

FUNERARY PRACTICES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Funerary International Series

Series Editor: Julie Rugg, University of York, UK

The study of mortality is now an established academic endeavour which is rapidly expanding in scale and in disciplinary reach. One missing element is a repository of basic facts about funerary practice in each country and the broader legal, governance and denominational frameworks for those practices which might serve to set more detailed research in context.

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FUNERARY PRACTICES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>List of Images</i>	ix
<i>List of Charts</i>	xi
<i>List of Tables</i>	xiii
<i>List of Boxes</i>	xv
<i>Foreword</i>	xvii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xix
<i>Map of England and Wales</i>	xxi
1. England and Wales: An Introduction	1
2. History	5
2.1. The Eighteenth Century	5
2.2. The Nineteenth Century	7
2.3. The First World War and the Interwar Period	14
2.4. The Second World War and the Post-war Period to c.1990	17
3. Demographic and Legal Frameworks	23
3.1. Mortality in England and Wales	23
3.2. The Role of the State: Legislative Frameworks	26
3.2.1. Death Registration	27
3.2.2. Transportation of Bodies and Repatriation	30
3.2.3. Law Relating to Disposal of the Dead	32
3.2.4. Planning and the Environment	36
3.2.5. Health and Safety	38

3.3.	Accommodating Religious Diversity	40
3.3.1.	The Church of England	41
3.3.2.	The Church in Wales	44
3.3.3.	Meeting the Needs of Minority Groups: The Legalities	46
4.	Cemeteries and Crematoria: Governance and Management	49
4.1.	Local Government Ownership	49
4.2.	Professional Management	52
5.	The Funeral Directing Industry	57
5.1.	Historic Development	57
5.2.	Current Structure	59
5.3.	Typical Premises	61
5.4.	Professional Organisation	62
5.4.1.	Trade Associations	62
5.4.2.	Training and Qualifications	63
5.4.3.	Codes of Practice	64
5.5.	The Work of the Funeral Director	64
5.6.	'Do-it-yourself' Funerals	68
6.	Religious Belief and Funerary Practice	69
6.1.	Christian Funerals	69
6.1.1.	Context	69
6.1.2.	Funerary Practice	73
6.2.	Muslim Funerals	75
6.2.1.	Context	75
6.2.2.	Funerary Practice	77
6.3.	Hindu Funerals	81
6.3.1.	Context	81
6.3.2.	Funerary Practice	82
6.4.	Sikh Funerals	84
6.4.1.	Context	84
6.4.2.	Funerary Practice	86
6.5.	Jewish Funerals	87
6.5.1.	Context	87
6.5.2.	Funerary Practice	89

7.	A Typical Funeral	95
7.1.	Immediately Following the Death	95
7.2.	Making Funeral Arrangements	96
7.3.	Care of the Deceased	97
7.4.	Between the Death and the Funeral	97
7.5.	The Day of the Funeral	100
7.5.1.	Dress	100
7.5.2.	Travel to the Funeral Service	101
7.5.3.	The Place of the Funeral	101
7.5.4.	‘Dressing’ the Funeral	102
7.5.5.	Attending the Funeral	105
7.5.6.	The Funeral Service	105
7.5.7.	Digital Recording	107
7.5.8.	Committal	107
7.5.9.	After the Funeral Service	108
8.	Paying for Funerals	111
8.1.	Average Funeral Costs	111
8.2.	Cost Breakdown	111
8.2.1.	Funeral Directors’ Fixed Costs	113
8.2.2.	Funeral Directors’ Variable Costs	113
8.3.	The Pre-payment Funeral Plan Industry	118
8.4.	Lower Cost Options	119
8.4.1.	Direct Cremation	119
8.4.2.	Municipal Funeral Services	120
8.5.	State Help with Funeral Costs	121
8.6.	Public Health Funerals	124
8.7.	Children’s Funerals	125
9.	Burial	127
9.1.	Burial Sites Historically	127
9.2.	Contemporary Burial Sites	129
9.2.1.	Number of Sites	129
9.2.2.	Layout	131
9.3.	Graves	135
9.3.1.	Technicalities	135
9.3.2.	Legalities	137

9.4.	Disused Burial Space	142
9.5.	Natural or Green Burial	146
10.	Cremation	149
10.1.	Historic Development	149
10.2.	Current Crematoria Provision	152
10.3.	Crematoria Design	154
10.4.	Cremation Certification and the Law	156
10.5.	Services in the Crematorium Chapel	159
10.6.	The Process of Cremation	161
10.7.	The Disposal of Ashes	162
10.8.	'Green' Cremation	163
11.	Commemoration	167
11.1.	Monumental Masons	167
11.2.	Commemoration within the Crematorium Grounds or Cemetery	168
	11.2.1. Cremated Remains	168
	11.2.2. Full Body Interment	171
11.3.	Commemoration in the Churchyard	174
11.4.	Commemoration in the Domestic Sphere	174
11.5.	Commemoration in the Wider Landscape	175
11.6.	Virtual Commemoration	176
12.	Conservation	179
12.1.	National Pantheon	179
12.2.	The Need for Protection	180
12.3.	The Management of Conservation in England and Wales	182
12.4.	Community Initiatives	184
	<i>Bibliography</i>	185
	<i>Index</i>	187

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 2.1.	Willesden New Cemetery (1891).	13
Image 2.2.	Visiting the grave, late 1930s.	16
Image 2.3.	Salisbury Crematorium (1960).	20
Image 3.1.	Harlow Hill Cemetery, Harrogate.	39
Image 4.1.	Thornton-le-Dale Cemetery.	54
Image 5.1.	Co-operative Funeralcare premises, in a suburban location : a typical, strongly- branded shopfront	60
Image 6.1.	Gardens of Peace Cemetery, Hainault, London, opened in 2002.	80
Image 7.1.	Bearers shouldering the coffin from the hearse to the chapel.	102
Image 7.2.	Floral tribute area at a typical crematorium (2015).	104
Image 9.1.	Technical drawing of a plot, demonstrating the relationship between the plot and the grave.	136
Image 9.2.	Typical local authority burial register page.	139
Image 9.3	Churchyard of St Peter and St Paul, Cromer, viewed from the church tower.	145
Image 9.4.	Woodland burial section at Carlisle Cemetery.	147
Image 10.1.	The Oaks, Havant, opened in 2013.	154

Image 11.1.	Garden of Remembrance, City of London Cemetery, part of the rose garden with dedication plaques..	169
Image 11.2.	Christmas decoration on a grave.	173
Image 12.1.	St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.. . . .	181

LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 2.1.	Number of Crematoria and Cremation Rate. .	19
Chart 10.1.	Crematorium opening: number, date range and ownership type: cumulative totals.	155

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1.	English and Welsh Population Growth, 1801–1851.	8
Table 3.1.	Deaths in England and Wales, Cremation Rates and Crematoria in Operation, 2008–2016.	25
Table 3.2.	Answers to Question ‘What is Your Religion’ on the 2011 Census, England and Wales.	41
Table 6.1.	Church Membership in England and Wales, Selected Years from 1985.	71
Table 6.2.	UK Jewish Population by Congregation: Percentages.	89
Table 8.1.	Average Funeral Cost by Area, 2017.	112
Table 8.2.	Cremation Fees, by Region, in 2013 and 2017.	116
Table 8.3.	Funeral Expenses Payments.	123
Table 9.1.	Number of Burial Grounds in England and Wales Identified by the Ministry of Justice 2007 Survey.	130
Table 10.1.	Progress of Cremation in Selected Years.	153
Table 10.2.	Mode of Committal, 1995.	160
Table 10.3.	Ashes Disposal Practices: Percentages in Selected Years.	164

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LIST OF BOXES

Box 3.1.	Circumstances in Which a Death Must be Reported to the Coroner:	28
Box 3.2.	Information that is Required in Order to Register a Death	31
Box 3.3.	Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 s5	47
Box 4.1.	Local Authority Governance and Burial Provision.	50
Box 5.1.	Usual Tasks Carried Out by the Funeral Director	65
Box 5.2.	Occasional Tasks Carried Out by a Funeral Director	67
Box 8.1.	Funeral Costs	114
Box 9.1.	Burial Site Types in England (from Twelfth Century)	128
Box 11.1.	Typical Plaque Inscription	170

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FOREWORD

Funerary practice is so broad a topic it is unlikely that any one individual can easily encompass all its facets. This collaboration reflects the combined expertise of two historians who are both heavily involved in current policy and practice. Dr Parsons researches and publishes on the history of cremation, burial and funeral directing, and for the past 30 years has worked as a training consultant and funeral director in London. Dr Rugg has written extensively on the history of burial practice, but also has an involvement and interest in policy and practice in contemporary cemetery and crematorium management.

Funerary Practices in England and Wales addresses a very basic gap: the lack of readily accessible contextual information and detail about funerary arrangements in England and Wales. The fact that the book has taken over a year to collate indicates just how widely spread is much of the information the text contains. The book has a number of additional aims. It hopes to be an essential reference text for practitioners, policy makers, students and academic scholars in a complex field that covers a whole range of activities and practices. As part of an international series, the book also aims to contribute to the task of understanding the varied contexts that configure funerary practices in different countries. The text presents information in as clear and as unvarnished a way as

possible. There is no commentary on the information presented: this book has no agenda beyond the desire to inform.

However, it is hoped that the text will be a baseline for future editions that will help us pinpoint shifting contexts, new trends, and obsolescences. Funerary practice mutates continually, but establishing practice at one single moment in time will be of value in years to come. We are both historians, and know that this text will at some juncture constitute a primary document: a robust narrative of funerary practice that we would have been delighted to encounter if it had been written in 1818 or 1918.

Information is correct as the text goes to press. We have been grateful for input from a wide range of experts, but any errors are our own.

Julie Rugg and Brian Parsons

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We are indebted to *Pharos International* and the Cremation Society of Great Britain for permission to reproduce cremation statistics.

Finally, our deep gratitude is extended to Philippa Grand at Emerald Publishing, who immediately understood the need for this book and for the associated international series. Philippa and her team have steered the text through with grace and efficiency.

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MAP OF ENGLAND AND WALES



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CHAPTER 1

ENGLAND AND WALES: AN INTRODUCTION

England and Wales are part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, commonly known as the UK, which is a densely populated island nation situated off the north-west coast of Europe with overseas territories including Bermuda, the Cayman Islands and Gibraltar. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are also Crown dependencies. The UK comprises England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which shares a land border with the Republic of Ireland. At the end of the 1990s, legislative enactment created separate, devolved, administrations for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Difference in burial and cremation law, religious history and funerary practice mean that Scotland and Northern Ireland will be dealt with in separate volumes of this series. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are also excluded from this volume.

England and Wales are highly developed, industrialised nations: the UK is currently the ninth largest economy in the world. At the 2011 census, the population of England and

Wales stood at 53m and 3.1m, respectively, with 81 per cent and 67 per cent, respectively, living in areas defined as urban.¹ Outside London – population 9.78m – there are 10 conurbations or cities that each has a population of over 500,000. The UK was the first nation to become industrialised in the modern sense, and massive increases in urban population in the nineteenth century constitute an essential context for the chronology of change in funerary practice. Nevertheless, rurality and images of rurality continue to feature as defining national characteristics and in many rural settlements the use of local churchyards continues as it has done for centuries.

The UK is stable, politically, relative to many other countries in Europe. For many centuries, London has been the seat of government. Legislation passes through an elected House of Commons and unelected House of Lords. MPs from all parts of the UK vote in the House of Commons. The Welsh Assembly, established in 1999, sits in Cardiff and is an elected body with devolved authority to create laws in a number of policy areas.² The UK is a sovereign state and Queen Elizabeth II has been head of state since 1952. The civilian population has not been subject to sustained military attack since the Second World War, although there have been periods of more or less intensive terrorist activity. This stability means that the UK has no legacies of recent military action or atrocity likely to have a substantive impact on funerary practice. Where change in practice is taking place, it is largely reflective of both an increased understanding of choice

¹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105224826/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/rural-urban-analysis/comparing-rural-and-urban-areas-of-england-and-wales.html#tab-Rural-and-urban-populations-in-2011>, accessed 18 Oct 2017.

²<http://gov.wales/about/?land=en>, accessed 16 Mar 2018.

mediated by an increasingly sophisticated and responsive market in funerary service, and growing cultural diversity following as a consequence of migrants settling in the UK from other parts of the world. English remains the principal language in England. Welsh and English are spoken in Wales, where all statutory documents are produced in both languages.

England and Wales are largely Protestant countries. From the period of the Reformation until the nineteenth century, the Catholic community was persecuted and denied a range of civil liberties which included the freedom to establish separate burial space. From the sixteenth century, a number of Protestant denominations – including Baptists, Quakers and Independents or Congregationalists – refused to worship according to the tenets of the Church of England. These groups were also denied certain civil liberties, but legal inequalities were largely resolved by the start of the First World War. Nevertheless, the Church of England remains the Established Church or state church in England; the Church in Wales – a related, but separate establishment – is the state church in Wales. Non-Christian religions in the UK remain a minority; after Christians (59 per cent), the largest group is Muslims, who comprise fewer than 5 per cent of the population. The centrality of the Church of England to national governance means that England and Wales cannot be defined as ‘secular’ countries, although religious tolerance is enshrined in many aspects of social life.