

which of course is what is needed for today's celebratory funerals. But, if these collections are anything to go by, the happy funeral may be followed by some pretty bleak grief. The contemporary funeral looks back to celebrate the life lived, but may struggle with the present reality of death and grief.

Any of these books would be useful resources, both in planning funerals

and in grief. As is to be expected, there are many overlaps. Astley's *Time to Go* was my personal favourite: just 91 pages, contains a wide range of sources, and a number of modern writers. Atwell is the most clearly Christian (significantly almost all of it pre-twentieth century). In purely quantitative terms of poems per pound, Benson and Falk is the best value. Both

Watson and Emerson have reasonably wide-ranging sources, and Watson has a good extract on friendship from Pooh, but not the one I was looking for! ●

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1. Whittaker A. *All in the End is Harvest*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984.
2. Keay K. *Laughter, Silence and Shouting*. London: Harper Collins, 1994.



WEBWATCH

Reconnecting with the dead

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IN DEVONSHIRE 80 YEARS AGO, my mother as a child often accompanied her own mother when called upon to 'lay out' the bodies of the recently departed. Then, in the developed world at least, dying gradually became something hidden away behind hospital walls and bodies were handed over to professionals. Over the last few years, however, people have started to reclaim their right to make their own informed choices not only about funeral rites but also the disposal of their loved ones.

Anyone interested in planning an unusual, environmentally sensitive or DIY funeral in the UK will find **The Natural Death Centre** at www.naturaldeath.co.uk a sound starting point, together with its publication *The Natural Death Handbook*. This charitable organisation acts as a funeral watchdog, monitoring a code of practice for natural burial grounds. The site has links to organisations with similar aims in other parts of Europe, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

For the USA, **Final Passages** at www.finalpassages.org aims to reintroduce the concept of home funerals as part of family life and to de-institutionalise death. Providing educational materials, seminars and in-services, the organisation supports those dying at home and anyone wishing to carry out a home or family-directed funeral.

The growing popularity of 'green' burial grounds, where only fully biodegradable coffins and shrouds are accepted and bodies must not have been embalmed or cremated, is reflected in a number of websites offering such services throughout the UK and in Europe (though not in the USA where this sort

of arrangement is rare). These are mainly in forests, eg those managed by The Woodland Trust¹, or other rural settings.

About 50 burials take place at sea in British waters each year and good information on this is to be found at www.bathnes.gov.uk, hosted by Bath and North East Somerset Council. On the homepage, click on B from the green A-Z and then scroll down to Sea Burials to access both a brief overview and a more in-depth document which includes details of how to prepare the body for burial, suitable coffins and how to obtain the correct legal documentation to comply with official regulations (the UK government does not encourage sea burials). The site also provides details of useful contacts.

Across the Atlantic, **Sea Services** claims to be the oldest and largest provider of sea burials and ash-scattering funerals in the USA, operating coast to coast. Its website at www.seaservices.com has a section on religious traditions, which gives an interesting overview of differing religious attitudes towards sea burials, including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Christian concepts, with useful links to more information. There is an extensive FAQ section and a pre-plan option for anyone who would like to make their own arrangements. With the provision of its own telephone counsellors and openness about fees, this seems a reputable company keen to provide a good service.

Sea Burials Australia has a surprisingly brief site at www.seaburialsaustralia.com.au but a little more information about the company is available at www.forpeaceofmind.com.au together with

an overview of Australian regulations.

Space burial is perhaps one of the most unusual types of funeral on offer. The first was preformed in Houston, USA in 1997 by a forerunner of **Space Services** which now holds the monopoly on this extremely expensive memorial service. Clients must first pay for a cremation, and then to launch a 'symbolic portion of created remains' at \$995 for 1g of human ashes or \$5,300 for 7g! Clients are posted a 'sampling kit' and the website at www.spaceservicesinc.com gives a list of global distributors so this form of 'burial' is accessible to any willing and able to pay the fees. Family and friends can attend the launch, receive an 'exciting' DVD recording and have a permanent virtual memorial on the internet for the deceased.

The website is rather vague as to the length of time remains will stay in orbit before being burned up in the atmosphere. Some may well argue that this type of memorial is a form of space pollution and although it is a service that obviously appeals to some, one cannot escape the feeling that this is very much a big business enterprise.

As yet there is no evidence to confirm that an alternative burial helps bereaved people in their grieving process, but it is not hard to imagine that this is so. Those involved in such funerals appear to gain from the feeling of being intimately involved in proceedings rather than being passive onlookers and there is a strong sense that these events are true celebrations of the lives that have passed. ●

1. Reviewed in *Bereavement Care* 2004; 23(3): 44.
2. Reed-Aspley I. The Woodland Trust. *Bereavement Care* 2006; 25(1): 15.