SPIRITUALITY IN
CONTEMPORARY FUNERALS

FINAL REPORT

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Arts & Humanities
Research Council

University of Hull
Acknowledgements

The research team are grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the funding that enabled this project to go ahead.

We should like to express our appreciation to the management and staff of Co-Operative Funeralcare in Hull for their interest in the project and assistance in putting us in touch with families. Without their co-operation we should have found it impossible to carry out this research. We are aware that some staff found it difficult to approach families about taking part in the research and are grateful that they overcame their misgivings to do so. We should also like to thank them for putting up with a researcher hanging around on the premises over such a lengthy period of time! We should also like to thank all our research participants, particularly the families who allowed us to observe their meetings and the funeral and who talked to us about such sensitive material at a difficult time. We should like to express our gratitude too to the funeral directors, celebrants and other professionals who allowed us to observe their meetings with families and agreed to be interviewed and also to Julie-Ann McKee and Helen Dainty for their painstaking transcribing. Last but by no means least; we acknowledge the valuable input of our Project Advisory Group who met quarterly through the project providing assistance in accessing funerals, advice on implementation issues and insights into the data. Members of the PAG were:

Mike Anderson Hull City Council Bereavement Services
Fr Gerard Burns Marist Fathers, Cottingham Road, Hull
Phil Daniels Jewish Orthodox Synagogue
Fr Pat Day Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church, Cottingham
Revd David De Verny Hull University Chaplain
Prof John Friend Jewish Reform Synagogue
Revd Rachel Ganney St James Church of England Church, Sutton
Major Jonathan Greetham Salvation Army
Gill Herbert British Humanist Association
Sue Humphries British Humanist Association
Revd Wesley Loane Hull University Chaplain
Dr Malcolm Payne St Christopher’s Hospice, London
Judah Rose Jewish Orthodox Synagogue
Lee Stephenson Co-operative Funeralcare
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1 INTRODUCTION

There has been a renewed public interest in funerals in the UK over the past 10 years or so. From the low-key ceremonies which contrasted the mid-twentieth century funeral with the elaborate affairs in vogue in Victorian Britain, the early part of this century has seen a steady expansion in the types of funeral available and a range of options for personalising the event. For a society which supposedly avoids discussing death, we have shown ourselves surprisingly interested in one of the central events around an individual death. It could be argued that what we are now seeing in the UK is the phenomenon described as early as 1963 by the American sociologist Jessica Mitford, who wrote a scathing critique of the funeral industry in the US, depicting funeral directors as exploiting people’s grief in pursuit of their own financial gain, offering services which together served to ‘prettify’ and remove the reality (and horror) of death (Mitford 1963 and 2000). However, much of what Mitford described has never become commonplace in the UK (Howarth, 2007). Tony Walter, a sociologist whose focus of interest has been the many ways in which our approach to handling death is changing, suggests that what we are seeing in the UK today is in fact mourners beginning to reclaim the funeral (Walter, 1990 and 2005) from the myriad of people whose job it is to put together the funeral ‘package’ - funeral directors, celebrants and officiants, cemetery officials, coffin-makers, stone masons, florists and hotels specialising in the funeral ‘tea’.

The reason Walter can make this claim is that we are seeing a trend towards bereaved families making increasingly personal choices about what they want to go into the funeral service and its associated elements, matched by an expansion of the choices which the funeral ‘industry’ has on offer. These choices are all about bringing the life and person of the deceased into the spotlight, rather than dwelling on the fact of their death. It is argued that funerals today serve the needs of the living, rather than commending the departed; that they are celebrations of the life lived rather than symbolically marking the passing on; personally customised tributes rather than an acknowledgement of the individual existence within a wider existential frame for understanding life and death (Gill and Fox, 2004; Loyalka, 2005; Holloway, 2007).

This process began with a reaction in the 1980s against the impersonal way in which funerals were conducted at a time when the vast majority chose an established church funeral even though most were not regular church goers. The religious liturgy frequently seemed at odds with the beliefs and perspectives of the mourners and many felt that this was no way in which to ‘say goodbye’ to their nearest and dearest. The funeral was, in effect, a meaningless event which did not allow the
bereaved to express what they thought and felt in either, words, music or symbols. It was during this period that the first humanist funerals took place, the early intention being that anyone – a family member or family friend, for example – could lead a simple service commemorating and celebrating the life. It is interesting that although many funerals are now secular, very few are the simple ‘DIY’ events which featured in those early plans to revolutionise funerals; humanist and other non-traditional funerals quickly established their own ‘secular priesthood’ of people who could lead this sombre occasion with appropriate ceremony and choice of words. Something of the traditional ceremony appears to have endured and we have to ask why. In fact, even amongst vehement secularists uncomfortable with religious forms and content, some disquiet is expressed about alternative humanist celebratory occasions which, equally, may not do justice to the feelings of the bereaved. Writing in the Guardian newspaper, Ros Coward (2002) says:

A few years back all the funerals I went to seemed to hit the wrong note. None of the dead had been churchgoers, so services were often excruciating.

But she goes on to say:

DIY celebrations sometimes feel like parties, but with the main guest absent. Death here ceases to be the great leveller but another demonstration of that person’s status, position and popularity. The modern need for consolation and celebration abandons the harshness of traditional rituals that can be infinitely more cathartic. Islam demands six weeks of mourning; Judaism has contamination rituals that effectively provide help for mourners. The traditional psalms and prayers of Christian burials articulate despair as well as hope. Such ceremonies acknowledge, rather than try to avoid, anguish, loss and grief. In a culture with so few true believers the old ceremonies won’t do, but we clearly need something that articulates sorrow as well as celebration.

Holloway has suggested that there are three strands co-existing in contemporary funerals: traditional - which may be religious or secular; ‘alternative’ - individually customised, celebratory events; or ‘technological’ - where the funeral is focused around an alternative form of disposal of the body (Holloway, 2007). Although there is considerable information available about alternative options (on the internet, for example) little is known about the extent to which these are being used and to what extent mourners pick and choose across the various styles. We also have limited and mostly anecdotal evidence about the effects of these changes on the roles fulfilled by the different professionals who contribute to the funeral. In a survey of funeral practices in the US, Laderman (2003) noted that ministers of religion were fearful of funeral directors appropriating their role in meaning-making. In a Canadian study, Emke (2002) reported that only 17.5% of clergy in
Newfoundland identified a theological purpose to the funeral. Ros Coward (in the newspaper article quoted earlier) is, however, highlighting something which is becoming increasingly apparent within this secularising trend: when it comes to funerals, people do not necessarily want to dispense with ‘religion’ altogether. This mirrors one of the observations about belief in contemporary Britain: we are better described as ‘post-Christian’ (Northcutt, 1992) than secular. Or to put it another way, most people will say that they are not ‘religious’, but few would say they are not ‘spiritual’ (Peberdy, 1993).

So at the same time as funeral practices have been changing fast, a debate about the nature and place of religion and spirituality in contemporary society has been going on in parallel (King, 2001). The straightforward position that we are an increasingly secular society is more complex when looked at in terms of some of the ways in which spirituality is defined. Contemporary definitions highlight the pursuit of meaning and purpose; a sense of relatedness between oneself, other people, and the natural and built environment - often experienced through morally and mutually fulfilling relationships; an integrated sense of self which may be termed ‘wholeness’; and experiences of transcendence which introduce the possibility of ‘going beyond’ the immediate, tangible realities of one’s everyday life. The emphases in contemporary spirituality discourse are on personal expression, life-enhancement and individually customised meanings over handed-down, traditional religious belief systems. All of this, it is argued by some writers, may or may not involve belief in some external power or divine being (Holloway and Moss, 2010). It is becoming apparent that seemingly secular practices may constitute new forms of religiosity and spirituality. In addition, although mainstream (Anglican, RC, Methodist, Baptist, Jewish) church/synagogue attendance is declining, fundamentalist religious groups in all religions are increasing their membership, and new immigrant populations are swelling the congregations of mainstream churches (Brierley, 2000). There is also a growth in interest in ‘new age’ religions and associated practices such as alternative health therapies (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005).

These two parallel trends - the changing nature and significance of funerals and increasing evidence of a broader spirituality (both associated with, and distinct from, religion) - are both interesting and have important implications for the way in which we ‘manage’ death in contemporary society. The rationale behind this project was that we could discover a lot about both contemporary funerals and contemporary spiritualities through focusing on indications of spirituality and religion in funerals today. Not only might this prove fruitful in furthering knowledge and understanding of each, it
might shed light on the wider question of how meaning is sought, constituted and expressed in contemporary societies.

Thus we chose in this project to look at spirituality through the question of meaning. Trends in both spirituality and funerals suggest meaning-making rather than meaning-taking, yet the literature fails to answer what ‘beliefs’ and ‘mythologies’ people construct for themselves. The fundamental question which this project aimed to address is how meaning is sought, ascribed and expressed in contemporary society through the funeral, and whether, and for whom, this can be termed ‘spiritual’. The intention was to explore the changing nature of belief in contemporary society; the search for rituals and practices to express contemporary spiritualities; the impact of secularising and postmodern trends on the socio-religious event of the funeral; the ascription of meaning, both individual and subjective and also socially prescribed; the connections between meaning and identity, including spiritual and religious identities; and the ethnically diverse and pluralist contexts in which these phenomena are played out.

Funerals bring together religious, social and cultural trends and perspectives in an experience of deep significance and emotional import for the individual, family and immediate community. In exploring these dynamic interactions we hope to contribute new knowledge and theoretical development in a changing field, which will be of use to the general public, those professionals involved with funerals, as well as those workers in health and social care agencies who support dying people and their families in preparing for death and its aftermath. The need for sensitive, informed support is aptly summarised by one of the participants in this study:

“I’ve never had to do anything like this before, you know and it’s, it really does mess about with your emotions and with your head and everything else, it really does”. (Son, Funeral 17)
2 THE STUDY

2.1 Aims and objectives

The research aimed to study funerals in and around the city of Hull to examine:

- The planning of the funeral
- The funeral event
- Post funeral behaviour and activities
- Perspectives of family members on the funeral, the reasons for choices and meaning attributed to elements of the funeral
- Beliefs of family members, both religious and secular and including ideas about death
- Perspectives of key informants, including funeral directors, celebrants and others involved in conducting funerals on contemporary practice and belief

By gathering data about these processes, events, beliefs and practices, the project aimed to explore key questions about meaning-making and whether, and for whom, this can be termed ‘spiritual’. These issues were explored through questions such as: what needs are expressed by mourners? What identities are displayed? How are these translated into specific wishes for the funeral service? What do advisors (funeral directors, celebrants) offer or suggest? To what extent do mourners derive significance from formal rituals and internalise institutionalised beliefs? How do celebrants mediate ‘given’ frameworks and make connections with individual customisations of beliefs and practices?

2.2 The research process

2.2.1 Data collection

The research was planned to centre on funerals conducted at the Chanterlands Avenue Crematorium and Cemetery in Hull which handles 2-3000 funerals per year, including non-religious funerals, and those in the Christian, Sikh and Hindu traditions. It was also hoped to work with up to six different funeral directors in order to obtain a geographic and social spread of funerals within the Hull and East Riding area and a diversity in celebrants. Recognising potential difficulties because of the sensitive nature of the research in accessing both funerals and the bereaved families, publicity
began well before the project start. This included mailing/emailing of leaflets to ministers of local churches, other faith leaders, a British Humanist Association representative, funeral directors and the local crematorium manager, followed by phone calls and visits in some cases where interest was expressed. For example, visits were made to several funeral directors, the Orthodox Jewish Synagogue and a local Interfaith Group. As the project began, these contacts provided the foundation for a Project Advisory Group, to advise the research team on project implementation.

The planned research process which was followed for the majority of funerals used a staged consent process which began with the funeral director asking the family if they were interested in participating in a research project. If response was positive, the researcher was introduced and given the opportunity to explain the aims of the project and expectations of the family. This also provided the opportunity for the family to see who would be working with them and begin building a research relationship. A leaflet was provided and a family member asked to sign an initial consent form, relating to the researchers’ observation of the meeting with the funeral director, any potential meeting with a celebrant and the funeral itself. The consent form also included a clause giving permission for the researcher to contact a family member one week after the funeral to ask if they were willing to be interviewed. Following consent the researcher observed the meeting with the funeral director, providing early information on the format of funeral and the decision making process for choices. If family and chosen celebrant were both willing, the researcher also attended the meeting with celebrant at which the content of the service was planned. Families were able to withdraw at any stage and two did so after the meeting with the funeral director and before the funeral. Families were also able to consent to limited participation for example to observation of the funeral and the funeral director meeting only or to observation of meetings and interview but not to researchers attending the funeral.

Two researchers then attended the funeral, attempting to be discreet, for example by sitting in the balcony at the crematorium chapels. This was partly in order not to intrude on the family at such a sensitive time but also because mourners other than close family were likely to be unaware of the research. Where possible the researchers took notes, using an observation guide to facilitate comparability across funerals, but in the cemetery chapel and churches where the researchers were in the congregation, this was impracticable. The two researchers reviewed their impressions of the funeral immediately after the service, in order to provide a single agreed account. This was written up by one researcher for the other to review and amend. Provision was made for assistance from interfaith group members where observations might entail other languages or cultures but in the event this was not needed. At about one week after the funeral, a researcher contacted by
telephone an agreed family member to ask if they were willing to talk about the funeral. Most thus contacted agreed, only three of those who agreed to be contacted then refusing interview. Reasons for refusal included being “still grieving”, and it being “inconvenient”. Most interviews were with one principal mourner but some with two family members. At the beginning of the interview a second formal consent was obtained, the consent form describing explicitly the purpose of the research and the way in which the results would be used. The interviews were conducted using a topic guide but the interview was allowed to flow in a substantially unstructured way, the order and depth of the discussion of the topics being largely controlled by the interviewee, although the researcher used prompts to follow up points of particular interest and promote comparability between cases. The purpose of the interview was to reach behind the processes observed to discover what feelings, beliefs and meanings were sought, expressed and ascribed within and to particular practices, symbols and elements of the funeral. The researcher identified from the meetings and the funeral itself indications of beliefs or lack of belief and asked those interviewed to reflect on these.

[Example: ‘You said that you’re not a religious family but you decided on a C of E minister/wanted the Lord’s prayer/ chose two hymns. Why was that? What did you think about the Bible reading that the minister chose/ about what s/he said about your mum being re-united with your dad? Did that mean anything to you?’]

Phase 2 of the project involved interviews of a number of key informants. Originally we planned to interview a sample of celebrants and funeral directors who had been involved in the funerals studied. However these comprised a smaller number of a more limited range than originally anticipated. In addition we have provoked a high level of interest both locally and nationally from those involved in some capacity in the conduct of funerals. We therefore drew up a list of 36 potential targets representing as wide a range of interests and perspectives as possible and conducted 29 interviews either face to face or by telephone. Again the interviews used a topic guide, based on emerging findings from the phase 1 data. The phase 2 interviewees were specifically asked to reflect on the significance of meaning making and spirituality in the funeral.

The 46 funerals generated a large number of documents for analysis, ranging from one per funeral for those who withdrew after the initial meeting or where there was an observation of the funeral only to four where the full process had occurred. Some families also provided copies of personal tributes and some celebrants their scripts. These data were coded and analysed using Nvivo and principles of grounded theory. Initially the funeral observations and family interviews were coded in
detail to free nodes. These nodes coded the events observed, perceptions of the events by the actors, and the meaning ascribed to the events and reflections on religious beliefs and conceptions of spirituality expressed by those interviewed. These nodes were then organised into trees, allowing the emergence of core and sub categories. Reading, thinking and discussion then allowed the identification of key themes and issues which informed the topic guide for the phase 2 interviews. The Phase 1 coding framework was then used as a basis for coding the key informant interviews, although it was found to require considerable elaboration particularly in relation to religious belief and spirituality. The study was qualitative in its approach but analysis included a limited quantification in order to ascertain the extent to which views expressed were widespread or those of isolated individuals. The semi structured nature of the interviews and the observation guide provided for some consistency between subject matter recorded although all issues were not always considered. Therefore the counts that were derived should be regarded as indicative rather than statistical frequencies. Team meetings considered content as well as process, in order to ensure that input to the analysis was from the whole multidisciplinary team, and resulting in new lines of questioning.

2.2.2 The Project Advisory Group
The PAG included representatives of funeral directors, all the main Christian denominations, the Jewish Orthodox and Jewish Reform faiths, the British Humanist Association, hospice professionals and the local crematorium manager. The PAG met five times during the life of the project in October 2008, January, April and September 2009 and April 2010 and received four progress reports and a draft final report. Input included early review of consent forms, and observation and interview guides, assistance in widening the range of funerals accessed, review of anonymised observation reports and interview transcripts and discussion of emerging findings. The PAG was an important element in the conduct of the research.

2.2.3 Gaining access
Funerals and families
Early contacts with both funeral directors and faith representatives generated considerable interest in the research and its potential value. The initial publicity to funeral directors had 32 addressees but no response was received from any of these. Six firms were approached by telephone and letter before the start of the research and two expressed interest although one later withdrew. In the event only Co-Operative Funeralcare, which has three branches in the city, was willing to participate actively by putting the researchers in touch with families. At a later stage in the research, a presentation was made to a meeting of local funeral directors and personal approaches made to
three firms, none of which took active part. Some of the firms expressed interest in the research but smaller firms said that they were too busy while larger ones said that it was not company policy or that managers would not permit it. Some individual funeral directors expressed concerns about upsetting their clients and therefore losing business. Staff at two branches of Co-Operative Funeralcare, although some had early misgivings and clearly found initial approaches to families difficult at first, became more comfortable with the research as they discovered that families did not find it offensive. Most of the funerals were accessed through those two branches.

Efforts to gain access through faith leaders and other celebrants also had only limited success. Besides the initial mailing, researchers met with the Bishop of Hull and leaders of other Christian denominations in the city six months into the project to report on progress, early findings and ongoing access problems. The local Interfaith group welcomed us to meetings, expressed interest and some members joined our Project Advisory Group. While many church leaders, representatives of other faith and hospital chaplains expressed interest in the research and hopes that we might contribute to clergy training, only one Roman Catholic priest actually introduced the research team to families. Some church leaders with whom this was discussed indicated that they would not feel comfortable with raising the subject with bereaved families and some that they had reservations about researchers sitting in on their meetings with those families. Initially, sampling was on a convenience basis dependent on the throughput of funerals. However data collection and analysis were concurrent using processes of theoretical saturation and constant comparison to ensure internal validity. In effect this meant that as the research progressed, the funerals accessed through the Co-Operative Funeralcare offered few new themes. After 40 of the target 50 funerals we made the decision to seek only specific types of funeral which differed in type from those initially observed, in effect those of different faiths and different secular approaches. Our PAG members facilitated access to BHA humanist funerals, Dove House Hospice put us in touch with one family and research team members used personal contacts to reach others. At the end of the fieldwork the total sample was 46 (see Table 1).
Table 1: Phase 1 data gathering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total funerals/memorial services studied</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family withdrew before funeral (C of E) – funeral director meeting only</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals attended</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting observations and interview but family asked researchers not to attend funeral</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial service (non denominational but C of E chaplain)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral Service video watched with family</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings of family with funeral director</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings of family with officiant</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with family post funeral</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The method of sampling had effects on the geographic and social distribution of the funerals studied. As can be seen in the map most of the funeral families were from inner East Hull, or from the northern and eastern housing estates.

![Geography of Funerals](image)

**Fig 1: Geography of Funerals**

**The key informants**

A potential list of key informants was prepared from celebrants and funeral directors who had participated in the project and those who had expressed interest in the project as a result of various
publicity efforts by the team. Apart from the early mailings and meetings with local groups, publicity was received in a Guardian newspaper feature in March 2009. This generated interest nationally enhanced by various individuals promoting the project on their blogs. As a result the potential list of those willing to be interviewed reached nearly 60 and we had to be selective. We attempted to interview a range of individuals representing differing groups and probable viewpoints. The only group for which we were unable to achieve as many interviews as had been hoped was the local funeral directors, many of whom were too busy to talk to us.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Informant interviews</th>
<th>29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funeral directors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrants (from funerals observed)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Faith representatives including Jewish Orthodox (this was a group interview), Jewish Reform and Muslim</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (crem, internet funeral orgs, registrar/civil celebrant)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Phase 2 interviews**

### 2.2.4 Research sensitivity and willingness of families to participate

The research team were very conscious of the sensitivity of researching the subject of the funeral at a time when families might be vulnerable. The project was planned with due attention to the BSA code of ethics, ESRC social research ethics framework and the Code of Practice for Social Work research. Before the start of the research project, its planned processes were reviewed by the University of Hull Research Ethics Committee. The research used a staged consent process as described above, with initial verbal consent followed by a two stage written consent process (see Appendix 1 for consent forms).

We found that families were very interested in the project, very willing to take part and very cooperative in talking freely about their experiences and beliefs. Ten interviews were with men, 17 with women and 7 with husband and wife couples. There were three interviews with mother/daughter pairs. The age range of those interviewed was approximately 40 to 80, most being middle aged. The participants were from a wide range of backgrounds but showed little discernable difference in willingness to participate. Families were keen to take part in research, partly because, “it might help others” and partly because, “the deceased would have liked that”. It was clear in some of the interviews that some subjects welcomed the research as a way of giving importance to the deceased, in adding a sense of the deceased’s immortality and recognition of his/her importance to other people as well as the immediately bereaved. This was perhaps particularly so when a very
individual funeral was planned. For example, one man showed a photo of his partner at interview and emailed it later to be used as part of the research (Funeral 10). The funeral was planned around the deceased’s favourite colour, pink, and the theme of light. He said of the photo “Pink and light are the first two words that come to your mind”. Some families specifically asked the researcher not to sit in the balcony but to join the mourners, which was gratifying but meant that note taking was impossible. Others, if they caught sight of the researcher, perhaps as they left the chapel, smiled in greeting and occasionally wanted to introduce the researcher to other family members. A number of those interviewed, from a variety of social and educational backgrounds, specifically asked to see the report and after the first few interviews this was routinely offered.

At the interviews, some participants did become distressed, including both men and women. Although some of the men were very embarrassed about this, making such comments as, “I don’t usually behave like this”, both men and women were emphatic that they did not wish to stop the interview. There would be a brief interlude off recorder with less emotional conversation and then a resumption of the interview. The researcher tried to intersperse more emotionally charged discussion with more mundane and found that it was relatively easy to judge when a participant did not want to pursue a line of questioning and also when it was time to bring the interview to a close. For example one widow talked very freely about the funeral, her husband’s last illness and their beliefs but suddenly seemed to lose concentration (Funeral 1). In several interviews, the interviewee said to the researcher in informal talk after the switching off of the recorder that he/she had benefitted from the discussion. One male, for example, said, “It has eased me” (Funeral 34). Another said that he had enjoyed discussing the funeral because others were not interested. His mates would say, “sorry to hear about your mother”, but would not welcome him talking about it (Funeral 17). A widow said that she had found the researcher, “sympathetic in the true sense of the word”. A sister said, “It was nice talking to you” (Funeral 7).

2.2.5 The analysis
The decision to take a grounded theory approach meant that the initial coding of this material resulted in a huge number of nodes relating to the events, the meaning ascribed and indications of spirituality and religious belief. The coding was carried out by one researcher and others commented by annotating scripts or in team meetings. The plan had been for other team members to code some of the material to provide an independent check and ensure internal reliability. However pressures of work meant that this did not happen. The nodes generated at the initial coding were then grouped into related groups. These included category classification material
relating, for example, to evidence for socio-economics and stated religion. Descriptive groups related for example to the liturgy, music, ritual, pre funeral matters such as choice of coffin and celebrant, and post funeral matters such as the reception, memorials and mourning behaviour. Other groups related to participants in the funeral – the mourners, celebrants and funeral directors. More interpretive groups concerned influences on the choices made, perceptions as to the purpose of the funeral and its achievement of that purpose, evidence of the role of emotion and views on death, life, religion and other philosophies.

Fig 2: Main node groups

All team members did examine the documents and were supplied with nodes in their areas of interest exported into Word. At the writing up stage, the research fellow who undertook the bulk of the data collection and all the initial coding produced a summary of the data which was further categorised and expanded and commented upon by other team members. It is recognised that this procedure was not ideal but we are confident that a multi disciplinary approach was achieved. All the team members observed and discussed individual funerals, contributing their own knowledge and viewpoints to the observation reports. The varied knowledge of the team members contributed substantially to team meetings as emerging themes were discussed. The additional insights
provided contributed to a broadening of the ideas and approach of the researcher responsible for the basic analysis. Thus the study was enriched by its interdisciplinary nature.

2.3 Description of the study

2.3.1 Location of funerals

As planned, most of the funerals were at the Chanterlands Crematorium/Northern Cemetery complex in West Hull (see table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service location</th>
<th>Cremation/burial</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chanterlands Crematorium Small chapel</td>
<td>Cremation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanterlands Crematorium Large Chapel</td>
<td>Cremation 7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burial 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cemetery Chapel</td>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cemetery Chapel</td>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haltemprice Crematorium Chapel</td>
<td>Cremation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octon Crematorium Chapel</td>
<td>Cremation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of area Crematorium Chapel</td>
<td>Cremation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/chapel</td>
<td>Burial 3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cremation 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memorial service 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synagogue/cemetery</td>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel/woodland burial site</td>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: The funerals*

Of these two thirds were in the small chapel and most of the remainder in the large crematorium chapel. Subsidence problems in Northern Cemetery meant that two burials in Northern Cemetery used the crematorium chapel for the service. The small chapel seats about 40 people and the large chapel 150. Both chapels are entered at the rear through a lobby, with separate entry and exits to facilitate circulation of funeral parties, and the catafalque is positioned centrally at the front in an alcove across which curtains can be drawn. Both chapels had a fairly unobtrusive cross on the front wall and contained restrained flower arrangements in neutral colours. The two cemetery chapels were older buildings and more overtly Christian with an altar table at the front.

Haltemprice and Octon Crematorium Chapel, while being of very different styles – Haltemprice being a converted Victorian chapel and Octon a purpose built modern chapel – both had on the front wall a stained glass window combining the symbol of the cross with a picture of a ship. For the Christian
funeral at Octon the table at the front bore a cross and candles while for the humanist funeral at Haltemprice there were only candles. Keighley Crematorium had another purpose built modern chapel. Octon and Keighley both had separate entrances and exits from the chapel itself.

Two of the church funerals were Roman Catholic. One was at a large and ornate baroque style church with much carving, painted walls and high level clear glass windows shining winter sunshine onto the proceedings. The altar was set in front of an elaborate reredos with four candlesticks. There were an additional two candles carried by acolytes but placed on the reredos at times. The other was a large 1960s light building with fixed pews, a large crucifix on the wall behind the altar, statues and candle prickets. The reredos bore 6 candlesticks and flowers. Next to the trestles where the coffin was placed stood the paschal candle. The other church funeral was at a Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Hall, a simple modern building with rows of chairs facing a dais with lectern. A memorial service was in the university chapel, which is non-denominational and inter faith – a neutral space with no religious symbols. The seating is arranged in a circle around a small table. The table bore a large lit candle, a vase of lilies, a plaque with the first name of the deceased and 4 small unlit candles.

The funeral held in a hotel was a memorial service following burial. A largish low room was set with tables for six in rows with a bar to one side. Next to this, there were baskets for donations, attendance cards and seed and at one end display boards with photos. The tables next to the displays were reserved for close family. The tables were set with lit night lights, short stubby stand alone candles in mauves (unlit), attendance cards, service sheets and crockery.

Key informants pointed to different practices in respect of the location of the funeral in other parts of the country. In Wales it is common for the funeral to be held in the house (Christian celebrant 14). In other parts of the country this also happened, especially where there was a family tradition of gathering at the house of the deceased for social occasions (Other funeral professional 17).

2.3.2 The Celebrants

The eventual total sample included 16 humanist/alternative services, 14 Church of England, 14 other Christian denominations, one inter-faith and one Jewish.
The non-religious proportion of the total sample was 35% and for the funerals accessed through the participating funeral director 33%. Is this breakdown likely to be representative of the funerals either in Hull or nationally? The manager of the local Hull crematorium and a West Yorkshire funeral director estimated non-religious funerals at 20%. The local Hull area manager of the participating funeral director said that he estimated non-religious funerals at 25-30% although statistics are not maintained. He was not aware from management meetings that the position was substantially different in any other part of the country except Ireland where there are more Roman Catholic funerals. The greater numbers of non-religious funerals than may have been expected in the research may be attributed to the conscious effort to include a wide variety of funerals which led to the later inclusion of funerals using BHA celebrants and the only “green” funeral. Alternatively there may have been a greater willingness to participate among those choosing a secular funeral, perhaps because those with “alternative” ideas want to publicise them. The similar effort to access funerals of other faiths was less successful. Another reason may have been the socioeconomic background of the majority of the participating families, with comparatively few from the educated middle classes. The relatively large numbers of Salvation Army funerals were not for families with specific Salvation Army links but because of the respect of one particular funeral director for one particular minister.

We were able to access only one funeral of a faith other than Christian and encountered no funerals where the family led the funeral themselves, although one of the celebrants interviewed had been asked by a funeral director to take a coordinating role in a funeral essentially conducted by the family.

| “Humanist” (BHA 3, Independent 8, retired church 1) | 12 |
| Church of England | 14 |
| Roman Catholic | 3 |
| Salvation Army | 5 |
| Methodist | 4 |
| Jehovah’s Witness | 1 |
| Independent Evangelical | 1 |
| Civil celebrant | 3 |
| Spiritualist | 1 |
| Jewish | 1 |
| Interfaith Memorial Service | 1 |

**Table 4: The celebrants/officiants**
“Someone who just co-ordinates it all, makes it happen. They won’t actually take anything from what you want to do. And they were happy with that then, and they said afterwards we’re so glad you know they, they persuaded us to have somebody”. (Christian celebrant 13)

Within the non-religious funerals only three were conducted by a civil celebrant, three by BHA celebrants although only one of these was in the local Hull area and the remainder by independent “humanist” or “alternative” celebrants. One of the key informants suggested that nationally:

“celebrants’ will soon out number humanist officiants and as awareness of the difference between humanists and celebrants becomes clearer, more and more people in the UK will opt for Civil Funerals as most people in the UK are not atheists”. (Other funeral professional 15)

2.3.3 The mourners

The majority of funerals were attended by a moderate numbers of mourners, as might be expected from the predominate choice of the small crematorium chapel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of mourners</th>
<th>Number of funerals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 40</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 60</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 80</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 – 120</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 120</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The mourners

There were a few small funerals, of elderly people and a few very large funerals with over 100 mourners. The age range of those attending was generally from those in their twenties to very elderly with middle aged predominating. Only fourteen funerals included teenagers and in only seven were younger children present. All funerals included both sexes although there were more men at some and more women at others.

2.3.4 The deceased

The gender split of the deceased was 20 male and 26 female, that is, 57% female. This compares with an almost equal split in deaths by gender in the Kingston upon Hull in 2008, which is the latest year for which statistics are available (Source ONS). Seventy percent were aged over 70 which is similar to what might be expected from Kingston upon Hull mortality statistics. Although the funeral directors’ unwillingness to raise the issue of research with families who had lost a child or suffered a
sudden or violent death meant that we were unable to access such funerals, the funerals we have been able to study are fairly representative of those taking place in terms of age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Funeral numbers</th>
<th>Funeral per cent</th>
<th>2008 deaths in Hull (Source ONS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 80</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: The deceased

**SUMMARY**

The research team specifically chose to focus on the Hull and East Riding area and the 46 funerals studied appear to be reasonably representative of deaths in the region in terms of age and sex of the deceased. Although systematic information on socio-economics was not collected, the sample included few funerals with middle class backgrounds. This probably reflected the location of the two funeral directors’ premises which provided access to the large majority of the funerals. The majority of funerals were attended by between 20 and 60 mourners with a reasonable balance between men and women and ages ranging from the 20s up to older people in their 70s and 80s. Nearly two thirds were conducted by a religious celebrant, all but one being from the Christian religion. Only 8 funerals took place at a location other than the crematorium or cemetery chapel, and there were only 9 burials. Physical surroundings included material symbols in all the funerals. A pen picture of each funeral is provided in Appendix 2.

A limitation of the research may be that the findings may not be transferable to other geographic areas. There is anecdotal evidence of both a north/south divide in funeral behaviour and also differences in approach between those of different socio-economic status. In other areas a greater diversity of culture and religion might be of greater significance. However this research does provide a detailed picture of beliefs and behaviours in a defined area and culture.
3 THE FUNERAL

“I think, the only thing I’d say is what we were able to do was a great comfort to us because, because it was the right thing. Had we been forced into the scenario of the crem just because we couldn’t get any support or advice or we hadn’t had you know the notion or whatever, and had energy to do it differently…. We’d been able to look back and think we did it all as he wanted it. Every bit of it, and that’s a comfort” (daughter, Funeral 42).

3.1 Before the funeral

The period between the death and the funeral emerges as one of significant activity in all of the funerals. Families put considerable time and energy into planning and preparing for the funeral, almost regardless of the age of the deceased or circumstances of the death. In only a handful of cases had this planning been done explicitly either by or with the person before they died, although in many more cases the deceased relative had indicated what their wishes were as to basic style of funeral and mode of disposal.

3.1.1 Planning the event

In all but the Jewish funeral, where the preparations and funeral follow a prescribed course, families find themselves making a considerable number of choices and decisions; the funeral emerges as a planned event. Planning for the management of the occasion was evident even in the Jewish funeral.

The funeral director

The first decision made by many families, unless they are practising members of a faith, is which funeral director to choose. The funerals studied were as a result of the methodology used and the unwillingness of other funeral directors to actively participate in the research, almost all with the Co-Op. The staff at two branches of the Co-Op were happy with the research and therefore most funerals were through those. For funerals with other directors the choice was a local funeral director.

The location of the addresses of families in Hull arranging the funerals in relation to the location of funeral directors’ premises suggests that proximity is a factor in the choice. Most of the families for funerals studied were either in the Bransholme area, in inner East Hull or in the East Hull estates of Bilton Grange and Greatfield.
Families which indicated why they had chosen the Co-Op gave the following reasons:

- The deceased had a funeral bond/plan with the Co-Op (6 funerals)
- The family had previously used the Co-Op and were happy with the service provided (5 funerals)
- A family member was a Co-Op employee or held a Co-Op card thus entitling them to discount (3 funerals)
- The coroner recommended the Co-Op (1 funeral)
- The widower had attended a Co-Op funeral at which there had been a particular celebrant. He came to the Co-Op because he wanted that celebrant.

Although the funeral director generally expected that a family would make an appointment for an initial meeting, several of the families involved in the research simply walked in to the funeral home off the street.

**Cremation or burial**

As mentioned above the majority of the funerals were for cremation. This is in line with the perception of a funeral director interviewed. He said:

“cremations are becoming more and more popular, and if you go back say 20 years it was probably 40-50% burials, cremation, where now it’s probably 80% cremation to 20% burial, it’s..., I think that will keep, carry on increasing”. (Funeral director 2)

However he pointed to differences between areas, saying:

“I think it would be even more so in places like London where they are short of space and the cost involved for a grave is phenomenal ...I think it, it, depending in the country it would probably go towards more burial”.

For Muslims and Jewish Orthodox all funerals are burials although Jewish Reform may choose cremation.

The choice had to be made early as it affected the booking of the funeral premises, preparation of paperwork for the funeral director and choices concerning the coffin and the body. For most of the funerals families were guided by the deceased’s wishes. A son said:

“Yes she wanted cremating she didn’t want burying so that was my mum’s choice so that was a simple solution really”. (Funeral 17)
“Arthur didn’t want to be cremated; he wanted to be buried with her. That’s why, they had a double grave”. (Funeral 20)

Some families had traditional preferences for either burial or cremation. One family said:

“We don’t believe in cremation....We like to have a burial...so that other people if they want to go, relatives...Then it’s there for em, they can go and have a look”. (Funeral 34)

A partner said:

“All of her family have been cremated and that was her choice there was no discussion, that was it”. (Funeral 10)

Another family said:

“We’re just a family that chooses cremation rather than burial”. (Funeral 33)

Seven families chose burial in a family grave and one family chose a woodland burial because of the appeal of the surroundings. The widow had discussed the question with her husband because of her own preferences. She said:

“I don’t want to be stuck in a church yard or, I don’t want somebody to be throwing me ashes about, I wanted something just like that and I sort of approached the subject quite a long while ago”. (Funeral 42)

Two families specifically chose cremation so that the ashes could go overseas and one family said that the issue was cost, cremation being cheaper. One sister had discussed the subject with her brother although he had not anticipated his early death. His view was that:

“it’s much cleaner really in the long run to get cremated and have your ashes scattered so he said if you go down, do you know what I might be buried, just going underground with the soil. Whereas if you go and get cremated it’s gone altogether”. (Funeral 7)

A few families were influenced by ideas about the decay or destruction of the body. One, who preferred cremation, said:

“I mean, it’s a case of do you want it all to be over in a few minutes or do you want to rot under the ground basically, and I wouldn’t like to have thought that he was”. (Funeral 33)
A widow thought similarly saying:

“I didn’t want him to rot underground….I couldn’t bear the thought of him being under all that soil”. (Funeral 8)

On the other hand another widow who had chosen burial said:

“I couldn’t stand the thought of, of his body just not being there anymore. Some people say the opposite but for me, when I visit the cemetery I know he’s not there, it’s just the thing of, but that was the body I loved and I couldn’t bear the thought of that being destroyed in that way. I prefer to just imagine it gradually over time disintegrating”. (Funeral 44)

Some key informants discussed reasons for the choice of burial or cremation. One suggested burial might be thought:

“not so final because you can, there is, the body is buried and you can go and lay flowers and you can go and sit and talk to the person, that sort of thing, I think”. (Christian celebrant 12)

Another thought:

“if you actually follow the, the coffin to the graveside, and see the earth, the handful of earth anyway, that actually, I think helps this coping with and the stages of grief more”. (Christian celebrant 29)

**The celebrant**

One of the first choices to be made was who would conduct the funeral. At the initial meeting of the funeral director and the family, the funeral director always asked the religion of the deceased. Where the reply indicated a religion the next question was did they have in mind any particular celebrant. Few families were active church goers and many said they were nominally Church of England/Roman Catholic/Methodist etc but were “not really religious”. In these circumstances the funeral director might ask if the family would like him to find a minister or he might suggest that they might like a humanist celebrant. A few families requested a humanist ceremony, either to the funeral director or found their own independently through the internet.

Essentially the first choice was whether the funeral was to be religious or not. In this the families were partly guided by what they knew or thought to be the deceased’s views. One sister said: “She was a Methodist you see and I’ve always been a Methodist”. (Funeral 38)
One son had chosen a Methodist minister because:

“That’s me mam’s will, yeah, yeah. I was torn between a Humanist ceremony wan’t I, or I, but
sort of, well you was there at the interview wan’t you, so we had a nod to religion, although it
wasn’t too religious if you’d noticed”. (Funeral 37)

A widow had chosen a Methodist minister from a particular church because:

“He went to their Sunday school, oh most of his childhood and became very friendly with the
Ministers there, so, so I thought fine”. (Funeral 40)

Similarly a son chose to have a funeral in church for his Roman Catholic mother even though he
himself no longer believed. For other sons, a Church of England service was felt to be suitable,
because their mother, without being a churchgoer would have wanted a “traditional” funeral. One
son said:

“We didn’t know what she wanted to be honest, we guessed, it would have been a tossup
between a traditional service and a humanist service and, I defer to my two older brothers who
thought she would prefer a traditional funeral”. (Funeral 19)

Another family who had discussed with the deceased in his final illness his wish for a woodland
burial, initially searched for a woodland burial site. The daughter said:

“He’d decided and, that he’d wanted (woodland site). So, I’d been on the website and there’s a
link then from (woodland site) website to Humanist”. (Funeral 42)

Having decided the type of celebrants, many families left it to the funeral director to find a suitable
individual. One son said:

“I’d have had anybody who (funeral director), you know and I’d’ve left it to them basically”.  
(Funeral 34)

The funeral director was guided partly by the church parish or area where the family lived and partly
by his knowledge of the potential celebrants and the type of funeral they would provide. When a
family was at least nominally Church of England the funeral director would try to contact their parish
priest. In a team ministry covering a large council estate one or other of the priests would be
available. However the researcher was aware of other localities where the funeral director would
leave a message for the relevant priest on an answer phone but be confident that there would be no
response. After leaving a short time for reply the funeral director would contact one of a number of
ministers with whom he had developed a working relationship and had confidence in the way the minister would conduct the funeral.

Eight families wanted a minister that they knew or that the deceased had known. For Funeral 41 it was the priest in the parish where the deceased had lived for many years and who continued to visit him after his move to a smaller, more convenient house and then in hospital. For Funeral 28 the daughters wanted a minister, who had known their mother, but retired from the parish which she had attended, to take the service. For Funeral 31 the son wanted the funeral at the Roman Catholic Church which his mother had attended until she became too infirm. For Funeral 12 it was the minister from a church which the mother attended although the deceased had had no faith. For Funeral 18 it was an acquaintance of the son, who was himself a priest. For the Jehovah’s Witness funeral it was a particular Elder. The son said:

“Now the Elder who took the service, him and his wife had also spent quite a considerable time in Ireland so they could relate to each other’s experiences during that time....... And so I felt it was appropriate that he take the funeral because he could sympathise with some of the experiences my mother had been through you see”. (Funeral 23)

For Funeral 46 it was the vicar of the church where the deceased had lived in her later life and with whom she had a good relationship. A daughter said:

“She was passionate about him, I mean she, she loved him and he loved her and they had a great, no, a very nice chap”.

At this funeral a family member was an ordained priest and led some of the service at the suggestion of the parish priest.

Several families asked for a celebrant who had taken a previous funeral for a family member or friend, although sometimes this was not possible because ministers had moved on or retired for health reasons. These celebrants included both ministers of religion and secular celebrants. The family for Funeral 22 asked for the same minister as had conducted the service for Funeral 8. A daughter wanted a particular minister because she had attended two services for friends that he had conducted (Funeral 34). A widower specifically asked for a particular secular celebrant because he had heard him at a service for a friend. He said:

“having heard (alternative celebrant) do a service I was so very impressed with him, granted I know full well that this is what he is doing for a living, he’s earning money from it but none the
less it came across in a sincere and nice way and I thought that’s what my wife Carol would have liked”. (Funeral 25)

Key informants reflected on the process of choosing a celebrant. One was concerned that ministers of religion should have the opportunity to offer a religious service to all who have any kind of belief. He said:

“My concern is that, that people know what it is that we’re offering so that they’re able to make the best decision for themselves” because “as parish priests in the Church of England we offer this to anybody in our Parish who wants it”. (Christian celebrant 30)

A funeral director however said that he did try to work with the churches.

“We’ve got a good rapport with most of the Ministers, so we get on quite well, we know what, you know, what is probably more fitting for each family really. But we do try and go to the local Parish of where that deceased lived”. (Funeral director 2)

Another similarly said:

“I generally suggest the minister from where they live”. (Funeral director 5)

Another celebrant appreciated the importance of the funeral director in guiding the family’s choice:

“If the funeral director has an awareness of what style that people do I think he, err, is able to point people in the right direction as to who fit that family’s needs”. (Christian celebrant 34)

For some celebrants there may be problems in conducting a service for those who are not practising members of their community;

“I’ve had occasion where there’s been somebody who we’ve not really known all that well but the relatives wanted it to be a Quaker funeral and the relatives maybe aren’t even in the area which makes it a bit tricky”. (Christian celebrant 35)

**Timing**

While many families were flexible about the timing of the funeral, some requested specific days, although it was not always possible to provide these. Thursday and Friday were frequently requested, the latter particularly with a view to mourners getting time off work or travelling from a distance. One family said:
“We thought if it was mid-week it would be difficult for people to get off work, but because Friday was the end of the week, they’d probably only lose half a day anyway, cos most people around here finish at Friday dinnertime”. (Funeral 35)

A widow said:
“Friday was a good day that both of them could get time off together and come, so that’s mainly why we decided to go for that, so they could be there”. (Funeral 40)

Three families wanted the funeral delayed until family members returned from holiday. One family wanted the funeral as soon as possible so that a family member could return to her home. A daughter said:
“My younger sister lives in London so, you know she didn’t want it to carry on another week so we wanted to try to get it all over and besides I know (other sister) was going away the following week so she wanted it all, you know, done before then”. (Funeral 5)

Some families wanted the funeral later in the day so that mourners coming from a distance would have time to travel. Two comments were:
“With them living all at Goole and Howden you see, that’s why I thought it would be better for them to get through like”. (Funeral 11)

“I did it in, got it done in the afternoon so it would give me brother from Leeds chance to get here and me brother from Scunthorpe chance to get here you see”. (Funeral 20)

Another family who had two funerals within the study period on both occasions chose a morning funeral. For the first the widow said:
“we wanted it as early as possible to be honest because I think the thing is if it’s later in the day, I think you can chew yourself up all day, can’t you getting, thinking that it’s got to come, it’s go to come but it’s just the sooner it’s done the better and also because (father), obviously he likes to keep his afternoons free because that’s when he likes to go and see (his wife in a nursing home)”. (Funeral 8)

At the second funeral of her mother in law she said:
“Obviously because you don’t want to be hanging around all day waiting to go and I think it’s, with it being sort of the ten o’clock service, it just, it comes perfect really because it gives you time to just get up, get ready and go”. (Funeral 22)
Other families preferred late morning to fit in with plans for a reception lunch afterwards. One widower said:

“It was really, it was an ideal time for us because I knew that, well I was hoping as it turned out it happened that a good few people would be coming back to the pub and you know there was food, a buffet laid on for them and that tied in, you know the end of the service tied in with this thing afterwards”. (Funeral 25)

One family decided because of nearness to Christmas to have a quiet family funeral and then a memorial service for a wider circle later. The date of the memorial service was two months after the death and allowed time for organisation. In addition the daughter said:

“I realised, tumbled to it that actually it would have been her birthday on this day so it was another celebratory thing”. (Funeral 46)

Key informants discussed two issues concerned with timing; the time allowed for the service and the difficulty of fitting in with particular times for the start. Some talked of the importance of allowing sufficient time for the content of the service and the numbers of mourners so that the service does not overrun it’s time slot and the family are satisfied. One said:

“And I think some families, where a big service is happening, there’s going to be a lot of people there, they’re not aware that there’s no extra cost to go on and have a double slot”. (Christian celebrant 34)

Another said:

“If it goes on more than three quarters of an hour it’s too long. If it’s less than 20 minutes you’re not giving the service due weight”. (Christian celebrant 29)

On the question of the day and time for the service a funeral director said:

“The family will say we can’t have the funeral this day or that day, it’s got to be a week on Friday because so and so is coming from Australia or or, it, it, we’re more, we’re more facilitators I think now”. (Funeral director 8).

A minister said:

“it’s can you do a funeral at half past 2 at (crematorium)? And you either can or you can’t”. (Christian celebrant 31)
For the Muslims and Jewish religions the funeral is arranged very quickly. Comments included:

"Jewish funerals in theory should take place within the same day the person dies". (Funeral 45). "But obviously within Islam we try to bury our dead as soon as possible. We don’t like to delay it. In 24 hours". (Other religious informant 23)

The announcement
At all the funerals where the researcher was present at the initial meeting between the funeral director and the family, the funeral director offered to insert an announcement of the death and funeral arrangements in the local paper. In most cases this offer was accepted although one family said that the deceased did not want an announcement because he had not seen his brothers and sisters for years and did not want them at the funeral. Two families said they would arrange their own announcement and three had drafted a notice themselves for the funeral director to submit to the paper. Most families were guided through a standard format announcement which might include all or some of the following:

- The name of the deceased
- The age of the deceased
- The place of death
- The manner of death – suddenly, peacefully etc
- The names of the deceased’s family
- Where the deceased was resting
- The time, date and place of the funeral
- The time and place of departure for the cortege
- A notice re flowers
- A notice re donations
- The location of a post funeral reception
- Guidance re a theme colour for dress

There was often much discussion about family members to be mentioned by name. There might be long lists of children and grandchildren because of a fear of giving offence by leaving anyone out. Some families solved the problem of having too many names by use of such formulas as “loved by his grandchildren and great grandchildren”. One son said it was not necessary to mention names because “she knows who they are” (Funeral 17). Another family specifically did this to keep the costs down. Some family members were consciously omitted such as an estranged husband and an estranged sister. One family omitted partners as they were regarded as “not family yet” (Funeral
14). On the other hand some families included the names of family members who had died previously. This included not only the deceased husband or wife of the subject of the announcement (e.g. widow of the late) but also children (loving Mum/Dad of the late), grandchildren (much loved Nanna of the late) and a best friend of the elder son who the deceased regarded as an extra son.

Another area where families had lengthy debates was in how to describe relationships between the deceased and the family. Particularly where a number of different relatives were listed, there was concern to avoid repetition by using “beloved”, “much loved”, “dearly loved” or “loving” in turn. One widower wanted simply “husband of” rather than “beloved husband” or “much loved husband”.

A key informant said in relation to Quaker practice “when notices appear concerning the death of ‘Friends’ in the magazine ‘The Friend’ there’s never any emotion at all it’s just fact you know name, age, relation and that’s it”. (Christian celebrant 24)

Another element which caused discussion was the words describing the manner of death. The standard suggestion was “passed away” with some qualifier but one widower was clear that the word should be “died”. Many families opted for “peacefully”. Some, even where the deceased was of advanced age and had been ill, nevertheless wanted “suddenly” saying that it had not been expected just then. One family agreed a suggestion from the funeral director for “Died peacefully after a long illness bravely borne” saying “that’ll be nice”. (Funeral 40). Another family wanted “passed away tragically date aged 77” where the decease had been ill for some time. Three families opted for a statement that the deceased was now reunited with family members who had died earlier. In two of these cases the suggestion came from one particular funeral director.

Two families did not want the deceased’s age mentioned, one because she had not liked it known. One family did not want to include in the announcement where the deceased was resting because they thought any viewing who had not seen her for a couple of years would be shocked. Nor did they want to include “cortege leaves from the house” because of parking problems. (Funeral 5)

For some families it was important that individual family members inserted notices as well as the official one but one widow was clear that she did not want this. She said she did not want a lot of people that she did not know putting in notices because the deceased “cannot read them and he knows who cares”. It was agreed that the formal announcement would contain a request from the family that there are no other notices. (Funeral 8)
Some families wanted to personalize their announcements. One family asked for the addition of a heart in one and an angel in the other. Another family asked for the addition of a sentence at the end of the formal announcement adapted from the funeral director’s guidance booklet on words: “He was a lovely man and we thank him for sharing his life with us”. The phrase was pointed out to the funeral director and he copied it but neither the son nor the daughter felt able to read it out.

(Funeral 36)

The cortege
Planning of the funeral included booking of vehicles for the cortege. Although three families chose to book a hearse only, most required at least one limousine and a few two or even three limousines. One of those that required only a hearse did not want to travel in cortege and the family met the hearse at the cemetery. This was the Jehovah’s Witness funeral where beliefs influenced a lack of ceremony. The other hearse only funerals used family cars as did others to supplement the limousines. There was sometimes considerable discussion about how many they could get in a hearse and which family members should go in it. In one funeral the son in law said he would drive behind to save two cars (Funeral 16). In another which used three limousines, the family thought that although cars seat six, it was important to not split up families (Funeral 5). The funeral director provided notices for display in family car windows and sometimes black flags to assist in keeping all the cars in cortege. One key informant referred to an increasing trend for using family cars rather than limousines, saying: “A lot of them want personal cars rather than the traditional”. (Christian celebrant 34)

3.1.2 The body
Families also engaged with the task of preparing their deceased relative for their role in the proceedings. Preparation and location of the body is determined by religious practice, but also in non-religious families appeared to be indicative of individual attitudes to and beliefs about death and the relationship of the living with the recently deceased.

Preparation of the body
For most funerals the preparation of the body was carried out by the funeral directors. Twice as many accepted the offer of “hygienic treatment” from the funeral director as refused. Some of those agreeing to this embalming did so because they wanted the deceased to look his/her best for those that might visit at the chapel of rest, in some cases even when they did not intend to visit themselves. One family said this would “preserve her for anyone that wants to go to see her”. 
Another family said this would “have him smelling nice” (Funeral 20). For one family hygienic treatment was specified in the funeral plan. Others agreed because of precedents in other family funerals. Of those that refused, in one case this was specified in the funeral plan. One widower said that he did not want more done to his wife’s body than necessary (Funeral 25). Others refused even though they expected particular family members travelling from a distance to want to see the deceased. One family’s reasons were that the time to the funeral was fairly short and the deceased was elderly. (Funeral 15)

For Muslims and Jews, however, the body is prepared by members of the community. A Muslim explained that this includes ritual washing which can be by:

“family members, and or it can be people from the community depending on, if for example, if there’s somebody been living in Hull who doesn’t have, they don’t have family living here then it could be somebody else from the community but usually I mean for example if a woman passed away then it would be a group of women or one or two women would wash the body, .... and it’s a duty or an obligation upon the Muslim Community to do that if there was nobody else from the family”.

For Jews there is a team of people willing to perform the washing or Taharah which is “one of the greatest honours which you can do as a Jewish person because like, because there is no reward for it because the person that you are doing it for cannot give you a reward” (Funeral 45). The team is a regular group but membership is open to all members of the synagogue. For the Orthodox Jews there is training for the Taharah. A key informant said:

“For the Taharah there is training, yes, but it tends to be that when you first go, obviously it’s not something that, a job that somebody, everybody can do, so people are approached and say would you, would you be prepared to try and usually the first time, as we say you just stand and watch and you know ask questions as you feel able to”. (Other religious informant 21)

The body is not embalmed.

**Location of the body**

In all cases except one the body was collected from the mortuary or home address by the funeral director, prepared as wished by the family and then installed in a chapel of rest until the day of the funeral. In one case only was the coffin brought to the deceased’s home address. This was for a
traveller funeral where the coffin was installed in the front half of a through room in a small council house. The priest reported to researchers that the deceased had been lying in state in a white draped front room with a statue of Christ and one of Mary. On his visit the family, mainly women and older men, had been clustered at the far end of the room. The widow said at interview:

“I did I had him home for five days, and I just used to swan in and out you know as though he was there but he was asleep sort of thing because he used to sleep a lot and I just used to go in and I used to say daft things to him like, ‘are we having a cup of tea’ do you know, these used to say to me “Mother you can’t be saying that to him””. (Funeral 1)

She found it very difficult when the funeral director came to screw down the coffin and take it to the funeral and became distraught.

One other family asked about the possibility of having the coffin at home, having done this when another relative died, but in the end did not go ahead. Although funeral directors interviewed thought this practice was limited, one celebrant considered that having the coffin at home is becoming more popular. She said

“I think about 3 years ago maybe I had 2, last year I would say easily into double figures”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

This had caused practical problems for the funeral director:

“it’s got to be heating off and all this, in the summer again nightmare so they sometimes provide fans and so on. But they have to then make an excuse to pop in every day, send a member of staff down and make sure that the room’s being kept at a proper temperature otherwise things are going to go badly wrong and when they come to collect the deceased to take them back for the, the last couple of hours to check, check them over and then off in the hearse, they, they don’t want to come to a body that’s become a hazard”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

She thought the reason for the change was:

“however traumatic it is for them to have the deceased at home it is better than thinking of them in an alien environment and ha…., and I think generosity of character as well, the spirit of thinking if he’s home everyone can come and see him, we can all sit together as a family”. (Humanist celebrant 19)
In the funeral of the priest (Funeral 2) the coffin was in church the night before. In this research project we did not encounter other instances of this practice but it is understood that in Scotland it is more common (Christian celebrant 14). A priest said:

“It’s just a simple service really it’s just a reception of the body and it, the body, lays there from the night before and often that’s the time when the family would come and go up to the coffin and they would touch it or kiss it or lay flowers on it or whatever, but that would generally only be requested by practising Catholic families”. (Christian celebrant 25)

At the Jehovah’s Witness funeral the coffin was not present at the funeral but carried straight to the cemetery by the funeral director. The son said:

“we don’t believe in bringing in dead bodies into the Kingdom Hall, that type of thing so people would be may be quietly respectful but there’s a scripture in the bible that says that we needn’t mourn like those who have no faith”. (Funeral 23)

For the Jewish funeral, where the coffin remained outside the synagogue during the service, a relative commented:

“I think there was also an issue, do you bring a dead body into a house of prayer?” (Funeral 45)

3.2 Content of the service

There was considerable conformity to a common pattern in terms of the shape and constituent elements of the funeral, even where families had set out to design their own customised event.

3.2.1 Service format

There were service sheets at eight of the funerals. Most were single folded sheets but the one for the Requiem Mass (Funeral 2) was a small booklet. Six of the service sheets, including Funeral 2, bore photos of the deceased. The Funeral 2 booklet was the most detailed with the words of all the hymns, the references of the readings and who read them, a summary of events in the deceased’s life, an expression of thanks, announcement of a retiring collection and an invitation to a post funeral reception. The others were orders of events specifying the music and in some giving the words of a hymn, poem or reading in full. In all six sheets announced a retiring collection and four, an invitation to a post funeral reception, at a fifth which was the hotel funeral, the mourners being already at this. At three the readers and/or contributors of tributes were listed by name.
One key informant thought it was important that the music was specified on the sheet so that mourners could play it afterwards in memory of the deceased. He said:

“they can listen to it on that, because music is very, very, very important to people”. (Other funeral professional 16)

At only one of the funerals was the coffin already present in church (a Requiem Mass), and in two the coffin was not present at the funeral service but only at the burial (the Jehovah’s Witness funeral and the Jewish funeral). At all the others, except one, the coffin was carried or in one case wheeled in to music. In some of the religious funerals bible sentences were also read at the entry.

In all funerals there was then some form of welcome, usually including some form of statement of what the celebrant thought was the purpose of the funeral. The religious funerals then followed a structure of readings, commentary on the readings, eulogy, commendation and committal interspersed with music of various kinds. For some this structure followed a set liturgy while for others it was more informal. For the BHA humanist funerals and sometimes the independent humanists, the welcome was followed by a statement concerning the humanist philosophy. Otherwise for these and the civil funerals the service or ceremony was centred on an account of the deceased’s life, either by the celebrant or by family and friends. Poems might be included at the wish of the family and friends or used as fillers where there was limited material for the eulogy. As in the religious funerals music was often used to break up the proceedings and to provide a period for private contemplation. The service ended with a committal and more music. In both religious and secular funerals the final words before the music generally related to thanks to mourners for their attendance or to specific family, friends and institutions, to announcements of a retiring collections and invitations to a post funeral reception.

Key informants thought that a structure was important to the funeral service although they differed in their views as to the type of structure that was needed. Some ministers of religion thought the formal structure of set liturgy was important. For example, one said:

“I believe that the Christian funeral service has a structure which is helpful to people, which a Humanist service hasn’t got. The structure works. I think the structure is helpful to a flow”. (Christian celebrant 13)
A humanist however saw the structure in terms of mood and emotion, saying:

“there’s a kind of cadence to the whole thing. There’s sort a serious bit at the introduction. The formal bit if you like. And then there’s the story, which often has some light moments and some you know, it has a bit of a like that, but it tends to be quite a positive thing, quite kind of upbeat and then you kind of slightly lower it towards the end of that, and then you have a period of reflection which goes right down in terms of mood and to something more solemn and serious and the committal which is the most sort of solemn and serious part of it. And then after the committal you lift it again and send people out to a more upbeat note”.

(Humanist celebrant 20)

Whatever the type of service it was agreed that it was important that the service should have a form – a beginning, middle and an end to help;

“the family to move on as they say, through the grief of loss, to acceptance”. (Christian celebrant 29)

In the words of another:

“the service can be like a rollercoaster and, if you do it wrong, people are up and down and they come out in a complete welter of aftershock really”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

Only one service was recorded. At three quarters of the funerals there was a retiring collection for charity. At the priest’s funeral the collection was for the church which had meant a lot to the deceased. At one funeral it was for a church neighbourhood centre which the deceased had attended, at another a SCOPE day centre and for others charities which the deceased had supported were chosen. However most charities were concerned with the disease from which the deceased had suffered, or the facility which had provided care at the end. Six funerals supported Dove House and four McMillan nurses. For some families the collection was of minor importance and they could not remember much about it or forgot to count it. Others interviewed introduced the subject voluntarily, took pleasure in the amount raised and considered it a mark of respect for the deceased. One partner said:

“And dear to her heart was the Daisy Appeal and the people that looked after her at Castle Hill were fantastic. And they need the money....And in the end we raised over £1400”. (Funeral 10)

A son said that the sum raised was:
“Absolutely brilliant” and that “that shows a lot of respect for my mum as well. That people were prepared to give, you know, for what they’d done for my mum”. (Funeral 17)

3.2.2 Music

Music emerged as one of the most important elements in almost all the funerals and one of the choices to which most time and attention was given. There was, however, a considerable range of music used and the reasons for choice of piece and nature of its significance varied.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals with exclusively secular content</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals with mixed music</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7 Funeral Music**

One funeral had no music at all. Key informants interviewed confirmed that this is unusual although for some people music is not important. There may also be particular circumstances. One celebrant said:

“a couple of times I’ve had a service for a profoundly deaf person, music hasn’t been a part of their life so we’ve gone in to silence”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

Other key informants pointed to other faiths such as Islam and Orthodox Judaism where there is no music (Other religious informants 21, 23). The Quakers will not usually have music although instrumental music might be played at the beginning and end (Christian celebrants 24, 35). At the Jewish Reform funeral attended psalms were sung and a key informant mentioned that Psalm 23 had been sung as a solo at a funeral he had conducted (Other religious informant 22).
Only 11 funerals had hymns sung by the congregation. One was a Roman Catholic requiem mass where the seven hymns were obviously chosen to be significant for the deceased’s vocation and religious beliefs. Four were for women who were a practising Christians, one with Jehovah’s Witness songs, and the others with hymns chosen because they were favourites of the deceased, relevant to aspects of her life or favourites of the mourners. In another the hymns were around the theme of love. A key informant suggested that for committed Christians the hymns chosen, “will have been sung at various key moments in their faith and faith journey as it were”. (Christian celebrant 12). The family chose the last hymn, “All my hope on God is founded”, for Funeral 46 because:

“it just to me summed up that, you know she had a great faith, and although she didn’t talk about it really, and to me it was just, you know, sort of summed it all up really”.

Four of the others who were not churchgoers chose “Abide with me”. A key informant described an occasion when a family had cried during this hymn but not for any religious meaning but because of its association with the deceased’s last football match. Similarly another key informant said:

“I think it’s more of a, more than it being of any having any spiritual meaning it’s something that it’s perhaps a hymn ... that has meant something to the family over the years”. (Other celebrant 28)

Another key informant suggested that the choice of hymns where the family are not churchgoers is often guided by the celebrant who will suggest well known hymns that mourners will be able to sing. He said:

“I always help them to choose the hymns that would be most likely known by people like ‘Amazing Grace’, or ‘The Lord’s my Shepherd’”. (Christian celebrant 25)

Two further families in the research would have liked to sing the Lord is my Shepherd but were discouraged from singing because of likely numbers of mourners and potential emotion on the day by respectively a minister and a funeral director. One key informant criticised this attitude saying;

“I think that’s offensive, because you’re taking...... I got really incensed, you’re taking, I didn’t say anything at the time but I did afterwards, but it’s taking away the choice of the mourners and the family, and the deceased”. (Other celebrant 36)

Another suggested that his approach would rather be:
“There’s no reason why we can’t have an organist and whatever that hymn be, say The Old Rugged Cross, but even, if the organist is playing it you might find once the organ starts playing that hymn they’ll start to sing the words”. (Funeral director 3)

Other families chose hymns variously sung by singers live or on CD or played on instruments. Three of these chose “Abide with me” and two, “Amazing Grace”. A key informant suggested that these hymns were popular:

“because people know it and it’s actually over the years, it’s, it’s been brought out by secular artists and bands so that, that’s something they can recognize as being religious but also you know down the years they’ve heard it on Top of the Pops”. (Christian celebrant 14)

Another said:

“Sometimes now they will play a hymn when we’re in (the crematorium) sung by somebody like Harry Secombe, or somebody like that, or that’s probably the best that they can manage really as far as religion’s concerned so I go along with that”. (Christian celebrant 25)

Three families allowed the crematorium/cemetery staff or the organist to provide “suitable” music for entry and exit which was hymn tunes.

Nine families chose CDs of music other than hymns which had religious or spiritual content of some sort, even if it was only the mention of God. These ranged from Robson and Jerome’s “I believe”, which talks about belief but not in what, and Bette Midler’s “From a distance”, which talks of a God viewpoint of the world, to the “Pie Jesu” from Andrew Lloyd Weber’s Requiem and “Panis angelicus”. It must be said, however, that the principal mourner had not registered that the “Pie Jesu” was from a requiem mass in spite of his being a lapsed Catholic. “Panis Angelicus” was chosen by funeral director for a family who requested “church type” music. In both these cases the families concerned thought that the music was appropriate for the occasion. Since they were not aware of the words the music must be speaking in its own right. One key informant said, “some chord progression, progressions in music are more likely to stir your emotions than others” (Christian celebrant 30) which may be relevant here.

Thirteen funerals had exclusively religious music, although for one it was only “suitable” crematorium provided music and another was the family who asked for “church type” music as
already mentioned. Six funerals mixed hymns with secular music and seven purely secular with popular songs with some religious content.

Most families chose secular music, 15 exclusively and a further 13 in conjunction with hymns or music with religious content. Several key informants confirmed that secular was more common today. Comments included:

“I think people are using more secular tunes these days, but I have to say secular tunes that have meaning for them as a family.” (Christian celebrant 24)

“Contemporary music instead of hymns, yeah, I do feel, yeah it has really really changed and will continue to change.” (Christian celebrant 34)

Live music at the funerals studied has included a jazz saxophone and bagpipe lament. CDs have been mainly vocal love songs but varying in style and period. The only songs which have recurred are Bette Midler’s “Wind beneath my wings” (3 times), with an instrumental version by Pan Pipes in addition, Frank Sinatra My Way (twice), “the Power of Love” (twice) and “Red Red Robin” (twice). Other songs have been by artists as wide ranging as Abba, the Beatles, Elvis, Bon Jovi, Queen, Cindy Lauper, Eva Cassidy and Barry White. One family chose a song from My Fair Lady, another two Puccini arias, a third Handel’s Water Music and a fourth the Moonlight Sonata.

### 3.2.3 Readings

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*Table 8 Funeral Readings*
Almost all the funerals included a reading of some kind. Over half the funerals studied included one or more bible reading or brief sentence and slightly less used poems. However 10 funerals combined bible readings with poems. A few funerals used prose readings other than from the bible.

The passages were generally read by the celebrant. At two Catholic funerals the readings were by other priests assisting at the service or a server. Family members read at seven funerals, including nieces, a daughter in law, a sister, a son, a daughter and a widow. On two occasions the psalm was read by all those present (or those that joined in). At one funeral a Salvation Army representative from the lunch club the deceased attended read. At others a reading was by respectively a friend and a former student. The types of reading are summarised in Table 8.

**Bible readings/sentences**

More than a quarter of the funerals used brief scriptural sentences. Some of these were read as the coffin was carried in, as in the various set Christian services, and delivered dramatically (“I am the resurrection and the life” etc). In other cases a sentence or two was read by a minister of religion as an introduction to the service after the entry music. In a Jehovah’s Witness service there were a number of brief one or two verse readings throughout the service. Two humanists and one civil celebrant used sentences from Ecclesiastes at the committal although in one case slightly adapted. In Funeral 33 the words “on earth” substituted for “under heaven” in “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose on earth, a time to be born and a time to die”. A key informant had come across this adaptation and commented “*And that made me cross actually that somebody was reading scripture but twisting it for a non-religious service*”. (Christian celebrant 30)

A longer reading from the same Ecclesiastes chapter was used at two Salvation Army funerals, chosen on both occasions by the minister. The most popular biblical reading however was psalm 23, either read by the minister or by the congregation together. This is in addition to the occasions when it was sung as a hymn. However in only two cases was this a clear choice by the family. In one case the family wanted to sing this as a hymn but compromised on reading it. In the other the deceased had specifically said that she wanted her granddaughter to read it. In the other funerals it was either suggested to the family or read without consultation.
Poems

Poems were included in funerals conducted by both ministers of religion and secular celebrants. Information on who chose the poems is not always available. However for eight funerals conducted by a minister of religion and using poems, the poem was specifically chosen by the family. Of the twenty funerals conducted by a secular celebrant and using poems, in eleven the celebrant chose the poems and in three the celebrant offered the family a folder of poems from which to select. In religious funerals the liturgy is either set or designed around the Christian message. Therefore the funeral is likely to include a poem only if particularly requested by the family. In secular funerals however there is no liturgy and poems contribute more importantly to the service which otherwise may only include the eulogy and music. One key informant said:

“sometimes I do (use poems) when basically, to pad out a service where people have got very little to say”. (Humanist celebrant 19) Another liked to use a poem at the end of the service saying “I like to pick a piece of poetry or help the family pick a piece of poetry, they know sometimes the family are quite keen on a piece of poetry, but to help them to move forward”. (Other celebrant 28)

She continued:

“some families like something fairly sombre towards the end and others want something that’s quite uplifting again it really just depends on the family so I work with them to find something that’s suitable for them”.

Many poems emphasise the positive – happy memories rather than expression of grief. These include the poem “Afterglow” which begins “I’d like the memory of me to be a happy one”¹. “Death is nothing at all” enjoins the hearer “Laugh as we always laughed”². If I should go before the rest of you says “life goes on, so sing as well.”³ “Instructions for life includes the words “let a smile come quickly for I have loved the laughter of life”⁴. “Remember me when I have gone away” suggests that it would be “Better by far you should forget and smile than that you should remember and be sad.”⁵ The whole poem “Smiling is infectious” was included in Funeral 42 to lighten the proceedings:

“Smiling is infectious
You catch it like the flu

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¹ Helen Lowrie Marshall
² Henry Scott Holland 1847 - 1918
³ Joyce Grenfell 1910-1979
⁴ Rev. Arnold Crompton
⁵ Christina Rossetti
When someone smiled at me today
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner
And someone saw my grin
When he smiled I realised
I’d passed it onto him.

I thought about that smile
Then I realised it’s worth
A single smile, just like mine
Could travel round the earth.

So if you feel a smile begin
Don’t leave it undetected
Let’s start an epidemic quick
And get the world infected!”

Smiling is infectious
by Karen McLendon-Laumenn

Some poems mention the idea of courage to deal with loss and difficulties. In “Four Candles for you”
“This second candle represents our courage.
To confront our sorrow,
To comfort each other,
To change our lives.”

Four candles for you, author unknown

“Instructions for life” by Rev. Arnold Crompton refers to “When you walk alone with courage”.
William Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Mortality” says “We will grieve not, rather find Strength in
what remains behind.”

Prose readings other than Bible
Only a few funerals used prose readings other than from the Bible, three of them introduced by the
celebrant and only two by the families. The passage “Footprints” was printed on the back of the
service sheet for Funeral 1 and read out by the priest.
3.2.4 Prayers

The funerals conducted by ministers of religion all included prayers of some kind said by the minister. Only about three quarters of these involved the participation of the mourners, in almost all cases this being in the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is familiar to a wide sector of Hull people and was therefore felt to be suitable for mourners to join in. One man specified that the Lord’s Prayer should be said at his funeral (Funeral 27). Comments made by family members at interview included:

“just the Lord’s Prayer was alright, cos I say everybody can join it.” (from a family member with no religious beliefs, Funeral 37).

“It’s just traditional motions to be honest for me, you know. It reminded me of being back at school saying all those prayers to be honest...no but again its part and parcel of a traditional funeral context isn’t it and you know traditional funeral I think on reflection was probably what mum would have wanted and expected.” (another family member with no formal Christian beliefs, Funeral 19)

One son, who although not a regular churchgoer had some Christian beliefs, was definite about the version of the prayer that should be said, that it should be the familiar one and not the modern one said in church which he had attended the Sunday after the funeral. He said:

“We’d always been, from being little we’d always been taught the Lord’s Prayer and then she (his mother) carried that on. Not the newer version cos I think the newer version is terrible, because they actually said that in the church, the newer version of the Lord’s Prayer and I just think it loses it by updating it if you know what I mean”. (Funeral 17)

Key informants confirmed the wide appeal of the Lord’s Prayer. One said that for some families:

“it’s the only prayer that they remember and they say to me, I would like you to include the Lord’s Prayer. So that actually goes across the board from the traditionalist who will say you know we really have to include the Lord’s Prayer”. (Christian celebrant 14)

Other prayers in which the congregation participated were in the Requiem Mass, in a Roman Catholic funeral which included responses and in an Anglican funeral which included a form of confession. At the Thanksgiving service for Funeral 46, the family put great thought into planning the prayers to express the faith of the deceased and that of themselves. These included a bidding prayer similar to that which had been used at a previous family funeral and a prayer asking for strengthening of faith and hope and that “we may live as those who believe in the communion of
saints, forgiveness of sins and the resurrection to eternal life”. This last is part of the Apostles Creed and is an explicit statement of faith.

Three non religious funerals included the Lord’s Prayer said by the congregation. Again this was included for reasons of tradition rather than from any religious significance. Families commented:

“And the Lord’s Prayer always seemed to figure so I knew it extremely well and I thought well yeah it would be nice to have that one....But it doesn’t have a great deal of significance for me again because I don’t have any beliefs.” (Funeral 25)

“I don’t really know any other prayers but I always know, I think most people know that don’t they?... I think it was may be just for like other people what was there and you know it just sort of, it just seemed..I mean I’m not religious but I don’t find that you know, over the top do you know what I mean. I just think it’s a nice thing and I’ve always known it because you learn it at school don’t you?” (Funeral 24)

One Jehovah’s Witness daughter whose mother had a humanist funeral, said that she did find the inclusion of the prayer helpful

“Although I didn’t, I, yeah, I pray when I feel I want to not when someone”. (Funeral 16)

Some used prayers from the standard Anglican, Roman Catholic or Methodist liturgy. The words of the “Lux aeterna luceat eis” generally in English translation and in various versions were said at various funerals, including those conducted by Roman Catholic and Anglican priests and one Methodist minister.

Some used extemporized prayer. The family member interviewed about the Jehovah’s Witness funeral explained the approach to prayer:

“It should come from the heart and the mind, not be like a written down parrot phrase thing that was somebody would just read a prayer out of a book or something like that.” (Funeral 23)

Some used well known written prayers. One Free Church Minister said part of the 13th century prayer of St Francis of Assissi, a prayer which was also used in the interfaith memorial service:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, 
Where there is hatred, let me sow love; 
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.”

The same Free Church minister used the prayer “God be in my head and understanding”:
“God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing.”

Sarum Primer, 1558

Whether extemporaneous or using written words, prayers frequently included giving thanks for the life of the deceased and asking for comfort for mourners, sometimes mentioning family members by name. Prayers for the deceased were said by Roman Catholic and Anglican priests but also, more surprisingly, by two Free Church ministers. For example in the closing prayer of Funeral 18 the minister prayed for “those that we love but are no longer with us. Let light perpetual shine upon them. Grant to the living grace, departed rest, the world peace and to all eternal life.” The family member interviewed would rather have expected the minister to use the phrase “remember the faithful departed and pray for those who mourn for them, so you’re not praying for the dead you’re remembering the dead.”

Others also prayed for rest and peace for the deceased. At a Roman Catholic funeral the words were: “Eternal rest grant unto her O Lord and let light perpetual shine upon him/her, may she rest in peace”.

In some funerals, including Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist celebrants, there were prayers that the family would be reunited with the deceased. One of those interviewed said he believed this as a Christian but thought:

“it would be important to the agnostic audience as well.”

This was because,

“I think funerals are a time when people’s spirituality comes out in its diverse forms and to, to bring to mind and to bring to heart the hope of life after death is appropriate”. (Funeral 18)
A civil celebrant, while not actually offering prayer, wished the mourners:

“love and understanding of each other, peace to the deceased and may she be reunited with her loved ones. Rest in peace”.

For a few it was important that there should be prayers. One lifelong Methodist said:

“And I say me prayers every night, every night I say me prayers, always have done, yeah, I do yes, it just had to be”. (Funeral 38)

Another practising Christian said:

“It’s clearly important to me as a Christian”. (Funeral 18)

On the other hand one bereaved sister whose mother had chosen a specific minister for her son’s funeral found the prayers too much. She said:

“my mother doesn’t regularly go to church and so it just seems a little bit hypocritical to go a little bit too involved into a lot of prayers and stuff like that, we all sort of thought maybe he did it a little bit too much. We’d have rather he’d reigned back a little bit and did a little bit less”. (Funeral 12)

One widow, where there had not been specific prayers, regarded the whole funeral as a prayer:

“I think the sort of prayer was the whole thing itself .....An offering err, wishing Justin on his journey. I see that as a prayer as well....Because after all a prayer is in my sort of feeling is just speaking how you feel to whoever, whatever out there, so I feel that that was what we tried to do”. (Funeral 44)

Some key informants talked about the specific types of prayer that they would include. One Christian minister said he would:

“include specific prayers, particularly I suppose, an opening prayer that recognises that we’re here to recognise that this person who’s died was a unique human being, created by God and loved by God”. (Christian celebrant 30).

Another emphasized the importance of prayer for the deceased:

“that person’s been put into his hands, asking for his mercy and thinking about you know life beyond what they’ve lived on this earth so that everybody’s prayer is important”. (Christian celebrant 25)
Jewish funerals include specific prayers the most important one of which is the Kaddish. A Jewish representative said:

“People say I don’t believe in God and yet they say the prayer, the Kaddish which is the official prayer that one says when they’re bereaved and that prayer is all about faith in God”. (Other religious informant 21)

For the family of Funeral 45, the prayer is “actually an affirmation of faith...but, but it’s traditionally called the prayer for the dead”. This presents some difficulties when individuals identify with the Jewish culture but are ambivalent about belief in God.

For Reform Jews there is an element of variation and even choice in the prayers used. There are also different prayers for men and for women (other religious informant 22).

For Muslims the entire funeral is prayer led by the Imam but said by all mourners, both men and women, and learned by Muslim children at a young age. The prayers have a specific format “it’s not one we can make up type of thing” (Other religious informant 23). Prayers are for the deceased because “The only thing that we can give that person who’s passed away is our prayers”. He explained:

“we pray that their eternal life is peaceful and happy and, and so on so, there’s, there’s a kind of a procedure and a specific way that the prayer is conducted. And it’s quite short; up to you know 5 minutes or so. At this point we, we stand in rows as we would pray normally. The prayer is not as lengthy and it doesn’t including the bowing and the prostration as the normal prayer would”. (Other religious informant 23)

### 3.2.5 Silent periods

Periods of silence were included by both ministers of religion and by secular celebrants. Some ministers of religion announced these as for private prayer but some merely announced them as a period of quiet. One suggested that mourners pictured the deceased as an aid to remembering her. Others suggested that mourners remembered special memories and gave thanks, took a precious memory and held it in their minds and other similar phrases, or said a private farewell. Of one funeral where the silence was absolute, the bereaved son said:

“So I think it was a time of reflection more than anything else. You know give them chance to think and you know to may be have a few regrets and whatever and that’s why it was nice, it
was and that give them chance to, like I say to have their own thoughts and you know their own regrets or, or whatever”. (Funeral 17)

Some secular celebrants offered a time of silence to remember the deceased and say a private prayer if that was their way or suggested that mourners used a music interlude for this purpose. This was requested by families to accommodate people at the funeral who did have religious beliefs. One father said:

“There may have been lots of other people that were religious there, we don’t know”. (Funeral 35)

“Yes I thought it was quite nice that you know it was, what’s the word, she gave people that choice, if people were religious that they could.” (Funeral 16)

Other families however did not want quiet interludes. One said:

“I wouldn’t, well we wouldn’t have wanted a period of morose self contemplation in it. It’s not what we wanted. It was a celebration”. (Funeral 10)

Another of those interviewed had not found the silent period helpful because:

“I just think well, you’re thinking all the time anyway”. (Funeral 12)

However another who also was thinking of his wife all the time did appreciate the interlude. He said:

“I do think about Carol all the time now and I always have done. She’s been the constant thing in my life all these years but yeah it was nice I did think of Carol when it was suggested that we have this period of contemplation”. (Funeral 25)

Others also found it appropriate saying:

“It was just like a quiet moment you know to sort of think about me mum. Yeah it was nice.” (Funeral 24)

“It gives you a bit of peace, because like I say I mean obviously it’s very upsetting isn’t it and you just, it was just nice to have a couple of minutes just to sit and think in your own mind.” (Funeral 5)

One minister of religion said he always included a time of silence so that those with beliefs in any religion could say a prayer.
“But you’ve got to realise that in the congregation there may well be committed Christians and you, you’ve got to give those people …... I mean there could well also Buddhists, Hindu’s and Muslim’s and whatever there, so you’ve got to given an opportunity at some point for those people to do what they want to do, which is probably silent prayer.” (Christian celebrant 12)

At Quaker funerals there will be longer periods of silence because:

“Quaker worship consists of silence, but within that silence anyone there present who wishes to say anything at all is welcome to do so”. (Christian celebrant 24)

A non religious celebrant referred to a funeral he had conducted where the family:

“didn’t want any words spoken at all at the farewell, they just simply wanted to, in fact eventually the daughter insisted that, she said that I really would like us all to stand and so they all simply stood and they said goodbye in their own way, in their own words silently. You know, there was a minutes silence or so”. (Other funeral professional 16)

Another non religious celebrant said that a period of reflection during music was preferred because:

“if it’s a silence you get the weeping and it’s quite upsetting for, you know, it tends to become quite an intruding sound”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

3.2.6 Funeral address/eulogy

The funeral address was the centre-piece in all the funerals, although in the funeral of the Catholic priest it was important but not dominant within the Mass. In every funeral, the address included some form of eulogy celebrating the life of the deceased. However, the extent to which the personal eulogy was embedded in a religious or philosophical framework which constituted the address, varied across both religious and humanist or secular services.

Address by celebrant on religious or philosophical matters

Most of the religious celebrants said some words about Christian beliefs, generally related to the readings chosen. These were usually brief, only one or two such as the Jehovah’s Witness offering a more substantial discourse on the theology of sin and death. Others either added a few explanatory sentences after a reading or integrated comments into the personal eulogy. The British Humanist Association celebrants made a statement about the humanist philosophy early in the service and the chaplain at the memorial service offered his own thoughts on grief.
**Eulogy by celebrant about deceased**

The celebrant gave some account of the life of the deceased in all the funerals studied except in the two where this role was respectively taken by a son and a partner. This generally included a chronological history of events, some description of the deceased’s character and interests and reference to the deceased’s relationships with others. The emphasis was always positive and problems such as marriage break up were not mentioned even when the former spouse was present.

The approaches to the account varied however. In only five funerals, all conducted by ministers of religion, was the minister personally acquainted with the deceased and the extent of this acquaintance varied. In one funeral where the priest knew the deceased well, the approach was to concentrate on the deceased’s character and illustrate aspects of this with reference to his interests and relationships. In others the approach was to concentrate on the deceased’s life as a Christian, with limited description of personality and personal relationships and other interests being ignored. In one the approach was similar to that in many funerals where the celebrant and deceased were not acquainted, a description of life events and activities only. In a Jewish funeral where the rabbi knew the deceased well, the Hesped covered factual material about her life and comments about her character and value to the community.

In the other funerals the celebrant relied for the personal part of the address on information provided by the family.

**Style and language of the address**

The styles varied from the fairly impersonal to almost conversational. In a number of funerals with celebrants of all types, the celebrant received nods or murmurs of corroboration, some actually asking for information or checking information with the mourners. This was sometimes much appreciated. One widow said:

“He was very caring and during the sermon he kept looking down at me and giving me little half smiles and little winks”. (Funeral 40)

**Tribute by family member or friend**

At most funerals the celebrant delivered the address but in some cases the celebrant also read tributes prepared by family members or friends. These were mainly descriptive accounts of aspects of shared experience, reflections on the relationship and the contribution that the deceased had made. Tributes included those from sisters, sons, grandchildren, friends and a tutor. At other
funerals family members and friends read their own tributes. Where these took the place of an address from the celebrant these included descriptive material about events and interests. However they also talked about the decease’s personality, their relationship, the deceased’s impact on others and in one or two the deceased’s philosophy of life. On some occasions the mourners gave the speaker a spontaneous round of applause. For one family it was important that the grandchildren had input to the funeral service including those of primary school age. An older granddaughter made some introductory comments and then the children all said a personal thank you to their grandmother for a specific memory (Funeral 46).

Whether delivered by themselves or by the celebrant some indicated in their comments their own beliefs and some introduced moments of humour.

Those interviewed appreciated the courage and effort involved for their friends and family in making a personal tribute. One widow whose son had spoken said:

“Love can, can do most things can’t it, where you wouldn’t do it for yourself but yeah it was a loving sort of gesture for him”. (Funeral 44)

For those who had made the effort to speak for their loved ones it was important to do so. One son said:

“It was important for us. Because I could do it and it’s always nice, it’s always good if a family member can”. (Funeral 18)

A partner said that people had said he was brave but:

“I was the only person that could do it”. (Funeral 10)

Another son said:

“It wasn’t religious or anything I wanted, I wanted to do it, you know what I mean, I wanted a representative of the family to say something rather than, and I’ve been to ones where somebody’s going to say something and they’ve broken down......I was worried I’d be a bit robotic wasn’t I, I still wasn’t sure how I sounded but I felt more confident as I went through”. (Funeral 37)

Celebrants mentioned their willingness to step in and read a tribute on behalf of a family member who did not feel confident to do so. One civil celebrant (Other celebrant 28) described a funeral which had comprised only a series of personal tributes which she read on the family’s behalf. A
funeral director commented that personal tributes were becoming more common so that she had introduced:

“a book that I give to every family, that we’ve made over the years and in it now I’ve put a piece in about writing a eulogy so that if you know somebody in the family does want to speak...it explains how to do it”. (Funeral Director 8)

Another key informant thought it was important that families took part and were not just passive observers. He said:

“With more educated people I do actually get a bit narked if they don’t write and say something themselves or certainly write something themselves”. (Other funeral professional 16)

However, a Jewish Orthodox perspective was that including a tribute by a family member was inappropriate because the tribute must be “within the bounds of the Jewish law, respectful and not offensive to anyone else in the audience” (Other religious informant 21). It was felt that on one occasion when a personal tribute had been permitted,

“it was the biggest mistake we could have made because it was just a pantomime and ... well the danger is that we create a precedent, exactly, but we would then have difficulty controlling, that’s right, and it was shocking. The, the young man, it was his mother and he was in no state to talk at all and you know it just, it didn’t, it gave no respect to, no, to, to the, it took away from the dignity that we’re trying to create”. (Other religious informant 21)

For Reform Jews however the family may be asked if they would like to do the eulogy, or provide a written text for the person conducting the service to read (Other religious informant 22).

Language

Most of the funerals attended were in English although at the requiem mass there were some parts of the mass in Latin and at the Jewish some funeral prayers in Hebrew. A family member said “normally ...you’d have a certain amount of traditional prayers which are said (in Hebrew) and after that there are some prayers which, how do you say, where it isn’t optional, but the, it’s more meaningful to the mourners to say them in English” (Funeral 45). This was practice in the Jewish Reform although for Jewish Orthodox there would be more Hebrew. A comment was “it’s very much up to the Rabbi to bring it in prayers, into the Service which are meaningful, and that can be prayers, that can be poetry, that can be anything into the Service which basically brings comfort, comfort to
the mourners and meaningful and meaning to the Service rather than the Orthodox which would basically have almost, I would say 90% of the Service in Hebrew with and probably the eulogy and the prayer in English”. A Muslim explained that the prayers at a Muslim funeral would be in Arabic (Other religious informant 23).

3.3 Ceremony, ritual and symbols
Despite the majority of families wanting to avoid too much formality, the funerals were not devoid of ceremony, ritual or symbols. Symbols were particularly prominent, both those commonly recognised and those customised symbols deriving from family history or personal attributes of the deceased.

3.3.1 Dress
Style of dress contributed substantially to the creation of the funeral as a ceremonial event, different from everyday life.

Celebrant’s dress
The celebrant’s dress was one of the more overt features which both reinforced ceremony and was also symbolic. The Roman Catholic priests wore albs with purple stoles for the ordinary funeral services and full white vestments for the requiem mass. While white is a funeral colour, the number of priests participating entailed use of the only Diocesan set, which is white. The Salvation Army minister wore uniform. Other ministers of religion varied in their dress. Some Anglicans wore albs and purple stoles, some cassock, surplice and stole and some suits with dog collars. Free Church ministers chose variously cassocks or dark suits. The humanists, civil celebrants and psychic wore dark suits but one male humanist wore blue shirts. One female humanist wore a pink scarf when the mourners had been asked to wear pink at the request of the deceased.

One civil celebrant interviewed said she would wear colours to fit in with what the family wished. She said:

“I asked the family at the interview if they’re happy with me wearing a dark suit with a splash of colour or would they like me to wear something particularly and I have on occasions bought yellow”. (Other celebrant 28)

However a humanist said while she would introduce a flash of colour she did not wear coloured outfits because families might not actually wear the colours that were discussed and she did not feel it appropriate. She said by wearing a coloured scarf:

“I’m making some kind of respectful contribution, but I don’t think it’s at all appropriate for the celebrant to be wearing a, a football shirt”. (Humanist celebrant 19)
A Rabbi wore a “shocking pink” coat because she was only in town by chance and able to conduct the funeral. However the daughter remarked on this as one of the things she would have liked to have been done differently. (Funeral 45)

**Mourners’ Dress**

For the close family at least, the colour and style of dress was carefully thought about. Most of the mourners in fact wore sober colours – black, dark or neutral greys and beiges. Dress was not particularly formal except in a few funerals where most men wore dark suits. These included a funeral in the West Riding where the deceased’s father remarked that:

> “Even his sons were smartly dressed. Yes, they were. They did him proud that day”. (Funeral 35)

At a funeral in the rural East Riding men were also mainly in suits and black ties. However formal wear also appeared at funerals where the family was from a Hull council estate, suggesting that individual family traditions may play a large part. At some funerals close family were formally dressed although other mourners were not. One son said that he had worn a suit because:

> “(his mother) always commented how...I look my best in a suit because she doesn’t see me that often in a suit. I’m more of a combats man and a tee shirt man more than anything else and that’s how I respected my mum because I know how she, you know how she liked me to look”. (Funeral 17)

Generally those interviewed had not suggested how mourners should dress but left it to people to make their own decisions. They thought that people chose to wear black or dark colours because of tradition and out of respect for the deceased. Comments included:

> “She wore black because she is a very religious person, and a very conventional person.”

(Funeral 39)

> “I didn’t particularly want black. I didn’t wear black as such, my coat was a kind of different colour but, no. If people had’ve worn whatever, I think it was because it was probably wintery as well. I think if it had been a summer funeral most people would’ve been in lighter colours.”

(Funeral 44)
“But I think that’s just, unless, I think unless you stipulate not to wear dark colours I think people do, because it’s just a centuries old thing isn’t it, that’s what they do. So I think more people do that through tradition”. (Funeral 22)

“I don’t know I just think probably just that you know, it’s sort of respectful I would’ve thought you know”. (Funeral 24)

“I think nowadays, I think people wear whatever they want to at funerals because its, as far as I’m concerned, it’s not what you wear at a funeral, it’s the point that you are actually there”. (Funeral 31)

However one brother who had himself bought new black clothes for the funeral was disgusted at another brother’s casual dress. He said:

“Black tie and all this lot and he just come as though he was just coming out, going out for the day. You know and to me that’s no respect”. (Funeral 20)

In only three funerals did large numbers of mourners wear colours. One was of a 44 year old woman whose favourite colour had been pink. She and her partner planned the funeral before her death and particularly asked that mourners should wear something pink. The mourners wore generally dark colours but, particularly the younger people, with touches of pink – pink scarf, pink shirt, pink tie. At another funeral of a 34 year old rugby league supporter, some wore black or dark colours but close family in particular wore red coats, red or red and white scarves, a red jumper under an open dark coat or red ties. One young man wore a football club shirt. Again mourners had been specifically asked to wear football colours in the press notice. In the third the widow wore mustard colour and one young woman pink. The daughter and her friend were in colourful dresses, leggings and high heels. Here the family had not specified dress except to say casual rather than formal.

For Funeral 46 where there was a funeral and later memorial service, dress was formal and sombre for the funeral itself but “lots of bright colours and things at the, at the (memorial) Service” because it was a thanksgiving service.

Some of the key informants had noticed a trend towards more casual dress. One said that while formal dress used to be universal:
“these days, you know you get people now who especially if they’d been work colleagues will pop in from work in their overalls, you know, works vans will turn up and then people will, will, will get out and then come into the service in, in you know work overalls, people will just turn up in jeans”. (Christian celebrant 14)

However the wearing of bright colours was still seen as limited. A funeral director said he now saw it:

“probably 10 times a year now so it’s, it is increasing but it’s a very small proportion”. (Funeral director 2)

3.3.2 The coffin
The style and material of the coffin played an important part in creating the ceremony and ritual for most of the families, although practical considerations such as cost also came into play. However, reasons were always given for the particular choices made, which frequently had to do with more than just cost.

In two cases the coffin was specified in the funeral plan. Otherwise similar numbers of families chose lighter woods for the coffin (oak and maple) and darker woods (cherry, rosewood and mahogany). Only three families chose elaborate, more personalised and expensive coffins and two families, wicker coffins. The wood chosen was frequently for aesthetic reasons, because the family liked the colour or it would set off the flowers they had chosen. Another frequent reason was because it was the sort of colour wood the deceased had liked. Comments included:

“Father - He liked all the things in his house was all dark oak
Mother - dark oak so we picked that one”. (Funeral 35)

“I chose it because it, it was the sort of colour that my parents, the wood colour that my parents have in their house”. (Funeral 36)

“where she used to live, she didn’t like, she liked furniture shall we say of that colour, cherry”. (Funeral 21)

For a number of families cost was a consideration either generally or because they did not see any point in large expense for something which was to be burned or buried. Comments included:
“we just thought well we’re not going to pick an expensive coffin because, what they got call it, not the cheaper one but not too expensive because of it going, do you know like to burn sort of thing”. (Funeral 7)

“It was only oak veneer so I didn’t have any real thoughts on it. I just thought that the price wasn’t unreasonable”. (Funeral 25)

“She (the deceased) left me a note that she wanted the cheapest funeral possible”. (Funeral 31)

At the other end of the scale some families chose elaborate coffins which were quite costly. A traveller family bought an elaborate carved mahogany coffin. The widow commented:

“It had the last suppers on both sides and he liked going abroad so, (son) kept saying to me ‘you’ve got the heaviest coffin that there is last, the last supper you know, you’re straining on men’ and I was apologising all the time you know saying ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry’ and he said ‘don’t apologise it’s what you want’.......You know so what he believed in l sort of did you know what I mean, not just because I was a Catholic because he believed it himself in his own mind, he was a Catholic. You know so as I say we went for the last supper which was on both sides of the coffin”. (Funeral 1)

Another family chose a coffin printed with the cosmos because of connections they perceived with the deceased’s interests and shared memories. The widow said:

“And there was an LP cosmos and the music is just beautiful and Justin was deeply interested in anything to do with, with science in general...it was his love. So it kind of all made sense really, he would’ve loved that, and the colour. That was the colour of the suit he had on when we got married. So, it was, yeah everything”. (Funeral 44)

Two families chose wicker coffins – one because she would have liked a woodland burial but this was not available in Hull. She said “So I compromised with the wicker coffin” (Funeral 39). The other was influenced partly because they had chosen a woodland burial but also because the deceased was a keen DIY person and would not have liked the destruction of wood. (Funeral 42)

A funeral director commented that families chose more substantial coffins for burial than for cremation. However personalised coffins bearing pictures were still only a minority choice “We’ve
probably had about 5 reflections coffins this year” (Funeral director 2). He thought this was more because people did not know about their availability rather than because of the slightly greater expense. Another funeral director commented that it was the poorer people who chose more elaborate coffins:

“It’d be the poorer people - you know that can ill afford to do these things, and I’ll say to them but you know there’s no insurance how are you going to pay for this? - that will want to do these things and the more well off people will still say now, it’s only at the crematorium we just want a simple, simple straight forward coffin”. (Funeral director 8)

At Jewish funerals the custom is for a very plain funeral, draped in a black cloth. A Muslim commented that while in this country Muslims do have coffins, traditionally they would be buried without a coffin but wrapped in two pieces of white cloth (Other religious informant 23).

3.3.3 The cortege and procession

The cortege represents one of the most ceremonial aspects remaining, with all families except one travelling in procession with the hearse either in limousines or family cars. For one funeral the cortege was more elaborate consisting of a shiny black hearse drawn by four black horses wearing head plumes. The horses had black blankets with a purple symbol on them. There were two top-hatted female grooms (Funeral 1). The hearse was followed by limousines. The widow said:

“I always promised him before even he had the stroke, look if you go before me I said I will promise to get you a horse and carriage because he’d seen a couple and he used to say ‘don’t they look nice’ but there was only two horses and I used to say, well I said to him I promise you if you go before me that is my promise, you know to get him a horse and carriage but I just went a bit over and I got four horses.”

A funeral director said that numbers of funerals with horse drawn hearses were increasing. At one time it was only the poor who had horse drawn hearses because they could not afford motor hearses. Now it has become fashionable to have a horse drawn hearse. She said:

“We have, we have one a month probably now because it’s a fashion and we are fashion led”. (Funeral director 8)

The procession also constituted one of the most ceremonial aspects, which sometimes was turned into a personal ritual. For most funerals the family gathered at the deceased’s home or that of a close family member and the cortege departed from there. For some however the family met at the
funeral director’s premises where there was a large car park and the cortege left from there. Reasons were varied. For Funeral 24 the son had only a small bungalow and the daughter lives in Beverley. One family made a special request for the route the cortege was to follow along the street where the deceased had used to live. The son said:

“Whenver we were in the East Hull locality she always said well can we go past down Abbey Street just to see the old house, I don’t know why it had a meaning so I think she would have liked that”.

The family appreciated that the funeral director fulfilled this request. The son continued:

“My uncle he, he thought that was very good, really really good. I said yes I said I can imagine that. She’d love that, cos that’s where her mother and father lived. And she was basically most of her life she was brought up there”. (Funeral 21)

The vehicles used were black except on two occasions the cars were maroon. One of those interviewed would have liked a lighter colour, saying:

“I would’ve liked light coloured cars as well. The (funeral director) used to do silver cars…..But they’ve stopped doing them now, but I would’ve liked the cars to have been a lighter colour as well. I think it just reflects a more, you know, less sombre”. (Funeral 44)

One key informant said, that with an increasing desire for personalisation and the idea of “celebration”,

“I can see a time when there’s people going to be, you know there’s going to be the traditional hearse car and then people are going to join in these pink limousines, I’m sure that’s going to come in at some point”. (Christian celebrant 34)

For Jews there is a requirement that the body makes only one last journey after death to its final resting place, meaning that when a funeral service had to be held at the synagogue rather than more usually in the cemetery Prayer House, the coffin was not brought into the synagogue. A family member commented:

“it’s got a thing that when the body comes from the, I presume the morgue or whatever it has one journey and it’s just one journey going to, straight to the grave...there’s apparently no stopping”. (Funeral 45)
3.3.4 Flowers

There were flowers at almost all the funerals and, as with other traditional elements, the choices – both to have flowers and the style of family flowers – were carefully explained and commented upon. For many it was family flowers only and otherwise donations to charity, also a growing trend in the view of some key informants. One said there are:

“Less and less flowers, usually one piece on the coffin and a few sprays. Some, sometimes it’s very, very simple where there’s just a few lilies, or a few roses and more and more people want to donate that money now to a worthwhile cause”. (Christian celebrant 34)

For some families flowers had little importance, but for most considerable thought and expense went into providing something that they thought was suitable. One family felt that flowers were a convention and that:

“you’d feel a bit mean if you didn’t you know get some or you know, but I wouldn’t say that I was a person what bothered with flowers and me mam didn’t”. (Funeral 24)

On the other hand it was important for another family that flowers were sent from everyone. A niece said:

“My mum and my two sisters, mum and two sisters and we just, we all made sure that he had some from everybody you know. So, we all had our individual sort of messages on them as well so it was nice for him”. (Funeral 27)

For the memorial service for Funeral 46 a friend did two large pedestal arrangements;

“she’d done it as a, you know for mum cos she liked my mother. You know she was fond of my mother”.

Several families commented that they wanted flowers because the deceased had loved flowers and this influenced the type of flowers chosen. For Funeral 36 the deceased was said to have loved all flowers especially sweet peas and roses. They chose a standard yellow and blue spray because they liked the colours but asked for roses to be added saying that the extra cost was immaterial. For another funeral where the deceased had liked flowers her son asked for them to be put in the chapel of rest before the funeral “just to make it a bit nicer for her in there”. (Funeral 17)

One deceased lady was said not to like red and white together, carnations or lilies but to like chrysanthemums (Funeral 19). According to his widow:
“James loved chrysanthemums, he liked, we both did, natural English flowers, British flowers rather than exotics brought it” (Funeral 39).

A daughter said:

“I wouldn’t have liked not to have had any flowers because she liked flowers but she wouldn’t have appreciated any wreaths or anything like that. You know people get wreaths and she didn’t like them”. (Funeral 5)

Another was said to hate flowers made into letters such as mum, grandma (Funeral 28). One widow:

“wanted something simple but meaningful and special, and they were special kind of lilies that I’d chosen”. (Funeral 44)

White flowers were chosen for the principal arrangements at more funerals than any other colour. At a number of funerals however, additional flowers from other family and friends meant that colours were varied overall. The reasons for choice of colours were often what the deceased was said to prefer or what the family member liked. One family chose yellow and white because “they’re a bit more joyful” which “might lift the spirit a little bit” (Funeral 12). Another family chose red and white, the team colours of the rugby side the deceased supported (Funeral 7). Another family chose purple to match the personalized coffin (Funeral 44).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour of principal flowers</th>
<th>Number of funerals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow and purple</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink/mauve</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red/red and white</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 9 Funeral Flowers

Seven families chose to have flowers made up into cushions spelling words such as “Mum”, “Nana” and “Dad” despite the cost of these arrangements. One family chose the letters HKR for the deceased’s football club. Other cushion arrangements chosen included a long cushion with the
words “Robert My Dad” picked out in flowers, a dog modelled in flowers, an anchor for a man who went to sea, a heart and two crosses. One son commented:

“It was an open heart wreath which I thought was very appropriate, and it looked very nice”. (Funeral 31)

Neither of the crosses was chosen by or for individuals with strong Christian beliefs. However, one son who was a practicing Christian and whose agnostic brother had chosen a cross said:

“He couldn’t articulate Christian doctrine if you gave him a million pounds but in choosing the white cross he was saying something”. (Funeral 18)

Some key informants suggested that there is a growing trend for flower arrangements in the shape of something relevant to the deceased. A funeral director said:

“We’re getting so many demands now for, for like pints of beer made out of flowers, and....fishes or bikes and....we’ve had trucks and all sorts....just unlucky that you haven’t seen any of those on the funerals you’ve had but that’s becoming really really popular now with the florists. The florists are getting so technical on different things, like building a full train or you know a truck or there’s all different things what’s been done now”. (Funeral director 2)

No flowers

There were no flowers on the coffin of the Roman Catholic priest and none at the Jewish funeral, as this is not customary. One partner who had planned the funeral with the deceased before she died chose to have no flowers at all but donations to charity. He said that flowers were a:

“Waste of money. She was very practical, well we’re both very practical people. And you know we’re safe in the knowledge that it’s gone to a worthwhile cause because all those flowers would be in the tip by now”. (Funeral 10)

At the Jehovah’s Witness funeral there were no family flowers because

“we believe that, that perhaps takes something away from what it’s all about you see” (Funeral 23).

However the Jehovah’s Witness daughter of a family which chose a humanist funeral but did not have flowers said:

“I would have liked to have had some flowers on the coffin because I just think it looks so like nobody cared about her but that was how they wanted it”. (Funeral 16)
Flower rituals

Besides the arrangements on and around the coffin, some families chose to use single flowers in rituals at the graveside or the crematorium. One son explained this as because:

“she was a rose, she was to me anyway, hence we’ve got roses everywhere”. (Funeral 34)

For other families this was a family tradition. At the woodland burial, instead of flowers, sprigs of evergreen were thrown into the grave because the deceased had been averse to cutting flowers. His daughter said:

“He thought that you should leave them in the ground cos they lasted longer”. (Funeral 42)

The laying of single flowers on the coffin was also commented upon by some key informants. One said:

“One funeral I did everybody was given a flower as they entered and before they left went and laid it on top of the coffin”. (Other celebrant 28)

For Jewish funerals there are no flowers but for Muslim funerals there may be:

“People can sometimes, they leave flowers with the coffin and obviously put flowers at the grave and so on. I think it’s just a, you know as a mark, mark of respect really”. (Other religious informant 23)

After the funeral, at the crematorium the staff would lay out the flowers for a short time and then dispose of them. At the cemetery flowers would be laid on the filled in grave. However some families chose to dispose of them in other ways. Two families laid them on other family graves. Two families took flowers out of the sprays and distributed them to family members. One daughter said:

“But we took the roses out, so all the women at the funeral had a rose”. (Funeral 36)

One son collected the flowers from the cemetery and laid them on the seat in the garden where the deceased had liked to sit. For two families flowers were chosen in arrangements which were suitable for use in nursing homes. One daughter in law said:

“Afterwards, took it back and split it up and took all the bows and things off and they got put into vases to put around the Home”. (Funeral 37)

At another funeral the flowers were afterwards given to the local church.
3.3.5 Candles

Candles were used as symbols in both religious and secular funerals. The priest used the symbolism of the Paschal Candle in his address at Funeral 31 and the minister at Funeral 34 also used religious symbolism, suggesting that the candles on the table at the front “unite us through the spirit. The flames are steady, they are living flames”. He said some words which paraphrased the Lux aeterna luceat eis. They are calm and beautiful and represent the calm spirit of the deceased. They also take away darkness, when we have candles we go from darkness to light. They illuminate dark days. For the family at that funeral, the candles had been requested to symbolize absent members of the family in Australia, the symbolism being the linking of family who were unable to be present, but said to be present “in spirit”, by the simultaneous lighting of candles in Australia. This may be an Australian custom as a civil celebrant said:

“I remember conducting one funeral where half the family were in Australia and as we started it was purely non-religious I don’t think there were any prayers or anything there, but as we started the ceremony the family came forward and lit a candle and at that same time the people in Australia were lighting a candle so it was kind of a coming together”.

(Other celebrant 28)

At the hotel funeral, led by a humanist, the candle flames were to symbolize the deceased’s influence in life. At the interfaith memorial service in the university chapel the deceased’s young brother lit the four candles for our sorrow, for courage, for memories and for love as a poem was read. The same poem was read at one of the humanist funerals, again chosen by the celebrant rather than by the family. At Funeral 46 “masses of candles” in church and on the coffin were chosen because of the deceased’s love of candles. A daughter said:

“she was a great candle person. She, you know had candles in bedrooms and things you know at home, and drawing room and that sort of thing. So we have candles and just flowers on the coffin”.

At one humanist funeral, however, candles were introduced by the celebrant but had no meaning for the family. The bereaved partner said: “the candles meant nothing to me either way. It was something that she wanted to do and that was fine, it may have meant something to others” (Funeral 10). However at another humanist funeral the family embraced the idea with each mourner lighting a candle at the funeral (Funeral 42). Another celebrant considered that people find candles helpful and symbolic of peace. She said:
“you can go into people’s houses, you know, very spiritual people you’ll find candles dotted all over the place, and people use it in, to produce a feeling of well being, you know. Having a candle around your bath, the nice smelly ones, that kind of thing”. (Christian celebrant 13)

At the Jewish funeral (Funeral 45) a candle was kept burning in the home for the seven days of Shiva mourning after the funeral.

At Funeral 42 it was suggested that mourners took the candles home afterwards, along with packets of seeds to plant in memory of the deceased. A daughter said:

“everybody talked about planting them, cos as people were going I caught nearly everybody and I said have you got your candle, oh yes I’ve got me candle, have you got your ......, yes I’m gonna, gonna plant me seeds in the garden, so I think people certainly left with the intention of doing it”. (Funeral 42)

3.3.6 Other symbols

At the above funeral memory boxes were given to the grandchildren, all these symbols being used as ways of helping to remember the deceased. At another, a personalized number plate was propped against the coffin. Another family where the funeral was led by a Free Church minister asked for a crucifix to be placed on the coffin. However, some secular celebrants commented that families wanted crosses and crucifixes removed for their services. One said:

“removing the crucifix is often something that happens in my ceremonies people want the crucifix removing from the chapel before we start”. (Other celebrant 28)

Another family planned a dove release although the weather made this impracticable.

3.3.7 Rituals

In the view of one key informant:

“Any society has some kind of ritual around death, because it’s a very important part of life in a way”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

Ritual in the funerals studied may be considered as of three types: ritual prescribed for religious services; ritual observed because of traditions; and emerging rituals. There is overlap, however, between all three types.
Procession rituals

Processing to the chapel

Traditional ritual is observed in the cortege as the funeral director walks the coffin from the cemetery or crematorium gates. This was generally appreciated but the Jehovah’s Witness family found this ritual at odds with their beliefs in not making a show or making rituals around the body. The son said:

“We didn’t expect them to march up when they first brought the funeral in and to march ahead of the coffin like that, like a triumphant procession…. Normally perhaps the Witnesses wouldn’t have done that you see. They would just have brought the coffin in and then taken it to the graveside”. (Funeral 23)

In Funeral 13 the procession also included a piper in full ceremonial dress but this was because the deceased liked the pipes rather than any Scottish or military connection.

Mourners’ entry procession

There were two rituals on entry to the chapels or church. In the majority of both religious and secular funerals the whole party of mourners followed the coffin into the crematorium or cemetery chapel. In others the main group of mourners entered the chapel and were asked to stand or did so spontaneously for the entry of the coffin. These included two funerals in church and both religious and secular funerals in chapel. In most of these the coffin was followed by a procession of close family. At one humanist funeral however the coffin was wheeled in on a trolley, there was then a pause and the family entered but not in procession, going straight to their seats. The widow said:

“I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to process behind it. Because I think it’s, it’s a sort of terrible thing to expect of a widow and her family, you know. It is not a nice experience at all. It might be showing respect and all that but it isn’t easy to do”. (Funeral 39)

At the Roman Catholic funerals in church the coffin was preceded by a crucifix.

Procession to the graveside

Where the funeral was for burial, at the end of the service in chapel the celebrant generally made an announcement to the effect that the deceased would be carried out to go to his final resting place. Where the grave was close the procession went on foot but more often the coffin was reloaded into the hearse with mourners following on foot. The procession from the chapel was led by the celebrant, then the coffin, then close family followed by other mourners.
**Coffin rituals**

A number of rituals were observed in relation to the coffin; the carrying of the coffin also forms part of the procession ritual.

**Bearing the coffin**

A crematorium manager said that for most funerals, bearers carry the coffin into the chapel and that it is rare for a trolley to be used (Other funeral professional 1). Family and friends acted as bearers in only three of the funerals observed. One key informant suggested that it is becoming more common for family and friends to carry the coffin. He said:

“in 9 out of 10 of the funerals that we do the families and friends bear the coffin”. (Other funeral professional 17)

He thought this was because:

“They see it as, as a, as an expression of their love for the person to bear them”.

A funeral director said:

“we went through a phase for years families would not carry coffins, now they all want to carry the coffin themselves again. That’s come full circle. You know, poor people carried their own coffins. You always had bearers, you know paid men to carry the coffin, snob factor again. Now, people carry their own coffins because it’s more about the earthly”. (Funeral director 8)

At Muslim funerals it is customary for family or community members to act as bearers:

“once the prayer is done then the body is lifted by a group of people who you know, now a days because of the coffins it’s easy to carry, you know you have, you know 5 or 6 people on each side carrying it to the hearse and then the hearse takes the....usually ....for example in our Community you might have 4 or 5 uncles and 5 or 6 cousins or whatever, so if it’s a case where most of the family, then usually the family like to be the ones that carry the body”. (Other religious informant 23)

It is also customary at Jewish funerals for the coffin to be conveyed by Jewish mourners. However, at the funeral in this study, the Prayer House containing the trolley had not been unlocked and therefore the coffin was carried and lowered by cemetery staff. This caused the daughter some distress.
Sprinkling or censing the coffin

Other entry ritual at Roman Catholic funerals included the sprinkling of the coffin with holy water at the door, something repeated at the end of the service. At the Requiem Mass there was use of incense, censing the coffin as well as the normal Mass censing. It is understood that the use of incense was to give honour to the dead. Incense was also used at the interfaith memorial service (Funeral 43).

A Church of England priest said at interview:

“we will sprinkle so and so’s body (with holy water) to remind us, as a reminder of baptism when we are baptised into the death and eternal life of Jesus. Sprinkle. We greet so and so’s body with incense, the sign of great honour. And the sign of great respect”. (Christian celebrant 31)

Another said:

“If it’s the funeral of somebody who’s been a regular church goer, then I will sprinkle the, the coffin with holy water as the person comes into the church. I will place a bible and a cross on the coffin with the words which common worship prescribes for that. (Christian celebrant 29)

She also said “And I make the sign of the cross 3 times on the coffin”.

Bowing to the coffin

Traditional ritual is also observed in the bowing of the funeral director to the coffin, something which was valued by some of the families as showing respect to the deceased. Comments included:

“They way (funeral director) respected me mam. When they came down, he walked in front of the car. And then as he came up and stopped he bowed”. (Funeral 34)

“And I thought they was really respectful, they all bowed, in front of the coffin”. (Funeral 20)

One funeral director indicated that showing respect was the intent. He said:

“Some funeral directors don’t, it’s not a standard thing across the board, but we think, you know it just shows your respect to the deceased and to the family really”. (Funeral director 2)

A Muslim indicated that there is no bowing to the coffin in Muslim funerals:

“we believe bowing and prostration is only for in front of God” (Other religious informant 23).

The coffin is brought into the mosque and positioned at the front.
Approaching and touching the coffin

The mourners approaching and touching the coffin was a feature at over one third of the cremation funerals. At Funeral 37 a son who had returned from Australia for the funeral went to coffin during the playing of a piece of music, accompanied by his own sons, and laid single roses. The son hugged the coffin and the grandsons comforted him. The son who had made the funeral arrangements said at interview that his brother had wanted to “do something” at the funeral but that the occasion to do it had been spontaneous.

Approaching and touching the coffin was more prevalent at funerals where the curtains were left open. At least two celebrants (both Humanist) invited family members to approach the coffin at the end of the service and the suggestion was adopted by some. At Funeral 16 immediate family did not but other mourners did come forward. The daughter interviewed said that she had not because:

“you’re at the front and you know everyone’s watching and you just feel well we better go now. Because my son did say you never went up to the coffin”.

On this occasion it appeared that the younger people took the lead, with older people following, sometimes returning to the chapel after leaving it. It seemed as if the young people going forward facilitated the older ones doing so perhaps because younger people display emotions more freely and older people are more inhibited unless others provide an example or permission.

A key informant reflected:

“I think younger people have a different view of how, how to perhaps....., not behave in a service but, but what’s acceptable and spontaneous in their actions and an older person might look at that, maybe it’s a tradition thing again. Some people will even be shocked, a person another individual would kiss the coffin. You know, for a lot of elderly people that’s, it’s like a taboo of, of coming up and touching a coffin, especially if you’re not next of kin, but some people grieving is still a very private thing”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

At Funeral 35 first family members— then other mourners, including men who were probably workmates, approached the coffin, stood for moments, some touched it in passing, some caressed it.

At other funerals, including both those led by ministers of religion and humanist and civil celebrants, there was no invitation but the procedure seemed to be spontaneous. There was little comment by
families at interview, most merely agreeing that this had happened. Some thought it was “nice”, for example, the widow at Funeral 8 said:

“It was nice yeah because it just showed that everybody else wanted to have their last, their last....Moment with him”.

Key informants varied in their views on the practice of touching the coffin, with both those of religious and secular backgrounds appreciating its value. One felt that it was an opportunity for the family:

“to be more connected, or family and friends, you know all the people at the funeral to be more connected to the coffin” He said “it means that people go up to the coffin and they have their own sort of private moment with the person when they, when they do that and things”.

(Other funeral professional 17)

Another thought it provided a form of finality:

“it helps to recognise that the person we’ve loved, or lived with, or whatever, has gone and I think it again, as I say earths it”. (Christian celebrant 29)

A funeral director thought the practice was increasing because of a diminished spirituality and greater emphasis on the earthly body in modern society. She said:

“I think it’s the earthly thing, you know the earthly to the spiritual because so few people have a strong foundation on any spiritual based faith there is more emphasis on the body and the earthly than the spiritual so we get people going forward touching the coffin, leaving flowers, kissing the coffin even”. (Funeral director 8)

However one celebrant, while allowing the practice if the family asked, would not offer or encourage it because he thought it generated negative emotions when he was trying to promote a positive “celebration”. He said:

“It increases, in my opinion, it increases the grief that they’re going under, sometimes it can be a nice farewell, touch the coffin and bow, but other people they just hug the coffin your whole service has been based on the fact that the support, celebrate, support, say goodbye and celebrate. By the time you’ve celebrated a life hopefully given people happy memories then in my opinion that’s enough and once they approach the coffin they’re just starting to go through all the grief again”. (Humanist celebrant 18)
**Cremation committal ritual**

The congregation was generally asked to stand for the committal. One celebrant stated that this was the official moment when they should stand in respect for the deceased (Funeral 22). On two occasions principal mourners went to stand by the coffin, one having been arranged at the pre-funeral meeting and the other a request by a mother at the time. At Funeral 6 the mourners were invited to come forward to join the priest around the coffin. This priest, who also conducted Funeral 19, asked the families on both occasions at her pre-funeral meeting if they wished to do this, although the Funeral 19 family declined. At Funeral 6 the priest commended the deceased to God. There was then a suggestion that mourners could touch the coffin and an older man did. As the mourners returned to their seats, the son hung back as if for a final farewell. For the son at this funeral he felt that approaching the coffin in this way was a way of moving forward. He said:

> “when I saw the coffin the next day with everything sealed in as it were, and the flowers and you could see her it took it a step away from me which is perhaps a good thing”. (Funeral 6)

The celebrants varied as to whether they faced the coffin, approached the coffin or remained facing the congregation. Those who faced the coffin included one humanist, one Methodist and several Church of England celebrants. Some celebrants raised their voices and delivered the committal words in a dramatic way. At two funerals there was a religious ritual of the priest (both Anglican) laying his hand on the coffin at the committal. At Funeral 41 the priest also made the sign of the cross over the coffin.

Of the cremation services where the coffin was placed in an area with curtains, mainly at Chanterlands, half the families decided that the curtains should be closed at the committal and half that they should remain open. This accords with the perception of one Christian minister of the proportions but a civil celebrant thought that 70—80% choose to have the curtains open. Is this a real difference associated with differing views of those choosing a non-religious service?

A funeral director suggested that the drawing of the curtains had been introduced when cremation first became common, because unlike with burial “there was no visible finish” (Funeral director 8). She thought that now that people are used to the cremation format:

> “We don’t need to close the curtains anymore because people are, are used to the format. They know that those doors are going to open and a funeral director is going to come in so, it has made a, a big difference now. They can leave the curtains open and leave”. (Funeral director 8)
Those that chose that the curtains should be closed recognized that there had to be a cutting off point, a letting go. One bereaved partner said:

“I mean for me that was just, that was the final goodbye angel. And that was it, that was the end of it”. (Funeral 10)

A sister said:

“that was the end wasn’t it”. (Funeral 38)

One son was more explicit saying:

“Of course it’s upsetting, cos it is the final, it is bringing the curtain down literally on a life, but you’ve got to do that. You can’t postpone the final goodbye, so I actually think you know, it’s only a personal view of course I respect those that see it differently, it’s no big thing but I just personally think that as upsetting as it can be when you see the curtains close, you can’t, it’s like me going back three times to say goodbye to my dad. You can’t do it anymore, and even though that’s difficult it’s got to be done”. (Funeral 18)

For another son he preferred that his mother went from him behind the curtains than that he left her. He said:

“Normally I just detest the funerals when they close the curtains, and then when I had the choice I thought I don’t want to walk away. I know again like I’m just actually, I’m actually contradicting what I’ve said but I didn’t want to walk away from the coffin and the body I wanted it to go from me, you know what I mean?” (Funeral 37)

The family of Funeral 11 chose for the curtains to be closed because they anticipated a niece being particularly upset and wanted this to be within the service rather than as mourners left. It was apparent that the curtains closing was a trigger for increased emotional display at some funerals and this was the very reason why other families chose for the curtains to remain open. One daughter said:

“That’s why we never, well we decided not to have the curtains closed because I think that’s quite sad, people tend to start wailing when that happens”. (Funeral 16)

The finality and need to have a cut off that some families had recognised was felt by others to be too difficult, too final and cold. One widow said:

“I just feel when the curtains come across like that it’s just so final and dramatic”. (Funeral 40)
A widower said:

“I think discussing it with Carol’s sisters that was theirs, as much as my own wish, and having got some support on that, it is, it seems very final when the curtains draw together it was just psychological thing really”. (Funeral 25)

This man said at the meeting with the celebrant that the deceased would want to be watching and a daughter in law also felt that it was shutting out the deceased. She said:

“If you close the curtains you’re shutting them out from everybody that’s still there”. (Funeral 22)

She went on to say that leaving the curtains open gave mourners the opportunity to approach the coffin at the end and say a personal goodbye. She said:

“you would rather leave them there and be able to .... just go and say your own farewells, cos there’s a lot of people may be didn’t want to go and see her in the, in the funeral directors, they may be didn’t want to go there but for some people it’s just nice to just, you know, just go and make a final contact with the coffin or just go and say your goodbyes or whatever. Whereas once the curtains closed that’s it, they’ve gone and you can’t do anything else”. (Funeral 22)

Others also found it easier to leave the deceased than have the deceased go from them. A widow said:

“I couldn’t bear, I couldn’t personally have watched the curtains close, I had to see him there and then me walk away from him”. (Funeral 8)

Whether or not the curtains were closed a number of spontaneous rituals were seen around the departure from the crematorium. In one case when the curtains were closed the partner of deceased stood briefly in the aisle facing the closed curtains before turning in almost military fashion and going out. This appeared to be a planned action. Other people then also stood facing the curtain in the aisle before leaving. Two women stood with their arms around each other and bowed. One woman waved. Six young women stood together with arms on each others’ shoulders. A woman on her own came back into the chapel and approached the closed curtains before turning and leaving (Funeral 10). At Funeral 18 one woman went through the curtain to the coffin and reappeared after a couple of minutes, presumably saying a private farewell.
Burial rituals

Lowering the coffin and filling in the grave

At the graveside for all the Hull burials the mourners were asked to keep back until the coffin had been lowered into the grave. There was no ceremonial lowering of the coffin or participation in filling the grave.

At a Jewish funeral, family members filled in the grave. A family member commented:

“so family members would normally be the first earth into the grave and then other people of the congregation also do it as well and in our particular case it was very interesting because quite a few women normally don’t do it, it’s usually men who do it but there were a number of people there who represented their husbands or whatever it was who couldn’t come, were ill or whatever it was”. (Funeral 45)

A key informant indicated that for Muslim funerals mourners would take part in the lowering into and filling in the grave. He said:

“Everybody will sup…. you know help lower the coffin or the body and whoever is available and whoever’s there will help you know put them the kind of soil back”. (Other religious informant 23)

Handfuls of soil or flowers

The other ritual at the graveside was the throwing down onto the coffin of soil and/or flowers. Handfuls of soil were thrown by a cemetery attendant at two funerals, by the minister at one and by family members at three funerals. The funerals concerned were led by both ministers of religion and secular celebrants. Seven families chose to throw in single flowers either as well or instead. These were generally roses in red, white or yellow. At Funeral 28 the deceased had particularly asked that this should be done. Families were not generally clear on why they did this. One said:

“Well, it’s just some’rt you do”. (Funeral 34)

And another:

“I wouldn’t say it meant anything really to be honest”. (Funeral 24).

For another family it was a family tradition which they thought provided a form of closure:

“We always have a flower, you know throw a flower in and that so, but we always like to put some mud in as well, you know. Just to sort, it sort of finishes off doesn’t it?” (Funeral 27)
One key informant commented that a box of soil should be provided rather than mourners have to find their own from around the grave. He said:

“It’s something that I said should be done at all cemeteries the Chapel attendant has a box. You feel that people are scrabbling in the mud and you do like to and the same farewells or whatever and that is quite an important part of a burial I think the dusting of the coffin”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

**Graveside ceremony**

Generally the format of the ceremony at the graveside was less structured than for the funeral service and more disorganized. Mourners seemed unclear as to what they should be doing and when. Being outside and at the mercy of the weather meant that sometimes what the celebrant said was inaudible. Sometimes families were clearly upset and did not take in what was said for that reason. One daughter said:

“I just find it really upsetting for some reason, I don’t know why, I think it’s because it’s so final isn’t it. You know it’s like going in but apart from that, I mean I didn’t really hear what she said because you know I was just sort of looking into the grave and I think I was a bit upset really”. (Funeral 24)

Sometimes mourners at the back chatted throughout. One family said they would have thrown in soil but “we didn’t know we could do it or not” (Funeral 20). With a lack of clear signals from some celebrants, the flower ritual sometimes seemed an apologetic addition at the end. There was often no clear ending with people unsure what to do next. One key informant commented on this saying:

“It’s a lack of communication sometimes. Sometimes I think maybe ministers may think people know what to do. A lot of the times on the telly, you very rarely see a cremation on the telly, in a crematorium, often its it is a traditional church service and then a burial and people always seem think that people will automatically know what to do”. (Other celebrant 27)

At one funeral studied (Funeral 27) a dove release was planned but did not take place because of the weather. One Roman Catholic priest talked of the symbolism of this act, although he did not think for most it was related to religious beliefs. He said:

“the doves will be the Holy Spirit. Well I don’t think it is the Holy Spirit I think it’s them, I don’t know is it freeing the spirit or something I don’t know….Balloons as well releasing balloons, I’ve had that once or twice from the graveside, for children more, it’s the same sort of thing isn’t it I don’t know, is it the spirit going up, I don’t know”. (Christian celebrant 25)
Other ritual

For Jewish funerals there is a tradition of the ritual rending of clothing. At the Jewish funeral attended (Funeral 45) the family had modified this, using a piece of black cloth rather than actual clothing. A piece of cloth had been rent at a previous family funeral and was then used again for the funeral studied. A family member commented:

“having got this piece of cloth cut you can wear it outside, you can wear it inside, well or you can keep it and I personally, it’s absolutely personal it was it was actually very thera, therapeutic”.

He kept the cloth with his prayer shawl and was then reminded of his mother every time he used the shawl. For the present funeral the cloth was divided into two and then half divided again between the son and the daughter. Parts of the same cloth were therefore used at the funerals of the two mothers. The daughter said:

“because the two of them were very very close. The two mums so it meant even more”.

She wore the cloth for the week of Shiva. She said:

“yeah I had, had it on my sweater and it was, it was actually quite nice”.

3.4 After the funeral

3.4.1 The Reception

At the majority of funerals there was some kind of reception afterwards and for over half the funerals an announcement was made in the funeral service or in the service sheet. Those that decided against a reception included one where the deceased had not wanted one, others where families did not want to prolong the event, and others feeling that there would be too few attending. One son said:

“we just felt it wouldn’t have been, it wasn’t that sort of funeral. I think it was more people would prefer to reflect on me mum, you know in a more solitary manner if you like”. (Funeral 19)

A brother said:

“But we thought there’s no point because we didn’t know at the time who was coming and who wasn’t. And there only was the three of us, so it was a waste of time having sandwiches and all that lot for three”. (Funeral 20)
Some made no formal announcement but close family and friends were invited back for refreshments. At Funeral 22 the widower was said to have:

“felt that he wanted, just to, just to continue the service and, just not just shut people out but he didn’t want a house full because I don’t think he could have coped with a house full so he was just very selective and he just said to one or two people, ‘do you want to come back for a cup of tea?’”

At Funeral 23 the son:

“made a particular list out with the sort of older ones who particularly, there was quite a number of the older ladies there who my mother was very close to and very close friendships with. And so we invited these along as well you see”.

Rather more invited mourners to a pub, club or restaurant than to a family home. Two used facilities provided by the funeral director or crematorium.

One son would have preferred not to have had a pub reception but chose to do so because of his mother’s friends. He said:

“it was fitting for her (his mother)”. (Funeral 34)

Other families chose the venue because of associations with the deceased. Comments included:

“he liked a little Guinness, so we used to take him, the (pub) being the, not the closest pub but the one that we went to the most, and he had his 80th Birthday there didn’t he”. (Funeral 36)

“I chose (restaurant) because it was where we went when we had a special celebration or, just wanted to celebrate our lovely life together once more”. (Funeral 39)

“we’d had our Silver Wedding meal there and we just liked it, it was a nice atmosphere”. (Funeral 44)

“my dad’s brothers drink there every week on a Friday night, play snooker there and drink a lot. And in the last year or two, well in the last year, my dad has been going quite a lot to see his brothers and so on. So there was that poignancy. But also my mum’s was there. My mum’s wake”. (Funeral 18)
One family chose to use the funeral director’s catering facility because of a recommendation and it was convenient. The daughter said:

“there’s nowhere to park in our street and she said it was alright and I remembered about that like even though I hadn’t seen her at the time like so, so I thought oh well we might as well do it and it’s over with then”. (Funeral 11)

At most funerals the reception was well attended, apart from those who had to return to work or travel some distance. Sometimes family or friends who had not been able to attend the funeral came to the do. This sometimes included children.

One widow said:

“It was nice to see. Some people turned up who I didn’t really think would’ve come back, you know”. (Funeral 40)

Many of the families passed around photographs at the reception, some made displays on boards and one family set up a slide show on a television screen, shown to music. Comments included:

“relatives bring pictures and it’s just a chance to see relatives you’ve not seen”. (Funeral 16)

“I mean my sister-in-law who, me brother who died, she brought a lot of old photos what me brother had and we was all looking at them and that you know and it was quite nice really because I hadn’t seen a lot of them and it was nice to see them”. (Funeral 24)

“and the thing is, what it also did, was it, people with the photographs, the people remembered me mam how she used to be which is to me more important”. (Funeral 31)

“there was something for everybody. We just had the, the slide show playing on a projection TV”. (Funeral 37)

Most families enjoyed the get together – the opportunity to catch up with people they had not seen recently, to exchange memories of the deceased and sometimes learn about new areas of his/her life. One family said that the deceased “got a good send off as they usually say”. (Funeral 7) A number referred to the reception as being “nice” for example:

“it was very nice. It was very nice, yeah yeah yeah yeah. The hard part I think had obviously been done by then. So erm no it was very nice”. (Funeral 12)
A daughter said:

“Mum had a chat to people who she hadn’t seen for a while”. (Funeral 36)

A partner had found the reception:

“very helpful. Because that’s the, you know, relaxed moment, it’s all over now lets you know start over and carry on now. And it’s good to catch up with people that you haven’t seen for a long time, friends and family....Sharing memories really, it’s nice, it’s just a big party”. (Funeral 10)

At Funeral 14 the family had shared:

“Not crying memories....Smiling and laughing memories.”

At Funeral 27 a sister said:

“we could talk and have a word with different people who you wouldn’t see at the funeral place you couldn’t really do that especially with the rain. But you only like have little snippets of talk with people whereas there, you had time to relax and talk things over and we learnt a bit about Don at work from his friends which you know they came over and talked to us and that... which we didn’t see that side of Don you know”.

One widow was less than happy because there did not appear to be a focus on her husband but on general chat. In addition the hotel did not cater well for her special diet and she felt isolated. She said:

“it was not really what I would call successful”. (Funeral 44)

Key informants commented on changing practice in post funeral meals. One funeral director said:

“we went through a phase where people didn’t want funeral teas. Oh, no, no it’s macabre, why does anybody want to go and sit and talk about someone after they’ve died. Now we don’t have teas now we have like, tomorrow we’re having a full lunch it’s £19 a head”. (Funeral director 8)

Another viewed the meal as part of the process of moving on from the death. She said:

“the funeral service itself is that right of passage and once they move on to the time afterwards, whether it’s in somebody’s home or on the pub, wherever, that’s when everybody starts to talk. I went to a brilliant one where somebody had brought masses of photographs
and they were all set out afterwards for people to go .... Oh I remember that you know. It kind of lifted the whole atmosphere and started people in the process of moving on”. (Christian celebrant 13)

For the Jewish Orthodox and Jewish Reform the meal has ritual content:

“the meal’s straight after the funeral, like a bagel, it’s it’s a bagel and eggs. You know a bagel?...The, the round bread, right. And it, and and hard boiled eggs, and and it’s symbolically it’s the cycle the life, the cycle of life, simple as that”. (Other religious informant 21)

“It’s actually all about the circle, it’s actually circle of life, it’s a continuity, like when you come back from the cemetery, there, there is this traditional plate of food which has an egg which, which obviously is the re-birth, it’s also the continuity of life, it’s also something that’s circular, anything that was circular…you can eat anything that’s circular”. (Funeral 45)

This is followed a year later at the stone setting for a less formal meal:

“We come together a year later or 6-12 months later, usually in more, and that’s when, that’s when we erect the headstone, that’s right, where we actually unveil the headstone so it’s actually a memorial service almost. It is...And then usually after that then you have your cup of tea and a bun, a cup of tea, a bun and a drink you know, and talk about (the deceased)”. (Other religious informant 21)

3.4.2 The ashes

For most families a standard polyurn was acceptable to contain the ashes, but a number of families preferred wooden boxes at considerably greater expense. Families who intended to keep the ashes tended to want the smarter container, but polyurns were chosen by those wanting to inter the ashes, those wanting to scatter the ashes in specific places and those who had no clear plans. A few families chose a polyurn with the idea of placing the whole urn inside a more individual container. One widower said the urn was:

“Just a plastic thing, it doesn’t look untoward I mean it’s sitting there on the top of some drawers at the moment. Not out of the way at all but I might just try to get a box or something that looks particularly nice and then sit the urn in that, sort of thing and may be just get a photograph of Carol on it”. (Funeral 25)
A daughter said:

“we chose the plastic urn for the ashes because we didn’t like the little wooden boxes, they look like coffins. And then you know we’ll find something to put you know the plastic urn into. Something more appropriate”. (Funeral 12)

A number of families chose to have the ashes interred in a family grave or in one case in a churchyard where other family members were buried. Others chose to scatter the ashes at a family grave. One sister said:

“So I thought, well I’d do that so I scattered her ashes round the grave that we have, yeah, and that was, I am sure it would’ve been her wish to be with dad and everybody else you know”. (Funeral 38)

A son said:

“I think it’s, symbolically it’s nice that they’re both in the same place”. (Funeral 19)

For some it was important that they attended the interment but others just awaited a phone call to say that it was done. One son said:

“I can’t be present I’m afraid no, I can’t go through it again...We’ve done our, paid our respects and I think I shall go, I shall go to the cemetery after the event....But I couldn’t be there again”. (Funeral 21)

For some the interment was to be soon after the funeral while for others there was to be a delay. One sister said:

“my father is buried and my mum’s plan for herself is that she will be cremated and then her ashes will go into the grave with my father....And at the same time she would like my brother’s ashes to go in with them”. (Funeral 12)

Families chose to scatter the ashes at various locations with personal significance. Sometimes the deceased had specified a location such as the Garden of Rest at the crematorium or even some particular part such as the lavender garden where a son had earlier been scattered. One family chose to scatter their mother around a rose tree in the garden of remembrance because of her love of roses and gardens. The daughter said:

“so it’s nice, and she would like that you know. Because it’s in a nice garden”. (Funeral 5)
One widower whose wife was German wanted to return her ashes to her place of birth where family members would scatter them on the river bank. He said:

“It’s spring water and its warm when it comes out the earth and even in winter it’s lovely to swim in it. She loved it, she was a great swimmer in her younger days was Elsa. And she’ll be at peace there”. (Funeral 14)

A widow chose to scatter the ashes at:

“a favourite haunt of ours when (son) was small and we were courting and it was nice open woodland then”. (Funeral 33)

Other locations included the beach which was the subject of some of the deceased’s paintings and at the rugby club of which the deceased was a supporter. Another widow proposed to split the ashes, scattering some on her husband’s first wife’s grave, taking “some to the Lake District where we were very happy” and probably keeping “some for myself and have a pot in the garden or something and have a rose.” (Funeral 39)

Another family intended dividing their mother’s ashes between family members. The daughter said:

“Well I think I want some, my sister wants some and my son does. I think, I think with mine I might plant a tree and just put the ashes round it”. (Funeral 16)

In one family a son, who now lived in Australia, wanted to take some of the ashes to Australia because his mother had always wanted to go there and this would be fulfilling her wish. On the other hand some families specifically did not want their loved one split up, either between people or locations or by scattering itself.

Several families chose to keep the ashes. One widower said:

“I don’t know, I will think about it but I’m going to keep the ashes with me. It gives me a little bit of comfort”. (Funeral 25)

A widow similarly found having the ashes comforting, saying:

“It feels actually quite comforting because I can talk to them, I can stroke his casket and it, it actually is really comforting and it gives us the chance to do something when we’re ready without doing anything hasty and then regretting it in time because we’re not going to anything with them at all for the time being”. (Funeral 8)
A daughter also recognised the comfort in having the ashes in the house, saying:

“And I’d said to mum…. you know, just put him somewhere where he would like and go and have a chat occasionally”. (Funeral 36)

For widows and widowers this also offered the possibility of mixing the ashes together after the death of the surviving partner. A daughter in law said:

“I think he’ll probably, he’ll just keep them in the house, he’ll just keep them in the house. Whether or not he, whether or not he wants to keep them with a view to having his put in there you know after his death, I don’t know”. (Funeral 22)

3.4.3 Ritual mourning

For Muslims the period of mourning differs according to the nearness of the relationship with the deceased. A key informant said:

“you know mourning is prescribed, you know the length of mourning and so on… For somebody who has lost someone you can mourn for up to 3 days… If it’s, if you’re, if, if you’ve been widowed, your husband or wife’s died you can mourn up to 4 months, 4 months and 10 days I believe”. (Other religious informant 23)

For Jews there is a ritual period of seven days mourning or Shiva when the family are supported by community members who come to the house for prayers bringing food. An interviewee said:

“in the Orthodox you’re supposed with withdraw from the world for a week and people bring you food and they look after you and the mourners are supposed to sit these low chairs all the time”. (Funeral 45)

For Jewish Reform the period is more flexible but Shiva is still observed. For the two Shiva days for Funeral 45 there were about 50 people attending on the first night and 30-40 on the second.

For Muslims there is also the idea of support from the community for families in mourning although this appears to be a less formal requirement. A key informant said:

“following on from the burial then obviously the family needs support either that’s through you know spiritual support through the Mosque or through the Imam giving them advice and guidance and so on. Or it might be simple things like you know if there’s neighbours or anybody, or friends they’ll provide food for the family for a few days until they’ve kind of got over it”.

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3.4.4 Memorials

One of the areas on which the families felt they had less guidance or indeed options, was in choosing the form of memorialisation.

Conventional memorials

For some families memorials in the form of the conventional gravestone were still important. For one son it was important that his mother’s name was added to the front of the gravestone rather than the back as had been suggested because of lack of space. He said:

“It’s her final resting place really I suppose. I shall go birthdays, Christmas”. (Funeral 21)

One funeral director suggested that there was now much greater personalisation of gravestones than in previous years. He said:

“Teddy bears for children but there, there’s football shirts, there’s, you can have ships, there’s all sorts of different things now, where before it was a standard”. (Funeral director 2)

Other families chose a rose tree with a plaque at the crematorium or a plaque in a garden of remembrance at the deceased’s place of work. Her partner said:

“somebody had the idea of planting plaques, you know, to remember these people and it was our HR Manager said, you know my boss had come to her with the idea of putting a plaque for Sarah there. And she had an expression, you know when she was talking to people either on the telephone or face to face, if they asked her to do something, she just did she would say always a pleasure never a bore...And when I started working there and I heard her saying this I said that’s the wrong phrase, it’s always a pleasure it’s never a chore and she said I’ll say it the way I like. And that was Sarah and that’s what she said and so that’s what they’re going to inscribe on it which I thought would be lovely, a lovely tribute”. (Funeral 10)

For others however it was not important that there should be a grave or marker as a focus. One widower said:

“You don’t need a tombstone at all. You know I can go in my room and I can talk to her”. (Funeral 14)

Jewish memorial traditions

For the Jewish Orthodox commemoration is important. Besides the stone setting service one year after the funeral, they have:
“Yizkor which is a communal prayer, a memorial, a memorial prayer, Yizkor, so people who we allude to, don’t, don’t come the rest of the year will come specifically because on Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement we have Yizkor, and in, in a ways it’s, you, even though somebody’s passed away you’re always thinking about them”. (Other religious informant 21)

At this:

“we actually spell it out in Hebrew and in English, yeah, the soul’s of the departed, which means not just remembering what they did, what they used to be, we, we are asking God and we’re reminding ourselves to remember, not what somebody once upon a, once upon a time was, but the souls, that means to reca...., to, cos souls could be forgotten or and it’s to, to, to continuously bring them to the fore”. (Other religious informant 21)

In the Jewish culture;

“part of the planning for the future is to remember the people that have gone before and what they’ve meant”.

Members of the Jewish Reform explained other forms of memorialisation. These included naming of babies after deceased family members and death anniversary recognition. A comment was:

“the other actual interesting thing here is that the Jewish religion has this concept of the Yahrzeit, which is the, which is the anniversary of death, so each year at the anniversary of the Hebrew date of death which obviously will vary depending on the lunar calendar you would light a candle and say prayers to honour the person who’s died”. (Funeral 45)

**Personally created memorials**

Families chose a number of other ways of creating a memorial to the deceased. Some of these were created around the funeral. At four funerals there was a condolence book. One celebrant pointed out that the delay caused by people signing a condolence book could cause problems for the conduct of the funeral. This was avoided by the practice at two others where mourners attending were asked to complete cards, some with the addition of messages. A partner said:

“I knew that people, not everybody that wanted to be there would be able to be there and the people that were able to be there would probably not be in the right frame of mind to you know leave a lasting tribute and it was only something I decided in the last week, the last week before the funeral....That it would be a nice thing to have that I can keep forever, and you know when I do meet people that I haven’t seen for years they can still write something in
there....It’s not just the rich and famous that can have a book of remembrance is it?” (Funeral 10)

A sister said:

“We just did it because obviously we don’t know all Don’s all his friends and we thought it was a fitting way for them to sort of, for us to know who they were”. (Funeral 27)

The book or cards might become included in a memory box. For some families the memory box was not so termed but was simply a way of keeping together items connected with the deceased and his/her funeral. Some celebrants provided a copy of their script. Where there was a service sheet this might be retained, or a copy of a poem read at the funeral. One son said:

“I’ve kept the disc (music from the funeral), I’ve kept all of mum’s stuff together anyway so I’ve kept it all in, I’ve got a vanity case down there with her bag and that which I’m keeping all together”. (Funeral 17)

A widow said:

“I had his brother here last night and I said to him ‘I’ve got your poem here, do you want it?’ but he said ‘no you keep it’. So I put it with all his bits and pieces down there”. (Funeral 1)

In another family all the grandchildren were given a memory box with the conscious intention of keeping the deceased’s memory alive. These boxes contained photos and small items which had belonged to their grandfather and which would trigger memories because his “grandchildren were a massive part of his life” and “we want them clearly to remember” and to know that “it’s fine to talk about him”. (Funeral 42)

Other families wore the deceased’s jewellery (a son wore his mother’s rings on a chain), distributed roses from the coffin spray, displayed photos which had previously been put away, framed and displayed the deceased’s paintings which had formerly been in drawers, or planted trees without necessarily any marker. One family purchased a brick in the deceased’s name at a football stadium.

A daughter planted a tree in the garden in memory of her mother, saying:

“when my best friend died I planted a tree because it just sort of reminded me...it’s more like a little memorial”. (Funeral 16)
A widow said:

“It’s only now that I’m going through his little room upstairs and finding, finding all his paintings in drawers and cases you know, and all sorts of places like that. I’ve just been mounting them all and I’m trying to marry the painting to a frame and get some of them framed up”. (Funeral 40)

Photographs
A very popular form of memorialisation which emerges both at the funeral and after is the display and use of photographs and other images of the deceased and family. At the funerals photographs were mainly propped on the coffin but in one case projected in a Power Point presentation and in another forming a display on a board. The photos were chosen to portray the deceased as mourners knew them but also to bring back memories of happier occasions. Comments included:

“Mam liked that one. And the other one of him raising the glass because that was Dad”. (Funeral 36)

“A lot of people that looked at that photo on the day, it was, it was nice because they remember Betty as, that was, I mean it just sums her up doesn’t it?”. (Funeral 22)

“Son - I took it with me cos it make me smile, it didn’t make me feel sad...for some reason it was like ..... it ....
Daughter in law— It give him strength”. (Funeral 37)

“And the photographs, that was the other thing, that was, we liked the fact that we were able to do all the photographs. It was a nice thing to do, but people, there were lots and lots of people that went and looked at them...You know picked sort of stuff that you could laugh at. Him pulling funny faces and doing stuff”. (Funeral 42)

At the funeral with the Powerpoint, the son said:

“I’m just thinking pictures, pictures paint a thousand words. ...And I just think they’re very powerful and when I combine them with music, they’re very powerful”. (Funeral 18)

One celebrant commented that she thought projection facilities should be provided at crematoria because:
“for me I would find that a huge comfort during the actual funeral service to be able to, to see pictures of when that person was alive, of what was actually prominent part of their life to be able to see that during that service”. (Christian celebrant 34)

A daughter in law said:

“it’s the first time I’d ever seen that photo but I think now he’s given it the light of day, I don’t think he’ll put it away again now because it’s there, it’s there right on the mantelpiece, in pride of place”. (Funeral 22)

**Alternative memorial options**

A funeral director mentioned other memorials now available. He said:

“like with the cremated remains there are so many different options with that as well which is more personal, like lockets, having part of the cremated remains in the lockets so their loved one is near them all the time. Jewellery is being made now out of cremated remains so you can have a diamond made”. (Funeral director 2)

There was some interest from some families in memorials organised by the crematorium (a memorial book) or by the funeral director. One widow for example specifically asked about a Salvation Army carol service at the funeral parlour at Christmas at which the deceased could be remembered in a named bauble on a Christmas tree. The funeral director reported that about 200 attend this service.

Some of the ministers of religion interviewed offered memorial services of various kinds. One conducted an annual service for:

“all the people whose funerals we’d conducted, or who’d had people who’d died, in the village. So for example, there might be somebody whose niece had died. Well, the niece would have been, the funeral would’ve been at another church”. (Christian celebrant 29)

**3.5 Degree of change**

Most of the key informants interviewed thought that funerals had changed over the last twenty or so years although one religious celebrant said “I think Church services are very much as they’ve always been” (Christian celebrant 13). She did however qualify this by going on to discuss the introduction of personalised music on CDs. Independent celebrants were emphatic about change having taken place. Many of these changes related to the roles of the various participants.
However, for some religious groups, there has been little or no change. The Muslim funeral has not changed because while:

“the things which happen before and after can be influenced by culture, and family and values, whatever the family have, but the actual funeral process is quite sacred and prescribed”. (Other religious informant 23)

The Muslim representative said that:

“he did not think many Muslims believe that Islam needs to be adapted to the will of people. People need to adapt to the religion”. He continued;

“one thing which is quite specific in the Koran is “there is no compulsion in religion”, so you are not compelled to be a Muslim but if you do choose Islam then you should follow the values and teachings of Islam, err and Islam is quite specific when it comes to, for example the whole issue of funeral and death.”

Similarly, Jewish Orthodox funerals have not changed, something a key informant thought was valued by the bereaved. He commented:

“The fact that we are doing the exact same service, although they personally are not so sure about every word I say, the fact that we are conforming and this is a unbroken chain of tradition, that is comfort for them so achieves a purpose even if it didn’t achieve the full purpose”. (Other religious informant 21)

This tradition was also seen to be valued by non Jewish mourners at the funeral:

“My experience is that the non-Jewish family members have as much respect as the Jewish members if not more sometimes. They liked the tradition, that, that it, that it was across the board every member of the Jewish Community receives the same treatment and they appreciated that that personal touch and that objectiveness”. (Other religious informant 21)

Minor changes to Jewish Reform funerals were pointed to in the participation of families.

**SUMMARY**

The overwhelming impression of the 46 funerals studied is that the funeral constitutes an important event requiring thoughtful planning and careful carrying out, followed by reflection and evaluation and incorporating important memorialisation aspects. There were no exceptions to this, even where
the funeral was small. Although we have described a number of contributing activities both before and after the funeral, it is important to emphasise that these together constitute one bonded event which is the funeral. While there is much evidence of personal choices and customising, there is also considerable evidence of people looking for guidance, falling into socially prescribed patterns and being happy to do so. Indeed, for the most part the personal choices were made within a broadly ‘given’ framework. These funerals were rich in symbolism and lack of formality did not mean lack of ceremony or ritual. Emerging rituals also show a general patterning and were without exception social acts, mourners taking their cue from each other and from behaviours they had witnessed elsewhere. Key informants identify considerable change in secular and Christian funerals, but those from the Muslim and Jewish traditions emphasised preservation of established practice as both necessary and helpful to mourners.
4 THE PARTICIPANTS

“I thought well I might as well have (funeral director) again because I knew ... that he’d do us, you know I knew he’d do us proud”. (Daughter, Funeral 22).

“He was a very down to earth, right background not flowery and I just thought yeah my dad would like that. He wouldn’t want, a pious plum in your mouth sort of vicar, he wouldn’t appreciate that”. (Son, Funeral 18)

“We’re not a big family but it brought us back together again. Even only for a short while, it actually brought us back together and made us feel as though we was a family again”. (Son, Funeral 17).

“She looked real stern as though any minute she was going to open her eyes and say what you, what you all stood round for looking at me like you know”. (Daughter, Funeral 11)

4.1 The funeral directors

4.1.1 Importance and distinctiveness of role

The importance of the part the funeral directors played in the funerals studied varied, although for most families it was pivotal. One funeral director said the overall aim was to “make it as comforting for a family as possible” (Funeral director 2). One priest said, “The funeral director is the first port of call really for most families they’ll come to the funeral director before they come to us” (Christian celebrant 25). Celebrants distinguished between the role of the funeral director and that of the celebrant as that of the funeral director being organizational while that of the celebrant concerned the content of the ceremony. Comments included:

“I think you can split the two things up into, the funeral director being more concerned with the sort of mechanics and the physical aspects of the funeral and the celebrant being more concerned with the ceremony, that that results from all those decisions”. (Other funeral professional 17)

“I’m in charge of the service, he’s in charge of all those other bits and pieces”. (Christian celebrant 34)
Some admitted that there was a blurring between the two roles and some felt that the funeral director and celebrant should work together as a team to provide for the family’s needs. Comments included:

“I actually feel that as a minister that you have to work hand in hand with the, the funeral director as a team and I, I feel that you should be a team, both undertaker and minister working as a team for the family”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“I think it’s a very important job and I think the funeral director and the priest or the minister has to, have to work very much together”. (Christian celebrant 29)

Three core roles with associated tasks emerged for the funeral director: offering guidance to the families; facilitating and directing proceedings; a caring and pastoral function for the bereaved.

4.1.2 Guidance

Some families had never arranged a funeral before and depended heavily on the funeral director for guidance. Some effectively wanted the matter taken out of their hands as far as possible. One son said that if his sister had not been there, he would have left it to the funeral director (Funeral 34). For some the existence of a funeral plan provided basic elements. A daughter said:

“I did a prepayment one and I think that was better because they do all the arranging for you like, you know, you haven’t got to worry about who wants paying and who doesn’t want paying and all that like you know so and I think he was very helpful was (funeral director) like, I think you know he sort of took the load, all the load off your shoulders”. (Funeral 11)

The funeral director was influential both in the amount of personal input to the funeral and in the choices made. Where a family had clear ideas, the funeral director often went to great lengths to allow their implementation. However, where the family were less definite, the funeral director tended to offer choices in the basic elements such as the celebrant or the coffin but to not introduce other possibilities. One daughter said:

“I think they should may be explain more options of what you can have. May be it was because it was busy but it tends to be just rushed and it’s oh have this, that and you know”. (Funeral 16)
This feeling contrasted with the experience of another family who said:

“they explained everything do you know, really good . And everything was wrote down and they let us, well we picked everything out all we needed”. (Funeral 7)

Another family appreciated:

“having a funeral director like Jane who is, you know, is willing to just do whatever people want and is willing to contribute ideas as well”. (Funeral 42)

The funeral director had considerable influence in guiding the choice of officiant, both type and the individual celebrant. If a family particularly wished for a particular officiant, the funeral director tried hard to contact him/her. However, if it was a question of the minister at the local parish church/chapel but the deceased had not attended, while the funeral director would attempt contact and perhaps leave an answer phone message, he sometimes preferred to book a minister with whom he had a good relationship. If a family had no strong religious commitment, some funeral directors would suggest a minister of religion whose approach to the funeral would focus on the deceased while including a certain amount of Christian liturgy. While many families were very satisfied with this, one daughter said her father had said Church of England because:

“they think they have to pick a religion, so he just organised the minister and that’s what upset me because my dad didn’t want a religious service”. (Funeral 16)

Other funeral directors in the same circumstances tended to suggest that a “non-religious” or “humanist” celebrant who would centre on the deceased’s life – a celebration of life but that the celebrant would still include a prayer if that was wished.

Funeral directors influenced choices in a number of other areas. The choice of coffin was guided by advice on relative costs and what was generally considered suitable for cremation as opposed to burial. Two funeral directors suggested to families that they might like to include items in a coffin for burial. Another funeral director suggested that a wicker coffin could be trimmed with ivy as the deceased had not liked cut flowers. One family said that their choice of large or small chapel was guided by the funeral director. One funeral director referred a family to a booklet and advised them to think about the service content before meeting the officiant. The funeral director generally guided the drafting of the newspaper announcement and sometimes made active suggestions for wording such as “Now reunited with loving husband” and died “after a long illness bravely born”. The funeral director also influenced choice of music, either by playing through CDs of the type of
music required for final choice by the family or on some occasions suggesting particular singers or undertaking to provide “church type” music. On one occasion this was Harry Secombe singing hymns and on another it was a hymn and “Panis Angelicus”.

Some funeral directors were explicit about their role in providing guidance:

“The family is looking to us for guidance to getting through the most difficult time they’ll probably ever have to go through”. (Funeral director 2)

“I think they’re, they’re looking for like reassurance, they’re looking for guidance from the funeral director in the different aspects of, within the funeral trade”. (Funeral director 3)

“they don’t really know, yes, how to set, how to set about it but what’s involved...I don’t try to, I give people the options if, if I think they don’t really want a religious service then I don’t, I just give them the options and then let them decide”. (Funeral director 5)

A number saw their role as providing options rather than steering or influencing families in their choices:

“It’s listening to the family for me, not, I’m, I’m not very good at having barriers. You know if a family come to me and say me mum wanted the funeral to be this way we’ll go out, you know I think all funeral directors will go out of their way to make it happen that way”. (Funeral director 8)

“I don’t try to push them one way or the other .... I personally think that err a funeral should be for, or what that person would want”. (Funeral director 5)

Skill in understanding the family’s wishes was highlighted:

“the main purpose of the funeral is to make sure that all the family’s needs are carried out and each family has a different need. Each family are looking for something different”. (Funeral director 3)

“And we’ve gotta understand the family’s wishes and put them you know into place really”. (Funeral director 2)
“we try not to dictate to any family of what you know, we think they’re, they’re gonna want. It’s gotta come from them of what, what their wishes are and obviously the deceased wishes was cos a lot of the times you know the deceased has already talked about it with their family about you know what they, what they would like to happen on the time of passing away”. (Funeral director 2)

Celebrants also commented on the importance of the funerals director’s role in guiding and supporting the families:

“I think it’s good that if they can give a family options because a lot of people don’t know about certain things you can have at a service, so whether that means releasing balloons or doves or a particular kind of service or other things, if they can do that, that’s great”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

“And they really need somebody who can just help them through it”. (Christian celebrant 13)

“To give them choice and guidance where they need it in order to have the experience that they need between the death and the end of the funeral”. (Other funeral professional 17)

“perhaps they haven’t had to deal with maybe even parents yet, you know passing away and they really are, they don’t know what to do and, and it’s a real trauma for them, and I, I think a good undertaker will take on a lot of that responsibility”. (Christian celebrant 14).

“I suppose so yeah they’re helping the families to give their loved one the send off that the families feel is appropriate”. (Other celebrant 28)

“I think the main job of the funeral director is to support the family and to listen attentively to the family even through the grief of what err the family would like and not hopefully to push them down an avenue that they don’t really want to go to but listening and then advising”. (Christian celebrant 34)

“on the day to guide them from the house, to help them in the car if there’s a problem within the family, as I’m sure you, you’ve seen, to help them to feel assisted and safe and secure on the day”. (Humanist celebrant 19)
They also emphasised the importance of the funeral director guiding the family to the right celebrant:

“To direct the family to the correct celebrant/humanist officiant or religious minister so that their needs and wants are full respected”. (Other funeral professional 15)

Two ministers suggested that some funeral directors discounted the church’s sense of responsibility towards its parishioners even where they were no longer church goers.

“I’m keen the, the funeral directors do make families aware that (a church funeral) is an option even if they are not regular church goers but maybe would value what the church has to offer if they knew what it was that the church was offering”. (Christian celebrant 30)

“Sometimes funeral directors will just book it with the crem and say this funeral’s taking place on that day can you do it and if not I’ll get somebody else, that kind of thing which isn’t, that’s not really the way we work because even though people aren’t practising they still like to think that they’re our parishioners”. (Christian celebrant 25)

4.1.3 Facilitating and directing

The funeral directors saw the task of ensuring the smooth running as central to their role:

“We’ve got to try and make it flow as easy as possible for the family”. (Funeral director 2)

“to make sure that everything goes to plan basically. That you know if we, if we’re booking and organising things to happen on a day and a time that we will make sure that it does”. (Funeral director 8)

“In my view we are undertakers because someone rings us up and asks us to arrange a funeral then we are undertaking to do that for, for that family”. (Funeral director 5)

Some families had specific ideas about the funeral, derived from other funerals they had attended in the past, from television programmes and internet websites or, occasionally, from discussions with the deceased. For these the relationship with the funeral director was as with an agent to carry out their wishes. A widow said:

“It was really us telling them, or suggesting would this be ok”. (Funeral 44)

For all the funerals studied the funeral director handled the supply of the coffin, the facility to visit the body in the chapel of request if required, the delivery of the body to the place of the funeral and arrangements for the burial or cremation. For all except one the funeral director prepared the body,
this being done by a team from the synagogue, as is customary, for a Jewish funeral. For most the funeral director booked the chosen officiant, booked an organist if required, made arrangements for floral tributes and newspaper announcements, provided escort and direction to the mourners on the day and provided a collection box for donations. The funeral director settled accounts for individual providers of funeral elements, requiring the family to pay only one overall bill. For a few funerals the funeral director provided other services. For example for Funeral 11 the reception was provided at the function room on the funeral director’s premises. For Funeral 42 the funeral director obtained the packets of seed to be given to mourners for planting in memory of the deceased.

Celebrants saw this role as crucial to the smooth running of everything:

“The family is the funeral director. Err the funeral director is the agent, the funeral director is a sub-contractor….. whose responsibility is it to dispose of the body, it’s the families and the funeral director is the administrator”. (Other funeral professional 16)

“I think it’s of crucial importance because the sheer mechanics of organisation, the problems are solved by having the link person in the middle”. (Christian celebrant 33)

“he is, or she is to bring everybody involved in the funeral together from crem, burial staff, church staff, officiants, ministers, flowers, music, newspaper announcements, doctors even. To negotiate and to work through all of that, it’s literally to direct everybody. Exactly, their job title says it all, they literally direct”. (Other celebrant 27)

“to direct and make sure everything happens as it ought to happen”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“someone you look to, to make sure there aren’t any glitches and problems and if there are any fights or difficulties or anything like that, that they’re there to kind of be in control in some way, somebody has some kind of control”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

By contrast, the funeral directors saw themselves as the ones ‘subcontracting’ certain elements of the funeral:

“we’re like a subcontractor to, you know families rely on us for certain aspects of the service which is beyond our control which we have to, you know Like have to subcontract out basically, like, like the minister for instance”. (Funeral director 2)
The celebrants afforded particular responsibility to the funeral director’s job in preparing the body:

“They have a large responsibility of, I was gonna say the ethical side as well, how the deceased is dealt with. Such as when people go to view”. (Other celebrant 36)

“Because a lot of people like to go and see the deceased just to make sure they’ve done as good a job on the deceased as possible so it looks as natural and isn’t going to upset people when they see it”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

“The funeral director takes charge of the body from the beginning, they look after the body throughout the whole however long it is ‘til the funeral and they get the as long as they get the body there on time they've fulfilled, to my mind, they've fulfilled their little bit”. (Other celebrant 28)

For Jewish and Muslim funerals the role of the funeral director is more restricted in that the procedures are prescribed and, particularly in Jewish Orthodox and Muslim funerals, not open to variation. The role of the funeral director is solely as a facilitator:

“we use their premises and and their facility for, for preparation, preparing the body”. (Other religious informant 21)

He (a male funeral director for Jewish Orthodox or Muslim) provides the coffin and facilities for preparation of the body, arranges transport and completes the infilling of the grave. The Muslim representative interviewed reported that the family generally notify the mosque of a death and the mosque than make the necessary arrangements. In Hull one particular funeral director is used who is aware of the particular requirements of Islam. He said:

“they’ve been supporting, all the Muslim funerals have been , the washing of the body has been done with them for, for many years so they’re quite well versed with the whole procedure”. (Other religious informant 23)

These include the funeral taking place within 24 hours, and that the ritual washing of the body is carried out by family and community members although at the funeral director’s premises. The body is brought to the mosque for the funeral and thence to the cemetery for burial. The coffin is lowered and the grave filled also by family or community members. For Orthodox and Reform Jews the synagogue team similarly is the first contact at a death, carries out the preparation of the body, provides other services and influences choices where these are permitted.
A funeral director from West Yorkshire reported that the local Mosque had set up their own preparation facilities and hearse, with the assistance of her own firm, and now conducted Muslim funerals entirely independently. She said:

“the Muslim Community now have their own hearse, there are coffins in the mosque in preparation for death because they’re very open about death, a lot more, they don’t talk about “if’s” like we do they talk about “when” because it’s very important in their life, you know. So we’ve set up a system that they can work with and even the Council have worked with, with them so that burials can take place as, within their traditions...Generally within 24 hours”. (Funeral director 8)

4.1.4 Caring and pastoral

Some celebrants saw funeral directors as having a more caring role rather than simply as organizers and managers. A civil celebrant said “They should ideally be an instrument of healing rather than administrators” (Other funeral professional 15). A Free Church minister saw the funeral director as involved in creating meaning for the family, saying “everything that the undertaker does needs to be meaningful for the family”. He also saw the funeral director’s role as a form of ministry commenting “I do see it really as, a ministry that the undertaker has I would say. Not just a task” (Christian celebrant 14). Two Church of England ministers used the word “pastoral” in relation to the work of the funeral director:

“It’s a, it’s a pastoral role as well as a, as well as a sort of organisational and administrative and all the other things that they have to do”. (Christian celebrant 30)

“I think the funeral director has to be very pastoral”. (Christian celebrant 29)

However, the funeral directors were both mindful of their caring role but insistent that this support was just all part of the job:

“one of my biggest problems with funeral directors nowadays is their ego’s. You know, they can all walk around with the canes and the top hats and look grand but I’ve been brought up to believe that these hands are for the bereaved and if someone falls or trips and you’ve got a top hat in one hand and cane in the other you can’t do anything to help them. My job and my brother’s job and my sister’s job is to put our hand out and say, come on I’ll hold your hand”. (Funeral director 8)
“from my point of view it’s simply to take all the worry off the, off the family”. (Funeral director 5)

“I think we, there is a fine line of where you can’t cross over to become a counsellor, we are a funeral service. We’ve gotta be caring as much as possible but in the same score we’ve gotta have that fine line to do the job to get everything done which needs to be done for the family”. (Funeral director 2)

“We’re there to support the family and make sure that everything, that they don’t have to think about anything”. (Funeral director 8)

The funeral directors saw their caring responsibilities as also extending to the deceased:

“it’s caring for the deceased as well. Obviously we’ve gotta show as much respect as possible, erm and dignity to the, to the person who’s passed away as well obviously the family have entrusted them into our care and we’ve gotta make sure that everything is taken care of most respectfully and dignified as possible”. (Funeral director 2)

4.1.5 Quality of service

The families were generally very satisfied with the service they had received from the funeral director. One widower commented:

“I’ve got nothing but praise for the undertakers, granted they get well paid for it but none the less, we weren’t disappointed with the service you know and the provision that they made for it”. (Funeral 25)

A son said:

“the thing I remember most about the funeral is the excellent service we got from (funeral director), I thought that was absolutely brilliant, I was so impressed with it, it is unbelievable, it really was”. (Funeral 31)

Some had written to the funeral director or included thanks in a newspaper acknowledgement. A widow said:

“I wrote to (funeral director) and said she was just such a comforting lovely person to have around”. (Funeral 44)
Comments about what was particularly valued included support in making the arrangements, the smooth running of the funeral itself, the way that the body was prepared and presented and the respect apparent in the funeral director’s rituals. Comments included:

“And she carried me through everything that had to be done”. (Funeral 40)

“And it ran like a clockwork, which it was planned to run like a clockwork”. (Funeral 37)

“It’s a smoother operation and they come over as being very sincere which adds to it, you know what I mean, which makes it even better, where s, you know, we have been to funerals in the past where all the attendants disappear, they are all having a smoke and a laugh and a joke, which is not what you want to be seeing when you are at a funeral, especially if it is somebody that belongs to you. But, yes, I mean, I actually told, went to (funeral director) and said to him, will you thank your lads because it was brilliant and I thought that it really was good, and an excellent service that they provided”. (Funeral 31)

“It’s the way she was dressed and everything that did, that I did like anyway. It was the way the (funeral director) did it all”. (Funeral 34)

“The way they laid the body out and things like that. It was very well done actually”. (Funeral 23)

“The way (funeral director) respected me mam. When they came down, he walked in front of the car and then as he came up and stopped, he bowed”. (Funeral 34)

Criticisms

There were a number of criticisms, for the most part from only a few families. These included:

- Some families were dissatisfied with the appearance of the deceased – that it did not resemble the deceased as he/she was known. One son said:

  “Now, when she was in the coffin, when she was laid there, they had padded her out with God knows what and it didn’t look anything like me mum to be quite honest”. (Funeral 31)

However this was balanced by those mentioned above who were pleased. One solution which was suggested to only one family in the researcher’s presence was that the family should provide a photograph to which the funeral director could work.
• Not being offered the opportunity for family to act as bearers until a family member asked on the day. A daughter said:
  “I didn’t know you would be allowed to but, they could have said that when we were organising the funeral”. (Funeral 16)

• Having to meet the funeral director at their premises. One daughter said:
  “I think yes I think at the funeral directors, I think they should have come to our home to discuss the arrangements.....I didn’t like the fact that we had to go there.” However there may have been particular circumstances at the time for this meeting as the funeral director concerned frequently does visit people in their homes. (Funeral 16)

• Not being offered a full range of options. A daughter said:
  “they could may be give people more options of what they could have. Because it’s a time when people are obviously in shock with their grieving and I think people just often feel they want the best for their loved ones and it can be, well I know it is a business, but it’s very, I think it’s exploited a bit. It’s like weddings isn’t it, people charge what they want because they know people will pay it and they know people will pay it at a funeral if it’s, you know they just want the best for their dead loved ones, don’t they”. (Funeral 16)

• Not offering funeral vehicles with disabled access or being prepared to arrange a taxi with disabled access. One son whose father was disabled said his father had:
  “to go behind the car, so somebody, me brother went in with him but, you know, it wan’t right that, it wan’t right that. That’s the one thing, that the one thing, it’s that. But that would’ve made me go to another company in future”. (Funeral 37)

• Not offering a service to dispatch ashes overseas, dealing with the paperwork involved. A son said it would have saved hassle:
  “The ashes would’ve been there, (funeral director) would’ve got more money and it may get, it might not be something that many people would use but some people would.” (Funeral 37)

• Restricted times for viewing the body. This was with a family firm of funeral directors, the larger concerns providing unrestricted day time weekday visiting.

• One widow would have liked light coloured cars rather than black for the cortege

• Lack of heating in the funeral director provided hospitality suite.

Celebrants also commented on the quality of the funeral directors pointing to variations in the standard of their work and the ease of working together. One priest commented:
  “I think funeral directors, good ones are just superb I really do and when you’re used to dealing with a good funeral director you are very conscious of the short comings of those who are not good. There’s a clumsiness and a crudeness and a lack of sensitivity and even paperwork is not
sent to you, you just get a phone call. Whereas a good funeral director, you get name, date of death, everything, because you have to register that death yourself”. (Christian celebrant 33)

A humanist celebrant felt that some funeral directors “can make assumptions about what people want and err not put enough effort in to actually finding out what they really want” (Humanist celebrant 20). A female religious celebrant suggested that while most funeral directors were good at the organizational aspects of their work, some were “not very good at the empathising with the families with this particularly sensitive ones, like a funeral of may be babies or children for example”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

4.1.6 Changes in role

Funeral directors who had been in the profession for any length of time were clear that their role had changed in the last 20-30 years. The changes identified included:

- A change from the funeral director being clearly in charge to one of the funeral director working with the family
  “it was just the funeral director dictated what was going to happen where as now the families dictate to us”. (Funeral director 2)
  “it is completely different you know. Me dad, in me dad’s day it was always, yes Mr Jones, no Mr Jones, whatever Mr Jones said was the law. Now I work with, you know with the family”. (Funeral director 8)

- Increased personalization and family participation
  “Whereas now everything is more personalised, you know, the music is personalised, the deceased wearing their own clothes is personalised, personal trinkets placed in the coffin, erm, family members carrying the casket into the chapel of rest. There’s all different things now which more and more families are getting involved in, whereas if you go back 20-30 years they probably didn’t have that option”. (Funeral director 2)

- Dispersion of families from the local area
  “you know it is very different...people always lived in the community you know 30, cos it’s near enough that now, 30 years ago it was the beginning of the breaking up of local communities so funerals took place within 3 days quite often cos we have a crematorium so close to us that someone might die on Sunday and they’d be buried, they’d be cremated on the Wednesday and that wouldn’t be unusual and everybody that needed to be there would be there because they all lived so close. Now you know most, a lot of the people in our area have moved out. You know it’s very rare that we get a family where they’re all still living in (town), very, very
rare. There’s no work so they’ve moved away for work and, so it takes longer to organize”.
(Funeral director 8)

• Decreased familiarity of families with death and its traditions

“And they don’t know, they don’t know the traditions anymore you know because they’ve not ...
..., like most of my friends are, are mid 40’s now and they’ve lived out of the area so when anything happens, if one of my friends parents die they’ll ring me up and they’ll say well what do we do, cos they’ve never been involved with a funeral whereas 30 years ago it was, at my father’s knee almost”. (Funeral director 8)

• Family breakdown

“there’s so much breakdown in the family you know and it makes it so much harder because, I sometimes have to make two visits”. (Funeral director 8)

Some celebrants suggested that the funeral director’s role had gained in complexity and required a greater flexibility:

“maybe twenty years ago it was the same type of coffin, everything followed a pattern and I think they have had to sort of broaden their way of thinking”. (Other celebrant 28)

“So I do feel that possibly the role for the funeral director has got more complex over the years because of this lack of people’s affiliation to church”. (Christian celebrant 34)

“I think they’re much more relaxed now about what, what they can allow people to do and about looking to find somebody who can provide the kind of service that people are wanting”. (Christian celebrant 13)

However one civil celebrant was clear that the extent of change is limited. He said:

“there’s the funeral directors who are really embracing this who, who are taking it much further in terms of choice, but you know my feeling is that the, the sort of standard package type of funeral is still the vast majority and if you go to, you know the crematorium for a day and watch the funerals that are, that are happening, you know, why are they all so similar?”. (Other funeral professional 17)

One female celebrant pointed to the presence of female funeral staff today, saying:

“Maybe in the last 20, 30, 40 years I think things have changed dramatically, although I would say, no, perhaps there’s more female staff now”. (Humanist celebrant 19)
4.2 The celebrants and officiants

4.2.1 Roles and functions

The role of the celebrant in the funeral may be seen as in three parts, although all celebrants did not fulfil all the functions. The principal role was to conduct the funeral itself. In preparation for this role all the celebrants had some kind of meeting with the bereaved family in order to plan the service. For some ministers of religion there was also a post funeral role in offering some form of pastoral care to the family, ranging from follow up visits and phone calls to invitations to church the following Sunday when the deceased would be remembered by name and invitations to annual memorial services.

4.2.2 The pre-funeral meeting

Time and effort invested

The pre-funeral planning meetings varied considerably in length and subject matter discussed. All celebrants were concerned to discover information about the deceased and the family which could contribute to their address. Those who were following a set liturgy inevitably needed less material to construct the service than those where the entire ceremony was about the deceased. However this did not necessarily mean that meetings were short, or the effort put into creating the service small, as some of these ministers took very seriously the pastoral opportunities of the funeral. A few offered prayers at the meeting and others offered cards for later contact or invitations to church on the following Sunday. Meetings with ministers of religion attended varied from just over half an hour to nearly two hours.

Some secular celebrants spent considerable time with the family, sometimes with several meetings and phone calls with different parts of the family but in other cases discussion would be quite brief and focused. Meetings with secular celebrants attended varied from about three quarters of an hour to 1.5 hours. Some of both ministers of religion and secular celebrants are known to have spent considerable time working on their scripts and some supplied copies to the families, some before for checking of content and some afterwards as a memento. One widow particularly valued this saying:

“It’s marvellous having that. She sent me it in its folder, but also I can get some off the internet and give them to people who are interested.” (Funeral 39)
Another widow said:

“even at the end I thought well yes I’ve told him (minister) all this about Bill but I just wish I could remember what he’d said, and there he was at the end of the service with two brown envelopes, one for me and one for me sister-in-law”. (Funeral 40)

Some celebrants put considerable effort into making sure that the funeral is right for the family, sometimes meeting several times to obtain information, check details and for the family to proof read the script. One civil celebrant said:

“I’ve been known to go back three times sometimes I think very occasionally four it’s just to get it right for them so that they can read it through….one thing about mine is it’s always proof read before I deliver it so it is the words of the family”. (Other celebrant 28)

While not going to the lengths of checking a written script, a Church of England minister said:

“at the end of the funeral visit…. I will reflect back to them what I think they’ve said, so I will say something like, from, from what you’ve told me I think the most important things you want me to talk about are ………, is that right? Then they have an opportunity to say yes that’s right or I think you’ve probably missed something”. (Christian celebrant 30)

A Free Church minister said:

“It takes an awful lot of emotional energy in actually preparing a funeral service from my point of view and actually the, the day of the service, I, I, after the service I’m completely emotionally drained”. (Christian celebrant 14)

**Listening to the family**

While celebrants and ministers of different denominations differed in their ideas about the content of the funeral, there was general agreement that the pre-funeral meeting was to discover the wishes of the family and plan a service which would have an order and format. Both ministers and secular celebrants talked of listening to the family. A Free Church minister said:

“I feel that as a Minister you need to, to listen to the family. Now I think what, what I like to think I bring to the family is listening to them, seeing what they would like in the service”. (Christian celebrant 14)
For ministers of religion using a set liturgy the wishes of the family would be integrated into the prescribed form. A Free Church minister said:

“I get a picture of what they want to say, what they want to do and then I weave around that, words and liturgy”. (Christian celebrant 12)

Another said:

“the important thing is to, is to listen to what, what they, what they’re saying to me and to dovetail that with my own Christian faith and then to you know build, build the service around those things”. (Christian celebrant 14)

Another said the task was:

“giving people permission to do what they want to do and then put into some sort of order and guide them, guide them through it” (Christian celebrant 13). A humanist celebrant said “the family visit is, is every bit as important as the funeral in terms of the mourning process because it’s where people start putting together their ideas about who this person was and what that person, what that person meant to them, and so it kind of starts to consolidate things for them. And the funeral is really when you kind of edit that and present it back to them”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

**Managing the service content**

Most ministers and secular celebrants checked details such as the chosen music and announcements to be made. More than half offered the option of family members giving their own tribute and asked for names to be mentioned in the address. Seven ministers of religion explained what the content of the service would be, while others discussed only the eulogy. Some offered choices for example of readings, asking if there were specific readings that the family would like or reading aloud suggested alternatives. At all the meetings attended the readings offered were from the Bible. At only a few were comments offered on the suggested readings or on matters concerning faith and death. Three ministers offered choice of prayers to be included. One minister asked the families for two funerals if they wished to come forward to the coffin for the committal and another at three separate funerals requested a photo of the deceased to obtain an idea of them. Of the secular celebrants two offered to include a prayer and two offered a choice of poems at least sometimes, on some occasions introducing them to the funeral without discussion. At three meetings with a minister of religion and one with a secular celebrant there was some discussion about beliefs. Even in the Quaker funeral there is some form in that “the Elders in this case, they give a kind of shape to
the proceedings if I may put it like that or give it a beginning a middle and an end. I think so it has to have a form” (Christian celebrant 24). There would be no written service but “we are mentally, spiritually prepared to speak”.

Guiding choices
The officiant was generally very much in control of the meeting, making suggestions and asking questions. This could be on some occasions because the celebrant is used to funerals whereas the family may not be. At the meeting before Funeral 20 the couple said they did not know what to say and had never arranged a funeral before. The humanist celebrant very much led, asking them questions and then phrasing what they said into the language he would use, then reading it back to them for approval.

Another key informant emphasized that it was also necessary to make families aware of the options that were available, saying:

“I think some families are not always aware of what can happen within that service, so I think again it’s a role of being informative, informing them about what they actually can have and how long that service is and really take them through the service at what point various different things can happen, so they’ve got options, they’ve got choices and they feel a part of what’s going on. I feel that’s really important for the, the official, well the officiant or the celebrant to be able to sort of let the family be able to express what they would like to happen”. (Christian celebrant 34)

Similarly for Funeral 19 a Church of England minister made a series of suggestions as to what would happen and these were for the most part agreed by the family. For Funeral 29 a minister of religion arranging a secular service made a series of suggestions as to his understanding of the deceased and asked the family for agreement or comment. There were occasional specific suggestions by family members such as on two occasions a request for the minister to say that the deceased was reunited with loved ones. Another family emphasized to an independent humanist celebrant that there should be no mention of religion at the committal. There were also occasional requests for specific hymns or music. Two ministers questioned the desire to sing hymns because of the potential emotion for mourners or difficulties of a small group singing. One of the families compromised on reading a psalm together but the other adhered to their plan for hymns.
In secular funerals particularly, the celebrant introduced poems or symbols such as candles and evergreen foliage to the funeral. Although these were sometimes approved by the family, there were occasions when either the family did not know or they felt neutral about the idea. However this did not generally cause criticism. One daughter said:

“I never actually knew what she was going to use because she didn’t sort of say, right well I’m saying this and this and this.... but I thought it was nice”. (Funeral 16)

A Free Church minister also suggested that although people want more involvement than in the past, they still want the minister to:

“lift a lot of the, the, the emotional trauma of the day and the practicalities onto our shoulders”. (Christian celebrant 14)

Another independent celebrant viewed his role as:

“to help the family to put together a ceremony which has meaning for them”. (Other funeral professional 17)

A humanist celebrant pointed to the occasional problems when family members did not agree about the funeral service, saying:

“ My only concern is when the family say dad was an atheist and he said I don’t want any of that clap trap and then, and they say he mustn’t have a Vicar, he even said he didn’t want a service, but then we find out about you and that’s what we’re having. And then somebody that I’ll see in the family visit will say, but I want the Lord’s Prayer. And when there’s that conflict then that’s quite difficult. Usually though there’ll be another family member who’ll step in and say, but listen dad just said he didn’t want that”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

### 4.2.3 Conducting the funeral

The way in which the celebrant conducted the service varied mainly with the type of celebrant concerned. These included:

- Ministers of religion/ faith leaders who followed a set liturgy, with varying amounts of personalization in the address;
- Ministers of religion who adopted a more flexible approach, including a much greater focus on the life of the deceased but still offering comfort and hope through religious ideas;
• Independent “humanist” and other secular celebrants who primarily centred on the life of the deceased but would include familiar religious elements such as the Lord’s Prayer, Psalm 23 and hymns if that was the wish of the family;

• BHA humanist celebrants who focused entirely on the deceased, except for brief references to the humanist philosophy and/or to eco ideas and who would include a period of quiet reflection which could be used for private prayer if mourners so desired.

The Muslim representative interviewed indicated that the role of the Imam is to lead the prayers but that the whole community take part. He said:

“The Imam leads the, the proceedings but we all do - Yeah, we all do pretty much the same thing except he leads what we’re doing And we all kind of imitate that, so in a sense we would all be doing the same thing as the Imam”. (Other religious informant 23)

The form of the funeral is prescribed and the prayers are in Arabic. They are said direct to God, not through the Imam. The representative said:

“The only thing that we can give that person who’s passed away is in our prayers and we pray you know, we believe God listens to our prayers directly, we don’t have to go through a hierarchy of priests or bishops or whatever else it is. We pray directly, we supplicate directly to God”. (Other religious informant 23)

The approaches used by celebrants varied from the formality of the Requiem Mass to an almost conversational style in which there was dialogue between the celebrant and the mourners. Some Roman Catholic and Anglican celebrants followed the set liturgy fairly closely but others took a more informal approach. The variety of approach even between representatives of the same church seems to indicate that celebrants are today very individual in their perceptions of the needs of the bereaved and their attempts to provide for those needs.

Celebrating the life

For non religious celebrants their role was seen as entirely concerned with portraying to the mourners the life and personality of the deceased. Comments included:

“And so my job is then to, to lead them. The funeral director goes and he closes those doors or she closes those doors and then it is my job to hold the congregation captive and to be able to talk about their loved one….My job is to unite everybody and impress, that as long as people do talk about the deceased, remembering the good and the bad, for example the real person, then they will all live on in their memories”. (Other celebrant 27)
“That, that the meaning sort of thing is, is about can I serve that person well because, then again I suppose that relates to what’s important about having a funeral in the first place and it’s for the people who are still alive, but it’s also something about what you are saying to the people. And especially when you get a big crowd and you know there’s a big crowd coming there is a sense in which that it’s, you’re trying to tell these people all about this person, bits that they don’t know as well”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

One funeral director identified differences between celebrants in their approach to the family, with an informal approach resulting in a more personalised funeral. He said:

“You know if, if the celebrant goes in and just asking a series of questions they’re not gonna get as much feedback I don’t think, as some, some people just go in and have a chat and as they’re chatting with the family they’ll be writing things down and ....” (Funeral director 2) He continued “Some of the services are quite personal and go in depth about the deceased and have a full story of their life and their lifestyle and what happened and others there won’t be hardly a mention”. (Funeral director 2)

Another funeral director thought that:

“the emphasis is, is on the personal with the Humanist, you know they tend to be so much more personal with their information when you listen to the services. Whereas quite often the vicar’s a little bit for factual”. (Funeral director 8)

**Expression of faith and promotion of belief**

For religious celebrants there is a need to integrate their discussion of the life and character of the deceased with expression of their faith. For a Quaker where there is no set liturgy the service is:

“a thanksgiving of what they (the deceased) have done for the Meeting and then, we’ll sort of think generally of the grace of God in that person’s life”. (Christian celebrant 35)

Some were concerned that the way in which they conducted the funeral should convey the Christian message. A Church of England priest said:

“I was struck and horrified by the way in which the funerals were conducted and I swore it would never happen with me and it never has. It was bland, it was impersonal and it didn’t bring out, for me, it didn’t bring out for me the Christian hope”. (Christian celebrant 31)

A Church of England minister was clear that there could be no compromise in this, saying:
“In my mind as a Christian Minister I suppose my purpose is to feel that I am also honouring
God in it... So as well as honouring the family I want to make sure that, in the way I conduct the service I am being faithful to my own Christian beliefs and my Christian faith ....I’m a Christian Minister and therefore the service will you know include some prayers and will include a reading from the Bible and a reflection on what that reading might be saying to us today. So, you know I, there’s no point in me pretending that you know I’m not going to do that, cos I am”. (Christian celebrant 30)

Similarly a Free Church minister said:
“’I think all the families... recognise first and foremost that I am a Minister of religion, that I am a Christian Minister, so I won’t water down that’. (Christian celebrant 14)

Another said:
“as a Christian Minister I am there in some ways proclaiming the Christian faith in all this”. (Christian celebrant 12)

Some ministers did not see that carrying out the wishes of the family and remaining true to their own faith were necessarily incompatible. One Church of England priest said:
“I’m very keen to, to take funerals for people who, who would like me to take a funeral whether, whether they’re church goers or not”. (Christian celebrant 30)

A Free Church minister said “You are celebrating the life of the person who has died, and you are proclaiming your Christian faith. That is what I am doing”. (Christian celebrant 12)

Other religious celebrants, while incorporating elements of the liturgy, recognised that:
“most people want it simple, as simple as possible really, some people want as little religion as possible, as short as possible sometimes, but I mean I do my best to accommodate, I think we all do to accommodate the wishes of people as long as they’re reasonable”. (Christian celebrant 25)

Another emphasised the importance of treating each family individually saying:
“yes, it, it’s another funeral but each one must be lovingly dealt with on an individual basis. You cannot deal with them the same. You may go through a, a format that you had in your
questions but the answer’s coming back would be very different and they’ll be unique and special to those, to those families”. (Christian celebrant 14)

However, some ministers of religion regarded the pre-funeral meeting and the funeral itself as an opportunity for evangelism. One said simply:

“Where else would you get the opportunity to talk to people with no belief?” (Christian celebrant 13)

Another was more explicit:

“You will have agnostics, atheists, you will have those that consider themselves Christian and yet don’t attend any Church. So you’re dealing with a full range of, of different attitudes and ideas. I still, I, I still find that a real challenge. To actually, to really you know share with them something of the faith and the hope of the Christian Gospel. The, you know, the positive message of eternal life, you know of life after death, that it’s not the end”. (Christian celebrant 14)

He continued:

“it’s almost like sowing the seeds. You do it in a, in a gentle loving, for them a safe way, you know. None of this sort of beating them on the head with a bible, that doesn’t work.....I think we have a unique, as a Minister, we have a unique opportunity that you don’t have in, in any other service within Church and in, in, you have an unique opportunity to reach the un-churched. More than anywhere else. You know, you can knock on doors and say hello to somebody and, you know, but when you come, when you, you’re almost parachuted into a situation where a family are really, really in need”. (Christian celebrant 14)

By contrast, some of those with religious beliefs were willing to work with a family without emphasis on faith. One religious celebrant said:

“I do, you know have obviously my own religious beliefs, but I would never enforce that on, on people but I do feel that a funeral service has to be right and it has to be what the family want. It’s a, I just feel that it could be complicated grief, complications could set in if that final putting that, you know loved one to rest is not right, and so therefore for me whatever that family would like....and I give them all the options and like I say, nine times out of ten you know they want to include anything anyway, but it’s not about me, this is about that family and I have to put my own beliefs to one side”. (Christian celebrant 34)
Another felt that introducing religious ideas which to a family are not seen as relevant could detract from the funeral from the family point of view. He said:

“you’ve just got to provide the opportunity in the service for people to do what they want to do so things don’t block it, block that process, and pious words can, can block the process or things that are irrelevant can block the process”. (Christian celebrant 12)

A Church of England minister said:

“people quite rightly in my opinion do not want to be preached at a funeral. They don’t want to be, they don’t want to be told what to think or what to believe. And maybe people you know have, I’m sure some people have had experiences of that happening at funerals and maybe that, that put’s people off having a church funeral, but that’s not my intentions at a funeral, to try and win converts” (Christian celebrant 30) He also said “I think probing too much about what they think is happening and what they’re trying to do is not something I would tend to do in the same way that I, I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t tend to, generally enquire, enquire very much about their Christian faith when I do a funeral visit”.

Unwillingness to compromise personal beliefs was identified by some respondents as a key difference between ministers of religion and independent celebrants. One independent celebrant had held discussions with a group of ministers of religion and found them all to be unwilling to set their own beliefs aside. For himself, on the other hand, as an independent funeral celebrant:

“my views don’t matter at all and it’s only the views of the family that matter and, and the person who’s died”. (Other funeral professional 17)

This he saw as a strength. Another independent celebrant saw his role as:

“First and foremost to fulfil the needs wishes and desires of the family/individual who has died and not to promote myself or religious or humanist philosophy”. (Other funeral professional 15)

A Roman Catholic priest identified a difficulty in that those attending the funeral may feel that they are being judged by a minister of religion but that value systems were never the less necessary. He said they felt:

“judged because they don’t go to church or judged because, well about a couple of divorces or I’ve been playing around, and it brings in this huge thing in society which has only come in the last 30-40 years to be non-judgemental, and of course that’s in all the secular disciplines like
counselling, social work, and it’s a half truth. We actually need to be judgemental but not explicitly and overtly and prejudicially judgemental with the people we’re dealing with because if you’re not judgemental you are actually operating a value free system”. (Christian celebrant 33)

A Church of England priest suggested that bereaved families relied on the minister’s own belief if they did not have faith themselves. She said:

“from my point of view I would see that God would want to be near that person in his or her grief and God would be reaching out to that person, but then I believe that God is reaching out to everybody all the time and we’re very good at ignoring God. And I think there is quite a lot to be said for the fact that when we’re in the really serious parts of life, and you can’t get much more serious than death then people are starting to think about what they do believe. The materialist that fills up so much of our daily life just gets cracked through in a way. What I do find is that often people rely on my beliefs, they say we don’t know what, we don’t know what to believe, what do you believe and I will say well I believe that God accepts your loved one with love and acceptance, and, and they rely on that faith in me”. (Christian celebrant 29)

**Involving the family**

Secular celebrants gave greater emphasis to the wishes of the family in their conduct of the service.

A humanist said:

“I see my job as helping the family through the service and finding out what they want, how I want them, how I, how they would like the deceased to be spoken about, whether that’s with some humour, whether it’s a very sentimental funeral service, if they want something very brief and so, to recount the person’s life as best as they can tell me, and to do that in a sensitive manner, and again with, with empathy for the family”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

Families were seen to vary in the amount of input to the funeral that they wished to have. One Free Church minister said:

“You have those who you go and visit and they are all prepared. They know exactly what they want to do - we want this reading, we want that prayer, we want these hymns, we want this music, we want so and so’s going to speak, we want this poem, we want to lay flowers at this point, we want to …… and it’s all, and they know exactly what they want to do. And then you go to others and they really want you to do it. And they, they’ll give you very scant information about the person whose died and you’ll ask them does anyone want to speak? No. What
about readings, poems, that sort of thing? No, leave it to you. Music, well wasn’t really interested in music, have some music from the chapel. That, those are the two extremes”. (Christian celebrant 12)

A civil celebrant made a similar point, saying:

“the more they give the more I can give. If I’m stuttering and I’m trying, it’s like getting blood from a stone it’s never going to be the best service in the world because they’ve not given me enough. If however we’re sat there chatter, chatter, chatter and I look at my watch and 2 hours has gone and I’ve got reams of notes then generally, touch wood, I can put together a pretty good service”. (Other celebrant 27)

An independent celebrant said:

“I regard my role as a funeral celebrant to make people aware of what it is we have to do, where we have to do it etc, any time constraints and then to involve them as much as I possibly can in the actual funeral ceremony. And as I always put it to them you know, the, this funeral must come out of the culture, customs and language of your family”. (Other funeral professional 16)

Providing comfort or support for the bereaved

Both religious and secular celebrants identified a role in helping families to come to terms with their loss and in providing comfort and support. An independent celebrant said:

“My job is to speak well of the dead, then create a relationship of truth with the family that allows them to know I will take good care of their loved ones legacy and the deliver the service in such a way that that it aids healing and holistic bereavement and touches the congregations hearts/souls as well as their ears”. (Other funeral professional 15)

A humanist said:

“everyone has it’s like to lose someone that they love and if I can make, what is perhaps the worst day in someone’s life, easier to bear, which I like to think that I do, that’s my main job I think”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

A Free Church minister said his role was:

“to be there as a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, whatever they need me to be” and “You’re there to share the load. You’re there to lift the load”. (Christian celebrant 14)
A Church of England priest said:

“as far as the, the relationship with the family is concerned I think what my main purpose is to, to listen to them, to hear what their needs might be, and as far as I’m able to respond to those. Which, which means I think, from a families point of view, reflecting something of the, of the loss that they feel, which would include talking about the person who’s died, and, and, and helping them to verbalise in that sort of formal setting what their feelings about their loss are, and through that to bring some element of comfort”. (Christian celebrant 30)

A Roman Catholic priest said of one funeral meeting:

“It was about a 2 and a half hour counselling session basically, and it was a blessed moment for him and for me because I was there for him and it just all came out and I think he went away a slightly happier man than when he arrived”. (Christian celebrant 33)

A Reform Jew said:

“The way I see it is taking the Service, you know, trying to offer some words of comfort, go round to the house in the evening, take the Service in the home and if necessary take the Service for the whole week”. (Other religious informant 22)

One funeral director thought that secular celebrants of his acquaintance put more effort into the funeral than the local clergy but he also thought that some clergy offered more comfort. (Funeral director 5)

**Satisfaction with the service**

Generally families were happy with the way the celebrant conducted the service, whether this was a minister of religion or a secular celebrant. Those who had chosen secular celebrants appreciated the way the celebrant had described the life and character of the deceased to form a celebration of life.

Comments included:

“I thought she did brilliantly really, cos I think most people think they lead pretty boring lives don’t they, and you think how on earth are you going to talk for about 10 minutes about a life, when you are doing day to day things, but I thought she was marvellous the way that she did it”. (Funeral 33)
“She was really nice and she made it feel nicer... It wasn’t like a funeral as we’ve always been to funerals....There wasn’t a religious stamp there or Victorian type funeral to my mind....it was, well like she said, a celebration of his life”. (Funeral 35)

Another commented on the way the celebrant expressed himself saying:

“I was particularly happy with the way he did the service”. (Funeral 25)

Those who chose religious celebrants were also generally satisfied with the conduct of the service. An Orthodox Jewish key informant said:

“They’ve not got criticism of the way the funeral was conducted....No, no one has said to me for example the, the Rabbi didn’t doing well or, or anything like that”. (Other religious informant 21)

A family member from the Jewish Reform said:

“since she was a, a Rabbi for the congregation and obviously, and she knew her from luncheons and all the rest, that she knew her very well she was able to give an absolute, you know brilliant eulogy”. (Funeral 45)

The Rabbi was, however, the subject of criticism for wearing a pink coat.

A daughter in law appreciated the delivery of the minister. She said ministers were:

“used to projecting aren’t they, they’re almost got to be able to reach the back of the church and with it being such a large place their voices, although they’re beautifully quietly spoken they have volume”. (Funeral 37)

However for others it was the caring approach of the minister which was important. One widow said she remembered particularly:

“the kindness and friendliness of the Minister”. (Funeral 40)

A son took comfort from the positive approach of another minister saying:

“He didn’t make it a sad occasion; he made it sound like mother had gone to, to like glory I think he said”. (Funeral 21)
Another son thought the approach of the minister was appropriate for his father saying:

“he was a very down to earth, right background not flowery and I just thought yeah my dad would like that. He wouldn’t want, a pious plum in your mouth sort of vicar, he wouldn’t appreciate that. ... And he did a great job, I was very pleased, I thought you know he hit the nail on the head”. (Funeral 18)

**Criticisms**

There were some criticisms of the officiant although most of the negative comments were in relation to other funerals that families attended rather than the ones in this project. Points of dissatisfaction in relation to the project funerals included:

- Getting dates or names wrong (Funerals 25, 12).
- Omitting the substantial part played in the deceased’s life by one family member because other members were more articulate. A son said:
  
  “I was the one that did look after her...I’d do it again....even though it got hard at times, but, but, he should have said that at the sermon. He never asked and he never went into that part”. (Funeral 34)
- The funeral seeming rushed. A daughter said:
  
  “he was alright what he said like and he seemed pleasant enough like you know. But I don’t know it just seemed quick, quick to what you know, unless it’s cos I, it’s a long while since I’ve been to a funeral, well cos Aunt’s wasn’t, he didn’t say a real lot the Minister there like, you know did he? I don’t which one he was like you know but, I say it was alright what he said like, but it just seemed as though it was over and it didn’t seem, as though it was over in a flash”. (Funeral 11)
- Too much religion. A daughter said:
  
  “But I do know that they did say to him look you know not too much and yes, maybe he thought that wasn’t too much I don’t know”. (Funeral 12)
- Inflexibility about timing. (Funeral 31)
- A perception that the minister knew little about the deceased although he claimed to have known her. (Funeral 31)

One funeral director had experienced families who were unhappy to pay the minister’s fee but not concerned about the rather larger fee for a humanist. She said:

“They don’t see the preparation that’s gone into the event” or that “the minister has that length of involvement because quite often a minister or vicar will contact the family afterwards”.
A difficult job

Celebrants also raised problems with conducting a “good” funeral, despite the financial incentive mentioned by some in that they are then more likely to be asked to conduct further funerals. Difficulties relating to mourners were mentioned, including the problem of relating to a congregation whose members do not necessarily have faith. One Roman Catholic priest said:

“it’s not easy to deal with a congregation of non-believers. It is hard work actually. It can actually make you sweat, it can fill you with foreboding that these people, quite a lot of them, and you see in their faces, there’s a kind of indifference, there’s a scowl, and there’s a troubled expression on their faces, they can’t cope. And maybe it’s, they can’t cope with the death, they can’t cope with the situation or they can’t cope with the ideas that are being expressed at the funeral”. (Christian celebrant 33)

One funeral director thought that the job of the humanist celebrant was easier than that of the religious minister because they did not need to include faith elements as well as talking about the deceased. She said:

“I think the humanist officiants, I think they’ve equally got a difficult job but I think it can be a bit more, it’s a more honest approach because you know saying look we, we don’t believe in that, we don’t have that need to give prayers and give bible readings so the family are a little bit more at ease I find with the humanist celebrants. They’ve already, in general they’ve already made the decision that’s what they want when we get involved. They’ve already sort of thought about having a “Humourist”, is quite often what they get called, we’ll have one of those Humourists”. (Funeral director 8)

A Church of England priest also recognised that it is easier to relate to some congregations than others. She said:

“But some of them are incredibly hard work and others aren’t, and, and there’s a sense in some that the congregation is coming with you and they’re much easier to do, whereas if they’re just there you don’t, I suppose I don’t know whether I’m connecting at all”. (Christian celebrant 29)

A humanist celebrant remarked on the way his position as a celebrant gave him the trust of the families and their willingness to share with him details of their own and the deceased’s lives. He said:
“what struck me as being weird sometimes is how much people are actually prepared to tell me and to talk to me you see when I walking to the door not dressed with a white collar or anything and they seem to just trust you implicitly and prepared to share thoughts and secrets which you wouldn’t really expect someone the first time you’ve met them to share”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

4.2.4 Post-funeral contact

Few of the ministers followed up the contact with the family after the funeral, unless the family was part of their congregation. Some made a phone call but few made visits. One said:

“Now if you go quite soon after the funeral they’re still pleased to see you and want to talk. You try going 6 month later and it’s oh no, they’re never going to be off our doorstep now these church people, you know, so they don’t actually want that”. (Christian celebrant 13)

She continued:

“I try and send a card to every funeral I’ve been to. I send a card, a couple of days after, sometimes I put the eulogy in it or any poem I use that they haven’t had. I just send it off just to let them know, you know, that they’re still in my thoughts and prayers, but that I’ve found is about the limit of the contact. They know how to get hold of you if they want to”.

At least one non regular churchgoing family did attend church the Sunday after the funeral and was enthusiastic about the service. For Jewish funerals the Rabbi or other representative from the synagogue would also lead prayers for all or part of the Shiva week of mourning. None of the secular celebrants engaged in any follow up during the course of the study.

4.2.5 Change in celebrant’s role

Independent celebrants in particular emphasised the changing role of the celebrant as a key factor in the changing nature of funerals. One said:

“I think that the celebrant is, is key to, to that change in being able to help families to express the loss in the way that they need to express it and to celebrate the life in the way that they need to do it. So I think that the role of, of, of the celebrant is, is changing from, from the point of view of, you know, taking more time with the family to, to really put together something which is for them. But also to, I think that the role of the Celebrant is, is changing in terms of trying to find, and we’ll come on to, to this in one of your other questions, but trying to find new rituals which make sense to people”. (Other funeral professional 17)
Religious celebrants also recognised a change in their role. A Free Church minister said:

“from my point of view, I have changed from taking a set service and going through it and slotting in odd pieces to do with the person. I’ve changed from that to almost at sometimes being an MC for an event, making sure that music comes on and flowers get put on coffins and all that happens and that’s, that’s an MC”. (Christian celebrant 12)

A Roman Catholic priest considered change in funerals to be:

“because we’ve moved from a fairly monolithic, mono-cultural, mono-faith society in the last 100 years to a very pluralistic, very secularised society in some ways and multi-ethnic. So it’s very, very different now”. (Christian celebrant 33)

For Reform Jews there had been little change except in slightly greater flexibility in allowing family participation in the eulogy and if there are non Jewish mourners. Comments included:

“we usually ask the mourners if they’d like to do it (the eulogy), or sometimes they write it out and one of us reads it”. (Other religious informant 22)

“we are a bit more flexible, err because the family will ask, you know if, if, in a sense if there’s a non-Jewish partner, a non-Jewish spouse I should say, they will, there are certain things that they want to do”. (Other religious informant 22)

4.3 The mourners

4.3.1 Numbers and composition

The majority of funerals were attended by moderate numbers of mourners with a few small funerals, of elderly people. The very large funerals included that of a member of a traveller family which was attended by approximately 300 of the traveller community. Another was of a Roman Catholic priest attended by priests from the whole diocese and the Catholic community, probably about 500 in total. At a third about 250 mourners included family, friends and members of the local community at a memorial service for an elderly lady with a large family and a prominent position in the community. About 100 mourners were present at one funeral where the deceased’s employer had given his colleagues time off to attend. About 120 attended the funeral of another youngish man, also including many of his workmates. One hundred family, friends and members of the Jewish community attended the Jewish funeral of another elderly lady. At most funerals the mourners included those who were middle aged and elderly and for about three quarters those in their twenties. Only fourteen funerals included teenagers, mostly grandchildren of the deceased and in only seven were younger children present. Some of these were toddlers and babies, probably
grandchildren and great grandchildren. In some instances where small children were present it was so that their parents did not need to look for childcare. Some families specifically said that small children would not be expected, although others said they had discussed the question and decided against the presence of two and seven year olds. On the other hand another family left the decision to the parents and six children attended. Their parents had prepared them for the service and

“they appeared to understand what was going on and whilst some of the parents in some cases looked jolly sad at the funeral service the children seemed to be master of it, they had tasks to do, they had the candles to light at the service, they might have had to carry a bunch of flowers out and they might have even helped somebody who was carrying the coffin”. (Funeral 46)

At the traveller funeral there were children of all ages, the whole community coming to the funeral.

All funerals included both genders although there were more men at some such as the funeral of the priest (because of the priests attending) and two funerals where large numbers of work mates attended. Two funerals with more women were of very elderly women deceased. Even the smallest funerals included friends and neighbours as well as family, and former colleagues often attended even when the deceased had been long retired. Representatives from the police attended the funeral of a police officer who had been retired for 20 years and at an 85 year old woman’s funeral there were:

“Friends, neighbours and a lot, a few of them, yeah, there was a lot of friends there and there was some from her work”. (Funeral 34)

Because Jewish and Muslim funerals are arranged very quickly the number of mourners may be influenced by whether or not people learn of the death and whether they can travel. A comment was:

“Most Jewish funerals take place usually, it can be the same day but most usually, usually within 1 day, very rarely more than 2 days after death. So it depends basically how quickly people hear about the person passing away which determines who, how many people turn up”. (Funeral 45)
However there are a minimum number of mourners required for a Jewish Orthodox funeral.

“they need 10 people if they’re Orthodox, and they’ve gotta have 10 people there so, 10 men, so then they’ll start phoning people to make sure that there’s 10 men there...which is really called a Minyan, which we call, translated is a quorum”. (Funeral 45)

In the Reform Synagogue women can be counted in the Minyan.

4.3.2 Importance to family

Family members interviewed were often surprised by the numbers attending but were always appreciative. The number of mourners was frequently mentioned in reply to the initial question “what do you remember most about the funeral?” It was also mentioned as something about the funeral that they particularly valued. One widow said:

“people came from, not just Hull but you know quite a way away some of them, so I was, I was highly pleased”. (Funeral 40)

A couple talking about their son’s funeral said:

“Mother – There was, I was amazed how many people
Father– Well, we was amazed.
Mother – Did turn up
Father – You don’t realise how many people you touch in your life”. (Funeral 35)

A daughter said about her mother’s funeral:

“And that was nice, you know, but a lot of her friends came, a lot of her older friends came who hadn’t seen her for a long time, you know but still kept in touch with her by Christmas cards and phone calls and things like that, a lot of them turned up as well, so that was nice”. (Funeral 5)

Those interviewed valued the respect shown to the deceased in friends and family attending and particularly mentioned seeing people that they had not seen for years. One widow found her husband’s friends’ presence a comfort. She said:

“Especially, the amount of people that bothered to turn up, I found that quite comforting actually. Cos I didn’t think I would, I thought it would be a bit too much seeing all those faces but then looking back it was actually you know it was quite nice that they’d all turned up”. (Funeral 8)
4.3.3 Absent mourners

Some of those interviewed mentioned people who would have liked to attend or who they expected but were unable to be there. Reasons included distance for example living in New Zealand, although a number of family members did take great trouble to travel from various parts of the world. For some it was holidays, some families being very understanding of such commitments. One family where a relative was on holiday said:

“Well, (cousin) was upset cos I spoke to him didn’t I on the phone, saying that we’re just so sorry but we’re just not going to be able to get there. We feel awful. And I said you don’t have to feel awful, you know, this phone call is enough to say that…” (Funeral 37)

For one son however it was so important that his daughter was present at his mother’s funeral that the funeral was delayed. He said:

“She was on a cruise you see and she says, dad, if owt happens tell me, ring me and tell me on me mobile. She says ring me and tell me and I’ll jump on a plane when we stop at a port somewhere, I’ll jump on a plane and come back. I says, you won’t”. (Funeral 34)

Other people were unable to attend because of poor health, particularly those who were elderly. However some also were said to be too upset to be present. Two comments were:

“Some people I found out subsequently didn’t attend because they didn’t feel emotionally capable of doing so”. (Funeral 10)

“one of my grandson’s didn’t come cos he was too upset, the youngest one, the one I’ve just spoken to on the phone”. (Funeral 33)

4.3.4 Composure

In the majority of funerals the mourners were composed and if emotion was shown it was very dignified and discrete. Apart from the traditional British aversion to showing feelings, one bereaved son explained his lack of obvious emotion as follows:

“I know it sounds stupid because she passed away but I didn’t want my mum to see me down….You know I didn’t want her to see me upset and gutted and that, even my boys, like my thirteen and my eleven year old have said to me ‘we’ve never seen you cry dad’ and I’m like ‘well that’s not for you to see”. (Funeral 17)
Inevitably close relatives such as widows, widowers and mothers frequently broke into quiet weeping at particular parts of the service. This might be at a reference to a particular event in shared lives, e.g. the widow at Funeral 8 wept at a reference to her meeting with the deceased – love at first sight – and to their 24 year marriage. It might be at the committal, in the crematorium when the curtains closed or as family members said their final farewells at the coffin or at the graveside. Music, where the mourners were asked to listen to a particular CD during the service, often triggered emotional responses. Younger people frequently showed more emotion than their elders. At the two funerals where there was audible weeping, it was younger people who wept. At interview a relative put this down to the lack of funeral experience of younger people. She said:

“Oh (niece) was yeah, I think the first time she’d been she’d happened to be to a burial like you know. Oh she went in hysterics yeah”. (Funeral 11)

At a few funerals, for mourners other than close family, the occasion seemed to be a social gathering and to generate a buzz of conversation as mourners gathered and awaited the cortege and at the traveller funeral even during the funeral. There the chatter continued through the music items and even when the priest had specifically asked for silence.

4.3.5 Participation

Active participation of the mourners was generally limited. One family said it felt rather “as though we were being carried along” (Funeral 35). Some families felt that mourners participated simply by being there and others that they had participated by choosing the content of the funeral. One of those interviewed thought they had participated by giving donations in the retiring collection.

More active participation on the day took the form of:

- Bearing the coffin
- Joining in hymns and prayers
- Reading biblical passages or poems
- Reading personal tributes
- Rituals around approaching and touching the coffin
- Lighting candles
- Interaction with the celebrant – nods, responses and comments
- Applause for those who read
- Playing musical instruments
- Rituals around flowers/soil at the graveside
4.4 The deceased

4.4.1 Dressing the deceased

Nearly twice as many families chose to bring in clothes for the deceased to wear in the coffin as to wear a gown. Where the family chose a gown provided by the funeral director this was often because the deceased had lost weight and clothes would not fit. The colour of the gown was usually chosen to respect the deceased’s remembered preferences.

Where the deceased’s own clothes were used, they were chosen because they were favourites of the deceased, because the deceased looked good in them or because of particular associations. For example, one son chose for his mother:

“Basically what she looked nicest in”. (Funeral 17).

A widower similarly chose for aesthetic reasons:

“She didn’t have any dresses or anything because they’d all gone. So it was a case of find something that looks nice and he had, he’d picked a really nice T shirt bless him and he had found one of her best bras and her best pants and everything so just to make sure that he knew she’d gone off looking nice”. (Funeral 22)

A daughter said:

“we dressed him in his best suit and made him look good..put his dancing shoes on because he loved his dancing”. (Funeral 36)

Some men were smartly dressed in suits. One couple wanted their son to wear a suit but this was vetoed by his sons. They were, however, pleased in the end, saying:

“when I come to think of it, he did, he looked quite smart in modern clothes, and so we went down to his house and the boys picked out, well, he had an expensive wardrobe!”. (Funeral 35)

At the traveller funeral the deceased wore a suit even though he never did normally. His widow said:

“I bought it before he died but, for a collar and tie I mean we didn’t go nowhere for collars and ties, you know and I thought what does he want a suit for, any road he went on and on about these suits so in the end I just went to George in Asda and got him one of those cheap ones, £25, I thought well he’s never going to wear it you know what I mean. So he got his white shirt and his black tie and black socks he wanted and black shoes, I used to call him the man in
black, you know what I mean, so, but then obviously this happened so he got the pleasure of wearing it”. (Funeral 1)

A number of families chose new clothes, either those that had not been worn or bought specially. For some these were casual as in Funeral 42:

“he went in his favourite jumper and nice shirt that he hadn’t worn and ...And his green cords”.

Another family bought a suit for the funeral:

“We bought him a new suit yeah....He didn’t own a suit....He didn’t own one but he went out in style”. (Funeral 27)

Another family:

“chose some clothes that the family had bought him for presents and things like that”. (Funeral 33)

A funeral director said that she advised families:

“look, we have a Matalan in town, don’t go somewhere ridiculous and buy an expensive suit, go to Matalan and get a suit from there if you if you really feel that it has to be a suit”.

However, for one family this was exactly what they did not want to do:

“he could never actually afforded to buy one when he was alive so the family bought him an expensive designer jumper that I assured them that he was wearing and that gave them some comfort to know that, even in death, he got what he wanted in life although they couldn’t see it they were just happy knowing that he was going to meet his maker or make his end wearing a jumper that he really wanted in life”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

In other funerals the deceased wore favourite clothes or those in which bereaved relatives were used to seeing them. For example, some older women wore favourite nightdresses. Another young man wore jeans and his football shirt with a football scarf to cover the post mortem scars.

On rare occasions the deceased had previously specified what they were to wear. One older woman had specified a particular trouser suit and another man an unworn set of work clothes. The funeral director said:
“I’ve had a gentleman, I had a gentleman not long ago dressed in his work gear. He was a delivery driver and he wanted to be in his work clothes. He loved his job and had to stop working because of his cancer and he’d got a brand new set of UPS uniform in his wardrobe for when he died and you’ll put me in that”. (Funeral director 8)

A number of families chose for the deceased to go to cremation or the grave still wearing jewellery. This was often because the deceased always wore certain items:

“She never ever took her rings off. She never took her chains and her cross off of her neck ever and as far as I am concerned, if that was what she did that was what she wanted to be buried in as far as I am concerned, because that was what she did”. (Funeral 31)

However one family specially went and bought new pearls for the deceased to wear (Funeral 34). One woman who had a humanist funeral and neither she nor her partner had religious beliefs, nevertheless went to cremation wearing a cross and chain (Funeral 10). At Funeral 1 the widow swapped her crucifix for the deceased’s so that they were wearing each other’s.

Cultural influences

Celebrants and funeral directors commented on the increasing practice of the deceased wearing their own clothes. One funeral director said:

“I bet nearly every person that’s in our Chapel of Rest now is dressed in their own clothes”. (Funeral director 8)

One celebrant thought that this was just:

“adding that, that, that personal familiar touch”. (Christian celebrant 14)

However another thought it was more connected with the idea of the funeral as a celebration, of going out dressed in best or most personally important clothes, clothes which convey the identity of the deceased. She said:

“that’s his celebration, yeah. The Indians used to, when they used to go to war, they used to dress in their finery because if they were taken they wanted to have their finery on as they went over, so it’s similar. So a similar thing I tend to think is when football and rugby and things like this, we’re all a tribe, we all go out there and we’re all together as one and that’s our finery and that’s the way I tend to look at that”. (Other celebrant 36)
She said if the deceased had faith they were dressing to meet their maker, but for most it was more going out in their best.

A funeral director pointed to media influences and the arrival of peoples from different cultural backgrounds such as Eastern Europe in the way the deceased is dressed. She said:

“it’s back to the television and in influences of the tel..., of the telly. I think that a lot of people watch so much now and films and such like and you know you must have seen it yourself, if you watch a film an American film and they’ll, someone’s died they’re laid in the coffin it’s half open and they’ve always got a tuxedo or their best frock on if they’re a lady”. (Funeral director 8)

The Muslim custom of dressing the body in white cloths is symbolic of the idea that we all come into the world and leave it as equals. A representative said:

“when you go on the pilgrimage there the men wear 2 pieces of white cloth, one around the waist and one over the shoulder and it symbolises that when we leave this world that’s all we’re gonna leave ....there’s no differentiation between the rich or the poor, the black or the white and all the different classes that come in between and when, when somebody dies they are wrapped in those two same sheets of cloth”. (Other religious informant 23)

There is similar symbolism in Jewish funerals where the body would normally be wrapped in a shroud, with for a man also his prayer shawl. A family member commented:

“basically the idea is you, you’re gonna, you would leave the earth the same way as you came into it”. (Funeral 45)

4.4.2 Accompanying items

A few families added items to the coffin to go with the deceased. Where the disposal was for burial, the funeral director sometimes asked if families wished to include items. These were mostly photographs, particularly where the funeral was cremation. One family wanted to put in a photograph of the deceased and his wife together, and also a packet of cigarettes because “I’m sure he is thinking about his cigs“(Funeral 20). Others included photos of animals. One widow said that this was “cos he loved his animals” (Funeral 40). Another family would have liked the deceased’s dog cremated (the dog was sick and had to be put down) and the remains included in the coffin but had to compromise because of cost. They “cut a bit of his hair off, took his photo and we stuck it on the photo and put it in his hand”
Another family included a toolkit because the deceased was keen on DIY. They said:

“Sister – We give him a hanky, cos he’d always to have a hanky in his pocket hadn’t he.
Niece – A Suduko and his pen and a Swiss penknife cos his, well thing, cos he was always....
Sister – Well, a little, a little thing in a case which wore, opened up and there were pliers and a little screw driver, you know”. (Funeral 27)

Another family included:

“little things, pictures the children had drawn and I put a lock of my hair in his pocket... A little bit that fell off my granddaughters costume on, on Halloween, all the kids came and my daughter dressed in their costumes. It was only a few days before Justin died, 4 or 5 days. And afterwards I found this little scrap of material that had fallen off her costume so I put that in the coffin as well”. (Funeral 44)

Key informants perceived that this procedure was important to some families and provided comfort. Comments included:

“It’s more commemoration of the life and what was important in the deceased’s life and I think with the, the family that are left doing that, they feel as if it’s, again it’s part of the involvement. They feel it’s well one of the last things we can do”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“it’s comforting to them to know that, there are photographs in the casket which their loved one is going away with photographs of the family or locks of hair or, there are so many different things”. (Funeral director 2)

4.4.3 Viewing the body

The majority of bereaved families made visits to the funeral director’s premises to view the body before the funeral. For most it would be close family who visited but some families were happy for other family and friends to visit as well if they wished. One son, whose mother had attended a community centre, was happy for her friends from there to go (Funeral 17). One widow said:

“my mum, Mark’s dad, a couple of my friends went, one of my neighbours went so that was nice because you know they, they, one of my neighbours he said I hope you don’t mind but I just want to go pay my respects. I said you’re perfectly entitled to, you know, if you want to then go by all means”. (Funeral 8)
However one widow said the deceased had not seen his brothers and sisters for years and she did not want them at the funeral. She arranged restricted viewing – only those presenting one of the funeral director’s cards would be admitted (Funeral 13).

Some went more than once or even every day. Elderly parents at Funeral 35 went twice, the second time on the day of the funeral when they “said our goodbyes there.” A widower;

“went every day, I knew he would, I knew he would. Yes he even had a special appointment on Saturday to go and see her because that’s by appointments on a weekend”. (Funeral 22)

A son said:

“I went every day. Just even if it was only for 10 minutes. I don’t know why, I just, I did I went to see her every day. Before she actually got took away. It’s a real strange feeling, I just wanted to make sure she was, my biggest I don’t know my biggest relief was the fact that I got her from the mortuary into the rest rooms and I just wanted to make sure she was ok. So I took some flowers, I took a load of flowers there so it would make the room smell of flowers rather than, you know smells like a rest room or whatever”. (Funeral 17)

He went on to say that he talked to her, saying:

“You know to actually let her know what was going on and if she approved of it. You know if it was ok for her and she approved of everything that we was doing. It was really strange but I just felt like that….I know that she wasn’t there, I know that, like I say her soul or whatever you want to say about, a life entity or whatever, had gone, but it was still my mum. What I could see there was still my mum. So that was showing my mum respect”. (Funeral 17)

**Whether or not to visit**

Some suggested that their reason for going was to say goodbye. One widower wanted to remember his wife as she had been in life but nevertheless went to see her dead; “just because I knew I wouldn’t see her anymore”. (Funeral 25)

One family who felt that they had already said their goodbyes and were confident that the deceased would not have expected them to go, nevertheless were very appreciative that the funeral director said that she spoke to him every time she passed. The widow “thought that were really nice”. (Funeral 42)
Those who did not want to visit the deceased generally felt that they wanted to remember the deceased as he/she was in life. A son was emphatic:

“I like to remember a person as they was, I don’t particularly like to you know, stand there staring at a corpse. I’ve seen too many corpses in too many years”. (Funeral 19)

Some had been influenced by previous experiences when their final memory had interfered with earlier happier memories. One daughter in law said:

“I said you’ve got to weigh up whether, what you want your last memories to be”. (Funeral 37)

A daughter said:

“We can remember dad as he was, we don’t need, we didn’t need (to visit)”. (Funeral 36)

However others who had seen the deceased in their last illness felt visiting them at the Chapel of Rest could improve final memories. One widow said:

“You know you, some people say oh I couldn’t go and see them, you know I’d rather remember them as they were but I think it depends on the circumstances of the death because sometimes you’re better off seeing them when they have been done and presented because I know Mark had had his cheeks padded, they’d just put a little bit of padding in his cheeks and he looked like his old self”. (Funeral 8)

A daughter said:

“I had to change the picture of her and I thought the only way I can do it is to go there and see how she is. Me sister had been…And she says, ah, she looks lovely”. (Funeral 34)

A sister said:

“You know I thought well, I’ll just go and see what she’s, she was, she was all right...Out of her pain”. (Funeral 38)

A son said:

“just to sort of put a final, a note of finality about it and it certainly was more pleasant to see her pleasantly laid out than perhaps when I first saw her when she was dead in bed”. (Funeral 23)
Others also referred to visiting as a mark of respect. Another son said:

“She looked terrible in the home, in the funeral parlour, she looked horrible. It wasn’t me mum at all, but as I say I had to go to pay my last respects basically because I was not there when she died”. (Funeral 31)

The idea that it was necessary to visit the funeral parlour if family members had not been present at the death was mentioned by others. A widow said:

“we were with him, you know, at the end, so, but his sister wasn’t and she wanted to go and she went and saw him. She said she’d had a chat with him and I told him off, she got upset when she got back but she were glad she’d gone”. (Funeral 33)

A daughter said:

“she wasn’t there when he were dead, when he actually died and for her to sort of, really to understand that he had died she had to go and see him...And I think if that’d have happened to me dad I’ve probably have gone”. (Funeral 42)

Key informants suggested the reasons for going to view the body included a feeling of duty, that they ought to go (Humanist celebrant 18), to be close to the person (Christian celebrant 30), to see them at peace (Christian celebrant 13), because they do not want to accept the death (Humanist celebrant 20), or for closure (Funeral director 2). Those that preferred not to visit wanted to remember the deceased in life. For Jews, mourners can stay with the body overnight if they want to, a tradition thought to have grown because;

“in the olden days there was always a worry that the body would be attacked, robed, defiled, whatever it was and the second thing was always the other worry, was the person really dead”. (Funeral 45)

**Impact of viewing the body**

Some of those interviewed were surprised at how upsetting they found the experience. One partner said:

“I got there and I was fine, I was waiting while they prepared her and I was fine but as soon as I walked into the room I was in pieces, just, I did not think it would affect me so much. Having seen her at home, you know, after she passed away, you know I didn’t think it would affect me so much but I think because a week or so had passed, seeing her there just brought back everything”. (Funeral 10)
This man felt it was the finality that was so upsetting. He said:

“And that was more of an end point than the funeral, the funeral was just a process we had to go through”.

One son also pointed to the difficulty of this end point, saying he:

“found it difficult to leave. In fact I walked out the door three times I think and went back....Because I knew that was the last time”. (Funeral 18)

A brother felt afraid because he was reminded of his own mortality and because with his brother’s death he felt alone. He said:

“I felt scared. You know of being left alone I think”. (Funeral 20)

For others it was a good experience to see their loved one at peace. A sister of a relatively young man who had died suddenly said:

“he was just like laid, you do you know at peace sort of thing, the way he was. He just didn’t seem, just asleep, just as if he was sleeping, sleeping peacefully”. (Funeral 7)

One widow was so satisfied with her husband’s appearance that she took a photograph. She said:

“And he just looked so lovely and peaceful. And I think people, one or two people, raised eyebrows at that but that was, I knew he wouldn’t mind, me doing that. I wanted to remember him, in his, just as he was and I wanted to remember the coffin and I wanted to remember the pictures and just as it was. ... Its, they’re not pictures I look at very often to be honest but I wanted to have those”. (Funeral 44)

A brother found comfort in making the visit saying:

“The only actual comfort I found me personally, even though it was upsetting was when I said good bye to him in the rest place”. (Funeral 20)

One daughter raised questions of touching and kissing the deceased. She said:

“we all kissed her and touched her like you know, so. Cos when me dad died I was a bit frightened to go in because it at hospital where he died and I went up to it but I didn’t, I daren’t, I don’t know why but it hasn’t seemed to bother me this time like, you know. Some people can and some people can’t can they? Touch them like when they’ve gone”. (Funeral 11)
A brother however could not bring himself to do so, saying:

“Like I said I didn’t touch him, and I think when I think back on it I should have done. You know held his hand and said good bye or whatever you’re supposed to do I don’t know but maybe I should have done. But I couldn’t. It was too upsetting as well seeing him laid there”. (Funeral 20)

For a widow:

“It was like I was getting extra time with him because I could just sit and talk to him and it was like it was giving me that little bit longer and having him with me, obviously he couldn’t speak back but I could sit with him and discuss things and talk to him about things and also I didn’t want him stuck there on his own”. (Funeral 8)

4.4.4 Talking to the deceased

Talking to the deceased was not confined to the chapel of rest. At two funerals family members who read their own tributes directly addressed the deceased although for one it was only to say good bye. For the other he mentioned a beach in Mauritius which was a favourite place and addressed the deceased saying “wait for me there, I’ll meet you”. (Funeral 10)

For some talking to the deceased was something that they could and did do anywhere. One widow said:

“I sort of talk to him in my head ... I feel I can communicate with him anywhere and anytime so...... And when I went to London recently I felt I carried him with me, so that was quite nice as well. Wherever I go now I feel he’s with me so the, the cemetery is not crucial”. (Funeral 44)

A widower said:

“I can talk to her anytime.

(Interviewer: And do you talk to her?)

Oh yes. I still talk to me mother....I mean I’ve talked to me mother for years, I don’t get answers of course but it its it gives you some solace to do these things you know. And some comfort so sometimes you can imagine her saying don’t be such a daft sod, get on with it you know”. (Funeral 14)

For some of the bereaved it was important to have a physical focus for talking to the deceased. Some talked to the deceased at the graveside on visits. Comments included:
“sometimes I talk to him and say there you are dad, I know you don’t, you say they’re a waste of money but we put you some flowers on and he always washes, cleans the stone like with some water and a chamois leather and yeah, there you are he goes. See you again we go”.

(Funeral 11)

“when I go to the grave now I just stand there and I talk to him and I know people, when people’s around, they are looking at me as though I’ve gone out”.

(Funeral 1)

One daughter had suggested to her mother that she could talk to the casket of ashes, saying

“And I’d said to mum, because mum knew that (friend) had done that as well, and I said, you know, just put him somewhere where he would like and go and have a chat occasionally”.

(Funeral 36)

A widow said:

“I actually at first thought will it feel a bit weird having them in the house and it doesn’t feel weird at all. It feels actually quite comforting because I can talk to them, I can stroke his casket and it, it actually is really comforting”.

(Funeral 8)

Another widow talked to her husband’s photograph:

“I looked at him like that and I said ‘you hurt me when you was alive but you’re not going to hurt me now you’re dead’ but I was just like thinking out loud”.

(Funeral 1)

4.4.5 Experiences of the deceased’s physical presence

At interview several of the bereaved talked about experiencing feelings of the presence of the deceased, generally just a feeling that they were with them rather than a seeing or communication.

Comments included:

“I kind of felt an arm up my back saying stand up and get on with it. As if somebody was watching me”.

(Funeral 10)

“I’ve often felt her, as I was sitting, you know I thought oh, she’s here....Like last night, even last night. Watching telly and she come, you know, she just sat here and just seemed to be there wi’ me. I thought, oh, you’ve come have yeah?” (Funeral 34)
“I experienced it with my partner yeah. When she passed away. I felt her presence very strongly at one point.
(Interviewer In the immediate aftermath or ...)
No it was a few days later”. (Funeral 19)

One referred to the awareness of an animal of this presence, saying:
“And (the dog) knows when she’s here, I’m sure he does and he did that last night, just sat. He pricked his ears up, stood up, laid down there, his head went up, his ears pricked up and he just sat there looking at me, and I thought that’ll be me mam”. (Funeral 34)

Some suggested that this feeling of presence might be a trick of the mind, created by the subconscious wish and need for the person. One bereaved partner said:
“I think oh, I thought about this a lot, I think they’re there when you need them to be there, but again I think that is probably a subconscious element of yourself”. (Funeral 10)

Only two people talked of the deceased being seen and this was not by themselves. For one it was, a child, a young relative. She said:
“But (granddaughter), she was 7 at the time, she was in the funeral car with us and I looked round to see if she was ok and I could see her looking out of the, the car and, I said what are you looking at, and she just sort of looked at me and didn’t say anything and afterwards I asked her and she told her mum the same she said I could see Grandad. She said he was walking in front of the funeral cars and she described what he was wearing. She described the clothes he had on in his coffin but she didn’t know cos she’d not been to see him, and he had his briefcase with him like when he’d go to, you know off to work, and she said and he was just like us. He wasn’t white and I think she meant like a ghost”. (Funeral 44).

For the other it was his son who showed the researcher a photo taken on a mobile phone which he claimed was his deceased mother at the window on the night when she had been moved from hospital to the funeral director’s premises. He said:
“he (son) showed me this, and I don’t know, as I say I don’t know how much you believe in things like this but erm he had a, what we can assume was a visit by my mum erm, ........ can you see, you see this here?....There’s a mouth, two nostrils, and eyes. Can you not see that?”
Although he had not seen this himself he had felt a sense of her presence. He said:

“I just had a feeling that she was there, now I reckon that she’d been, I’m not religious but it’s really strange, that she’s been disturbed by getting moved and it’s given her chance just to pop in and see us all, you know in a strange sort of way”. (Funeral 17)

Another widow talked about an experience that her husband had had:

“It was a very old house and we were about 8 months doing it up. We lived in the corner cottage here and we were about 8 months doing this one up before we moved in and he used to come back and say, been working too hard, I must’ve been because I’ve seen (previous resident Mr Harrison) again, he keeps coming to look to see what I’m doing. And he used to talk about (Mr Harrison). He used to say, he stands at bottom of the steps and watches me. And then, when we’d moved in and he said (Mr Harrison)’s gone now, he’s happy with what we’ve done”. (Funeral 42)

4.4.6 The deceased as an active participant

Deceased’s awareness

A number of families made passing references to the deceased’s awareness of what was going on before the funeral. In composing the newspaper announcement for Funeral 17 it was said that it was not necessary to mention names because “she knows who they are” (Funeral 17). In choosing flowers one sister said that the deceased did not like flower crosses and would not want one. The sister could not remember the name of the flowers the deceased liked. Said “She’ll be looking down on me and saying....” (Funeral 38) The curtains were to be left open for Funeral 25 because “she would never forgive us – she would want to be watching”. (Funeral 25)

One son felt he had to keep up a good front at his mother’s funeral because he did not want her to see him distressed. He said:

“I was just trying to be strong for my kids and for everybody else around me and for my mum. I know it sounds stupid because she passed away but I didn’t want my mum to see me down”.

(Funeral 17)
Another son talked of his mother being buried in an area of the cemetery with other family members. He said:

“So, yeah, the whole generation is in that one area of, you know, where she was buried, in that one section, the whole generation, her brother, her sister and she is now there. So yeah, she will have somebody to talk to if you believe that sort of thing”. (Funeral 31)

These ideas appeared to be almost instinctive and not clearly thought out. However one son had a more developed belief in the awareness of the dead of the world. He said:

“I’ve just read on the subject about for about 20 odd years just and it’s very much largely academic literature on the subject you know, done by academics. You know on the subject. .... and all the research they’ve done suggests people are aware after they’ve died you know. You know tried to comfort people etc etc but most people are usually too full of grief to be aware of anything”. (Funeral 19)

In the Jewish faith the deceased are thought to be still aware and not at rest until after the funeral:

“according to Jewish Law the deceased is still aware and must be given full attention”. (Other religious informant 21)

Contacts by the deceased

Some of those interviewed thought that their loved ones tried to make contact and influence them. One woman said:

“I believe they come and talk you as well because they do” (Funeral 27).

A son said:

“I think that maybe she comes back and just gives me a little visit and gives me a little kick up my backside of something like that” (Funeral 17).

One woman reported an experience which she identified as a spirit contact although she was not clear what it meant. She said:

“all of a sudden I was sat there and I just heard a voice in my left ear that said 'wush, like the wind going wush past me, I heard a voice going past me saying wush. I don’t know. That was before, that was before me mam died, but I don’t know. And then I, a few weeks ago I heard a voice, I don’t know whether it was her or not but I thought I heard a voice. (Interviewer And did that voice say anything specific?)

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At a pre funeral meeting one family reported strange occurrences with bedside lights coming on without switching – the deceased said their son had put them on to show her that he was still there (Funeral 13). At another meeting a widower said a photo of his son fell down three times before son died and regarded it as evidence of supernatural (Funeral 22). A number of those interviewed referred to evidence of contacts made by deceased family members from lights and other electrical apparatus switching on and off. Comments included:

“Daughter - we think (dead daughter in law)’s been around since she’s, you know. And there were all sorts of things that happened with lights. The night me dad died the lights were ....

Widow– The lights were going up and down

Daughter – Up and down all night and we said this is Nan, his mum”. (Funeral 42)

“I mean, we had a little radio with a slide button and it used to keep turning itself off and on, and I used to say Vera’s here again. She’s putting radio on to let us know she’s around, and you know it in’t something that scares me”. (Funeral 42)

“Wife - I’ve got a jewellery box and it’s like that and to play all you...It plays on its own...And that’s my husband.

Daughter - And it’s done that since my dad died”. (Funeral 27)

**Contacts through mediums**

One family had a friend who was a medium and claimed to have heard from her brother. She said:

“And I’ve heard from Don....And she didn’t know Don. She’s told me lots of different things that nobody else could have told me”. (Funeral 27)

In another family, at a pre funeral meeting it was reported that the deceased and his widow had visited medium in the hopes of contacting her son. The medium said that people who were contacting her were happy that she had a little box. She did not think she had one but found one containing a lock of her mother’s hair. The medium also said it did not matter that she forgot flowers when she went to the cemetery. She felt the medium could not have known except through spirit contact. (Funeral 13)
Deceased providing assistance

A few of those interviewed talked of the deceased responding to cries for help by providing assistance, sometimes feeling that this must be coincidence or the result of their close relationship in life but nevertheless thinking of the experience as real, or real to them. One bereaved partner said:

“About a week after the funeral I had to obviously, the banks and building societies to sort out, and I had an appointment at the bank to close, or suspend her accounts and take in her credit cards and cash cards and I found everything that I needed apart from the two cards, and I knew I’d seen them when I was sorted through stuff, but couldn’t find them anywhere. I looked in the safe, I looked in the drawer where we keep odds, I looked everywhere that I think they could be. And after about half an hour I just sort off, didn’t even think about it just said oh come on Sarah show me where they are, nothing happened and I came downstairs to look for something else and I opened a box looking for this something else and this small cash bag fell out with the cards in it all cut up. So I’d obviously done it and put them there without thinking about it because I was looking for something else and as I picked this box up you know with quite a jerk this bag just when ‘plop’ and fell on the floor, ah so I just looked up and said thank you. So whether that’s just my mind playing tricks you know subconsciously I knew they were there, I don’t know I’ve been through it a thousand times but the fact is I said you know show me where they are and there they were”. (Funeral 10)

A widow had a similar experience. She had been asked for a particular CD and said:

“So, I said oh I’m sure I will have but I said, Bill’s got 100’s of CD’s, they’re all upstairs in the cupboards that he built, especially for all these CD’s. I says I’ll have a look but you know I can’t promise I can find it. Oh, don’t worry he said. Anyhow, I went upstairs and I opened all these doors and there’s rows and rows of CD’s and I thought oh, mostly classical, and I thought, where on earth do I search amongst these, and I started looking through them all, there are so many. And I just said, oh Bill help me, where’s the Spinners, and then I just opened this cupboard and sure enough in front of me face there was about 8 or 9 Spinner’s CD’s and I just plucked one out at random and the Family of Man was the very first one....Haa, haa, so I mean that was just coincidental I suppose, but it just, you know, it just makes you think”. (Funeral 40)

Two of those interviewed referred to beliefs in “guardian angels” One said this was just “Somebody just looking after you, keeping an eye on you” but went on to suggest that it would be a family
member (Funeral 29). Another family referred to a relative’s beliefs and also believed family members intervened:

“He did some Reiki to help him when (wife) were dying and when, after she died, and he’s been in his own view talked to (wife), had a blessing to move on. He thinks he’s got some guardian angels that, that’s you know, his part of what he went through in Reiki seen, and one of them was Nan and Nan was a big part of, she was a very strong character me mum, me dad’s mum, and we were saying at the time, that night, Nan’s coming for him. Not to take him to heaven, but just to take him wherever people go”. (Funeral 42)

**SUMMARY**

All groups of participants emerge as playing a significant part in the process of planning and carrying out the funeral. Funeral directors regard their role as essentially guiding and supporting the families, in particular, offering them choices and ensuring that their wishes are carried out. They see their overarching responsibility as ensuring the smooth running of everything so as to take the burden off the family. It is thus a key but background role. For the most part, the families endorsed this analysis and were satisfied with the service they got. The celebrants and officiants, on the other hand, emerge as playing a more pro-active role, sometimes steering rather than guiding the families through choices for the ceremony and with a clear view of their responsibility to ensure that the funeral fulfils its central purpose. This was variously defined, with ministers of religion operating across a wide spectrum in terms of the extent to which they privileged the religious content and purposes of the funeral. Similarly, humanist celebrants and other secular officiants varied in the extent to which they promoted their philosophy of life and death or simply tried to serve the wishes of the family. Overall, however, there are probably more similarities than differences in the perceptions of role and functions and actual practices of the celebrants and officiants, especially if these are extracted from their specific religious or secular context. Facilitating an appropriate form and ritual in the ceremony and leading and supporting the mourners are common priorities for all the celebrants. As with the funeral directors, the families generally felt that this was what had been provided. The mourners emerge as surprisingly active participants (given that very few made a formal contribution within the funeral service), with clear ideas of what they want in terms of the overall tone, and detailed observations about the event and the ways in which the funeral directors and celebrants fulfilled their roles and functions. Perhaps most surprisingly, it is clear that for many families the deceased is also an active participant – before, during and in the immediate aftermath
of the funeral. This suggests a need for the living to gradually separate themselves from the dead and for the status of the recently deceased to move gradually from that of dying person to dead body.
“Christ has conquered death”.

“We cannot do anything about death but we can do something about living. ... She was a member of the ‘great human community’.

“... my thoughts are that we die. You know we’re mammals, like all animals we’re born, we live and we die. It’s as simple as that you know it’s just a matter of logic to me”.

“I don’t believe that you can die and your energy or your soul whatever you want to call it can just disappear. I think it is somewhere... I don’t know where but you can’t destroy energy. It just may be takes a different form or what have you and that’s what I believe”.

“Despite the fact of all the services I’ve ever done people may not believe in God but they are still spiritual people and they do believe that somehow the spirit will, will be with you if you ask for help from them they’ll be there. ... I have a lovely ideal image in my mind that you can pop down and help your loved ones in time of need”. (Other celebrant 27)

5.1 Formal religion

For the 41 funerals for which information is available about the stated religion of the deceased, either from the family meeting with the funeral director or from interview, 23 were Church of England, three were Methodist, four Roman Catholic, one Jehovah’s Witness, one spiritualist and one Jewish. Only eight said that the deceased had no religion. However many qualified their statement by saying that they were “not practising” or “not churchgoers”.

5.1.1 Religion and belief in the funeral service

Two thirds of the funerals studied were led by Christian ministers of religion. While the proportion of religious content to attention to personal description and accommodating families’ choices varied, all proclaimed Christian beliefs to some degree. However, only one (the Jehovah’s Witness Elder) engaged in a thorough-going exposition of the theology of sin, death, redemption and resurrection. Some pointed to the difficulties of reconciling their own faith with that of the mourners:
“So as well as honouring the family I want to make sure that, erm, in the way I conduct the service I am being faithful to my own Christian beliefs and my Christian faith. So there’s kind of, I think they’re probably the two main sides to it.... Often there will be a degree of overlap, where, where the person has had an active Christian faith and been a member of a Church community the two fit together very well. Where someone has not been to Church really at all, you know, as part of their regular life and, and perhaps would say I’m not religious, there’s not so much overlap. There is always some because otherwise people you know, wouldn’t, wouldn’t come and ask and want a church, a church funeral”. (Christian celebrant 30)

**Life after death**

Christian ministers all felt that it was important that the funeral contained the Christian message of life after death, giving hope to bereaved. Comments included:

“share with them something of the faith. And the hope of the Christian Gospel. The, you know, the positive message of eternal life, you know of life after death, that it’s not the end”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“for the Christian death is actually a natural progression from this world to the next and, and both are equally important, and total meaning is given by this belief in God who had a son who died. And he himself didn’t want to die, he didn’t want to go through with what he was facing the next day and even on the cross he said ‘Father why have you forsaken me?’”. (Christian celebrant 33)

“that’s where the funeral is so crucial to steer it towards the future, not just looking back. I mean I often say, ... in this service we’re not just looking back we’re looking forward to that day when love comes to its completion, and we shall all be one. I don’t mention Heaven, don’t mention purgatory because people don’t know what that means. They think Heaven is, is where you go when you die”. (Christian celebrant 31)

The promise of life after death is not confined to Christianity but is also an essential element of Judaism and Islam. Comments included:

“the idea that the soul lives forever that is a very, that is a, a fundamental tenet of the Jewish faith”. (Other religious informant 21)
“we believe in an afterlife which is, which we believe is the eternal life so, we, we pray that their eternal life is peaceful and happy and, and so on”. (Other religious informant 23 Muslim)

Jewish funerals include an explicit affirmation of faith:

“we confirm publicly that our faith in God and in a just God has not been shaken, has not been damaged at all. Our faith is God is absolute, that he’s just and he is, and he does everything righteously, and we reflect on not what has God done to us but what have we done for God”. (Other religious informant 21)

At Muslim funerals and Christian ones in the Catholic tradition there are prayers for the deceased:

“we pray for those who have deceased, not just the one, not just the person who, who has deceased at that day but also previously who who’s deceased”. (Other religious informant 23)

For Muslims there is a developed concept of the afterlife, judgment and the way in which the afterlife is influenced by both behaviour in life and prayers after death:

“the Prophet Mohamed said that .... there’s only 3 things which will benefit you after, after your life and that’s you know if you’ve, if you’ve given continuous charity or, for example. For example if you’ve built a school. Even though you’ve passed away there’s still children accessing education after you and, and people are still benefitting you, so you’d still be rewarded for that on an ongoing basis. Something else is if you’ve given knowledge to someone, even though you’re not there, they are still, they have that knowledge and they can pass that knowledge on. And, ....the third is ... if you’ve brought up, if you’ve had ... the opportunity to, to bring up good children and that, that benefits you even though you’ve passed away because they can pray for you, they can do good deeds in your name, they can you know do charity in your name and so on and you will be rewarded for that even in after, after you’ve passed away”. (Other religious informant 23)

Ongoing respect for the deceased

Both Christian ministers and other religions saw the importance of being respectful to the deceased and the contribution that the person had made in life, whoever he/she was. A Christian minister said:

“I always say that I am, we are here on behalf of many many 100’s of people whose lives have been touched by this person over the years, and we need to recognise, although we don’t know
them that they were made in the image of God and they had skills and talents and love that they shared”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“when a person passes away the body is still special and it must be buried respectfully in the presence of a Jewish Community.. It has to be within the bounds of the Jewish law, respectful and not offensive to anyone else in the audience”. (Other religious informant 21)

“This man has achieved a lot in this world but yet compared to what he can achieve it’s nothing and we have to carry on the work of the person. So the focus is God knows what he is doing, we still have work to do”. (Other religious informant 21)

Other religious themes
Other themes in the Christian funerals tended to clustered around specific elements of the service. A number featured in the more formal religious readings and content of the minister’s address:

Salvation and redemption
(Funeral 2) In a reading - He will swallow up death in victory and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces.....He is our God. We have waited for him and he will save us. This is the Lord we have waited for him. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation;
(Funeral 26) The minister gave thanks that death was not the end, referred to salvation through Jesus Christ.
(Funeral 6) The minister said that Jesus knew how his friends felt but also that he had to die. He knew that by dying he could defeat death once and for all, he knew that if he died he would be raised back to life so that everyone else who dies could believe in him and be given life after death, life everlasting. Jesus Christ conquered death so that mourners can be reunited with Doris in heaven.

(Funeral 31) The priest then gave an address starting by pointing out the paschal candle, the Easter candle. On Holy Saturday the 5 nails are inserted in the candle, symbolising the 5 wounds of Christ and the suffering of the world from which we are redeemed by Christ.
Resurrection
(Funeral 19) The emphasis was on resurrection, comfort and loss in the prayers and introductions to the various items.
(Funeral 31) The (paschal) candle is lit at Easter to mark the resurrection and new life in Christ and thereafter is lit at baptisms to symbolise new life in the church and at funerals to symbolise the promise of the resurrection.
(many including Funerals 18, 21, 22, 27, 28, 37, 40) At the committal - the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.
(Several including Funerals 1, 18, 38) Introductory sentences – I am the resurrection and the life.
(Funeral 46) Bidding prayer - Strengthen this faith and hope in us all our days that we may live as those who believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

Judgment
(Funeral 31) She had a deep faith which carried her through her hard life. He said she was a feisty lady and implied that she might have things to be forgiven when she was facing her maker; they were to pray for her; idea of judgment.
(Funeral 23) Reading - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

However, in general the Christian ministers laid little emphasis on the idea of judgment, preferring references to God’s mercy. One said:

“I don’t believe that there’s a question of whether we’re going to Hell or not, I just don’t believe that, and if that came up I would express my views that, that God is a loving parent and no parent will condemn its child”. (Christian celebrant 29)

“we’re praying for, in our tradition, we pray for the dead so, well yeah so that would be an important thing to do you know emphasising the Mercy of God really and then part of the Mercy of God would be bringing consolation, comfort to the family and friends”. (Christian celebrant 25)

The principle of “reward and punishment” was mentioned in relation to Jewish funerals. A Muslim also said:
“if we have done things which are wrong, we’ve sinned, we’ll be questioned about those as well and that’s another important aspect of the funeral prayer because it focuses err in terms of the actual prayer itself, you know it focuses on asking God for forgiveness for the person who has deceased….we believe whatever you, you’ve done or whatever mistakes you’ve made if you turn to God and ask for forgiveness then God will forgive you. You know, the, the same, we’d say the same of the Prophet because we’ve followed that, even if your sins are mounted from the earth to the skies and you ask God for forgiveness he will forgive you because he is, you know, all forgiving and even in the Koran there is a whole chapter, Chapter 9 in the Koran, the whole chapter is called Forgiveness…..your soul will wait until the day of judgment It’s not as soon as you die you’re judged you, you wait for the actual day of judgment and then everybody who’s died, they are judged”. (Other religious informant 23)

Other themes featured in the minister’s attempt to reach out to the families with religious comfort:

Forgiveness
(Funeral 12) The minister prayed to Jesus who is the source of all strength, forgiveness, hope;
(Funeral 6) The minister then invited the mourners to join in a prayer, explaining that when someone dies we are left with a sense of loss and sometimes a sense of regret. There may be things that we would have liked to say but did not get the chance or things that we did say but wish we had not. The prayer was a form of confession.

Being reunited with loved ones
(Funeral 13, 21, 22) Minister said it is not goodbye but au revoir ‘til we meet again;
(Funeral 14) The minister said the deceased would be reunited with her Mum, Dad and brother in law;
(Funeral 17) They could also take comfort from scripture. She read from St John – in my Father’s house etc. I am the way, the truth and the life. They could take comfort from the picture of heaven that Jesus paints. There will be room for all who accept the invitation to go there. It is a place where they can be reunited with others who have gone before in the presence of Jesus. Jesus reassures us that he will come and take us to that place when it is time to go;
(Funeral 2) There was an emphasis in prayers and in the commendation that the deceased was going to his Father (God) but also joining family members who had gone before.
The Love of God

(Funeral 14) The minister said that God made promises to the deceased and to us – the love of the Lord never ceases... All are in God’s image, all represent God’s love;

(Funeral 17) Then there was a prayer for mercy for those that mourn, to strengthen them with the knowledge of God’s love;

(Funeral 32) He asked them to remember those that mourn, and pray that they may have consolation in God’s love.

God’s support and comfort

(Funeral 13) The Minister said that mourners receive comfort from family and friends but also from God. The deceased believed in an afterlife. They should take hold of that; put their trust in the belief that God had prepared a place for the deceased.

(Funeral 18) The minister prayed that God should be a refuge, a strength, that fear should be dispelled and hope reawakened;

(Funeral 21) He said a prayer of praise to God, for support from God for the family, strength, blessing, love;

(Funeral 40) He said God is a refuge and a strength;

(Funeral 46) There was a prayer for those that mourn – consolation of your love. Prayer to bring us at last to heaven where there will be no noise nor silence but one equal music, no fears nor hopes but one equal possession, no ends nor beginnings but one equal eternity. Prayer for support until life is done – “safe lodging, a holy rest and peace at the last”.

Going to God

(Funeral 14) The minister then said God has prepared a place for the deceased. Imagine if she was coming to your house, what you would have waiting. Today the deceased has everything she wants because God has prepared a place for her. She had peace when she was with them but now has peace beyond our understanding so do not be worried or afraid;

(Funeral 2) The deceased had gone to “join his Father who created him”;

(Funeral 26) We come from God and return to God, to live in his house for ever.

5.1.2 Funerals of committed religious adherents

For some funerals, the deceased had been a committed Christian and religious beliefs were central to the service. For example, at Funeral 2, the whole service was an affirmation of the faith of the deceased priest, together with the priests from the surrounding area and members of the Roman
Catholic community with whom the priest had worked and lived. The service was a Mass, the central act of worship of the Roman Catholic Church. The hymns seemed to have been chosen with relevance to the priest’s religious life. Numerous priests took an active part in the celebration of the mass and contributed readings and the homily. Lay members of the church led prayers. The congregation as a whole participated in hymns, prayers and other parts of the liturgy.

At a Church of England funeral for a practicing church member there were prayers for those present and also prayers explicitly for the dead, both the deceased and others known to the congregation. All joined in the traditional version of the Lord’s Prayer and in a number of hymns. At the committal the priest went to the coffin and laid his hand on it. The words were the usual earth to earth, dust to dust ones but also included an exhortation to the deceased to “Go forth upon your journey” and the words the words “may light perpetual shine upon him, may he rest in peace”. The priest made the sign of the cross over the coffin. A Methodist funeral (Funeral 38) was overtly Christian, in accordance with the wishes of the family. This was reflected in the fact that Christian prayers were used, from the Methodist service book, a blessing was given at the end, and also in the choice of hymns / readings. The service reflected a Christian theology of hope in life after death, reflected in the introductory words ‘I am the resurrection and the life’. In the introduction the minister stated that mourners were there to worship God, and also to give thanks for the life of Emily, and to remember her. God a refuge and help at times of bereavement. In a very different form of service with no set liturgy, faith was central to a Jehovah’s Witness funeral (Funeral 23) where the Elder included numerous short texts from the Bible in his address as well as centring his address on the deceased’s life in relation to her beliefs and missionary practice. Again the congregation, this time all from the Jehovah’s Witness community, took an active part in joining in the songs and looking up in the Bible the texts. One key informant, however, questioned the amount of understanding even committed Christians had of matters of faith:

“If you asked a Christian, a committed Christian about eternal life and life after death they probably wouldn’t be able to give you much on that, haa. If you asked them about the meaning of communion when we celebrate the mass or whatever they wouldn’t be able to tell you that either”. (Christian celebrant 12)

The only funeral of another faith attended was Jewish Reform (Funeral 45). This includes psalms and special prayers which accept death as part of the reality of life and affirm faith in God at the same time as recognising the grief caused by loss of the deceased person. Some of the important prayers use the Hebrew name of the deceased, a name usually that of a deceased relative with the addition
of the father’s name. Prayers include the reciting of the Kaddish which is a very ancient, Aramaic prayer, the language of post-Babylonian exile Jews (5th c. B.C.E.). It is recited responsively. Popularly thought of as a mourner’s prayer, it is, in fact a prayer devoted to praise of God, affirmation of life and hope for the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. It is meant to be said within community – i.e. within a minyan (a minimum community of 10). Because it involves praising God in bad times as well as in good, it has come to be associated with times of mourning. In Reform Judaism both men and women recite the kaddish. One of the reasons it is important to support people and attend funerals and shiva is in order to have the required minyan to recite the kaddish. In the words of a daughter “it’s affirming, you know even if in death, you still believe in God” (Funeral 45). The Jewish funeral was imbued with religious ritual before the funeral, during the funeral e.g. the keriah or cutting of the clothes, at the graveside e.g. the ritual filling of the grave by Jewish people, and the offering of the condolence, “May you be comforted amongst all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” The funeral is followed by the ritual seven day mourning period of Shiva which includes further prayers.

5.1.3 Religious funerals of those with less commitment

One secular key informant thought that while numbers of active believers were fewer, those that did believe had stronger commitment. He said:

“My general conclusion with belief systems is that although they are shrinking in terms of numbers the people who go to the church or the synagogue or the mosque tend to be very committed. Where faith exists it tends to be strong. The lukewarm people have fallen by the wayside”. (Other funeral professional 15)

However, for the majority of funerals conducted by a minister of religion the deceased and/or the family had no strong religious beliefs. This did not mean that the service necessarily took a different form or included less religion in the minister’s input. For example, at a Church of England funeral (Funeral 26) the minister began the service by emphasizing that this was a Christian service. The deceased was of the generation that believed in the Christian message. We come from God and return to God, to live in his house for ever. We have a soul or spirit as well as a body. We commend the deceased’s spirit into the hands of God. Another Church of England minister took great pains both at her pre-funeral meetings (Funerals 6 and 19) and at the funerals themselves to give explanations imbued with theological content. A Salvation Army minister took a less formal approach, emphasizing that the service was one of thanksgiving for the life of the deceased and devoting a larger proportion to the eulogy (Funerals 8, 13, 21, 22, 27). However faith was
nevertheless clear in his inclusion of scripture sentences such as “the eternal God is your refuge” and “blessed are they that mourn”, the assurance that the deceased had been “promoted to glory” and various extempore prayers of thanksgiving, and for comfort, strength and reassurance.

Key informants generally recognized that numbers of those actively practising any kind of organized religion were few, although there was a perception that most people had some kind of belief in God and that it was frequently based on Christianity.

“there’s a lot of people out there who err believe in God and have spiritual lives but they’ve written off the Church”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“many that I’ve spoken to have a belief in God and have a sincere belief that death is not the end, that they believe that they’re going to meet, you know, that they, …Auntie Mary, or what…..They might not describe it as Heaven as, as I would or, or into eternity, but certainly yes, I, I think that even those that have no real, you know church commitment, faith commitment, in a way they have a faith that they, they, they believe in God”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“Mostly I find that they’ve got some sort of tenuous belief in something which is vaguely Christian. Certainly a belief in God”. (Christian celebrant 29)

“There’s very, very, very, very few atheists, 100% atheists. It’s quite funny really, cos I think well there is always that little, that little nagging doubt in their head that … there is a God …, and ….yeah I think people take a lot of comfort from beliefs. I think when somebody dies you need something to hold you up really don’t yeah. If you believe something it, you know, it doesn’t have to be there, but it makes you feel so much better, it’s what faith’s about init of course. You know, you actually believe in something that you don’t know exists”. (Other funeral professional 1)

5.1.4 Families’ expressed religious beliefs
Some of the families included items in Christian religious funerals which expressed their own beliefs. A family member contributed a passage which was read at Funeral 1. This described a man’s dream of scenes of his life as he was walking along a beach. He noticed two sets of footprints but only one at times of trouble. He was worried and asked God why he had not been with him at those times. The reply was that at those times the Lord had carried him.
Other families expressed belief through hymns. For example, for Funeral 34 the deceased requested “the Old Rugged Cross” with its references to forgiveness, salvation and the eternal life. The Lord’s my shepherd, included in several funerals, refers to God being with a person through death, support and comfort from God. For Funeral 46 “all my hope on God is founded” is an affirmation of the beliefs of the deceased and the family.

Other families chose popular songs with religious themes. The Elvis Presley song “Crying in the chapel” chosen by the family for Funeral 32 includes words referring to God’s help:

“Take your troubles to the chapel
Get down on your knees and pray
Your burdens will be lighter
And you’ll surely find the way”. Songwriter Artie Glenn

Similarly for Funeral 8 the widow chose Andrea Bocelli - The Prayer which talks of praying for God’s guidance:

“pray you’ll be our eyes, and watch us where we go,
And help us to be wise, in times when we don’t know
Let this be our prayer, when we lose our way
Lead us to a place, guide us with your grace
To a place where we’ll be safe...” Songwriters David Foster, Carole Sager, Alberto Testa, Tony Renis

At Funeral 4 Mario Lanza’s song includes a prayer for God’s help:

“I’ll walk with God from this day on
His helping hand, I’ll lean upon
This is my prayer, my humble plea
May the Lord be ever with me” Songwriters Nikolaus Brodszky and Paul Francis Webster

Some of those interviewed who were committed Christians commented on the beliefs expounded in the service. A son commented on the minister’s words that God is with us whatever we believe:

“That’s quite interesting. Because that recognises the diversity of religious belief. And there was quite a universal streak in it as well... I mean that, that bit about you know my dad might not have been a church going type but it only takes one moment and you know.... so that appealed to me, I thought that was good theology”. (Funeral 18)
A Jehovah’s Witness commented that the purpose of the service was:

“just to sort of remember my mother and to highlight her faith and hope for the future. That death isn’t the end to things but there is the hope of a resurrection or restanding to life, that’s emphasised very much throughout the bible you see. So that’s the purpose of the whole service, it’s on a positive vein or a positive outlook for the future you see.” (Funeral 23)

Similarly a daughter said:

“I think it was a confirmation of, of my my faith really. It was, yes, emphasising all the things that I would you know hoped, you know life after death and all that sort of thing and you know as the sort of positive aspect of death really to me, I would hope”. (Funeral 46)

A widower who, although not a churchgoer, found some meaning in the religious elements of the service found comfort in the idea suggested by the minister that the deceased had been “lent to us” He said:

“I think it’s brilliant...Yes it’s good, it’s true in a way you know, but....

(Interviewer) So lent to us in what way?

(Widower) To enhance our lives and to bring some happiness”. (Funeral 14)

Where the families said they had no strong religious commitment, but had chosen a minister of religion, the music chosen was usually secular and there was variety in the extent to which the religious elements in the service had meaning for the mourners interviewed. For some religion was important nonetheless. One son said of a Church of England funeral:

“for somebody like myself who isn’t particularly religious at all, she kept everything to the sort of set texts and the various basic sort of standard ways that she would normally do a general funeral service I believe and that’s the way I would have wanted it”. (Funeral 6)

Although he was not particularly religious he had remembered the essential message of the reading and the minister’s interpretation of it.

A widow said of a Salvation Army funeral:

“it just had the right balance of, of religion and generalisation because I mean you’ve got, I have a Christian belief, Mark had a Christian belief but not overly, you know we didn’t go to the church we just, you know, it’s just something that you do believe that there’s something
else, there is an afterlife and there’s a God and so I wanted something that would reflect on that without being, without being morbid”. (Funeral 8)

Others, while not churchgoers, said that they had some form of belief in God. One widow who had had a Methodist service for her husband said:

“Yeah, you want to believe don’t you. I mean, again this is something everybody wants to believe in obviously, cos I mean that’s what carries you along, but I know there can never be any proof of all of this, nobody knows, but you just want to believe it yes, and I think because you want to believe it you do believe it”. (Funeral 40)

A daughter who had chosen a Church of England minister for her mother’s funeral said:

“I suppose deep down I do believe there’s a God up there. May be don’t always think there is but I think as you get older I think you believe more than when you’re younger. But I’m not sure about the afterlife. Or whether you meet, you all meet up at the end I don’t know. It seems a bit hard to believe that like but, I think I do believe in God. Yes. I mean I don’t go to church like but…..” (Funeral 11)

Others, however, had found the religious content of the funeral incompatible with their ideas. One sister, whose mother had chosen an independent evangelical minister for her brother’s funeral, said:

“my mother doesn’t regularly go to church and so it just seems a little bit hypocritical to go a little bit too involved into a lot of prayers and stuff like that, we all sort of thought maybe he did it a little bit too much. We’d have rather he’d reigned back a little bit and did a little bit less”. (Funeral 12)

A son who had agreed to a Salvation Army minister because his mother had attended their lunch club said:

“She didn’t, she didn’t think the church had really a lot to do with her faith quite honestly. She thought, a lot like myself although she used to watch ‘songs of praise’ she wouldn’t miss that for the world”. (Funeral 21)

Another son, who had chosen a Church of England funeral for his mother because he and his brothers thought she would prefer a traditional funeral, said:

“So for me standard religion just didn’t provide answers you know”. (Funeral 19)
Another son, whose mother was a practicing Roman Catholic, chose a Catholic funeral but was emphatic that it did not reflect his beliefs. He said:

“I don’t believe in anything like that. Me mum did so the least I can do is go to her last wishes. I mean, you know, it is doing what I can for her because that is what she would have wanted to have done had she been alive, she would have done it for, well she did do it for her mum and anybody else. But, that would have been the thing that she would have wanted because that is what she believed in. Me, I don’t, but I only did it because that was what me mum wanted”.

(Funeral 31)

For a Jewish daughter, her adherence was to the Jewish culture rather than religion. She said:

“I’m a kitchen Jewess, and all of that. I love the culture, I love the way of going around it but but belief, mmmm, I’ve got to think about it. You see I think of it as a culture rather than a religion”.

(Funeral 45)

Her husband suggested that there was room for all types of belief to contribute in the synagogue and that belonging to the community was an important part of religion. He said:

“there’s a prayer which we say, we usually say it in English actually, they talk about, about asking God’s blessing for those who go for Synagogue to pray, for those who conduct the prayers, for those who support the Synagogues, for those who support the ritual etc, etc, so err all these things are all part of the, of the Community so some people obviously prayers are more important, they don’t do much in the Community but other people maybe you know, feel that they’re not sure of their belief in God for them to do the Community thing that’s you know, that’s more important or, sorry, equally important. It’s probably everybody is you know unless you have some maybe particularly strong revelation in your life, for most people I would think that that the spirit of community and the feeling of goodwill to each other and towards man, whatever, it, it is, is probably one of the reasons why you belong”.

(Funeral 45)

5.1.5 Religion in services conducted by humanist or civil celebrants

The independent humanists encountered in this research were willing to incorporate religious elements and one had in fact left the British Humanist Association in order to cater for what she saw as a need of the families with whom she was working. She said:

“their stringent rules meant that if a family said we’d like an instrumental version of Ava Maria playing cos my dad thought it was really special, I would have to say no. And I was turning
down a lot of work and a lot of families were having church services because of that and I didn’t feel I was doing what, what I could be”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

Another pointed to the frequent desire for religious elements even where the family chose a non-religious service:

“even people who aren’t religious who say I’m not religious, I don’t believe in God, but can we have the Lord’s Prayer or I like Jerusalem can we sing the hymn and that aspect of respect, of dignity, of even religion even though they say they’re not religious it would be a long, long time I think, if ever, before the Lord’s Prayer is never heard at funerals again even for non-religious funerals ... it just seems to be important to people that the words are said at the end - whether it is an insurance policy or whether it’s just cos its been learnt by rote”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

Another said that while it did not accord with her personal belief she would accommodate in the funeral service those of the bereaved:

“I do get a lot of stories of you know, dad’s back with mum now, and I think if that, if they find that a comfort, that’s fine. I don’t know, I mean I, my beliefs are you’re alive, that’s great, once you’re dead that’s it but if it helps them, fine I’m certainly not going to, to decry somebody else’s belief”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

The independent “humanist” celebrants and civil celebrant conducting the funerals observed were generally willing to include prayers if the family wished and some in fact offered to do so. Where the offer was accepted, it was the Lord’s Prayer which was said. The reasons given included that some attending might like it, and because it was part of their cultural background. At Funeral 25 the Lord’s Prayer was said, although the widower made it clear that he had no religious beliefs, because his sister really wanted it. At interview the widower explained:

“he mentioned that you know it is nice to have some element of a religious thing to these services and I have been to lots and lots of funerals over the years...And the Lord’s Prayer always seemed to figure so I knew it extremely well and I thought well yeah it would be nice to have that one...But it doesn’t have a great deal of significance for me again because I don’t have any beliefs”.

At the pre funeral meeting with the celebrant for Funeral 29, the family agreed to the Lord’s Prayer because they had had it at the father’s funeral and “older people might appreciate it” At the funeral,
the officiant announced that he would say the Lord’s Prayer and those that wished should join in. A number did but probably more of those at the back who were older family and friends. At Funeral 24 again about half the congregation joined in. At interview, the daughter explained:

“She said would you like any prayers? So we just said you know like me brother said, oh the Lord’s Prayer and I said oh yeah I quite like that. So yeah so we both decided to have that prayer, you know I don’t really know any other prayers but I always know, I think most people know that don’t they?

(Interviewer) Indeed but why did you want to have a prayer if you’re not religious?

(Daughter) Well I don’t know really I think it was may be just for like other people what was there and you know it just sort of, it just seemed….Yeah yeah, I mean I’m not religious but I don’t find that you know, over the top do you know what I mean. I just think it’s a nice thing and I’ve always known it because you learn it at school don’t you? So it always stays with you even though I don’t go to church and pray, but I can always remember that so I suppose most people do don’t they so that’s why we said that”.

At one non-religious funeral Psalm 23 was said. A daughter said:

“it just must made it that little bit traditional as opposed to you know, having a full religious thing, didn’t it?” Her husband added “I mean, we can still lead a Christian life without being regular church goers”. (Funeral 29)

At other non religious funerals, the music CDs chosen included religious ideas – the hymn “Morning has broken”, Panis Angelicus, Pie Jesu, Bette Midler’s “From a distance” and Mario Lanza’s “Walk with God”. However the family for the funeral where Panis Angelicus was played commented:

“I wouldn’t even have thought that it was religious but you know I just thought it sounded nice .... but even though I didn’t know it I just thought it was sort of peaceful and nice”. (Funeral 24)

The widower interviewed for Funeral 25 where other family members had chosen Pie Jesu said:

“They seemed to think it was some sort of particular church music, a hymn or something... I thought it was extremely nice music and I was pleased that it was played because everyone seemed to respond in the same way, I think the same thing about it that it was particularly nice.”

Although brought up a Roman Catholic he had not realized it came from the Requiem Mass.
5.1.6 Christian religious themes in the music chosen

The idea of God’s love and support is expressed in many of the hymns chosen and in some of the popular songs with religious subjects. For example hymns include the words about the love of God: “I cannot tell why He whom angels worship

Should set His love upon the sons of men”  
*William Young Fullerton (1857-1932), 1929;*

“Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me bring your love.”  
*Words by Sebastian Temple*

“The King of love my Shepherd is”  
*Henry W. Baker, 1821-1877*

In some hymns and songs the need for God’s support is recognised. Elvis Presley’s Crying in the Chapel includes the words: “Get down on your knees and pray, Your burdens will be lighter”  
*Songwriter Artie Glenn*

The hymn “abide with me” states “I need thy presence every passing hour”. In “Amazing Grace”, the writer is confident that “He will my shield and portion be...as long as life endures.”

Similarly at the Requiem Mass hymns asked that Christ should be “all around me, shield in the strife” and were clear that “I will be with you wherever you go”. Praise my soul the King of Heaven states:

“Father-like, He tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame He knows.
In His hands He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.”  
*Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847), 1834*

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6 Henry F. Lyte, 1847
7 John Newton 1725-1807
8 Christ be beside me, James Quinn, adapt. from St. Patrick’s Breastplate, 8th cent
9 Gerard Markland
Ideas about comfort are expressed in hymns e.g. “When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me,”\(^{10}\) “Thy rod and staff my comfort still”\(^{11}\) and “But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted”\(^{12}\) but not explicitly in the secular songs. Bridge over Troubled Water talks about “When you’re weary, feeling small, When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all, I’m on your side”\(^{13}\). The inspiration for the song was however in an earlier Gospel song so that although no specific reference is made to God in the Simon and Garfunkel song, it is God’s support and comfort which is its subject.

Some hymns explicitly refer to God’s support in death, again at the Requiem Mass with the words “Guard and defend me from the foe malign, in death’s dread moments make me only thine”\(^{14}\) and at Funeral 28 “Rock of ages” includes the words:

“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.”

Augustus M. Toplady, 1740-1778

At the Requiem Mass the ideas of salvation through Christ (Soul of my Saviour, Christ be beside me\(^{15}\), I will be with you\(^{16}\), and the concepts of redemption and resurrection (I know that my Redeemer lives\(^{17}\), I cannot tell) were strong. The words of the Pie Jesu sung at one funeral also expressed ideas of salvation (Qui tollis peccata mundi) although the principal mourner did not recognise the words. Other hymns also made such references in “Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?” (Abide with me), “And in dying that we’re born to eternal life” (Make me a channel of thy peace\(^{18}\)) and in the Old Rugged Cross:

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10 Abide with me Henry F. Lyte, 1847
11 The King of Love my Shepherd is Henry W. Baker, 1821-1877
12 I cannot tell William Young Fullerton (1857-1932), 1929
13 Bridge over troubled water P. Simon 1969
14 Soul of my Saviour Words: Latin, fourteenth century; trans. anonymous
15 James Quinn, adapt. from St. Patrick’s Breastplate, 8th cent
16 Gerard Markland
17 Catholic hymn, author unknown
18 Sebastian Temple
“In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
a wondrous beauty I see,
for ’twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
to pardon and sanctify me.” 

George Bennard, 1873-1958

The hymn Love divine all loves Excelling also talks of salvation through Christ and life after death, and “O love that will not let me go refers to “Life that shall endless be”.

Unsurprisingly there were references to the Eucharist at the requiem mass “In bread we bring you Lord, our body’s labour” and “Soul of my Saviour sanctify my breast, Body of Christ, be thou my saving guest, Blood of my Saviour, bathe me in thy tide. The words of Panis Angelicus are entirely about the Eucharist but were chosen for a humanist for a family with no religious beliefs.

The ideas of sin and forgiveness were more strongly portrayed in hymns in less strongly religious funerals. The words of Ave Maria include “Pray for us sinners Now and at the hour of our death” but this hymn was sung by Harry Secombe at a nominally Church of England funeral. The Old Rugged Cross, rock of ages and Make me a channel of thy peace also expound this idea.

Other ideas illustrated in hymns were that of vocation in the priest’s funeral and that of going to God in “Mama why did God take my Daddy” at the traveller funeral.

What is not clear for the most part in the choice of religious music or popular music containing religious ideas, is the extent to which the religious content formed (part of) the reason for the choice. The widow who chose “From a distance” had done so because her husband used to play it when he was cleaning the car, rather than from any identification of religious ideas.

5.1.7 Religious content in the address

The address at the funeral of the priest offered links of the Gospel reading with that of the priest’s vocation before going on to discuss his life. Another Roman Catholic centred his address on the Paschal Candle and its symbolism of new life in Christ and the promise of the resurrection. This priest said that he used the symbol;

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19 Charles Wesley
20 George Mattheson, 1882
21 Kevin Nichols
22 Words: Latin, fourteenth century; trans. anonymous
23 Latin prayer origins unknown pre 15th century
“as an aid to preaching because often people are not used to listening to sermons or homilies so I just explain what the candle is all about and our belief in a death resurrection and I hope that the one who’s died will share in this”. (Christian celebrant 25)

Another particularly concentrated on the beatitudes and tried to explain the idea of poor in spirit to the mourners. Other themes included:

- Christ has conquered death, the promise of being reunited in heaven
- Death is a comma, not a full stop
- God has prepared a place in heaven for the deceased, peace beyond our understanding so do not worry
- There is room for all in heaven, do not have to go to church to be accepted
- God is our shepherd and takes care of us at difficult times
- Christ was a religious non conformist (the deceased was a non conformist) If he sets us free we will be free indeed
- Symbolism around candles taking away darkness, representing calm and simultaneous lighting linking absent members with those present

One Anglican priest discussed in detail what he saw essential in a funeral address. He said:

“at every funeral I would want to include a number of things, remembrance and thanksgiving. Maundy Thursday, recognition of suffering and solidarity by God with those who suffer, Good Friday. What’s the third one? Oh recognition of God’s judgment and the offer of forgiveness which is a general Easter thing. And then resurrection, hope, number four. So…even though funerals vary massively the actual core message is always the same, it’s always those four things. Thanksgiving, suffering, forgiveness, hope, those four words”. (Funeral 18)

He thought;

“Funerals are a time when people’s spirituality comes out in its diverse forms and to, to bring to mind and to bring to heart the hope of life after death is appropriate. Even, I mean I actually have a, part of my eulogy is something on the lines of I recognise the diversity of belief here, some will be strong believers, some will not be, most of you will be in between, what I want to say to you today is that whatever you believe, there is a sense in which uncle Bob lives on. If you don’t believe, he lives on in your hearts and memories and that’s not insignificant. For those of you that do believe we have the Christian hope of resurrection, that death is not the end, etc. So it’s about bringing up, it’s about bringing up the question, if you like. In
minimal terms a question of hope of resurrection, of resurrection hope whilst acknowledging
diversity.”

For some families they took little in of the religious part of the address. Comments included:

“And in a way I sort of listened but I wasn’t listening.” (Funeral 34)

“Well actually I didn’t even know what that meant, you know my mind wasn’t, my mind wasn’t
there sort of thing.” (Funeral 1)

5.1.8 Religion and philosophy in the committal
The form of the committal for the ministers of religion was some variant on the formal words from
the burial service:

“We therefore commit his body to be burned; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in
sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(Prayer Book 1662).

The committal words used by other celebrants varied. Two independent humanists and a civil
celebrant adapted words from Ecclesiastes Chapter 3.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose on earth, a time to be born and
a time to die”

Others concentrated on saying farewell and that the deceased was now at peace. One independent
humanist said:

“We rejoice that you lived, we say goodbye, we remember your kindness, generosity, we say
farewell, we wish you peace.” (Funeral 16)

A civil celebrant said:

“we thank you for being part of our lives. We wish you peace ever after. May you be reunited
with your loved ones once again. We love you and we will remember you always. Rest in
peace.” (Funeral 36)

A BHA humanist said:

“We now commit his body to its final journey with appreciation of all that he has done. We
thank him for being Dick and for being part of all your lives in the way he has. He is beyond
the pain and suffering that human life can bring and is at peace. He will not be forgotten but
will live on in all your memories for many years to come and will continue to influence the lives of the next generations as they grow up”. (Funeral 35)

Some emphasised that this was a natural process or part of an earth cycle. A civil celebrant said:

“Here in this last act, in sorrow but without fear, in love and appreciation, we commit Philip’s body to its natural end”. (Funeral 33)

A retired minister of religion conducting a secular funeral combined the church committal with cyclical ideas. He began:

“we commit her body to the elements; ashes to ashes, dust to dust” but continued “in the cycle of life and death where the earth is replenished and life is eternally renewed”. (Funeral 29)

A BHA humanist said:

“we commit his character and personality to our memories and his love and friendship to our hearts. Here in this last act we commit his body back to the elements, back to the universe which sustains and regenerates all life”. (Funeral 39)

A number of celebrants addressed the deceased personally in the committal as can be seen from quotes above. These included both ministers of religion and secular celebrants. At Funeral 41 the priest went to the coffin and laid his hand on it. The committal followed the earth to earth, dust to dust words with a prayer exhorting the deceased to “Go forth upon your journey”. This prayer is sometimes used with the dying but was also apparently used at the funerals of Princess Diana and Pope John Paul II. Another Church of England committed “your body” rather than his/her body. The son commented at interview:

“it’s the fact that she was still talking to my mum as a person. And that’s what I’d been doing every single day in the rest rooms”. (Funeral 17)

While for Christian priests who believe the deceased is going to an afterlife this addressing of the deceased may not be too surprising, other celebrants, some of whom say that this life is all there is, also address the deceased in the present tense. A humanist ended the committal by saying:

“In the words that deceased used when he put his sons to bed, “on behalf of you I now say (Present tense) to Dick:

“Night. Love you as much as all the writing in all the books all over the world”. (Funeral 35)
A daughter said after a humanist celebrant had addressed her mother at the funeral:

“I thought it was a bit strange but...well because of my beliefs my mum is dead and feel like
you’re talking to someone who’s dead”. (Funeral 16)

There appear to be some conflicts between the ideas of addressing the deceased by name, thanking him/her and saying that he is at peace with the idea that there is nothing after death. On two occasions a civil celebrant referred in the committal to the deceased’s being reunited with loved ones.

5.1.9 Other evidence of religious belief

One son with Christian beliefs reflected on why he had felt the need to view the body in the funeral parlour:

“it was important for me, I don’t know why it is important for people, it’s a saying good bye
isn’t it, it’s a last chance. Even though you know whatever faith position you have or don’t
have, that body is significant. The material is significant even though it’s not the, by any
stretch of the imagination, whether you’re an atheist or an orthodox Christian, it’s not them
it’s a shell however you interpret that”. (Funeral 18)

For some families it was important that there should be a religious element to the service because of their vague beliefs in a supreme being and/or an afterlife but they did not want a formal service. For these they relied on the funeral director to put them in touch with a minister who would provide the sort of service they desired. A family said that the deceased believed in afterlife although he did not go to church, while they themselves did not believe in anything. They did not want formal service because, “you don’t want that if you don’t go to church”. One widow said:

“I have a Christian belief, Mark had a Christian belief but not overly, you know we didn’t go to
the church we just, you know, it’s just something that you do believe that there’s something
else, there is an afterlife and there’s a God and so I wanted something that would reflect on
that without being, without being morbid and I thought, I actually felt that (minister) spoke as
if it was all just coming naturally from him without having a pre-planned service”. (Funeral 8)
5.2 Other belief systems

5.2.1 Humanism

Three of the non-religious celebrants belonged to the British Humanist Association, another two were independent humanists and the remainder were a civil celebrant, an “alternative” funeral celebrant and a retired minister offering a non-religious service. The BHA celebrants and one of the independents announced themselves as humanists. The independent humanist generally did not talk about what humanism was but on one occasion made the statement “For those that believe that this life is all that we have, it is important to live life to the full”.

The BHA humanists expounded the humanist philosophy in more detail. At Funeral 35 the celebrant said that mourners were there “to commemorate and celebrate the life” of the deceased. She said the deceased had lived his life without religious beliefs and the family had chosen a humanist funeral to respect his views. She said “As humanists we try to live happy and fulfilled lives, caring about each other as we do so”. The deceased “would not have called himself a humanist but in many ways he led his life with those values at its heart. Even though not everything worked out the way he hoped, he carried on trying to improve his lot by learning right to the end of his life”. The same celebrant at Funeral 42 said:

“Humanism is the view that we can make sense of the world using reason, experience and shared human values and that we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. Humanists seek to make the best of the one life we have by creating meaning and purpose for ourselves. We choose to take responsibility for our actions and work with others for the common good.”

The other BHA celebrant said at Funeral 39 “Humanists believe that we have only one life, that it is our responsibility to make it a good life, and to live it to the full – something (the deceased) surely lived up to”. As a Guardian reader James admired Polly Toynbee and her philosophy.

Families’ choice of humanist celebrant

For many families who chose a humanist service, such as the family mentioned above, this was as an alternative to a religious service rather than for any positive beliefs in the humanist philosophy. In fact, one family said:

“even though we chose a Humanist to celebrate dad’s life... to me that didn’t mean that you, we were actually following the philosophy”. (Funeral 36)
A widower who also chose a non religious service said:

“I didn’t want a religious ceremony. I would have felt it would have been hypocritical on my part to have done it and it wouldn’t have been respectful of Carol’s memory to be hypocritical and have a religious service when I don’t have any religious beliefs”. (Funeral 25)

For several families what was important was that the funeral centred on the life of the deceased. A daughter said:

“I’m not religious and my brother isn’t and me mum wasn’t so I would’ve rather it been spoke about me mum then like, you know a lot of praying and all that sort of thing”. (Funeral 24)

Another daughter felt that humanist funerals portray the person and that what they wanted was:

“to celebrate dad’s life”. (Funeral 36)

Others, while not commenting on humanism as such, made it clear that it was the approach to the funeral as a celebration of life that was important.

However there were some families who went out of their way to find a BHA humanist celebrant because they did share humanist ideas. Two of the three families who chose BHA celebrants had identified humanism as the philosophy of the deceased and/or of themselves. One widow had asked advice from a nurse and searched the internet. She said:

“one of (the nurses), she was a Humanist and she said, well lets Google the Humanist Society and get a phone number, and so, I did and asked for Celebrants in this area and I got 3 in York, one in Louth and none in Hull”. (Funeral 39)

This family regarded themselves as humanist. The widow said:

“We both would call ourselves Humanists. We take the Humanist magazine regularly, and, though we don’t always read it as carefully as we should, but we don’t have religious faith and, but we do believe in Humanist principles”. (Funeral 39)

Another family had come to the BHA website via a website about green burials. The deceased had always said he was an atheist but after reading the website they thought a humanist was:

“Exactly what he was, so in the last few days of his life he decided, I think he decided that he was probably a Humanist”. (Funeral 42)
The human community

At Funeral 25 an “alternative” celebrant appeared to be expounding a secular philosophy of death. He said the world is a community, no man is an island\(^\text{24}\). Death is an end, as natural as life. We cannot do anything about death but we can do something about living. We are here to celebrate a life. The deceased will live on in people’s memories. The coffin contains a physical presence but the things that made Carol what she was are not in the coffin. Those are out here now in the hearts and minds of those who remember her. She continues in the thoughts of those Carol loved. She was a member of the “great human community”, we all share in the loss when a community member dies”.

5.2.2 Earth cycle and eco ideas

Both humanist and other non religious services introduced the idea of the cycle of life and death. This was perhaps most explicit in the interfaith memorial service where the second reading was from Nietzsche and was concerned with his concept of “eternal recurrence”\(^\text{25}\). (Funeral 43)

These ideas were most apparent at the committal and/or burial. At Funeral 29 the retired minister conducting a non-religious service used a form of committal which combined the conventional church committal with eco ideas. The committal began, “we commit her body to the elements; ashes to ashes, dust to dust” but continued “in the cycle of life and death where the earth is replenished and life is eternally renewed.”

Similar forms of committal were used for two BHA humanist services. At Funeral 42 the committal was:

“to the earth which sustained and nourished him for his 72 years and which regenerates all life”.

At Funeral 39 it was:

“Here in this last act we commit his body back to the elements, back to the universe which sustains and regenerates all life.”

\(^{24}\) John Donne, Meditation XVII 1624

\(^{25}\) appearing for example in The Gay Science 1882
For Funeral 42 a quote from Lucretius referring to a cycle of life and death was chosen by and read by the celebrant:

“Leave this world, Nature says, as you entered here. The same passage which you made from death to life, without fuss and without fear, make it again from life to death. Your death is in the order of things: it belongs to the life of the world.”

An independent humanist referred at the committal to, “The earth which has sustained her all her life.”

The poem “My Father kept a garden”, chosen by a widow for her son at Funeral 33, may be talking about the relationship between father and son but also may relate to spirituality ideas of person and the environment. The poem may be interpreted as wisdom handed down through the generations from father to son and likened to growth, nurturing and moral example.

Families made no comment about these ideas if introduced by the celebrant. For example, a daughter in Funeral 29, which combined eco-spiritual ideas with traditional liturgy, when asked about this said:

“I don’t really remember it all to be honest. No.” (Funeral 29)

A few, however, had developed their own ‘eco’ philosophy. For example, a father said:

“I think this planet governs itself for life. It provides life for food for other life. So, and that’s how aah I see it. Now I know Dick thought exactly the same”. (Funeral 35)

A daughter said:

“But something goes on, yeah. Recycled.” (Funeral 36)

Another daughter talked of a photograph display that had been mounted at the funeral and linked this with the idea of keeping memories alive and a cycle of life. She said:

“There was that thing of life, what’s that thing in Lion King, I can’t remember, you know that thingy of life, the cycle of life or what …. I don’t know what it is. But it kind of were there, in the photographs, there were people there that you know, and you know, you could, you just could see people. There were people there on the photographs who weren’t there anymore

26 Traditional knowledge has been described as ‘knowledge and values which have been acquired through experience, observation, and from the land or from spiritual teachings, and handed down from one generation to another’ (Wenzel cited in Zapf 2005: 637).
and then dad was added to the list, you know, and ultimately life is that we’ll all be added to the list.” (Funeral 42)

“From a distance” is a popular song which refers to God watching us. From a distance the world appears in harmony - the environment and men, men and other men, hope and peace. In its reference to “no guns, no bombs, and no disease, no hungry mouths to feed” it has resonances with Revelation 21.4:

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”.

However it more specifically relates to ideas of the need for balance between humankind and the environment, a spirituality of human existence connected with its environment.

The poem “Do not stand at my grave and weep” introduces eco ideas of an afterlife in the natural world.

“I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glint on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you wake in the morning hush,
I am the swift, uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.”

The poem “On Wenlock Edge” in its reference to the tree of man is placing ourselves in relation to humankind throughout history.

“Then, ’twas before my time, the Roman
At yonder heaving hill would stare:
The blood that warms an English yeoman,
The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

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27 Text by Mary Frye 1932
28 A.E. Housman (1859-1936)
There, like the wind through woods in riot,
Through him the gale of life blew high;
The tree of man was never quiet:
Then ’twas the Roman, now ’tis I.”

The poem “And did you get what you wanted”\(^{29}\), however, suggests that the purpose of life is:
“To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.”

### 5.2.3 Spiritualist church

A spiritualist celebrant explained ideas of a spirit world:

“not everybody does it my way but I go straight to the person and I tell them, I’ll give them specifics, and I’ll describe the person that I’m actually talking to or hearing from, and err do it that way, and it can give an awful lot of relief and joy and they sometimes just want guidance and give them specifics of what they want guidance on. Not them telling you anything, cos I don’t let anybody tell me anything......it’s on a vibrational level, it’s rather, I don’t know how they see us apart from the way, for some, I’ve not died yet, haa, nearly did but I’ve not died yet. but from what I can understand they come from, they’re around and let us, it’s like the dimensions merging, the, the levels merging.....My mum-in-law, staunch Catholic, absolutely disbelieved this side of life that I believe in and she didn’t believe what happened during my marriage and she blamed it all on me, haa, because she believed what her, her son said and within half an hour of her passing, I didn’t know she’d gone, because nobody told me, she appeared to be in the flipping kitchen and frightened the life out of me, and apologised, and that was earlier this year, and for someone who was totally against anything like that, that was amazing. ... it’s just a merging of, of dimensions, that’s the only way......like holes in different places....and I believe in angels, haa, and I know everybody’s got guides, I know that we have, we are cared for for a lot more intelligent beings up there than we have down here”.

(Other celebrant 36)

One family with spiritualist beliefs did not want a mainstream religious service and initially the funeral director put them in touch with a female non religious celebrant. However, after meeting with her, the family decided against this because she did not share the beliefs of the deceased and

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\(^{29}\) Raymond Clevie Carver 1938-88
the widow. The proposed celebrant would have conducted the service as they wished but did not herself believe. They asked a friend to lead the service (Funeral 44). The friend suggested “The Souls in the cavern” be read; it was accepted because of shared spiritual beliefs. The passage concerns discussion among souls waiting in a cavern when it is time for one of their number to take human incarnation about which other souls will be his spirit guides. A second passage from “the Rainbow Journey” was chosen by the son because it expressed shared metaphysical and mystical ideas.

In the poem, ‘Tesco Twilight’, written by the widow who had spiritualist beliefs30, and read at Funeral 44 seems to be linking mankind with the universe as a whole and the spirit world.

“Our love as part of the Universe,
Expand into oneness and infinity.
Souls merging, spirits soaring, sparkling and scintillating
Into the ebony vastness”

Christian ministers and other celebrants commented on these types of belief:

“They believe in ghosts. They believe in horoscopes, they believe in all sorts of mystical things that I don’t believe in as a Christian, but they do”. (Christian celebrant 13)

“you know, she has conversations with her elder sister and she said, do you? I said no, that’s, that’s not a gift that’s given to me. So I wouldn’t deny the, the helpfulness of this but I think it comes to, to some sort of peoples and not others”. (Christian celebrant 29)

5.3 Spirituality

In addition to beliefs which stemmed from an organised belief system, a range of ideas and beliefs were expressed which appear to show evidence of a more diffuse spirituality. Most of these spanned religious and non-religious positions, and the contradictions in their thinking were sometimes recognised by respondents.

5.3.1 Conceptualising death and the afterlife

In addition to making the practical arrangements for the funeral, it became apparent that all respondents were trying to find a way to understand death. For those with firm religious beliefs, they did not appear to need to move outside of this framework. The committal sentences used by

30 and reproduced with her permission
most ministers of religion were slightly differing versions of those prescribed for burial. Ministers also included prayers and in one case Psalm 23. The Roman Catholics sprinkled the coffin with holy water “as a sign of new life” (Christian celebrant 25) and at one the Hail Mary was said together by the mourners. A spiritualist informant also used holy water (Other celebrant 36). The Jehovah’s Witness Elder used short readings, prayers and comment chosen by the son. He said the basis was:

“the hope for the future and the Psalms dealt with the condition of the dead, they’re not suffering because it says the dead aren’t conscious of anything. So we can be assured that the person isn’t suffering or conscious of things you see, it’s like we’re asleep”. (Funeral 23)

At the funeral conducted by the spiritualist friend of the widow, the celebrant said we have commended the deceased to God, now we commit his body to the ground, earth to earth etc but there was no mention of resurrection. She went on to ask divine spirits, angels, to assist the deceased on his final journey from the earth to begin the next phase of enlightenment (Funeral 44). The widow commented:

“I believe in whatever we like to call it, whether it’s God, Spirit, whatever. I don’t exactly know what it is, but I do, that’s just a word that sums up everything that you know. Whether it’s God, Spirit”.

One humanist key informant said that she used the phrase “earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes” because:

“It doesn’t say anything about God in it, and it’s actually, it’s exactly it. You know, if anything it’s saying that’s it, you know this is where you are. It doesn’t really mention anything transcended at all. And there’s something about that, that’s a tradition, and that’s, I quite like that one because it has, it has meaning you know”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

For those who did not have the knowledge or faith to rely on a theological or prescribed interpretation, finding a concept to ‘manage’ death was key. Many of the ideas expressed nevertheless chimed with religious themes and interpretations.

As well as what was said in interview, the choices of music and readings provide a reflection on death. Some secular songs expressed ideas about death or transcendence although it is uncertain how closely most families considered the lyrics and whether these ideas were involved in their choices. Abba’s “I believe in angels” may refer to death in the lyric “When I know the time is right
for me, I’ll cross the stream - I have a dream.” Sinatra refers to the approach of death in “And now, the end is near; And so I face the final curtain.” Robson and Jerome say simply “I believe”, and “Amazing Grace”, which is thought of by many as a pop song rather than a hymn says “How precious did that Grace appear...the hour I first believed.” However, in the main it is in religious music that ideas about death are found. The hymn “Abide with me” refers to God’s presence and support in death. Mario Lanza’s “I’ll walk with God” and the hymn “the King of Love my Shepherd is” refer to the removal of fear in death when leaning on God. Ave Maria asks for Mary’s prayers at the hour of death. “Make me a channel of thy peace” and “Rock of Ages” talk about salvation and the promise of eternal life after death.

**Going to God /home or heaven**

A few poems refer to the idea of going to God, some explicitly and others by implication. “God’s Garden” refers to “The day God called you home.” “God saw you getting tired” says:

“So He put His arms around you
And whispered “Come with Me.”

“The Waiting Game” talks of the day soon when the “shroud will split and I will burst the wall of my cocoon and I’ll emerge into the fullness of your light.”

“When I come to the end of the road” refers to going home.

“For this is a journey that we all must take
And each must go alone.
It’s all a part of the Master plan,
A step on the road to home.”

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31 Benny Goran Br Andersson, Bjoern K. Ulvaeus
32 Songwriters: Revaux, Jacques; Anka, Paul (Eng Lyr); Thibaut, Gilles; Francois, Claude;
33 John Newton (1725-1807)
34 Poem written by Mrs.Libertie Treenery Semanko in October 2004 on the death of a dear friend
35 Written By Layla Loretta Maples LLM - Condensed from the longer original written by Jenny Frey
36 Eddie Askew from ‘Music on the Wind.’ 1998
37 Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)
Few families thought of the deceased as having gone to heaven, however, despite the fact that ministers of religion referred to heaven and there were references in readings and hymns at religious services. Families made only qualified comments about heaven. A widow said:

“I hope he is in heaven, cos he wasn’t a bad man...He never did anybody a bad turn...but nobody has proved to me that there is one, so I’ve yet to find out myself”. (Funeral 33)

A sister and niece said:

“Sister We call it heaven don’t we?
Niece You call it heaven don’t you but it’s whatever you know, whatever it is, we don’t know.
Sister Yes.
Niece It’s just the next stage isn’t it?
Sister But it must be alright or they wouldn’t stop there would they?” (Funeral 27).

A Jehovah’s Witness explained his belief:

“the majority of mankind will be brought back to the Earth here to live on the Earth under the new Earthly system which God originally intended for the human race so when he created Adam and Eve there was no thoughts of them ever going to Heaven, it was to live on the Earth and paradise so his original purpose will eventually be restored to man and that is that humans will live on the Earth and be brought back to the Earth you see. So that’s where the Witnesses differ from the mainstream Christian religions whereas the church’s teach everybody goes to Heaven, the Witnesses teach there’s only 144,000 go to Heaven, first Christ and then the Apostles and he spoke of these as a little flock of anointed Christians are bought from the Earth to go to Heaven but the vast majority of mankind, their hopes are Earthly, to be part of the new Earthly system.” (Funeral 23)

Others were clear that there is no heaven, or that heaven and hell are in the earthly life:

“I don’t believe that there’s a heaven”. (Funeral 17)

“I don’t think I believe in particularly in, in heaven”. (Funeral 42)

“I’m just glad that she’s resting now. That’s what I think. I mean I don’t think she’s gone to heaven or anything like that. I just think it’s over for her and that’s it”. (Funeral 24)
“It’s like my theory on heaven and hell. Right I don’t think it’s up there or down there. I think you make it as you go through life. Your own heaven and your own hell”. (Funeral 20)

“my father used to say you make your heaven and hell on earth. He said it’s up to you. It’s your heaven and I believe it’s true in a way, cos it’s the way you live isn’t it and ...The things you do”. (Funeral 38)

**Dualism and transition**

Many of those interviewed talked about some kind of afterlife, although they had no clear idea of what this might be. These included families who had chosen religious funerals and those who had opted for the secular;

“I think there’s some’rt, there’s some’rt, there must be some’rt after death”. (Funeral 34)

“I do think that there must be something, something more than just what we have now”. (Funeral 8)

Others however hoped that there might be some kind of afterlife but were not sufficiently convinced to believe. Comments included:

“I hope there is a life after death, cos she’ll be meeting a lot of friends, won’t she? Yeah, it’s something that takes a lot of getting into, you know thinking about and, you know, I don’t know. I hope there is but I can’t, I won’t say that I’m sure there is, you know”. (Funeral 38)

“Admitted, when the Minister says that to you at any funeral you think oh maybe there is, yes, yes please let’s think there is, you know and you go along with that”. (Funeral 40)

“I’d love to think that there is an afterlife, but I’m not sure. I don’t know, I don’t know. I’d love to think that he was sort of you know, his spirit was up there looking down on us”. (Funeral 12)

“I’d like to think we pass on into another life as you might say, a better life”. (Funeral 21)

“But I’m a don’t know, I really don’t know. I hope that there is something afterwards, but I just don’t know”. (Funeral 31)
Many respondents made the distinction between the essence of the person and the ‘shell’ of the body, as the following comments illustrate:

“But I do believe that we all have a soul and that soul is us, the or whatever is wrapped round it is irrelevant to a certain extent and that soul goes on, erm…”. (Funeral 36)

“erm there’s supposed to be this tunnel that you go through towards the light...And all the people you’ve known and loved are there beyond this light”. (Funeral 40)

“Well physically we die but spiritually we don’t die”. (Funeral 19)

“So there’s somert, but I do think there is something more spiritual about what he leaves behind, you know, what people do leave behind.” (Funeral 42)

“Younger daughter said saw her mother when paramedics came – mother was not there, just a body.” (Funeral 28)

“When the hearse pulled up initially I got a knot in me stomach and I just went over to it and stared at it, I thought, it’s a box. It’s just like I said when I went to the interview, the person inside it is me mother, but whether you’re religious or not religious it’s just the shell”. (Funeral 37)

“Erm well we sleep in death”. (Funeral 16)

Often this was expressed in songs and poems. For example, one frequently used poem denies the impact of death:

“Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
I am not there, I did not die!” 38

One poem suggests that death is rest. The poem “Don’t think of him as gone away” 39 says:

“Just think of him as resting
from the sorrows and the tears,

38 Do not stand at my grave and weep by Mary Frye 1932
39 Ellen Brenneman
in a place of warmth and comfort,
where there are no days and years.”

The 17th Century poem “To my dear and loving husband”\textsuperscript{40}, chosen by a widow with some Christian beliefs although not a churchgoer, assumes eternal life.

“Then while we live, in love let's so persevere
That when we live no more, we may live ever.”

The poem “Death is nothing at all” is by Canon Henry Scott-Holland, 1847-1918, Canon of St Paul’s Cathedral was read at two non-religious funerals and one conducted by a Methodist out of respect for the traditions of the family. It refers to there being a continuum between life and death, death being merely a next stage and explicitly suggests that we will meet again after death.

“Death is nothing at all
I have only slipped away into the next room...
There is absolute unbroken continuity
What is death but a negligible accident?”

Similar ideas are expressed in the poem “Don’t think of him as gone away”\textsuperscript{41}

“Don't think of him as gone away,
his journey has just begun.
Life hold so many facets,
this earth is only one.”

\textbf{Reincarnation}

One funeral included explicit beliefs about reincarnation. The celebrant, who was a friend of the family read a piece at the start of the service relating to a belief that souls are aware before they are born and know the circumstances in which they will live and what they are to learn in their time on earth. Other souls accompany them to provide support or where necessary enmity in order for them to achieve their purpose (Funeral 44). The words of the committal called upon “Divine spirits, angels, assist deceased on his final journey from the earth to begin the next phase of enlightenment.”

\textsuperscript{40} Anne Bradstreet (ca. 1612-1672)
\textsuperscript{41} Ellen Brenneman
At the interview the widow explained her beliefs:

“I think earth is a place that we’re basically spirit, and this human body houses that spirit and at the end of your period on earth, which you’ve decided before you were born, you go back there, and perhaps come back again”. (Funeral 44)

She said that she believed people had lived many times before and had had experience, both herself and other family members of being regressed under hypnosis. This had resulted in:

“a holistic belief I suppose about reincarnation and the spirit world”. (Funeral 44)

Although ideas about reincarnation were not presented at any of the other funerals, at interview several raised the subject. Another woman believed in reincarnation because of experiencing feelings of having been in places before when she had not. She said:

“for a couple of years every time we went there I said, that place means something to me, that name. We never went to it, this village, then a couple of years later we was driving and I thought, there was one of these names that meant something to me and it had gone. For a couple of years something was drawing me to that, but we never actually went and then after that it had gone, so what the connection was I don’t know, but I suddenly felt drawn to this name, to this place”. (Funeral 29)

Her husband however had less well defined ideas. He said:

“But I think there is something after life but I am not sure if you get, if you are reincarnated or are you drifting about somewhere. I don’t know.” (Funeral 29)

Other comments included:

“I believe that you’re reborn again.. I believe that you’re not born into, into the world just to die.” (Funeral 20)

“But I do believe in, I think if anything I do believe in reincarnation. Yeah, in a way, cos I think we do come back.” (Funeral 34)

Another of those interviewed had an explicit belief in reincarnation, come to after 25 years study of philosophy, eastern religions and specifically reincarnation. He said he did not believe in reincarnation as animals but;
“just the soul go you know and evolve and carry on a lifetime. Yeah I think it does..... Well basically you are a sum of all your experiences”. (Funeral 19)

**Death as the end**

Unsurprisingly some of those who had chosen non religious funerals thought that there was nothing after death. These included one family where the deceased “didn’t believe that he went anywhere” although his widow and daughter thought there must be something (Funeral 42). A middle aged woman who lived in Beverley although her family was from East Hull said:

“I don’t think there is anything else. I don’t think, I mean I don’t know for definite but that’s what I personally think”. (Funeral 24)

A man who had been brought up a Catholic but chose an “alternative” celebrant for his wife’s funeral said:

“my thoughts are that we die. You know we’re mammals, like all animals we’re born, we live and we die. It’s as simple as that you know it’s just a matter of logic to me.

(Interviewer) So death is the end.

*Final yes. Totally and finally*. (Funeral 25)

A widow who had shared humanist beliefs with her husband said:

“Oh, it’s the end....Except for memory” (Funeral 39).

Others had chosen ministers of religion to lead the funeral, in all cases the deceased being from the previous generation. One family chose a religious service because it was traditional, although:

“Mother always had a view that as far as she was concerned you could bury her by the side of the road. ... she wasn’t a great one for symbolism. So in her view is was a kind of I’m dead that’s it. End, end of”. (Funeral 19)

The son interviewed had no religious beliefs.

Another family chose a religious service because they thought the mother would have wanted it, because of tradition. The son and daughter said at interview:

“We don’t believe that there is anything after you’re gone, when you’re gone you’re gone that’s it”. (Funeral 37)
A son who had been brought up a Roman Catholic and whose mother had asked for a Catholic funeral, himself no longer shared these beliefs. He said:

“I think, my personal opinion is, that when you are dead, you are dead... In the meantime, I am a total non-believer. I think as far as I am concerned, when you die, you die, your body ceases to function, your brain ceases to function and what you left, you just rot away”. (Funeral 31)

5.3.2 Continuing in memory, influence and in what one leaves behind

In both religious and non religious funerals there was an emphasis on the life of the person continuing in memory. Comments included:

“when I talk about it in my services about so long as you keep them in your mind and talk about them, and there are so many readings and poems that do say this as well so beautifully, if you talk about them, with no false air of solemnity in your voice, talk about them as though they are just in the next room and their memory, they do still live on and love will still live on. Because they’ve died the love hasn’t stopped and I do very firmly believe that the bits that I talk about regarding the living on in a memory, they’ll be by your side err for all eternity they do very very much like that and they do believe in that”. (Other celebrant 27)

“And as you remember the parts of, the person goes on living in you”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“I do believe that there’s something going on that we don’t understand something perhaps spiritual and I do like to say to people that if as long as you keep the memories alive they’ll live alive in your heart then that person will live on inside of you”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

A BHA celebrant said,

“The memories that you recall today can remain with you forever. Cherish them and keep the safe. Whilst they remain with you Dick will always be part of your lives”. (Funeral 35)

A key informant said that a passage from William Penn is often read at Quaker funerals:

“the one that starts “The truest end of life is to know that life, the life that never ends”. It, it’s just finishes up with “Death is but crossing the world as friends do the seas, they live in one another still, for they must need to be present that love and live in that which is omnipresent, and this divine glass they see face to face and there converse is free as well as pure”, and so on that’s 1693. That usually will feature somewhere”. (Christian celebrant 35)
A minister of religion said:

“Mark will always be with us although he is physically gone in special memories”. (Funeral 8)

The minister in Funeral 6 gave a prayer of thanks for the gift of memory which would keep the deceased with the mourners in the days ahead.

Memory is also important in the Jewish faith:

“part of the planning for the future is to remember the people that have gone before and what they’ve meant and what have you and I’m sure that’s from, from the culture that I’ve grown up with”. (Other religious informant 21)

Another of the group of Jewish informants also felt that;

“those who’ve passed are with me. Yeah. Always. If there’s anything. They’re watching you.
Yeah Just a sense of presence”. (Other religious informant 21)

Some respondents talked about the need to find a focus for remembering:

“There was, there was a lady at (place) who did this and she had a little chair. It was a private grave yard of course which is quite unusual, and she had a garden chair at the end of the grave and she used to walk about a mile to this, this private grave yard, and yes she would commune with her husband but it’s not like saying that’s where he is. This is the place where I can remember him is perhaps”. (Christian celebrant 29)

The widow in Funeral 39 said:

That is how I interpret immortality. In memory and in being spoken about”.

William Wordsworth’s poem, “the Excursion”, captures this immortality:

“And when the stream that overflows has passed,
A consciousness remains upon the silent shore of memory;
Images and precious thoughts that shall not be
And cannot be destroyed.”

Making one’s mark
Both ministers of religion and secular celebrants referred to the deceased living on in memory in their influence on those that remain and in what they leave behind. For example a civil celebrant
said at Funeral 33 that he lives on in memories and “though no longer a visible part of your lives, he will remain a member of your family or of your circle, through the influence he has had on you and the special part he has played in your lives”.

A Quaker said:

“It’s letting your life speak. So when you come to the end of it hopefully you’ve, you’ve done something”. (Christian celebrant 35)

Another celebrant said:

“He may no longer be here but his influence on the lives he has touched continues. James will always be part of your family and part of your lives; hold onto him in your thoughts, talk about him often and enjoy your fond memories of him. In remembering him and in keeping alive what he meant to you, you will be paying him the greatest tribute”. (Funeral 39)

This was an idea also expressed by the bereaved and in poems chosen. The poem “You can shed tears that she is gone” includes the words,

“You can close your eyes and pray that she will come back,
Or you can open your eyes and see all that she has left”.

A sister made this point explicitly:

“I mean you can leave your mark on the world left behind can’t you...you know, through other people” (Funeral 38).

Some respondents, both celebrants and bereaved, described this as the deceased’s ‘legacy’. For example the, celebrant in Funeral 13 referred to the “legacy that the deceased has left in his influence on others and how he is remembered”. (Funeral 13)

A daughter said:

“I mean I’m one of his legacies, (brother)’s a legacy of his and my kids are his legacy...You know, whether he’s still here or not I don’t know but he’s always been part of us life’s and he always will be”. (Funeral 42)

David Harkins 1981
The poem, “Theocritus to Heraclitus”\(^43\), suggests that the poet Heraclitus lives on in his works in the reference to nightingales \(^44\).

> Still are thy pleasant voices,
> Thy nightingales, awake,
> For Death, he taketh all away,
> But them he cannot take.

**The essence of the person**

Sometimes the emphasis was on retaining the person through their essential characteristic. For example, a long standing friend talked about the deceased’s personality and his catch phrase “Power to the People”, believing that all people should live as equals and that divisions are man-made (Funeral 12). A son thanked God for his father as a family man and working man. Another son finished by saying of his father, “I know you will be here in spirit”. His brother said simply “You’re in our hearts forever and always” (Funeral 35). A former student suggested that the study of poetry together freed them “to give consideration to all the things of the spirit rarely admitted to in the light of common day” (Funeral 39). At Funeral 44 a son said that his father lived by a philosophy encapsulated in a quote which he read\(^45\):

> *look to this day for it is life; the very best of life. in its brief course lie all the realities and truth of existence – the joy of growth, the splendour of action, the glory of power....for yesterday is but a memory and tomorrow is only a vision*.

In Funeral 41 the priest chose a passage from Thomas Treherne (1634-1674) which he linked to the idea of the deceased’s strength and dependability. His interests and activities were mentioned as examples of where he had shown strength and dependability.

> Strange is the vigour in a brave man’s soul. The strength of his spirit and irresistible power, the greatness of his heart and the height of his condition, his mighty confidence and contempt of dangers, his true security and repose in himself, his liberty to dare and do what he pleaseth, his alacrity in the midst of fears, his invincible nature, are advantages which make him master of fortune. His courage fits him for all attempts, makes him serviceable to God and man.”

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\(^43\) William Johnson Cory 1823-1892
\(^45\) Dr Brenda Davies from the book The Rainbow Journey.
Continuing bonds of love and relationship

There were some references by celebrants at the funerals to the deceased’s continuing presence. For example a civil celebrant said at Funeral 33:

“Philip hasn’t left you, he is still with you in spirit, by your side, for eternity”.

The theme of continuing through the love shared between the deceased and bereaved features in the celebrants’ ‘talk’ and is reflected strongly in the lyrics of songs chosen and in the tributes paid. It is not prominent in the actual interviews.

“We will leave him with the sound of Barbara Streisand, one of his favourite artists, singing “Evergreen” – a love song that symbolises that love can continue even though someone’s life with us has reached its end. Love is an enduring and energising asset of human beings, which can remain with us and assist in overcoming the grief of loss”. (Funeral 42, humanist celebrant)

For some religious celebrants, the idea of a continuing presence is not part of faith but something that the bereaved feel is helpful. One minister of religion said:

“And so I would say if you feel that whoever there is close to you they’re walking alongside you, they’re just holding your hand, they are. Then of course, we’re not into the realms of trying to find them, because they’re there”. (Christian celebrant 31)

Several songs refer to a continuing relationship with a loved one, even if they cannot be seen. Some of these are talking about being geographically parted on this earth but can be interpreted in the context of their choice for a funeral as suggesting a continuation beyond death, in the hearts of those that remain and in the world around.

“Even if you cannot hear my voice
I’ll be right beside you dear”\(^\text{46}\)

“In my heart, There will always be a place
For you for all my life
I’ll keep a part, Of you with me
And everywhere I am, There you’ll be.”
“Even though there may be times

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\(^{46}\) I’ll sing it one last time for you, Snow Patrol
It seems I’m far away
Never wonder where I am
cause I am always by your side.”^47
“I’ll be seeing you
In every lovely summer’s day,
In everything that's light and gay.
I'll always think of you that way.
I'll find you in the morning sun,
And when the night is new.
I'll be looking at the moon,
But I'll be seeing you.”^48

“If you're lost, you can look and you will find me,
Time after time
If you fall I will catch you, I'll be waiting,
Time after time.”^49

These ideas were also expressed in poems chosen for the funerals, either by the celebrant or by the family.

The poem “Don’t think of her as gone away”^50 says,
“And think of her/him as living, In the hearts of those she touched,
For nothing loved is ever lost and s/he is loved so much.”

A strong theme in the poems chosen is the deceased’s continued awareness of earthly concerns and care for those that remain. “When I am gone, release me let me go”^51 says:

“I will not be far away, for life goes on.
so if you need me, call and I will come.
Though you cannot see or touch me, I will be near
And if you listen with your heart, you will hear

^47 Faith Hill There you’ll be Songwriter: Diane Warren

^48 Familiar places lyrics by Irving Kahal. The song was published in 1938.

^49 Cyndi Lauper Time after time Songwriters: R. Hyman, C. Lauper,

^50 Ellen Brenneman

^51 Ardis Marletta
Then when you must come this way alone,
I will greet you with a smile and "welcome home"

Another example is in the poem “Instructions for life”:
"I shall be with you
For these have been the realities of life to me.
And when you face some crisis with anguish –
When you walk alone with courage
When you choose your paths of right
When you give yourself in love
I shall be very close to you.”

5.3.3 Being reunited

The idea of being reunited with the deceased and other family members who had died featured strongly, most often through songs and poems. Both ministers of religion and secular celebrants referred to the deceased going to be reunited with loved ones, or gave assurances that mourners would be eventually reunited with the deceased. For example a civil celebrant said at the end of a service may she be reunited with her loved ones (Funeral 15). At the committal for Funeral 24 an independent humanist said we come to say farewell to Eileen committing her body to the earth and in so doing reuniting her with (her husband) and other family members.

Many of those interviewed indicated that they would like to believe that they would meet again, although some suggested that this might be wishful thinking because of their feelings of loss. Comments included:
"I like to believe that I would meet me mother and dad, me mother and father when I die.” (Funeral 38)

"Well I don’t actually know to be honest. I only said that hoping that you do.” (Funeral 20)

"(Interviewer:  Do you think that you will see her again in another life?)
Son:  I’d like to think so. Yes.” (Funeral 21)
“it would be quite nice if happened but I don’t imagine it really would happen but you know it would be nice to go back in time for her in that way but I think her general feeling was once, once you’ve passed on you are, what’s the word, not within yourself but you don’t perhaps go back and meet mothers, uncles etc.” (Funeral 6)

“I’d like to, I’d like to say you know, I’d like to see him again, I’d like to think that you know, but I don’t know.” (Funeral 12)

“But we’d always held it there as a dream that that’s the place we’ll meet and that’s why even at the end I said you know that’s where I’ll meet you. You know.

Interviewer: Right which does imply that deep down you think you’re going to meet her again.

Yes. Probably or is that just wishful thinking I don’t know.” (Funeral 10)

Others had quite definite beliefs. A daughter said,

“I believe she is with me dad now”. (Funeral 29)

A son said:

“In fact, all the family’s there, somewhere they are”. (Funeral 34)

A widow said of her mother:

“I was with her when she died actually. And just before she died she just gave a little smile and then she died. And, they do say from hearsay that when you die you see your loved ones sort of thing. Waiting for you on the other side sort of thing”. (Funeral 40)

One widow bereaved of both her husband and her mother in law in a short time found the idea comforting. She said:

“I know he’s got, because you believe in an afterlife, we always said well his granddad’s up there and there’s one or two people who’ve, we’ve lost in the past you know friends and we say oh you know there’s so and so up there and so and so up there, but, but actually having mother and son reunited you know you just think it’s quite comforting”. (Funeral 22)

As well as expressing these beliefs in interview, families chose poems and songs whose words implied a belief in seeing their loved ones again. Songs without any specific religious significance refer to being reunited with loved ones which in the context of the funeral means after death. For
example the song ‘Mama’ says “Mama, until the day that we’re together once more”\textsuperscript{53}. The song ‘Mama why did God take my Daddy’ says, “And honey daddy can’t ever come back to us though we can go to him”\textsuperscript{54}.

The poem “When I am gone release me”\textsuperscript{55}, which was chosen by the family for Funeral 15, alongside promising ongoing support to the bereaved, expresses the same idea of being reunited in the future:

It is only for a while that we must part
so bless those memories within your heart.
I will not be far away, for life goes on.
so if you need me, call and I will come.
Though you cannot see or touch me, I will be near
And if you listen with your heart, you will hear
All of my love around you, soft and clear.
Then when you must come this way alone,
I will greet you with a smile and "welcome home"

The poem “Death is nothing at all”\textsuperscript{56} which was chosen by several families, includes an explicit reference to this belief in the last lines:

“One brief moment and all will be as it was before
How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

However on some occasions these last lines were omitted and the poem is otherwise open to different interpretations.

Thoughts on reuniting were not always infused with sentimentality:

“So erm, where do they actually go, bloody hell... I don’t know...Erm but as for where they actually do go, I don’t know may be they’ve got, my mum’s maybe got a smoking room up there I don’t know. She’s maybe sat having a fag. I don’t really know. But erm I do believe that they do come together. I believe that they do come together”. (Funeral 17)

\textsuperscript{53} Lyrics by Jamie Redfern
\textsuperscript{54} Song by Loretta Lynn
\textsuperscript{55} Ardis Marietta
\textsuperscript{56} Henry Scott Holland 1847 - 1918
The idea of reuniting was sometimes expressed in funerals where the family had no belief in an afterlife. A funeral director commented that when she had on occasion commented on the conflict of ideas to families they had replied “oh well, you've never to give up hope have you” (Funeral director 8).

The notion of being reunited did not occur to everyone, however, and in these cases there was a stronger emphasis on still having the person with them in some way:

“I've never thought of that actually. I've never thought oh I'll see me mam or I'll see me dad or anything like that, I've never thought of it that way at all. I have thought of it that they're here now you know they're all around. If I want to talk to them I can just talk to them”. (Funeral 14)

5.3.4 Beliefs about animals

Some families expressed beliefs in an afterlife for animals as well as for humans, intermingled with their other beliefs. One widow whose husband’s sick dog had been put down near the time of his own death took some comfort from her belief that “they’re both together and he got his wish and he’s not in no more pain like him now”(Funeral 1). She went on to talk about a stray dog which appeared around the house at the time of her husband’s death, perhaps to call him to an afterlife. This idea was in spite of it being contrary to her conventional Christian beliefs. She said:

“they used to call his mother O-, and (relative) said ‘we’ll keep it and if anybody, let the police and that know and if anybody comes for it and says it’s their dog we would thingy but for now we’ll call it Ollie’, you know like short for O, she said ‘we’ll call it Ollie’ and it just sat there and its ears seemed to go up sort of thing. And then the next morning it disappeared again and we’ve never seen that dog since. So we said and I know, God forgive me for saying this, but because his mum’s dead, we was saying we wonder if this dog was his mother, you know I know it sounds stupid and that but has she come back as a dog, because it just kept disappearing and you could go and have a look and it was nowhere in sight and we thought it was, you know, really funny about it.”

Another widow mentioned a friend’s offer of comfort:

“we had a dog years ago called Archie who used to do lots of running with us, we always used to take him with us and when (friend) rang he said, well he said don’t worry about him because he said, he’ll be up there having a run with (dog’s name) and I said yeah he will”. (Funeral 8)
One son felt that the dog recognised a continuing presence of his deceased mother. He said:

“And he knows when she’s here, I’m sure he does and he did that last night, just sat. He pricked his ears up, stood up, laid down there, his head went up, his ears pricked up and he just sat there looking at me, and I thought that’ll be me mam”. (Funeral 34)

5.3.5 Other metaphysical concepts

Hope

Christian hope is expressed in music chosen by those with religious beliefs. A Jehovah’s Witness funeral chose a hymn based on a text which is written on the family grave headstone and;

“says that we’re awaiting a new Heaven and a new Earth and that particular song is rejoicing in the hope of the new Earthly system, that the bible speaks about you see. Based on the thoughts of Revelation Chapter 21. So that sort of gave a hope for the future you see. A positive hope or promise. For the future. And we felt that that would be a good thing to finish on you see.” (Funeral 23)

The son interviewed thought that the fact that the hymn was sung lustily meant that “everybody there was into the spirit of the hope for the future of the dead.” Similarly Funeral 28 chose the hymn “Make me a channel of your peace”57 which includes the words “Where there’s despair in life, let me bring hope”

However the song, “You’ll never walk alone”58, which has more secular relevance, also refers to hope:

“Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart
And you’ll never walk alone,
You’ll never, ever walk alone.
Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart”

The idea of hope for the future being expressed at a funeral may therefore be of wider importance than to the Christian community. In the words of the song ‘From a distance’59,

‘From a distance, there is harmony,
And it echoes through the land.

57 Sebastian Temple
58 R. Rogers/O. Hammerstein II
59 Songwriter Julie Gold
It’s the voice of hope, it’s the voice of peace,
It’s the voice of every man.’

One widow found hope in Beethoven’s opera ‘Fidelio’ even though she did not understand the words. She said “it’s about, it’s all about freedom and hope, and yes, freedom and hope.”

**Light**

Light is a recurrent theme used by celebrants of all persuasions. It both features in the religious liturgy used – ‘Let light perpetual shine upon (her)’ – and in the extempore words of ministers, often contrasted with the ‘darkness’ of loss and grief:

“You gave to us, God gives everlasting love, life and light to you”. (Funeral 14)

Final prayer of thanks for the deceased’s legacy of love and light that remains. For memories and a sense of family bonding. (Funeral 22)

He said in their hearts and minds they should now go to Australia where there were two grandchildren. In spirit we can unite together, grandchildren are lighting candles. Look at the candles on the table at the front (mini altar). They unite us through the spirit. The flames are steady, they are living flames. He said some words which paraphrased the Lux aeterna luceat eis. They are calm and beautiful and represent the calm spirit of the deceased. They also take away darkness, when we have candles we go from darkness to light. They illuminate dark days. (Funeral 34)

The minister said that this was a ‘dark time’ but there was also ‘light’—their memories of the deceased. (Funeral 5)

A poem used by one humanist celebrant and one Christian celebrant is, ‘Four Candles for You’.

Light as a motif can also be seen in the lyrics of music and poems chosen by the bereaved, in this case linked to the continuing protector theme:

‘Cause I always saw in you
My light, my strength.”[60]

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[60] Song There you’ll be Songwriter Diane Warren
It is less frequently explicitly identified by the bereaved, but when it is, it is significant:

“...erm one thing that I remember was that (minister) gave thanks for erm, Betty’s legacy of love and light....yeah, she was a light to a lot of people. A beacon.” (Funeral 22)

A man used the imagery of light (and the colour pink) in talking about his partner who had died young. He said the light that burns twice as bright burns half as long and the deceased burned very bright (Funeral 10). In interview he produced a photograph of his partner turning her face to the sun to illustrate what he meant:

“Sarah could light up a room, I know you hear that all the time and you read it in literature and sometimes it’s meant very I don’t know, with poetic license but she could. She could walk into a room and her smile and her personality would just radiate.”

Energy

One widower viewed the essence of a person as energy, saying that his wife was all around him, and that he could talk to her anywhere, not needing a grave to visit. He said:

“I don’t believe that you can die and your energy or your soul whatever you want to call it can just disappear. I think it is somewhere....I don’t know where but you can’t destroy energy. It just may be takes a different form or what have you and that’s what I believe”. (Funeral 14)

Another son and his wife also referred to the idea of life as energy although they did not develop the idea of where the energy went. They said:

Son “The person inside (the coffin) is me mother, but whether you’re religious or not religious it’s just the shell. It’s gone, whatever was there, energy
Daughter in law— Yes the energy, whatever you
Son— has all gone
Daughter in law— Whatever you care to call it, the essence of the person”. (Funeral 37)

5.3.6 Culture as spiritually sustaining

One key informant suggested that what many people have is not faith but a cultural background which makes religion familiar and comforting:

“They don’t have a fully developed belief system but they do have a sentimental attachment to that which they were probably exposed to in their youth. I mean obviously that doesn’t happen nearly so much now, so the older generations, you know they were brought up with the Lord’s Prayer and they were brought up with Abide with Me, they were brought up with
the idea of you know Heaven and in a Christian context, so if you like, haa, they, they like those reference points” (Other funeral professional 16)

This could be either Christian or of another faith. A Reform Jewish informant suggested that, for many Jews, Judaism is more about cultural identity than faith. However this could be a form of spirituality. He said:

“they get comfort, well it’s, so it could well be spiritual, yeah, but that’s all I can, I can’t be any more specific” (Other religious informant 22)

SUMMARY

The data about religion and spirituality indicates a huge range of beliefs and extensive drawing upon these in the face of death. There is less evidence of people holding to formal, ‘given’ belief systems, rather, a tendency to latch onto single ideas which provide comfort and help to make sense of the experience of death and bereavement on an individual basis. Both religious and secular celebrants struggle, at times, to accommodate the beliefs of families, although most have a clear idea of the philosophy of death they wish to convey. Although almost all make some attempt to expound this philosophy in the funeral service, a focus on the life of the person who has died allows for much easier consensus and perhaps explains the dominance of celebrating the life over any other element in modern funerals. Thus, it is possible that this trend is not explained simply by the desire for greater personalisation, but also reflects the uncertain nature of belief. Equally, it does not appear from this data that the funeral has become focused solely on the loss and grief of the bereaved.
6 MEANING

“The music, whatever you have is, is the most important or equally important as everything else, because that is when people will cry, at that point, a piece of music.” (Christian celebrant 12)

“The lyric meant everything, you know......It was just, it summed up everything that I thought. So. Nothing more to say on that it was just very, very meaningful for me”. (Funeral 10)

“It, it, it obviously it could be taken with a religious significance if that’s the eyes you’re looking at it with...but it also, if you’re looking at it with a non-religious eyes it can be just a case of I’m a memory away.” (Funeral 37)

“I would see them as searchers for meaning really, I wouldn’t say they had faith or didn’t have faith I’d say they didn’t really know what they were searching.” (Christian celebrant 25)

6.1 The process of meaning-making

A central objective of this project was to explore the process of meaning-making in funerals today. The search for meaning is commonly cited as part of the modern quest for spiritual fulfilment, and a very popular bereavement theory also hinges on helping people to find meaning in their loss as a road to recovery. We did not directly ask the bereaved people in interview about what they had found meaningful, but the word cropped up many times as they talked of their reasons for making the choices they did and also as they reflected on the funeral afterwards. We did, however, ask the families, celebrants, funeral directors and other key informants about what they saw as the main purpose of the funeral. Within these responses many talked about the importance of the funeral being a meaningful event. Although meaning-making is often talked about as one process, our observations suggest that it can be usefully divided into 3 contributory processes: seeking meaning, creating meaning and taking meaning. In other words, how did they bereaved families pursue their search for meaning in the funeral preparations; how was meaning jointly created between the families, the funeral directors and the celebrants; and how and what were the meanings taken from the event as they experienced it.
6.2 Seeking meaning

The choices families made and their reasons for these choices appear to be an important indicator of their search to invest the funeral with meaning.

6.2.1. Music

Music emerges as one of the most significant elements in the funeral service, to which most families gave considerable thought. Two different religious officiants said music helps to break up what they say and give an opportunity for a pause for thought and reflection. In a number of funerals, the celebrant announced the music in the middle of the service suggesting that mourners should reflect on the person of the deceased, his character, his life or their relationship with him. For example in Funeral 34 it was suggested that they should reflect on things they “would like to say to her and tell her them through the music”. Humanist or civil celebrants frequently suggested that the opportunity could be also used for private prayer if mourners wished to do so. Much of the music chosen for this part of the service was quieter, more reflective or more concerned with human relationships. One secular celebrant gave his view of the importance of music in the middle of the service. He said:

“In the middle of the service I think it’s important for people to sit back and listen to a piece of music which has got meaning and memories for them and at the end of the service too and the family will say oh well we’re thinking about that and eventually will choose music, having discussed it with each other which is not necessarily a tribute to the person, but it certainly brings back memories of the person and uses it in that other person’s light”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

Making choices

Families chose differing types of music for different times in the service. The music at entry varied with some being very personalised and at other times being more neutral. In two funerals conducted by ministers of religion the bible sentences set for the funeral service were spoken against the music, in both cases against secular songs and resulting a in a strange dissonance of ideas. At interview the widow at one of these was not aware of the biblical sentences but only of the song which she had chosen. At the other the son who was a committed Christian was aware of the sentences and said he would have preferred the sentences to be read after the music. At a third funeral a passage relating to the deceased and his widow’s beliefs concerning the afterlife and the spirit world was read against the theme music from the film Gladiator. In this case the widow was aware of both but other mourners may have had difficulty in hearing the reading.
The reasons given for choice of the music were frequently the way it expressed a relationship of mourners with the deceased or related to shared activities or occasions. The bereaved did not specifically refer to choosing items to express feelings of loss but these were implicit in some of the songs chosen (eg “Now you’re gone”\textsuperscript{61}, “Baby ‘cause I’m missing you now”\textsuperscript{62}, the bagpipe lament “Last Goodbye”, So, softly as I leave you there”\textsuperscript{63}). One minister of religion said that they could take comfort from the words of the song which expressed feelings that they might find difficult to express themselves. A funeral director said “It’s the words that are important”. (Funeral director 3)

However, in the view of some key informants music expresses more than just the words of the lyrics. Comments were:

“Why music, oh because it expresses so much more than words can do”. (Other funeral professional 16)

“Music speaks volumes in, in that, that cannot be spoken in any (words)”. (Christian celebrant 33)

On two occasions the music was chosen with the specific purpose of lightening the proceedings, particularly at the end of the service. One relative said:

“Arthur was quite a miserable man so I thought with him dying it might like lift him a bit”. (Funeral 20)

One family in choosing the Red Red Robin, did so partly in the hopes of bringing a smile to the mourners as they left. A daughter said:

“I said why we chose it and she said, that’s great. Ha, ha….and yes, I think most people did smile”. (Funeral 36)

Another family chose “Are you going to San Francisco?” as the final music because;

“We wanted to have it at the end as a kind of, as we walked out, for it to be a more uplifting piece maybe you know. I remember smiling as I came out at people. But people didn’t smile back. I wanted it to, to be left on a high note rather than a sombre piece”. (Funeral 44)

\textsuperscript{61} Now you’re gone Songwriters: J.E. Altberg, T. Nabuurs

\textsuperscript{62} Missing you now Songwriters: W. Afanasieff, M. Bolton, D. Warren

\textsuperscript{63} original Italian lyrics by Giorgio Calabrese, Hal Shaper November 1961 wrote English lyrics
A key informant had also noticed this approach, saying:

“I’ve noticed quite a few times they want that upliftment at the end. It’s that, you’re off, especially with burials. You’re going out let’s have a bit of lift there”. (Other celebrant 36)

The choice of music seems to be important for the majority of families. One woman, who chose to have bagpipes played live because her husband liked the pipes, said it was important that the music was “right” because “you only get one chance” (Funeral 13). Another couple, to make sure there were no hitches with the music,

“did 3 CD’s one track on each one, written on it, this is the first, going in, this is the middle, this is the end, and it couldn’t go wrong” and also had “back-ups in my handbag”. (Funeral 37)

Another family had particularly valued the same music as played at the graveside also playing from the hearse as they returned to the car park after the burial (Funeral 42). For the family in Funeral 22, it was the Jim Reeves songs which provided a lasting memory of the funeral.

One key informant summed up music’s importance saying:

“Music touches your lives, through your life and you see different areas of your life and music for me always ....Yeah, it’s kind a like a sound track of your life I suppose when you think about it”. (Other funeral professional 1)

**Meaning for the deceased**

Choosing music with the tastes of the deceased in mind has been a recurring theme, either as actually chosen by the person concerned before death or those known to be liked. Some of those who had died had planned the music with their families before they died or left written instructions. One son had asked his father a couple of days before he died what music he would like for the funeral and was told the hymn “I vow to thee my country”. The widow said that he had always liked this and it was used at Princess Diana’s funeral (Funeral 44). One partner said:

“We talked for a long time last year when she was diagnosed about our favourite music and we listened to thousands and thousands of tracks ... The middle one, Run, was a joint choice......The last one, Summer Sun was Sarah’s favourite track of all time and it just reminded her of summer sun and holidays and happy times”. (Funeral 10)
A husband said:

“Jokingly over the last 2-3 years she’d said things, if ever I were to die this is the music that I would like”. (Funeral 25)

One person had left written instructions that the hymn should be either “Abide with me” or “The Old Rugged Cross”. “Abide with me” was popular with others, two other families saying:

“Mother always said she wanted ‘Abide with me’”. (Funeral 21)

“He wanted ‘Abide with me’ he wanted that one”. (Funeral 27)

The choices made by deceased person’s for their own funerals included a variety of music as well as hymns, including “Wind beneath my wings” (Bette Midler), “The power of love” (Celine Dion) and “You’ll never walk alone”. One man was said to have chosen Frank Sinatra’s ‘My Way’ because he, “felt he left this world very content with his lot and what he had achieved in his time, without compromise or losing his individual style”. It also had associations for him because it was played at his mother’s funeral”. (Funeral 42)

Other items chosen by the families were often said to be a favourite of the deceased or to be special for him/her. At one funeral the music items were said to have been special to the deceased at different parts of her life. Elvis Presley “Burning Love” was said to be the deceased’s favourite at one funeral and Johnny Cash’s “Walk the line” to be a particular favourite at another. One son said:

“she loved Puccini and them two particular arias she loved so it seemed fitting really”. (Funeral 19)

Another son said of a hymn:

“And so it’s one that my mother particularly liked. It has a sort of jaunty air to it you see, so we just played that as an introduction”. (Funeral 23)

A sister and niece said:

“We watched Beaches on television with Bette Midler and he said I like that, that song he said, I like it and we bought him the CD so he got that and he liked that so we got that one. And then he’s always playing Frank Sinatra so we did ‘my way’ because he always did everything his way. And Matt Monroe, he liked that one”. (Funeral 27)
Sometimes it was not a particular song that was a favourite but a liking for a style of music or particular singer. At one funeral the deceased was said to love Jim Reeves. At the funeral where the family invited a friend of the deceased to play jazz, a family member said:

“with not us not knowing anything much about jazz, (friend) said he knew what Chris would like”. (Funeral 12)

At another, a son said:

“Elvis and the Beatles were particular favourites of his but not those particular songs”. (Funeral 18)

A key informant felt that the deceased’s preferences were important to families. She said:

“I find it’s mainly music that the deceased has enjoyed. The choices of music are mainly yeah what the deceased has enjoyed and they often will go to great lengths to get that music you know if it’s something that they know the deceased wanted, sometimes it’s not very often, I don’t find, it’s something the family like it’s something the deceased would have liked”. (Other celebrant 28)

**Meaning for the bereaved**

At other times families chose particular music because of associations that it had with the deceased. Sometimes this might be simply the music of the era which defined that person, usually their youth. One aunt chose Handel’s Water music because she thought it “reflects the lovely gentle personality” that the deceased had (Funeral 35). At other times there were more specific associations. One elderly lady had been in the habit of singing the song after she was in a nursing home and the family thought it must mean something to her. A relative said:

“And the last one, the reason we chose that one is because when she sort of went in the residential home, she kept quoting the words all the time, she used to just say, I’ll be seeing you in all the old familiar places”. (Funeral 16)

Another elderly lady was said to have become a ‘spectator of life’ because of her infirmity and her family felt that Louis Armstrong’s Wonderful World was relevant because of the lyrics “watching people go by and things like that”. (Funeral 37)

For another family there were associations with what the deceased did and said in relation to the music, including it being the ring tone on his phone. A widow said:
“It was ‘stand by me’ going in, well he used to play that when we was at home on his music and he used to always say to me ‘you will stand by me won’t you’, do you know. ... And that ‘now you’re gone’ when him and my daughter used to go in the car he used to have it blasting out”. (Funeral 1)

Another widow chose Vaughan Williams “Lark ascending” because of memories of hearing a lark on a walk early in their relationship and the habit they developed of playing this music at significant times like anniversaries (Funeral 39). For two Hull Kingston Rovers supporters, one age 34 and the other 90, the song Red Red Robin had rugby league associations. One man used to sing Roger Whittaker’s “Last farewell” at parties. For one son a particular song brought fond memories of his father “doing what he did in the way he did it”. Another son had bought his mother the “Mamma Mia” DVD before her last illness but she had not watched it. He and a grandson took a portable player to the hospital and watched it beside her bed. Although his mother was unconscious the son thinks that she reacted in some way to that song (Funeral 17).

One key informant commented that the associations with music were important. He said:

“Music’s become more prevalent in the funerals. People relate people to music and relate certain parts of your, your life. We all do it. There’s certain music comes on and you remember something from that time and it’s very, what’s the word I’m looking for, it’s I’m trying to put it into words, like a personal tribute”. (Other funeral professional 1)

For other bereaved families the music chosen was significant in expressing their relationship with the deceased. For example one chose the song “Mama” for the words “Mama, I want to tell you that I’ll always love you” (Funeral 34). A husband chose a song with the words “Have I told with all my heart and soul how I adore you well darling I’m telling you now”, saying:

“It just seemed to sum up everything I felt about Carol”. (Funeral 25)

One partner chose a song by Queen saying that:

“The lyric meant everything, you know.....It was just, it summed up everything that I thought. So. Nothing more to say on that it was just very, very meaningful for me”. (Funeral 10)

The words of this song included:

“Look into my eyes and you’ll see I’m the only one
You’ve captured my love stolen my heart
Changed my life........
.............I will find you anywhere you go
Right until the ends of the earth
I'll get no sleep until I find you
To tell you when I've found you
I love you
Take my breath take my breath ... away”

A widow chose “The Power of love” because,

“I’d bought that piece for Justin years ago, 80’s I think it was and it just summed up what I felt about him. You know we were together as a couple so yeah, that was why that one.” (Funeral 44)

A daughter in law chose a Jim Reeves song for her mother in law because in the words “I love you because you’re you’ the song,

“just about sums up (wife) and (husband) you know, because they were such a, such a lovely couple”. (Funeral 22)

Other music was chosen because it had other meaning for the bereaved. One widow chose ‘Mama why did God take my daddy?’ because the children were asking her questions and,

“I thought that they was asking me but I couldn’t give them an answer”. (Funeral 1)

A son chose one hymn because of the importance of faith to both his mother and himself saying:

“we kept the sort of theme of (minister)’s talk dealt with the quality of faith, so we thought that particular song was suitable to the sort of theme that he struck out on you see”. (Funeral 23)

Another widow chose the theme from the film Gladiator because it was music she first heard when her mother died and it;

“it kind of emotionally summed up a lot of feelings that I was feeling at that time”. (Funeral 44) She continued “it’s a very enigmatic piece of music I think and I think it just summed up, you know, what we were, the kind of atmosphere again. Uplifting as well as that moody kind of, yeah”.

64 Take my breath away Words and music by Freddy Mercury
**Appropriate but not significant**

Some families were not concerned about music and happy for crematorium/cemetery staff to choose something “suitable”. Families said that “(the deceased) was not really into music” or “was not a music person” and wanted only “something gentle in the background”. At other times music was suggested by the funeral director such as Harry Secombe singing “Ave Maria” and “Amazing Grace” at Funeral 11. On other occasions the officiant or funeral director was asked to choose music within a certain style – Gospel for Funeral 20 and “church” music for Funeral 24. The Funeral 24 family were concerned that the music should be “appropriate” saying; “I mean it’s better than something like Bon Jovi blasting out, do you know what I mean”. Several other families also wanted the music to be “appropriate” to the occasion. One said “we thought we ought to have something like that” (Abide with me) and another “The words were appropriate for a funeral and it’s about making connections with the people that are going to be there”. This wanting the music to be suitable was generally in relation to hymns and other religious music although one wife did choose Cindy Lauper “Time after Time” because “it seemed quite appropriate for the day”. (Funeral 8)

**Themes in the lyrics**

The words of the songs were frequently important to families. However, a key informant pointed out that families may choose a song for a particular part of the lyric, such as the refrain, although the theme of the song as a whole is not relevant. He said,

“the goodbye my lover refrain is, is incredibly powerful but the entire lyric has got absolutely nothing to do with a mother saying goodbye to her dead son”. (Other funeral professional 16)

This was apparent in the funerals studied. For example, for Funeral 34 the song “time to say goodbye” was played, almost certainly because of its refrain since the other words were all in Italian.

**Human love**

The most frequently recurring theme in the lyrics is that of human love. Although one song refers to love for a mother as mentioned above, most songs are referring to the love between a woman and a man. Sub themes include:

- The nature and importance of love (e.g “Love is a many-splendored thing”65, “For 'tis love and love alone, The world is seeking. And 'tis love and love alone, That can repay. 'Tis the answer, 'tis the end and all of living, For it is love alone that rules for aye.”66)

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65 Paul Frances Webster
66 Ah sweet mystery of life, Words & Music by Rida Johnson Young & Victor Herber
• Support from one partner to another (eg Your love made me Make it through , Oh, I owe so much to you\(^{67}\))

• Sense of belonging (eg “cause I am your lady And you are my man”\(^{68}\), “You have made my life complete, And I love you so.”\(^{69}\), “You’re the first, you’re the last, my everything”\(^{70}\))

• Staying together, love forever (eg “Love me tender, Love me sweet, Never let me go”\(^{71}\), “I’d tell you that I’d never leave you, And love you till the end of time, If you were in these arms tonight”\(^{72}\), “And I knew our joy would fill the earth, And last till the end of time my love, It would last till the end of time my love”\(^{73}\)

• Uniqueness of the relationship (eg “But of all these friends and lovers, There is no one compares with you”\(^{74}\) “Only you, and you alone, Can feel me like you do”\(^{75}\), ”Look into my eyes and you’ll see I’m the only one, You’ve captured my love stolen my heart”\(^{76}\), “and you’ll always be the only love I ever knew”\(^{77}\).

• Effect of loved one (eg “So I’ll be there when you arrive, The sight of you will prove to me I’m still alive”\(^{78}\), “You light my morning sky With burning love”\(^{79}\)

• The need to express love (“’Cause I’ve lost loved ones in my life Who never knew how much I loved them”\(^{80}\)

In Funeral 41 the minister linked the words about the love of God in the hymns “O love that will not let me go” and “Love divine all loves excelling” to the human love of the deceased for his wife and the wider love that drove his various work in the community.

At Funeral 42 the celebrant introduced the Barbra Streisand song as:

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\(^{67}\) There you’ll be Songwriter: D. Warren
\(^{68}\) The power of love Songwriters: Mende, Gunther;Rush, Jennifer;Applegate, Mary;De Rouge, Candy
\(^{69}\) Love me tender words & music by Vera Matson - Elvis Presley
\(^{70}\) You’re my everything Songwriters: Sepe, Tony; White, Barry; Radcliffe, Peter Sterling
\(^{71}\) Love me tender words & music by Vera Matson - Elvis Presley
\(^{72}\) Bon Jovi in these arms Songwriters: Bon Jovi, Jon;Sambora, Richard S.;Bryan, David
\(^{73}\) The first time ever I saw your face Songwriters: Maccoll, Ewan
\(^{74}\) In my life Songwriters: Mccartney, Paul;Lennon, John
\(^{75}\) Elvis Presley
\(^{76}\) Take my breath away Words and music by Freddy Mercury
\(^{77}\) I won’t forget you Songwriter H.Howard
\(^{78}\) Super trooper Songwriters: Andersson, Benny Goran Br;Ulvaeus, Bjoern K.
\(^{79}\) Burning Love Songwriter D. Linde
\(^{80}\) If tomorrow never comes Kent Blazy / Garth Brooks
“a love song that symbolises that love can continue even though someone’s life with us has reached its end. Love is an enduring and energising asset of human beings, which can remain with us and assist in overcoming the grief of loss”.

Memories
Another frequent theme is memories, looking back over life and remembering the good times and the not so good. Examples include:
“When I think back, On these times, And the dreams We left behind”\footnote{There you’ll be Songwriters: Warren, Diane}
“Memories, light the corners of my mind
Misty watercolour memories of the way we were.”\footnote{The way we were Songwriters: Bergman, Alan;Bergman, Marilyn;Hamlisch, Marvin}
“I’ll be seeing you,
In all the old familiar places”\footnote{Familiar places lyrics by Irving Kahal. The song was published in 1938.}

“There are places I’ll remember
All my life though some have changed”\footnote{In my life Songwriters: Mccartney, Paul;Lennon, John}

“I’ve lived a life that’s full.
I’ve travelled each and ev’ry highway.”\footnote{My way Songwriters: Revaux, Jacques; Anka, Paul (Eng Lyr); Thibaut, Gilles; Francois, Claude;}

Saying farewell
Some songs are explicitly a farewell to the loved one. For example in “Time to say goodbye” sung by Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman at Funeral 34 the words are all in Italian except for the phrase “Time to say goodbye”. Roger Whittaker’s “Last Farewell” is in fact a farewell in time of war and was chosen because it was the deceased’s party piece for Funeral 36 but was also possibly thought appropriate as a farewell at a funeral.

Saying farewell is differently treated in a Roman Catholic funeral where the hymn listed on the service sheet as ”The Song of Farewell” was in fact part of the Mass of the Resurrection, using the words from Job and relating them to Christian belief in the resurrection of the body.
"I know that my Redeemer lives and on that final day of days His voice shall bid me rise again; unending joy, unceasing praise. This hope I cherish in my heart: to stand on earth my flesh restored, And, not a stranger but a friend, behold my Saviour and my Lord”.

Loss
Families chose songs which expressed feelings of loss. Although one song expressed loss of a father (“Oh mama why did God take my daddy” previously mentioned), most described emotions felt at relationship break up or parting to express the loss felt through death. These included:

“To think I might not see those eyes
Makes it so hard not to cry
And as we say our long goodbyes
I nearly do”\textsuperscript{86}

“Baby ‘cause I’m missing you now
And it’s drivin’ me crazy
How I’m needin’ you baby
I’m missing you now”\textsuperscript{87}

“Wishin’ you were here by my side is all that I can do
Got my arms around my pillow at night, they should be
Holdin’ you”\textsuperscript{88}

“I realize my love for you was strong
And I miss you here now you’re gone”\textsuperscript{89}.

One key informant referred to the importance of the theme of mourning the relationship:

“it’s songs that, that have you know words like you know I will always be with you, or, or, you know, the sort of the sadness of parting”. (Christian celebrant 30)

\textsuperscript{86} I sing it one last time for you Snow Patrol
\textsuperscript{87} Missing you now Songwriters: W. Afanasieff, M. Bolton, D. Warren
\textsuperscript{88} ibid
\textsuperscript{89} Now you’re gone Songwriters: Altberg, Jonas Erik; Nabuurs, Theo
Music and spirituality

In a few funerals the music chosen seemed to be as an expression of faith - in a Roman Catholic Requiem Mass, two Anglican services and the Jehovah’s Witness service. For example, at the mass the words of the hymns seemed to have been chosen with relevance to the priest’s vocation (whom shall I send, Here I am Lord), to the Eucharist (In bread we bring you lord our bodies’ labour), to the idea of salvation through Christ (Soul of my Saviour, Christ be beside me, I will be with you, to the concept of redemption and resurrection (I know that my Redeemer lives, I cannot tell). In other funerals, even when hymns were chosen, it is not clear whether this was because this was the thing to do, i.e. “appropriate”, or when the deceased was said to want a particular hymn, whether this was for spiritual reasons.

Families did not generally specifically refer to spirituality in relation to music. However one widow chose a Schubert quintet because:

“it has a tenderness and a gentleness and an uplifting quality” which she found “tender and beautiful and so spiritual”.

This same widow chose Beethoven’s Fidelio because, although she did not know the meaning of the words:

“it’s all about freedom and hope, and yes, freedom and hope”. (Funeral 39)

Some key informants considered that spirituality was expressed in the way that it connects with the deceased and the deepest feelings of the mourners. One explained:

“you know is spirituality about the essence of that person and therefore is their spirituality imbued in the, in the fact that, you know that they want to go out to a particular piece of music. I think that, I think we’re also talking about things which are unconscious”. (Other funeral professional 17)

One key informant pointed to therapeutic effects of actively participating in music by singing. She said:

“Now when you’re in grief and when you’re in the funeral you’re actually holding your breath”.  
90 “It gets everything moving and actually helps the people there to actually feel that little bit better, but if they’ve got that little bit of grief there still that they’ve held in, or they’ve been

90 In order to sing it is necessary to breathe deeply.
crying or anything like that it can help giving those next few minutes to sort, to get themselves
together, but they can also enjoy the music”. (Other celebrant 36)

6.2.2 Poems

Poems were not used frequently, but were also significant in the providing meaning. However, where the celebrant had chosen the poems, rather than the family themselves, they often made little impression on the families. One widower said:

“I don’t think I was asked, I’m sure we weren’t. I can’t remember honestly, my memory isn’t as
good as it used to be. But I, I’m not a great poetry person anyway. I read a lot, literature and I
like a lot of the Classics but poetry is something just doesn’t have any great appeal to me so no
I wouldn’t, I don’t think he asked me....No, no significance no not for me”. (Funeral 25)

A daughter said she: “wouldn’t have remembered it unless you’d mentioned it” but now that she
thought of it the poem was relevant because, “me mam, all me mam lived for basically was her
family and that was what the poem was about”. (Funeral 5)

However one key informant had been asked by families to provide a copy of poems read (Humanist
celebrant 19). Generally families thought that the poems had been appropriate. Comments
included:

“They fit the occasion”. (Funeral 35 father)

“It’s very nice isn’t it?” (Funeral 38 sister)

“It was her choice. She asked me and, of course, it’s lovely isn’t it?” (Funeral 39 widow)

One sister said that poems help with the grieving process. (Funeral 7)

Making choices

The most popular poem at the funerals researched was “You/we can shed tears that he/she is
gone”, adapted according to the gender of the deceased. This was chosen by secular celebrants on 5
occasions and by the family twice for religious funerals. “When I come to the end of the road” was
used at services by three different secular celebrants, on two occasions chosen by families from an
offered selection and by one minister of religion who used it in two religious services and one
secular service. This particular minister used little set church liturgy even in the religious services.
Key informants found that families found it hard to choose poems probably because so many other things were on their minds. This meant that the same poems tended to be chosen, because they were familiar and did not require reading in detail. One said,

“people do tend to have sketchy look through, which is often I suppose why you get the “do not stand on my grave” and “death is nothing at all” because they’re very simple and easy to, to look through and they do pretty much say everything you want to say”. (Other celebrant 28)

Sometimes she had found an excuse to leave the family briefly and:

“If you just disappear for a minute or two it just gives them a little bit more time to look through, so more poems seem to be coming out”.

Where families had chosen the poems the reasons given were various. Death is nothing at all appealed because of its reference to the deceased being “in the next room”. Although written by an Anglican priest with a Christian view of an afterlife, two families did not interpret it in this way but thought of the deceased as being close through memories. Two comments were:

“cos you’re surrounded by memories aren’t you?” (Funeral 33)

“It, it obviously it could be taken with a religious significance if that’s the eyes you’re looking at it with...but it also, if you’re looking at it with a non-religious eyes it can be just a case of I’m a memory away”. (Funeral 37)

Other poems were chosen because of particular associations with aspects of the deceased’s life or personality. One elderly lady had written her own poem for her funeral which the officiant read. The substance was, don’t send flowers when I am dead, rather visit me while I am still alive when I can enjoy it. A widow chose “My father kept a garden” for her son with the idea of relating it to her son’s relationship with his father (Funeral 33). Another widow chose “Smiling is infectious” which she found on the back of an air freshener because:

“I just thought that fits him down to a tee because he were always happy, smiling and making people laugh wasn’t he. So, you know we put that in didn’t we?” (Funeral 42)

A brother and his wife chose “When I come to the end of the road” because; “it suited Arthur didn’t it?” and felt that this was part of the service that they would remember. (Funeral 20)

A family chose “God’s garden” because,
“there was a lot of things in that that Don mentioned and it sort of fit, a lot of things fit in with it. You know so, it did sort of fit in what he wanted and everything and a lot of his wishes and that so it sort of was appropriate for that you know”. (Funeral 27)

One widow chose, “On Wenlock Edge”, because it was the subject of a recent conversation with her husband. She said:

“he was restless but he wasn’t ill, and I said, would you like me to read a poem? And he said, yes, read, and he couldn’t remember the name of it but he gave me a line and it rang a bell and I realised it was Wenlock Edge and I read it and he asked me to read it again, and he said, the line, the tree of man, he said that’s Patrick White’s novel, had I read it and I said no I hadn’t and so he talked about it for about 5 minutes”. (Funeral 39)

Some poems were chosen to express the emotions that the bereaved had for the deceased. A widow had written a poem some years ago about the way she felt about her husband on a particular occasion. She said it was:

“just a beautiful few moments and I remember thinking I’ve got to capture this, this is important, I want to remember this forever”. (Funeral 44)

She read the poem at his funeral.

A bereaved partner had also written a poem himself but found himself emotionally unable to read it as he planned at the funeral. He said:

“When I looked at it and I looked at the people in the room I just realised that I wouldn’t be able to read it out so I just skipped it”. (Funeral 10)

One daughter went on the internet to choose a poem which expressed her feelings for her father, choosing one entitled “Dad”. She selected this particular poem because “it wasn’t in any strange sort of English” and then omitted the last verse because of its religious references. (Funeral 42)

Key informants thought that where families chose poems it was to express thoughts that they could not otherwise put into words. One said:

“Even in religious funerals, yes, yep because quite a lot of people don’t, haven’t got the capacity to write something themselves or they’re too emotionally involved to sit down and write so they’ll read a poem or find a poem and read a poem instead”. (Funeral director 8)
Themes in words of poems

These are similar to the themes in the songs/music chosen.

Human love

The most frequent theme in the words of the poems was that of human love, of the deceased for the bereaved and of the bereaved for the deceased. A poem about feelings for a father referred to a time when “my life was consumed in you, in your love”\(^{91}\) (Funeral 42). Another poem, chosen three times by the same celebrant, ends with the words “for nothing loved is ever lost and he is loved so much.”\(^{92}\)

In the poem “Four candles for you”\(^{93}\) the fourth candle is for “our love” and ends “We love you. We remember you.” The poem “My Father kept a garden”\(^{94}\) finishes “And I hope today he feels the love Reflected back from me” which the family (Funeral 33) interpreted as the love of the deceased for his son. The poem “Tesco Twilight”\(^{95}\) is an expression of the love of a widow (Funeral 44) for her husband, saying “Oh that these moments could last forever, Both safely enfolded within our deepest love.” Another widow (Funeral 8) expressed her love using the words:

“If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov’d by wife, then thee.”\(^{96}\)

The poem “When I am gone release me let me go”\(^{97}\) includes the words “I gave you love, you can only guess how much you gave me in happiness. The poem “When I come to the end of the road”\(^{98}\) says “Remember the love that we once shared” and “You can shed tears that he/she is gone”\(^{99}\) suggests “you can be full of the love that you shared”.

Memories

Another frequent focus is memories, looking back on the shared life. The four candles poem\(^{100}\) says:

“This third candle we light in your memory.

For the times we laughed,
The times we cried,

\(^{91}\) Dad by Judy Burnette
\(^{92}\) Don’t think of him as gone away by Ellen Brenneman
\(^{93}\) Author unknown
\(^{94}\) Author unknown
\(^{95}\) Written by widow
\(^{96}\) Anne Bradstreet (ca. 1612-1672)
\(^{97}\) Ardis Marietta
\(^{98}\) Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)
\(^{99}\) David Harkins 1981
\(^{100}\) author unknown
The times we were angry with each other,
The silly things you did,
The caring and joy you gave us.”

“You can shed tears that he she is gone”¹⁰¹ suggests that memories should be used in a positive way:
“You can remember her and only that she is gone
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on”

Other poems also think of memories as a way in which the deceased lives on. In “the Excursion” William Wordsworth said:
“And when the stream that overflows has passed,
A consciousness remains upon the silent shore of memory;
Images and precious thoughts that shall not be
And cannot be destroyed.”

Brian Patten’s “How long is a man’s life?” is even more explicit:
“A man lives for as long as we carry him inside us,
For as long as we carry the harvest of his dreams,
For as long as we ourselves live,
Holding memories in common, a man lives.”

Loss
A third theme is that of loss. The four candles poem¹⁰² begins with this idea:
“The first candle represents our grief.
The pain of losing you is intense.
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.”
Other poems made similar references to the pain of loss.
“It broke our hearts to lose you”¹⁰³
“Weep, if you must; parting is hell”¹⁰⁴
“They told me, Heraclitus,
They told me you were dead.
They brought me bitter news to hear

¹⁰¹ David Harkins 1981
¹⁰² author unknown
¹⁰³ Gods Garden Poem written by Mrs.Libertie Treenery Semanko in October 2004 on the death of a dear friend
¹⁰⁴ If I should die before the rest of you Joyce Grenfell 1910-1979
And bitter tears to shed.”

A number of other poems suggested that grief was inevitable but should not be too prolonged. These included:

“So grieve awhile for me if grieve you must,
then let your grief be comforted by trust”

“Miss me a little ~ but not too long”

6.2.3 Pets
For a number of families pets had been an important part of the deceased’s life and this was recognized by their mention by name at the funeral. In addition photos of the deceased with his dog formed part of the Powerpoint at Funeral 18, and were displayed beside the collection box at Funeral 40 (although the collection was for the ward at a local hospital rather than an animal charity as at two other funerals). Two families included photos of dogs, one with some dog hairs attached in the coffin. The latter family also had a flower arrangement in the shape of the deceased’s dog (Funeral 1).

6.3 Creating meaning
The aspirations of the families in choosing specific elements of the funeral service can be seen to come together in the co-creation of the event with the celebrant and the funeral director. Key informants’ responses about the main purpose of the funeral are centred around making it a meaningful event, celebrants being particularly conscious of their part in creating meaning out of an otherwise sad occasion. The purposes highlighted group into four categories, each of which offers different dimensions of meaning.

6.3.1 Shared humanity
These were shared purposes across all shades of religious and secular funerals, although the degree of emphasis varied.

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105 Theocritus to Heraclitus William Johnson Cory 1823-1892
106 When I am gone release me let me go Ardis Marletta
107 When I come to the end of the road Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)
Celebration of the life

Celebration of the life of the deceased is a predominant theme in the creation of meaning, referred to at more than half of the funerals observed by the celebrant. These included a few services conducted by ministers of religion, both Church of England and Free Church, but the majority were those led by humanist or civil celebrants. The celebrants had often been chosen by the family because this was the approach they were known to take, either in the case of the humanists and civil celebrants where this was the whole focus of the service or where a particular minister was chosen because he was known to take a less formal approach rather than following a set liturgy.

For the families who chose non-religious funerals they were concerned to show what was important in the deceased’s life and their relationship with him/her. A daughter said the funeral was a celebration of her mother’s importance to the family (Funeral 5). For those that had chosen a non-religious funeral the celebration of life was particularly important. Examples of comments were:

“I liked the fact that people came and we did something that they, took part in something they enjoyed about me dad, so their final sort of, what they were left with was really a celebration of his life”. (Funeral 42)

“It was like do you know like a bit of both a celebration of his life and a saying goodbye for the last time that we see him”. (Funeral 7)

“As far as I’m concerned the purpose of the funeral is to celebrate life”. (Funeral 36)

However, those who had chosen a religious funeral made similar comments:

“And I think to celebrate one’s life is much better than the way they used to do it”. (Funeral 21)

“It’s just like a celebration of the fact that somebody’s been here and now they’re no longer there, I think”. (Funeral 37)

For some families who chose more traditional religious services the celebration came afterwards in the post funeral reception. One said:

“I think that was a celebration because it brought all the memories back of yer mam and you know, trips to the seaside when you were a kid with yer mam’s brother and all their kids and I think that was like a celebration. It was looking back on her life”. (Funeral 31)
More than half of the key informants interviewed also considered the funeral to be a celebration of the life of the person, at least as part of its function. Comments included:

“It’s also about putting that person who’s died centre stage for the last time, and a chance for people to really celebrate and pay tribute to, to that unique life”. (Other funeral professional 17)

“Quaker funerals are just, they’re just part of, of how you’ve lived. It’s rather trite to say a sort of celebration cos that’s that’s what people trot out, but it is really, yeah they are”. (Christian celebrant 35)

The idea of the uniqueness of each human life and that all people have impact in some way was something that was emphasized by humanist informants. Comments included:

“it has to be an acknowledgement of that person. In a Humanist funeral, where, where I think it’s even more important, if humanism is about anything that’s different from religion it’s about what the person has been, not where they’re going to. So, and a religious ceremony has always got in it some sense of there is another world, you are going to a better place or something like that. We’re saying no there isn’t, this is what you’ve been, this is what this person has been, this is what’s important, this is how this person has impacted on the world, this is how they were significant, however small”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

“a lot of people do say well that’s just what we wanted, we wanted the celebration and sometimes stillborn twins they say the same thing that although they didn’t have much of a life to celebrate they’ve altered people, they’ve changed people’s lives forever and they’ve had such an effect on people’s lives, looking forward to seeing them buying clothes and although there are sad bits they have had it where they haven’t had much time on earth they’ve influenced people quite a great deal”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

A funeral director considered that this was;

“why probably more Humanist services are becoming involved because it’s more of a celebration that way than rather than the religious side of things”. (Funeral director 2)

For ministers of religion it was also important to celebrate the life of the deceased but as only part of the purpose. Comments included:
“You are celebrating the life of the person who has died, and you are proclaiming your Christian faith...it’s their memories but also celebrating their skills and talents and what they’ve passed onto others”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“in a funeral, we are commending the person to God, we are asking for solace in our grief and we are celebrating the person’s life”. (Christian celebrant 29)

The celebration of life was important because informants perceived that this is what bereaved families were seeking, had meaning for them and would give them satisfaction. Comments included:

“They’re looking for an opportunity to express their grief, their respects, their love in their terms. And, and to celebrate the life”. (Christian celebrant 31)

“In one way or another, through the, through description, music, whatever, that person’s got to come through. And if that happens then usually the family is happy with what has gone on”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“But I’m finding more and more that they want to celebrate life and they want it to be a happy occasion rather than a mournful time, but they do want that time to be able to contemplate and reflect on their loved one”. (Christian celebrant 34)

One civil celebrant acknowledged the part that the post funeral get-together had in achieving the celebration, saying:

“really it’s from my point of view it’s for celebration of the life and talking about the person that has died and then going on to the obviously if there’s some sort of a wake or party afterwards, I call it a party because invariably that’s what they turn into, a party and celebrate the life”. (Other celebrant 28)

One minister of religion saw the funeral as more of a celebration when the deceased was an active member of the church community. He said:

“there’s a different dynamic altogether I think in those funerals ...more of a celebration of the life of the person that’s been active in the parish I would say... You know we do we do weddings of people we’ve never seen, we do funerals of people we’ve never seen, but they’re not really parish celebrations I wouldn’t say they were well it’s like a family isn’t it?...I mean a
celebration in the sense of active worship which are prayers offered to God for those people in that sense”. (Christian celebrant 25).

For a Quaker:

“It’s letting us all look at, well we’re looking at the grace of God in that person’s life and, and as we believe, what, I mean our main approach I think to spirituality is that we, we’re very much aware of the divine in each person”. (Christian celebrant 35)

Some informants also emphasized the importance of acknowledging the pain and the negative aspects of the deceased’s life in order to achieve a true celebration. Comments included:

“to do the service as a true celebration of life, you do have to gauge, its’ like whether or not you need a slightly more sombre take on things, but generally people do want a true celebration of life, people really do want to celebrate that person. My job is to unite everybody and impress, that as long as people do talk about the deceased, remembering the good and the bad, for example the real person, then they will all live on in their memories”. (Other celebrant 27)

“if they’re gonna celebrate life, you know it’s brilliant but it must also describe and acknowledge pain. They must be emotionally sincere, they mustn’t shirk facing, the magnitude of what's happened". (Other funeral professional 16)

**Remembrance**

Linked to celebration of the life is the simple act of remembering. Both ministers of religion and secular celebrants laid emphasis on remembering the life and personality of the deceased, although for secular celebrants there was little other content while the religious services expounded or referred to ideas of faith. Comments from families included:

“And you don’t go to these things for the sheer pleasure of them do you, you go cos ...To remember the person”. (Funeral 40)

“It’s one big section of what the funerals about, remembering”. (Funeral 18)

“the fact that there were people saying things that I thought were appropriate afterwards, to me and others to, amongst themselves just remembering Carol in a good way. (Funeral 25)
Both religious and non-religious key informants referred to the funeral as commemoration of important aspects and qualities of the deceased. What is important is the way in which people are remembered, not just that they are. Comments included:

“It’s more commemoration of the life And erm, what was important in the deceased’s life". (Christian celebrant 14)

“to help people to recall the qualities in that person who has died which are enduring”. (Christian celebrant 31)

“Even if you believe absolutely that you are dust when it’s over there is a sense in which how you are remembered is very important, that, that you don’t like the idea that people will think ill of you, or that they will discover horrible skeletons .... So there’s, there is something about being human that means you care about how you are remembered”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

Thanksgiving and gratitude

Another related function is to give thanks for the life lived. Most ministers of religion included thanksgiving to God for the life of the deceased in the service. Comments included:

“I say in my funeral service, err, you all have memories of and you offer those memories in thanksgiving to God, that how I put it”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“It’s a thanksgiving of what they have done for the Meeting”. (Christian celebrant 35)

One considered that younger people are developing a trend for regarding the funeral as a thanksgiving. He said:

“young people want to make it a Thanksgiving Service as opposed to just a funeral service And I, I think, I think young people actually are, are very in tune with their emotions when tragedy strikes”. (Christian celebrant 14)

For secular officiants the idea of thanksgiving was still sometimes present but expressed as thanks to the deceased. Sometimes these thanks were addressed to the deceased in the present tense. Some phrases used were:

“We thank him for being Dick and for being part of all your lives in the way he has". (Funeral 35)
“Philip we thank you, thank you for being part of our lives”. (Funeral 33)

“This would be an opportunity to come together with those who loved the deceased to show that they were glad that he had been part of their lives”. (Funeral 39)

For some families it was important to thank God for the life of the deceased. One said for him it was important:

“to give thanks for her life and how she made friends and worked hard for herself and other people and especially the immediate family”. (Funeral 6)

For another the service:

“was just a sort of a thanksgiving really and mum was very, very unkeen on the word memorial service and it ....it’s absolutely not memorial”. (Funeral 46)

This family felt that this was what the deceased would have wanted although it had not been discussed, because they had had a similar service for the deceased’s husband.

One family who had chosen a civil ceremony expressed their own gratitude explicitly in the newspaper announcement of the funeral. They included the phrase “He was a lovely man and we thank him for sharing his life with us”. (Funeral 36)

Paying respects

Some families referred to the funeral being for the mourners to pay their respects or honour the deceased. For example one said:

“it was showing respect to me mam in another respect”. (Funeral 34)

Key informants also commented on this function of the funeral. Comments included:

“It is a time to honour the dead and show that their loss is significant to those left behind.”

(Other funeral professional 15)

“it’s a time of gathering for everyone else to, to pay their respects to the family. Not only to the deceased but to the family”. (Funeral director 2)

“why do people go to a funeral? They go there to, you know you ask people and they say it’s to pay our respects”. (Other funeral professional 16)
One humanist key informant suggested that the funeral was important in showing:

“a respect for humanity and a respect for people being human isn’t being humanist being different from anything else”. She continued “I think it’s, it’s about acknowledging the humanity of the people who are still alive as well, that if we’re good human beings we have some respect for people who have been, and if you just let people drop dead and ignore them that somehow that to me shows (that you are not) a human”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

Two non-religious celebrants indicated in their introductory sentences that the funeral was to pay tribute to the deceased. For one of these, a humanist funeral, the widow said:

“it mattered terribly to me that it was a fitting tribute to him. And if it had not been I would have been very disappointed”. (Funeral 39)

6.3.2 Religious and sacramental purposes

A central task for the religious celebrants was to draw out the sacramental purposes of the funeral service. However, the families made little comment about these aspects even when they had chosen a religious funeral, although this man, exceptionally, placed the resurrection at the centre of the funeral:

It was just to sort of remember my mother and to highlight her faith and hope for the future. That death isn’t the end to things but there is the hope of a resurrection or restanding to life, that’s emphasised very much throughout the bible you see. So that’s the purpose of the whole service, it’s on a positive vein or a positive outlook for the future you see. (Funeral 23)

Commend to God

Many of the religious celebrants indicated that the funeral was in part to commend or commit the deceased to God. Anglican ministers emphasized the importance of commending the deceased to God as part of the service. Comments included:

“a prayer of commendation which is commending the person to God’s care”. (Christian celebrant 30)

“a main part, main point of a funeral, we need to commend the person who’s died to God…. I suppose from my Christian point of view the most important thing is to commend the person’s soul to God”. (Christian celebrant 29)
However another religious celebrant acknowledged that this had little relevance for a lot of bereaved families. She said:

“They want certain words read but they don’t want to commend to God’s mercy. They just sort of, they just …….They just want to commend the body to the ground. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes”. (Christian celebrant 34)

This was borne out by the families. None mentioned the commendation, although two families did comment that it was important to have a religious element to the service, “the Godly side” as one family put it (Funeral 34). Another said the funeral was:

“just to say goodbye and to have a religious service at the end of his life and know that you’ve done things in the way that they’re expected to be done”. (Funeral 40)

Proclaim faith/worship God

For religious celebrants the funeral must be an act of worship which honours God and is true to their faith. A Jewish informant said:

“we confirm publicly that our faith in God and in a just God has not been shaken, has not been damaged at all. Our faith is God is absolute, that he’s just and he is, and he does everything righteously, and we reflect on not what has God done to us but what have we done for God”. (Other religious informant 21)

Christians commented:

“As a Christian Minister I am there in in some ways, proclaiming the Christian faith in all this”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“In my mind as a Christian Minister I suppose my pur..., my purpose is to feel that I am also honouring God in it So as well as honouring the family I want to make sure that, in the way I conduct the service I am being faithful to my own Christian beliefs and my Christian faith”. (Christian celebrant 30)

“it would be Christian worship and that’s always for us Trinitarians where it would be worship of God the Father reflecting on the life of Jesus, his death and resurrection and how that leads us to God the Father and also the communities so speaking about the Holy Spirit within us and how that brings us together as a worshipping community. Now that’s the sort of ideal really, of each active worship.... parts of the worship I think would be proclamation of the Gospel and
that is speaking about eternal life and our hope for eternal life for the person who’s died”. (Christian celebrant 25)

Some Christian ministers considered the funeral to be an opportunity to spread the Christian message to those who would not normally be accessible. Comments included:

“I think we have a unique, as a Minister, we have a unique opportunity that you don’t have in, in any other service within Church. And in, in, you have an unique opportunity to reach the un-churched”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“I must admit as a Christian Minister of a kind, I’m I’m pretty selfish when it comes to the, having the opportunity to do something a bit evangelical”. (Christian celebrant 13)

However one minister said:

“people quite rightly in my opinion do not want to be preached at at a funeral. They don’t want to be, they don’t want to be told what to think or what to believe. Erm, and, and maybe people you know have, I’m sure some people have had experiences of that happening at funerals and maybe that, that put’s people off having a church funeral, but that’s not my intentions at a funeral.. To try and win converts”. (Christian celebrant 30)

For celebrants in the Catholic Christian tradition and Islam the funeral was important to pray for the dead. A Muslim explained:

“what we believe is that you know once somebody, one somebody dies you know everything they own is left behind. Their wealth won’t help them. Their families you know, it won’t benefit them in any way. The only thing that we can give that person who’s passed away is our prayers”. (Other religious informant 23)

**Move to afterlife**

Some celebrants referred to the funeral being to send the deceased to an afterlife but families did not express these ideas. The exception was a family with a spiritualist beliefs who talked of the funeral being “to mark Justin’s death, to wish him well on his journey, to let him know how much we loved him, the friends and family together around, and be there”. (Funeral 44)

Only a few key informants discussed the funeral as moving to the afterlife. Comments included:

“our liturgy tries to point them beyond that and to life beyond death”. (Christian celebrant 25)
“it’s true of course that that person is moving on”. (Christian celebrant 31)

“there’s also is there a not an issue of release of the spiritual soul? When the body is interred the soul returns to its rightful place. ... the soul returns to heaven”. (Other religious informant 21)

“we think that the funeral is also for the person who’s died, it’s, it’s an expression of, of, of their life. And a farewell into whatever they believe life beyond this world, you know, whether, whether that’s that life just comes to an end, whether there’s some ongoing consciousness or, or whether you know, there’s a resurrection or hope of resurrection. So we, we see, we see the, you know, that, that it’s not just for the people who are left, they’re, they’re there to, in a way do something for the person who’s died”. (Other funeral professional 17)

6.3.3 Emotional and psychological functions

These purposes appear strongly linked to the degree to which the bereaved were able to turn the funeral into a positive, meaningful event.

**Farewell**

The idea of the funeral being a goodbye to the deceased was emphasized in the service by most of the secular celebrants but not by most ministers of religion. At civil and humanist funerals there was sometimes repetition of the words goodbye and farewell in various contexts. The celebrants used the words in the committal. For example, one humanist said in the formal committal, “With respect you bid him farewell.” (Funeral 39)

However, saying goodbye was important to both families who had chosen religious services and those who preferred civil or humanist celebrants. One son finished his personal tribute with a look at coffin and the words “Goodbye Mum” (Funeral 37). Others commented at interview:

“I mean for me that was just, that was the final goodbye angel”. (Funeral 10)

“It’s not for the person that’s gone, the person that’s gone. Whichever way you believe in it is either not there or has gone to a better place so the funeral isn’t for them it’s for the people that’re left behind to give them a sense of being able to say goodbye”. (Funeral 37)

For some it was important that the goodbye was from the community, whether of family or friends:
“it’s to say goodbye isn’t it in a way, all her friends and everybody there”.

(Funeral 38)

“I think it was to say goodbye and to make sure that everybody attended had their say to say goodbye as well I suppose”. (Funeral 42)

“So it was nice to have the family together saying good bye to my mum”. (Funeral 17)

“I think it’s a way of saying goodbye to someone in a collective manner if you like. collectively. I think people do it individually in their own way in their own time at their own space but it’s a way to do it collectively. A bringing together to people”. (Funeral 19)

Another suggested that it was important that it sent the mourners away with good memories:

“Its purpose was to say goodbye to someone in the best possible way and I think it did that really well. It said goodbye and it had a reflection on her life, the happy times, and I think it sent people away with the right lasting memories of someone which I think is what they should do. You know you remember the good times but it gives you the chance to just say farewell and you know pay your respects really. And I think it did all of those things”. (Funeral 22)

For some families the funeral allowed them to move on. One said:

“You’ve still got your memories and things like that, but you’ve got to look ahead, not all the time, but you’ve got to go on don’t you, because if you don’t you’d just be in a permanent sort of, state of depression all the time”. (Funeral 29)

For another it was a laying to rest of a lady who had been ill for a long time, she was at peace and there could be a form of closure. A daughter commented:

“it was just, that’s it, you could draw a line there and that’s it, finished”. (Funeral 45)

For others it provided a finalization for the mourners in general, a marking of the end of the deceased’s life. One said:

“it’s functional for the people that came because some people feel cheated. I myself have done that, if somebody’s just had a private funeral full stop you feel you haven’t actually completed the process of you know life and death as it were”. (Funeral 46)
As in the funeral services attended, saying goodbye was not a purpose referred to by ministers of religion. One reason may be that for those with religious beliefs death is not the end and therefore not the end of a relationship but a time for change in the nature of that relationship. One minister said he tried to:

“help them to understand that the relationship with the deceased is an on-going relationship”. (Christian celebrant 31)

For funeral directors and non-religious celebrants it was emphasized that saying goodbye was important and that it should be in an appropriate manner. Comments included:

“I believe that there should a committal a time when you say good-bye”. (Other celebrant 28)

“For a family to be able to say their farewells to a loved one in an appropriate manner that they see fit”. (Humanist celebrant 19)

“The main purpose, well I think it’s, the main purpose is to give the family their chance to say goodbye”. (Funeral director 8)

“They can say their final farewells in, in a way that feels appropriate for them and appropriate for the person who’s died”. (Other funeral professional 17)

For one humanist it was important that the service was more than saying goodbye. She said:

“I think to some people it matters a lot that it’s more than just saying goodbye and I think the meaning, a lot of meaning is about this person isn’t with us anymore, we have, we’re going to say goodbye, we’re not going to see them again. It’s sad, we want to express our sadness and we want to remember them in a good way”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

For other celebrants the saying goodbye at the funeral allows closure and the beginning of a healing process:

“First of all of saying goodbye. The, the closure that can allow the healing process to begin for those that are there regardless of whether they’re blood relatives, family, friends, work compatriots, anything like that, it’s closure. To me that is the main thing is closure. Psychologically there’s proof of this with the, with the different studies that are on, we need to see closure”. (Other celebrant 36)
“It is an ending or a closure isn’t it for them, and they want, want it to be done in the best possible way”. (Christian celebrant 12)

“It’s, it’s a point of, of, of, of closure. That’s very important. There’s a point of closure isn’t there? That’s very important. Often for a lot of reasons it may not be must the fact that the person has died and it’s the closure of their life, but if there has been suffering there has been protracted illness err then, clear, clearly there is closure on that, not only for the one who’s passed but also for the family, bereaved yes, those who have been bereaved as well”. (Other religious informant 21)

Support and comfort for the bereaved

Both religious and secular celebrants included in their introductory words the idea that the funeral was to give support and comfort to the bereaved. Religious celebrants referred to support from God, both in prayers for those that mourn and explicit references such as the description of Psalm 23 as “a song of comfort in difficult times and trust in a loving God” (Funeral 6). Another minister said that God is a refuge and a strength. “Help us to hear your word so that loneliness is eased and hope reawakened” (Funeral 40). Both religious and secular celebrants thanked the congregation for their support to the family in attending the funeral. Some added comments such as at Funeral 22 where the minister said we need people around us at difficult times, we need to be there for each other. The idea of supporting the bereaved is stronger in some other faiths. For example at the Jewish funeral visitors began to arrive to offer comfort to the mourners mid-morning for a early afternoon funeral. This is followed at the graveside by offering ritual words of comfort. A comment was:

“the congregation recognises you’re in mourning and, and you are recognising them and they’re there for support... that you’re comforted by all the mourners of Zion, so it’s like the congregation are making a special blessing in you”. (Funeral 45)

Later still mourners meet at the house for the Shiva mourning period, bringing more food which “actually is really a week of community support”.

Families commented on the comfort that the presence of friends and family brought, taking this as a recognition of the regard in which the deceased and the bereaved were held. Comments included:

“Knowing that you know, people had taken time off work to, to come there. That does bring a great comfort”. (Funeral 36)
“It’s the reactions, people, how caring people were when you haven’t seen them for such a long time but there was that thought for yer”. (Funeral 37)

“I haven’t seen him for what 20 odd years but, we kind of helped each other through it”. (Funeral 20)

“Not particularly about the funeral as such, the thing that helped me most was (sister) and (another sister) and all my kids”. (Funeral 5)

“I was surprised at the amount of support we had ….. so the fact is that they all though she was lovely and everything, but to do that and then come to a funeral as well surprised me and and the cards we’ve got as, as (brother) said it’s like having a, you know different face. She had the community face and the family face kind of thing, two different sides”. (Funeral 45)

Key informants both from a religious and secular background thought that the funeral has a role in supporting the bereaved, and bringing healing.

“I think the main purpose is to bring a sense of hope, comfort and reassurance to the family”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“I think obviously one of the purposes to support the people who are affected by the death”. (Other religious informant 23)

“it is part of the healing process. You see people, it helps, it helps people heal a little bit, but not fully of course, it’s, it’s, it’s you’ll have seen when you’ve been in the services it’s, it’s quite like a play really. And you see it play out all the time. People as they’re going in are absolutely distraught, but generally when they’re coming out, obviously they’re very upset but you see, a relief, like a part of the healing process has started and they’re like, they’ve got over that obstacle of the funeral and they feel so much better”. (Other funeral professional 1)

Some ministers of religion referred at interview to God’s comfort and support for the bereaved in His love and mercy. Comments included:

“we need to work with the funeral family, in supporting and consoling them and I as a Christian Priest need to assure people of God’s love for all people and God welcoming people into the world to come”. (Christian celebrant 29)
“so that would be an important thing to do you know emphasising the Mercy of God really and then part of the Mercy of God would be bringing consolation, comfort to the family and friends”. (Christian celebrant 25)

Both religious and non religious key informants saw the funeral as a way of helping the bereaved to cope with their loss and find comfort and meaning in the death of their loved one. Comments included:

“I think it’s, it’s my role to sort of gather things together for them, to try and help them in a way, make sense of what’s happened”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“from a families point of view, reflecting something of the, of the loss that they feel, which would include talking about the person who’s died, and, and, and helping them to verbalise in that sort of formal setting what their feelings about their loss are. And through that to bring some element of comfort”. (Christian celebrant 30)

It’s an attempt to deal with the mystery of death. It’s a ritual, a coming together, mutual support, prayer to a God if they believe in God and it’s to try and give meaning to it. It’s dealing with it....Yes, and the loss”. (Christian celebrant 33)

“to make death emotionally manageable, which of course is what a religious funeral does, and what any funeral tries to do, to make what appears to be a catastrophe endurable”. (Other funeral professional 16)

Both religious and non religious informants emphasized the importance of the mutual support provided by the mourners.

“to bring the family together during a, a, a you know a real time, a traumatic time for the family”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“I think the first and most important thing is the sense of community that is established at a funeral because these are relatives, they’re friends, sometimes lifelong friends, they’re neighbours, they’re people who are concerned for all sorts of reasons and the sheer coming together is a very, very powerful statement, and support and participation in the mystery of what’s going on”. (Christian celebrant 33)
“To bring the family and friends of the deceased together to mourn as a group ... I think the main purpose for all the family and friends to come together to gain strength from each other ... and it’s’ it’s really to sort of surround and it’s to protect, and help and support the chief mourners”. (Other celebrant 27)

“It is a time when friends gather to support family and those closest to the deceased. It is a time to focus on the relationship you shared and an opportunity to share your memories with others. Sharing lessens the pain and helps you to feel less isolated”. (Other funeral professional 16)

6.3.4 Social and community functions
The social and social ritual functions of the funeral created a further tier of meaning.

Send off
The other side to the coin of the funeral being a chance for the bereaved to say goodbye, was the chance to give the deceased a good departing. Families said that the funeral was to give the deceased a send off, the last thing that they could do for him/her. Comments included:

“it was more to give mum a proper sort of send off”. (Funeral 37)

“we gave mum a traditional send off which is what she would have wanted”. (Funeral 19)

“I think it went really well and it was a really good send off for him really. Something that you know really proud to have done it for him”. (Funeral 27)

“You know I think everybody ‘s entitled to a decent send off, it might be a strange way to put but I think that they are, you know the wishes of that person, if they’ve lived all their life”. (Funeral 17)

Both religious and non religious celebrants recognized that people were looking for a good send off although one humanist thought that this was more when people had no strong beliefs in an afterlife. Comments included:

“They’re looking to give somebody a good send off”. (Christian celebrant 31)
“when they have these photographs and other things that were special to them both the deceased and the family I think they, they’re making a statement of, well, you know, we want to give them a good send off”. (Christian celebrant 14)

“they came in with a list, as they put it a list of demands of what they thought mum would want, which would make mums day a perfect day a perfect send off”. (Funeral director 3)

“people who don’t profess to being religious then their final closing chapter in someone’s life is very important and they like to give a good send off”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

Rite of passage
Some respondents went further than ideas of a send-off, consciously identifying the funeral as a marker event in the cycle of life and death. One son said the funeral was:

“a rite of passage, its recognition of a life lived and a life gone and very important, it’s very important, funerals are, they will change over the years but the significance I think will always be well, out of anthropological studies the first things we find in ancient ancestors is recognition of the dead”. (Funeral 18)

Both religious and non religious key informants also considered that the funeral was a rite of passage. Comments included:

“It is a time when family and friends can use ceremonial rites of passage to commemorate the life of the person who has died and helps to ensure they are remembered for all the right reasons”. (Other funeral professional 15)

“I think also the purpose of having a funeral is marking the passage, rite of passage all those kind of things”. (Christian celebrant 13)

“I see it as an important part of the whole mourning process anyway in terms of people’s mental health, but as a piece of what society does”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

“It’s one of life’s cycle of events... Just like dying is. Yeah, it’s like, it’s like we celebrate birth in one way, err coming of age, you know bar mitzvah, bar mitzvah, marriage, various stages of life. This is a stage in life which has its particular way of being observed, during the funeral and after”. (Other religious informant 21)
“we all know it’s gonna happen but when you’re a part of a funeral it really brings it home and it reminds you. It’s a constant reminder that life isn’t forever and sometimes you know it acts as something which pushes you towards doing more good”. (Other religious informant 23)

Social occasion

It was clear even in the small funerals that the bringing together of a wider community than the closest bereaved created additional meaning. Some of the funerals seemed to fulfil an important social function. Although at most funerals mourners exchanged conversation while waiting for the cortege to arrive, in some this was subdued while in others there was quite a buzz of conversation. At the traveller funeral the chatting did not stop when the cortege arrived but continued throughout the service, even when the priest asked for quiet. At the Jehovah’s Witness funeral before the service people chatted informally with music in the background and there was more chatting among the party afterwards before travelling to the cemetery. Similarly there was audible conversation before the Church of England Funerals 26 and 41, the latter over the organ in the background. Funeral 41 was one of the few when researchers attended the post funeral reception. Almost all the mourners went to the hospitality suite for a sandwich and cake buffet. The widow sat in a corner and mourners queued to give their personal commiserations and kisses. The mourners then tucked in. While there was talk about the deceased, particularly about things people had not known about him, much was catching up on matters of common interest to the various groups.

Families commented at interview that the funeral had provided an opportunity to bring together family and friends who seldom saw each other and that this provided support for the most immediately bereaved. Comments included:

“So, no it was well attended, and just lovely to meet people afterwards again And at the end I met everybody and had a little chat and a cuddle with everybody And they were all so nice”. (Funeral 40)

“It’s such a horrible time isn’t it but it’s the only time, half the time you ever get to see your family”. (Funeral 5)

“It was just nice to have everybody together out of respect to my mum. Because she’d always wanted that anyway, you know my mam had her mum who was very family orientated and like I say when my Nana passed away everybody just seemed to drift apart. Because my Nana was like the, the main link in the chain. She kept everybody together. Then when my Nana
passed away then the daughters just drifted away. And the fact that my mum died brought everybody back together again. It was nice”. (Funeral 17)

“Because last time I saw them I’d have been about 9 or 10 so my mum’s family wasn’t a very close family. So yeah. So it was nice to actually see them, her family. So and it was also, I mean but more importantly it was nice, you know kind words you know”. (Funeral 19)

Two families commented that bringing family and friends together for the funeral had mended rifts in relationships. Comments were:

“I did it for our Arthur you know, being nice to our (brother), you know and we did this together. And that’s what I’ll remember. The first time in 20 odd years we kind of communicated for a bit”. (Funeral 20)

“It’s helped me mend a friendship which had been damaged many years ago and we were particularly good friends of a couple (names) and there was a disagreement over an issue not related to the four of us indirectly but anyway, we fell out of friendship”. (Funeral 25)

Secular celebrants commented that the funeral fulfils a function in allowing the social group to accommodate the loss of a member and readjust to a different relationship with the deceased as well as in remembering that member – a sort of way of moving on corporately. Comments were:

“I think there’s an element of it of the family re-grouping by all coming together at the funeral they accept that perhaps an elder figure not always an elder figure but an elder figure in the family has now gone and they all have to re-group”. (Other celebrant 28)

“the family and the friends have a, a threshold where everything has changed but nobody really knows exactly what the future is going to be in terms of the way that relationships shift and your relationship with the person who’s died shifts and expands really in a way”. (Other funeral professional 17)

“we had one particular family where you know mum was sort of quite a matriarch. She died, everybody always gathered at her house. You know, that had been the sort of family tradition so we had the funeral at her house. Families can find their, you know to talk to families they’ve got ways that they do things and it might be about the look of something or the music or the gathering afterwards or the food that they have afterwards, you know, we still see that as part
of the funeral is everybody gathering and having you know, cake or steak and kidney pie”. (Other funeral professional 17)

Disposal of the body
The function of disposing of the body was also mentioned as one of the purposes of the funeral. It did not appear that this in itself was linked to meaning-making, although the rituals accompanying the disposal and burial do appear to be meaningful. For a few families the funeral was something that they had to do rather than fulfilling a positive function. Comments included:

“it seems to be something that you have to do, I’m not quite sure legally if it has to be done or not, I don’t know. If somebody passes away do they have to have a funeral?” (Funeral 12)

“It’s not helpful, it’s just something what has to be done”. (Funeral 16)

“I mean, you’ve got to have a funeral, haven’t you?” (Funeral 33)

Both religious and non religious informants referred to the practical function of the funeral in disposing of the body and ensuring that the disposal is appropriate. Comments included:

“The main purpose is again in my eyes only the main purpose of the funeral is the disposal of the body”. (Other celebrant 28)

“It is the time of a dignified disposal of a person’s physical remains and a time to acknowledge their final resting place”. (Other funeral professional 15)

“The other main purpose is to dispose of the body cleanly and efficiently”. (Other celebrant 27)

“it is to secure from a legal and a social and a spiritual setting the disposal of remains, of people who’ve died”. (Christian celebrant 31)

“We need to deal very respectfully, which the body, which is left behind”. (Christian celebrant 29)

“there’s the practical element of disposing of the remains”. (Christian celebrant 25)
For the Jewish Orthodox the disposal of the body is part of Jewish law in that the body is still regarded as special and it must be buried respectfully in the presence of a Jewish Community. A comment was:

“It’s dealing with the physical remains. Physical remains rather than the, the life of the person, the story of the person, that carries on. ... The body returns to its original place, we came from dust and we return to dust... It means the soul and the body are not at peace, at rest until after the funeral”. (Other religious informant 21)

Two non religious informants had come across families who did not see the need for a funeral service but merely of a disposal of the body. Comments were:

“a lot of people do think that they have to have a funeral although very often nowadays, not very often but fairly frequently now you get a response err well so and so just wanted to be got rid of you know in the, in the back garden”. (Other funeral professional 15)

“others it’s a bit of a ritual that they have to go through and the deceased would rather....that’s it and bury them in the back garden”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

6.3.5 Impact of music

The significance of the music chosen has already been identified as part of the quest to imbue the funeral with meaning. In the actual funeral, it was frequently a trigger for emotion to be expressed. Even where mourners were generally composed, listening to the music seemed often to be accompanied by quiet tears and production of tissues. Similar emotion was less apparent where mourners participated in singing rather than listening to CDs. This may be concerned with the active participation or may be rather related to the more personal content of the recorded music. Either way, the active engagement with music appeared to intensify the meaning for the mourners.

Key informants also commented on the role of music in releasing emotion:

“The music, whatever you have is, is the most important or equally important as everything else, because that is when people will cry, at that point, a piece of music”. [Christian celebrant 12]

“music is incredibly important to people and, and without understanding that fully, I accept it, I mean I find the music we play at funerals you know is incredibly moving, and if I’m moved they
must be incredibly moved and it feels it does say it all in a way that words never can because we’re not really taking in words anyway at a funeral”. (Other funeral professional 16)

6.4 Taking meaning

There is considerable evidence of families taking meaning from the prescribed elements of the service and the way in which things were done. However, this did not apply uniformly across all aspects.

6.4.1 The eulogy

Great efforts were made in some cases to get the history of life events right. This was much appreciated by the families, many of whom said that the part of the funeral that they remembered most was the celebrant talking about the deceased. One daughter-in-law said:

“What I can remember was (the minister) did marvellous job. He painted a lovely picture of Betty and I can just remember it being you know, just a good, a good summary of Betty’s life and you know, as I say he did a good job in summarising her and her life really”. (Funeral 22)

A daughter said,

“I just remember it all about you know talking about my mother and her life”. (Funeral 24)

Another said,

“to my mind it’s absolutely crucial”. (Funeral 45)

For another daughter however the address made less impact. She said:

“you know I can’t remember half he said. It’s a complete blank. I can remember saying that, I can remember him saying about going to pictures when she used to go on her own cos she loved pictures like, you know and she liked books”. (Funeral 11)

Many celebrants made efforts to provide an indication of character, generally by telling stories about the deceased, which was appreciated by some but others were less pleased. A daughter said:

“I think it more, from what people said, it more just reminded people of her character.... I wanted it more on her life really more than her character”. (Funeral 16)

Some of the stories had humorous elements, introduced sometimes to show that the deceased “liked a laugh” or “was always joking” but also with the specific intent in some cases to lighten the
The touches of humour did provoke ripples of laughter in many funerals even though there were some where there was little response. At Funeral 35 the father and mother agreed that the address gave a good picture, saying:

“Father - Yes it did because Dick was a very cheerful fella.
Mother – Yeah. He was a quiet....
Father– He was a very quiet personal chap, but there was a lot of laughter”.

A widow thought that the touches of humour made her husband seem more real. She said:

“And you know, little things like that that you just think yeah it just reflected on the very human side of it, you know. It was, even though it was his funeral he’s still a person”. (Funeral 8)

There was frequently reference to particular family members and friends by name which was generally valued although a cause for criticism when the names were wrong. One sister said:

“And that’s what I thought, that she should be mentioned because she’d been a very good friend to her”. (Funeral 38)

Another sister whose name was wrongly mentioned said:

“A bit naughty isn’t it. It’s not ... yeah. I mean Ok he was very you know very apologetic at the end but it shouldn’t happen”. (Funeral 12)

Celebrants interviewed varied in their approach to the eulogy. One civil celebrant said:

“you’ll note all my tributes start off generally, when they were born, where they were born and I do tend to do a bit of a biography at the beginning”. (Other celebrant 27)

However a minister of religion said that families sometimes wanted a factual biography but others:

“are quite clear that they don’t want that because they say everybody there knows all that anyway, we don’t need telling that”. (Christian celebrant 30)

Some referred to their ways of dealing with the fact that they frequently did not know the deceased. One said:

“I usually start, when I’m doing the tribute, if I’ve been asked to do the tribute I invariably start by saying I didn’t know Jo personally. Or I’d only met Jo a couple of times so I’m actually the least qualified person to say anything. But what I’m saying I’m saying on behalf of the
family and I hope that what I do say will ring true to you and will reflect what Jo was actually like for you”. (Christian celebrant 30)

Another said:

“I tend to say I have met, X, Y and Z to learn something about this person and from them my impression is ….. this person …….. So it gives my personal impression, which actually makes it more personal to other people I think”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

At an Orthodox Jewish funeral there will be:

“a eulogy, it’s about the person, it’s a eulogy about the person. We always, we conclude at the time that this is nothing compared to what the man, what the person did, and obviously we will carry on speaking about the deceased, for many days, weeks, months to come. The Rabbi will try and mention all the family and, and together, it’s a sort reflection just covering the basic, yes, yes it’s introducing who this person is if anyone doesn’t know”. (Other religious informant 21)

Some celebrants emphasised the importance of getting the eulogy right. One said:

“obviously the tribute is the main thing to get right by speaking to the family, interviewing the family and being available to the family and various different members of the family, I feel the tribute is the main thing in the funeral that gives people comfort”. (Other celebrant 28)

6.4.2 Readings

For families where a Biblical reading had been chosen for them, it had little meaning. One woman said:

“it is traditional obviously readings and its one that a lot of people know…So. And it’s one that mum would’ve known”. (Funeral 19)

Another said that it had been helpful but because it was “nice” rather than from any religious significance. She said:

“it gave it that bit of a religious side, you know. The, it wasn’t overpowering again, it was just, it was just something that was nicely done”. (Funeral 40)
A bereaved son said:

“Well I remember if from school, it brought me back to being in school assembly about 35 years ago and so as much as anything it brought me back to that”. (Funeral 6)

Another reading frequently chosen was the passage from St John concerning the way to God through Christ who has gone to prepare a place. Again it was the minister who chose this reading, both Anglican and Free Church ministers. Some ministers introduced the reading either when suggesting it at a pre-funeral meeting or at the funeral itself by words of interpretation, that it offers comfort (Funeral 17, 32) or hope (Funeral 6). One Church of England minister said that the mourners could take comfort from the picture of heaven that Jesus paints. There will be room for all who accept the invitation to go there. It is a place where they can be reunited with others who have gone before in the presence of Jesus. Jesus reassures us that he will come and take us to that place when it is time to go. She continued by referring to the universality of help from God - it does not matter whether you go to church to accept the offer of Jesus help at a time like this (Funeral 17).

However the bereaved son at this funeral did not take in at all this message of Christian hope. He said:

“I don’t know cos I think I was a little bit, I didn’t really listen to a lot of it, I was more focused on the actual, I think I was focused on my mum’s coffin and flowers and trying to keep everybody together, if you noticed I was holding, my thirteen year old behind me, I was holding his hand”.

However at another funeral where another Church of England minister had referred to the reading as expressing a looking forward to when the mourners would be reunited with the deceased, another bereaved son had listened to the reading, felt that the modern language in which it was read made the message more accessible and remembered that;

“It talks about being shown the way?...How can we know the way, and Jesus saying.....

Interviewer: The way is through me.

Son: Yes. Yes that was, it was nicely, nicely worded and just in an accessible way....Just a bit more conversational than the sort of rigid text that it might have been years ago”. (Funeral 6)

Neither of these families, nor another son who commented that this reading had been “appropriate”, had any strong religious beliefs although the Funeral 17 man took his son to church on the Sunday after the funeral at the invitation of the minister.
The 1 Corinthians passage about love was used by two Church of England and the Salvation Army minister. One Church of England minister specifically related the reading to the deceased’s love for his wife and his love for his fellow men shown by his work in the community. The daughter in law interviewed in relation to the Salvation Army funeral said that the readings the minister had chosen were:

“comforting and they were uplifting and they give you, they give you the strength to, to believe that there is something higher than this, how can I put it into words, I mean I do and I think most people, most people unless you don’t have any faith at all, you do think that there has to be something more than this and I think he just, I think he just chose the right, the right verses for, for that you know, just to say that yes, although you’re here to mourn the death it’s, it’s just moving on like he said you’re promoted to a higher ground and I do, I do, I do believe that”. (Funeral 22)

Key informants commented that families with little religious commitment sometimes found this reading helpful. One said:

“They absolutely love the words and they say that expresses their loved one to a tee, I would like to include that. Then I have to say well, you are aware that it does come from scripture, it’s from the bible. And they say yes, but those words we want to embrace”. (Christian celebrant 34)

Another said:

“So they’d chosen a reading, that lovely version of Corinthians from St Paul And he broke it down into verses and he referred each verse to his father”. (Christian celebrant 13)

The passages from Isaiah 25 and St Matthew were chosen for Roman Catholic funerals, again by the priests. Isaiah was chosen for the priest’s funeral but for the other two the families took little meaning from the readings. One son said of the reading that it was:

“for me mum....it wasn’t for me, wasn’t for me brother or any of the family, because we are but biggest lapsed Catholics that there are”. (Funeral 31)

Key informants commented that families seldom had ideas about bible readings. Some offered a choice of passages. Some chose themselves from a number of readings which they thought relevant. One felt that after meeting the family she was often guided in her choice. She said:
“nearly always, either when I’m with the family or when I come back home to prepare the right passage seems to come to mind, and it’s almost... And so I feel it’s almost given. You know I feel that in some sense God’s direct, directing me towards the right passage”.

(Christian celebrant 29)

6.4.3 Satisfaction

One striking theme from the post-funeral interviews is their reflection on whether or not they achieved what they had set out to do. Interviewees tend to repeat one phrase over and over: ‘it was nice’; ‘it was about right’; ‘it was lovely’; ‘that was OK’ (no respondents have expressed dissatisfaction; even where there was a minor disappointment this is seen as subsumed within the larger whole). The data show that in the interviews families mention the word “nice” 313 times, “good” 103 times, “right” 61 times and “appropriate” 35 times in the context of views on elements of the funeral or of the funeral as a whole. This overall sense of satisfaction is displayed even when the bereaved person admits that they cannot remember much of the detail or actual elements of the service. It seems to be inextricably linked to the extent to which they were able to take meaning from the event.

In terms of the funeral as a whole, many of those interviewed commented favourably. Examples were:

“And, no I think it just, I say, funerals aren’t nice but it couldn’t have been nicer. Not a thing. It just, it just went, well as I hoped it would do. It just was perfect, if funerals can be perfect”. (Funeral 40)

“Yeah, but you look back and it was a nice, lovely day”. (Funeral 42)

“I think everything went as well as we would like it to you know, because it was, everything was good”. (Funeral 5)

“I would think it’d probably just be the whole, the whole package, the whole day. The fact that a lot of people turned up, the fact that (celebrant) did a good job, the fact that everybody that was there took away their own happy memories as well as sad memories. Yeah and I think nothing, nothing specific just everything about it I think. They’ll always stay with me as a day that, as funerals go, and it was just, it was just as nice as it possibly could’ve been I felt.
Yeah and I think that as I say nothing specific just as a whole. Yeah it was quite good. I was pleased with how it went. Yeah I was”. (Funeral 8)

Areas of satisfaction included:

• As planned

“it was as I planned it. It was simple.” (Funeral 33)

“Oh, yes, it was a good funeral, you know it was all done in the way I, you know, I wanted it”. (Funeral 38)

• Right for the mourners

“On the whole I thought it went off pretty smooth from our point of view– and, err, that was the main thing of the day. Cos we were dreading it coming. But it, we wanted it, we wanted it right for the family and everybody else”. (Funeral 35)

• Right for the deceased

“we were thinking we’re gonna give him, we’re gonna do it the right way”. (Funeral 42).

“And I’ve tried to do it basically the way that I thought that she would have wanted it. You know she hasn’t been back yet to tell me that I haven’t so I must have done something right”. (Funeral 17)

“I think the overall memory was that it went well and by well, I mean it went as intended and I feel it was the sort of funeral which was appropriate for my dad and his character and personality”. (Funeral 18)

“So, I think it’s just trying to find the most appropriate way of saying good bye what would be that person’s wishes”. (Funeral 19)

“It was a really good send off for him really. Something that you know really proud to have done it for him so”. (Funeral 27)
“She would be happy with how we did everything and in the past where we’ve been to other family funerals it’s what we would have done and just keep everything quite normal and in the way that we’d always done it”. (Funeral 6)

**Satisfaction with funeral directors and celebrants**

Within the funeral the main subject for satisfaction comments is the way in which professionals - funeral directors and celebrants - carried out their role/tasks. Comments included:

“I was happy with everything and happy with the funeral directors and (celebrant), you know I couldn’t fault it really. I thought it was you know I thought it was quite nice and I was glad that it went off all right and everybody said that they enjoyed the service and that and I thought oh well that’s good you know”. (Funeral 24)

“I would say that (celebrant)’ part of it was good but it was just a general nice feel about the whole service, it just went very well organised, the undertakers were extremely good, couldn’t fault them one little bit. We had a good congregation”. (Funeral 25)

With funeral directors satisfaction relates largely to the service provided in terms of taking some of the burden off the bereaved, doing a ‘nice job’ aesthetically.

“Everything, everybody has been real nice, real friendly, real efficient, say there were no worries at all once you started speaking to people. Everything would be organised, everything would be, any questions would be answered. ...As I say, everything went so nicely, everything went, you were so well looked after you didn’t ......” (Funeral 29)

“Because they was they was brilliant. And the staff and all that lot was understanding and you know, I which helped me, you know I did I felt they made a good job of it”. (Funeral 20)

“They come over as being very sincere which adds to it, you know what I mean, which makes it even better, whereas, you know, we have been to funerals in the past where all the attendants disappear, they are all having a smoke and a laugh and a joke, which is not what you want to be seeing when you are at a funeral, especially if it is somebody that belongs to you. But, yes, I mean, I actually told, went to (funeral director) and said to him, will you thank you lads because it was brilliant and I thought that it really was good, and an excellent service that they provided. So, yes that was the thing I remember most, that was the, the thing that impressed me more than anything to be quite honest”. (Funeral 31)
With celebrants satisfaction relates to creating the right ambience, striking the right note in terms of reflecting the essence of the person who has died and also correctly interpreting what the bereaved wanted/needed from the funeral service. Clergy tend to focus more, through the prayers, on the comfort and sustaining of the bereaved. One or two families have commented that this was ‘nice’.

- A “nice” service
  “very nice, she did a really nice, I mean the number of people that came up to us and said how nice the service had been. You know so she did a very good job”. (Funeral 5)
  “I liked the way (minister) lifted the occasion, it’s a very sad occasion and I liked the way he lifted it. I thought it was very good”. (Funeral 21)

- The “right” tone
  “I was very pleased with how it went on the whole and the way the overall tone of (minister)’s style was great it was just right for my dad. So, and there were lots of comments about that by the way that, along the lines of, you know, oh he was a nice minister wasn’t he, very down to earth and, didn’t feel intimidated cos, my family a lot of them are no church especially working class families find church ministers very intimidating. But they didn’t feel that with him so”. (Funeral 18)
  “And I think he found just the right, you know just the right things to say that sum that up without being too you know, too deep”. (Funeral 22)

- Conveying the person of the deceased
  “And I think she summed it up quite well in what she said”. (Funeral 10)
  “the way he brought in all the things he had asked us about and that we told him, yeah, he made it sound ok”. (Funeral 29)
  “the way that she spoke about me father...I thought it was real, really nice”. (Funeral 36)
  “he did marvellous job. He painted a lovely picture of Betty and I can just remember it being you know, just a good, a good summary of Betty’s life and you know, as I say he did a good job in summarising her and her life really”. (Funeral 22)
“The good bits, was some of the nice things that he said. And the fact that everybody enjoyed the service, you know. All the people that spoke to me about it they all said it’s summed him up. You know he said some really nice things about, about Mark and just remembered some good times as well as the sadness of the day”. (Funeral 8)

- Comforting the bereaved

“I found that really nice and I’m sure (widower) did you know because you just think, it’s kind of a special thing to say because you feel yeah, promoted to glory, it just sums it up doesn’t it. I think it’s just a really nice comforting thing and you think yes, yeah they’ve gone to a better place and they’ve gone somewhere where nothing can hurt them now”. (Funeral 22)

- The Christian message

“So it’s about bringing up, it’s about bringing up the question, if you like. In minimal terms a question of hope of resurrection, of resurrection hope whilst acknowledging diversity. And I thought in his way he did that quite well”. (Funeral 18)

Other sources of satisfaction

Other areas for satisfaction mentioned by several families included the burial location, the chapel, use of candles, the coffin, rituals, the ability to participate, prayers, readings and times for reflection. However those mentioned by more than ten families were:

The numbers of mourners, seeing those with whom they had lost touch and the respect this showed for the deceased:

“I thought it was nice that they all turned up. I’ve seen a lot of people that I haven’t seen for many years”. (Funeral 21)

“I think there would be as many as that. Yeah and the cards that we got, you know by and large pretty well represented all the people who were there and it was just very very nice overall”. (Funeral 25)

“And that was nice, you know, but a lot of her friends came, a lot of her older friends came who hadn’t seen her for a long time, you know but still kept in touch with her by Christmas cards and phone calls and things like that, a lot of them turned up as well, so that was nice”. (Funeral 5)
Flowers:

“it did look really nice. I went and actually took a photograph of them. I went back the next
day to the crematorium and they’d laid them all out so I just rearranged them, cos they put
them like in a small square and I just rearranged them and took a couple of photographs of
them you know just so that we got them pictures there of the flowers, so yeah I was very
pleased with them to be honest”. (Funeral 17)

“we actually went to the flower shop and we started asking and looking through. It was an
open heart wreath which I thought was very appro
priate, and it looked very nice”. (Funeral 31)

“It was just plain white and it was beautiful spray actually, it was just what I thought it would
be, it was just like it was in the brochure, they had done it really nice and it just sat on the
coffin and it just looked lovely, it did look really nice”. (Funeral 8)

Good memories and elements which helped to trigger them:

“he put them on a slide show, and so, we just had, we did, the eldest daughter did a play list of
sort of nice music but not morbid but of all different ages. Some of it very modern. Yeah, so it
was a good mix for, there was something for everybody. We just had the, the slide show
playing on a projection TV. Cos that was really good cos that jogs a lot of memories”. (Funeral
37)

“I’ve learnt how to do PowerPoint by doing my mum’s because basically I thought it would be a
nice thing to do. We had all those lovely photos, my mum was very attractive and we had
photos from when she was baby until just before she died and so basically it took 24 hours I
stayed up through the night doing it”. (Funeral 18)

“You know it was nice to, she had lots of memorabilia and photographs etc, that we hadn’t see
like, she had a picture of me mum’s marriage you know, wedding photographs and never seen
them, ever”. (Funeral 19)

Music:

“It was a nice song to go out to wasn’t it, it was quite long as well, so you could walk out to it”.
(Funeral 37)
“There was er, ‘Your love’s lifting me higher’ and, that was going in, and ‘Happy Days’ on the way out. Real good”. (Funeral 20)

“I wouldn’t even have thought that it was religious but you know I just thought it sounded nice didn’t it, you know I mean it’s better than something like Bon Jovi blasting out, do you know what I mean. And I mean even don’t it, I mean I did know Morning has Broken but even though I didn’t know it I just thought it was sort of peaceful and nice you know what I mean”.
(Funeral 24)

“I thought it was extremely nice music and I was pleased that it was played because everyone seemed to respond in the same way, I think the same thing about it that it was particularly nice”. (Funeral 25)

Poems:

“It was different to the one I thought she’d chosen, but I liked it, it was nice”. (Funeral 33)

“I think the poems were …….. I think it, it was nice, broke up the narrative And it was, it was nice sort of poem, it was very him wasn’t it?” (Funeral 42)

“I think it was a very nice poem wasn’t it and, very its suited Arthur didn’t it?” (Funeral 20)

Post funeral reception:

“Oh very helpful, very helpful. Because that’s the you know relaxed moment, it’s all over now lets you know start over and carry on now. And it’s good to catch up with people that you haven’t seen for a long time, friends and family”. (Funeral 10)

“it was very nice. It was very nice, yeah yeah yeah yeah. The hard part I think had obviously been done by then. So no it was very nice”. (Funeral 12)

“So but once it was all over with and we got back and everything then we started to talk and it was a lot more, you know we talked about different things about Don and it was a lot nicer. So. It was more appropriate yeah”. (Funeral 27)
“a lot of family came back as well you know so it was nice. And especially you know, if it’s a bit far flung you know, so but it was nice, you know we had, I know it sounds silly but we had a good time, you know”. (Funeral 5)

Treatment of the body:

“Yes she looked alright, yeah she looked nice. Yeah yeah”. (Funeral 11)

“I just wanted her to look nice, cos people was going to be seeing her, because I know that if she ever did go anyway she liked to look nice”. (Funeral 17)

“And they made an excellent job of it. Er, with a nice light blue satin sort of gown and things like that. Er, so the whole thing was very well prepared”. (Funeral 23)

“we took some, we took her nightie and a little cardigan type thing and it was in a turquoise blue and they found some real pale green satin for inside the coffin and they said it matched really nice and she looked really nice so, you know we were pleased that they had gone to see her and that I knew she looked nice”. (Funeral 5)

“And he looked fine actually, it was actually a comfort to see him. It sounds so bizarre doesn’t it but he actually so well compared to how he had been because he had been so poorly and they padded his cheeks out which was nice because he had gone very sunken”. (Funeral 8)

6.4.4 Finding meaning at times of existential challenge

People were thought to instinctively turn to a higher being, something outside themselves when faced with very difficult circumstances.

One Key Informant said:

“I think, I think that the idea of God is very invasive indeed err despite the fact that people are, they appear to be and say that they are, totally convinced that they don’t believe in an Almighty, they don’t believe in God, they don’t believe in God in the circumstances in which we are talking to them at that moment, but put them in a different set of circumstances and something rings a bell. ....even the people that don’t believe somehow say God help me. God, somebody else help me not mother, not father, God help me”. (Other religious informant 21)
In the context of the funeral some saw death as having been a taboo subject, so that people found it very difficult to cope with although another thought that this was changing. Comments were:

“I think that most people go through life with their eyes shut to the whole business of death, and when it happens it’s a catastrophe”. (Other funeral professional 16)

“I think more and more now err people are beginning to speak about it. It’s been a taboo subject, nobody wanted to, wanted to speak about death”. (Funeral director 3)

People were therefore seen as searching for meaning to help them cope with the mystery of death and the loss of their loved one.

“my sense is that yes people are trying to find meaning, they’re trying to make some sense of what’s happened”. (Christian celebrant 30)

“people reach out for something don’t they at that point they have a need for something. ...They don’t know what it is“. (Funeral director 8)

“I would see them as searchers for meaning really, I wouldn’t say they had faith or didn’t have faith I’d say they didn’t really know what they were searching”. (Christian celebrant 25)

“Yeah I suppose it’s hard to be an atheist when you’re dealing with a death of a loved one and it’s easier just to cling on to a little bit of some vague cloudy thing out there”. (Christian celebrant 25)

For some, they still turn to the church to fulfil this need:

“You’re still getting, like you said it’s a miniscule amount of the population will go to church and a massive, maybe 70, 80% of people have a religious minister when they, when they, they die”. (Other funeral professional 1)

“there is quite a lot to be said for the fact that when we’re in the really serious parts of life, and you can’t get much more serious than death then people are starting to think about what they do believe. The materialist that fills up so much of our daily life just gets cracked through in a way. What I do find is that often people rely on my beliefs, they say we don’t know what, we don’t know what to believe, what do you believe and I will say well I believe that God accepts
your loved one with love and acceptance, and, and they rely on that faith in me”. (Christian celebrant 29)

However for some, their bereavement causes difficulties with their faith:

“A bereaved person’s faith may either give them comfort at such a difficult time, or they may feel angry or forsaken “why did God let my loved one suffer so much” or “why did God take the person I loved too soon”. “(Other funeral professional 15)

Many take comfort in other ways, including the belief that they will be reunited with loved ones some day:

“Not just in my memory, not just in my, in my thoughts, but I know you will be with me, and you’ll be there to help me. So even though it’s non-religious there’s still a kind of reaching out for something other than you know what we would describe as normal day to day life”. (Christian celebrant 30)

“It is important for them to believe that they will either meet up with their loved one once again or that their loved one is around looking after them, so even if they don’t believe in God they do believe in something. And I think that there has to be something to almost fill, fill that gap because it’s such an enormous whole you know if your, your married to someone for 50 years, you, they’ve just disappeared, they’ve just gone”. (Other celebrant 27)

“I remember once when I was burying a husband with his wife, in the same grave, when you know the wife had already gone before and her husband was joining her in the grave. And it was a kind of strong sense that you are together again now. I mean they are physically together again But there was a sort of feeling of, sort of kind of spiritually together again, but I mean, which I didn’t, don’t believe but there’s a kind of romancing it in a way”. (Humanist celebrant 20)

“The majority of people would are happy for me to say it would be nice to think now that he’s reunited with maybe his wife, not in heaven but perhaps in spirituality and I think perhaps there is a human need or a human trait to want to believe”. (Humanist celebrant 18)

“Much easier to believe that they’ve gone somewhere else and they’re waiting for yeah than to believe that they’ve gone and you’ll never see ‘em again”. (Other funeral professional 1)
“the way that comes out perhaps in the things that people might say who are not particularly religious is, he’s, my Nana is with Grandad now that’s the way they will find meaning, in the hope that death is not the end”. (Christian celebrant 30)

Some had noticed new trends including a need to do something to mark their loved ones existence and a trivialising of death to make it more acceptable.

“And we now see road side shrines. Because people want to do something, they feel as though they want, they feel as though death excludes them”. (Christian celebrant 31)

“I think there is a trivialising tendency, which seeks to make what has happened less and it, it’s not a gigantic event, it’s, you know we can somehow make it much much more you know the dead person is only in the next room. So if we can, if we can make it emotionally, if we can make it manageable, if we can make it emotionally manageable like that by making it smaller then we sort of don’t have to go on and you know seek much in the way of meaning”. (Other funeral professional 16)

Others commented on a new idea that loved ones became stars:

“other thing is the growth of, and both of these I see as rather sentimental which is very judgmental of me. The idea that when Grandma dies she becomes a star, a star in the sky”. (Christian celebrant 29)

“he’s, he’s that star, you know and they’ll take children out if it’s a grandparent who’s died, they’ll take children out at night and point up and say there’s your Grandad, he’s that star there. Now I mean that’s not something I subscribe to but that’s the way in which people try and find meaning”. (Christian celebrant 30)

SUMMARY

The data reported in this section shows a diversity of meaning-making at both individual and community levels. At the same time, there is considerable overlap in the themes and experiences evidenced by the bereaved families and considerable consensus between celebrants and officiants about the purpose of the funeral and their role in mediating the experience of death, as well as the practices they employ. The key differences between religious celebrants and others is the
combining of these roles and purposes with religious sacramental and proclamatory functions, which, for the most part are not experienced as significant by the families, although some found meaning in handed-down tradition. However, the ways in which the families in this study pursued and experienced meaning in a broader sense, chime with contemporary definitions of spirituality and often include a transcendental element.
7 CONCLUSION

“The main influences? Wow, that’s a big question.” (Partner, Funeral 10).

7.1 Significance of the funeral

The shape of funerals today is generating increasing interest and comment in the popular media. During the life of this project a celebrity funeral\(^{108}\) took place which sparked interest in our data from journalists, one radio programme conducting its own street poll into whether or not people had planned their own funeral already, and if so, why they thought this to be an important thing to do. In his Forward to Tony Walter’s book on funerals (Walter, 1990), the psychiatrist and bereavement theorist Colin Murray-Parkes, suggests that the funeral is an illogical act for rational people but it remains remarkably preserved in all societies.

The picture which emerges in this study is of a social event which is also a social act, which individuals and families take great care to imbue with personal meaning. This same process appears to apply regardless of the age and social status of the deceased, although the extent to which it is elaborated and emphasised does vary. Thus, our data would seem to suggest that the idea that contemporary funerals serve the sole purpose of assisting the bereaved to come to terms with their loss, is an at least partial modern myth. In fact, as Parkes points out, from an emotional point of view funerals are often regarded as an ordeal which has to be gone through (Walter, 1990, p.vii).

Certainly some of our respondents did say that they had been dreading the funeral and had found it difficult emotionally, but all took satisfaction from feeling that the event had gone well, as they had planned. The main significance of the funeral appears to be related to the enduring human and social need for the living to manage the transition from life to death of the person who has died. This incorporates the acknowledgement of personal loss, but equally important is the rite of passage in which the loved person, temporarily afforded the social status of ‘the deceased’, becomes a corpse which is buried or cremated. It is through this process that the living separate from the dead. Thus, a physical procedure - disposal of the body, is encapsulated in a ritual social process - management of the death, which demands a philosophical response on the part of the individual concerning the relationship between life and death. Moreover, each of the physical, the social and

\(^{108}\) Jade Goody, 4 April 2009, former ‘Big Brother’ contestant; the media followed her illness and preparation for death including planning her own funeral.
the philosophical elements are redolent with emotion. This is the essential link with the central question of this research - to what extent do contemporary funerals have a spiritual dimension, and in what ways is this explored and expressed? Contemporary understandings of spirituality combine physical, social, philosophical and emotional responses to the question of what it means to be human (Holloway and Moss, 2010).

7.2 Summary of key findings
This project has generated a large amount of information about what is going on in funerals in Hull and adjoining areas. In the course of exploring the central question, rich and extensive data were gathered on a number of aspects which bear further analysis in their own right. These include: the purpose and significance of the funeral; the planning process; the content and elements of the service; the roles of the different participants and their relationships to and with each other; social rituals; and personal symbols.

7.2.1 The funeral as an event
The funeral is a significant event in which time and effort is invested in planning, performing the service, and personal reflection afterwards; it is not clear to what extent participation in this research prompted reflection which would not have occurred otherwise but it was not uncommon for bereaved people and key informants to comment that they had found the opportunity to reflect to be of great value.

• The choice of funeral director is largely dependent on previous family contact or experience of attending another funeral.

• Choice of funeral director influences other significant choices such as choice of celebrant; this influence varies even within the same firm and according to the opinions of the individual funeral director.

• Most families chose cremation over burial but their reasons related to personal feelings and ‘beliefs’ rather than there being any common patterns, except for those families whose religion prohibited or inclined towards one form rather than another (burial over cremation).

• Services followed a similar pattern regardless of the religious or secular orientation; all were trying to create a ceremony.

• Music was a significant element particularly for families; families were generally less interested in readings although celebrants were generally keen to introduce them, religious
celebrants pointing towards particular passages from the Bible, secular celebrants often suggesting favourite poems.

- Symbols and ritual were evident in all the funerals, employing a mix of personal customs and symbols and selected use of religious or other cultural tradition; dress was generally important and reflected either a sombre tradition or was personally symbolic.
- A Eulogy formed the centre piece of the funeral address in all cases, regardless of the religious or secular orientation of the celebrant; in a small number of funerals a family member contributed their own additional tribute.
- In only a handful of funerals had the deceased made their wishes for the funeral known beforehand and this was usually limited to specific items or elements rather than planning the complete service; however, doing things according to what the deceased “would have wanted” was of overriding importance for all the families.
- It was very important for the families to feel satisfied with the way the funeral had gone and with their choices.

7.2.2 The participants as actors in a drama
Families, funeral directors, celebrants and also the deceased, emerged as active participants in the funeral, in which each had distinct roles, assumed characters, and were conscious of the interaction between the different ‘players’. Thus they came together to enact a ‘story’. It was clear that at this point the influence exercised by the deceased, including many accounts of a tangible sense of their presence, makes them still an active participant rather than the story being created around their memory. This suggests that although there may be elements of a memorial service in the modern funeral service, there remain distinct differences between the two events in function and character.

- Funeral directors offered guidance, caring and support to the families as well as facilitating and directing proceedings.
- Celebrants/officiants had a clear sense of responsibility that the funeral should fulfil its central purpose from a religious/philosophical stand-point, but also in terms of what the families wanted.
- Families played an active role as instigators and watchers; although not many ‘participated’ in the service by, for example, doing a reading, all had played a part in planning and organising and/or ‘watching over’ how things actually panned out; many spoke of their attendance (and that of other mourners) at the funeral as in itself active participation.
The influence of the deceased was evident in, “what s/he would have thought of” the funeral and its constituent elements; in sensing her/his support to get through the service; and in continuing to play a role in the family - for example, bringing them together.

7.2.3 Evidence of religion, spirituality and beliefs

The data provides considerable evidence of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices although little evidence of adherence to formal belief systems - religious or humanist. For the most part bereaved individuals described a personalised construction of ‘beliefs’, often centred around only one specific belief - e.g. about the soul. The experience of the death of a loved one appeared to act as a catalyst requiring the bereaved to conceptualise death and confirm or formulate religious or spiritual beliefs. The funeral was the vehicle which allowed them to focus on and experience their spirituality, whether through formal religion or less prescribed form.

- For families who were committed adherents to a religion, the funeral liturgy and service content provided the main expression of their beliefs.
- This also applied to key informants representing a particular religious tradition; Christian ministers felt the need (to a greater or lesser extent) to acknowledge/expound the Christian faith in the service.
- Families’ choice of religious or secular celebrant did not necessarily reflect that they held a religious or secular position, and was sometimes done more with the perceived wishes of the deceased in mind than the preferences of the mourners.
- Speculating about and holding firm beliefs about an afterlife was a prominent feature of the bereaved individuals’ response to the death; families sometimes discussed this together in the interview.
- Affirming a particular stand-point on death and its relationship to life was a key feature in the celebrants’ conducting of the service.
- Religious ministers used the affirmation of faith to frame the committal/burial; the liturgy provided a ritual and ceremony which allowed them to engage with this emotionally difficult point/task within a formal framework of faith.
- The committal/burial could be an awkward point in secular ceremonies at which celebrants often introduced their own form of words in a liturgical manner apparently in order to manage the sense of finality; BHA celebrants did not deviate from their stated philosophy of life and death, but other secular celebrants were prepared to use words which might comfort the family even if they suggested some continuing contact after death.
Religious and spiritual themes and beliefs were expressed in the music chosen for the funeral, although this was not always recognised by the families, or not the reason for choosing the piece.

7.3 Summary conclusions
Six broad conclusions can be drawn from this data concerning the evidence of spirituality in contemporary funerals.

7.3.1 Spiritual beliefs, cognitions and practices
There is significant evidence of beliefs, cognitions and practices which broadly correspond with contemporary understandings of spirituality.

King (2001) makes the point that it is more accurate to talk about ‘spiritualities’ rather than ‘spirituality’, and our data would certainly bear this out. Our respondents were using concepts of death, beliefs about what happens or might happen after death, and practices and behaviours which helped them to maintain a ‘connection’ with the person they had lost, to help them make sense of the death and manage its impact. However, they were for the most part not doing so according to a particular spiritual tradition but building their own ‘package’ of spiritual resources. This is in line with the arguments discussed in the introduction that contemporary spiritualities are ‘post-Christian’, and eclectic and concerned with lived experience over institutionalised belief (see also Tacey, 2003).

An interesting feature of some of the beliefs articulated is their resonance with eco-spirituality models. This is also evident in views about cremation or burial and options for memorials. A strong feature of eco-spirituality is its insistence on the importance of ‘place’ for spiritual well-being and alternative ways of understanding our relationship to our environment - be that natural or man-made (Zapf, 2005; Crisp, 2008).

7.3.2 Personal meaning-making processes and practices
There is significant evidence of the need to engage in personal meaning-making.

The pursuit of meaning is commonly cited in contemporary definitions of spirituality (refs) and a characteristic of spiritual integrity frequently pointed to is the ability to find meaning in situations of trauma and existential challenge (ref). Meaning-making is one of the more recent and arguably
persuasive theories of bereavement and grief therapy (Neimeyer and Anderson, 2002). Further, one of the characteristics of bereavement through horrific and shocking circumstances which complicate the grieving response (such as murder) is that the bereaved person engages in an existential search, frequently with a moral dimension (Holloway, 2007). We had only one such death in this study - the suicide of a young man - although there were a few deaths of younger people, one sudden. Nevertheless, the encounter with death, even the anticipated death of an older person, provoked the response of needing to invest the funeral - and in so doing the life and the death - with meaning. Interestingly, the explicit celebration of the life in the eulogy was not for the most part the focus of the families’ meaning-making, except insofar as it captured the ‘essence’ of the person. Families made the funeral meaningful through the personal touches and sharing of private scripts.

Meaning-making also occurred through the experience of community. Spirituality in community is a neglected dimension in much of the spirituality literature particularly that on spiritual care, but its significance as a resource and characteristic of resilience should not be understated (Holloway and Moss, 2010). A wider community of mourners coming together to support the family was appreciated by the families more because it lent further meaning to the death than because it provided them with emotional support (although these categories are not, of course, mutually exclusive).

7.3.3 Personal meaning making and spirituality

*Personal meaning-making processes and practices are linked to recognition of spirituality and spiritual experiences.*

The question still remains as to whether this personal meaning-making is evidence of spirituality, regardless of the fact that it may share some of the features commonly accorded to spirituality. There is sufficient evidence to draw the tentative conclusion that the meaning-making processes and the meanings which people found, were embedded in a spiritual dimension for the majority of our respondents, irrespective of the status of belief. In the earlier family interviews, this link was not made explicitly by the interviewer, but as the interviews progressed and similar patterns of response emerged, the question was often put directly as to whether what they were talking about related to spiritual or religious beliefs. The ways in which families talked about the meanings which they had taken from the funeral service and the ways in which they had *experienced* it, reflected their spirituality. Or to look at this the other way round, they found meaning in a spiritual dimension.
In a discussion about spiritual care in the context of palliative care, Allan Kellehear (a sociologist) has suggested that 3 types of needs are evident. **Situational needs** arise because people find themselves asking questions about life transitions and reflecting on suffering. In so doing, they are searching for purpose, meaning and hope. **Moral and biographical needs** are specific to their personal situation, often concerned with their personal relationships and need to find peace, and may lead to the person asking religious questions. **Religious needs** may emerge from these reflections and in the context of dying, Kellehear says that they frequently lead to thoughts about an afterlife (Kellehear, 2000). The families in our study were not necessarily dealing with the level of existential crisis which Kellehear seems to be pre-supposing. However, all three types of need can be seen running through our data and this model is helpful in trying to understand the links between their meaning-making and their spirituality. Certainly the key informants saw the links between meaning-making and spirituality, but emphasised that for the majority this was a somewhat directionless process (see p. 253).

### 7.3.4 Formal belief systems

There is little evidence of adherence to formal belief systems but considerable evidence of people drawing on religious tradition to imbue the funeral with meaning and as a vehicle for spiritual experience.

This data neither suggests that people are more religious than secularists maintain, nor that the Christian religion is as moribund as is often argued. On the one hand, even the ‘committed religious’ in this study did not (with the exception of the Jehovah’s Witness and Catholic priest’s funerals) demonstrate a well-worked out set of beliefs, as the religious celebrants acknowledged. On the other hand, there was a perhaps surprising amount of religion in these funerals (as Section 5 evidences) including the use of the Lord’s Prayer, Psalm 23 and the hymn ‘Abide with Me’ because they were thought appropriate, familiar and comforting. In her recent study of death and dying, Glenys Howarth suggests that people use spirituality as a ‘sacred canopy’ when facing death, rejecting prescribed forms of religion in favour of their personal search for spiritual meaning - although she does acknowledge the continuing importance of formal religion in some cultures and the resurgence of all forms of fundamentalism world-wide (Howarth, 2007).

However, it is important to ask what are the roots of this spiritual quest, and our data would seem to suggest that some element of Christian tradition was underpinning a lot of these funerals, sometimes even when taken by a secular celebrant. More importantly, this was experienced as
spiritually sustaining. In a study of black Afro-Caribbean women who were users of mental health services in Manchester, women turned to their Bible and prayer for support and strength, particularly in times of trouble. These women were not currently Church goers, but they had been sent to Sunday School as a child and taught to say their prayers as well as observing mothers and grandmothers reading their Bible and praying (Edge, 2005). Interestingly, the women commented that they were not bringing their own children up in this way. A question for future studies of funerals and studies in other regions of the UK, might be to what extent this drawing on the Christian tradition will diminish as older generations die out.

7.3.5 The importance of ritual

*Ritual is an important element in social, familial and individual behaviours and helps to imbue the death with meaning for the community, the family and the individual.*

Contrary to what is often said about modern funerals, these funerals were rich in ritual. Jenny Hockey makes the same observation about the rich and diverse forms of ritual evident in the ways in which death is marked in the UK today (Hockey, 2001). The rituals and symbols employed by the families were central to their meaning-making. Of particular importance was the fact that they were not private, even though they might be very personal. For example, it was the public use of a particular style of dress which made it symbolic of the person. Behaviours, in particular those relating to the coffin which we have suggested as emerging rituals, were social acts. For example, if a family took up the celebrant’s suggestion that they might like to gather round the coffin, they all, or several members, did so; there were no instances of one person standing alone. There were, however, many examples of one person leading the way with a particular gesture or behaviour, with others following in ritual sequence. Moreover, this personal customisation took place within a structure which followed a remarkably similar pattern across all variants of the funeral, in terms of the processes before and after as well as the actual funeral service. It is this which makes the funeral, still today, a ceremonial ritual.

Traditional religious ritual was particularly prominent in the committal where its power was consciously used by the celebrants. Secular celebrants appeared to be consciously creating a rhythm which held the function and form of the service together and offered opportunities for ritual to be introduced. They each had developed their own forms for particular points in the ceremony. Walters observes that, ‘Funerals have a tone, a drama, a flow’ (Walters, 1990, p. 36) and it is the task of the celebrant to provide a safe environment in which the ‘rite of passage’ of death is managed.
Our data points to an enduring need for ritual in the funeral service, the only explanation for which would seem to be located in the existential challenge of death.

7.3.6 The contribution of funeral directors and celebrants to meaning-making and meaning-taking

Funeral directors play an important part in facilitating meaning while celebrants consciously help to create meaning; however, the extent to which bereaved individuals and families find meaning within the religious or philosophical stand-point of the celebrant or other overt spiritual framework, largely depends on their starting point.

We referred in the introduction to Jessica Mitford’s (1963) classic study which portrayed the modern funeral industry as cynically exploiting people’s misery and uncertainties to persuade them of the need for extravagant, expensive funerals which allowed mourners to avoid death’s starkest implications. There continues to be comment that funeral directors exercise undue influence over mourners’ choices and the shape of proceedings (Walter, 1990 - although he does suggest that the tide is turning, particularly in certain social groups ‘reclaiming’ the funeral). Our data shows the funeral directors as seeing their role as facilitative and supportive and the bereaved families agreeing with this. There is no evidence, however, that the funeral directors are consciously trying to create meaning with or for the families. Rather, in offering them choices, making suggestions from past experience and doing all they can to help families have the funeral they want, they are facilitating the families in their meaning-seeking and meaning-making behaviours.

By contrast, there is ample evidence in this study of celebrants trying to create meaning for the families, by picking up how they think and feel about the funeral, weaving their ideas into a narrative and developing this according to their (the celebrant’s) own philosophy of life and death. Laderman (2003) also found that American clergy see meaning-making as a major part of their role in the modern funeral. It is possible that for religious celebrants, this process of creating meaning has taken the place of expounding theology. We found that in only one funeral was a thorough-going theology of sin, death, new life and resurrection expounded - by the Jehovah’s Witness Elder. Many more, however, referred to particular theological precepts such as the Christian hope of the resurrection or God’s unfailing love.

In summary, our data points to a spiritual dimension as significant in the funerals studied. It is:

- multi-faceted;
- evidenced in behaviours and practices as much as in beliefs articulated;
- not particularly systematised;
- shows considerable individual variation;
- but also, developing patterns, forms and emerging rituals.

An independent funeral arranger in this study sums this up for us:

“I think that very few people nowadays would seem to see that the purpose of a funeral is to serve a higher being but there is often a sense of serving a higher meaning... but that, that meaning is not nearly so well defined... it's spiritual but it's not defined”.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1 Consent Forms

The University of Hull
Department of Social Sciences

Consent form for families.

TITLE OF STUDY: spirituality in Contemporary Funerals

Name of researchers: Margaret Holloway, Peter Draper, Vassos Argyrou, Daniel Mariau, Sue Adamson

I understand that:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- A researcher will attend the meeting at which I/we discuss the content of the funeral of my loved one. The researcher may take notes.
- Two researchers will attend the funeral to observe the ceremony and may take notes.
- A researcher will interview me. The interview will be taped and transcribed. It will then be coded and my name kept separately from it.
- The purpose of the interview is to explore the reasons for the type of funeral I/we chose, the meaning that I understand in the various parts of the ceremony and my feelings about the way in which it helped me in my bereavement.
- A researcher will also at a later date interview funeral directors and leaders of the ceremony. These interviews may refer to the proceedings at the funeral of my loved one.
- The results of all the interviews will be used for research purposes and may be reported in both academic and professional journals, including those of the funeral industry, various religious ministries and social and health care. We may also contribute to training programmes for those in the funeral industry.
- In the research report and in other publications, I will remain fully anonymous and any information I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my identity to an outside party.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.
- I agree to take part in the above study.

Signature:........................................ Date:.................................

Name: .............................................
The University of Hull
Department of Social Sciences

Consent form for families

TITLE OF STUDY:  Spirituality in Contemporary Funerals

Name of researchers:  Margaret Holloway, Peter Draper, Vassos Argyrou, Daniel Mariau, Sue Adamson

I understand that:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- A researcher will talk with me. The conversation will be taped and transcribed but all the information will be kept anonymous.
- The purpose of the meeting is to explore my experience of the funeral.
- Talking about the funeral may bring back memories and be an emotional experience. I understand that I can interrupt or terminate the conversation at any time.
- The results of all the discussions will be used for research purposes and may be reported in both academic and professional journals, including those of the funeral industry, various religious ministries and social and health care. They may also contribute to training programmes for those in the funeral industry.
- In the research report and in other publications, I will remain fully anonymous and any information I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my identity to an outside party.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.
- If I am unhappy about any aspect of the research I am aware that I can contact:

  Professor Majid Yar
  Chair, Department of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
  University of Hull, HU6 7RX Email M.Yar@hull.ac.uk Tel 01482 462108

- I agree to take part in the above study.

Signature of participant:………………………………. Date:………………………..

Name: …………………………………………

Signature of researcher:………………………………. Date: ………………………

Name: ………………………………………….
## APPENDIX 2: FUNERALS PEN PICTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funeral</th>
<th>Deceased and family characteristics, pseudonym</th>
<th>Research process</th>
<th>Features of funeral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Roman Catholic priest aged 75+ Henry</td>
<td>Attended funeral only</td>
<td>Requiem Mass. The pomp of the Catholic church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deceased elderly female Forces family, 6 children Joan</td>
<td>Attended funeral only</td>
<td>CofE service with hymns during the service but pop music to enter and exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Deceased female aged 80+ Joyce</td>
<td>Attended funeral only</td>
<td>Humanist service with mainly secular music but also Mario Lanza Walk with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Deceased female aged 75+ Marion</td>
<td>Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with daughter</td>
<td>Humanist funeral – Secular music. The first with a coffin ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Deceased female aged 80+. Bransholme family Doris</td>
<td>Attended meetings with funeral director &amp; celebrant, funeral, interview with daughter</td>
<td>CofE with minimal personalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Deceased male aged 30s who died suddenly. Another Bransholme family Robert</td>
<td>Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with sister</td>
<td>Humanist funeral. Red and white because of Hull KR associations. Music secular songs with life associations. Ideas about reincarnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Deceased male aged 50 who died after illness East Hull family Mark</td>
<td>Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with widow</td>
<td>Salvation Army though “not really religious”. Appreciated service. Music popular religious/secular. Coffin ritual. Some ideas about afterlife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Deceased male aged 80+ Peter</td>
<td>Withdrew after funeral director meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Deceased female aged 40+ who died after illness Sarah</td>
<td>Attended meeting with funeral director, funeral, interview with partner</td>
<td>Humanist. The pink funeral. Music secular with life associations. No religious belief but discussion of continuing presence and being reunited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11 | Deceased was female aged 90+ and in a home in East Hull. Georgina | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with daughter | CofE. Popular religious music but would have liked to sing *The Lord is my Shepherd*. Conventional religious beliefs although no certainty. |
12 | Deceased was male aged 50+ living in out of area but with a Bransholme background Chris | Attended meeting with funeral director, funeral, interview with sister | Independent evangelical. The jazz funeral. Too much religion for sister and deceased said not to have been a believer but would have appreciated that it was for his mother. |
13 | Deceased was male aged 50+ from East Hull Andrew | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral. No interview | Salvation Army but family only nominally religious (CofE) Bagpipe funeral. At celebrant meeting widow talked about spirit presence, lights coming on, had contacted medium. |
14 | Bransholme tower block. Deceased was female aged 75+ Elsa | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with widower | CofE though she had been RC but not practising. Music secular. Husband talks to deceased and other deceased family members. She is all around us. |
15 | Deceased was female aged 90+. Bransholme family Peggy | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral. No interview | Civil celebrant. Secular music. |
16 | Deceased was female aged 75+. Lived in East Hull. Anna | Attended meeting with funeral director, funeral, interview with daughter | Humanist funeral. Secular music. Coffin ritual. Daughter was Jehovah’s Witness. |
17 | Deceased was female aged 65. Branshome family Pamela | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with son | CofE but nominal belief though son did go to church the Sunday after the funeral. Secular music. Interview stories about face at window – continuing presence. |
18 | Deceased was male aged 65+. Lived on Bransholme. Son was a CofE minister practising out of area Daniel | Introduced by funeral director but not able to attend meeting. Attended funeral, interview with son | Funeral conducted by Methodist minister, an acquaintance of son. Music secular. Powerpoint pictures of deceased’s life – a celebration of his life but with religious framework but not too in your face to accommodate local family and friends beliefs. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Deceased</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Family Details</th>
<th>Type of funeral</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Beliefs and Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>80+</td>
<td>Bransholme</td>
<td>Sons, 2 of whom lived there, the other an academic Julia</td>
<td>CofE but nominal belief, thought deceased would want traditional funeral. Music opera because of deceased's preferences. Continuation of spirit and reincarnation.</td>
<td>CofE</td>
<td>Minimal spiritual beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70+</td>
<td>Bilton Grange</td>
<td>Family interviewed</td>
<td>Humanist. Secular music. Importance of respect. No belief in God but ideas of reincarnation, something outside the material reality.</td>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>Secular beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85+</td>
<td>E. Hull</td>
<td>Son lived Keyingham</td>
<td>Salvation Army because deceased had attended SA lunch club. Music hymn/semi religious. Son knew when mother had died before notified. Would like to think there is an afterlife.</td>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>Salvation Army beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85+</td>
<td>Bransholme</td>
<td>Son lived Bransholme tower block</td>
<td>Jehovah’s Witness funeral. Belief that sleep in death until day of resurrection when the chosen few will go to heaven and the rest be resurrected in the body on earth.</td>
<td>Jehovah’s Witness</td>
<td>Beliefs in afterlife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>E. Hull</td>
<td>Much younger daughter lived in house on new development in Beverley</td>
<td>Humanist funeral but with “church type” music chosen by funeral director. No belief in afterlife, death is the end but liked the music “peaceful”. Graveside ritual but no meaning taken. However do visit graves of family members</td>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>Secular beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Garden Village</td>
<td>Lived in comfortable detached house</td>
<td>Humanist funeral. Widower was lapsed Catholic, now atheist. Wife had been nominally CofE. Death is the end but visits churches for the tranquillity. Pie Jesu included at sisters’ wish, widower did not recognise as from requiem</td>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>Secular beliefs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 26 | Deceased female aged 80+  
Sister and niece lived on Orchard Park. Rose | Attended meeting with funeral director, funeral.  
No interview | Cof E. Crem music and Abide with me on CD |
| 27 | Deceased male aged 60+.  
Sister and niece lived on Greatfield Estate Don | Attended meeting with funeral director, funeral, interview with sister and niece | Salvation Army. Hymn and secular music. Family cooperation in planning funeral and deceased’s own choices. Rituals with flowers. Ideas about continuation, contact through medium, “they come and talk to you” |
| 28 | Deceased female aged 70+.  
Daughters lived Bilton Grange Jane | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral.  
No interview | CofE with hymns and participation of family members in giving own tributes. Rituals with flowers at graveside. Deceased and daughter confirmed as adults. |
<p>| 29 | Deceased was female aged 85+. Daughter lives Garden Village Rebecca | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with daughter and son in law | Humanist funeral. Music secular. Talk about hearing voices, connections to places, guardian angels |
| 30 | Deceased was male aged 85+ Dennis | Family withdrew after meeting at funeral director |  |
| 31 | Deceased was female aged 85. Lived East Hull Son lived on estate in Bilton Connie | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with son and daughter in law | RC funeral. No music. Son had lost his faith, no belief in afterlife, full of resentments against RC church. His wife thought there might be something. |
| 32 | Deceased was male aged 75+. Family lived on Sutton Trust. Valerie | Attended meeting with funeral director and funeral. No interview | Cof E with prayers, sentimental religious poems and popular songs. Minister talked about being reunited after death Also probably his choice of poems |
| 33 | Deceased was male aged 65+. Family lived in small house on Calvert Lane Philip | Attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with widow | Civil celebrant. Widow regards self as agnostic because nothing is proved but hopes deceased is in heaven, that there is an afterlife. Music secular but with possible spiritual elements – “from a distance” Bette Midler - environmental issues. Poem being in next room and seeing again |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deceased</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Nature of service</th>
<th>Afterlife beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, aged 85</td>
<td>Small council bungalow off Preston Road</td>
<td>CofE, attended meeting with funeral director, funeral, interview with son</td>
<td>Thinks there must be something after death although not sure believes in Christian ideas expressed at funeral. Feelings that deceased is still with him at times, response of dog.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, aged 45+</td>
<td>West Yorkshire suburb Dick</td>
<td>BHA humanist, introduced by celebrant, attended funeral, interview with parents</td>
<td>Not religious – father thinks that the earth governs itself, cycle of renewal and said deceased thought same. Popular and instrumental classical music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, aged 90</td>
<td>Bilton Grange</td>
<td>Civil celebrant, attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with widow and daughter</td>
<td>Methodist service to respect wishes of older family members although son and wife had no religious beliefs. Music instrumental classical and popular songs. The poem about being in the next room but interpreted this without religion as being only a memory away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, aged 75+</td>
<td>Family interviewed in West Hull suburb</td>
<td>Methodist, attended meetings with funeral director and celebrant, funeral, interview with son and daughter in law</td>
<td>Daughter believes we have a soul which goes on although not sure about being reunited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, aged 75</td>
<td>Privately owned house off Beverley Rd</td>
<td>Funeral was Methodist, overtly Christian with hymn and organ music. Bible reading and Christian poem. Sister unsure about how much she believes about the afterlife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, aged 75+</td>
<td>Substantial house in Avenues</td>
<td>BHA humanist service. Deceased and wife believed in humanist philosophy but wife expressed feeling that this did not rule out spirituality. Specific comments about spirituality. Wife had been brought up in free churches and been to a RC school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, aged 40</td>
<td>Family lived on Bransholme</td>
<td>Methodist service because he had been brought up a Methodist, though they had been married in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deceased</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Event Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Male, 75+</td>
<td>Bungalow, East Riding</td>
<td>CofE church and neither went to church. Funeral overtly religious. Nondescript organ music chosen by organist – one was Schumann ‘dreaming’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Male, 70+</td>
<td>West Yorkshire suburb</td>
<td>BHA humanist service. Woodland burial and memorial service in hotel. Although deceased had no beliefs in Afterlife, widow and daughter were not sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male, 20ish</td>
<td>Overseas student</td>
<td>Interfaith memorial service conducted by CofE chaplain. Use of Christian sacred music, incense, secular readings and a Christian prayer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Male, 55+</td>
<td>North Hull family, academic background</td>
<td>Service led by spiritualist friend – beliefs important to the family. Secular music and readings but with spiritual elements – reincarnation. Reference to afterlife – moving on to next phase of enlightenment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female, 85+</td>
<td>Rural background</td>
<td>Reform Jewish service with burial. Traditional prayers. Eulogy important. Jewish culture important to daughter but unsure about religious belief.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Female, 85</td>
<td>Educated rural background</td>
<td>Family funeral service with burial followed by large scale memorial service a couple of months later. Committed Anglican Christian services with substantial involvement of family members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>