

Bereavement Care is an international journal for all who care for the bereaved. Founded 12 years ago as an in-house journal of the UK national voluntary organisation Cruse, it has since changed its character to appeal to a much wider readership in all parts of the world and has set up a Board of internationally distinguished Advisory Editors.

Bereavement Care aims to provide impartial and unbiased information and guidance to counsellors and others about the psychological, social, spiritual and other needs of people bereaved by death. It is not committed to any one sectarian or theoretical dogma, nor does it promote any particular method of counselling or therapy.

To keep our readers up to date, *Bereavement Care* publishes summaries or full reports from recent scientific literature and reports from major conferences in a jargon-free style accessible to the intelligent layman. Our reviews of books and audio-visual materials will be of special interest to those who organise teaching programmes or who stock libraries.

We hope that you find the newly designed *Bereavement Care* interesting and useful, and would welcome your comments. We also encourage the submission of articles, letters and personal experiences that add to our understanding of bereavement, especially from people of diverse races and religions.

Please help us to make this low-cost journal more widely known by passing on a subscription form to a colleague.

War Graves Pilgrimage¹



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In the past two decades there has been an extraordinary growth in pilgrimages to overseas war graves. This article seeks to ask what this means for the bereaved and for veterans. Are they somehow making up for the funeral that, for them, never was? And how does the experience affect their grieving?

PHYSICAL AIDS TO MOURNING

The funeral, by finally dismissing corpse and coffin from this world, brings home the finality of death. The painful physicality of the coffin's presence and its tangible and visible removal from our sight in crematorium or burial ground is one of the most effective ways in which denial, a common early defence mechanism against the shock of bereavement, is ended—thus enabling the mourning process to begin. In the months and years afterwards, many bereaved people regularly tend the grave—another physical reminder of the one they love. Both the funeral and tending the grave can be particularly important in the case of sudden or premature death.

So what happens when there is no funeral, or the family are unable to attend it, or when the grave is overseas? This is the situation of the vast majority of British servicemen who died in World Wars I and II. Unlike the Americans who do their utmost to bring their war dead home, we British have buried our fallen more or less where they fell. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, this was in the face of considerable opposition from bereaved families, but the male military desire to be buried with comrades won out over (largely female) kin's need for a funeral to attend and a local grave to care for. (This is now changing, however.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The death of a loved person faces each one of us with a dilemma: do we 'write-off' the dead person (like a bad debt), forget that they ever existed and carry on without them; or do we turn towards the lost person, cherish the memories that are left and find new ways of building them into our lives? Most people choose the latter course despite the difficulties and pain that it involves.

The problem of finding meaning in a loss is particularly great when the loss was sudden, violent and untimely or when the body of the dead person is not available to 'bring home' the reality of the death. This is often the case in times of war and it can delay or protract the work of mourning. In this paper Tony Walter describes and explains the value of pilgrimages to the graves of those who have died at war. These are an opportunity for the bereaved to tackle unfinished psychological business, which may then be continued and completed with the help of a counsellor.

Most of the Falklands dead were brought home, and repatriation was the norm in the Gulf War.)

The rise and fall of pilgrimages

Around the world, there are 2,500 military cemeteries managed by the Commonwealth (formerly Imperial)