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**“Giving something back”: A case study of woodland burial  
and human experience at Barton Glebe.**

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**2010**

# Abstract of Thesis

“Giving something back”: A case study of woodland burial and human experience at Barton Glebe.

Hannah J. Rumble

This thesis engages with the recent innovation in British funerary rites known as ‘natural’ burial through an interview-based case study of one particular site, Barton Glebe, which offers ‘woodland’ burial. Through ethnographic description and socio-cultural analysis the values, concepts and behaviours aligned with natural burial are approached from the perspective of the bereaved, pre-registered users, site providers and those in the funeral industry.

The thesis begins by providing an overview of natural burial in Britain (Chapter 1), in which historical and cultural continuities between contemporary British natural burial provision and prior disposal practices are compared (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 provides a historical account of Barton Glebe’s first ten years of burial provision. Chapter 5 shows how Barton Glebe is not only a physical landscape but also an emotional landscape, in which emotions and memory are socio-spatially articulated through ‘nature’. Chapter 6 identifies the range of values invested in Barton Glebe and argues that the policing of graves and enforcement of rules and regulations by ground staff are reactions to a conflict of values, most often between site management and the bereaved. Whilst not unique to natural burial, this conflict is particularly striking in a burial ground in which little or no memorialisation should take place. Subsequently, Chapter 7 argues that the dead are not necessarily given sovereign status, a feature that distinguishes Barton Glebe from other places of burial. It is the ‘natural’ world that becomes a feature at Barton Glebe and, I argue, can create a therapeutic landscape for the bereaved. Chapter 8 concludes by arguing that the motives to *give something back* and *to return to nature* allow those who pre-register to affirm their core values and imagine continuity of identity beyond death (by becoming a part of ‘nature’), whilst the desire to *be of use* grants personal salvation for some pre-registered users.

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## **Statement of Copyright**

*The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.*

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...And a smile of appreciation for the persistent, quiet support of one Bristolian postman who is now very much informed about natural burial.

**In Memory of Dr Michael Cousins**

# Chapter 1

## Researching 'Natural' Burial in the UK

This thesis concerns a relatively new arrival amongst British funerary rites, generically called natural burial, also known as 'woodland', 'green' or 'eco' burial. By utilising an interview-based case study of a woodland burial ground near Cambridge called Barton Glebe, this thesis documents the values and practices that constitute this newest burial option in contemporary Britain. Natural burial ideally requires no embalming of the corpse,<sup>1</sup> which should be placed in a shroud or biodegradable coffin;<sup>2</sup> a native tree or shrub is then, but not always, planted on or close to the grave in place of a stone memorial. Many natural burial sites will allow some degree of grave memorialisation but, in keeping with the concept and landscape, memorials should be, again ideally, biodegradable, such as wooden plaques and flower bouquets without Cellophane wrapping. Often natural burial sites are managed to encourage native flora and fauna. Some natural burial grounds have invested in the latest RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) microchips which, when placed in individual graves, allow graves to be located with the deceased's bio-data in the absence of a stone memorial.<sup>3</sup> Whilst natural burial sites are the result of a broad concept in burial provision, the actual management, landscape and ownership of these sites vary enormously (Clayden *et al.* 2010, West 2010).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since the embalming chemicals are regarded as environmentally hazardous.

<sup>2</sup> These come in a variety of materials: cardboard, bamboo, seagrass, willow, wool, jute or sustainable sourced pine for example. See Cowling's extensive list of current coffin and shroud options in Britain (2010:164-169).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ASSETtrac's 'Epitrace' for example, which is supplied to the Arbory Trust (the case study) for grave identification purposes, <http://www.assettrac.co.uk/epitrace.htm> [Retrieved 25/06/10] and see *Long Term Identification of Graves in Natural Burial Grounds* PowerPoint presentation prepared by ASSETtrac Ltd available from: [www.assettrac.co.uk/downloads/Epitrace.ppt](http://www.assettrac.co.uk/downloads/Epitrace.ppt) [Retrieved 02/08/10]

<sup>4</sup> See also Clayden *et al.* (2010), Cowling (2010) and West (2010) for an overview and definition of *natural burial*.

## ***Natural Burial's Distribution and Demand***

In 2009, the annual percentage of cremations in Britain represented 73.33 per cent of all deaths that occurred in that year.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that the remaining 26.67 per cent of deaths were disposed of through earth burial;<sup>6</sup> however, it is not known what proportion of these burials represent the newly emergent practice of 'natural' burial.<sup>7</sup> In 2010, 207 natural burial sites are in operation across the United Kingdom (UK) and a further 35 are at the planning or proposal stage;<sup>8</sup> a significant development since Britain's first woodland burial ground only opened in 1993 under Ken West at Carlisle cemetery.

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<sup>5</sup> 413,431 of the 563,785 reported deaths. Taken from statistics compiled and published by the Cremation Society of Great Britain. Their statistic for the annual number of deaths is sourced from the Office for National Statistics. See

<http://www.srgw.demon.co.uk/CremSoc4/Stats/National/2009/StatsNat.html> [Retrieved 06/09/10].

<sup>6</sup> Very few are 'buried' at sea, which can only legally take place off the Needles, Isle of Wight and between Hastings and Newhaven on the South Coast. For further information see [http://www.mceu.gov.uk/mceu\\_local/fepa/Burial-guide.pdf](http://www.mceu.gov.uk/mceu_local/fepa/Burial-guide.pdf) [Retrieved 02/08/10].

<sup>7</sup> Greenfuse Contemporary Funeral Directors in Totnes, Devon, recorded that as of June 2010 the last 60 funerals they conducted showed: for a deceased 70 years old or younger, 42 per cent had a woodland burial (compared with 35 per cent cremated, 16 per cent buried in a municipal cemetery or churchyard and 6 per cent buried on private land); for those aged over 70 only 24 per cent had a woodland burial with the majority of this age group being cremated (69 per cent). 90 per cent of funerals for those 70 years or younger involved an eco-coffin; if the deceased was over 70 years old this figure remained high with 68 per cent of funerals involving an eco-coffin. These statistics cannot be used as a national average but they are surprisingly high compared to natural burial statistics given by celebrants and funeral directors working in Cambridge. Perhaps this is because Greenfuse specialises in green and/or alternative funerals, so those people who use their services are already attracted to a natural burial and/or eco-coffin. These figures were quoted in an unpublished paper by Jane Morrell and Simon Smith of Greenfuse *When I'm 64 – the babyboomer funerals. Is this the future of English funerals?* presented at the CDAS / University of Bath Conference 'A Good Send Off: Local, Regional and National Variations in how the British dispose of their dead' at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute, 16/06/10. For further information on Greenfuse see: [www.greenfuse.co.uk](http://www.greenfuse.co.uk) [Retrieved 29/06/11].

As a comparison some of those funeral professionals I interviewed in Cambridge were able to offer figures for the number of natural burials they had conducted on an annual basis. One funeral director reported he had done 378 funerals in 2008 of which only 10 were whole body natural burials (2.65 per cent) and 90 per cent of these were at Barton Glebe. A civil celebrant claimed that over a year, only 16 of the 520 funerals conducted were natural burials (3.07 per cent); another said only two of her 123 funerals that year were natural burials (1.62 per cent). The most comprehensive statistics were offered by a humanist celebrant who quoted the number of natural burials per annum over four years as:

2005 - 5/200 funerals (2.5 per cent)

2006 - 3/200 (1.5 per cent)

2007 - 4/200 (2.0 per cent)

2008 - 3/200 (1.5 per cent)

Natural burial therefore roughly constitutes 2 per cent of this humanist celebrant's annual funerals.

<sup>8</sup> Disclosed in personal correspondence with A. Clayden dated 02/08/10. Cf. Clayden, A. Hockey, J. and Green, T. *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial*. ESRC funded research project. <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/conference.html> [Retrieved 29/06/10]

Rapid proliferation of natural burial sites can partly be attributed to the effects of: a) the Environmental Protection Act in 1990 (West 2005:172), which meant crematoria were accountable to Local Authority Air Pollution Control (LAAPC) and had to address air-borne emissions such as mercury by seeking to achieve the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA's) target of 50 per cent abatement by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012,<sup>9</sup> which subsequently directed public attention towards cremation as a source of air-borne pollution, b) the relative lack of planning restrictions and legislation for private natural burial grounds (West 2010:45-46), c) the reduction in maintenance costs contrary to routine, intensive maintenance demanded by conventional cemeteries (West 2010), and d) public awareness-raising and advocacy by the Natural Death Centre (Clayden *et al.* 2010b:120).<sup>10</sup> The NDC launched the Association of Natural Burial Grounds in 1994 "in an attempt to ensure that every locality should have its own natural burial ground, where a tree is planted instead of having a headstone" (Weinrich & Speyer 2003:7). There is a perception, partly fostered by the NDC, that natural burial is cheaper, more environmentally friendly and caters for bereaved families who desire greater involvement in funeral planning, including body preparation and transportation (Whitten 2006:138). The NDC certainly advocates change in British funerals and death care at a time when, it is argued, funeral professionals separate the living from their dead (Whitten 2006:143). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) assert that natural burial "has broad appeal as an alternative to a conventional cemetery" (2009:2). Whatever the truth of these claims made by the NDC, the MoJ (2009) and Whitten (2006), what is significant is that they are being made in the first place and, the fact that they exist in the public domain, means they can potentially influence people's choices and decision-making in funeral planning.

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<sup>9</sup> See Morrow (2005:343) and *Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions Organisation* <http://www.srgw.demon.co.uk/CremSoc/Constitution/AnnualReports/Rep08-09.html> [Retrieved 23/06/10]. For further details on environmental discourse and cremation see Jupp (2006:172-176).

<sup>10</sup> The Natural Death Centre (NDC) is an educational charity which sees death as a natural part of life. Founded in 1991 by psychotherapists, Nicholas Albery, Josefine Speyer and Christianne Heal, it is committed to supporting cultural change and working towards empowering people in the process of dying and organising funerals. The NDC published the *Natural Death Handbook*, now in its fifth edition, which has been instrumental for general public access to information on organising a funeral, particularly natural burials. See The Natural Death Centre <http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/index.php?page=home> [Retrieved 24/06/10]

Of the 207 existing natural burial sites, most are located in England rather than Scotland or Wales according to the distribution map below, which was produced by researchers at the University of Sheffield<sup>11</sup> conducting survey research on natural burial provision.<sup>12</sup> A further 24 sites are, currently, in planning with another 11 sites having been proposed across Britain.<sup>13</sup>

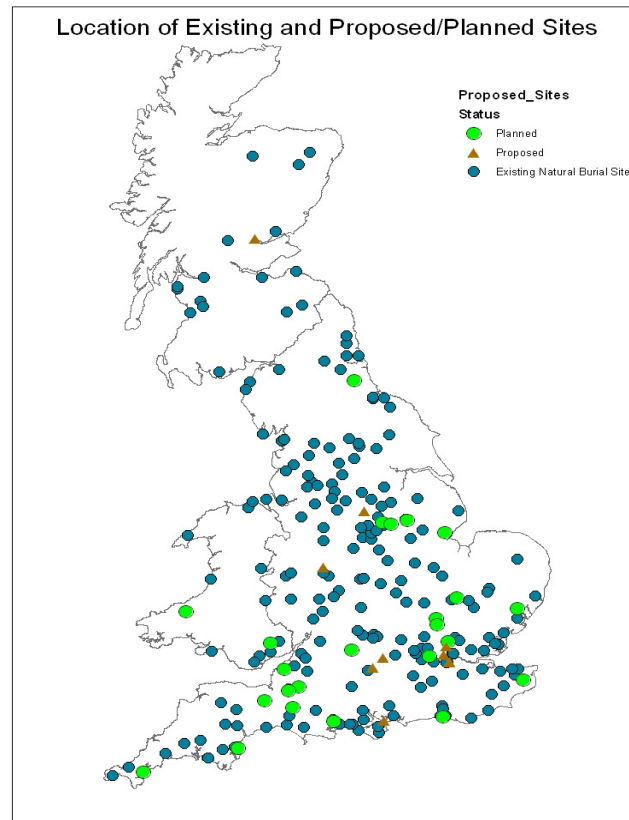


Figure 1: Distribution of natural burial sites in the UK

Source: Reproduced with permission from Clayden, A. Hockey, J. and Green, T. *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial*. ESRC funded research project.

<sup>11</sup> Available to view online at <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/sites.html> [Retrieved 23/06/10]

<sup>12</sup> The project conducted between the Department of Landscape and the Department of Sociological Studies involved 20 natural burial site visits and interviews with respective owners or managers as well as longitudinal ethnographic work in four sites in England and Wales. The theoretical objectives of the project seek to address “whether natural burial is a refusal of modernist, professionalized death; part of a resurgence of romanticism; a chance to help save the planet (and claim ecological immortality); or an opportunity to assert one’s identity that more conventional disposal options are not offering.” (Unpublished conference paper entitled *Natural Burial: Its local interpretations and implications for a ‘good send-off’* presented at ‘A Good Send Off: Local, Regional & National Variations in how the British Dispose of their Dead’ at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute in conjunction with the University of Bath and the Centre for Death and Society, 19/06/10).

<sup>13</sup> Cited in personal correspondence with A. Clayden dated 02/08/10. The NDC (Newsletter, Autumn 2010) has just announced that Ireland’s first natural burial ground, located near Killane in County Wexford has received planning permission and will officially open in October 2010. See [www.greencoffinsireland.com](http://www.greencoffinsireland.com) [Retrieved 21/09/10]. A second Irish natural burial ground is also about to open.

## ***Research Rationale and Contribution***

Despite the paucity of figures regarding natural burial, what is certain is that just as “England became the first Western society to adopt cremation so extensively” (Jupp 1993:167), so too with natural burial (Green 2008). However, the very recent availability of natural burial is set within the context of a major behavioural change in British death rites within the last century. Between the 1880s and 1960s there was a historic shift from a preference for burial to cremation.<sup>14</sup> This shift nurtured the innovation of privatised rites associated with cremated remains from the 1970s and facilitated the opportunity for scattering or interring ashes in places of personal significance, in addition to cemeteries, churchyards, burial grounds and gardens of remembrance<sup>15</sup> (Davies 1992, Davies and Guest 1999, Grainger 2005a, 2005b, Hockey *et al.* 2006). Now, an innovation is occurring in burial provision with the emergence of ‘natural’ burial. According to market research by Mintel (2007),<sup>16</sup> 64 per cent of those over 55<sup>17</sup> “like the idea of a green funeral or being buried in a woodland or meadow” (cited in the NDC newsletter Spring 2010:8). However, despite expressed public interest:

It remains to be seen just how widespread this form of coping with human remains will become in replacing either cremation or traditional forms of burial but, certainly, it presents a major change in belief and practice as far as the history of death is concerned. (Davies 2005a:88)

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<sup>14</sup> For effects influencing this change see Jupp (2006).

<sup>15</sup> See *Glossary* for historic and/or linguistic definitions of these places for human remains in Britain.

<sup>16</sup> See report details at <http://academic.mintel.com/sinatra/oxygen/display/id=219305> [Retrieved 23/06/10]. James Leedham of Native Woodland Ltd also cites the Mintel (2007) report in a presentation to the European Conference of Selected Independent Funeral Homes (SIFH 2010), in which he claims 63 per cent of British people “like the idea of an eco-coffin, usually made of wicker or cardboard” (cited from an unpublished PowerPoint presentation ‘Green with Envy’ attached to personal, email correspondence, 06/07/10). In the same presentation, Leedham also claims that 60 per cent of burials in natural burial grounds are “pre-sales”. He encourages funeral directors to harness the growing ‘green’ market in funerals by offering natural burial in pre-paid funeral plans. Though these statistics are from an unknown source so they could not be verified, they are nonetheless interesting claims. The presentation can now be viewed at: <http://www.nativewoodland.eu/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=17&cntnt01reurnid=15> [Retrieved 07/07/10].

<sup>17</sup> From 850 questionnaire respondents.

This thesis is concerned with elucidating the socio-cultural “belief” and “practice” that ‘natural’ burial in Britain encompasses and fosters. This is achieved through a single case study of Barton Glebe woodland burial site in Cambridgeshire. The Arbory Trust manages Barton Glebe, which opened in 2000.<sup>18</sup> The Trust’s site is almost unique in the context of British natural burial, because it is consecrated and was set up by a Christian trust. As far as it is known to date, there are only two other consecrated natural burial sites in Britain, one on land privately owned by a funeral director in Lancashire and another owned by the Diocese of St Albans.<sup>19</sup> Since the aim of this research was to document the meanings and assumptions brought to bear upon natural burial, primary emphasis was given to socio-cultural dimensions rather than to biological or material aspects. It does so, not by theoretical propositions informed by prior scholarship, but through the generation of first-hand accounts by people already engaged in this practice at Barton Glebe, by funeral professionals, officiants, visitors, site users and providers alike.

Until this research was undertaken scholars had little evidence of what values and attitudes were aligned with the contemporary practice of natural burial in Britain, both with respect to site users and by those who develop and manage such provision.<sup>20</sup> Until now, what researchers understood about natural burial came from observing the historical rise and practice of other disposal modes that subsequently contributed towards formulating conceptual frameworks for understanding the emergence of natural burial and aligned attitudes and practices. Prior to this study, there already existed a rich collection of ethnographies and qualitative studies that focused upon the provision and use of cremation (Davies 1990, Davies and Shaw 1995, Jupp 1993 & 2006, Parsons 2005, Prothero 2001) and cemeteries (Dunk & Rugg 1994, Francis *et al.* 2005, Kellaher *et al.* 2005, Worpole 2007), both in the United Kingdom and

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<sup>18</sup> The Arbory Trust are the non-academic collaborator in this AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award. See Appendix 11.

<sup>19</sup> For further information about these sites see:

<http://www.muchhoolewoodlandburialground.co.uk/home.html>

<http://www.woodlandburialtrust.com/> [both retrieved 27/07/10] and Appendix 12.

<sup>20</sup> Clayden and Dixon acknowledged that “motives for choosing natural burial and the significance of the memorial tree are more complex than has previously been acknowledged” (2007:241). Moreover, the timeliness of this research cannot be stressed enough. The NDC have acted as consultants for BBC Radio 4 when natural burial was written into the script of ‘The Archers’ in 2009. There has also been numerous radio coverage of natural burial, including The Jeremy Vine Show on BBC Radio 2 (aired 12/08/09) and a play written and performed about natural burial (Wade 2005).

overseas. In relation to natural burial prior to this research, there existed: an online questionnaire commissioned for market research;<sup>21</sup> an article about the funeral industry's 'green' advertising (King 2009); feasibility studies for potential natural burial provision (Green 2003, Rempel 2007); limited academic articles (Clayden 2003, 2004, Clayden and Dixon 2007); as well as a postal survey sent to 40 pre-registered woodland burial users at Carlisle cemetery in 1997 that was part of a wider study on cemetery use (see Francis *et al.* 2005). These texts inform theoretical discussion of natural burial despite their limited empirical foundation. The primary objective of this thesis therefore, was to provide much needed qualitative data on natural burial.

### ***Research Approach and Objective***

I approached this case study aimed at documenting the behaviours, values and assumptions fostered by and invested in Barton Glebe by the Trust, pre-registered users, bereaved visitors and professionals as a social anthropologist, by not taking anything said, done or observed for granted. The thesis inevitably uncovered some 'received truths' and 'common wisdom' implicit to Barton Glebe and natural burial practice more generally. However, its purpose was not to judge or de-value individuals' concepts or values that they had invested or aligned with natural burial, but rather to understand how various ideas and values come to create the basis for an orthodoxy of belief and practice in natural burial (Ingold 2000:14, Richardson 2003:47-48). In short, I was motivated to uncover what meanings were ascribed to natural burial and Barton Glebe in particular; why people support it and what practices, attitudes and behaviours it engendered for all concerned.

With no prior research theoretically, empirically and *exclusively* engaged with natural burial, it would have been misguided to begin from a series of focused, theoretical research questions based upon *a priori* propositions borne of my own assumptions on

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<sup>21</sup> Some results were kindly made available through personal correspondence with Mike Salisbury in 2008. The Natural Burial Co-operative, Centre for Natural Burial ([www.naturalburial.coop](http://www.naturalburial.coop)) conducted an online survey from its website. The results from the first 500 responses were kindly made available by Mike Salisbury who estimated from newsletter subscriptions that 70 per cent of respondents were from the USA, 20 per cent from Canada, with the remaining ten per cent mostly from the UK. The consumer questionnaire conducted by The Natural Burial Co-operative (formerly Forest of Memories) from 2006-2007 is confidential and not for distribution therefore, I have been unable to reproduce the results here.

a practice I had never previously encountered. Rather, the objective of this research was to undertake a qualitative, exploratory study to find out how and why a variety of people engaged with Barton Glebe.<sup>22</sup> This research was therefore, first and foremost framed as a single case study to understand what attitudes and behaviours are engendered by one woodland burial site and its provider, the Arbory Trust. Before presenting an overview of the thesis it will be useful to sketch the national provision of natural burial highlighting its heterogeneous practice within a diversity of landscapes (Clayden 2003, Clayden *et al.* 2010, West 2010).

### ***Introducing a Typology of Natural Burial Provision***

As the number of natural burial grounds increased, different interpretations of this form of burial have emerged. This diversity begins to challenge how we might define natural burial. (Clayden 2004:68)

Harris, a former environmental columnist with the Los Angeles Times who recently wrote a book on American natural burial, anticipates that the next challenge for the “green burial movement” will be to define itself (2007:188). However, aside from a broad definition of concept-based practice, no all-encompassing definition for a natural burial ground currently seems possible.<sup>23</sup> Variation and commonality across natural burial sites is wholly dependent on site ownership, on whether provision is exclusive or subsumed within grounds that offer other modes of burial, on memorialisation regulations, and on whether the natural burial site is subject to statutory or ecclesiastical law.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Clayden and Dixon (2007:241) have constructed a typology of natural burial grounds based upon ownership:

1. Local authority cemeteries
2. Privately managed natural burial grounds
3. Natural burial grounds managed by charitable trusts (e.g. Arbory Trust)

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<sup>22</sup> Essentially, Chapters 6 and 8 are concerned with *why* people engage with natural burial, whilst Chapters 5 and 7 focus upon *how* they do so.

<sup>23</sup> A conclusion also drawn by West (2010) who has been working in the death industry for 45 years.

<sup>24</sup> People’s designations of burial places are informed by their own cultural and experiential understandings. Thus, some of those interviewed commented that they thought Barton Glebe woodland burial site *was just like a churchyard* simply because it was consecrated and subject to ecclesiastical laws. For the majority who do not have a professional understanding of funerary practices, the terms designating distinct places of the dead are often used interchangeably but always to designate a place that accommodates or commemorates human remains.

By identifying variation in the management and origin of natural burial sites, a classification by ownership acknowledges the heterogeneity of current provision. However, the character of a natural burial site is also dependent upon a site's history of land use as well as ownership (Clayden 2003).

Clayden reported that “farmers, individuals, and private companies manage approximately 30 per cent of natural burial grounds as businesses” (2004:74). This percentage has increased over the last six years by 8 per cent if those sites listed in the NDC's database are used as a guide. The current Manager of the NDC stated that there were 208 ‘active’ natural burial sites in the United Kingdom as of February 2010,<sup>25</sup> of which 120 are municipally owned, 79 are privately owned and 9 owned by charities or trusts. This means, according to the NDC that 58 per cent<sup>26</sup> of natural burial provision is offered and owned municipally. However, although local authorities dominate in terms of ownership of natural burial grounds, it is the privately managed natural burial grounds that occupy the largest area in hectares of natural burial ground.<sup>27</sup> This is probably because natural burial provision under the ownership and management of a local authority is not exclusive, with the provision being more likely to be located within an existing cemetery or crematorium. The exclusive or inclusive designation of land for natural burial also impacts upon management practices. The influence of regular cemetery management prevails in natural burial sites that are part of inclusive local authority provision, so that burial spaces are often in rows with each grave marked with a memorial tree replacing the customary headstone. By far the most common expression of natural burial in local authority owned sites is to plant a tree upon each individual grave, creating “woodland through burial”.<sup>28</sup> Often, in this context, visiting is inscribed upon the landscape through

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<sup>25</sup> Compared to the figure of 207 quoted by researchers at Sheffield University in personal correspondence dated 02/08/10.

<sup>26</sup> Calculated using the NDC's database in February 2010. This figure was given in personal correspondence. Clayden *et al.* (2010b:120) alternatively claim 56 per cent.

<sup>27</sup> From unpublished research by Clayden, A. Hockey, J. and T. Green (2010) *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial*. See <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html> [Retrieved 18/04/10]

<sup>28</sup> From unpublished research by Clayden, A. Hockey, J. and T. Green (2010) *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial*. See <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html> [Retrieved 18/04/10]

visible objects, not always biodegradable, being left upon graves, as is customary in the rest of the cemetery or garden of remembrance.

Privately owned or charitable trust owned provision tends to be exclusively for natural burial, whereas provision owned by local authorities tends to be part of a landscape of inclusive provision, creating a place for the dead that maximises styles and choice of burial. A crematorium or cemetery might utilise both modes of disposal (burial and cremation), amongst a variety of settings (rose garden, woodland area, war memorials etc.) for segregated users (Catholics, Muslims etc.), which places limitations upon achieving the ideal concept of natural burial under municipal provision:<sup>29</sup>

Barton is a whole woodland area: it's professional and encapsulated by its own privacy, whereas this isn't. We're selling a bit of a cemetery as part of a cemetery! And I think it therefore dilutes the whole green burial bit. So I've no idea how they're going to react here [*possible clients*] but again, we're down for offering choice... (An employee at Newmarket Road cemetery in Cambridge)



Figure 2: Hexham cemetery's natural burial provision  
Source: Author's photo taken June 2008

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<sup>29</sup> This is perhaps one reason why local authority-owned natural burial sites tend to have the lowest annual burial figures, though a notable exception is Brighton and Hove City Council's woodland burial provision (opened in 1994) which is now full due to "large demand". Cf. <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1001143> [Retrieved 16/04/10]. These details were disclosed from unpublished research by Clayden, A. Hockey, J. and T. Green (2010) *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial*. See <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html> [Retrieved 18/04/10]

Natural burial grounds that are privately owned or owned by a charitable trust offer the greatest diversity of locations and management practices, which I argue is partly due to the fact that these sites usually occupy a larger number of hectares and therefore have fewer spatial restraints acting upon them. Privately owned sites can produce their own code of practice and do not necessarily have the same financial budget constraints as a local authority provider. Unlike a local authority provider, privately owned sites have greater accountability to themselves and greater control over their natural burial provision with regard to landscape and regulations. From the photos below one can, for example, see that the landscapes of privately owned natural burial sites vary greatly. Figures 3 and 4 show privately-run natural burial grounds that are visibly less manicured and regimented than the local authority provision in Figure 2.



Figure 3: Graves in a green field burial ground owned by a farmer in Co. Durham  
Source: Author's photo taken June 2008



Figure 4: Privately-managed Epping Forest Burial Park  
Source: Author's photo taken April 2008

The extent to which each site will regulate the pro-environmental practices of natural burial also varies enormously, prompting Clayden to assert that for the benefit of consumers, natural burial ground providers “must be explicit about what is and is not permitted” (2004:75). This is particularly relevant with regard to memorial items at the graveside and coffin or urn specifications:

The introduction of an environmental classification may benefit both the consumer and burial ground manager by clarifying the environmental aims of the burial ground and how these are going to be achieved through ongoing management. (Clayden 2004:75)

Clayden's (2004) call for an environmental classification could, in fact, be a source of tension in natural burial provision, since provision is also initiated for the purpose of creating a viable form of income generation, particularly with privately owned sites.<sup>30</sup> Natural burial provision initiated by local authorities on the other hand is often in response to expanding options in which natural burial is seen as a way of utilising small pieces of land within an existing cemetery or crematorium that does not require high levels of grounds maintenance. Not all natural burial provision is, then, implemented for pro-environmental purposes.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Leighton (2008) as an example.

Despite such diversity, it seems possible to classify natural burial sites in the UK in three ways:

1. With regard to *ownership* as Clayden and Dixon (2007) identified above.
2. With regard to the *physical landscape* (i.e. mature woodland or copse, green/meadow field, newly-established woodland).<sup>31</sup> The landscape's appearance is also linked to the aims of some site providers to do one or more of the following: reclaim native habitats, preserve native habitats or create native habitats.
3. With regard to '*green*' *credentials* that encompass the purpose and future vision of the site (i.e. whether the natural burial site is simply an outcome of broadening local authority provision or it provides a viable financial venture for someone's livelihood, or whether the site has been established to expressly conserve biodiversity and native habitats).

In the USA, the Green Burial Council identifies three types of 'natural burial cemetery'.<sup>32</sup> This taxonomy is constructed upon the extent to which a site focuses upon the conservation of land, as opposed to burial, as the guiding principle of provision:

1. Conservation burial ground
2. Natural burial ground
3. Hybrid burial ground

Harris claims the "greenest" in this taxonomy is the 'conservation burial ground'. Whereas the 'natural burial ground' "offers a green burial that may or may not involve ecological restoration of the land" and the 'hybrid burial ground', like many

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<sup>31</sup> As Figures 2, 3 and 4 illustrate.

<sup>32</sup> For a distribution map of 'natural burial preserves' in America see <http://naturalburial.coop/USA/> [Retrieved 23/06/10] One of America's 'conservation' burial grounds is also the nation's first national pagan burial ground. Founded in 1995 and known as Circle Cemetery. It is located within 200 acres of nature preserve called Circle Sanctuary. See <http://www.circlesanctuary.org/cemetery/> [Retrieved 30/06/10] Email enquiries were sent to the UK Pagan Federation to learn of similar initiatives in the UK but a reply is still pending. Certainly, further research on natural burial provision for pagans would be illuminating, despite the fact that the designation 'pagan' is contested and ambiguous to start with. See <http://www.paganfed.org/> [Retrieved 30/06/10]

of the natural burial grounds in the UK, is “a conventional cemetery that accommodates green burial” (2007:177).

Other countries appear to be propagating their own variation of the practice, though far from the extent witnessed to date in the UK. In Japan, people can choose tree-burial (*jumokusou*).<sup>33</sup> In Taiwan, the local government of Taipei are promoting ‘tree burial’ alongside ‘flower burial’ and ‘sea burial’, available since 2003 as a “result of enquiries into disposal practices in Australia” (Tremlett 2007:30). New Zealand,<sup>34</sup> Australia,<sup>35</sup> Canada,<sup>36</sup> Netherlands,<sup>37</sup> Germany<sup>38</sup> and Italy<sup>39</sup> also have one or more natural burial grounds (Joyce 2009:529).

Looking across cultures and time, the current innovation of ‘natural burial’ shares practices in common with the “sacred groves” of rural India, garden burials of British Quakers in the mid- to late- seventeenth century and the Orthodox Jewish tradition of interring a non-embalmed corpse in a shroud or plain wood coffin to honour an Old Testament interpretation of “dust to dust” (Harris 2007:165). Harris concludes that natural burial in America is “little more than a return to long tradition. Much of what constitutes natural burial...was once standard practice in this country, the default, not the exception” (2007:3). A subtle but significant difference in the evolution of the practice between Britain and America is that in America the practice is in some ways more radical since American burials typically involve a concrete-reinforced vault and

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<sup>33</sup> See Sebastien Boret’s forthcoming doctoral research at Oxford Brookes in which he undertook anthropological fieldwork at a Japanese tree-burial cemetery. Draft chapters of Boret’s thesis were kindly made available through personal correspondence.

<sup>34</sup> See Living Legacies at Motueka for example: <http://www.livinglegacies.co.nz/> [Retrieved 06/05/10]

<sup>35</sup> See BushLand Cemetery at Lismore Memorial Gardens run by Lismore city council [http://www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/cmst/lcc002/view\\_doc.asp?id=4877&cat=302](http://www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/cmst/lcc002/view_doc.asp?id=4877&cat=302) [Retrieved 28/06/10]

<sup>36</sup> See advocacy by Mike Salisbury: the current president of the natural burial cooperative in Toronto <http://www.naturalburial.coop/canada/> [Retrieved 06/05/10]

<sup>37</sup> See Klaassens and Groote (2010) and *Natural Burial Grounds* [Retrieved 28/06/10] <http://www.compasnet.org/afbeeldingen/Magazines/ED%20Magazine%204/15%20In%20particular.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> See *Reinhardswald* [Retrieved 06/09/10] <http://www.friedwald.de/Startseite.AxCMS?ActiveID=1001> and, *A Final Resting Place in a Quiet Forest - Alternative Funerals* [Retrieved 06/09/10] <http://www.goethe.de/ges/phi/dos/rkd/en128025.htm>

<sup>39</sup> See *Capsula Mundi*. Two Italian designers have created a biodegradable egg-shaped coffin that is interred with a tree above. The idea is that this will facilitate the propagation of memorial forests in places of burial. [Retrieved 06/08/10] <http://www.capsulamundi.it/>

an embalmed corpse (Ashwood 2009). When Ramsey Creek,<sup>40</sup> the first American ‘conservation burial ground’ opened in 1998, both the location and the mode of burial were a radical break from the Mitford (1963) portrayal of the American funeral industry. In Britain however, embalming is not obligatory practice<sup>41</sup> and graves are not constructed as cement-lined vaults, so in many ways natural burial is less obviously distinct from other burial places and modes.<sup>42</sup>

However, this research suggests natural burial sites are qualitatively distinct from other burial places in contemporary Britain in two ways. Firstly, they have an explicit dual purpose, both as a place to inter ashes or a corpse, and as a place deemed to contribute to ecological preservation or improvement to be enjoyed by the living. A natural burial site is therefore “unlike a cemetery with its singular mortuary purpose” (Clayden *et al.* 2010b:135). In Britain, this is encapsulated in some providers’ ambitions for making natural burial sites protected ecological places to be managed by environmental or wildlife trusts once burial sites become full. In America, Joe Sehee, Executive Director of the Green Burial Council even wants to use natural burial grounds as a “fundraising strategy” to purchase and create public open spaces to be enjoyed by the living.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See *Memorial Ecosystems: The Leaders in Conservation Burial – About Ramsey Creek Preserve* <http://www.memorialecosystems.com/Locations/WestminsterSC/tabid/58/Default.aspx> [Retrieved 09/02/10]

<sup>41</sup> In an unpublished paper Parsons (2010) highlights that although embalming took place in Britain during the eighteenth century it was largely restricted to nobility and set apart from the services of the undertaker. Parsons attributes a historical shift, the re-location of the dead resting at home to funeral parlours, as largely influencing the significant uptake of commercial embalming in this country from the late 1950s: “The growth of embalming stems from a period when greater responsibility for the body was being acquired by funeral directors. Whilst custody did not automatically mean embalming would be carried out, the supply of embalming was in the interests of the funeral director in contrast to the service being demanded by the bereaved” (2010:5). Presently however, there are no accurate figures for embalming conducted in the UK (2010:8). The British Institute of Embalmers (BIE, launched in 1927) does not carry out a survey, although it has tried to do this in the past. One unsubstantiated source states that up to 90 per cent of bodies are embalmed (Pym 1990:49). Parsons, in personal correspondence commented: “I doubt if the figure is that high. The large firms promote embalming, as do most co-ops and many smaller businesses, but they always hesitate in giving out figures...I would take a guess that around 50 per cent of people dying in the UK are embalmed.” What is known however is that embalming faces challenges because of “concerns about the environmental consequences of burying or cremating embalmed bodies, and also the threat of the withdrawal of formaldehyde by the EC” (Parsons 2010:8). See also West (2010:23-26).

<sup>42</sup> Further comparative research at natural burial sites in countries other than the UK would provide insightful information on the extent to which new interpretations of the practice that began in England reflect local customs, cultural practices and context.

<sup>43</sup> From an interview in *Green Burial – KQED QUEST* (view from 09.18 minutes) YouTube [Retrieved 02/03/10] [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTzQ0GOelHk&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTzQ0GOelHk&feature=player_embedded)

Secondly, natural burial provides a contemporary therapeutic landscape for mourners.<sup>44</sup> The visible presence of the dead at Barton Glebe is minimal compared to a cemetery. The creation of a burial place in which human beings are not necessarily given sovereign status (Worpole 2003b:193), but rather where the natural world is preserved and/or encouraged to flourish, has prompted some criticism that natural burial is a recent cultural development indicative of death denial. For example, in reference to Forever Fernwood cemetery in California:

In this particular “cemetery”, at least in its green burial section, there are no visible signs of the dead who are buried there. This makes it feel [sic] like a park – *but nothing more, only a park*. It is no longer a cemetery but a park whose link with death is nothing more than its use as a space for environmentally-friendly body disposal. *It has lost all connection with the personal and cultural memorial function of a cemetery.*<sup>45</sup>

A widow whose husband is buried at Barton Glebe similarly described another natural burial site in Essex as being *more like a park with a chapel*. What is at stake here is the perceived cultural function and appearance of places of burial. The writer of the blog extract above has clear notions of what a cemetery should do and look like, but in reality, do such distinctions and fixed functions of place matter? As Rugg (2000) and other historians of cemeteries have so clearly demonstrated, the meanings and purposes of burial places are highly mutable because they are subject to the sensibilities and tastes of the living. So, despite the fact that in England the most common mode of disposal is cremation, voiced amongst my informants there is an attitude that funerals at crematoria are a *one-size-fits-all-thing* which makes them seem *so artificial*.<sup>46</sup> Cemeteries and churchyards on the other hand are sometimes seen as places of neglect and *monuments to death*. This ever-changing historical trajectory with regard to how places of the dead are valued and therefore used, has inevitably meant that for some people the recent option to have a natural burial holds much allure; an allure that this thesis sets out to identify.

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 7 for detailed discussion.

<sup>45</sup> Original emphasis. This view is maintained by an alternative burial provider, Perpetua’s Garden, in *Denying death in green burials?* (December 10<sup>th</sup> 2009) [Retrieved 02/03/10] <http://perpetuasgarden.org/green-burial/integrating-death-in-green-burial/>

<sup>46</sup> Both quotes from Andy whose grandmother is buried at Barton Glebe.

## ***Thesis Overview***

Following this broad view of natural burial's concept and provision in Britain, Chapter 2 will outline the methodological approach undertaken for the case study with Chapter 3 locating the research within existing scholarship on death, dying and disposal. It highlights: a) historical and cultural continuities between the innovation of natural burial and prior disposal practices and b) the assumptions in natural burial literature regarding the class and age of users. Chapter 4 presents the case study by providing a historical account of the Arbory Trust and its development of woodland burial provision at Barton Glebe.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Barton Glebe is a physical landscape in which emotions and memory are socio-spatially articulated through 'nature'. It demonstrates how natural burial is fostered by a perception of the natural landscape as therapeutic; a quality that people locate in the cyclical renewal of life dramatised and displayed in the seasonal landscape. I suggest that this symbolism of 'nature', particularly conferred by flowers and trees, grants the bereaved and those facing their own mortality a motif of hope and continuity in an 'emotional landscape'.

Chapter 6 offers an extensive discussion on the values people invest in natural burial, by presenting the range of motives that led people to pre-register and/or choose Barton Glebe on behalf of the deceased. I conclude that natural burial is inevitably a contested practice for those who engage with it, because of the multiplicity of values that are conferred upon this burial mode. Typically, environmental and aesthetic values are most often in conflict, with the former more readily asserted by the Trust and the latter by the bereaved. This tension over the extent to which particular values are exercised creates a value-judgement that some natural burial sites are more 'natural' than others. This is partly fostered by a conflict of interest between commercial and ethical/environmental motives for engaging with natural burial. Nevertheless, despite the array of values drawn upon in pro-natural burial choices, these values demonstrate how some people seek a 'retrospective fulfilment of identity' (Davies 2002[1997]:141, 2005a) in which personal identity values held in life are honoured in death, again fostering a sense of continuity from life to death and beyond.

Chapter 7 looks at the place called Barton Glebe. In doing so, I argue that although life (activities of the living and growth in the natural world) and death (corpses) are brought closer together, they are not on equal terms, for life is emphasised and death is muted. This is because the dead are not *necessarily* given sovereign status in the landscape of a natural burial ground (Worpole 2003b), as is usually the case with the erection of gravestones and other visible memorials. Rather, the natural world is more often emphasised and therefore granted sovereign status, creating a naturalised context for death that lessens the visibility of the dead in the landscape. However, what is understood to be nature's sovereign status in natural burial grounds is actually an aesthetic veneer of the natural landscape, judiciously planned, planted and managed. Finally, because natural burial grounds do not necessarily look like people's cultural expectations of a cemetery, visitors may feel more at ease and less inhibited at Barton Glebe since the presence of the dead is more concealed, facilitating the impression that the place exclusively belongs to the deceased person they are visiting. Thus a new burial place is emerging that nurtures a non-conventional mode of engaging with the dead; be it a picnic in the burial ground or reading a book by a grave. Natural burial sites therefore offer something in addition to going to a burial ground with the explicit, sole purpose of visiting a grave. This is one of the reasons I argue why these places are becoming associated with being *more relaxed*, as interviewees often described.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 engages with the ethnographic data to reflect upon human experiences with death in relation to natural burial using anthropological gift theory. The conceptual allusion to gift-giving and reciprocal nourishment is seen to provide a creative means for the pre-registered and bereaved to imagine continuity beyond death and to affirm meaningful relations and the values of the living. The motive to *give something back* or *be of use* that is commonly offered by users to explain their natural burial preference has added social significance when analysed using gift theory. If the giving of gifts is a conduit for, and expression of, personal relationships (Godelier 1999), then to *give something back* using the corporeal body as a source of nourishment symbolically encapsulates and expresses people's sense of connectedness, social responsibility, their value of life and all that is inalienable from their identity and core values. I also argue that through analysing some of the motives

for pre-paid users desiring to *give something back*, natural burial offers a new creative outlet for seeking and framing salvation, albeit in its broadest sense. Finally, I argue that pre-registered users' desire *to return/go back to nature* constitutes a realisation of Lifton's (1974, 1976) symbolic immortality theory through the natural pathway in which a continuity of identity is achieved by being survived by 'nature'.

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It should be noted that in the following pages, text italicised in direct speech or citations represents original emphasis by the speaker or writer. As demonstrated in the paragraph above, paraphrasing of idioms and utterances often used in the context of natural burial and quoting sections of cited text or interview in the main text of the thesis, are also italicised.

## Chapter 2

### On Practice: Disciplinarity and method

Chapter 1 indicated that this research constitutes a case study. Case studies are not necessarily undertaken to provide generalisable data<sup>47</sup> but are exploratory from the outset and accordingly seek to produce a ‘depth’ of description and interpretation. There are voices in this thesis rather than statistics and trends. Nevertheless, this research is complementary to concurrent survey research on natural burial being conducted by the Department of Landscape and Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield.<sup>48</sup>

This research is exploratory in approach and has involved a journey that has sensitised me to the nuances of the funeral industry, bereavement and death, but has not necessarily given me any clear answers. Similarly, the thesis presents an unfolding of issues but does not present substantive conclusions on natural burial *per se*. Rather, the research and subsequent thesis focus upon capturing some of the complexities and nuances of the emotional processes fostered in woodland burial and all the aligned experiences, spaces and states as expressed in people’s values, sense of place and their modes of engagement with Barton Glebe.

The themes which emerged, loosely providing the chapter structure (emotions, values, place, memory and motifs of immortality and salvation), were mainly derived from initial categories that emerged in coding interview transcriptions.<sup>49</sup> This thesis is not predicated upon a hypothesis, but began with the broad aim of ethnographically understanding what woodland burial constitutes and represents to those already engaged in the case study. The anthropological analysis presented here offers a socio-

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<sup>47</sup> Generalisation in qualitative research is often seen as an objective for social surveys (Alasuutari 1995:156).

<sup>48</sup> See *Natural Burial Project* led by Andy Clayden as principal investigator and Jenny Hockey as co-investigator. [Retrieved 20/06/10] <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html>

<sup>49</sup> See a list of the initial codes generated from transcriptions in Appendix 13.

cultural description and interpretation of a network of people who coalesce around Barton Glebe woodland burial ground.

There are limitations to using a single case study to illuminate social and cultural understandings of woodland burial, because a woodland burial site does not contain a representative sample of the population with regards to age, sex, social status, cause of death etc.; a limitation shared by case studies on specialist cemeteries. Moreover, burial practices and attitudes are seldom static through time and need not correlate with wider socio-cultural attitudes (Humphreys 1981). Variation often exists within a culture with regards to the treatment of the dead making inferences from case studies complex and necessarily limited. However, in this case neither empirical generalisation nor theoretical inference constituted the research objectives.<sup>50</sup> Rather, the aim was to present an anthropologically-driven descriptive case study of an emergent burial practice which, in its widespread availability, is seemingly peculiar to contemporary Britain.<sup>51</sup> The primary aim was to offer ethnographic insight into people's attitudes towards this practice and the ways in which they engage with it.

The research process began by consulting theoretical texts to identify possible socio-cultural landscapes through which the emergence and meaning of natural burial could be understood.<sup>52</sup> However, it was only through sustained conversation and observation of Barton Glebe's users that a 'second landscape' of local practice emerged concerning individual understandings of the world and how these combined in the practice of woodland burial at Barton Glebe. This second landscape became visible through fieldwork and ethnographic description and interpretation (Hirsch 2003:2). This is the value of an ethnographic case study of Barton Glebe, even if it did rely heavily on interviews.

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<sup>50</sup> Hammersley is especially critical of ethnography and dismisses the ethnographic research context of many anthropological works as lacking "intrinsic interest to a large audience" (1992:5). Subsequently he discerns two means by which ethnographers and anthropologists attempt to make their work of wider relevance: either to argue that the case study is representative of a wider sample or to generate or support a theory (1992:5). In either case Hammersley concludes "neither is pursued very successfully by ethnographers at present" (1992:6).

<sup>51</sup> See Figure 1, page 4.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 3.

## ***Methodological Issues***

### **Anthropology at home**

The British anthropologist's gaze has been turning homeward since the beginning of the 1980s; by that I mean to Britain and to a lesser extent Europe, as opposed to the former colonies of 'classic' anthropology (Watson 1999:17). However, the nature of conducting fieldwork in a post-industrial society that is also the researcher's homeland usually involves day-to-day social interaction that is "often spatially dislocated, time-bounded and characterized by intimacy at a distance" (Hockey 2002:211). The participation in the "flow of ordinary encounters" by the researcher can become more ambiguous as "the spatial and temporal boundaries which traditionally separate the field from academia" become increasingly blurred as they are brought closer together (Hockey 2002:211). An ambiguity that means whilst "anthropologists abroad may exchange mutual exoticisms with detachment...presented with parallel practices at home, they respond as citizens" (Okley 1987:79).

In turning homeward I do not believe that I cease to *do* anthropology. Though the object of my research is geographically and linguistically more localised to my own place in the world, I still embody a critical, reflexive, questioning perspective when in my role as a researcher cognizant of anthropology's "methodological heritage" (Messerschmidt 1981:15).

I found that my 'field' existed everywhere because people met in daily life engaged in conversation about my research. Advantageously, by conducting research in my native language I was able to have in-depth conversations on complex issues with a range of people from many walks of life. Moreover, people were often familiar with the discourse of higher education and the fact that someone may spend three years researching an aspect of the human socio-cultural world. I did not have to explain myself in this regard, nor present an alternative scenario that explains my interest in the subject to give people a sense of who I was and why I was there, all of which I

have encountered and negotiated in previous fieldwork overseas.<sup>53</sup> However there are also inevitable compromises and complexities that arise from studying within my own culture, especially, gaining a coherent sense of when I was *doing* research and when I was not and feeling the immediacy of accountability for all I said, did and wrote as a researcher. These are two issues that demand immediate discussion.

### **Defining and locating the 'field'**

Barton Glebe and the Arbory Trust's woodland burial provision were the object of research. This incorporated the physical geography of the woodland burial site as well as the interactions, behaviours and values of those who came into contact with the Trust and/or Barton Glebe.

The demand for defining the object of study in anthropological fieldwork conducted in Western society quickly emphasises how the 'field' is actually a multi-dimensional concept that needs *locating* (Coleman and Collins 2006:4). Moreover, my 'field' transcended spatial, temporal and cultural boundaries, emphasising Caputo's assertion that "retaining a spatialized understanding of the field imposes limitations and biases that are unproductive in contemporary anthropological research contexts" (2000:21). Today's cultural complexity, exacerbated by virtual communication, means that it is over-simplistic to conceptualise the field only in the geographical plane of 'space' and 'place' (Coleman and Collins 2006). In identifying my research 'domain', spatial qualities are:

...significant but not absolutely primary dimensions of ethnographic practice...fields are as much 'performed' as 'discovered', framed by our boundaries that shift according to the analytical and rhetorical preferences of the ethnographer and, more rarely, the informant. (Coleman and Collins 2006:17)

Essentially, Coleman and Collins (2006) argue that fieldwork is performative, reliant upon social relationships that can transcend space and time. Suggestions have also been made for 'multi-sited' or 'multi-locale fieldwork' where locale can imply virtual space as well as geographical space (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), though this is

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<sup>53</sup> Primarily for my undergraduate dissertation (*Venerated Waters: Locating Ganga Devi in the Lives of a Hindu Fishing Community in Rural Bangladesh*) for the Department of Anthropology at the University of Durham.

debated (Marcus 1995). Other alternatives for conceptualising the context for conducting anthropological research are to refer to ‘networks’ or ‘communities of practice’, a series of ‘moments’ or ‘conversations’; an encounter or event in which “the ‘field’ is detailed in the moment of its occurrence” in all its embodied “emotional engagement” (James 1999:118). Kristmundsdottir (2006) in her role as an anthropologist sees herself *as* the location for fieldwork in biographical research. A context that means:

In effect, the researcher enters the field whenever she is researching, a process that may involve extensive travel as well as exploring written documents, reminiscences, and so on. (Coleman and Collins 2006:17)

This was how I approached my own ‘fieldwork’: not so much a place but a research mode engaged with when in situated moments or conversations related to woodland burial. My ‘field’ became a series of encounters with people and involved a process whereby I was “situated” in the field wherever I happened to be conducting anything research-related. I carried the field with me and subsequently the field “shifted from being a geographical place to being a subjectively defined location” (Kristmundsdottir 2006: 168), which I took with me as I connected with, travelled along and intersected social networks. By conceptualising the field as a heterogeneous network (Burrell 2009) I was able to follow the Arbory Trust’s provision along various networks of engagement from funeral professionals, to staff, officiants and the bereaved and pre-registered users, out of which emerged a network connected to the Trust. Thus, a ‘field site’ was constructed from continuity in connection (Burrell 2009:190) and I was able to forge a link between processes and situated experiences (Burrell 2009:187). The Arbory Trust became the entry point into a network rather than constituting the research location.

By defining the field site as a network...the field site transitions from a bounded space that the researcher dwells within to something that more closely tracks the social phenomenon under study. This site is constructed in terms of how such a phenomenon is perceived and acted on by participants. Ultimately, this approach is in keeping with the *emic* ideal of ethnographic practice. The field site comes to be defined by the physical movements, places indexed in speech and text, and social imaginings produced by research participants. (Burrell 2009:195-96)

I then traversed heterogeneous networks beginning with the Arbory Trust's list of suppliers, service providers and other professional contacts. As I followed these for interviews, each would yield another contact to broaden my social network in relation to Barton Glebe and natural burial more generally. The same applied to the site users initially sought from an open day held at Barton Glebe. These individuals would subsequently introduce me to friends or colleagues who they thought would be willing to speak with me. Moreover, references to people and places in interviews provided ever expanding opportunities for new locales to visit physically or online (cf. Burrell 2009:192). This was particularly the case with professional social networks. In defining the field as a heterogeneous network, the Trust's annual open days were instrumental in providing entry points to this network providing, like Burrell's internet cafes in Accra, "an accessible public space where people could be recruited for interviews" (2009: 196).

### **Defining a role and gaining trust and access**

By conceptualising my field site as a network of things, words and people, defining a role within the field was no longer an issue, whereas it had posed a problem at the beginning of the research project since I had intended to spend protracted periods of time in Cambridgeshire assuming a role within the Trust, and presumably onsite.<sup>54</sup> That was, until I visited Barton Glebe for the first time. The site itself has no full-time staff, just two or three part-time staff who make themselves available for funerals and to the public on Wednesday mornings. This situation did not provide enough opportunities for social interaction to justify the financial expense of staying in the vicinity for protracted periods of time.<sup>55</sup> I therefore had to re-design my approach to accessing entry points for research material and participants. By following networks of site users and professional contacts made at the open day I was able to make a

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<sup>54</sup> The methodological heritage of the discipline of anthropology, even today, implicitly aligns being a 'proper', authentic anthropologist, with immersive periods spent in the social and geographical context of research by primarily utilising participant observation, despite all the academic claims to the contrary. The emic training of anthropology teaches that to conduct such 'fieldwork' provides more worthy knowledge than can be discovered through interview and survey data alone. So in the first instance I was anticipating conducting research in the manner in which I had been accustomed to understand was the only 'right' way of doing anthropology. See also Kristmundsdottir (2006) who offers a concise critique of anthropology's disciplinary boundary-making through method.

<sup>55</sup> This also has implications for bereaved visitors and some frustrations were voiced in interviews with regards to the on-site availability of Arbory Trust staff for enquiries and after care.

series of brief visits to Cambridgeshire<sup>56</sup> where I utilised contacts and acquaintances made during research to stay in Ely, Barton, Comberton and Cambridge on various occasions.

My collaborative partnership<sup>57</sup> with the Trust was most fruitful in providing opportunities to access networks; and affiliation with the Trust meant I was more often trusted by site users. Access to potential interviewees was also contingent upon the capacity to create friendships and access subsequent networks made during the course of research (Guest 2007:233).<sup>58</sup> Being affiliated to the Trust as an independent researcher from Durham University gave me a public persona and institutional status with which I was able to negotiate meetings with various funeral professionals; however, it also meant I had been situated within the Trust's own trusted professional network. Affiliated to the Trust, I could not undermine their professionalism or organisation. However, though my research is facilitated in collaboration with the Trust, my affiliation with them did not extend to furthering their professional interests for financial gain. Additionally, I consciously avoided becoming involved in advocacy or interests groups, despite being approached, as I did not want to compromise my impartiality in relation to the subject by being typecast by funeral professionals as having an agenda that was either pro-cremation or pro-burial and worse, seen to be promoting a particular natural burial site.

### **Research ethics**

The application of Western ethical standards in anthropological research is itself an ethnocentric endeavour that is often unquestioned (Van der Geest 2003). Yet one cannot deny that 'responsible' research demands ethical guidelines, even if these are deemed to be provisional preferences in meeting the demands and complexities of conducting social research in the contemporary world. Taplin (2009) speaks of the "give and take" in contemporary social research where reciprocal relationships should be promoted. In such a research approach, ethical research practice is responsive to

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<sup>56</sup> The longest duration in Cambridgeshire for any one research visit was four weeks, the shortest being two days. These visits were made between 2008 and 2010.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 11.

<sup>58</sup> The relative success or failure to achieve this is dependent on the researcher's self-awareness and sensitivity to 'impression management' and appropriateness for self-disclosure. See Hammersley and Atkinson (1983).

complex situations that arise during the course of research, assisted by the researcher's cultivated reflexivity, rather than anticipating scenarios through normative ethical codes:

Reflexive thinking in the field facilitates ethically aware practice in complex situations, being responsive to a specific place and time and which may lead to a change in research plans (Cutcliffe and Ramcharan 2002). Researchers can therefore be equipped to make decisions in recognition of what is being 'given', 'taken' or 'gained', as the research relationship shifts and changes. (Taplin 2009:238)

As in most social relationships, the research process involves elements of unpredictability requiring researchers to be fully responsive to circumstances. "Emergent ethics" and "reflexivity" are inherent in facilitating this responsiveness (Taplin 2009:238). Atkinson (2009) and Dingwall (2008) have argued for a re-thinking of the regulatory ethics that are now being applied to the social sciences and arts and humanities under formats inherited from biomedical research, which they argue impoverishes research and has detrimental impacts upon the researcher or trainee doctoral student<sup>59</sup> (Atkinson 2009:21).

Atkinson argues that most ethnographic research is dependent upon "successful negotiation and maintenance of *access*" (2009:19 original emphasis) to the membership of a research group, rather than individuals consenting to interview or trails and tests. Thus, "most ethical protocols" are rendered "anthropologically naïve at best" (2009:19) because access and maintenance of ensuing relationships can only be part anticipated and will inevitably change over time and lead the researcher into different contexts and circumstances:

...the nature of the research itself is so profoundly an emergent property of the processes of data collection and research design, that are themselves emergent, unfolding processes, that it becomes all but impossible to solicit consent to the research that is 'informed' in the sense of being predictable and explicable before the research itself is carried out at all. If the outcomes of an ethnography were entirely predictable, then there would be virtually no point in conducting the research at all. (Atkinson 2009:21)

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<sup>59</sup> For example, Douglas-Jones's multi-sited ethnographic research on bioethics led her to argue that ethics-forms constitute a normative contract based upon anticipation and prediction, which stifles the responsive mode of the researcher (doctoral research in process at Durham University, Anthropology Department, draft chapter made available through personal contact).

Citing Murphy and Dingwall (2007) Atkinson highlights that:

...the iterative nature of ethnographic inquiry means that access is always relational and sequential, rather than based on a one-off contractual agreement, and that ethnographic researchers will never find it possible to specify at the outset all that her or his research will involve (2009:22).

Atkinson's solution is not to revert to covert or unethical research practices in ethnography but rather to develop a "general application" of research guided by core values and guiding principles (2009:25) as opposed to normative procedures and prescriptions, which assume research participants engage on an individual basis as is the case with clinical trials. The ethnographer's iterative research inquiry does not sit well with ethical procedures modelled on those practised in the biomedical sciences. Whilst I concur with Atkinson (2009), the vast majority of 'data' in my research was collected in the form of individual interviews. Therefore, I had more opportunity to apply ethical procedures, such as consent forms and offering anonymity in any written documents than if I was undertaking participant observation as the main source of data generation. Nevertheless, there is an exchange of vulnerability implicit in anthropology since "anthropological knowledge grows out of social relationships" (Sykes 2005:206-07). Securing informed consent from participants is recognition and understanding of this inherent process on behalf of the researcher, yet it has limitations.

### **Voluntary informed consent**

Before each interview, the interviewee was informed that their identity would be anonymised by reference to pseudonyms. The interviewee was then asked to sign a consent form.<sup>60</sup> In this way I was granted voluntary consent by interviewees on the expectation that anonymity would safe-guard individual identities. However, I did stress to each interviewee that the intended insertion of excerpts from interview transcripts to support thematic discussion in the thesis might jeopardise the attempt to conceal identities. For as Mellick and Fleming argue, the "aggregation of separate details" may lead to "unwitting disclosure" of identities (2010:307). This was

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<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 10.

especially true of those who are already in the public domain, such as the Trust employees and volunteers, Trustees and key historical figures to the Trust's formation. Subsequently, I decided to refer to key figures in the inception of the Arbory Trust by their real names as their identities were already disclosed in media archives.<sup>61</sup> However, I decided to anonymise those currently working for the Trust by referring to their job title only because, I argue, by not referring to the speaker of an interview excerpt with reference to their professional relationship to the Trust would lose value in context and meaning. Nevertheless, these individuals are identifiable from disclosure on the Trust's website. Only the bereaved and pre-registered were given individual pseudonyms. These are the boundaries of anonymity I felt I could realistically draw in this research. 'Privacy' and 'informed consent' are contested, context specific terms (Mellick and Fleming 2010: 309 citing Homan 1991) derived from normative ethical guidelines, yet they are not wholly satisfactory. The vulnerability of the researcher is still at stake even when informing interviewees in order to gain their consent, because one can never wholly predict the outcomes of research, such as thematic content for discussion or future publications and ensuing ramifications of the research. In practice, informed consent is actually a contract of trust granted by the interviewee which holds the researcher accountable in the face of many unpredictable outcomes. Though an insufficient ethical tool, it still has its purpose.

In my case, the consent forms were a naïve promise that could never be completely adhered to and they highlight a tension between normative ethical procedures and the operationalisation of these procedures in the context of social research.<sup>62</sup> At best, the consent forms symbolised a) a declaration of trust from interviewees regarding a projection of future and unforeseen circumstances, b) a means of introduction and formality and c) a panacea for the researcher's anxiety over the emotional encounter of interviewing bereaved people. At worst, they represent a mistruth on the part of the researcher about what it is they are going to *do*, for an anthropological approach means the interpretative focus of research – what gets 'written up' – is never wholly predictable before or even during 'field work'. A certain degree of anxiety persists for

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<sup>61</sup> For the purposes of Chapter 4.

<sup>62</sup> For example, the implications arising from research and the researcher's aims may not be fully realised by some research participants or they may become "invisible" over time" (ASA 1999:4).

the social researcher concerning whether one is being 'ethical', 'professional' and 'rigorous' throughout the non-linear processes of data-gathering.<sup>63</sup>

## ***Multiple Methods***

### **Attitudinal questionnaires<sup>64</sup>**

Structured upon a thematic framework, questionnaires were administered to those who had pre-registered for a grave space and/or the bereaved of those interred at Barton Glebe. Those who participated in the postal questionnaire were self-selecting after I had made an address to the public gathered at Barton Glebe during the Trust's annual open day in 2008. The Trust preferred this approach to accessing questionnaire respondents rather than posting a questionnaire to all those on their mailing list, which the Trust felt would entail a violation of privacy for those individuals and families they dealt with.

Questions of validity and generalisability arise when relying upon self-selecting interview and questionnaire participants because of the unrepresentative, non-random sampling this approach involves.<sup>65</sup> However, since the aim of this research was to gain some ethnographically informed understanding of people's motives, perceptions and mode of engagement with Barton Glebe, rather than to make substantive claims about natural burial as a national burial phenomenon, I did not perceive a lack of generalisability as particularly problematic. Simpson's (1998) anthropological research in divorce courts was similarly reliant upon divorcees volunteering to participate in his questionnaires and interviews for a longitudinal study on divorce and separation. He noted "distortions" that enter data samples based upon self-selection and observed that of the self-selected couples, "over time the attrition was likely to have moved the samples in the direction of a more educated and articulate group than would have appeared by random chance" (1998:18). I am aware that this may also have occurred in my own research at Barton Glebe, particularly with the bereaved.

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<sup>63</sup> See Woodthorpe (2007a, 2009) on similar personal confessions from her research encounter in a London cemetery.

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix 9.

<sup>65</sup> The majority of the bereaved and pre-registered interviewed were pro-natural burial because it had been actively chosen rather than avoided and moreover, these people knew natural burial existed in the first place.

I used the questionnaire as an opportunity to: a) gather a preliminary idea of people’s views of Barton Glebe, reason for engagement and mode of engagement<sup>66</sup> and b) to make contact in order to invite volunteers for face-to-face interviews to be conducted in their homes. I sent out 31 questionnaires with a covering letter<sup>67</sup> to those who had signed up at the Trust’s open day; 23 were returned<sup>68</sup> and all but four volunteered to participate in interviews, representing 83 per cent of the self-selecting sample.

The questionnaire was designed for those who have pre-registered for a grave space with the Trust and those who knew someone interred at Barton Glebe, who I collectively refer to as the ‘bereaved’. In designing the questionnaire I was also mindful that some respondents may fall into both categories. I use the category ‘bereaved’ in the broadest sense as this is a culturally, socially, heterogeneous group.<sup>69</sup> I did not include a ‘none of the above’ category on my questionnaire for respondents to self-identify with because I knew from the Arbory Trust that all respondents had an existing personal connection with Barton Glebe.

### **Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews<sup>70</sup>**

Interviews followed up questionnaires to the bereaved and/or pre-registered, as well as including:

Funeral Directors	7
Clergy	4
Humanist or Civil Celebrants	4
Arbory Trust Staff and Trustees	10
Bereaved and/or pre-registered	27

<sup>66</sup> E.g. place of funeral, religious or secular, who officiated?

<sup>67</sup> See Appendix 9.

<sup>68</sup> Representing a 74 per cent postal return rate.

<sup>69</sup> I use ‘bereaved (visitors)’ as a category of research participants throughout the thesis rather than ‘bereaved families’ because not all those who visit a grave are visiting deceased kin; some visit Barton to locate a friend’s grave. Similarly I do not refer to the deceased as ‘loved one’ because this assumes a positive relationship was maintained by a visitor and the deceased.

<sup>70</sup> I conducted 61 face-to-face interviews and two telephone interviews. Interviews took place in participants’ homes or work place with the majority conducted between February and June 2009. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee on a digital voice recorder and each interviewee gave voluntary informed consent at the time of interview (see Appendix 10). The interviews were subsequently fully transcribed and then thematically coded using themes generated from the data itself, rather than being identified prior to interviews.

Barton or Comberton village residents	5
Other natural burial providers	3
Local cemetery managers	1
Local eco-coffin supplier	1
Other <sup>71</sup>	1

All professionals, pre-registered users and bereaved visitors were approached because they already engaged with the Trust in some way. However, access to local residents in the area was opportunistic and random and not all those interviewed necessarily knew anything of Barton Glebe and/or the Trust. The funeral professionals were approached through existing professional contacts maintained by the Trust. A letter of introduction<sup>72</sup> was sent to those professionals on the Trust’s mailing list inviting them to participate in an interview at their place of work. Once an initial core of funeral directors, clergy and celebrants were interviewed I often found they would recommend others in their profession to approach. It should be noted that all methods used involved my disclosure of affiliation to the Trust and my role as a researcher.

In anticipation of eliciting strong emotions from discussing sensitive topics in interviews, together with my physical presence as a researcher, like Morris and Thomas (2005) who conducted interviews with terminal cancer patients and their families, I decided to be flexible and informal in my interviews. Therefore, all interviews were loosely structured and conversational in style, though I did keep a list of key how, why and where questions with me as memory aids. Like Arnason (1998) who conducted interviews in relation to bereavement counselling, I found that interviewees readily engaged with the interview process. I would usually begin with greetings and asking “so how come I am sitting here with you today?”, to which people offered accounts of how they came to be at Barton Glebe the day they signed up for a questionnaire.

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<sup>71</sup> Ken West. He is a key public figure in the natural burial movement. I also conducted numerous informal conversations with other public figures associated with the NDC for example, but only Ken’s telephone interview was formally pre-arranged.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix 8.

Though my interviews were highly conversational and without a replicable set of questions, I hesitate from defining them as ‘unstructured’ because conceptually this is a misleading term. *All* interviews, including the ‘unstructured’ format commonly used by anthropologists, are “structured at a number of levels” (Collins 1998:2) and represent complex, dynamic social constructions where “multiple dialogues are conducted between multiple selves” (Collins 1998:1). ‘Unstructured’ interviews are still transformative in nature and are co-produced between the interviewee and the interviewer.

Place is also transformative by exerting an influence upon interviewee and interviewer. Retrospectively, I considered if I should have conducted interviews onsite at Barton Glebe rather than the interviewee’s home or work place. My primary motive for preferring to conduct home interviews was that it presented an opportunity to gather implicit contextual information on the interviewee from the material culture evident in their home as well as from the residential location. Also a number of interviewees were terminally ill and/or had restricted mobility, whilst some lived at considerable distance from Barton; thus for practical reasons home interviews were preferred for their own convenience. Owain Jones argues “remembering being-in-place” and “emotions of (remembered) place are powerful elements of emotional geographies of the self”, but “remembering through place” (2005:213) also constitutes this process. Owain Jones’s comment prompted retrospective consideration of how recollections of a funeral or grave visiting, for example, may have changed in narrative, tone and emotion if I had asked the bereaved and/or pre-registered interviewee to comment whilst onsite at Barton Glebe. Woodthorpe (2007b) chose to conduct informal interviewing at the graveside in her ethnographic study of a London cemetery and argues that interview content is contingent on the place of the research encounter as people present their knowledge and understanding differently in different contexts and times (2007b:87). Perhaps therefore my interview ‘data’ better represents ‘recollections’ or ‘imagined realities’ rather than ‘realities’ *per se*?

Finally, within anthropology there is “a methodological hierarchy which urgently requires reconsideration” where “a series of stand-alone interviews is often regarded as the poor relation or handmaiden of a participant-observation study” (Hockey

2002:210). Hockey's reconsideration of what exactly constitutes the anthropological method has been extremely influential in identifying the methods I used. Instead of understanding the interview (in all its various forms) as standing outside of participant observation, it is more truthfully "a particular kind of social interaction - one with its own ethos, habitus and practicality" (Rapport 2002:205). The interview is not "abstracted from the temporal flow of the life-course" (Rapport 2002:205) and moreover:

In a world of consultants and confessional chat shows, interviewing begins to resemble a form of participant-observation. As a practice it conforms closely to Western categories of experience. (Hockey 2002:220)

Interviews are part of day-to-day life in contemporary England and in the context of conducting research amongst the bereaved I was surprised by their willingness to be interviewed. Indeed some informants expected it in my role as a social researcher. I suspect that the willingness of many of the bereaved I have met is, in part, because they consciously or unconsciously welcome an outlet for their grief and a listening ear in a society which so often leaves the bereaved to deal with their grief privately, especially after a few months have passed from a funeral.

I assume "that reality and social life are always and essentially mediated through meanings" (Alasuutari 1995:35) and therefore it is my research objective to uncover these meanings – *what* they are, *why* these meanings are created and finally, *how* they exist or circulate. Both participant observation and interviews are heuristic devices that can be utilised to elucidate and understand these 'meanings'. Moreover, the complexity of contemporary British society and in conducting participant observation and interviews that span Cambridgeshire and further afield "requires" the collaboration of multidisciplinary approaches (Cohen 2002:329).

### **Observational studies**

These took place at Barton Glebe woodland burial site, including three funerals that took place there and visits to alternative disposal provision in Cambridgeshire and 17 other natural burial grounds in England and Scotland. Site visits always involved

photographic documentation,<sup>73</sup> making field notes on layout, fees, site regulations and my own impressions. If someone from management was available on site I would approach them for an impromptu interview.

Finally, the interviews, questionnaires and field visits were conducted in conjunction with continuous desk-based research that involved following online natural burial interest groups and blogs,<sup>74</sup> as well as online searches for media coverage and reference to the Trust's legal and administrative documentation and correspondence dating back to 1995.

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the methods and methodological issues that informed the doctoral research, particularly how the 'field' was re-framed in conducting anthropological research in the researcher's home culture on a cultural phenomenon that transcends a fixed geographical locality. The following chapter however, looks towards the theoretical influences underlying this research rather than the methodological influences discussed here.

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<sup>73</sup> Retrospectively, if I were to make changes to my methods I would incorporate the innovative visual method used by Clayden, Hockey and Green (September 2009 and Autumn 2009) in their concurrent natural burial research. They visited their case study sites fortnightly over a year to photograph the same chosen graves. This allowed the researchers to visually capture the seasonal landscape changes and any changes to memorials by bereaved visitors. This approach revealed subtle, ephemeral changes that they refer to as the bereaved's "ghost-lines", which they argue "indicate a form of 'dwelling' (Ingold 2000) within the burial ground" (From a conference paper abstract 2009). In my research I learnt of these processes anecdotally via interviews and participant observation; however a longitudinal visual record would have provided salient illustration to complement interview text.

<sup>74</sup> Primarily Charles Cowling's blog: *The Good Funeral Guide* [Retrieved 09/09/10] <http://www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk/blog/> and following the Facebook Group, *Natural Burial in the United Kingdom*, at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=137367937049&ref=mf> [Retrieved 09/09/10].

## Chapter 3

### On Context: Innovation, continuity and identity in modern British disposal practices

Apart from a postal survey to pre-registered users of Carlisle cemetery's woodland burial provision undertaken by Francis *et al.* (2005), very little is empirically known about this latest burial practice. So whilst "natural burial might signify a shift in both the (material) culture of burial and, more broadly, in environmentally-orientated ethical practice", it is important that "other interpretations must be considered" (Hockey 2007:2). Accordingly, this chapter is concerned with 1) theoretically mapping those "other interpretations" of natural burial's social and cultural significance and 2) identifying assumptions about natural burial in academic and popular literature, which mainly concern the age and class of those who choose natural burial.

In expanding upon the brief historical context presented in Chapter 1, this chapter also asks if natural burial is a newly emergent phenomenon or the reclamation of a historical practice. The emergence of natural burial is compared with the emergence of cremation in the mid to late nineteenth-century, suggesting that cremation and natural burial share some commonalities in their British social emergence. I also argue that there are historical and cultural precedents in the emergence and practice of natural burial, particularly that natural burial is an innovation that revives romantic constructions of nature as has been previously seen in the development of garden cemeteries and crematoria from the mid nineteenth century.

#### ***Modern Death Practices in Britain***

It is argued that British death rituals in the latter half of the twentieth century have changed as a result of

...secularization and diversification of religious belief and practice; social and geographical mobility; the growth of both consumerism and environmentalism; changing conceptions of home and hygiene; the

manner and scale of death in two world wars and the professionalization of care of the dying and disposal of the dead. (Hockey *et al.* 2001:186)<sup>75</sup>

‘Modern death’ in Britain is shaped by social processes such as secularisation, medicalisation of death, privatisation, the disappearance of death from public life, and individualism.<sup>76</sup> Additionally it is argued that death is no longer acknowledged in an open and frank way and that this “pornography of death” (Gorer 1987) is concurrent with a mistrust of rituals associated with death, further rendering bereavement a privatised ordeal (Parkes *et al.* 2000:4).

The arrival of natural burial and the aligned natural death movement represent an attempt to reclaim the cathartic nature of death rites and establish a therapeutic means for grieving in secular society (Wienrich and Speyer 2003). The Natural Death Handbook (Wienrich and Speyer 2003) was written at a time when there was an increase in New Age interest in death and dying, fostered by “expressivist” critiques of secularised, medicalised and individualised death and dying (Walter 1993 referring to Bellah 1985).<sup>77</sup> Walter attempts to define the ‘New Age’ in discussing the New Age literature on death and dying (1993:132+) though quite how the heterogeneous concept of the ‘New Age’ is defined is an unresolved and contested debate.

Natural burial has also emerged at a time when scholars claim there is increased demand for personalised funerals (Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006, Sheppy 2003, Walter 1993, Davies and Walter 2008), in which even the book of Common Worship (2000 Edition) has been amended to accommodate this trend (Sheppy 2003, see also Denison 1999). This is significant because it means that the Church of England recognises the demand for personalised funerals and has created liturgical provisions for it. Personalisation is said to be facilitated by a shift in funeral rites to celebrate the life of the deceased (Lucke *et al.* 2006, Prothero 2001) because of the effects of

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<sup>75</sup> For a general overview of the theoretical orientations and disciplinary approaches to ‘death studies’ see Walter (2008).

<sup>76</sup> Walter (1993) refers to these sociocultural processes as the “secularization package”: medicalization, privatization, individualism, and an expressive approach to bereavement. For a historical and cultural overview of each of these social phenomena see Walter (1993).

<sup>77</sup> Bellah (1985) for example, referred to ‘expressive individualism’ as a cultural turn that placed great value on the expression of feeling, which became extremely influential in counselling, palliative care and the hospice movement. Whilst expressivism was a “feature of modern death” in critiquing the medicalisation of death, Walter argues that expressivism actually enhances the “secularization and individualization of death” (1993:131).

consumerism, individualism (Howarth 1996:23, Walter 1997, Davies and Walter 2008) and secularisation (Emke 2002, Walter 2005, Venbrux *et al.* 2009), in which people are increasingly no longer finding solace in religious funerals (Howarth 1996, Walter 1996): thus, alternatives for seeking solace are sought. Though Holloway *et al.* (2010:196) make an important suggestion that perhaps the dominance of celebrating the life of the deceased in contemporary funerals is less evidence for personalisation, but rather the outcome of seeking some consensus by funeral officiants in the face of diverse, oftentimes uncertain beliefs.

The effects of secularisation and demands for personalisation upon funeral behaviour are presented as meta-narratives on contemporary death and dying in Britain. However, they have only been empirically tested to a limited degree; they are persuasive yet remain inadequately qualified.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, definitions and evidence of secularisation remain highly contested (Bauman 1992, Berger 1999, Emke 2002, Jupp 2006, Vandendorpe 2000, Wallis and Bruce 1992, Walter 2005).

It is argued that in the absence of a prescribed ‘tradition’ in death many contemporary Americans, for example, are free to choose from numerous traditions or invent their own (Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006:224). This is what the Natural Death Movement is doing according to Walter (1994-1995). Garces-Foley and Holcomb (2006:221) suggest that woodland burial in America is facilitating the option for ‘do-it-yourself’ funerals. It is also argued that the opportunity for personalised locations for interring or scattering cremated remains and associated privatised rites, has also led to increasingly personalised memorial behaviours (Davies 2002, Prendergast *et al.* 2006).<sup>79</sup> Prothero argues there is also evidence suggesting a “reinvestment” of the

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<sup>78</sup> An exception to this is concurrent research projects undertaken at the Centre for Thanatology, Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Researchers are conducting empirical research into the effects of secularisation on personalisation in Dutch funeral practices and notions of a post self. Cf. *Mortality* 2009, 14(2) dedicated to research findings from these Dutch scholars.

<sup>79</sup> Research conducted on the ultimate locations of ashes taken away from British crematoria showed that a place for the ashes was still important, thus keeping some cultural legacy of burial implicit within the cultural innovation of cremation and the disposal of ashes (Kellaher *et al.* 2005). Worpole (2007:5) argues that “The high proportion of cremations, the legal proscription against the re-use of graves until the present time, together with the large number of people who make private arrangements for the disposal of cremated remains, leaves the traditional churchyard, cemetery or burial ground in a seriously weakened position...”; a situation he identifies as “English/British exceptionalism” in burial practice. Worpole also argues that the increasing trend to bury cremated remains challenges distinctions between cemeteries and crematorium gardens, which “are becoming once again like burial grounds...” (2007:4). This trend is also extended to natural burial grounds. A surprising outcome of

spiritual in personalised rituals that focus upon the private scattering of ashes representing “a shift not from religion to irreligion but from certain religious beliefs and metaphors (most of them Christian) to alternatives (some Asian, some New Age, and some more modern versions of Christianity)” (2001:12). In short, the improvised rites that have evolved through the practice of modern cremation “are spiritually charged” Prothero argues (2001:12), despite the fact that the advent of cremation generated “a new possibility of engaging with death rites separate from ecclesiastical control” (Davies 2005b:xxiv; Prothero 2001). The assumption here is that individuals need an outlet for securing solace in death; if not from god, then from something else: the body or nature for example.

### ***Identifying Historical and Cultural Precedents***

Gittings (2007), an historian, recounts an example of woodland burial that took place in Derbyshire in 1823, in which a General requests to be buried in unconsecrated ground in a shroud made of perishable material with his grave marked by the planting of “Several Acorns” so that “one good tree may be Chosen and preserved and that I may have the satisfaction of knowing that after my death my body may not be quite useless but serve to rear a good English oak...” (Gittings 2007:321).

Gittings provides further examples of unusual burial or commemoration that occurred in Britain between 1689 and 1823. She suggests that contemporary academic interests in ‘personalisation’ in funerals and disposal are often misguided by assuming that these personalised expressions are recent socio-cultural inventions since “others were creating their own individualized burial rituals with vigour and imagination long before us” (2007: 343). She suggests that individuals were challenging notions of consecration, identity and established rituals long before the late twentieth century contrary to the notion that contemporary social change in funerals is the result of the

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natural burial has been the request by bereaved and/or the pre-registered and the subsequent provision by natural burial operators, to inter cremated remains despite negative ecological appraisals of cremation (West 2005, 2008). One reason for this is that people are looking for aesthetically pleasing places to locate ashes and natural burial sites appear to fulfil some desire for a *peaceful* or *pretty* place, whereas more longstanding places of human interment or ash scattering, such as gardens of remembrance or urban municipal cemeteries, have begun to be culturally representative of neglect, anti-social behaviour, overcrowding and decay.

modernist ‘cult of the individual’ (Howarth 1996, Walter 1997, Wouters 2002, Wienrich and Speyer 2003, Long 2005, Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006).

Whilst I agree with Gittings that we should not lose sight of the historical trajectories of practices assumed to be emergent today such as natural burial (Gittings and Walter 2010), what *has* changed is the number of these burials taking place and the contemporary social context of the practice. Natural burial is now widely available across Britain and whilst a resurgent interest in the natural world and the landscape developed in the eighteenth century (Bhatti 1999; Gittings 2007), current interest in the natural world is often expressed in the rhetoric of eco-politics such as global warming, recycling and waste. These are issues that have also had a major impact on government legislation for bodily disposal in this country since the 1990s (Jupp and Gittings 1999; Jupp 2005; Kellaheer, Prendergast et al. 2005; Jupp 2006; McLellan 2007). For example, the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990, which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1991, had a significant impact upon general running costs of crematoria, as they sought to comply with new regulations on airborne emissions and other pollution reduction measures (Jupp 2006:173, Jupp and Walter 1999).<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to realise that history shows some individuals have always experimented in death rites and separated themselves from popular practices of the day, challenging the notion that ‘individualism’ is a (post)modern phenomenon (Gittings 2007).

Natural burial therefore, represents an innovation in burial *provision*, though the concept itself is not new. Romantic notions of returning to nature, perceiving decomposition as a source of fertilisation for the land and using trees as burial markers have all been employed at various points in human history and imagination (Francis *et al.* 2005, Gittings 2007, Uchiyamada 1998). Prior to the eighteenth century in England a simple burial without a coffin was “the lot of the poor”, whilst it was not until the late seventeenth century that an increasing number of graves in churchyards were marked by tombstones (Mims 1999:137). Burial in unmarked graves with corpses wrapped in shrouds or in biodegradable coffins has been practised in British

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<sup>80</sup> Davies suggests that cremation rates in Britain and parts of Scandinavia “will either plateau out or recede as ecological concerns, coupled with an ever-growing sense of the personalized wishes of the dead, lead to interment in natural contexts of woodlands” (2003: 774).

history, though the revival of these practices in ‘natural burial’ operates in an entirely different socio-cultural context. Moreover, the innovation of natural burial with perishable grave markers can be practised today because an unmarked grave does not carry the stigma it has done at other times in history, particularly in relation to pauper burials (Richardson 1987). Additionally, the concept of lawn cemeteries in the 1950s and 1960s saw grave markers flush to the ground so that they did not “impact on the landscape.”<sup>81</sup> This bears resemblance to the management aesthetics of the Arbory Trust today who regulate memorials in order to maintain their minimal impact upon the woodland setting. Therefore, all wooden plaques are placed flush to the ground. Wool is also being revived as a material to be buried in, such as Hainsworth’s woollen coffins, launched in 2009.<sup>82</sup> Historically however, the *Burial in Wool Acts of 1667 and 1678* meant all corpses had to be buried in wool unless the Plague was the cause of death.<sup>83</sup> Sir Francis Seymour Haden’s (1818-1910) earth to earth movement is also a reminder that ‘natural’ burial is not altogether a new cultural practice, though the prevalence of natural burial today is remarkably different (Parsons 2005, Berridge 2001:206).

### ***Burial Reform***

Though he began his career as a surgeon, Haden is much better known as a staunch anti-cremationist. He established the earth to earth movement in 1875 in opposition to cremation.<sup>84</sup> As cremation became more popular in Britain, Haden refocused his anti-cremation argument upon cremation as a source of pollution and its ability to cover up crimes (Parsons 2005:206, Jalland 1996:204). However, Haden did not simply appeal for burial reform but for the “whole system following death: the need to improve the death certification system, to reduce the delay between death and burial (and thus alleviating the need for a strong coffin), and to regulate undertakers and private cemetery companies” (Parsons 2005:206).

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<sup>81</sup> From a report by English Heritage and English Nature (2002:9)

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.coffins.co.uk/shop/45-Wool-and-Cotton-Coffins> [Retrieved 18/07/10]

<sup>83</sup> These acts were repealed in 1814.

<sup>84</sup> For a detailed account of the burial reform and associated cremation debate between Haden and Sir Henry Thompson who founded the Cremation Society in 1874 as its President see Jalland (1996: 203-209) and Parsons (2005).

Haden designed a ‘perishable’ *papier mâché* coffin to address public health concerns of the time and to provide a solution to rapidly diminishing cemetery space for burials, especially in London.<sup>85</sup> Haden proposed that a coffin made of materials that permitted an increased rate of decomposition, placed in a shallower grave, would permit cemeteries to re-use grave plots over a shorter period (Kazmier 2005; Parsons 2005). Haden’s ‘earth to earth’ coffin was manufactured by Dottridge Brothers in London until the 1930s. Yet by the time Haden died on 1 June 1910 he had become “a lone voice” in opposition to cremation (Parsons 2005:219). However, one of Haden’s anti-cremation arguments that cremation is a source of pollution is shared by natural burial supporters today.

### ***Innovations Compared: Cremation and Natural Burial***

This chapter argues that cremation and woodland burial share parallels in their social origins as innovations to bodily disposal (Berridge 2001). Britain was the first European country to popularise cremation (Jupp 2006) and likewise, natural burial (Green 2008, Joyce 2009). The latter began in 1993 when Ken West, then Bereavement Services Manager of Carlisle Cemetery, instigated woodland burial in an unused part of the municipal cemetery in response to his conversation with two women who, in their disapproval of cemeteries as ecologically barren, wanted to be buried in their back garden.<sup>86</sup> Almost 20 years later, West (2010:15) asserts that “a significant number of cremationists now recognise that natural burial is the first real threat to cremation, and take every opportunity to oppose it.”

Those who proactively sought to establish cremation in this country at the close of the nineteenth century and a century later natural burial at the close of the twentieth century were driven by ideologies for change through campaigning. However, each campaign was socio-historically specific; the agenda of the cremationists in the 1880s

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<sup>85</sup> Even in the 1580s strong concerns regarding the “overuse” of London churchyards were being voiced, prompting wealthier churches to purchase burial ground beyond their parishes (Jupp 2006:21). The issue of burial space is still unresolved for open cemeteries today and clear government proposals for the future of disused burial grounds are also still pending (Cf. Dunk and Rugg 1994): “despite a current cremation rate of 71% (in 2004) a crisis in cemetery space arose in the 1990s and still awaits practical government action.” (Jupp 2006: xv)

<sup>86</sup> “The scheme was originally intended for people who had expressed a need for an alternative to conventional cemeteries and cremation e.g. back garden burials. A secondary appeal was that native woodland would be created thereby providing wildlife habitats, especially for the diminishing red squirrel.” (West 2008:104)

utilised rhetoric from public health, whilst the agenda for those in the Natural Death Movement from the early 1990s utilised the rhetoric of environmental protection. The cremationists argued death was a ‘sanitary’ problem (Berridge 2001: 188), whilst supporters of natural burial it is argued, locate death as increasingly an ‘environmental’ problem (Jupp 2006). Both the cremationists’ campaigns and those of the natural death movement have utilised secular, materialist arguments concerning the quality of the environment to gain supporters.

As Berridge highlights, “pollution has played an integral role in shaping the landscape of death” (2001: 189).<sup>87</sup> The cremationists sought an alternative mode of disposal that would negate the need for overcrowded cemeteries that were often deemed places of foul air and disease.<sup>88</sup> Cremation was pioneered as the cleaner alternative for the environment by reducing the potential for infectious disease and kept the land for the living (Jupp 2006). Today, natural burial is marketed as an initiative to improve the environment by curtailing the need to use cremation and so diminish the amount of air-borne pollutants, especially mercury from fillings in teeth (King 2008).<sup>89</sup> By opposing cremation, the champions of natural burial also claim natural burial uses fewer raw resources such as imported marble for headstones and oil for fuelling cremators and therefore, enhances benefits for future generations.<sup>90</sup>

There are also social similarities between those who advocate natural burial today and those who supported cremation in the nineteenth century:

Support for cremation was strongest among the upper and middle classes, notably amongst the literary and scientific intelligentsia, and weakest among the working classes. That minority of people who chose cremation

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<sup>87</sup> Worthy of future theoretical discussion, I note the paradox that although corpses are often seen as polluting objects, the living strive to dispose of them using non-polluting means. Perhaps this is because the non-polluting method of disposal symbolically combats the spread of pollution from the corpse? There are also interesting binary oppositions implied in these arguments and perceptions regarding preferred disposal modes that are also worthy of future academic exploration: land/air, good/bad, change/harm, living/dead for example.

<sup>88</sup> Following the cholera epidemic in 1847-1848, burial was prohibited in towns from the 1850s for fear of public health. (Jupp 2006: xiv)

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed history of the government’s concern with mercury emissions from the cremation process that were formalised in the 1992 Convention for the Protection of the North East Atlantic cf. Jupp (2006: 175).

<sup>90</sup> These arguments were reiterated by the bereaved and pre-registered at Barton Glebe, as well as those pioneering contemporary natural burial provision in this country. See Chapter 6.

before 1918 were often unbelievers influenced by the public health argument, whose mourners were usually hesitant at the unusual prospect of attending a cremation ceremony. (Jalland 1999:251)

The sample group of bereaved and pre-registered at Barton Glebe lend some support to Jalland's argument, in that a significant number were 'professionals' or had been.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, some interviewees confided that their friends or family were not always at ease with the idea of woodland burial just as Jalland (1999:251) comments that "mourners were usually hesitant at the unusual prospect of attending a cremation ceremony."<sup>92</sup> Despite the sample group I interviewed being mostly professionals, I hesitate from claiming natural burial is a 'middle class' practice however, since this research utilises a single case study located near to a wealthy, international university town and therefore, generalisability is limited. Nevertheless, it must be said that natural burial is often assumed to be a) a middle class practice and b) indicative of the values and behaviours defining the 'baby boomers'. For example, Speyer, a founder of the Natural Death Centre, wrote an article outlining the reasons supporting "environmentally friendly, natural burial" in the official journal of the Cremation Society and International Cremation Federation. As well as outlining a pro-natural burial argument, Speyer claimed that:

Some choose natural burial because they reject the Victorian style of stiff upper lip men dressed in black and 'a quick service at the crem'. They are more likely to *think for themselves*. They usually have strong environmental concerns, they want to do things *in keeping* with their beliefs, *they want to make it personal* and they often, but not always, have a spiritual belief that is not readily housed in any of the major religious traditions. They have a sense of ownership, they feel that this is a very *special event in their lives*, which they *want to personally be in charge of*, and they *do not readily hand over to others* who they don't know. They may decide to organise the funeral with or without the help of a funeral director and *they might or might not want* to use a religious minister. They *may choose* one of the many officiants now available or officiate themselves. (Speyer 2006:6-7)<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Professions of those interviewed who had pre-registered included many retired teachers, university staff, doctors, social workers, a dentist, prison chaplain, freelance writer, former members of monastic orders, headmaster, librarian and a farmer. There were a few notable exceptions, which in the main were due to poor physical or mental wellbeing, thus these interviewees were deemed unable to work. The remainder were housewives or respondents who only disclosed that they were 'retired', rather than commenting upon their former occupation(s).

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter 5 for interview narratives that support this.

<sup>93</sup> My emphasis added to highlight the implicit assumption here that those who choose natural burial demonstrate independence of thought and initiative.

This description of natural burial users and supporters mirrors how ‘baby boomers’<sup>94</sup> are perceived in the media, as free thinkers and challenging the status quo, leading to unqualified claims that natural burial epitomises the ‘baby-boomer’ generation’s behaviour and attitude in addressing their mortality (Beckford 2010, Berridge 2001, Feagan 2007, Harris 2007, Jones 2008, Ministry of Justice 2009, O’Brien 2009, Whipps 2007, Whitaker 2007, Whitten 2006).<sup>95</sup> However, there are problems with claims that type-set natural burial supporters and/or resort to generational types, as this funeral director and civil celebrant demonstrates:

The baby boomer generation I suppose are in their 70s now but I’m getting people a lot older than that, who’ve come from a much more traditional generation who are still wanting woodland burial, I mean I’ve got a lady who’s 104! [Me: Why’s that do you think? What’s their motive?] I wish I could bottle it. I dunno...[pause]...I’d like to be able to give you a good, glib answer to that but it’s indefinable.

Firstly, I wish to avoid essentialising natural burial’s emergence to an aging ‘baby boomer’ population since this all-encompassing generational category ignores class, socio-cultural group, ethnicity, gender, religion, politics and regional demographics and variations in the UK.<sup>96</sup> Secondly, to assume that those who choose natural burial *think for themselves* is a value judgement that implies those who therefore use any

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<sup>94</sup> A particular generational group assumed to have a shared cultural outlook arising from common formative events in the individual lives of those who make up that generation. Therefore ‘baby boomers’ is a sociological category indicating a period of shared cultural history thought to have significant ramifications upon social behaviour and change (See Wuthnow 2007: 1-7).

<sup>95</sup> Prothero’s historical account of cremation in America also concludes that cremation was fostered by allowing “baby boomers to do death their own way” (2001:212).

<sup>96</sup> For example, Berridge (2001: 263-64) writes: “For the first generation with the privilege and power to experience the beginnings of life as an autonomous decision, and to bring self-assertiveness to the maternity ward, it is a logical progression to wish to control the manner of their demise.” Berridge is referring to aging ‘baby boomers’, some of whom instigated the natural birth movement. However, of those I interviewed who had registered for a grave space at Barton Glebe the ‘baby boomers’ – those between 44 and 64 years at the time of writing – represented a mere 20.8 per cent. The vast majority were older than this age group and represented 66.7 per cent of those interviewed. If one includes those pre-registered who completed a questionnaire but declined to be interviewed, then the ‘baby boomer’ sample diminishes further to 18.5 per cent, whilst those older than this generation increase to represent 70.4 per cent of the research sample. Obviously these percentages are unrepresentative because they are based upon a self-selecting group. Unfortunately, the Arbory Trust do not maintain a record or database of the ages of those who come to pre-register a grave space. There is much need for a quantitative survey of natural burial users, of which the ages of those who pre-register for a grave space is valuable information. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise the trend in the interview group because it suggests a challenge to perceived stereotypes of those who utilise natural burial provision. Generational types may be sufficient for market research but they remain wholly unsatisfactory for nuanced qualitative research that seeks to understand a cultural phenomenon that to date has received very little empirical research interest.

other disposal method are not thinking for themselves, but rather ‘following the crowd’ of ‘mass’ culture. This attitude is condescending and elitist and suggests class values. Finally, contrary to Speyer’s claim, a number of those interviewed *did* have a religious belief housed in one of “the major religious traditions”.

Jalland (1999) argues that support for cremation originally came from the British upper and middle classes. As I argue above, Speyer’s description of those to whom natural burial appeals implicitly espouses class values that are also articulated by some natural burial providers and are used to inform provision initiatives. For example, Croydon Council’s proposal for natural burial reports: “Natural burial customers tend to be white, middle class and deeply concerned about issues such as organic food and recycling.”<sup>97</sup> The values identified in Chapter 6 demonstrate there are numerous values influencing people’s decision-making to choose woodland burial, regardless of *organic food and recycling*. However a number of those interviewed did represent professional, educated sections of society, with a number having links to Cambridge University. The core values and decision-making rationales documented in Chapter 6 *do* demonstrate that in this research, social class and education are important and evident in interviewees’ verbal expression. Interviewees were often erudite and uninhibited in offering their opinions. However, until a survey is conducted focusing on the socioeconomic demographics of users, the class-based appeal of natural burial will remain empirically inconclusive. This thesis mainly utilised a self-selecting group from an open day at one particular natural burial ground. Therefore, this research is inadequate for addressing issues of social class despite scholars in ‘death studies’ being called to do so (Howarth 2007a).

Turning from this brief mention of those to whom natural burial may appeal, I now address the social innovators behind cremation and natural burial. Both British cremation and natural burial have been initiated by social innovators who seek to reform burials and funerals with the aid of high profile supporters; an innovative group according to Berridge who “represent small satellites of radical cultural

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<sup>97</sup>From Croydon Council’s Cabinet meeting (13/11/06) agenda item 9 – Proposal for New Burial Space under their Bereavement Services 5 year plan (page 36, point 8.5). Cf. <http://www.croydon.gov.uk/contents/documents/meetings/546596/790921/547232/547276> [Retrieved 20/11/09]. The assumption that natural burial provision is for those deemed pagan or “New Age” is evident in Combe’s (2001) reporting on plans for Barton Glebe.

activism” (2001:219). Just as the Cremation Society “enjoyed impressive representation from the upper echelons of society” (Berridge 2001:201) so natural burial has received support from individuals with public profiles. Public perception has aligned Princess Diana with woodland burial on private land and Dame Barbara Cartland’s woodland burial has also lent credibility to the practice (Berridge 2001: 219). Much more recently Wendy Richards, a long-term actress in the television soap ‘EastEnders’, received media attention when her funeral incorporated a bamboo coffin (Barkham 2009) and Keith Floyd, a TV chef, was recently cremated in a banana leaf coffin. Others who have opted for eco-coffins with private garden burial include the playwright Robert Bolt and the politician, Alan Clark (Berridge 2001:220). Meanwhile, the Arbory Trust enlists the following intellectual and professional elite on their Board of Trustees: The Bishop of Ely, Professor David Bellamy, Lord Fairhaven, Sir Francis Pemberton, The Right Reverend Dr Geoffrey Rowell and The Right Reverend Professor Stephen Sykes.

Jupp’s detailed history of British cremation records that “the first category of those eligible for honorary membership” of the Cremation Society in 1880 were the scientific elite “promoting the value and respectability of cremation for politicians, the law, the funeral and mourning industries, sanitary engineers, officers of health, doctors and clergy” (2006: 61-62). Similarly, the combined professional kudos of the Arbory Trust Trustees serves to promote the respectability of Barton Glebe. Finally, just as cremation “was first proposed by a voluntary society led by members of the professional establishment” (Jupp 2006: 200), so the vigour of campaigns for natural burial provision in Britain by the Natural Death Centre, relied upon volunteers.<sup>98</sup>

However, there are differences in the pace at which these modes of disposal were, and are, being adopted. One of the social contexts that has changed dramatically is the communicability of ideas in fostering socio-cultural change. Compared to when the Cremation Society was first trying to institutionalise itself, the Natural Death Centre has been able to utilise the internet and television as means to communicate its campaigns for change and foster authority in natural burial provision.

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<sup>98</sup> A fledgling version of the former London-based Natural Death Centre is now establishing itself in Australia, championing social change in funerals in the Southern hemisphere and also entirely driven by volunteers. See <http://www.naturaldeathcentre.org.au/> [Retrieved 02/07/10]

Cremation was initially very slow in its growth rate. From 1885 till 1900 only four crematoria had opened in Great Britain (Parsons 2005: 225) and it took approximately another 65 years after the Cremation Act in 1902 for half the funerals in Britain to involve cremation (Jupp 2006: xvi). Compare this with the fact that within a decade from the first woodland burial ground opening in England, 182 natural burial sites were established.<sup>99</sup> The growth rate of natural burial provision is impressive and although it does not rival the current preference for cremation in Britain, is developing into a potential threat for those with commercial interest in cemetery burial according to some (Harris 2007). This opinion was also shared by a cemetery manager I interviewed and those interviewees who all preferred a natural burial site to a cemetery.

Referring to the graphs below, one can observe that since Barton Glebe opened in 2000 there has been a steady increase in the number of interments and reservations over the years. In mid 2000, there were approximately 50 grave space reservations and no interments. By the end of 2007 there were approximately 425 reservations and 300 interments; an increase of 750 per cent over seven years for reservations, giving an average increase of 107 per cent per year, whilst interments over the same period averaged at 43 burials per year.

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<sup>99</sup> These figures were cited from the Natural Death Centre's website:  
[http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/the\\_funeral\\_trade.html](http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/the_funeral_trade.html) [Retrieved 02/03/09]

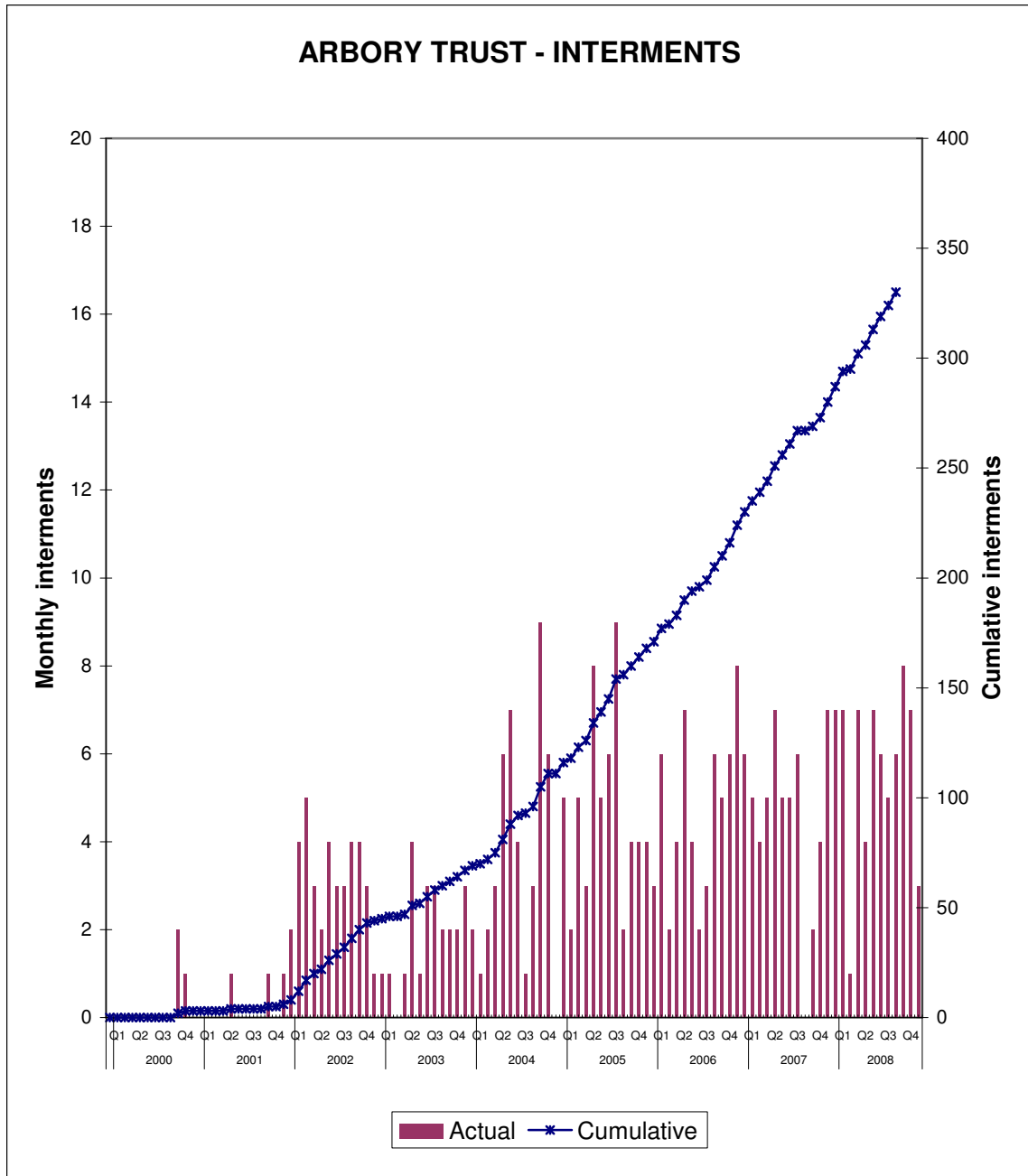


Figure 5: Monthly interments at Barton Glebe, 2000-2008

Source: The Arbory Trust

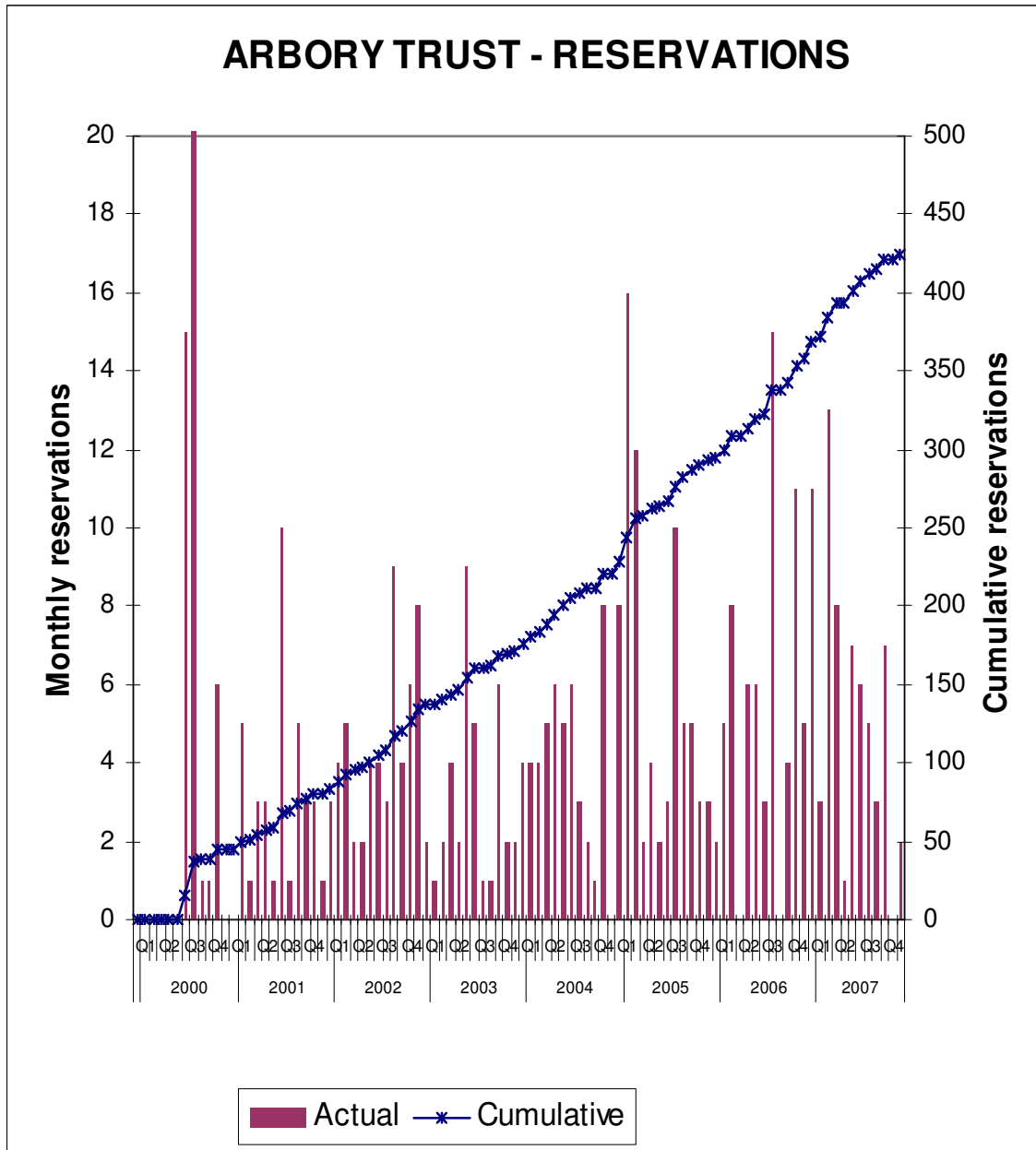


Figure 6: Monthly burial reservations at Barton Glebe, 2000-2007

Source: The Arbory Trust

Unfortunately, not much can be made of these figures because the increase of 300 interments over a short period begs the question of whether the case study site is particularly active. How does Barton Glebe compare to other natural burial grounds over the same period? Moreover, one would also need to compare these figures from Barton Glebe with those of local cemeteries over the same period to gain some indication of the total number of people buried, in order to calculate the percentage of those who chose to use the woodland burial site as opposed to other burial provision. Nevertheless, a limiting factor preventing the use of these figures for evidence of

national changes in disposal preference would still prevail because they are limited to a very small geographical area and sample size, therefore offering minimal statistical inference. Greater survey research is needed in relation to natural burial, whereas rich statistical data exists for cremation.<sup>100</sup>

It must be remembered however, that in recent British history cremation has been perceived as the antithesis to ‘tradition’, despite currently being understood as the ‘norm’ in funerals, statistically at least. Whether natural burial will follow a similar historical trajectory, from innovation to tradition, remains to be seen. Harris argues that North American “natural alternatives” in burial provision will “ultimately” change modern funerals (2007:6) and it is with a keen eye over the coming years that death studies scholars will learn how this may unfold. Moreover, in referring to natural burial users:

I don't think you can pigeonhole the sort of people that go there [to a named woodland burial]...I just think that more and more, people just think it's the right way to go. It's the right thing to do, because of course all the time we're being told what's good for the environment, what's eco-friendly and people have just become more conscious of it I think, so they make those decisions [for natural burial] thinking that it's *their* contribution. (A civil celebrant)

This comment, whilst referring to potential natural burial users, also highlights the influence of authority, public opinion and consciousness-raising upon individuals' preferences in death practices: who authorises that woodland burial is the *right thing to do* and why is it necessary to have a sense of *right* here at all? By whom are we *being told what's good for the environment* and why does this influence disposal preference? This is the challenge for sociologists and anthropologists interested in the cultural practice of natural burial. Moreover, the civil celebrant's comment regarding a *contribution* one can make through one's choice of disposal mode is interesting because why should a *contribution* be deemed necessary in the first place? In Chapter 8 I argue that natural burial can be empowering precisely because it can be understood as allowing a person to contribute, to give of themselves or partake in reciprocal relations, which grant a sense of redemption, salvation and/or continuity for the person facing their mortality. This *contribution* is facilitated through the

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<sup>100</sup> See country by country cremation statistics in Davies and Mates (2005).

conceptualised process of *going back to nature*: but as Gittings (2007) cautions in her research, this is not a postmodern idea.<sup>101</sup> The desire to be buried under an oak has been an enduring romantic ideal in British history. What contemporary, nationwide natural burial provision is doing however, is to democratise that ideal; British people, if they so wish can now return to the elements more readily. It is not an option simply for the “eccentric” or “enlightened” of yore (Gittings 2007).

### ***Innovation and Tradition***

The premise behind natural burial “was straightforward and innovative” in that urban natural burial provision in particular, “provides additional burial space, satisfies a growing demand for environmentally friendly funerals [and] provides new amenity green space for the community” (Ministry of Justice 2009:1). However, far from *straightforward*, the emergent innovation of natural burial displays parallels with an ‘invented tradition’.<sup>102</sup> This is achieved through a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 2005[1983]:1).

For example, the Trust’s woodland burial provision is governed by overt planting rules in the pursuit of establishing ‘natural’ woodland. Custodians of the Trust ensure that memorials placed by visitors upon graves are made of highly specific materials,

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<sup>101</sup> Similarly Davies argues: "...ecology is not 'post-modern'; if anything it resembles modernity itself as an overarching story of the way things are and of how we relate to the way things are. It covers how we eat, what we buy and how we die. Here, too, the body assumes new significance" (2005a: 80-81). He continues in the same volume to argue that: “While the shared credal beliefs of established religions in many parts of Europe and beyond have fragmented, and whilst some individuals may have adopted something of an individualized, self-constructed, idiosyncratic outlook on life, it remains the case that many have come to share in the scientifically informed notion of ecology” (2005a: 87-88). On the contrary, Hockey, Katz *et al.* (2001:208) argue “highly idiosyncratic” approaches to funerals are postmodern and Walter (1994-95) and Worpole (2003a) both claim woodland burial practice is also postmodern. I would add a caution here, because it is extremely premature to make assumptions about postmodernity with regards to natural burial, since natural burial is far from standard choice in Britain and the designation ‘postmodern’ is itself ambiguous and contested.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Tradition’ is a nebulous word because it can mean “the earliest known written or oral sources...or...the beliefs and practices that, over the course of history, become accretions to the original forms” (Beckford 2005:134). ‘Tradition’ is difficult to define because it is socially constructed and contested, as the scholarship of Hobsbawm and Ranger (2005[1983]) demonstrates. Moreover, “the deliberate attempt by religious groups to return to tradition is itself a non-traditional strategy that smacks of a self-reflexive, late modern attitude to knowledge” (Giddens 1994 cited in Beckford 2005:134). The same could be argued for social or cultural reform groups such as the Natural Death Centre.

not exceeding particular dimensions, and set flush to the ground to inculcate the Trust's future vision for the woodland burial site. The Trust also publishes annual planting guides freely available from the lodge at Barton Glebe.<sup>103</sup> They specify which native plants are acceptable to plant upon graves. Legitimacy is aligned with the concept of a plant or tree species being 'native' to the local area. The construction of 'native' and 'non-native' categories tacitly reinforces elements of 'tradition' in woodland burial provision. By privileging 'native' species, it is implied that 'native' trees or plants are somehow older and more authentic than the non-native natural landscape and subsequently constitute 'traditional' English woodland. This idea is implicitly aligned with a more 'traditional' burial mode viz., natural burial. These planting regulations are one means of inculcating particular values whilst also creating continuity with the past. The Trust explicitly aligns its provision with a time that transcends the modern age by claiming on its homepage that: "Woodland burial is a centuries-old practice which is justifiably enjoying a great revival."<sup>104</sup> By advertising its provision as a "revival" of an ancient practice, implies that its provision has temporal continuity, which I argue could be interpreted as justifying woodland burial as an 'authentic' burial mode as opposed to cremation and cemeteries as less authentic places for interment or the scattering of ashes.

Walter (1994-95) identifies a deliberate invention of tradition taking place in the natural death movement. The natural death movement asserts a form of 'traditional' or 'natural' death in order to "highlight the deficiencies of a modern over-medicalized death" (Walter 1994-95: 245). This was a cultural trajectory of death first commented on by Gorer (1987 [1965]) in writing about a twentieth century death taboo being akin to pornography, creating a sociocultural condition that left mourners with "maladaptive and neurotic responses" (1987: 116). Natural burial and the natural death movement at the close of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century are examples of social inventions in which "bits of death cultures from around the world are mixed together at will" often with the purpose "to eulogise primitive or Victorian death, in order to highlight the dreadful taboos and depersonalisation of the modern way (Lofland 1978)" (cited in Walter 1997:9). This is evident in publications by those advocating the home funeral and do-it-yourself movement (cf. Gill and Fox

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<sup>103</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>104</sup> *The Arbory Trust* <http://www.arborytrust.org/> [Retrieved 07/07/10]

2004) and some interviewees compared Barton Glebe to the burning ghats of Varanasi and Zoroastrian 'sky burials'; all of which were deemed to be 'natural' processes.

The legitimacy of an invented tradition can be established through the construction of an ideal past or 'golden age' (Lewis and Hammer 2007:4, Walter 1993 and 1994-94), which, in relation to natural burial, is often expressed by 'nature'. Romantic notions coalesce to produce a perception that natural burial *is* a 'natural' means for disposal, where one can also be more intimately involved in the funeral and burial process that subsequently fosters more 'natural' emotions.

So it is not just death which is subject to reinvention but 'nature' too. It has been suggested that at the turn of the twenty-first century "there is a hint of the return of romanticism"<sup>105</sup> in British disposal modes especially with regards to how people appropriate 'nature' for their own spiritual and emotional needs. 'Nature' can be deployed as "a rhetorical contrast with 'culture'" (Harvey 2007: 279), despite the fact that 'nature' is itself a cultural construct (Davies 2005a, Harvey 2007, Jones and Cloke 2002, MacNaghten and Urry 1998). 'Ecology', 'nature' and 'tradition' are powerful rhetorical tools because they can assimilate, exemplify and transfer, either tacitly or explicitly, moral values and human identities.

### ***Identity, Natural Burial and the Spiritual Landscape***

Jupp argues that disposal modes have largely lost their theological significance, partly because the church lost sole custody of corpses, making modern funerals and disposal modes mainly a matter of personal and institutional convenience (2006:202). This is certainly evident in the reasoning behind much local authority interest in establishing natural burial provision within existing cemeteries or crematoria grounds, because there is a perception that 'natural' burial requires less grounds maintenance and therefore, lower financial overheads all of which add to institutional convenience. But what of those who utilise natural burial provision?

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<sup>105</sup> From a report by English Heritage and English Nature (2002:9)

If funerals are deemed to have lost their theological significance so that hope is no longer located in God's Kingdom, Walter (1996)<sup>106</sup> argues hope is now found in "secular heavens". Natural burial can facilitate a secular heaven by locating the identity of the deceased closer to the earth rather than the heavens, where affinity lies between the deceased and the natural environment rather than a religious identity located with God (Davies 2002, 2005a, 2006b). With fewer people identifying with the Christian church *per se*<sup>107</sup> a shift has occurred in the fulfilment of one's identity that is very much this-worldly according to Davies (2002). Cremated remains taken away from crematoria permit a 'retrospective fulfilment of identity' by scattering ashes in a place of significance for the deceased and/or bereaved (Davies 2002:141) and permits the life-values of the deceased to be reflected in death-values. Moreover, in the context of a natural burial, the retrospective fulfilment of identity by locating the deceased in woodland, and in some instances with a memorial tree planted above the grave plot, grants a sense of "ecological immortality" that Davies speculates is the outcome of our "consumerist individualism" (Davies 2005a:86) and British society's growing institutionalising of ecological ethics to produce a "secular eschatology" (Davies 2005a:80). Davies (2005a) provides a compelling argument that religion is being replaced by an ethics and spirituality discourse, in which individual immortality in heaven is replaced by an ecological immortality for humanity on earth. Davies offers three meanings of 'spirituality' that are popularly used outside of the ecclesiastical domain from the beginning of the twenty-first century: the embodiment of belief, the practices of new religious movements and the aim of palliative care to provide "a mode of reflection upon the quality of life that might be pursued by those coming to the end of their days" (2005a:85). It is the latter interpretation of 'spirituality' that is of relevance here for it is this "means of focusing and giving voice to experience, emotion and self-reflection in the face of death" in a positive, enabling manner (Davies 2005a:85) that makes natural burial so salient a concept to those who favour it. The perception of nature and natural life encapsulated by the concept of

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<sup>106</sup> See Chapter 11 especially.

<sup>107</sup> Heelas and Woodhead *et al.* (2005) argue there is evidence in Britain of a decline of 'life-as religion' to a growth in 'subjective-life spirituality', which they argue accounts for secularisation and sacralisation both operating in contemporary Britain, whilst Lynch provides evidence of what he terms "progressive spirituality...a new phase of organization of the religious Left in western society" (2007:39) that has partly arisen from a need to engage constructively with ecological catastrophe (see pages 35-38).

natural burial facilitates the materialisation of this mode of ‘spirituality’ (Davies 2005a).

Empirical data generated by this doctoral research suggests that ‘nature’ is a malleable concept acting as a conduit for forging and affirming human identities and placing them in the natural order. For example, some pre-registered interviewees saw ethical choices made around funerals as an expression of personal faith and respect for God’s creation. Others were less focused on securing their immortality but rather with lessening obligations to surviving kin whether financially, emotionally or socially. I would argue that it is not that a sacred eternal heaven has been replaced with a secular perception of immortality in ecology, but rather that ‘nature’ is a mutable concept that can be framed religiously, spiritually, materially etc. This is why ‘nature’ has readily been used as a means to reveal authentic truths and get closer to ‘authenticity’ by numerous social groups through time and across cultures (Schmitt 1969).

Despite contestation over the concept of ‘nature’ because of attendant cultural, religious and social symbols and representations (Daniels 1993 and 1997, Habgood 2002, Harvey 2007, MacNaghten 1998), history demonstrates that ‘nature’ provides an enduring means of re-configuring identities. Since the eighteenth century ‘woodland’ for example, has encapsulated a culturally “complex symbolic terrain for rival definitions of Englishness” (Daniels 1993:7), in which the “oldest, richest and most complex associations adhered to the oak” (Daniels 1997:48). ‘Woodland’ and ‘forest’ have enduringly symbolised nationhood and politicised identities and agendas (Ackroyd 2002).

Consider for example, the planting of the National Forest by the Countryside Commission to bolster the quality of life for the region (East Midlands), the nation and beyond: “The National Forest...reflects the recent rediscovery of the redemptive qualities of trees and woodland in landscape and cultural renewal” (1999:17). I argue this is precisely the rationale behind the Forestry Commission’s investment and involvement with the Trust in developing Barton Glebe. Just as the Trust planted a broad-leaf, native woodland, so the National Forest embraced the “English woodland tradition in the form of broad-leaved species of oak, ash and alder” (Bell 1999:20).

The site for the National Forest was decided a mere two years before Britain saw its first natural burial ground open. Bell assesses the National Forest as a political statement: “In offering a critique of an environmentally destructive world, it seeks to reassert Britain’s moral position internationally as a progressive society actively supporting a renewed consciousness of and concern for nature” (1999:17-18). Similarly, individuals can assert that they are progressive by engaging with a contemporary “responsible dignified choice” in death by choosing natural burial, in which a moral position is also reasserted in framing natural burial as an opportunity for renewing a “sense of the sacred in the natural world” (Owen Jones 2008:156).

...we’re finally seeing the wisdom of allowing Mother Nature to run her natural course...more of us are coming to believe that a lasting legacy to a life well lived may be as basic as good earth. Our best last act may, in fact, be the simple act of using what remains of our physical existence to fertilize depleted soil, push up a tree, preserve a bit of wild from development, and, in the process, perpetuate the natural cycle of life that turns to support those we leave behind. All the better that such basic, earth-friendly send-offs are sparing of resources, driven by families, and easy on the pocketbook. (Harris 2007:186)

Whilst there are numerous points of qualification needed to support this statement, Harris’s conclusion, which attempts to identify natural burial’s allure in America, does illustrate the moral and spiritual qualities conferred upon ‘nature’ and the ‘natural’ world in this burial practice.

### ***Moral and Therapeutic Landscapes in Death***

Ariès asserted that for the English, unlike the French, “nature retains emotional power, and its connections with death are real and profound” (1981:534). Hockey *et al.* state that “the aesthetics of death ritual throughout the twentieth century” are dominated by Romantic configurations of ‘nature’ (2001:272). I argue that these romantic configurations in the aesthetics of death are currently epitomised in natural burial practice.

In this current time of supposed heightened environmental risk, gardening is claimed to offer “‘elevated’ intellectual and moral value”, particularly for the middle classes

(Bhatti 1999: 185).<sup>108</sup> Loudon's (1843) book on the planning and layout of cemetery landscape also spoke of moral improvements that could be facilitated by landscaping (1843: 12-13, Jupp 2006: 37, Rutherford 2008:28-29):

A garden cemetery and monumental decoration are not only beneficial to public morals, to the *improvement of manners*, but are likewise calculated to *extend virtuous and generous feelings*. Affliction, brightened by hope, ever renders man more anxious to love his neighbour. (Loudon 1843: 11)

John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), a major influence upon nineteenth-century cemetery design, is credited with the burial plot grid system so often associated with municipal cemeteries today. According to Jupp, "Loudon instinctively knew that the cemetery was the place for reform; he sought to civilise death by making the place of the dead into a garden" (2006: 36). The Natural Death Centre similarly have sought to reform funerals by promoting alternative places for the dead, such as natural burial grounds and people's private land. For the Natural Death Centre, natural burial sites have been hailed as palliative and spiritual burial places complementing their funeral reform initiatives.

In Britain, garden cemeteries brought great change in burial provision. Initially developed by private companies and later run by public authorities, they appeared after 1800.<sup>109</sup> The earliest English garden cemeteries were set up by dissenters. In 1819 the first cemetery, the Rosary in Norwich, opened and, because it was non-denominational, it was therefore seen as "a great innovation" in burial provision (Rutherford 2008:13). This was at a time when, as a result of urbanisation and mass migration during the industrial age, parish churchyards had commonly become unhygienic and full to capacity (Elliot *et al.* 2007:23).<sup>110</sup> Garden cemeteries were seen

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<sup>108</sup> Whilst Stearns argues that historically, amateur gardening in the 1840s-1880s was believed to facilitate the "moral improvement" of the British working classes (1981:391).

<sup>109</sup> "Publicly funded cemeteries remained rare until the 1850s Burial Acts, indicating that legislation was necessary to encourage the provision of new cemeteries available to all denominations and classes. Exeter Cemetery was the first cemetery in England to be paid for by public money..." (Rutherford 2008:18). "The majority of cemeteries currently in use were founded in the period 1853-90, when burial boards were the principal agency of new cemetery land" using monies from the Poor Rate to cover the expenses of laying out new cemeteries (Dunk and Rugg 1994:10). However, newly created local authorities from the 1890s increasingly took over the role of laying out cemeteries and burial boards fell into decline (Dunk and Rugg 1994:10). Cf. also English Heritage and English Nature (2002:7-9).

<sup>110</sup> As Rutherford explains: "By 1830 mortality rates in cities were horrifying and the idea of the cemetery, detached from a permanent place of worship, was being discussed more seriously. It would

as a way forward.<sup>111</sup> Francis *et al.* (2005:6) argue that it is particular cultural constructions of the garden as “a spiritual and palliative resource that led to its being privileged as an ideal accompaniment for burial.” Garden cemeteries were intended to allow the bereaved to make visits to an urban grave in “an attractive and evocative setting”,<sup>112</sup> whilst rural parts of Britain still saw the use of churchyards for Anglican parishioners and non-conformists opened burial grounds near to their chapels (Rutherford 2008:18).

In contrast to urban churchyards, where many corpses were crammed together, private cemeteries offered every deceased person a separate, identifiable grave with a unique memorial of individual choice, a focus for romantic contemplation and commemoration. There, money and freehold, not inherited privilege or the vested power of the Anglican clergy, provided the middle classes with membership in a new democracy of the dead and a ‘symbolic geography’ for a new community of the living. (Francis *et al.* 2005:32)

The Victorian garden cemeteries that sought “to mirror Elysium by creating an Arcadian setting for the mortal remains of the deceased: man’s idea of Paradise on earth” (Rutherford 2008:6, Tarlow 2000b) began to wane in the twentieth century. They gradually fell out of popularity as cremation became the more common mode of disposal from the 1960s onwards and sentiments changed. Cemeteries were no longer always viewed as paradise on earth, but as places of neglect and under-funding, with regimented, serried ranks of headstones in various conditions of repair. Similarly crematoria are now sometimes seen to be “banal and anonymous” with a reputation for “conveyor-belt” funerals (Grainger 2005a:20 citing Curl 2001:193, Walter

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solve the problem of overcrowded churchyards by being set beyond the urban centre, allowing spacious and long-term provision.” (2008:14) London was the first city to be the focus of plans and the idea of placing cemeteries beyond urban centres revived the ancient Roman practice of “locating burials and cemeteries on the edge of towns” (Rutherford 2008:9).

<sup>111</sup> For further information on the modern cemetery’s origins, garden cemeteries, Loudon’s influence upon the cemetery as a garden landscape, and the later development of memorial gardens, see Francis *et al.* (2005: 30-49) and Tarlow (2000b). An American master’s thesis argues that the professional landscaping of American cemeteries, in which the aesthetic of the cemetery was believed to aid healing from loss, was indicative of Anglo-American cultural values influenced by medical theory and transcendentalism of the early nineteenth century (Rao 2002).

<sup>112</sup> “In the course of the last two centuries the idea has been put forward and gained wide acceptance that the last resting place of the dead should be in a pleasing environment, less forbidding than the formal stonework of a churchyard. Hence arose the idea of a cemetery as a kind of garden, arousing thoughts about the beauty of living things as well as reminiscences of the dead person.” (Francis *et al.* 2005:xx)

2005:184). Davies (1995:37) argues that idiomatic reference to a conveyor-belt expresses a sentiment that crematoria are impersonal and mechanical.

Crematoria were developed by the cremationists as a rejection of “mournful Victorian cemeteries and called for the abolition of grounds strewn with an endless sea of derelict graves and withered flowers” (Grainger 2005b:213). Unlike cemeteries however:

Many early British crematoria, particularly those built in the late nineteenth century, were denied the opportunity of landscaping, by being placed within, or adjoining, existing cemeteries. (Grainger 2005b:213)

This is very similar to the development of local authority provision of natural burial today, as these sites are more often located as adjuncts to existing cemeteries and crematoria and therefore, more usually lack the aesthetic ‘natural’ qualities of privately managed natural burial sites.<sup>113</sup>

Clearly, gardens, cemeteries and crematoria have all been subject to aesthetic notions of ‘taste’ and values of the day, reflecting expressions of human relationships with the wider world, as such they are places invested with moral value. Culturally, they make a statement about people’s relationship to nature (Bhatti 1999). Just as cemeteries and crematoria were conceived and designed as beautiful, therapeutic landscapes of their day, so natural burial’s aesthetic aims to foster a contemporary therapeutic landscape for the bereaved and dying. The cultural, often romantic understandings of ‘nature’ that inspired the landscaping of garden cemeteries particularly, the notion of ‘nature’s’ transformative capacity for healing, renewal and moral improvement (Francis *et al.* 2005), are still implicit in the contemporary innovation of natural burial.

This latest innovation in burial provision appears to hold appeal because of socio-cultural constructions of nature and a landscape’s deemed aesthetic qualities that not only facilitate healing, but also the maintenance of (emotional) health and wellness (see Williams 1999a:4). To argue that natural burial is perhaps offering a new

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<sup>113</sup> See Chapters 1 and 7 for expanded discussion.

therapeutic landscape in death is to offer a relational understanding of place and space with human activity rather than simply articulating place as a physical entity (Williams 1999a:2). It is a theoretical notion increasingly being recognised by geographers (Williams 1999a:3, Gesler 1993, 2005) that attempts to establish a socio-ecological, holistic understanding of health and reject the biomedical model aligned with the medicalisation of health. This is concurrent with critiques of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' medicalisation of death in Britain by academics and practitioners in death and dying (Bauman 1992, Howarth 1996, Jupp 2005, Jupp and Walter 1999, Walter 1993, 1994-95, 1996, 2000, Weinrich and Speyer 2003).

Moreover, secularisation and the 'spiritual revolution' (Heelas and Woodhead *et al.* 2005) arguably fosters spiritual revivals in human-nature relations, which renews a sense of the sacred towards the earth and promotes environmental welfare (Davies 2005a). Perhaps nature's allure becomes all the more pertinent in an age of perceived environmental risk (Beck 1995) and ethical consumerism (Dickens 2004). Vandendorpe for example, observes that contemporary funerals in Belgium are expressing new identity references which orientate an individual's sense of belonging to society and nature rather than religion and local community (2000:29). Perhaps natural burial is a creative innovation which, symbolically at least, attempts to rectify perceived damage already wrought or practices that will safeguard the planet. The emergence of natural burial partly demonstrates that the environment and future of the planet has tangible meaning for some people. Additionally, there are new emotional options and a lack of constraint upon them in death, dying and funerals. A time of emotional choice is upon us more than ever before perhaps, and grief theory has fostered this in reaction to the medicalisation, and often implied impersonalisation, of death and dying (Lofland 1978, Walter 1993:131). This is set within a wider "massive subjective turn" in modern culture (Heelas 2006:224), in which it is argued we seek to emphasise and express our own individual, subjective selves. Walter (1993:127) optimistically argues that New Age interests in death and dying "represents a significant attempt to reverse the secularization of death" whilst the Natural Death Movement is constructing "new forms of association and new understandings of spirituality that draw both on present and past" (Walter 1994-95: 245). Harvey makes a connection between 'green burial' and the spiritual needs of pagans: "With the rise of 'green burial' in woodland or meadow sites in which not only ecological concerns

but also the personalization of ceremonies is stressed, many of the spiritual concerns of both pagans and New Agers can be met” (2005:5). Sadly, he does not expand upon this claim in describing *how* their “spiritual concerns” are being met. Harris concludes that the contemporary, unitary appeal of natural burial amongst a “disparate group” in America “is the welcome promise of natural burial: simplicity, low cost, and a return to the elements” (2007:4). Are these qualities valued by self-identifying pagans and New Agers? Sociologically we should ask why these associations with natural burial are *welcome* today by anyone at all, though further research is warranted to address this question adequately despite these associations being explored in relation to this case study in Chapters 6 and 8.

So whilst this thesis cannot substantiate the extent to which secularisation and alternative spiritualities are inherent to natural burial’s appeal, I do argue in Chapter 6 that there are many romantic values implicit in British people’s decisions to choose natural burial and Chapter 5 demonstrates that therapeutic relations are evident between bereaved visitors and Barton Glebe itself. Similarly, this thesis prompts speculation on the extent to which romantic, therapeutic constructions and relations with ‘nature’ embodied in the practice of natural burial, facilitates a “renaissance of a perception of death as a gateway to another existence, that is, an explicitly religious approach to death” in much the same way it is argued the New Age engagement with death is doing (Walter 1993:127)? Chapter 8 suggests that to an extent this may be so, as people who pre-register for woodland burial at Barton Glebe have articulated a sense of their own symbolic immortality and salvation by *giving back* or *returning to nature*. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the aligned associations of ‘nature’ in natural burial enable people to attain and practise a mode of ‘spirituality’ that is concerned with articulating the ineffable and inalienable qualities of life in “giving voice to experience, emotion and self-reflection in the face of death” (Davies 2005a:85).

## **Summary**

This chapter argued that natural burial represents a cultural innovation that shares commonalities in its social emergence with the development of cremation a century before in Britain. It has also emphasised historical and cultural continuities and

legacies resurfacing in natural burial viz., that appeals for simplified burials under oak trees, for example, have been documented from the eighteenth century onwards; that biodegradable coffins were actually first produced as part of Haden's burial reform until the late 1930s; and that culturally understood therapeutic, moral provisions of 'nature' greatly influenced the garden cemetery movement's landscape design in the nineteenth century. This chapter has also revealed unsubstantiated assumptions regarding the age and class of those for whom natural burial appeals, as well as theoretical assumptions that natural burial is fostered by a spiritual turn; a reaction to 'modern' death practices; processes of secularisation and the demand for personalised funerals. These are all assumptions I argue that to date have been inadequately empirically qualified with regards to contemporary natural burial practice, though research is forthcoming.<sup>114</sup>

From documenting the British socio-cultural context that witnessed the emergence of natural burial, the following chapter historically traces the emergence and first decade of the Arbory Trust's woodland burial provision, which constitutes the case study for this doctoral research on values and behaviours aligned with natural burial.

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<sup>114</sup> *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial* a research project conducted by A. Clayden, J. Hockey and T. Green at Sheffield university. <http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html> [retrieved 04/09/10]

## Chapter 4

### Introducing Barton Glebe

Following the previous chapter's discussion of British cultural innovations in bodily disposal this chapter focuses specifically on the innovative provision of the Arbory Trust at Barton Glebe woodland burial ground, its historical context and geographical setting, charting the inception, development and first 10 years of the Trust's provision to contextualise the ethnographic data of the following chapters. To achieve this, administrative files held by the Trust dating back to 1995 were extensively drawn upon, alongside transcribed interviews with representatives of the Trust and Trustees, material from the Trust's website, newsletters and a collection of newspaper cuttings, press releases, detailed site plans and financial appraisals. There is currently no standard practice or provision with regards to natural burial in Britain with a particular site's location and historical development being important factors in shaping management practices. In recounting key events and decisions made in the inception and early years of the Trust, this chapter highlights Barton Glebe's distinctive provision and describes the woodland burial site's current landscape and management practices. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of alternative burial and cremation provision in the region reflecting on how this may impact upon the relative success of Barton Glebe.

#### ***The Arbory Trust***

The Arbory Trust is a registered charity established under the auspices of the Church of England and launched in 2000 to offer woodland burial provision.<sup>115</sup> The Trust is a member of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds (ANBG)<sup>116</sup> and maintains an

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<sup>115</sup> Legal approval of Trust deeds were secured in 2000. However, the Trustees had been meeting since 1996 to discuss the feasibility of implementing woodland burial provision.

<sup>116</sup> Launched in 1994 by the Natural Death Centre, the ANBG maintain a publicly available list of all member UK natural burial sites. Membership to the ANBG is only permitted upon meeting particular standards in natural burial provision, though sites are rarely inspected. The ANBG's *Code of Conduct for Members* is available at: <http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/uploads/free%20downloads/Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf.PdfCompressor-33100.pdf> [Retrieved 14/07/10]

ambition to invest surplus funds to further woodland burial provision around the country under its name. However, as some working for the Trust admit, they are currently some way from achieving this ambition and for now, all funds and management activities are focused upon their only woodland burial site in Barton, some 4.5 miles South West of Cambridge. The Trust's administrative office is located approximately 20 miles away in the Diocesan office of the Church of England in Ely.



Figure 7: A map of Barton Glebe's location  
Source: <http://www.arborytrust.org/findus.htm>

Despite being a consecrated, Anglican affiliated site, those buried or wishing to be buried at Barton Glebe come from all religious denominations and none, as well as from all over Britain. A minority come from overseas, but the majority of those interred at Barton Glebe were at one time residents from approximately a 25-mile radius of Cambridge:

Defining our catchment area is virtually impossible. We don't always get to know where people come from or why, but what does emerge often is the fact that there has been a Cambridge connection somewhere in the past...Of course the majority of those buried and (probably) with reservations do live somewhat more locally. I am not that good at guesstimating distances but I think it fairly safe to say that we regularly get people from distances of 25 to 30 miles.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>117</sup> An extract from an email received from the Trust Administrator dated 15/12/08.

The Trust claims to offer “a real alternative to churchyards and municipal cemeteries, many of which are either full or nearing capacity.”<sup>118</sup> Certainly, the Trust’s provision *was* unique and innovative because it provided the only consecrated woodland burial site in Britain with support from the Diocese of Ely until, in 2006, six years after the Arbory Trust was launched, St Mark’s Church in Bedford received planning permission for a woodland burial ground located at Keysoe in Bedfordshire.<sup>119</sup> This site, set within 60 acres of *existing* woodland, was consecrated on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007 by the Bishop of Bedford, The Right Reverend Richard Inwood. Only the woodland burial grounds at Barton and Keysoe are consecrated in addition to a privately owned site in Lancashire.<sup>120</sup> The Arbory Trust and St Albans Woodland Burial Trust are also less typical of other natural burial providers in that they are managed, administered and funded as non-profit making charitable trusts.

Barton Glebe was consecrated by The Right Reverend Anthony Russell, then Bishop of Ely<sup>121</sup> and Chair of the Trustees for the Arbory Trust, on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2002. The Diocese of Ely was also supportive in the inception of the Arbory Trust by releasing a portion of church-owned land, known as Glebe land.<sup>122</sup> Barton Glebe was so called because the Trust felt it appropriate to continue to reflect the history of the land through its name.



Figure 8: Barton Glebe’s entrance  
Source: <http://www.arborytrust.org/barton.htm>

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<sup>118</sup> *Trust History* <http://www.arborytrust.org/history.htm> [Retrieved 14/07/10]

<sup>119</sup> See *St Albans Woodland Burial Trust* <http://www.woodlandburialtrust.com/> [Retrieved 10/09/10]. The driving force behind this site’s provision, the Revd. Charles Royden, had attended the earlier meetings of the Arbory Trust’s Trustees.

<sup>120</sup> Consecrated by the Bishop of Burnley in October 2005, this woodland burial ground located near Preston, is called Much Hoole. It is privately owned by a funeral director called Geoff C. Whalley. See <http://www.muchhoolewoodlandburialground.co.uk/home.html> [Retrieved 13/07/10]

<sup>121</sup> Bishop of Ely from 2000-2010, successor of Bishop Stephen Sykes (1991-1999).

<sup>122</sup> See *Glebe* in Glossary.

Barton Glebe covers almost 40 acres in total; the collective acreage of South and North Glebe. South Glebe represents approximately 16 acres of newly established woodland and, at the time of writing, accommodates almost 400 interments within nine glades. A neighbouring field on the northern edge of South Glebe, North Glebe, was grass seeded in the spring of 2009 and planted with whips<sup>123</sup> in the winter of 2009/10. North Glebe is not yet open for burials though its 11 glades have been assigned tree names.<sup>124</sup>

The Trust is overseen by a Board of Trustees<sup>125</sup> and employs an Administrator, Arbory Assistant and two site Guardians who are engaged in the day to day running and management of Barton Glebe. Additionally, there is an advisor to the Trustees from the Forestry Commission who was instrumental in securing Forestry Commission grants and designing the woodland burial site's layout and planting plan.

The planting of South Glebe involved almost 10,000 trees, all native broad leaf species, with North Glebe gaining 10,440 trees, all from the following species: Ash, Alder, Hornbeam, Birch, Oak, Wayfaring tree, Yew, Dogwood, Barberry, Whitebeam, Wild Service, Spindle, Crab Apple, Willow, Field Maple and Aspen. Not all natural burial ground providers in this country aim to establish native woodland as part of their provision, some simply allow bereaved families to plant a tree upon an individual grave, whilst others do not permit individual grave planting with trees, nor do they plant trees on the site. The Arbory Trust's vision however, is very much

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<sup>123</sup> See *Whip* in Glossary.

<sup>124</sup> Whilst the nine glades of South Glebe are named after wildflowers (see Figures 9 and 13 in this chapter), the allocation of these particular names is not accidental. They serve to intensify representations of 'nature' and further validate Barton Glebe as a 'natural' landscape by intensifying the nature-focused grammar of discourse used in relation to Barton Glebe. See Chapter 7 for further discussion.

<sup>125</sup> At the time of writing in 2009, these are: The Right Revd. Dr Anthony Russell (former Bishop of Ely), The Revd. Peter Owen-Jones (the visionary and instigator behind the Arbory Trust), Sir Francis Pemberton (a local retired land agent), P.F.B. Beesley, Esq. (Legal Secretary to the Bishop of Ely and Legal Adviser to the Trustees), Professor David Bellamy (environmental campaigner), The Right Revd. Dr. Geoffrey Rowell (Bishop in Europe and Church of England Spokesman on burials and burial practices), Mr Hugh Duberly CBE (Lord Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire and former President of the CLA), The Right Revd. Professor S. W. Sykes (former Bishop of Ely 1991-1999 who initially lent Church of England support to Peter Owen-Jones's plans for the Arbory Trust in the 1990s), Dr Gareth Thomas (who, at the Arbory Trust's inception, acted as an advisor from the RSPB and is currently responsible for mapping bird species at Barton Glebe) and Lord Fairhaven (arboretum specialist).

centred upon creating ‘native’<sup>126</sup> woodland in conjunction with offering woodland burial.

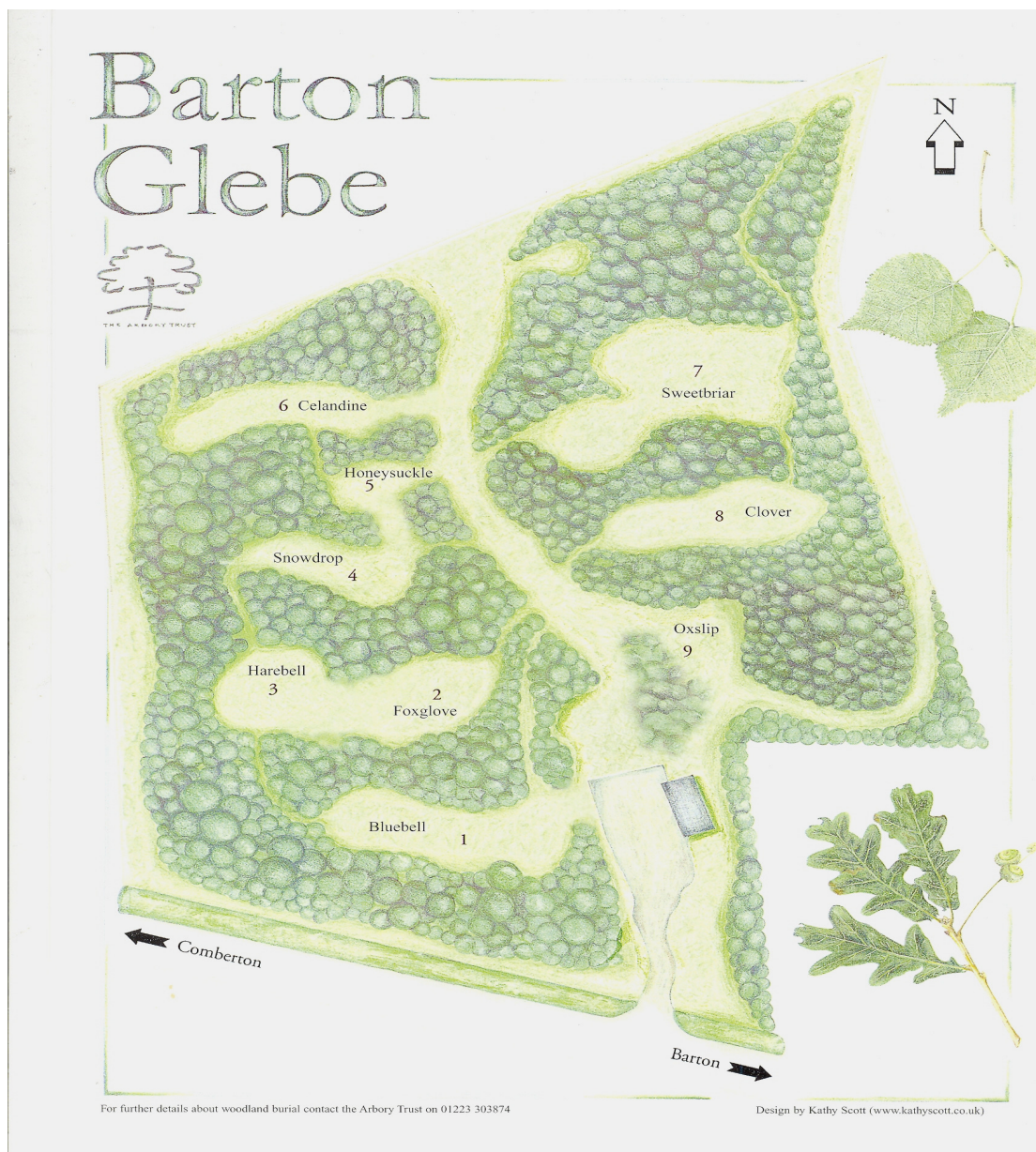


Figure 9: The glade layout of South Glebe

Source: Reproduced with kind permission from the Arbory Trust

Though the Trust do not permit bereaved visitors to plant trees upon individual graves, the trees planted by the Trust around the glades can be sponsored.<sup>127</sup> The decision *not* to implement individual tree planting on graves was two-fold. Firstly, as a Christian charity, the Trust wanted to “avoid any suggestion that life is being

<sup>126</sup> Which the Trust understands as mixed deciduous woodland.

<sup>127</sup> See Appendix 4.

reincarnated in the form of a tree.”<sup>128</sup> Secondly, there were anticipated management issues in the event of a tree dying; how would the bereaved family react and would the Trust have to replace the tree? Dr Julie Rugg,<sup>129</sup> an authority on cemeteries in England, had written to Bishop Stephen when the Trust was still at the planning stage expressing concern over the management of privately-run natural burial sites. One concern she expressed was the bereaved’s emotional investment in trees:

Because we know so very little about the community of bereaved people who have chosen burial in a woodland site, I think it is best to be on the cautious side with respect to anticipating their needs with respect to continued involvement in the site and interest that may be attached to a specific tree. (From a letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 1998)<sup>130</sup>

Subsequently, the Trustees had to make a decision on whether trees would be planted in memorial upon individual graves (as was the procedure begun by Ken West in Carlisle) or would another system be put in place? These two reasons, one theological and one practical, meant the Trust pursued glade planting with clearings for burial and provision for a tree sponsorship scheme, whereby an *existing* tree could be sponsored in the woodland surrounding each glade.

Sponsorship is acknowledged by certificate at the cost of £50 per tree. However, since the Trust’s inception the practice with regard to tree sponsorship has changed. The current practice endorsed by the Trust is:

We will no longer place stakes with numbers by individual trees as has been the practice in the past - this is a necessary decision to ensure the appropriate development of as natural a woodland as possible. With an ever increasing amount of numbered stakes, it had become obvious that

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<sup>128</sup> In a letter from the Trust to the Archdeacon of Lichfield dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 1998. Contrary to this view however, the following chapters demonstrate that the motif of life and the deceased’s identity continuing in trees, more broadly ‘nature’, is commonplace in the practice and concept of natural burial and holds much allure for those drawn to Barton Glebe, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

<sup>129</sup> Based at the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York was appointed in 1991 to the Cemetery Research Group (CRG), established at the University of York in 1990 to conduct research on local authorities and cemetery conservation. Dr. Rugg is also a principal advisor to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, in its inquiry into cemeteries conducted in 2000-01, as well as sitting on the Ministry of Justice Burial and Cemeteries Advisory Group and Re-Use Sub-Group. In 2008, Rugg was elected to the position of Honorary Vice President of the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management and continues to be an authority on cemetery and burial provision. Further information on the CRG can be found at:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/crg/index.htm> [Retrieved 14/09/09].

<sup>130</sup> Weller (1999) also voiced what he saw as potential management problems in natural burial provision.

the natural appearance would soon be lost, and thus be deviating from the continuing aim to develop a natural environment wherever possible. Existing stakes will remain until they perish naturally, but will not then be replaced (this is not a change in policy). It must also be remembered that where a tree has been adopted in the past or indeed will be sponsored from now on, this does not prevent others from using the ground around it for burial or cremated remains plots.<sup>131</sup>

Similar regulations exist around the planting or placing of any flowers upon or around a grave. Flowers which are *planted* must be native to the woodland the Trust is trying to establish. This has been a difficult area to regulate by those responsible for the day-to-day running of Barton Glebe and as a result, those concerned felt it was necessary to produce a planting guide for users of the burial ground.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, the Trust created regulations for cut flowers:

Cut flowers can be placed on graves but the Trustees reserve the right to remove them as part of routine care after a period of time. Artificial flowers are not permitted.<sup>133</sup>

Plastic, Cellophane and other non-biodegradable components of a bouquet are actively discouraged and often swiftly removed from a graveside by the management. A similar view is taken by the management on non-floral items found on or near a grave:

Essentially, one simple wooden marker (roughly the size of an A3 piece of paper) is permitted, and must be laid flush to the ground. It must not have any brass or other plaque attached. Cut (not wrapped) flowers may be placed, or wild flowers planted, but no vases or baskets (of any kind) or ornaments of any kind are permitted (even if they are made of wood).<sup>134</sup>

The Trust's enforcement of their regulations is motivated by their original purpose<sup>135</sup> to create 'native' woodland *in conjunction* with offering burial, therefore:

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<sup>131</sup> <http://www.arborytrust.org/adpotion.htm> [Retrieved 12/12/08]. For further discussion see Chapter 7 *Anonymity vs. Memorial: Tree sponsorship and identity*

<sup>132</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>133</sup> Rule 2 of *Rules of the Burial Ground* <http://www.arborytrust.org/rules.htm> [Retrieved 13/07/10]

<sup>134</sup> July 2007 Arbory Trust Newsletter, page 2. Newsletters were originally sent out twice a year to all of those pre-registered for a grave space at Barton and to next of kin for those buried at the site. In 2009 the Arbory Trust began distributing newsletters electronically via email. All newsletters dating back to January 2006 were uploaded onto the Arbory Trust website.

<sup>135</sup> See Terms of Reference of the Trust this chapter, page 81-82.

...all grave markers (which must be wooden) should be flush to the ground or as near as possible - it was never the intent that very visible markers should protrude upwards, and we feel that it is important that they should all be as unobtrusive as possible. It is important to remember that one thing that distinguishes us from most other cemeteries is that the aim is ultimately to have no visible trace of graves, and indeed many choose to come to us for this very reason.<sup>136</sup>

The glades are mown annually, though not when there are nesting ground birds or flowers in season, and this is offered by the management as another reason why permitted grave markers at Barton Glebe are placed flush to the ground so that a mower may pass over them. Located along the edges of glades are benches which bereaved visitors have sponsored, though this opportunity for memorialisation through the sponsorship of benches ceased in January 2008:

With immediate effect, we have taken the decision that no further benches will be permitted for the foreseeable future. On close inspection we feel that there are now more than enough, and we have to turn down requests almost daily. Imagine what it would look like if we agreed to them all!<sup>137</sup>

The Trust felt they had enough existing benches and wished to maintain their vision of providing an alternative burial space that minimised visible traces of graves on an (establishing) native woodland landscape.<sup>138</sup> New graves are immediately sown with grass seed mixed with wild flower seeds to also encourage the invisibility of graves and a 'natural' appearance; a relatively new practice undertaken by the Trust since January 2008. However, some graves have not been as successful as others in propagating grass cover, whilst others take longer to sink to ground level.<sup>139</sup> Currently, the Trust keeps a working map in the Memorial Lodge that identifies each grave's location, orientation and occupier, be it an existing grave or grave-space reservation.<sup>140</sup> Reservations at Barton Glebe are accepted in full or part payment and entitle a person to a grave space within the burial ground:

...but not a particular location, unless it is made for a spouse or partner who is already buried at the ground. In that case, the adjacent grave space

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<sup>136</sup> January 2008 Newsletter, page 1. Cf. Chapter 6 and conflict over core values.

<sup>137</sup> January 2008 newsletter, page 1.

<sup>138</sup> See issues arising from users' expectations and experiences of Barton Glebe, particularly concerning ground maintenance and memorialisation regulations in Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>139</sup> The rate of descent is attributed to soil type. Barton Glebe is situated upon clay soil.

<sup>140</sup> For a discussion of issues concerning grave location choices and orientation see Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

will be guaranteed. Anyone may express a preference as to where they may like to be, but this cannot be guaranteed. Reservations can be made in advance until the Trustees declare otherwise.<sup>141</sup>

The opportunity to secure an ‘X-marks-the-spot’ grave reservation ceased in January 2007 as it was deemed easier for managing grave reservations. This is an example of how, as the physical site developed, there was also a development of needs, hence acquiring a lodge and then extending it for example. Further, as more people chose to pre-register at Barton Glebe, so the Trust needed more thorough management systems and record keeping. This led a founding Trustee to comment:

I suppose the main organisational change has been seeing how *complex* the site has become as more and more people become interested in the woodland burials...

Over the decade that Barton Glebe has been in operation, the fees have increased only once, in 2004.<sup>142</sup> Despite increased fees, entitlements remained the same in 2010:<sup>143</sup>

**Single grave space entitlement (burial) £750**

This carries full entitlement to a reserved grave space. The fee for adjacent plots (e.g. for spouse/partners) is twice the single fee (£1,500). The Arbory Trust does not dig double depth plots.

**Reservation of grave space (burial) £375**

50 per cent of current full payment for a burial plot. The remaining sum due is 50 per cent of the full cost of a grave space at the time of burial, *not* at the time of reservation.

**Single grave space entitlement (cremated remains) £350**

This carries full entitlement to a reserved grave space for cremated remains.

**Friends of the Arbory Trust £25 per year**

This provides the opportunity to support the Arbory Trust. No special privileges are attached.

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<sup>141</sup> *Fees and Grave Reservation Details* <http://www.arborytrust.org/fees.htm> [Retrieved 12/07/10]

<sup>142</sup> Initially, the fee structure was:

£250	Reservation of a single grave space (cremated remains)
£250	Reservation of a single grave space (burial)
£500	Purchase of a single grave space
£25	Friends of the Arbory Trust

<sup>143</sup> As listed at: <http://www.arborytrust.org/fees.htm> [Retrieved 12/09/09]

These fees are subject to annual review by the Trustees and relate *only* to the provision of a grave space. They do not include fees administered for church or ministerial services or charges levied by funeral directors for such things as coffin or casket purchase and grave digger's fees. The purchased grave space is issued with a deed number and guaranteed in perpetuity (for 75 years) from the date of burial. Perpetuity secured through the purchase of a grave space, be it for bodily interment or cremated remains, varies between natural burial site providers in the UK.

Coffins or caskets used for a burial at Barton Glebe must be made from biodegradable material, of which there is an increasing number of suppliers available either online or supplying directly to funeral directors.<sup>144</sup>



Figure 10: The Lodge (before extension) at Barton Glebe  
Source:<http://www.arborytrust.org/lodge.htm>

Facilities for a funeral or memorial service at Barton Glebe have changed over the years. Currently there is an extended timber Memorial Lodge that for a fee can be utilised for a funeral service. The Lodge is always open when a funeral is taking place so that mourners have access to toilet facilities and can seek shelter on inclement days. Though the Lodge is not a chapel it can be used for services, but its size restricts the number in attendance.<sup>145</sup> The Lodge is always manned on a Wednesday between 9-11am, providing an opportunity for visitors to the burial ground to have queries answered or assistance provided. The Lodge is the outcome of generous donations. It was constructed in 2005 and officially dedicated on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2005 by the former Bishop, Anthony Russell. The Lodge houses the Trust's burial register, site maps and the Memorial Book.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Cf. funeral directors attitudes towards eco-coffins in Chapter 5, page 122 -123 and *Contemporary sensibilities of taste* in Chapter 6, page 176 -178.

<sup>145</sup> See a comment on the extended lodge on page 95 of this chapter.

<sup>146</sup> Also a donation by a widow whose husband was one of the first to be interred at Barton Glebe. The Memorial Book, unlike a book of remembrance at a crematorium, is not permanently on display or



Figure 11: The Memorial Book  
Source: <http://www.arborytrust.org/memorial.htm>

## ***Barton Glebe: Origins and Site Development***

### **The genesis of an idea**

The Revd. Peter Owen-Jones – from now on cited as Peter - was credited by Bishop Anthony as *the energy behind the Arbory Trust and made it his project*.<sup>147</sup> From 1998 until 2005, Peter ran three parishes in Cambridgeshire as the Rector of Haslingfield (Harlton, Great Eversden and Little Eversden). He currently holds office as a Rector in Sussex and occasionally presents BBC programmes on many aspects of religions in the world.<sup>148</sup>

In a telephone interview Peter freely expresses his views on the Church of England's engagement with contemporary environmental issues at a time when *environmental consciousness has taken over so that people see the future as a renewed Eden rather than Jesus's resurrection*. Peter claims that the Christian eschatological model is on the wane because Christianity has remained *out of sync* with society because of a focus upon the salvation of self over the world: an eschatological framing that he refers to in terms of *Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism*. Peter's views echo those of Lynn White (1967) who controversially argued that "Christianity is the root of the world's environmental problems" as Genesis 1 was understood by Lynn White to

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housed in a specially designed cabinet, which grants architectural expression to the book of remembrance. Therefore, it is questionable to what extent the Trust's Memorial Book is a focused and accessible point of memory for bereaved visitors, quite contrary to the significance and role of books of remembrance at crematoria. See Marshall (2005:92-93) for further details on books of remembrance.

<sup>147</sup> Extract from a telephone interview conducted on 30/06/09

<sup>148</sup> One programme Peter presented, *Around the World in 80 Faiths*, is the focus of AHRC-funded doctoral research by Ruth Deller at Sheffield Hallam University, who is interested in the portrayal of religion and spirituality on television. For further information see: [http://www.ruthdeller.co.uk/?page\\_id=5](http://www.ruthdeller.co.uk/?page_id=5) [Retrieved 16/09/10] and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/80faiths/> [Retrieved 16/09/10].

assert human dominion over nature (cited in Truelove and Joireman 2009:806).<sup>149</sup> Peter visualises and articulates a way in which the Church can be linked to society by situating the salvation of self within a greater salvation for earth<sup>150</sup> and in so doing, legitimating the Church's involvement with woodland burial provision.<sup>151</sup> Peter believes that so long as people understand Christianity to be the concern of the salvation of self, they will never be able to see woodland burial as a Christian practice.<sup>152</sup>

Peter recalls he had been reading some New Age literature where monks of another religious tradition were buried under an apple tree. He liked this idea of orchard burial,<sup>153</sup> which gradually in his mind became 'woodland burial'. Peter learnt that Ken

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<sup>149</sup> In some ways Peter's eco-theological views are indicative of Lynch's 'progressive spirituality', particularly Peter's motivation to engage with ecological issues (2007:35+). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to review debates concerning Christianity and environmental ethics; however, reference to the following concurrent AHRC-funded research project at Exeter University gives a concise overview of debates and lists (forthcoming) primary publications from the project led by Professor of New Testament Studies, David Horrell: *Uses of the Bible in environmental ethics* [Retrieved 18/07/10] <http://huss.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/uses/publications/>

<sup>150</sup> As a historical and cultural comparison Schmitt documents how American clergymen engaged with nature in a belief that nature was "the gospel of the holy earth" and could soothe "troubled Americans" in the early twentieth century (1969:19, 145 and 141-145 especially). See Chapter 8 of this thesis for a broad discussion of salvation in relation to natural burial.

<sup>151</sup> In an interview with the Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech who served in the Diocese of Ely as Vicar of Histon in the parish of Histon and Impington from 1991 to 2005, the Archdeacon also emphasised the benefits the Church of England could receive by engaging with woodland burial provision: "I think it's excellent actually [Barton Glebe]. I mean, both theoretically excellent...but *now* having had experience of it as an Archdeacon, I can actually see the value of having that sort of alternative site. And it's a very *good* way for the Church to serve a very different community maybe; that people of all religions, faith or none can use and that the Church of England can facilitate that to see some of the benefits that we have. I think more could be made of it being a Church of England site. Not for the sake of the bereaved, but I think quite often we're doing a lot of things in the background and people don't realise we're involved and it's just another way of saying: yeah, we're here for you and we care for you as the Church of England, whether you have any faith or not. And I think that's an important thing that the Church of England can do because we're not a membership church but we seek to serve the wider community." Cf. this chapter page 97, footnote 191.

<sup>152</sup> Taken from a transcript of our telephone conversation, 19/12/2008. Cf. Chapter 5 *Consecration and security* page 124-126. Similarly, Truelove and Joireman (2009) claim "Christian beliefs" are "negatively related to ecocentrism and positively related to anthropocentrism" (2009:808-809), because "Christians' lack of awareness of the biospheric consequences of environmental problems is responsible for their lack of proenvironmental behaviour" (2009:818). This is a bold claim considering that the plethora of Christian denominations and traditions is never acknowledged and therefore highlighting the contested nature of the term. I also noted that those Christians represented in the research were far from a representative sample (cf. 2009:810-811).

<sup>153</sup> One could argue that parallel practices to woodland burial in other cultural contexts include the sacred groves and planting of fruit trees over burial sites in South India (Uchiyamada 1998), Japanese tree burial, *jumokusou*, (Boret 2008) and Taiwanese 'tree burial' (Tremlett 2007).

West<sup>154</sup> had also thought of orchard burial about five years earlier in the early 1990s, but Peter felt he could not implement orchard burial because *orchards need big financial and man-power input to be maintained.*

In 1995 Peter approached The Right Revd. Stephen Sykes,<sup>155</sup> who was Bishop of his diocese at the time and receptive to Peter's initial proposals for "locating, creating and managing woodland and meadow burial sites."<sup>156</sup> Peter claims that Bishop Stephen also understood *the total disconnection of the Christian Church from the environment: The fact that in 2008 they still rant about women bishops and gays suggests to me just how severe the situation is with the Christian Church being divorced from reality!*<sup>157</sup>

In a face-to-face interview Bishop Stephen recalled that he thought Peter became involved with woodland burial provision *because he just thought it was consistent with the Christian doctrine. Creation. That we should care for the earth.* Bishop Stephen explained that he was also receptive to the idea because as a systematic theologian *I take an interest in everything...it's everything in the light and belief in God. There isn't anything I'm supposed to not be interested in.*

Therefore, on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1996 a meeting was called to discuss the possibilities of this fledgling idea between the Stephen Sykes, Peter and the Diocesan Secretary, Dr Matthew Lavis.<sup>158</sup> The Diocesan Secretary remembers those early days working with Peter and Bishop Stephen; a time when his initial input was to draft a financial appraisal for the woodland burial site's proposal:

I said: "would it be a good idea if I did a financial projection?" And I have to say that at that point I thought this would knock the whole thing on the

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<sup>154</sup> Credited with implementing Britain's first woodland burial ground during his time as the Superintendent at Carlisle Cemetery (Cumbria) in 1993. In the same year he won an award recognising this innovative provision from the Natural Death Centre for the most helpful cemetery in the UK.

<sup>155</sup> Bishop Sykes was a distinguished Professor of Divinity and Theology at Durham and Cambridge, before being made Bishop of Ely (1990-1999), after which, he most unusually ceased being Bishop of Ely to become Principal of St John's College from 1999 at the University of Durham. He is now Honorary Assistant Bishop of Durham (Church of England Year Book 2006:545).

<sup>156</sup> Correspondence dated 1 June 1995 from Bishop Stephen to the Diocesan Secretary.

<sup>157</sup> Transcribed telephone interview with Peter, 19/12/2008.

<sup>158</sup> Dr Matthew Lavis holds a doctorate in geography and prior to being responsible for diocesan finances in Ely, held a post as Registrar at the University of Buckingham in University administration. He is also the second supervisor for this collaborative doctoral research.

head so we could get back to normal business...there were an *enormous* number of variables: Were we going to buy the land? Were we going to do it on a mortgage? Were we going to get the land gifted to us, and so on and so forth? We then had the issue of how we were going to allow people to register interest in this. People who had an interest might not necessarily need the grave for another 40/50 years so how do we register in some form of financial appraisal/spread sheet for the next 30 years or so? How would you take account of the fact that some people might register but not take up the land?...But it seemed to us, based upon a crude financial appraisal, that based upon 1000 burials over a period of 40 years and a burial ground of 40 acres I think it was, that it could break even and it could generate enough money to maintain it...So there were lots and lots of ifs and buts about it because we were gambling on the generation – we assumed the generation who'd be most interested in it would be the younger generation<sup>159</sup> – and we thought the elder groups would be a lot more traditional and therefore, not be interested and so we had the financial appraisal very much skewed towards people registering and taking up their place many years later.

Bishop Stephen sent a letter to all the diocesan Bishops outlining intentions for the Arbory Trust's woodland burial provision. The response was that:

Nine dioceses were aware of the practice [of natural burial] and the diocese of Coventry has recently dedicated a burial woodland in Allesley...Six dioceses (Sodor and Man, Bradford, Norwich, Wakefield, Gloucester and Hereford) stated that they were not interested in woodland burials. Ten dioceses (Peterborough, Bristol, Oxford,<sup>160</sup> St Albans, Chichester, Lincoln, York, Durham, Sheffield and Birmingham) were what can be described as neutral about the prospect. 12 dioceses (Colchester, Coventry, Ripon, Southwark, Lichfield, Blackburn, Liverpool, Winchester, Manchester, Worcester, Truro and Chelmsford) expressed that they were indeed interested in the idea and would like to hear more about it. The only point of concern within this group was from the diocese of Winchester who was worried about the strength of cardboard coffins.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Their initial assumption is contrary to the representation of ages I interviewed. Generational preferences for 'natural' burial are discussed in Chapter 3, page 45. Cf. footnote 96.

<sup>160</sup> Prior to assuming his position as the Bishop of Ely, Bishop Anthony was previously working in the diocese of Oxford and was involved in discussions regarding a possible green burial site in Oxford diocese as some Glebe land was potentially available for such a purpose. By the time he became Bishop of Ely he was already familiar with proposals for green burial and the Arbory Trust was established.

<sup>161</sup> Extract from a letter from Peter to the Diocesan Secretary sent in 1996 but without a specific date. Cf. funeral directors reactions to cardboard coffins in Chapter 5, page 122-123.

## **The acquisition and development of Barton Glebe**

The Estate Secretary to the Church Commissioners sent a letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> March 1996 to the Diocesan Secretary listing “parishes in the Diocese of Ely where the Commissioners own land in blocks of over 40 acres...”<sup>162</sup> With identified site possibilities, the Arbory Trust Working Group undertook site visits:

...Peter Owen-Jones, Steve Scott and I then went out and looked at various bits of woodland in the diocese that had been planted by the Forestry Commission, so we could see what early woodlands look like and I went to look at very mature woodlands in Anglesey Abbey so I had some idea of how far to plant the trees apart... We searched the diocese’s land bank and there were about three or four pieces of Glebe land which were about 40 acres. The idea was that it wasn’t necessarily Glebe land, but that it was land under the control of the diocese and we wanted a piece of land of about 40 acres and its location was clearly important: and the piece of land that seemed most attractive was Barton as it was close to Cambridge therefore, close to an area of high concentration and high number of churches, many of which have closed churchyards and so on and so forth. And so this would have a good local catchment where the alternatives were the crematorium and the cemetery... (Ely Diocesan Secretary)<sup>163</sup>

In a letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> October 1996 it was stated by chartered surveyors that the area of Glebe land identified by the Arbory Trust Working Group was currently occupied by a tenant farmer. Possession of the land by the Trust could only be obtained once planning permission was granted.

## **Planning permission**

In January 1997 the Trust therefore began making enquiries into securing planning permission. In response to plans for the proposed woodland burial site at Barton Glebe, the Environment Agency’s Chief Planning Officer at South Cambridgeshire District Council on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1997 wrote:

The Environment Agency would advise that the depth of on-site groundwater be investigated, in the form of boreholes/trial pits, and monitored *prior* to submission of any formal planning application. The

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<sup>162</sup> Professional advice from the Advisor of the Forestry Commission recommended 40 acres as being “the *minimum* size to maintain the flora and fauna of a woodland site” (from correspondence to Carter Jonas from the Diocesan Secretary dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1998).

<sup>163</sup> For further information on ‘alternatives’ for body disposal in Cambridgeshire see page 97-101 of this chapter.

following should be taken into consideration when analysing aforementioned investigation:

No burials shall take place within 10 metres of any ditch or watercourse.

No burials shall take place in saturated ground.

No burials shall take place within 50 metres of any well or borehole.

The base of any grave should be a minimum of 2 metres above the highest recorded groundwater level.

The Environment Agency's recommendations meant that four trial boreholes had to be dug in November 1999 to gain information on the amount of groundwater under the site. This information was necessary for the submission and success of the planning application. The Trust also had to meet planning regulations on their designs for a memorial lodge that specified the lodge had to be rural in design, hence the actual lodge taking the form of a wood-panelled building that many research participants jokingly referred to as *the shed*.

Having identified Barton Glebe as the preferred site for the project, serious consideration had to be given to how the Trust were going to acquire the land and whether acquisition was going to be facilitated by mortgage, lease/rent or a combination of the two, and under what time-frame. The chartered surveyors who hold responsibility for managing Glebelands in the Cambridge area recommended that the Arbory Trust developed and acquired the 40 acres in stages;<sup>164</sup> hence South Glebe being open for burials, whilst North Glebe is currently being landscaped. The surveyors valued the land per acre and suggested an amount for statutory compensation to be offered to the tenant farmer.<sup>165</sup>

Because we weren't sure whether this was going to take off or not, we didn't take the full 40 acres into management straight away. We got planning permission for the whole lot, but we left the tenant to farm the other 20 acres. Once we were sure that the project was going to take off then we began to think more positively about the second phase... We had some resistance from the tenant in the first instance who thought it was a crazy idea and would never take off and we had a certain amount of, not resistance, but *anxiety*<sup>166</sup> from the local Parish Council; Barton PCC. (Ely Diocesan Secretary)

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<sup>164</sup> In a letter to the Diocesan Secretary dated 27/08/98.

<sup>165</sup> The figure is stated in the same letter above.

<sup>166</sup> See Chapter 5, page 121-123.

Gaining support from the local parish council was vital, because in order for the Arbory Trust to secure planning permission, their planning application would have to go before Barton PCC. It was vital that the local parish council did not feel alienated from the project and its intended provision. So the Diocesan Secretary went to a parish council meeting organised by Canon Hugh Searle:

...it was a courtesy really, simply because the burial ground was going to be in that parish. And it was *very* interesting because there was the normal group of people who were concerned about whether woodland burial was proper; that was voiced but it was a very minor voice. What agitated them more than *anything else*, was the notion that the place was going to be taken over by strangers and that there was going to be no room left for local people; an anxiety that there'd be so many people wanting to be buried here that there wouldn't be any room for the locals. There was a very parochial anxiety about it, but I won't put it any stronger than that. We said that there wouldn't be any special treatment for people from Barton but that we didn't see why people from Barton *shouldn't* be buried there. We didn't expect the 1000 plots to disappear over night in one major sale! But we certainly resisted the notion that there should be a designated area marked off for Barton people. It was a suggestion hinted at, rather than a proposal. It was quite clear to us that we wouldn't be going down that route; I mean why should we be having segregation? We shouldn't have segregation of any sort. We weren't saying "here's a consecrated area, and here's a non-consecrated area. We weren't saying here's an area for Jews or Muslims or Christians or anyone else, nor here's a piece of land for people from *Cambridgeshire*"...So, we didn't have any distinction at all!

At a Trustees' meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1999 Canon Hugh Searle (then Rector of Barton) reported that he: "had hosted an informal meeting with the Chairman of Barton Parish Council, other members of the Parish Council and the PCC. The concept of a woodland burial sited in their parish was warmly accepted." Nevertheless, in October 1999, the Parish Clerk to Barton wrote a letter to the Arbory Trust's representative at Carter Jonas surveyors, alerting him to the Parish Council's concerns over "the potential amount of funeral traffic going through the village." The Clerk expressed the view that the Parish Council hoped to see "an indication of policy on this within the planning application" as well as raising some comments and suggestions on behalf of the Parish Council ahead of the official planning application.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Details from correspondence dated 15<sup>th</sup> October 1999.

## **Establishing the Arbory Trust: Trustees, administration and charity status**

In minutes of a Trustees' meeting dated 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1999 held at the Church Commissioners in Millbank (Westminster), it was decided that although Bishop Stephen was resigning from his position as Bishop of Ely with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September that year, he would remain a member of the Arbory Trust. A requirement of the Trust Deed stated that the Chairman must be a Bishop of the Church of England, hence the succeeding Bishop of Ely, Anthony Russell, became Chairman.<sup>168</sup> At the same meeting it was also agreed that steps be taken to appoint an administrator for the Trust<sup>169</sup> and that a business plan needed to be funded. For this purpose, four of the Trustees formed a sub-group to oversee these developments: Mr Hugh Duberly, Sir Francis Pemberton, the Diocesan Secretary and Peter Owen-Jones. It was also agreed that the application for planning permission should proceed.

In Barton four days later, on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1999, a difficult meeting took place between the tenant farmer and the Diocesan Secretary. The tenant farmer made it very clear that he would resist the re-possession of tenancy, which according to him, represented one fifth of his farming land and thus, damage to his livelihood. In time however, planning permission was granted and the tenancy was lifted on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2000. This was not without the former tenant farmer making one last appeal to the Trustees in a hand-signed letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> October 1999 that clearly states what he sees as a wrong-doing by the Church of England to undermine his livelihood. Nevertheless, the former tenant farmer continues to have a dynamic farm business in Barton village to this day.

A letter from Lee Bolton and Lee solicitors on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1999 confirmed the Charity Commission's approval to register the Arbory Trust:

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<sup>168</sup> He retired from his position as the Bishop of Ely on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

<sup>169</sup> A position effected from 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1999. The Arbory Trust's first Administrative Officer was initially a part-time post. Primarily the duties of the Administrative Officer were: "To establish an administrative procedure for the promotion of woodland burials and to maintain a record of those making payments to join the scheme", as well as to "prepare a business plan with a programme of requirements to establish the operation of the woodland burial site in 2001." (Extract from the advertised Job Description) This was no easy task however, especially when there were so few benchmarks for the Administrator to follow. When the Trust advertised this post, they had little idea that burials would take place ahead of any tree planting the following year.

...subject to the amendment of the objects clause to the following: *The advancement of the Christian religion by the provision and maintenance of a public burial ground.* Their reasoning is that they see the Charity's primary purpose and [sic] advancing Christianity. Access for members of the public is not sufficient to deem the charity as one for public benefit. Further, because there are no specific plans with regard to conservation or preservation of the natural environment other than the natural biodiversity which will develop in the burial ground, these factors are not considered to be the Charity's primary purpose. (original emphasis)

This led to an agreed re-wording of the Terms of Reference of the Trust, noted in the minutes of a Trustees meeting held in Westminster on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1999: "and in addition there should be an added clause to outline the environmental issues upheld by the Trust." Subsequently, in November 1999, a special resolution was passed for the following clause to be inserted:

Without prejudice to the generality of the objects it is the intention of the Charity to preserve public burial grounds in such a manner as to provide a semi-natural woodland environment and to ensure a diversity in woodland structure and safeguard notable species and communities.<sup>170</sup>

1999 also saw a number of media articles covering 'green' burial provision, which subsequently enhanced the notoriety of natural burial and the Trust's site in particular. Media coverage also enhanced momentum in the run-up to the first burials that took place at Barton Glebe the following year.<sup>171</sup> However, before the circumstances surrounding the first burials are described, it is necessary to recount the plans and design process for Barton Glebe. The planning and planting of South Glebe in the late 90s is integral to what one sees and experiences upon visiting the site today and very much influences how visitors to and users of the burial ground engage with the Trust's provision.

### **Site design: Planning and planting a native woodland**

The Forestry Commission Advisor to the Board of Trustees, Steve Scott, was instrumental in designing the woodland burial ground and securing funding for tree planting by the Forestry Commission under their Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS,

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<sup>170</sup> Correspondence from the Arbory Trust's solicitors dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 1999.

<sup>171</sup> See Cambridge Evening News (Unknown 1999), The Times (Fisher 1999) and The Guardian (Ward 1999). The Guardian article prompted a reservation enquiry to the Arbory Trust from King's Lynn, Norfolk.

later renamed the English Woodland Grant Scheme<sup>172</sup> under new funding regulations). Steve began a Woodland Grant Scheme application for the planting of trees in the 16.28 acres of South Glebe in late 1999. Around this time Steve also conducted a site visit to Carlisle's woodland burial ground and spoke to the (then) Cemetery Director, Ken West, who was "full of interesting and practical information."<sup>173</sup> However, Steve was not without criticism of Carlisle cemetery's provision:

...Although it was impressive on the one hand, it was again planting trees upon individual graves – it was done in a very regimented, almost war grave sort of style – and again the recruitment of the trees and the development of a woodland if you like, was going to take *forever* and they were gonna grow and crowd each other out so I just couldn't see how that was going to develop as a *woodland*.<sup>174</sup>

Woodland burial sites, in Steve's view: "won't solve the crisis of timber prices or add much in the way of inner city greenspace. They do, however, at a very practical level offer an alternative to the traditional cemetery or crematorium whilst contributing in a modest way to woodland creation...But to work satisfactorily they must be sensitively planned and well maintained" (Scott 2003: 43). So just what were the decisions he took with regards to planning Barton Glebe and its future maintenance?

Why not just adopt an *existing* woodland? Well, you've got roots in the way – that's the first thing, and secondly if you're talking about our 'ancient woodland' (the key post-glacial pearls that are left, our key conservation assets)...If you start planting people in amongst all that, technically speaking you're going to knacker it! So this wouldn't really work on an existing woodland site because, a) the roots and b) you're gonna knacker the existing woodland. So it all pointed towards planting a *new* woodland in a green-field site in which you would then have permanently open glades and you'd bury people there and then. If you designed the woodland correctly, you could plant a semi-natural type of woodland and manage that for the woodland's sake and the two could co-habit but they're not going to be prejudiced by the other bit of land use.

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<sup>172</sup> The Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme funded planting for South Glebe, whilst the English Woodland Grant Scheme was the primary source of funding for North Glebe. For more information on these grant-aided schemes cf. <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d6dcccen> (Retrieved 03/06/09). Scott claims that "Cambridgeshire is the least wooded county in Britain (3.6% tree cover)" (2003: 37).

<sup>173</sup> Correspondence to the Diocesan Secretary, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1999.

<sup>174</sup> From a face-to-face interview with Steve Scott.

And that was the concept I first worked on with Matthew Lavis and Peter Owen-Jones and that's how we came to what we have here...

When choosing a suitable site to establish native broad-leaf woodland, Steve had several criteria in mind:

1. The site needed to be south facing to receive the maximum sunlight into the woodland and glades.
2. Ideally, the site needed to have a backdrop of existing woodland and even more ideally, that the existing woodland needed to be accessible to people visiting the burial site to create 'depth' to the woodland which *gives people an instant woodland 'hit'*.<sup>175</sup>
3. The site needed to be free of constraints such as built-up housing, and Roman archaeology preventing the option for future expansion of the site if desirable.
4. The site must not be too remote otherwise people will not venture from urban areas to use the facilities.
5. For burial purposes and establishing trees, sand on gravel soil is ideal for drainage purposes. Clay on chalk soil is far from ideal however; most of Cambridgeshire is clay on chalk.
6. Finally, Steve had researched the *minimum* area needed to *give you some sort of woodland experience* and a 'depth' of woodland around each glade, which he calculated at roughly 20 to 30 metres.

Similarly, when he designed the glades he had three factors in mind:

1. They needed to be aligned East-West so that they received maximum sunlight.
2. They needed to be accessible (for anticipated future timber extraction for coppicing) without the need to enter the glades, partly because the ground might sink under the weight of vehicles where graves have been dug.<sup>176</sup>
3. Finally, Steve wanted to be able to offer people choice in the shape and size of the glade:

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<sup>175</sup> Steve Scott in interview. See also Chapter 5 (page 126-131) *Managing disappointment* and the woodland experience.

<sup>176</sup> Hence an external boundary ride and a central track up through South Glebe.

The smaller glades would shadow over earlier, which might appeal to some people, and they'd also look more woody so they'd be more attractive to people earlier on compared to the other glades...I wanted something organic in shape and another of those learning experiences that emerged after the fact, is that people like their loved ones to be buried in the little niches, the little bays and alcoves that have been created by the wavy edge of the woodland.<sup>177</sup> We hadn't anticipated that but *again* there's just this feeling of comfort and nestling into the wood. Those have been really popular so we've exaggerated that in the second phase's planting, more than we have done in the first one... (Steve Scott)

Steve wanted to *mimic natural systems* and this meant that particular species of trees were clumped together around specific glades *rather than have a matrix of lots of different species spread across the entire site* because:

...natural processes tend to clump species together in drifts, so again we've designed it like that. But the disadvantage with this scheme is that if the soil is not suited to a particular species in a particular location then you get a lot of deaths and it becomes very noticeable. Whereas if we'd gone for a very generic mix then there'd be enough of something to come through and we would have avoided it. (Steve Scott)

When it came to planting the native trees from locally collected seed sources the Ely Diocesan Secretary recalls:

...About 10,000 whips were put in the ground and to the casual observer you'd hardly notice that it was planted at all, particularly because the old grounds were growing through: oilseed rape and beans! And so it was only when we began cutting it into the shape of the glades that you could see any kind of structure. It was several years before you could actually see that there was a woodland there...July 2000 we sent someone round with a mower to mow the areas which had been designated as glades, and because those areas were cut but the rest hadn't, then you began to see the shape of it. And it was actually *very important* that we were able to give people a notion of what the structure would look like. And that is an argument for why it might have been better to put individual guards on all the trees, which we're going to do in Phase II [North Glebe]. The benefits are: it protects the trees and reduces virtually to nothing the risk of rabbits and deer damage, it protects the trees from the mowing but also, and this is where I think we made a mistake, it would also have given *instant* structure to the woodland. People would have seen that there was something there. It would have given visual structure very much earlier.

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<sup>177</sup> Glade selection and burial location preferences are discussed in reference to interview data in Chapter 7, page 203-210.

## Launching the Arbory Trust

The Trust's launch was bolstered by media coverage (e.g. Combe 2001). However, long before Barton Glebe opened for burials, the Trust had already received enquiries from people wanting to be buried at the grounds. In 1998, a lady had written to Ely Diocese after seeing an interview with Peter Owen-Jones published in the Church Times dated 12<sup>th</sup> June 1998. This lady, residing in Staffordshire, had stated a preference for "green burial" in her will because she felt "the pollution aspect cannot be ignored" with regards to cremation. Another lady, this time from St Ives in Cambridgeshire, made an enquiry regarding the Trust's provision, also in the same year, as well as an enquiry from Portsmouth where the enquirer hoped to see similar provision available in West Sussex.

From the outset the predicted site capacity for burial, for South and North Glebe combined, was estimated at approximately 2,000 burials. However, "it is now estimated that we have capacity on Phase I [South Glebe] for at least 2,000 if not closer to 3,000" burials.<sup>178</sup> This is just as well, considering the Trust had underestimated enthusiasm for its provision:

...the thing that amazed us was *how* committed people were to this woodland right from the start. Those that were sold on the idea were committed 110 per cent. They really were. And the first person that was buried there, he and his wife heard about it in the summer of 2000 because we opened our books in June 1999 I think, but we said we wouldn't be burying people until June the following year by which time we would have planted the trees and so on. Well, what do you do when a person registers in autumn 1999, is very keen, thinks it's a wonderful idea and comes and looks at the field before you've started anything, when it's just had a crop of beans taken off of it and thinks this is a really wonderful place...then dies after Christmas? You can't say: "well I'm actually very sorry but we're not actually burying people until June." So this person's grave was located in a spot where beans had been taken off in the autumn, it had been planted with grass but you had these rogue plants coming through. He was buried and his family said afterwards that it was absolutely wonderful, but then you look at that field and you thought: "what on earth are they saying that about!" They have been vindicated because he's now part of that group of people who started this woodland, *literally* started this woodland, and the trees have grown up around his coffin. So he was one of the first people who actually had *faith* in the project. So it's nice that we were able to do that. And there were three or four other people who were buried around that time in a similar situation,

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<sup>178</sup> Extract from Barton Glebe's Management Plan 2008-2010.

which really, if we'd taken a much more rational approach we'd have done it a bit later. But those were people who were keen and that keenness has been demonstrated by lots and lots of people who've been buried there ever since and that's one of the satisfying things about it. (Diocesan Secretary)

### **Consecration**

On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2002, the then Bishop of Ely, Anthony Russell, consecrated Barton Glebe.

...every 10 yards or so the Bishop said a prayer and marked the ground with a cross and did the whole circumference of the woodland and we finished up having some drinks and refreshments in what was *then* the memorial lodge, which was a Portakabin. The Portakabin was covered in flowers! *Painted* flowers!...[pause]...I was horrified! But it was good publicity. (Diocesan Secretary)

The diocesan magazine reported:

The first woodland burial site in the UK to be endorsed by the Church of England was consecrated last month. In a simple legal and religious ceremony attended by over a hundred people, the Bishop of Ely, Dr Anthony Russell, assisted by the Diocesan Registrar Peter Beesley, set aside the site between Barton and Comberton to be used for burial in perpetuity...Over 40 burials have already taken place since the ground opened just over a year ago...New rules had to be drafted to allow woodland to be consecrated as burial ground in the same way that all churchyards are. The new rules are likely to be used as a model for other dioceses to follow. (*Ely Ensign*, 2002:24)<sup>179</sup>

In England (and before the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales), consecration of land had special legal consequences only if it was consecrated by an Anglican bishop. The Roman Catholics and the (disestablished) Church in Wales 'consecrate' land but, unlike Anglican consecration, this has no legal effect other than that imposed internally on members of those denominations and externally in so far as, as owners of land, they can impose any restriction on the use of the land that any landowner can. Homfray (2009) traces the origins of consecration (as a legal precedent) to pre-Christian Roman law. Consecration:

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<sup>179</sup> See Appendix 6 for an Anglican service for consecration of a burial ground.

...possesses a special, recognised and legal effect upon that consecrated. Once consecrated, the land and all to do with it, including any building, is subject to the Ordinary, who has a jurisdiction to ensure that on it and in it the ecclesiastical laws of the Church of England are observed. The same provision applies to churchyards for burials. In England, consecration does not appear to have any recognised legal effect on any land or building not belonging to the Church of England. The essence of consecration is that something can only be consecrated - and so made sacred - by a person authorised so to do. (Homfray 2009:38)<sup>180</sup>

McGregor (2009) disputes the fact that consecration holds no legal effect if it is applied to something other than land or buildings belonging to the church:

The Cemeteries Clauses Act 1847 made express provision for the consecration of ‘any portion of the cemetery set apart for the burial of the dead according to the rites of the Established Church’, and the cemetery company was obliged to demarcate the consecrated and unconsecrated parts. The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 now provides for a burial authority to ‘apply to the bishop of the diocese in which a cemetery is situated for the consecration of any part thereof’. There is no doubt that the consecrated parts of municipal and other cemeteries are subject to the jurisdiction of the consistory court, notwithstanding that they are not in the ownership of the Church of England...Whether the land consists of a churchyard belonging to the Church of England, or part of a cemetery or burial ground maintained by a local authority, the legal effect of consecration is to subject it to the faculty jurisdiction. (McGregor 2009:195)

According to the Arbory Trust’s solicitors “there is nothing in law to prevent the consecration of a piece of privately owned freehold land”<sup>181</sup> but it is at the diocesan Bishop’s discretion to consecrate or not. Dedication on the other hand, marks land symbolically while avoiding the restrictions that consecration places on it. A dedication can be undertaken by a parish priest, but legally there is no change in status.

The practical and theological issues discussed prior to the Arbory Trust’s decision to consecrate the site are of some special interest here; especially since the vast majority

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<sup>180</sup> “Since consecrated lands and buildings are set aside *in sacros usus* for ever (or until legislation affects the release), they may thus be regarded as given back to God...” (Briden and Hanson 1992:88).

<sup>181</sup> Correspondence to the Legal Advisory Commission dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 1996.

of natural burial sites in this country are not consecrated.<sup>182</sup> At the first meeting of the Working Group on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1999, it was stated in a report of this meeting that:

The working group was of the opinion that Christian woodland burial sites should be consecrated as a clear indication of their sacred nature, and to distinguish them from other woodland burial sites. We must ensure that Christian woodland burial sites are ecumenical.

However, opinion was divided amongst the Trustees:

...there were three schools of thought: on the one hand, there were the very basic, primitive Anglicans, like myself, that thought if this is a Church of England burial ground then *of course* it'll be consecrated! But then there was the school of thought represented by Peter Owen-Jones which was a very important one and his argument was that all land has value in God's sight and that to consecrate a piece of land was to say that there was something less good about everything else...The Owen-Jones view was that by consecrating some land and saying this is special, you are devaluing everything else. And I think there is enormous merit in that argument. Against that, there was the third, official school of thought which was led by Bishop Geoffrey Rowell,<sup>183</sup> who said that it would be totally wrong for the Arbory Trust to regard itself as a Christian burial ground and to *not* consecrate and that view, in the end, prevailed. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the religious niceties of it, from a *commercial* point of view it was definitely the right thing to do because it gives *security*<sup>184</sup> to people who come along and say: well how long is this going to remain a woodland burial site? Is it going to be sold for flats in 50 years' time? They have a feeling that because it is consecrated it is

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<sup>182</sup> The owners of the privately owned Muchwood Green Burial Ground tried to get their site consecrated but after approximately two years gave up their pursuit as, the wife of the farmer who owns the land explained in an interview: "...the Deacons weren't interested in Ely. But then, in hindsight, I said: "well, does it matter?" You know, you've got other religions and people with no religion so it doesn't need to be consecrated. You can open up to a bigger market. Luckily the local vicar said he'd come and bless each individual plot if a person wanted it and so it kind of went from there really, but I wasn't involved at the time...I just think through *lack* of knowledge he [her husband] just thought *that* was the right way to go; nothing other than that really. But again, with the benefit of hindsight, it has actually been to our benefit *not* to consecrate, 'cos some people have rung up and said: "it's not a Christian burial site is it?" And we say: "no, we're any denomination." In fact it was the right thing *not* to get it done. So it was just lack of knowledge *at* the time..." Cf. West (2010:105-106) who offers advice to those natural burial providers considering consecration.

<sup>183</sup> Chair of the Churches' Funerals Group since 1997. For further information on this Group's aims and provision cf. <http://www.christianfunerals.org/> [Retrieved 17/09/09]

<sup>184</sup> The Administrator of St Albans Woodland burial Trust made a similar remark about notions of security in death: "I think the fact we're a consecrated site, it has *nothing* to do with religion, *nothing at all!* But I think it's the fact we're *secure*. It's *safe*; it's that comfort blanket that people *know* it's going to be there." See Chapter 5, page 124-126, *Consecration and security*.

*literally* for ever and ever going to be a woodland.<sup>185</sup> That's not necessarily the case but it gives surety to people which no other undertaker can legally give. So that was the reason why it was decided to be consecrated.<sup>186</sup> (Diocesan Secretary)

The year following consecration, in October 2003, Professor David Bellamy, one of the Arbory Trust Trustees, visited Cambridge to promote woodland burial at a conference run by the Trust held at Ridley Hall, a theological training college. Representatives from 15 dioceses attended, with the aim of considering the introduction of “similar environmentally friendly burial schemes elsewhere in the country” (*Ely Ensign* 2003:4).



Figure 12: The Revd. Peter Owen Jones and Prof. David Bellamy  
Source: *Ely Ensign* 2003 (no. 168):4

On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2005, Barton Glebe's first memorial lodge was dedicated by the former Bishop of Ely, Anthony Russell. Finally, the burial ground had the

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<sup>185</sup> This is never advertised by the Arbory Trust, however St Albans Woodland Burial Trust do use their consecrated status as a marketing tool. On the St Albans Woodland Burial Trust website it is written that: “The woodland is guaranteed and protected for all time, one of only two in the UK with consecrated status” (<http://www.woodlandburialtrust.com/> [Retrieved 14/09/09]).

<sup>186</sup> Of those research participants who completed questionnaires, responses to question C3 and C4 were varied (see Appendix 9). Of those who stated they did not believe it important that Barton Glebe was consecrated comments were offered: *although I'm pleased that the Church is willing to engage in such an environmentally friendly activity! Despite for religious reasons it makes no difference to me a number still stated that they thought Barton Glebe being consecrated would therefore be there forever.* Those who felt consecration was an important aspect of Barton Glebe's allure usually stated that a consecrated site was appropriate for their own or the deceased's Christian faith. Some added that consecration, in their view, ensured Barton Glebe would never be re-developed for another purpose in the future. Consecration is clearly aligned with perpetuity, rightly or wrongly, regardless of faith; an issue discussed further in Chapter 5, page 124-126 and Chapter 6, page 182-183.

opportunity to offer facilities that could be used by visitors: a toilet; a small, quiet room with a vast glass window that looked over the burial ground, and refreshments. The gravelled car park at the entrance, together with the memorial lodge and the burial ground's entrance signs gave shape and presence to the long-nurtured vision of Barton Glebe by all who had tirelessly worked towards establishing the Arbory Trust. Looking back at the developments made by the Trust, the Diocesan Secretary recalls the fortunate, unforeseen circumstances that permitted the lodge's construction:

I had pencilled into my financial appraisal the memorial lodge which was very much wishful thinking. If we ever got to that stage it would be nice to have an area where people can gather and as the idea progressed that developed much more into the notion of having an enclosed office space and a room in which people could perhaps have a small service. I budgeted for about £25K but what we've got, in the end, cost closer to £75K. That might not have got off the ground, if *again*, it hadn't been for a gentleman of advanced years ringing up the administrator and saying that he was interested in what we were doing, having seen it in the newspaper, could he go up and look at it, but he didn't want anyone to know that he was going. And so all of this was done under a cloud of secrecy and he thought it was so nice [Barton Glebe] that he asked the administrator on his visit: "what would make a difference to it?" And so the administrator said: "well, we're hoping to do a memorial lodge". And he said: "well, if I gave you £25K, would that help?" And we said: "yes, that would go a long way"...That gave us enough money to start off with and then other donations of money started to come in and we were soon able to think very positively about doing the memorial lodge. The money from burials made it possible too. When the lodge was finished we invited the man to come and see it and he asked if the costs were fully covered and what was outstanding and so he made another donation! He didn't want his name associated with it...that he donated generously to the memorial lodge. And again that's something that's very nice about it. We haven't fund-raised in the *traditional* sense of having to wring money out of people. People have given very generously and very willingly.<sup>187</sup>

### ***The Arbory Trust Today***

The Diocesan Secretary visited a woodland burial ground in Essex in 1996. He wrote down his impressions of his visit and closed the document with a comment of what he

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<sup>187</sup> Donations to the lodge exemplify another form of inalienable gift-giving. The fact that these donations are usually given anonymously only serves to intensify the nature of the inalienable gift. In other words people give generously to the Trust because it affirms their own core values. It could also be said that this man's generous donation is a means of securing symbolic immortality through Lifton's (1974, 1976) creative pathway, in which one's memory and identity is continued by the things one helped to create during one's lifetime. See Chapter 8 for an extended discussion.

saw as immediate priorities for the Arbory Trust upon acquiring a site for woodland burial. These priorities were, in part, influenced by what he learnt from his site visit in Essex. They were:

- a) To plant trees
- b) To construct a car park and erect a 'memorial lodge'. The lodge should display information about the Arbory Trust, the objectives of the Trust and the specific information about the burial ground, as well as a small quiet room. In due course it should record information about those buried in the woodland, together with a map of the woodland.
- c) To erect a sign board indicating the nature of the woodland. It was possible to drive past the Essex site without knowing what it was.
- d) In due course it might be advisable to publish some rules or guidelines for those visiting the woodland.<sup>188</sup>

The Trust has succeeded in fulfilling *all* the priorities listed above in just over a decade. In that decade, natural burial provision in Britain and public awareness of such provision has increased. Not only are the public becoming informed of what to expect from natural burial, but the Trust has learnt much with regard to users' expectations and preferences and some of these lessons have been incorporated into the designing and implementing of Phase II, North Glebe.

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<sup>188</sup> From a document titled 'Essex Burial Ground Visit' dated 11<sup>th</sup> May 1996; written 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1996.

# Barton North Glebe

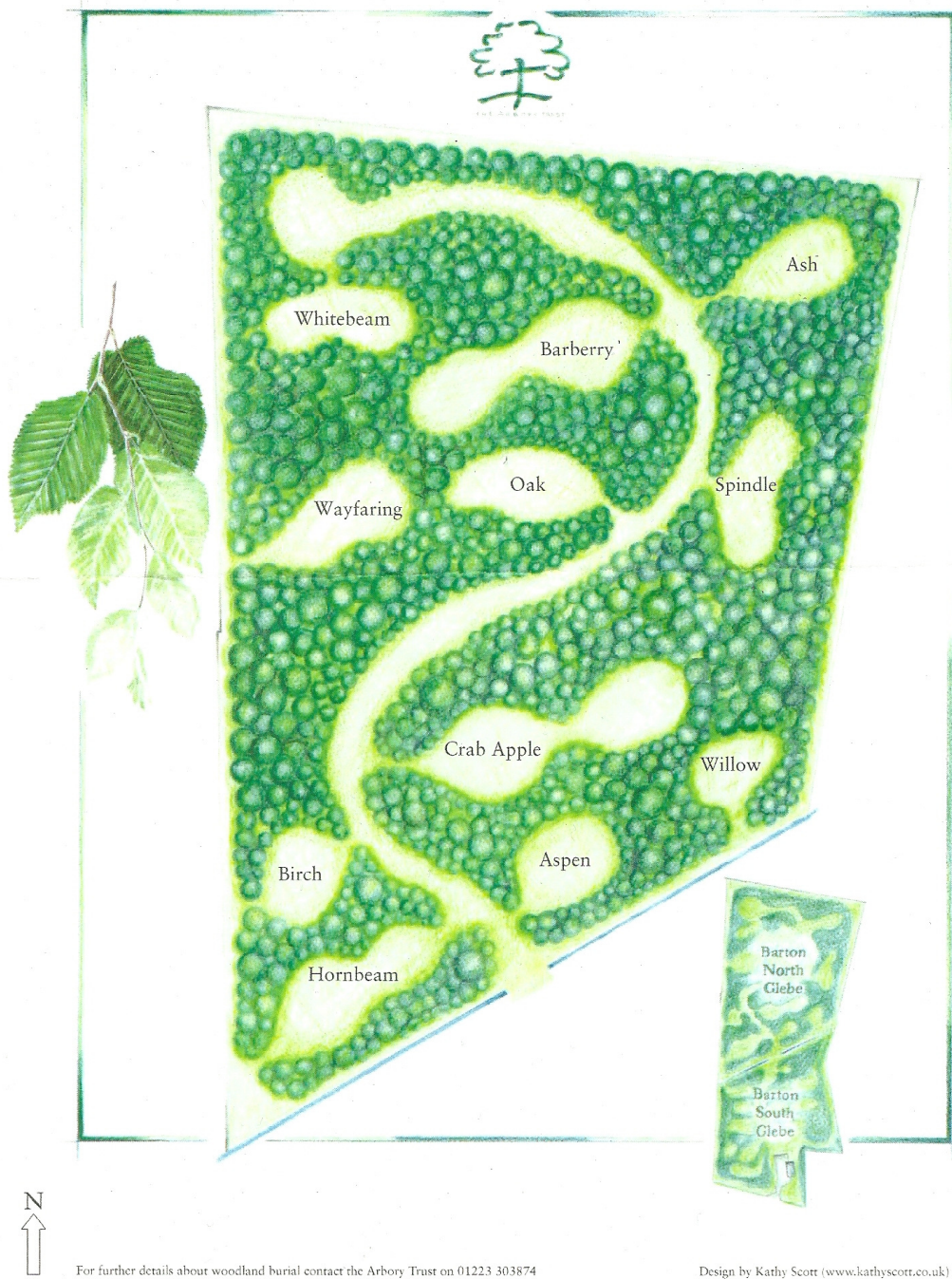


Figure 13: The glade layout of North Glebe  
Source: Reproduced with kind permission from the Arbory Trust



Figure 14: North Glebe looking over to South Glebe in June 2010  
 Source: Author's photo

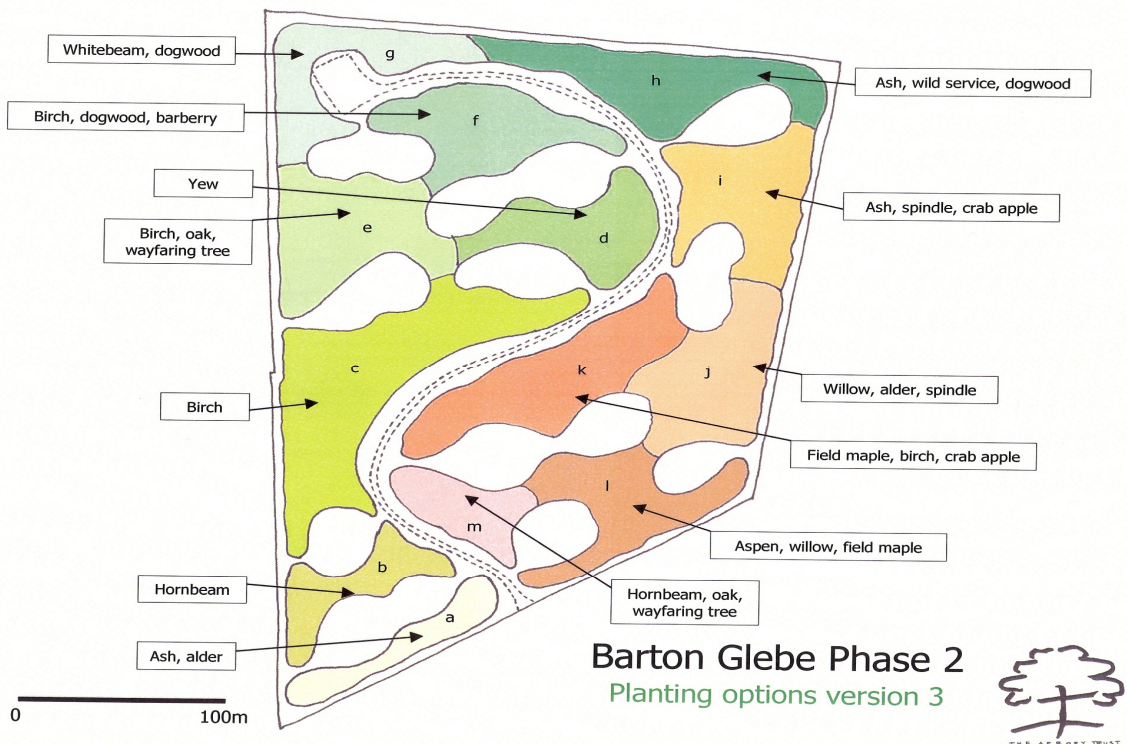


Figure 15: Tree species planting plan for North Glebe  
 Source: Designed by S. Scott of the Forestry Commission and reproduced with his permission

The glades are smaller in Phase II than initially planned because they're more successful and I've even gone for a North-South facing glade just to give some more choice...and the difference in the English Woodland Grants scheme is that we can now grant aid up to 40 per cent open ground so the *entire* gross area has been, or will be, funded by the Forestry Commission this time round, whereas before, it was the area net the glades. (Forestry Commission Advisor)

Phase II, now known as North Glebe, represents the remaining 22.72 acres of land that the Arbory Trust owns and has planning permission for. Provision for 11 extra burial glades was made public in the April 2009 newsletter and by summer 2009 the former arable field was ploughed, tilled and seeded with grass to create woodland undergrowth. Plans were also announced for enlarging the lodge to the public at the annual Open Evening on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Signs were also erected on site to remind visitors to keep dogs on leads and to shut the entrance gate upon departure; a move that has not gone without comment by some visitors to the burial ground.<sup>189</sup>

In 2010, at the time of writing, North Glebe has long grass cover and has been planted with whips in spiral guards, whilst the main track has been mowed through the long grass.<sup>190</sup> Prior to tree planting in summer/autumn 2009, North Glebe contained a flock of 50 Cumbrian Rough Fell sheep that helped minimise vegetation whilst the land lay fallow. From January 2010 work also began on the lodge extension so that now 75 people can be accommodated for funeral gatherings rather than the former maximum capacity of 30. The extension also included renovations to existing kitchen and office facilities, enabling both funerals and post-funeral gatherings to now take place in one location. The extended and renovated lodge is one example of how the development of Barton Glebe has better met the needs of the bereaved.

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<sup>189</sup> See Chapter 5, page 119-121 *Emotional agents*.

<sup>190</sup> Clearly visible in the foreground of Figure 14.

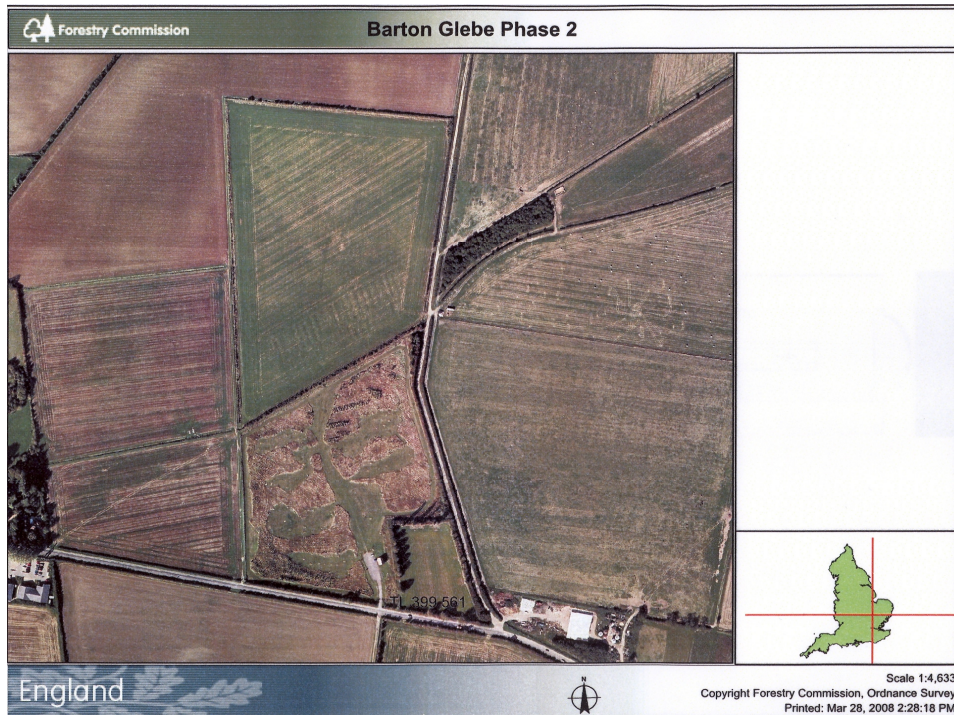


Figure 16: Aerial photograph of Barton Glebe showing the glade formation of South Glebe and the grassed field of North Glebe

Source: Reproduced with permission from the Forestry Commission

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In looking to the future, one founding Trustee informed me of his aspirations and visions for the future of the Arbory Trust:

I think it'll grow organically and I think the idea and the concept will spread. I think the *standards* that are there – you know quality of customer care, infrastructure, management that's quite a good bench mark for other people to follow. And I hope not too far in the distant future, but not more than 10 years though, I hope they can branch out and set up some new sites as and when they have the staff available for that; when they're *able* to have staff go out and replicate what has been done at Barton.

Certainly, what sets Barton Glebe apart from other 'natural' burial sites in the region is the dedication of the Trust to establish native woodland *in conjunction* with offering alternative burial provision. Perhaps this is a luxury for those providers who do not have to be entirely commercial in their venture and who have benefited from support and guidance from a wide range of specialists in their fields: from landscaping, woodland management, land management, burial law and ecclesial law, to the botanical and ornithological world. Moreover, the cultural capital of the Church of England through the quiet support of Ely Diocese has certainly been instrumental

in securing the acquisition of land and establishing the authority and credibility of the Trust.<sup>191</sup> The consecration of the site has given the Trust almost unique status amongst natural burial providers and has certainly attracted media coverage of both the Trust and the burial ground.

### ***The Cambridgeshire Context: Other disposal provision***

There are now three natural burial sites in Cambridgeshire, with the nearest to Cambridge being Barton Glebe. The other two sites are private, commercial enterprises and neither belongs to the Association of Natural Burial Grounds. Muchwood Green Burial Ground<sup>192</sup> is located just outside the town of Ramsey on a small area of a farmer's set-aside meadow. Trees are planted annually upon individual graves by the management in late autumn. Brinkley Woodland Cemetery,<sup>193</sup> to the East of Cambridge, is near Newmarket on the Suffolk/Cambridgeshire border. Like Muchwood, this site is arable set-aside belonging to a farmer, however, unlike Muchwood, the management at Brinkley do *not* permit the planting of trees upon individual graves. Both differ markedly from Barton Glebe in that they are not primarily concerned with establishing a native woodland and neither site is consecrated or has facilities on site for visitors. All these factors: the motivation for provision; the ownership and location of the site; site facilities and existing landscape structures influence the 'mood' of each site greatly. It is very difficult to make comparisons between the 'success' of each site since this will also depend on access to advertising, the geographical location of the site and the number of existing open churchyards and cemeteries in the area, as well as successful working relationships with local funeral directors. Thus, even if one had access to annual burial statistics for each site, comparative inference would be limited, since successful take-up rates for any natural burial ground is multi-faceted.

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<sup>191</sup> The Arbory Trust is an absolute expression of the same core value observed in the Church of England: that the church extends hospitality to care for the souls of anybody. The state Church maintains inclusive membership, as does the Arbory Trust. Despite being a Christian charity, the Trust extends its provision to anyone who wishes to be interred at Barton Glebe; as has been observed with parish churchyards. See page 75, footnote 151 of this chapter where similarly the Archdeacon expresses that Barton Glebe is a means for the Church to serve a different community.

<sup>192</sup> <http://www.muchwoodburials.co.uk/> [Retrieved 18/07/10]

<sup>193</sup> <http://www.countryside-burials.co.uk/> [Retrieved 18/07/10]

In addition to these three natural burial grounds within Cambridgeshire, other natural burial grounds exist in *all* of Cambridgeshire's neighbouring counties.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, in 2008, Cambridge City Council made a repeat planning application to have a section of Newmarket Road municipal cemetery utilised as a green burial site, covered favourably in the local press (Grove 2008). The cemetery's management have anticipated that the proposed six-acre woodland burial area will accommodate 150 interments. A third planning application has been submitted since the second application was vetoed; however problems persist since the cemetery's management have discovered an aquifer<sup>195</sup> under the designated woodland burial area, preventing burial for fear of leeching into groundwater. It remains to be seen if the city cemetery is successful in their third planning application.



Figure 17: The proposed woodland burial area at Cambridge City Cemetery, Newmarket Road

Source: Author's photo taken March 2009

For residents of Cambridge and adjoining villages, the City Council maintains three cemeteries: Histon Road (opened 1843, now closed for new burials), Newmarket Road City cemetery (opened 1901, now full therefore, only open for 're-opens' where people have pre-purchased grave space) and Huntingdon Road cemetery (opened 2003 on the site of Cambridge city crematorium). The crematorium, off Huntingdon

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<sup>194</sup> Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire.

<sup>195</sup> A ground water source; essentially mineral water running through rocks.

Road/A14, was opened privately in 1938 and subsequently taken over by the City Council in 1950. The crematorium has a memorial woodland for the scattering of cremated remains. There is also woodland burial provision for whole-body interments on site, which opened in 2005 and is estimated to hold 150 burial plots, but to date remains unused. However, the woodland area for the strewing of ashes is popular and near full.



Figure 18: Cambridge City Crematorium's 'memorial woodland' for the scattering of ashes  
Source: Author's photo taken April 2009

As well as municipal and private burial provision there are also many open churchyards to be found in the semi-rural countryside around Cambridge. The village of Barton also has an open Church of England churchyard<sup>196</sup> as well as access to the city crematorium and woodland burial at Barton Glebe, amongst others.

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<sup>196</sup> St Peter's Parish Church in Barton [Retrieved 18/09/09]<http://www.bartonspeters.org.uk/>

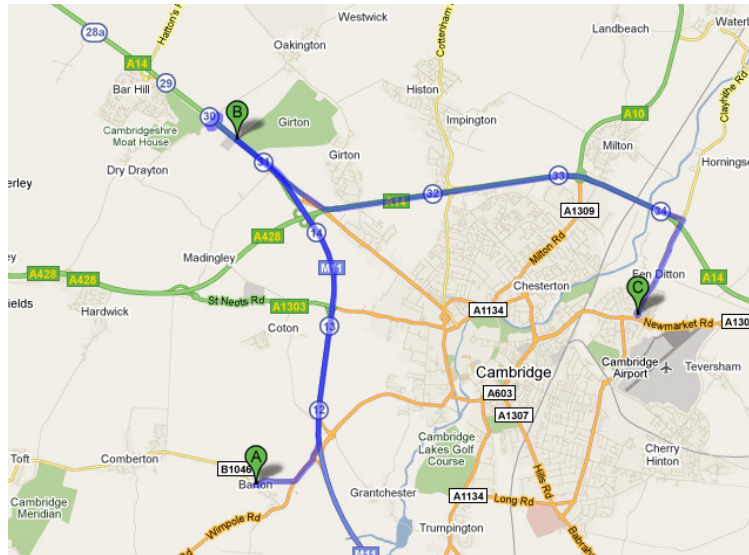


Figure 19: A map locating Newmarket Cemetery (c), Cambridge City Crematorium (b) and Barton (a)  
 Source: ©2010 Google - Map data © 2010 Tele Atlas

The villages near Barton (Coton and Dry Drayton for example) also enjoy the same advantage, but disposal options for those living closer to Cambridge city, or in the city itself are fewer, as the priest in charge for the parish of Barton, Coton and Dry Drayton explained:

Barton, Coton and Dry Drayton are all open graveyards. I think if you live in villages like these, whether you believe or not, you have an affinity with the churchyard, your ancestors are there! I mean there are still some families in these villages who go back generations and that's very important to people; that sense of place, of rootedness and that'll be what will call them back for their funerals...But it is a problem in the city of Cambridge because I don't think there are any open churchyards in the city. And they've just started doing burial at the crem but it costs a fortune and they have ridiculous things like the Bar Hill saga. They have real problems with Bar Hill because it's a new village – like a huge estate built in the 70s – and although they provided a church, they didn't provide any burial space and it's been very contentious because originally the parish of Bar Hill was carved out of the parish of Dry Drayton and people who lived in Bar Hill, but before 1990 when that carving took place, have the right to be buried in Dry Drayton churchyard, which infuriates the people of Dry Drayton because they like to think that because they live in an old village they're above the people who live in Bar Hill. But the poor old Bar Hillers, even though the crem is *just* down the road and not inside the Cambridge city boundary itself, because they don't live in the city boundaries, they get charged the outsiders' rate to use the burial spaces at the crem! So I have had situations where I have had *distraught* parents call me because their child has tragically died but they have *nowhere* to bury them at Bar Hill. So I just tell my difficult parishioners to stop being so unchristian and we bury them in Dry Drayton churchyard, but I think

that's what makes the woodland burial site attractive to people who might not immediately think of it if they had a number of options. I mean I think people like the idea of somewhere beautiful to come back to if they anticipate someone visiting the grave and I think that's another area where woodland burial comes into its own.

This anecdote illustrates some of the issues that influence the success or failure of natural burial grounds to attract custom; primarily, site location in relation to other disposal provision in the vicinity and the strength of 'tradition' or 'community' that keeps a geographical area utilising a particular parish churchyard, crematorium or cemetery. Woodland burial is attractive to those who have a limited number of options with regard to disposal mode and location because, conceptually at least, it provides *somewhere beautiful* for the bereaved to return to; an option valued by a number of research participants and one that is discussed in Chapter 6. When the Trust's Working Group held their first meeting in February 1999 their main recommendation was "that woodland burials should be offered as a choice, with other forms of interment, to all Christians in the geographical area of the Diocese [of Ely]."<sup>197</sup> It is to the credit of the Arbory Trust that the disposal *choice* they have created actually extends far beyond the exclusivity of Ely Diocese and Christians.

## **Summary**

This chapter has documented the key events and decisions taken in the inception and first ten years of the Arbory Trust's woodland burial provision. The decision to consecrate the site, create native woodland utilising a glade format for burial and not permit graves to be marked by tree planting, together with substantial support from Ely Diocese, generates Barton Glebe's distinction from other natural burial sites. Having focused upon the Arbory Trust in this chapter, it is to those who utilise the Trust's provision that we now turn. The following chapter demonstrates that Barton Glebe is not only a physical landscape but an emotional one as well, replete with memories that extend beyond the institutional memory of the Arbory Trust documented here.

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<sup>197</sup> From a report of the first Working Group meeting in 1999.

## Chapter 5

### If Trees Could Talk: Emotions, memory and nature

From the previous chapter's historical focus on the Arbory Trust's emergence, this chapter turns to documenting the attitudes and behaviours associated with Barton Glebe and/or the Trust. In doing so, this chapter primarily concerns human 'emotions' and the socio-cultural constructions of 'nature' to explore people's engagement with Barton Glebe and/or natural burial. Evidence suggests that woodland burial allows for freer forms of behaviour and emotional expression in a more relaxed atmosphere, as opposed to more customary burial landscapes. This chapter also reveals how objects placed in Barton Glebe are emotional agents as people can take comfort, reassurance or offence from them. Further, despite the often assumed anonymity of a grave without a headstone, bereaved visitors still find ways to personalise a grave and generate a relationship with the woodland burial site as a way of coming to terms with their grief. Interviews with funeral directors demonstrate that an element of anxiety is triggered by clients' requests for natural burial and/or eco-coffins, because eco-coffins threaten to jeopardise the professionalized handling of a corpse and funeral; whilst disappointment can be aroused in the bereaved upon first visiting a natural burial site as it does not fulfil their imagined allure.

The latter half of this chapter argues that implicit cultural constructions of nature, in particular the association of trees with qualities such as longevity, renewal and healing, potentially allow natural burial grounds to become therapeutic landscapes.<sup>198</sup> Natural burial grounds are marketed as a disposal mode *and* location that positively addresses environmental protection. However, this chapter argues that the cultural phenomenon of British natural burial is much more than simply a response to environmental concerns and 'green' agendas. Natural burial meets the needs of people who rely upon their imagination when seeking to find hope and renewal in response to the ontological crisis that death can initiate. The "craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality" (Schama 1996:15, Post 2005) is perhaps why the

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<sup>198</sup> See Chapter 7 for further discussion.

woodland glades and meadow fields utilised for natural burial are profoundly alluring as locations for mortal remains. Thus, Barton Glebe is an emotional as well as a physical landscape (Cf. Ministry of Justice 2009:10).

## **Emotions**

Though this research is not primarily a study of emotions, there is value in the study of emotions for advancing academic understanding of the behaviours and emotional displays associated with natural burial. This is because: “Emotion...is everywhere. Emotion is part of what makes human experience meaningful (just as meanings make experience emotional)” (Tarlow 2000a:720). Before demonstrating how emotions are managed, elicited and fostered in Barton Glebe and in relation to natural burial more widely it is crucial, however, to define ‘emotion’ as it is used in this chapter.

### **Definition of ‘emotion’**

‘Emotions’ encompass a diverse array of historically and culturally contingent categories. Dixon’s “historical provenance of modern theories of the emotions” suggests that the category ‘emotions’ appeared in the nineteenth century replacing terms such as “appetites, passions, affections and sentiments” (2005 [2003]:2). Dixon claims that the earliest known use of the term ‘emotions’ arose from within the School of Scottish empiricist philosophers, from David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) onwards. Within this academic context “the term ‘emotions’ was baptized in a way that suggested these mental states were passive and non-cognitive” (2005[2003]:23). Even today, a cursory glance at the Oxford English Dictionary for a definition of ‘emotion’ describes an ‘emotion’ as an “instinctive feeling as distinguished from logic or reasoning” (OED 2006 [2001]:242-243).

Using Lupton’s designated terms there are two general approaches to the study of emotions: “emotions as inherent” and “emotions as socially constructed” (1998:10). ‘Emotions as inherent’ is a category that encompasses the literature on the physiology and evolutionary origins of emotions, in which Darwin’s (1999[1889]) pioneering work, cognitive theory and the work of William James (1890) fall. These works tend to articulate that emotions are to a greater or lesser degree inherited and shared by all

humans (extending to animals) and focus upon physiological arousal. Social constructionist approaches on the other hand tend to focus upon emotions as contingent (in part or entirely) upon external forces to our physiological bodies and more importantly, that a degree of emotion is learnt. Constructionist approaches pay closer attention to the impact of social, cultural and political forces upon our understanding, expression and application of emotion. According to Lupton (1998), this broad approach includes the scholarship of Durkheim's functional-structuralism (2008 [1915]), Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (1962) and the work of Hochschild (2003 [1983]). Other theoretical approaches encompassed by "emotions as socially constructed" include: poststructuralist theory in which discursive practice means "emotional experience is the rendering of bodily sensations into language" (Lupton 1998:24); psychoanalysis, which aims to illuminate "the unconscious dimensions of the emotional self" (Lupton 1998:25) and embodiment theory (cf. Lyon and Barbalet 1994 cited in Lupton 1998) that attempts to readdress the balance of focus in discursive or cultural constructions of emotion by paying equal attention to how emotions are lived out, understood and felt in our bodies. Thus, great emphasis is given to the embodiment and subjectivity of our emotions. There is also growing interdisciplinarity in the study of emotions (Corrigan 2008, Davidson *et al.* 2005, Hinton 1999, Reddy 2001, Rue 2006, Tarlow 2000a), bridging bio-cognitive and socio-cultural constructionist approaches. By conceptualising 'emotions' as "highly complex bio-psycho-social phenomena" (Rue 2006:123), these scholars attempt to overcome the nature-culture dichotomy that places emotions in opposition to reason and synthesise naturalistic concepts of emotions as "innate physiological processes" (White 2002[1997]:148) with semiotic approaches to the study of emotions that understand emotions as social and cultural constructions.

This chapter's ensuing analysis of emotional behaviour in relation to Barton Glebe prioritises the socio-cultural *modes* of display and *management* of 'emotion' in a highly particularized socio-cultural context, rather than seeking to define an 'emotion' *per se*, which is beyond the remit of this thesis. In many ways this chapter concerns the 'emotional geography' of emotions in a woodland burial site: emotion's "socio-spatial mediation and articulation" through focusing upon the "emotional relationality of people and environments" (Bondi *et al.* 2005:3). In speaking of people's emotional engagement with a woodland burial site, the 'mood' of the place is also implicitly

referred to. However, there are subtle distinctions between an 'emotion' and 'mood'. An emotion is an intensified 'mood' or an intensely felt triggered feeling whilst a mood is an enduring embodied experience. Emotions have intentionality and an object focus, whereas moods are without an object, lending them to a sense of enduring feeling. But as Kangas rightly observes:

...the distinction between emotions and moods is not always easy to draw. The more general and unfocused the object of the emotion is...the harder it is to distinguish from a mood. (2008:400)

### ***Sanctioning Emotional Displays and Place***

Mourners' emotions can be influenced by time, architectural and space constraints, cultural sanctions and expectations derived from experience. For example, some young people in Britain have felt unsure of which emotional displays and personal modes of behaviour are appropriate for visiting a crematorium because of their relative inexperience with funerals and crematoria (Davies 1990:14). Equally, priests and civil celebrants have made similar comments in relation to mourners at natural burial sites and to some extent they negotiate this by attempting to 'manage' emotions and behaviour in the setting of a funeral at a natural burial ground:

I suppose there's a slight sense of disorientation than with a churchyard, because in a churchyard everything is laid out in rows so you kind of know where you are and which way you're facing: and so there's a sense in working out the place for yourself [at the natural burial site] in order to make the right space for the mourners. Because they've chosen woodland burial...you need to make them feel comfortable so they don't think: Oh! This is awkward! Where am I supposed to stand? How am I supposed to act? So you both have to work it out for yourself quickly, because it's not as immediately obvious, and convey that to people to put them at their ease. (Priest in whose parish Barton Glebe is located)

The demonstrable *disorientation* of mourners comes from a lack of formalised practice and cultural familiarity with natural burial, indicative of the newness of this cultural practice in Britain. An example of unfamiliarity with woodland burial came from a comment made by a local resident:

I'll be honest with you, when I first passed it I thought: woodland burial site? It's a place for people to bury their pets! But as I understand it, woodland burial is where somebody is put in a box and left naturally to decompose. Is that right?

When I asked her why she thought it was for pets, she said: *because I've never seen anything like that! I thought it was unusual. Because, maybe because it's a bit odd...* Similarly, another local resident in reflecting upon her expectations before her first visit to the burial ground for the father of her neighbour's funeral exclaimed:

I had *absolutely* no idea of what happened and what went on there! You know, I had no pre thoughts about it really...I thought it was just a big field!

For those who have attended or anticipate attending a natural burial ground, it is commonly voiced that the funeral is more relaxed for mourners:

I think it [a woodland burial site] allows your *emotions* to be played out much more *naturally* than in a crematorium or in a church...[slight pause]... I think there would be less freedom for you to think and reflect at a crematorium and churchyard – it's a more *controlling* environment than I would imagine at a woodland burial site. I mean some people like the control as it helps them cope and get through it – from the moment they get there to the moment its finished everything is organised, and they just have to do very little. And others might find the woodland burial *approach* - which I think *does* give you more freedom and flexibility and creativity - might be harder for some people. (Local resident who attended a funeral at Barton Glebe)

I think it's easier for people to *grieve* in that sort of context [natural burial] than in a crematorium...I think it makes death a much more natural thing, you know part of the natural process. (A pre-registered woman)

For those who preside over funerals at natural burial grounds it is commonly noted that the time keeping is more relaxed:

...people stay longer there than they do at a normal cemetery – well obviously at the crematorium you've got to get out because you're on a time limit; it's a sausage-making mentality! [giggles] You know, you're always watching the clock when you're in a crematorium, but I was amazed (it wasn't a particularly sunny day or hot, but it wasn't wet) we stood there absolutely for *ages* afterwards. We stood there probably for half an hour talking and chatting! (A civil celebrant who conducts funerals at natural burial grounds)

...when we have a funeral up there – a burial or a funeral – people stay for ages! (A woodland burial site administrator)

I think people felt a little more comfortable lingering afterwards; after I'd pronounced the blessings and the final words. Maybe because it's an open space: there's more of a chance to just pause and take breath after the funeral has finished, but a churchyard is a bit crowded and stepping on other people's graves. I mean, I think there was a slightly more relaxed atmosphere afterwards at Barton. (Anglican curate who has conducted funerals at Barton Glebe)

There was no hurry. 'cos normally when you go to a crematorium you've only got half an hour...but at [redacted] [a natural burial site] nothing was hurried...There was *no* hurry. We weren't timed or anything like that...everyone just lingered on you know. In fact, it took us a whole day and it was really, really lovely! ...there wasn't any hurry – there was no time factor coming into it, which was good... 'Cos as I say, if you go to the crematorium you can't always do what you want to do in half an hour.<sup>199</sup> (An independent funeral director)

Repeated suggestions that people *stay longer* or *linger* at the graveside in a woodland burial ground suggests a relaxed atmosphere and more positive mood than is customarily expected at a funeral. This quality is valued by those who support woodland burial, as a woman who has pre-registered for a grave space at Barton Glebe demonstrates by comparing crematoria and woodland burial sites:

I mean it's a *soulless* place! [a crematorium] It's the sort of place where you feel you can't chat, you can't relax. Again, this *difference*: You know people are *quiet*, in the wrong sense of being quiet. Whereas I hope it would be very natural just to be yourself when you're going to a woodland burial and the funeral. So yes, I would hope that the place makes a difference, but I think it's more than just the place; there are other things going on...

Unfortunately she did not explain this statement further. Speaking of how landscape is used to evoke particular moods and emotions in relation to cemeteries, the historian, Schantz employs the term “melancholy pleasure” to describe the intention of reformers behind America's rural cemetery movement in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>199</sup> Trish Green's unpublished presentation at the First National UK Natural Burial conference, held in Sheffield on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010 demonstrates that time is a primary factor operating right across all her data, in which a funeral at a natural burial ground is deemed to be more relaxed because there are no time restraints for the mourners or the funeral director; subsequently funerals can take an entire day rather than the allocated time-slot at a crematorium or church for example.

These reformers aspired to elicit a mood of “melancholy pleasure” in visitors to their cemeteries by inducing a “transformation in the hearts of the living” (2008:72). Melancholy pleasure was “a disposition to be savored”: part “mystical, emotional and pleasurable” cultivating “feelings and sentiments” beyond mourners’ own horizons “and more worthy of Christianity” (2008:72). The moral and emotional imperative behind America's rural cemetery movement in the nineteenth century mirrored the garden cemetery movement in other parts of Europe at the time, as well as the ideas associated with the Scottish botanist and cemetery designer, John Claudius Loudon (1783–1843) in Britain. Moral and emotional transformations in mourners were deemed possible and beneficial through the creation of beautiful landscaping and serenity, far removed from people’s experiences of overcrowded churchyards and “scenes of profane commerce” (Schantz 2008:73). Moreover the “melancholy pleasure” bestowed upon visitors to a rural cemetery in America was implicitly associated with “gentility”, so much so Schantz argues that “the rural cemetery developed as an institution of refinement in American culture” by “condemning the spirit of commerce as an impediment in the proper mourning of the dead” (2008:75). This woman’s comment above suggests that she perceives the constraints for funerals held in crematorium chapels and their atmosphere as an “impediment” to her execution of “proper” mourning.

Emotional displays and behaviours are likely to differ markedly in their expression and appropriateness, with regard to cultural sanctions and regulations that are stratified through gender, generation, ethnicity, class and religion. For this reason, managing the diverse expectations and behaviours of mourners and those pre-registered in a natural burial ground is a challenging task of mediation for the funeral professionals and those who oversee natural burial sites; an issue to which we now turn.

### ***The Management of Emotions in Natural Burial***

The French sociologist Durkheim argued emotions are intensified through action and are socially obligated (e.g. mourning): “society exerts a moral pressure on its members to put their feelings in harmony with the situation” (2008 [1915]: 297). Rue identifies that such “emotional regulation may also generate the most substantial differences

between cultural traditions” (2006:118) as anthropologists have demonstrated in relation to death rites.<sup>200</sup> The following themes arising from interview transcripts and fieldwork notes illustrate how “emotions mediate behaviours” (Rue 2006:118) and vice versa at Barton Glebe. For example, despite the Trust discouraging the gardening of graves many visitors still do so because they feel they need to, in coming to terms with their grief. It is also revealed for example, that there is a socio-cultural expectation amongst those who support natural burial that this burial mode facilitates therapeutic moods and therefore aids the bereaved in reconciling life without the deceased.

### **Grief and tears**

At Barton Glebe people not only choose where they want to be buried, but also how they want the grave to be orientated. In order to implement this choice, one of the ground staff will carry two stakes and walk with the person who is choosing a grave location around the site. Once a location and orientation have been decided, the grounds’ person is supposed to stake the position of the head (a fluorescent stake) and feet (a wooden stake) so that accurate records can be later made on a site map to inform the grave-digger and Trust staff of a grave’s location and orientation.



Figure 20: Staking out a grave’s position and orientation at Barton Glebe

Source: Author’s photo taken April 2009

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. Bloch (2000 [1992]) and Rosaldo (2007)

The act of choosing a grave location and orientation is often highly emotionally charged for the person doing the choosing and so the Trust's ground staff engage in subtle acts to regulate the display of emotion and its intensity:

...we have to *mark* the place with stakes otherwise you would forget [where someone has chosen for interment] That's a *big* thing when you come to actually put the stake in and I *usually* mark the head and the foot, but I very rarely take two poles with me for the head and the foot. I put one in at the head and I *hope* I remember which way the foot's going to go for the gravedigger, because *that* can be *very* emotional when you *actually* put the stake in and they know *that* is where the grave is going to be dug. It can be...tricky. So, as I say, I only put one pole in and then when they go I put two in to mark either end. I think it's something a bit like what the funeral director was saying when mourners see the coffin being lowered; when they're *choosing* and then you actually *mark* the spot, it's reality: it's not just "it's going to be over there by that tree: Oh! That tree's pretty and there's a daffodil there!" It's *actually* going to be *dug* there...and that can be...and sometimes I don't even stick it in, I lay it on the ground because, you know, you sometimes just get a feeling that there's going to be tears. You know, nobody wants tears particularly. I mean, you get them and you cope. You know, people are embarrassed. They don't want to cry. And so, you know, you want to avoid it (One of the Trust's ground staff)



Figure 21: A grave's location is identified using only one (orange) stake

Source: Author's photo taken April 2009

Durkheim's (2008 [1915]) claim that emotions are intensified through action is clearly evident here. The act of choosing and identifying a grave's location with a stake can elicit tears. Emotions are perhaps intensified because there is finality about choosing a grave location for the bereaved that serves to make them acknowledge their loss in death, in the same way as a coffin being lowered into a grave can also elicit intense emotions. Choosing a grave's location entails a collapse between past and present, between the memory of the deceased and their painful absence, where past and present will become fused in a new relationship that is to be invested in the grassy area around the erect stake.

The remark that *nobody wants tears particularly... people are embarrassed. They don't want to cry...so, you know, you want to avoid it* also demonstrates the social sanctions upon emotions. There is a tension here however, because contemporary bereavement literature advocates the benefits of tears in expressing grief whilst Hockey's (1993) research on the other hand, demonstrated how such 'natural' emotional expression can jeopardise structured ritual in funerals for the congregation and clergy. Clergy have developed strategies for dealing with uncontrolled emotional expression just as ground staff have done in the context of staking graves however, there is an implicit tension between "professional competence" and "the therapeutic value of emotional expression" (Hockey 1993:139).

### **Grief and memorialisation**

Some bereaved visitors creatively attempt to mitigate site rules and regulations,<sup>201</sup> partly to assuage their doubt and anxiety over decisions taken in engaging with this disposal mode, as well as meeting changing needs in grief; particularly as "the absence of a gravestone only exacerbates an emotionally trying time" (Francis *et al.* 2005:60), as with bereaved visitors to cemeteries in the period before a headstone is erected.

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<sup>201</sup> See Appendix 1.

On visits to natural burial grounds around the country I have seen cases where anniversary cards, birthday cards and photos are left hidden behind stones, in long grass or tucked in tree stakes around the grave.<sup>202</sup> In one case a widower had a keyring inserted with a small photo of his wife, which he had hung out of sight, from a branch of the tree planted upon her grave. Clandestine expressions of grief at Barton Glebe include a widow who buried a bracelet worn by her husband under the tree she sponsored in his memory:

I mean you're only allowed certain flowers so I dug up primroses and snowdrops from the garden and put them round the tree. And then we've sneaked in his bracelet because I thought: Oh well! They won't see that!

Another woman inserted the single stem of a cut flower upon the grave of her daughter at the same height as the wild flowers already growing on the grave, so the presence of the flower stem was not immediately obvious; half hidden by the permitted species of wildflowers. A widower's children want him to cremate his dog when it dies and place the ashes on their mother's grave:

So I shall go up there and put a handful, but don't tell them I'm going to put a handful as they [the Trust] don't like you doing it! [giggles]

This widower's covert behaviour with regards to burying the dog's ashes in his wife's grave suggests that this private act is an assertion of self in relation to others, perhaps towards the Trust or family members.<sup>203</sup> His covert behaviour also allows him to foster a developing relationship with Barton Glebe and practise or distribute his emotional agency. Moreover, his on-going connection with his wife's grave is an expression of the continuing bonds that the bereaved can maintain with the deceased rather than relinquishing bonds over time (Klass 1999 and 2006, Klass *et al.* 1996).

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<sup>202</sup> Clayden *et al.* also give examples of such "ephemeral marking" by the bereaved, observed at other natural burial sites in the UK (2010:163-164).

<sup>203</sup> Visiting another natural burial site in South Yorkshire I learnt of a family disagreement whereby a bereaved person had placed a laminated photo of their mother upon the grave. Another sibling did not like it so the photo was surreptitiously hidden under a stone by the grave. The sibling who wanted the photo would then uncover it for the duration of their visit to the graveside. Certainly this private act was an assertion of individual needs between siblings.

It is not surprising that a number of those who visit a grave in a woodland burial site should feel a strong desire to memorialise the grave because the object(s) used can give material form to memories, bonds and emotional connections in grief. Objects therefore materialise the immaterial and indeterminate.<sup>204</sup>

...objects help to give a sense of direction and stability, providing continuity of time (in, for instance, photographs and mementos) and help as well to consolidate the fragmentary self by providing markers of identity. What is important in such objects is not their aesthetic or economic value, or even their value as status markers, but their ability to evoke emotional connections to one's past and to others. (Kieschnick 2008: 233)

As the widower implied, the Trust's management is keener to regulate memorial practice and keep it to an absolute minimum, compared with a number of other natural burial sites around the country, which are generally more permissive with regards to the materials and format of memorialisation around the grave. Ideologically, graveside memorialisation is "seen as violating the original concept of a collective, woodland memorial" leaving natural burial ground providers "faced with difficult choices: to enforce the rules or to turn a blind eye and respect the needs of an individual or family" (Clayden 2004:72).

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<sup>204</sup> E.g. Roadside shrines and memorials see Einwalter (2007).



Figure 22: Creating woodland as a living memorial

Source: Author's photo taken April 2009

The aim of the Trust to “create a living memorial by encouraging new woodlands”<sup>205</sup> is used to justify implementing a thorough ban on objects at the graveside *except* for the planting of wildflowers upon the grave and the regulated wooden plaque placed flush to the ground. This means that there are very few observable contradictions to the site regulations by visitors; unlike what one can observe in many other natural burial grounds around the country. However, in interviews people spoke of the

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<sup>205</sup> <http://www.arborytrust.org/> [Retrieved 21/07/09]. It is interesting to note that in the same year Barton Glebe opened, a “living memorial” in the Netherlands was also set up commemorating those who had died of cancer in Trees for Life Day. As with woodland burial, Trees for Life Day is an occasion where “hope is mediated by the...idyll of the forest and nature...” (Post 2005:258).

significance of their planting behaviour and the lengths they would go to in planting permitted species of flowers upon the grave. This might be interpreted as making the grave-site meaningful to them and thereby, managing their own grief by reducing any anxiety or doubt over the chosen mode of disposal.

Below Kathy describes her husband's grave and the lengths she has gone to in tending it. She, too, discloses how another visitor clandestinely personalised the grave next to her husband's with a photo. Kathy's reaction to the photo demonstrates how emotional agency is not only vested in other human beings, but also "nonhuman phenomena such as animals, landscapes, artifacts and works of art" (Svašek 2007:230):

...I was planting wildflowers and things on his grave – most of which don't survive – but that was quite therapeutic. But one day there was a grave nearby with a photo of a very glamorous young woman and I thought: Oh! The 97 year old is here and the glamorous lady's there and Victor's here! [laughs]...It's like a little garden. You're *not* meant to garden but it looks wild! I mean this is all to do with my grief! I spent *ages* researching wild flowers which will grow on calcareous things. Although Victor's grave doesn't look as spectacular as some it's got meadow clery which is *rare* – and two out of eight of them survived – and I think it's got sixteen types of wild flowers which came up last year. And really, I just go and see how they're getting on! And sometimes I cut the grass down a bit if it's smothering things and sometimes I plant a few new ones if they're not doing very well. And I used to cut Victor's hair, so I sometimes think it's like cutting his hair!

Kathy's likening of cutting the grass around her husband's grave to cutting his hair when alive, furnishes another demonstration of how bereaved visitors personalise and endow the natural landscape with meanings that afford continuity with the deceased's life and identity and a continuing relationship with the deceased by survivors (Klass 1999 and 2006, Klass *et al.* 1996). This behaviour has also been observed at cemeteries (Francis *et al.* 2005:99) where visits to a cemetery following a funeral "are an important element in the construction of the continuing bond both as an inner reality and as part of the family system" for the bereaved (Klass 2006:848). So despite the absence of, for example, a headstone, curb sets or an individual tree upon the

grave, the bereaved can *still* find subtle ways to channel their emotions into fixed locations charged with embodied meaning. Kathy's emotions are socio-spatially mediated as she develops a relationship with Victor's grave and the wider environment of Barton Glebe. Victor's grave is a micro-site of emotional geography and also constitutes a part of Kathy's continuing bond with Victor in her daily life after his death (Klass 1999 and 2006, Klass *et al.* 1996).



Figure 23: A grave planted with wild-flowers at Barton Glebe  
Source: Photo reproduced by kind permission of Fiona Reid

Another case concerns Andy's grandmother. He describes what his mother does when they visit and he interprets it as a means for his mother to assuage her doubts about woodland burial and the choice they made to use it.

Basically, she doesn't *talk* to the grave, she looks around the area, and I think, in her own mind, she's reassuring herself that she's made the right decision. Because that's what she does. She keeps saying: "Oh nan would've loved it here! This is just the place nan loves!" So in *her* mind she's reassuring herself that she's made the right decision. She's under no

false idea that my grandmother is going to be there to *speak* to, because as far as she's concerned there's more of my grandmother in her *home* where the two of them lived together...

Perhaps the home is replete with memories for her that she cannot easily identify in the woodland burial site's setting. Yet bereaved visitors are able to "extend the socio-spatial concept of 'home'" (Francis *et al.* 2005:104, Clayden & Dixon 2007:257) to the woodland burial site by bringing the familiarity of home to the grave. Andy's plan to transplant some wildflowers from his mother's garden to his grandmother's grave is a common example of how this can be achieved. This was one of the most commonly expressed activities by bereaved visitors to the woodland burial site and is a means by which visitors can engage with their grief without contravening the regulations on visiting behaviour and memorial activities set by the Trust.

I did plant some bluebell bulbs, as it is bluebell glade. I was in Richmond Park the day she died and there used to be the Isabella plantation in Richmond Park, which she always used to tell me about, full of bluebells. So I thought: Oh! I'll put bluebells on her grave! But they haven't seemed to have taken! So I would like the woodland burial site to try and get some bluebells in bluebell glade! Mine didn't take *at all!* I took 100 bulbs up there and I took some plants, but I don't know if the soil isn't right, they didn't take. I was *very* disappointed. (Beth's mother and sister are buried at Barton Glebe)

Planting wildflowers is an opportunity for the bereaved to generate a relationship with a grave and, in time, Barton Glebe as a whole. Planting also allows a visitor to assert themselves and validate the decision for a natural burial by creating continuity between 'home' and Barton Glebe. Planting therefore keeps memories and the deceased's identity alive,<sup>206</sup> quite literally symbolised by the life of the flowers. However, the Trust regulates emotional expression of the bereaved through regulating the gardening of graves by sanctioning the species of permitted flowers and the extent to which visitors can be seen to be gardening a grave.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Note the connection between flowers (bluebells), the deceased's identity and the bereaved's memories in Beth's quote above.

<sup>207</sup> See Kathy's comment on page 119-120 in this chapter.

Behavioural dispositions towards planting as a culturally sanctioned and acceptable mode of behaviour and display of emotion are informed by the dominant social/cultural context and concomitant traditions from which natural burial has emerged in Britain,<sup>208</sup> viz., tending to the grave in churchyards and cemeteries, and much more recently, tending to the rose bush, flowers or memorial plaque in a crematorium's Garden of Remembrance. This is evident in Kathy's admission that her husband would have loved the *fact that I planted the flowers and went to see how they were getting on and things, because I don't know what else to do at a grave actually!*

### **Validation and solace**

In the absence of a headstone bereaved visitors are imaginative in conceptualising the uniqueness of the deceased's grave in other ways, often utilising materials that the 'natural' landscape offers. So despite the seemingly "collective memorial landscape" of natural burial, in which the identity of the individual is "ultimately subsumed" by 'nature', the bereaved create "many different strategies that try to preserve the location of the grave and identity of the deceased" (Clayden *et al.* 2009:48).<sup>209</sup> Take Kathy, for example:

There's also a toad that lives on Victor's grave! I've disturbed it two years running because I go and plant bulbs in October. I was digging in some wild daffodil bulbs and disturbed the toad but I can see it's come out because it's left a big hole by the side of the grave and I feel quite pleased with that!...But I quite like having this toad on Victor's grave. It's life isn't it? And it makes it feel *special* that something's made it [Victor's grave] their home.

Her expression that the toad's home at her husband's grave bestows the grave with a special quality, is another means by which bereaved individuals can seek solace and gain confirmation in the appropriateness of the choices they have made. To perceive

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<sup>208</sup> Francis *et al.* make a similar observation with regards to behaviour at cemeteries: "Their behaviour, including their private, individual mourning rituals, is shaped in part by the existing cemetery landscape, itself a product of the cemetery's history, the practices of previous and present generations of mourners and the current management's policies" (2005:20).

<sup>209</sup> This raises the question of whether the need to identify and demarcate the uniqueness of the grave is a matter of individualisation. If so, then perhaps this graveside behaviour is characteristic of modernity for Giddens (1995[1991]) argues individualisation is a key characteristic of modernity

your husband's grave as *special* because a toad has chosen to make it their home, is to see the grave as unique, set apart and personal, despite the absence of a headstone and any recognisable memorialisation and this confers great comfort to the grieving. I also heard of similar comfort being taken by bereaved visitors in their recollections of the presence of butterflies, birds and dragonflies around the grave.<sup>210</sup> These animals are joyous symbols and celebrations of life at the graveside and, if only for a brief moment, afford the bereaved visitor an opportunity to sequester the harsh realities of death and the loss of someone held dear.

### **Emotional agents**

Signage is another means, aside from site regulations, by which natural burial site providers can sanction behaviours regarding how a visitor should engage and understand the landscape. However these are not always adequate nor deemed appropriate in informing visitors how they are to *feel* and what they are supposed to *do*. Aside from signage authorised by the site providers there are other signs at the woodland burial site, half-hidden and clandestinely left by visitors, from which other visitors can then take comfort, offence, or use to navigate the way to a particular grave. Just as we learnt that grave stakes are emotional agents, so these signs and memorial objects are “active subject-like emotional agents” (Svašek 2007:230). Moreover, “the knowledge that the manipulation of matter may cause particular reactions in others is a powerful way in which people can distribute their own emotional agency” (Svašek 2007:231). Thus, objects moved, left and removed are therefore acting as emotional agents as Kathy's comment demonstrates:

I feel that they're [the Trust] becoming a bit legalistic because I mean the first time I went, there were little bits and pieces that people had tied on trees and there was one bit I used to *love* walking past! There was this tiny little blue stool on a tree which I presume was adopted for someone's ashes and there was a little bird made of raffia and it was there for months and I used to love walking past it. But now they've starting clearing all these things up! And [redacted] [ground staff] told me yesterday that they're not going to have people adopting trees anymore but I thought it really

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<sup>210</sup> Klaassens and Groote (2010) observe that in Dutch natural burial grounds butterflies and birds are particularly resonant cultural 'nature' symbols. The Dutch associate butterflies with beauty and death because of their perceived fragile, transitory nature (2010:7) and many bird boxes are erected by the bereaved in the natural burial ground.

*matters* to me that that's my mother's tree! Because there isn't a grave. I was talking with [redacted] [a grounds' lady] and she said she feels awful, but she goes round pulling out people's plants which are not quite what they should be. And I *like* it to be a conservation area as well, with all the wild flowers and things, but also people have huge needs don't they when someone's died? And I think if there's some things that shouldn't be there, so what? So what? If it's a comfort to somebody. So I feel they're getting very...they're getting a bit too...*zealous* almost! And I miss all those bits because I suppose I wander around an awful lot actually. And all these funny little quirky things that are slowly being eradicated and it's sad in a way, because for me, they were part of the landscape where Victor was buried. I mean you never knew who they were, who visited or who put them there, but you thought: "Oh yes! It's here!" Because it *does feel* like this community of the dead...And all these little ornaments and strange things were almost like part of the society of all these dead people and their bereaved relatives! [chuckles]...and I feel it's sad they've gone actually.

The identity of *the society of all these dead people and their bereaved relatives* as Kathy articulates it, is challenged whenever the Trust decide particular objects need to be removed that contravene site regulations. As Svašek (2007) argues, by moving matter the Trust is attempting to control behaviour but, in doing so, is also provoking the emotional agency of the bereaved. The woodland burial ground is not the only place in which the sanctioning of behaviour associated with emotional displays takes place; the internet is also used by bereaved visitors to contest what they see as the site management's misconduct. In the spring of 2009 for example, a series of emails were sent back and forth between recipients who were accidentally disclosed in an email sent by the Trust to those on their mailing list. A limited number of people used it as an opportunity to garner support from other bereaved visitors in a campaign to voice annoyance at activities perceived to be undertaken by the site staff. The staff were demonstrating almost zero-tolerance to non-permitted memorialisation practices in order to maintain the aims of the Trust by keeping to a rigid interpretation of what a woodland burial site should look like.<sup>211</sup> Emails circulated the mailing list and the

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<sup>211</sup> Milton analyses the behaviours of nature conservationists through the framework of purity and pollution and concludes that conservation projects are themselves boundary maintenance exercises. I see strong parallels between this claim and the behaviour of ground staff at Barton Glebe and the sometimes puritanical zeal of natural burial providers in other parts of the country: "In order to conserve the things that constitute nature, the boundaries that separate them must be maintained, and in order to conserve nature's 'naturalness', the boundary between the human and the non-human must be preserved. So it is not surprising if conservationists sometimes appear, when viewed through the filter of Douglas' model of symbolic classification, to be acting like nature's housekeepers, obsessively restoring order by putting things where they belong – eliminating species that are in the wrong place,

management sent out an official email that was then re-circulated with people's responses annotated within the inline text of the email. So, though the woodland burial site "encodes emotional responses" (Francis *et al.* 2005:26) through the Trust's regulations and signage and therefore informs the emotional relationality between visitors and Barton Glebe's environment, bereaved visitors were able to contest and challenge these regulations in an online space.

### **Anxiety, fear and security in relation to the dead**

A primary emotion expressed in relation to death and dying is fear (cf. Bauman 1992, Davies 2002[1997], Giddens 1995[1991], Malinowski 1984[1948], Shilling 2005[1993]): fear of what will happen to the body, of the unknown, of things beyond human control. This fear prompts a search for a sense of control in reactions to an anxiety felt both individually and socially on a collective level.

In the previous chapter we learnt that when plans for Barton Glebe were first raised with Barton Parish Council the response was "not resistance, but *anxiety*";<sup>212</sup> raising the question of *anxiety* of what exactly? What does this emotion express in relation to death? Corpses and the dead occupy ambiguous, contradictory positions in our minds because they are something to be treated with respect and left undisturbed, whilst at the same time being sources of pollution and subsequently something to be removed and feared (Bradbury 1999, Douglas 1966). Malinowski (1984[1948]) acknowledged the opposing attitudes societies hold in relation to the dead, aiming both to retain an aspect of the corpse or preserve it and also to dispose of it completely. This is exemplified by mummification on the one hand and cremation on the other. This dichotomy reflects society's reaction to the death of a member and survivors' reactions to the death of another, whereby "the longing for all that remains of the dead person" co-exists with "the disgust and fear of the dreadful transformation wrought by death" (Malinowski 1984[1948]:49, Hertz 1960). Mortuary rites, Malinowski (1984[1948]) argues, permit both further contact with the dead and also signify a rupture with the deceased and their removal. The living's ambivalent relationship with

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returning them to where they used to be – tidying up the mess that others...have created." (Milton 2000:242-243). See also Chapter 6, page 188-192.

<sup>212</sup> See Chapter 4 page 79 for full quote.

the dead and death itself means that it is vital the living attempt to sequester their anxieties around death and the dead by seeking a sense of control that is often conferred through mortuary rituals and associated socio-cultural codes of behaviour for the bereaved who are most at risk from the polluting forces of an ambiguous corpse. Not until the corpse has been fully transformed into another entity can the survivors be fully liberated from the intermediary period following a death for “mourning is merely the direct consequence in the living of the actual state of the deceased” (Hertz 1960:51).

Funeral professionals (civil and humanist celebrants, funeral directors) also display anxiety towards the corpse, which surfaces in conversation concerning eco-coffins and the sentiments of the bereaved:

I mean we have had a number of requests to be buried without a coffin, and if they do, then we tend to steer them in the direction of a cardboard coffin. One of the reasons why we do this is because, OK, the [dead] person might want that, but for the people who are watching that is *really, really* difficult to cope with: the shroud. In fact, I think they wouldn't be able to cope with it.<sup>213</sup>

Unlike the funeral director above, other professionals I spoke to viewed cardboard coffins with caution.<sup>214</sup> This caution was expressed by discouraging clients from choosing a cardboard coffin and to look more favourably upon a wicker coffin for example. This dislike of cardboard coffins or shrouds, hidden behind a professional concern for the sentiments of mourners, I argue, is actually a professional display of anxiety because the cardboard coffin or shroud threatens to unmask the fragility of their professional services in staging death.<sup>215</sup> They are less predictable in their behaviour than woodchip veneer coffins for example, and the closest potentially to revealing the decomposition processes of the corpse. The subject-object ambiguity of

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<sup>213</sup> This demonstrates how “there is often a gap...between the fantasies inspired by objects and the reality of their consumption” (Lupton 1998:141). For example, the person who has anticipated their own death and requested a shroud may have a fantasy of it which contradicts the experience of its consumption (i.e. it is distressing for the bereaved family to see the deceased in a shroud) whilst other consumers of eco-coffins are disappointed with the real product upon first being confronted with it as captured in Laura Wade's play 'Colder than Here' (see Scene 6).

<sup>214</sup> See also West (2010:26-29).

<sup>215</sup> Howarth's (1996) anthropological research with funeral directors in East London in the 1990s describes in detail how funeral directors stage-manage their handling of the corpse to hide death from the bereaved and manage the corpse's pollution, see Chapter 5 in particular.

the corpse, which itself is prone to expansion making the sides or base of a cardboard coffin sag and a wicker coffin creak, confers an overwhelming material presence to the corpse/deceased. In this context the emotional agency of the corpse is heightened for the mourners, bearers and funeral director.<sup>216</sup> However, a corpse contained within a woodchip-veneer coffin does not generate this emotional agency to such a degree, quite simply because the corpse is 'hidden' and its decomposition does not interfere with the material structure of the coffin. I argue, therefore, that when a funeral director says he or she is concerned that a shroud or cardboard coffin may offend the sentiments of mourners at a funeral, they are really commenting upon their own anxiety that their masking and staging of death may be jeopardised.

We prefer wicker or willow. I don't like cardboard. Cardboard's wibbly. I don't like something I can't handle! Cardboard's made from wood pulp anyhow. What's the difference? You might as well have chipboard; it's solid anyhow. It's more rigid. (An independent funeral director)

Cardboard ones are a bit of a nightmare. If you put someone heavy in one of those they won't last in it for long at all, so if we have someone heavy we don't put them in the cardboard coffin till the last minute...And with the cardboard ones, because they tend to bulge out at the sides and the screwings on them aren't that wonderful, we do tend to use additional sealing such as big heavy double-sided sticky tape down the sides as well...But I really like the wicker ones. They always look pretty! (Funeral director)

Biodegradable coffins appear to threaten disorder upon the order the funeral professionals have painstakingly created in dealing with death and corpses on a day-to-day basis. When ritual order in the work place and funeral ceremony are in jeopardy, the potential for ensuing disorder threatens to expose the unpleasant, polluting realities of death (cf. Bradbury 1999:113-139, Douglas 1966). Expressed professional anxiety is as much about concealing the corpse in efforts to avoid upsetting the sentiments of the bereaved, as it is about preventing the unmasking of the clumsy, inconvenient aspects of death and disposal despite attempts to sanitise it. Rollers will jam, coffins will sag and corpses will sometimes move inside coffins threatening to reveal their presence.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Cf. Svašek (2007).

<sup>217</sup> These objects therefore have emotional efficacy (Svašek 2007:243) and coffins especially, are "emotionally evocative signifiers" (Wulff 2007:6). Coffins inhabit ambiguity because they are

## Consecration and security

From speaking of anxiety and the corpse, I shall briefly turn to discussing notions of security and the corpse, best expressed in aligned ideas of resting in peace, consecration and perpetuity. A few interviewees commented that consecration of Barton Glebe offered a sense of security. Though very few outside of the clerical profession understand the nuances of consecration, it signifies a ritual act underpinned by legal sanction that symbolically assures the living that the dead will remain undisturbed.

I was quite pleased it was consecrated land because it then becomes forever more. It wouldn't get touched. Well I don't think so. It wouldn't get planning permission to build there permanently. (Stan is making his funeral plans)

One of England's consecrated woodland burial sites advertises its legal status on its website. Subsequently, consecration is used as a persuasive device to assure potential clients, because of anticipating fears or anxieties held by the website's readers:

Consecration does not make the soil more holy, but it does set our woodland aside as a special place for ever. You can be assured that this woodland burial site will always remain as a natural woodland setting. It cannot be sold for another purpose and it will not fall into disrepair. Since the ground is consecrated by the Church of England, people who are buried here can lie in this land forever, until nature runs its natural course. Consecrated woodland burial ensures that our loved ones really do 'Rest in Peace.'<sup>218</sup>

This natural burial provider is using a typically religious idiom, *Rest in Peace*. However, eternal peace is a notion that is being moved from the sacred to the practical; the soul is not at peace but rather the human corpse. The religious idiom shifts from the immaterial to the material and from resting next to the sacred church to

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concealing *and* revealing. See Davies (2008b:23-26) on the nature of a coffin to the body and to the earth.

<sup>218</sup> See St Albans Woodland Burial Trust *Why Consecration?* <http://www.woodlandburialtrust.com> [Retrieved 28/10/09]

resting in peaceful nature.<sup>219</sup> A man commenting on his mother's attitude to Barton Glebe also implies an emic understanding of resting in peace as a material, practical concern that the corpse remains in situ and undisturbed:

...she was much happier about it [Barton Glebe] once she knew my grandmother's remains were *safe* and not going to be dug up and shifted...

It is interesting that, upon interviewing a young couple from Barton village the wife offered her opinion that what happens to ashes is not as important as what becomes of a whole burial: a *whole body needs to rest in peace* she said, *ashes are ashes*.<sup>220</sup> For the deceased, once cremated, has been transformed into another entity, symbolic of Hertz's (1960) double-burial rites and the concomitant transformation of the bereaved. However, whole-body burials where the corpse is not exhumed after a period post-burial, are rather more ambiguous. The corpse certainly decays over time and is transformed figuratively to dust, but the intervening period remains variable and ambiguous. Perhaps for this reason, whole-body burials, as opposed to interred cremated ashes, remain potentially threatening to the living. Thus, the living seek to place the dead somewhere they can be assured the dead are able to remain undisturbed: to 'rest in peace'.<sup>221</sup>

For some, the very fact that the established church was prepared to consecrate Barton Glebe legitimates the provision offered by the Arbory Trust and nullifies any anxieties that woodland burial may not be entirely appropriate for a Christian believer.<sup>222</sup>

Well I thought if the Bishop of Ely, you know, being Master blessed, gave his approval, then it was good enough for me! (Stan, bereaved and in the process of arranging a reservation at Barton Glebe)

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<sup>219</sup> Though 'Rest in Peace' has its origins in an Anglican reaction to the Catholic notion of purgatory it holds an affinity with a sleeping place for the dead located in nature amongst flowers and birds where one can *lie in this land forever in a natural woodland setting*.

<sup>220</sup> This wife is implying that she perceives a link between the whole body and needing peace. The woodland burial site that advertises its consecrated status anticipates such a sentiment held by potential clients so the website's rhetoric explicitly makes and promotes a symbolic connection between the religious rite of consecration and an eternal dimension of time synonymous with peace.

<sup>221</sup> Whilst not forgetting there is also a religious anxiety that cremation prevents the body from being available for resurrection.

<sup>222</sup> I certainly observed occasions when this anxiety was aired in public enquiries to Trust staff.

Legitimation of Barton Glebe arises from its affiliation with the Church of England: a powerful established, enduring Christian institution with considerable cultural authority. So much so, that a lady whose husband is interred at Barton Glebe told me that she could not discern the difference between Barton Glebe and a churchyard precisely because it was consecrated.

### **Managing disappointment**

Whilst some visitors to Barton Glebe may not discern a difference between Barton Glebe and a churchyard, the landscapes of these two distinct burial locations can be markedly different. At anytime of the year a cemetery and/or churchyard always has something to distract a visitor in addition to the natural landscape (e.g headstones, memorabilia, and plastic flowers); however a natural burial site in winter can be bleak. Those privately owned natural burial sites which occupy existing mature woodland tend to attract more custom precisely because there is something growing in the landscape all year round: whereas very often there is very little to observe in a meadow burial site in winter. The seasons can emphasise a bleak or barren landscape affording little comfort to the bereaved visitor. The natural burial sites that have received large financial investment and are located within existing mature woodland tend to offer, I argue, a theme park experience because of the stage-managed woodland experience.<sup>223</sup> These sites bestow comfort upon the bereaved all year round by cultivating a product that meets people's expectations of 'woodland', achieved mainly because they are natural burial sites located within existing mature woodland.

On the other hand, a field or newly planted woodland can be extremely barren when exposed by the seasonality of the landscape. For bereaved visitors to these landscapes, it is sometimes too much to bear in their grief and it feels heartless and disrespectful to bury the person they are mourning in a landscape that suggests the deceased has been abandoned or isolated by the living.<sup>224</sup> Quite the opposite is true of cemeteries which are replete with evidence of human activity so that:

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<sup>223</sup> See Chapter 6, page 181, footnote 306.

<sup>224</sup> The woodland scene visitors are presented with does not match their expectation, which Woodland Burial Parks Ltd. on the other hand, are so good at delivering.

The tidiness and upkeep of the grounds tacitly signify safety, confidence and support – the landscape demonstrates that both management and mourners are prepared to take care of the dead in respectful ways. (Francis *et al.* 2005:137)

A funeral director said of the privately owned green burial ground in her town that when it first opened and she took her funerals there she would advise families that *you've got to have vision, because it was just a field of weeds*. Other funeral directors and civil celebrants have been equally keen to manage their clients' expectations of woodland or green burial to avoid disappointment or anger on the day of the funeral. Woodland burials, also referred to as 'green burials', link in people's minds idealised visions of nature. The 'green' associated with 'eco' and woodland, as well as the green of nature that waxes and wanes due to the seasons, are expectations held in parallel by those talking about natural burial. Therefore, disappointment and expectation both need to be managed. Funeral directors try to avoid disappointment through managing their clients' expectations by advising clients to visit their preferred natural burial sites *before* finalising funeral plans:

When I first heard of green burial sites I got a vision in my mind that it's woodlands and lovely plush grass, you think Epping, but all we saw when we arrived at this site in [REDACTED], it was just what looked like big mole hills. Apparently what they do when they fill in the graves is that they literally mound them up and put a tree in the centre and as the ground settles it gradually levels out. So now, if somebody comes in and says they want a green burial...I always advise them to see the site *first*, rather than to say "yes, that's what we want", because, you know, whatever you talk about you get a vision in your mind and then when you actually see it up close, it's not like that *at all!*<sup>225</sup>...And others come in and say they'd like to be in the Arbory [Barton Glebe] and I'll say: well, have you actually *seen* it? And they'll say: *no*. And I'll then tell them: well I *suggest* you *do* look at the place *first* to ensure that this is what you actually want to do! So as I say, you're not turning up on the day, you're not thinking: oh blimey! I didn't think it'd be like this! Because it is a bit of a shock isn't it? (An independent funeral director)

The concern expressed by the independent funeral director with regards to the discontinuity between natural burial providers' brochures and the reality of their provision, also highlights a tension between being 'business-minded' and being sensitive and considerate to others' needs and feelings. If the funeral director were

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<sup>225</sup> An example of imagined allurements, discussed further on page 131.

truly motivated by profit, a negative image that funeral directors are often given, he would not be concerned whether his clients liked the natural burial ground. However, the success of his business demands that he is sensitive and aware of his clients' emotional needs (see Bailey 2010). As a result he has realised that some of his clients are disappointed by the 'reality' they are presented with, so he encourages them to look at natural burial sites before settling on the option.

Another funeral director below, in speaking about the steps he has taken to avoid disgruntled customers, also demonstrates the importance of the concept of time in natural burial. Initially, there appears to be a cultivation or expectation of an image for a natural burial site, exemplified by Woodland Burial Parks Ltd., to be *a wonderful woodland where graves are dug between the tree roots* but over time, acceptance of the 'natural' prevails, in all its seasonality:<sup>226</sup>

For families that sometimes do come and ask what are their choices and what are the alternatives, I give them the information and tell them that they *really* ought to go and have a look. If it's a very nice brochure, that's all very well and good but they've got to really feel comfortable to go and see how it's set up. And you've got a wonderful contrast because families that are not sure, I tell them to go to [redacted] [site A] and to [redacted] [site B], because some like one and some like the other! [giggles] And it's amazing what different vibes you get and what people think when they come back because they're completely different aren't they? One's already established, there and ready, and the other one's just a complete field and in the wintertime they don't cut the grass or anything and people come back and say: You're right, we're not going there now! And they have completely different thoughts really. And I think [redacted] [site A] and [redacted] [site B] are very vastly different. Certainly [redacted] [site B] – which is our nearest to here and our branch in [redacted] – people go and look at [redacted] [site B] and they're put off really because of how it's set up and how it's different to what they thought it would be like. I think people expect it to be a wonderful woodland where graves are dug between the tree roots and they'll be buried under a tree – you know, it's somewhere lovely to come and walk – and [redacted] [site B] is an open field with a little cut path round the edge isn't it? And they don't realise that the concept is then to *plant* the trees and make a *wood*! Which some people like; some people are set against it when they go and look, and [redacted] [site A] is too far. So it's a kind of Catch 22 at the moment...

There is a tendency for people to expect an established forest, but it is only through accumulated burials over time that trees are planted upon graves in some cases, thus it

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<sup>226</sup> As with the widow on page 136 whose attitude to planting her husband's grave changed over time.

is only over a duration that the concept becomes clearer and visible. As the funeral director suggests, some clients accept nature's seasonality and a woodland's different stages of growth; for other people they prefer the cultivation of an image most often met by privately-run, well invested natural burial sites. However, even the funeral professionals have been surprised by their own reactions upon visiting natural burial sites. An independent funeral director who has been in the business 60 years told me:

It wasn't what I was expecting [Barton], neither was [redacted]. I was a bit...not upset...a bit...not disappointed, I was...surprised shall we say. It wasn't what I expected. I expected something that was neater and tidier...

Here again we see that people's expectations are partly the result of their own lived experience and cultural familiarity. This funeral director has had much experience with cemeteries and churchyards so he was expecting something *neater and tidier* because that is what he is used to with regards to the landscape the dead occupy, indicative of his acquired cultural values with regards to where and how the dead are located. The reactions, either by the professionals or anecdotes of their clients' reactions, demonstrate that 'woodland' is a concept replete with cultural expectations. Natural burial sites are rich in symbolism provided by historical and socio-cultural constructions of landscape. They are symbolically loaded places saturated in life-giving/life cycle metaphor; quite unlike a crematorium, which is a symbolically neutral or depleted landscape according to many who chose to use Barton Glebe. For example Stan's views on cremation are shared by a number of bereaved people I interviewed:

I've got nothing against it [cremation], it's just I've never met anybody who likes going to a crematorium...it's *too austere!*...and it's *too clinical*. And I've been to a number of funerals and they're all *exactly* the same

One of the reasons Stan chose to pre-register a grave-space at Barton Glebe was because of his strongly held views about crematoria, which therefore meant he did not desire his own funeral to be held at a crematorium. For a number of reasons, he decided woodland burial was a better option. Stan's comments lend support to Davies's view that the possibility of removing ashes from crematoria to privately dispose of elsewhere has diverted "attention from the crematorium and reinforces its role as a transient place of utilitarian necessity" (2005c:145). The attraction of

crematoria is diminishing because Davies (2005c) argues, they are becoming 'non-places'. He uses Augé's (1995) term 'non-place' to refer to "places of transition – places that people pass through but which carry no personal significance for those individuals" (2005c:145): they are usually necessary places to our lives but lack symbolic depth or enduring meaning. For some people, crematoria are viewed as "a necessity as part of someone's 'journey' but...devoid of particular significance" (Davies 2005c:145). In considering the extent of non-place or allurement within crematoria, Davies (2005c) refers to the hermeneutical analysis of sacred architecture by Lindsay Jones who argues that some architecture, as with art, invites expectations within us; invitations to participate in a building through an "identificatory pull" or "allurement" motivated by "self-reconciliation" (2000:77) that something in a building or place is close to us; has something to do with us.

Unless this quality of allurement or magnetism or invitation, this so-termed perception of similitude, is present in the architecture in one form or another...passers-by will not feel compelled to pause and invest themselves in hermeneutical reflection on that architecture. (Jones 2000:79)

As this chapter has demonstrated a woodland burial ground, like sacred architecture, can inspire visitors' expectations so that they can bring "their hopes, joys and sorrows" (Davies 2005c:145) to the site and make connections between their experience and the place itself; investing their expectations in the woodland burial ground. The place becomes symbolically loaded, exciting perhaps, and therefore much more significant than a crematorium, unless that is, one's expectations of a woodland burial are not met in the landscape. Then, people can feel disappointed as discussed above.

I must say when we first made the arrangements I went a couple of times and then it was a couple of years until my recent visits to Barton and when I did go I was disappointed. I thought it looked pretty *scruffy* compared to what I expected. Well, obviously trees take a long time to grow, but it was all sort of rough grass and no sign of real trees. I mean I can see that in the end the trees *will* come and the grass will be in better shape. So, yes, I expect it will improve but there was a time I was rather disappointed about the general way it looked. (A pre-registered widower whose wife is interred at Barton.)

Disappointment raises an interesting possibility; perhaps there is a distinction between ‘real’ allurement (i.e. when one is confronted with a particular space or building) and ‘imagined’ allurement? Moreover, initial disappointment when first visiting Barton Glebe, indeed any natural burial site, suggests there is a strong cultural expectation of ‘woodland’ in Britain, fostered by the cultural and idiomatic allure of trees for example. Certainly, there appears to be an element of romanticism in the cultural allurement of woodland burial (real or imagined) and subsequently woodland and other aspects of ‘nature’ have a cultivated emotional geography:

I have seen it now looking all bleak and very barren and all sort of not beautiful, but to me, that *is* still beautiful! That’s the winter! But come spring there’ll be the spring plants coming through and come the summer we’ll have the next and then we’ll have the autumn. But to me, it’s still beautiful! And I *know* if I brought friends up here they’d be going: this looks awful! And yet I can’t see that. And the other thing which I *absolutely* adored at Barton was the little log cabin as I call it! It’s like a little house on the prairie! That just *blends in* and it’s *so natural!* And it just sort of welcomes you. I mean, when I first went it was closed and I just looked through the windows and I said to my two friends: doesn’t that make you feel welcome here? It’s warming. It’s not making you feel cold. It’s not sort of a stark sort of church or anything. It’s warming and homely. And that open evening, actually being in there, my friend said: you know this *is* beautiful isn’t it! It’s well thought of. It’s not over imposing: it’s just plain. The wood’s used naturally. Again it was all sort of *natural*. (Rosie, pre-registered)

Rosie is demonstrating that emotions are indeed socio-spatially articulated and mediated. She fostered a relationship with the *log cabin* that elicited associations with warmth and homeliness. This is one example among many of how natural burial provision is fostered by an emotional relationality of people and their environment; a relationality that, in the main, is deemed to be therapeutic and positive.

### ***Place, Nature and Positive Emotional Expression***

Similarly, there is a commonly held attitude by those who choose woodland burial that it will provide a more positive experience for the bereaved if, and when, they visit. For example, a local resident who attended a funeral at Barton Glebe said a woodland burial would *definitely* provide a positive experience for the bereaved in her opinion, because:

You can touch and hear and feel: it's the leaves and the trunks and the shapes and the fact that everything is *alive* and lush and green and to me, that's very spiritual. If you're anxious or worried about something, to go for a walk in a wood is very therapeutic because of that life and the *energy* that that wood gives off: the light, the colours, the smells, the noises...

The belief that a walk in a wood is *very therapeutic* because it grounds one's emotions, as implied by the lady above, is an example of how a cultural pre-adaptation has fostered the uptake of natural burial in Britain. Cultural associations towards woods, trees and nature are imaginatively appropriated, both implicitly and explicitly, in establishing the value and practice of woodland burial; a theme discussed later in this chapter. For example, Milligan identifies that the perceived therapeutic value of "people-landscape transactions" is predicated upon four cultural framings of 'nature' that foster therapeutic value: nature restores, nature provides a site for reflection and diversion, nature facilitates competence building and nature carries symbols that affirm the culture or self (2007:261-265). The pre-adaptation of woodland's cultural associations is also evident in the following comment by a cemetery manager, who stated that he saw woodland burial sites, as opposed to the cemetery provision he was offering, as an empowering experience for the bereaved:

[Woodland burial is] more cost effective for the public, it's kinder. It's the natural choice to me. It's more friendly and kinder.... Whereas I class the memorial headstone as tat because it's on that headstone that you get that tat....I just think it's personalisation in your face whereas a woodland burial, I think it's more natural, there's more contentment, and when you visit it's like a wood you visited three or four days past – it's just a continuation! You don't get that same kind of grief element, you don't feel like you're in the same boat as everyone else. It kind of makes you more empowered...with a woodland burial you don't have to put your glad rags on to visit: but most of the time you can't anyway, it's wellies and boots or whatever! So it actually brings you down to that kind of level of environment whereas here [the city cemetery] everybody puts their own issues on it [death/burial]. I just think it takes away from the cemetery *feel*.

Note the number of positive 'emotion/feeling' words the funeral director uses in relation to woodland burial: *contentment*, *kinder*, *friendly* and *empowered* for example, and what is this *cemetery feel* he speaks of? Perhaps the *feel* of a place can arise from the *purpose* of a place?

This question concerns the much wider issue of the historical and cultural perception of space and place and how these are socio-culturally conceptualised and engaged with. The multi-purpose utility of natural burial sites is discussed in detail in Chapter 7; nevertheless, it is worth commenting here that the perceived utility of a woodland burial site, I argue, depends upon the perception and ability to distinguish between life and death in such places. Cemeteries, crematoria and graveyards<sup>227</sup> are more exclusively associated with being places of death where a visitor's purpose often centres upon visiting a grave: to *hover there and then go*, as a man who desires a woodland burial identifies. Another man, whose grandmother is buried at Barton Glebe, echoed the same sentiment when he described his mother's visits to his grandfather's grave in a cemetery:

...it's always been about *doing* something. We went to my grandfather's grave and we cleaned the headstone and made sure all the plants were right and that, and then we left. So in some respects it was more a *duty* than a spiritual journey...

At the woodland burial ground however, people sometimes simply come to walk their dog, take a picnic, read a book, relax or are placed in a reflective mood as they walk around the site and observe growth in trees; others are mindful of birdsong and changes in wildflowers. Nevertheless, life is all around. The distinction between places of life and places of death decreases in a woodland burial setting, putting visitors at ease, as a widower speaking of Barton Glebe claimed: *...There's less separation when we die, and that lovely idea that we become part of the earth again.* The separation between life and death in Barton Glebe is lessened therefore in a number of ways: it is a place that offers more than the purpose of grave-visiting, the landscape is replete with 'natural' life, symbolically the corpse constitutes new life in the soil and graves are not necessarily visible to visitors. Janet has pre-registered for a grave space at Barton Glebe and is also alert to new distinctions between life and death offered by woodland burial:

...if people choose to go back [to Barton Glebe] it's a very natural, very *positive* sort of atmosphere. Whereas graveyards, you know, people don't go there! It's a separation. It emphasises the separation between life and

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<sup>227</sup> Churchyards, however, are much more ambiguous because they are also aligned with life: wedding photographs outside the church for example.

death, and it emphasises, to me, even more, that we want to sanitise. Whereas for me, death is part of life...life comes out of something and goes back into it. It seems to me, of what I've read, that although there is a separation in that it's a designated site, it's *not done* in the same way. I mean, me walking along the road there I just think that there's a field with trees – you know, it's a *part* of nature! Unless you knew it's there, you wouldn't think: "Oh! There's a graveyard!", whereas you do with a cemetery. So that distinction isn't quite as strong with woodland burial.

In this sense then, woodland burial offers an alternative to the *cemetery feel*. The primary focus of natural burial sites need not be the grave. Interviewees often referred to the natural landscape as a therapeutic focus that elicited more positive emotions than they imagined a more customary place of burial would:

There's a sense of walking in a meadow amongst the trees and the sun's shining – a *pleasantness* of a *place* rather than lines of *hard rock* and stone with different names etched in them. It's just a softer picture to me than a cemetery...If you go to a graveyard there is only one purpose for you going to a graveyard, but if you go to a woodland burial site you can walk round and enjoy the flowers, the trees and the birds, and you can go for a walk and you can remember and mull over without necessarily thinking: I'm going to visit the grave of so and so. So if she [his wife] did go there ... it would be a more positive experience: more of a place just to *be* rather than *tend* a grave and put flowers on it and all that sort of stuff. You know, the focus is very much different that just going to a place and walking around it, which you do when you go on country walks and enjoy the surroundings – you have time to think. If people *were* to visit [his grave] you'd want to have that sort of experience rather than one where they thought they *had* to come: a) to tend a grave and b) that they'd come to that *specific* spot and *hover* there and then go!

This man's perception of going to a cemetery or graveyard with only one purpose is a cultural one. For him, Barton Glebe is *a softer picture* compared to a cemetery however, not only because of the landscape's 'natural' aesthetic, but because there is some freedom in going to a place one can just *be* rather than fulfilling socio-cultural obligations to *tend a grave and put flowers on it*. Moreover, sovereign status is often granted to 'nature' in natural burial grounds<sup>228</sup> and this facilitates *a more positive experience* for those visiting because death becomes muted for life.

There appears to be an implicit, emic perception of woodland as therapeutic, which demonstrates a deep-seated cultural tendency in England for particular aesthetic

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<sup>228</sup> An argument I present in Chapter 7.

qualities in nature and the landscape to be morally conceived as inspiring positive emotions; often deemed “healthier”<sup>229</sup> and cathartic (cf. Speyer 2006). Preferences for a natural burial setting, as opposed to formal, manicured, serried ranks, often encompass an attitude that woodland burial grounds enable a catharsis in grief suggesting an implicit socio-cultural assumption that trees, in particular, embody therapeutic value and:

...appear to have personal significance for most social groups in British society...Woods and trees are seen as affording particular settings for tranquility and bodily relaxation, where one can escape the perceived stresses of modern life. Trees remove the presence of modernity and provide a setting for intimate social relations, for therapy, for play, for fantasy, for revitalization. (Macnaghten 2004:234)

However, in this research more often trees were not the prime focus for renewal and therapy, rather ‘nature’ and the landscape more generally was.<sup>230</sup> Particularly because of the changing seasons,<sup>231</sup> the landscape of woodland burial and the wildflowers planted upon graves grant a symbolic connection with what is seen in nature to mortality and death’s inevitability, but also with renewal. As the widow below identifies, ‘nature’ *speaks very much of life and death*:

[Barton] is very seasonal. I mean there’s another grave of a person I actually knew there who died earlier this year, and when her grave was fresh and new, it was literally *covered* with flowers because it was in the summertime. It was *gorgeous!* But now all those flowers you see have died and there’s nothing very much there at all now, so I don’t know whether they will also be planting plants that come up every year...[slight pause]...that’s much the best thing to do: not annuals, but perennials.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> This is demonstrated by the cultural notion that going for a walk is good for calming the mind, relaxing and aiding meditation for example. This example of cultural attitude formation has recently received attention by evolutionary psychologists keen to demonstrate and measure our connectedness to nature (taken to be expressed as pro-environment behaviour) in relation to positive emotional expression. See the research of Nisbet *et. al.* (2009) and Mayer *et. al.* (2009). Their research utilises a ‘connectedness to nature’ and ‘nature relatedness’ scale as a measurement but ignores the socio-cultural factors that influence emotions and behaviour or capacity to engage with ‘nature’. So although the concept is interesting, I believe their results are rather limited in application and overly simplistic.

<sup>230</sup> Whereas West (2010:56-57) argues: “It is my experience that where a tree is included as a component of the grave sale, the appeal to grave owners is increased. For many people trees have a romantic connotation.” Since the Arbory Trust do not include a tree as part of the grave sale, the wider natural environment is drawn upon in the imaginations of users and visitors.

<sup>231</sup> For a discussion of the seasons and mortality in relation to Victorian attitudes see Wheeler (1990:51+).

<sup>232</sup> This lady is clearly a keen gardener and it is interesting to note that her designation between annuals and perennials acts as a motif of existence itself. Perennials blossom every year whereas annuals do not

So there's something very...speaks very much of life and death in nature, you know, and that's really rather lovely...It can be very *bleak* there in the wintertime. But that's okay I think: it's the seasons, it really reflects the seasons...For the first two and a half years he [her deceased husband] was there, *I* needed to *do* something. *I needed* and *wanted* to make a garden in memory of him, which is why it was such a shock when I went there last November and it was covered with all these bramble things, and I thought: well, it's not what I wanted! But I think my views are gradually changing so that I can see that the seasons are part of life and death; and they're illustrated at Barton Glebe in a beautiful way!...[pause]...And I don't think I have to do any more...[pause]...I'm glad I did what I did, but I don't have to try to create something myself, because the place itself does that.

Nature's agency can be distressing for some bereaved visitors, especially when nature's growth is seen to be stubborn or unwanted in smothering (and so transforming) an attempt to garden or manicure a grave.<sup>233</sup> The seasons and nature's unwanted growth such as the brambles mentioned above, threaten to mask the identity of the deceased and their locality, often held dear by the recently bereaved. Like the widow speaking of the brambles on her husband's grave and the lack of flowers in winter on her friend's grave, a funeral director also acknowledges the occasional unsettling impact of the seasons on people's grief and expectations of woodland burial:

...the winter it's all *drab* and then there's a change and in the summer and spring it's lifted again: and I think, if you can get that into your mindset, *that's* what it's about! Whereas, I suppose, for a *normal* burial, there's more of continuity because it's manicured, it's looked after, you *can* cheer it up with some flowers on the stone, you can *wash* the stone, er, but with the woodland, *that's* the reality!<sup>234</sup> And the reality of life is like that: you know, sometimes it's down here, and then it rises up and comes back down again. It's like a circle, you know, and for some people, that's what they want! But I think the *true* woodland burial people *know that* and *accept that* – they don't question it – it's where people are of two minds and *then* they have that realisation that “ooh! That's not quite...I was here in June and it was *glorious!* Birds flying around, and the sun and blue skies” and then you've got a thunder storm, or in autumn when all the

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enjoy the same longevity or cyclical flowering. The memory of her husband and her continuing relationship with him is embodied by the perennials she has planted: life and his memory continue.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Slater and Peillon (2009:99) regarding similar nature-society relations in the context of domestic gardens: “gardening labor processes” versus nature's growth.

<sup>234</sup> Notice he is using active verbs in relation to cemetery visiting: it reinforces the comments made by visitors and users of Barton Glebe that in a cemetery one goes a with purpose to *do* something – usually out of a sense of duty - whereas a visit to a woodland burial ground inspires less a sense of duty, rather an opportunity for meditation whilst going for a walk.

leaves are blowing and things are dying, you know, and people “oh! *That’s* not what I had in mind at all!” And then the thought that they’re out there in this bleak land, you know, so, it *is* difficult for *some* people. But, you know, once you’ve made the choice, that’s it!

When the *drab* landscape elicits strong negative emotions for visitors, often they will resort to trying to garden the grave; to intervene with ‘nature’ and produce new life symbolic of continuing memories and the identity of the deceased. As the widow stated:

For the first two and a half years he was there, *I* needed to *do* something. *I* needed and wanted to make a garden in memory of him...But I think my views are gradually changing.

This opinion is shared by a number of the bereaved, but it is not only a reaction to emotions elicited by the seasonal landscape. Not only did the frequency of visits to a grave diminish over time, but so did the importance of the grave’s location and therefore, the felt *need* to garden the grave.<sup>235</sup> This behaviour echoes Hertz’s (1960) observations in the psychological transformation of the bereaved over time. This widow is beginning to comprehend the woodland burial site as a whole rather than just her husband’s grave: a psychological transformation directly reflecting the transformation of the grave. Her husband’s corpse has not only disintegrated but has also been reconstituted and changed in character, a fact reflected in the widow’s changing relationship to the grave and her concept of it. Where once there was a separation of the deceased and the grave following death (marked by the widow’s desire to make a garden upon her husband’s grave in memory of him), now there is a reintegration that permits the widow to comprehend the entire grounds at Barton Glebe and the trees growing there. For those bereaved visitors who are still focused upon a grave and feel a *need* to garden it, it is perhaps because of their liminal status, itself indicative of the corpse’s liminal status. The duration of time permits the corpse to become reintegrated into the soil in its composite elements, idiomatically referred to by the living as *going back to nature*, and so the bereaved become reintegrated and begin to acknowledge the natural burial site as a whole.<sup>236</sup> The psychological

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<sup>235</sup> For examples in municipal cemeteries see Clegg (1989) and Francis *et al.* (2005:56).

<sup>236</sup> Bradbury argues that for contemporary Britons the rite of reincorporation is most likely to be the private interment or scattering of ashes where “the remains of the deceased are ‘let go’ into the domain of the dead.” (1999:139)

transformation in the widow is indicative of the necessity of time to allow her to make the separation between the living and the dead since:

The brute fact of physical death is not enough to consummate death in people's minds: the image of the recently deceased is still part of the system of things of this world, and looses [sic] itself from them only gradually by a series of internal partings. We cannot bring ourselves to consider the deceased as dead straight away: he is too much part of our substance, we have put too much of ourselves into him, and participation in the same social life creates ties which are not to be severed in one day. (Hertz 1960:81-82)

Equally, "the restorative character of living trees and plants" provides "a vehicle for transforming the turbulent emotions of loss into a more fixed hope in renewal and regeneration" (Francis *et al.* 2005:41) that can empower the bereaved in coping with a death.

This is what we get up at the woodland, people saying: "oh! They'd love to be among these trees!" It makes them feel that *life* is continuing and *that* I think is what the *woodland does*: it gives you that feeling of "it's not ended!"...we have such *joy* up there and people say: "isn't this lovely!" And in summer you'll get a dragonfly just flit past and "oh! That's my wife!" or "that was my daughter"... (An administrator for a woodland burial site)

Death is an inevitable and natural part of life. But we tend to treat it like it's unexpected and unfair. So if woodland burial helps to make a connection with nature and the understanding of death's inevitability – the seasons you see in the trees and the leaves falling what have you – if we can connect our own mortality with what we see in nature, then there's a sense that woodland burials can be positive [for mourners]. (A Baptist minister keen to register for a grave space at Barton)

I have not pursued a detailed discussion on the cultural symbolism of trees (Cf. Bloch 1998, Eliade 1985:7-8, Davies 1988, Jones and Cloke 2002, Palmer and Palmer 1997:76-82, Rival 1998) because as this chapter has shown, the focus for those who visit Barton Glebe has more often been on the immediacy of the grave's environment in relation to 'nature', birdsong, insects and plant life, rather than solely trees. Perhaps this is in part because of the influence of time and the subsequent development of Barton Glebe's woodland, as a number of interviewees attended graves or funerals when the site was still in its infancy. Also the Trust does not permit individual trees

upon graves, so the trees are not an immediate focus for grave visits. This demonstrates that there is a difference between the aspects of nature that are emphasised in the marketing by site providers and the expectations of the pre-registered, compared to the aspects of nature emphasised by the bereaved. The latter group tend to focus upon the flowers and wildlife, whereas the former anticipate the central significance of trees; just as the Baptist minister and woodland burial site administrator have done. Nevertheless, as the Baptist minister articulates there are cultural associations being made between trees and nature in relation to death and life: a discussion to which I now briefly turn.

### ***Nature Symbolism and Ontological Security***

Woodland burial sites incorporate distinctly English cultural motifs of nature and landscape<sup>237</sup> derived from particular historical and cultural trajectories of woodland. Cultural motifs of woodland and nature were implicit in the comments made by those who had visited Barton Glebe. Alistair, whose father's ashes are interred at Barton described woodland burial sites as having *a greater pastoral, naturalistic element to them*. He articulates what for many, I suspect, is an unconscious romantic allure in the practice.<sup>238</sup> For example, Beth articulates her concept of a woodland burial site as oppositional to industrialisation; a cultural association she takes emotional comfort from in relation to mortality:

I think it's a *lovely* idea, I really do. Well, it's a sort of dust to dust, ashes to ashes<sup>239</sup> concept isn't it? As I say, it's part of life! People are just part of the whole process of living and dying and it's better than a cemetery really with all those *stone* memorials dotted about the place. So no, I like the idea very much. It's been a positive experience for me, but just because I like the concept of a woodland burial site: it's not industrialised as I said about crematoria in a way. It just seems *natural*. A natural and *fitting* end to someone's life. You just go back to where we've come

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<sup>237</sup> See Porteous 1996:101-103 for an analysis of English landscape tastes.

<sup>238</sup> See Chapter 6 *Romantic Values*, page 154-165.

<sup>239</sup> Steven, whose wife is buried at Barton Glebe, said of woodland burial that he liked *the idea that it really is dust-to-dust*. His comment, along with the one made above, suggests that *dust-to-dust* in the context of woodland burial has changed its meaning from its origins in Christian eschatology: "The 'earth' that returns to the earth is not the sinful son or daughter of Adam and Eve but the natural human body that had once been formed by earthy, natural processes, and now continues those processes through its death" (Davies 2005a:83).

from...it just seems very appropriate and fitting to me, and not egotistical at all.<sup>240</sup> (Beth, whose mother and sister are buried at Barton Glebe)

Beth's comments beg the question as to why she perceives woodland burial to be *a natural and fitting end to someone's life*. Trees (particularly the oak) have strong appeal because they embody and reinforce culturally resonant symbolic notions such as longevity, British liberty (Ackroyd 2002) and national identity,<sup>241</sup> as well as romanticism for nature and the English countryside. Roses,<sup>242</sup> as well as oak trees<sup>243</sup> have historically - and continue to have - explicit English cultural motifs bound up in "discourses of Englishness" (Tolia-Kelly, 2007:175). Humans have always had an intimate relationship with trees that extends to the physical, cultural and spiritual (Deakin 2008) and Jones and Cloke speak of "arbori-culture" (2002:230) to emphasise the social constructions of trees as well as their dynamic materiality.

Nothing can compete with these larger-than-life organisms for signalling the changes in the natural world. They are our barometers of the weather and the changing seasons. We tell the time of year by them. Trees have the capacity to rise to the heavens and to connect us to the sky, to endure, to renew, to bear fruit, and to burn and warm us through winter. (Deakin 2008: xi-xii)<sup>244</sup>

Trees are given the symbolic quality of displaying transgenerational continuity or longevity (Macnaghten 2004:232). The Arbory Trust implicitly articulates this arboreal quality on its website when claiming that by choosing a woodland burial one is creating something for one's grandchildren to enjoy in the future. The life of trees and the lives of people are inextricably bound up because trees manifestly grow within the living memory of a person (Ingold 2000:204). Trees bridge the temporality of the fixed landscape and the transient, fleeting landscape (Ingold 2000:205) by embodying "an intergenerational model of time" (Macnaghten 2004:232). Perhaps

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<sup>240</sup> Her comment raises the question of whether she is implying that cemeteries are "egotistical" and if so, is it because of marked graves?

<sup>241</sup> For historical, comparative analysis of "Sylvan patriotism" see Schama (1996:172).

<sup>242</sup> For comparative, historical detail on the culture of flowers in association with death and funerals refer to Goody (1994[1993]: 283-320). For specific discussion on the changing use and meaning of roses cf. page 293-299 and Chapter 5.

<sup>243</sup> Particularly in naval architecture, the English oak was prized for ship-building. Any British ship built of English oak had its national character reinforced since the character of timber conferred the character of a nation (Schama 1996:164).

<sup>244</sup> Woodland Burial Parks make similar historical claims about woodland's utility. See <http://www.woodlandburialparks.co.uk/About-Us.ice> [Retrieved 23/08/10]

this confers upon trees their powerful agency and salience in their role as memorials to the dead? Trees appear rooted and fixed in a fast paced global world with ever-changing natural and man-made landscapes, and where cycles or routines of time are broken down under modern living.

Material symbolism abounds so that other materials one can find in a woodland burial ground, in addition to trees, are also replete with sociocultural meanings and associations: wild flowers, stone, water, many species of birds, soil and even weather patterns.

Whilst the meanings of things can be arbitrary and open to continuous reinterpretation, the physical properties of materials such as stone, wood, water and fire are such that they resist certain interpretations and understandings and invite others. In such cases, their materiality may be a significant element of their metaphorical associations. In comparison to wood, stone has physical properties of durability, hardness, solidity and weight, the latter implying unity in the physical labour of moving a large stone. In terms of materiality, as opposed to linguistics, the sign is not arbitrary. Stone's durability and enduring nature places it at a different temporal level to the lifetimes of wood or people. Monuments of stone transcend the transience inherent in more perishable materials such as vegetal matter and wood. (Pearson & Ramilisonina, 1998: 310-311)

However, symbolically the "heart of oak" shares many of the metaphorical associations listed above for stone (Schama 1996:164). Wood may be inferior to stone in terms of its material perishability; however, unlike stone, wood and trees are dynamic, producing life from their own decay: mirrored by the corpse in the notion of decomposing *back to nature*. It is this dynamic potential for renewal that captures people's imaginations when they first learn of woodland burial. This is demonstrated by Beth, who was quoted at the beginning of this section stating woodland burial is: *A natural and fitting end to someone's life. You just go back to where we've come from.* By harnessing people's imaginative capabilities, woodland burial (conceptually at least) is another example of humankind's creative attempt to overcome the ontological crisis and ensuing insecurities posed by death. Woodland burial grants a transcendence of death through seeking renewal, solace and therapy in 'nature', just

as some have attempted to do with technoscience (e.g. Celestis and cryonics)<sup>245</sup> and religious eschatology (e.g. heaven and resurrection day), for example. Natural burial provision in Britain, as a newly emergent cultural phenomenon, is more than just accountable to an environmental agenda (as is often implied in the media and marketing of eco-coffins and natural burial grounds); the practice harnesses pre-existing cultural idioms linking ‘nature’ with healing and renewal and therefore offering symbolic transcendence of mortality in which death is not oblivion, but the propagation of new life. The dead continue ‘living’ in memories and the landscape, which is highly therapeutic for the bereaved in coping with their grief. Funeral directors also recognise this quality in natural burial and some are keen to emphasise it as such to their clients:

You know, it’s about *trees* and sustainability and putting something *back* and having the thought that your loved one is part of that continuance you know. The *land* and sustaining that, you know.

Bloch asserts that the success of ritual symbolism lies in the “transformative potential” of the symbol, thus “the symbolic power of trees comes from the fact that they are good substitutes for humans...they both share ‘life’” (1998:40). Rituals “exploit the parallels and connections established by the partly shared processes of humans and non-humans in order to link dramatically the former with the latter” (1998:41).

In the case of woodland burial the deceased can *return to nature* and symbolically obtain a form of immortality. Trees, even when felled or thought dead continue to provide life for other things on their bark, they are ambiguously dead *and* alive (Rival 1998:27), and so the deceased’s corpse is symbolically invested with providing new sources of life from its very decomposition in a woodland burial site. This notion is supported and bolstered by the very use of eco-coffins, which are designed to rapidly decompose back into the soil and not prevent decomposition of the corpse.

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<sup>245</sup> Cutting interpreted the post-cremation services of Celestis as offering “an afterlife journey narrative” (2009:356) that permits transcendence by drawing upon a quintessentially American cultural imaginary of technoscience: “technophilic, commercialised, and inspired by an optimistic frontier-spirit of exploration” (2009:357). Here again we witness how a cultural imaginary of the natural world around us is capitalised and nurtured by the human imagination in securing hope in death.

Rival's (1998) edited volume provides rich ethnographic evidence of arboreal symbolism across cultures for all rites of passage and celebrations of the life course.<sup>246</sup> In the same volume, Bloch identifies a problem with much of the psychological and anthropological literature making cross-cultural or historical comparisons that conclude trees share "life" essence with humans, and therefore have the capacity to act as symbols with transformative capacities. This is because, Bloch argues, scholars neglect to critically analyse the implicit assumption "that all cultures, and therefore all people, have a concept of 'life'" (1998:44). The symbolic representation and cognition of continuities and discontinuities between humans and plants or life and death (non-life) varies from culture to culture and society to society. It is the *intentionality* of things that develops into a concept of life that is universal across cultures according to Bloch, permitting the pervasive symbolic function of plants and trees in rituals seen throughout the world and its history. Moreover, "tree symbols materialise the living process at three levels: that of individuals...communities and social groups, and that of life itself" (Rival 1998:24). Despite being "potent symbols of vitality", trees maintain an ambiguous status as living organisms (Rival 1998:23). Rival argues that it is precisely this ambiguity that imbues trees with great symbolic power<sup>247</sup> for "life travels in them from seed to fruit to seed...[but] Trees do not have a life, they propagate life" (Rival 1998:23). The same could be said for flowers and the idealised role of the corpse in natural burial: they propagate or sustain life. It is this life-giving role for the corpse that offers emotional support to the living, either in facing their mortality or attempting to re-adjust to life in bereavement. The symbolic cycles of life and death culturally symbolised in 'nature' offers hope to the living. The natural symbolism encapsulated in Barton Glebe's landscape offers hope that death is not the end and not out of place in the order of things. This is a great *comfort* and therefore, therapeutic:

It's a comfort! The *continuity* of seeing things go on. You know, it makes *dying* just like leaves falling off a tree. It's all...[pause]...circular...isn't it? (Belinda is registered and her husband is buried at Barton Glebe)

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<sup>246</sup> In the same volume for example see Uchiyama whose ethnographic work concerns the sacred groves of untouchables and the planting of coconut and jack-fruit trees upon the grave in Kerala (South India), as well as Knight's research on Japanese family forestry where tree growing is likened to child rearing and particular trees are planted to mark the life course of a family member as well as in death.

<sup>247</sup> The anthropologist, Victor Turner, identified that the success of a ritual symbol depends on this ability to be ambiguous so it can be "multireferential" (1967:29). In the symbolic context of trees, their life-giving properties mirror that of the corpse decomposing in the earth to *return to nature*.

## **Summary**

This chapter has revealed that there is an overarching attitude by those who support natural burial that it is an emotionally positive act, suggesting that what is considered 'natural' is becoming a new therapeutic means of dealing with death. *Returning back to nature* offers hope and renewal, as well as some solace from ontological insecurities in facing the harsh emotional realities of death by focusing upon all the *life* that nature sustains, evokes and promises. Such framings demonstrate the emotional geography inherent in natural burial's practice and concept, for human emotions and memories are socio-spatially mediated and articulated by the non-human environment of a natural burial site.

Moreover, this research demonstrates that nature provides a symbolically creative means for projecting continuity of memories and identity of the deceased. The ontological security offered by 'nature' resides in the symbolic potential of woodland, flowers and trees especially, to produce life from their own decay. It is this dynamic potential for renewal that captures people's imaginations when they first learn of woodland burial. Natural burial, conceptually at least, is another example of human imaginative creativity in dealing with the changes and insecurities posed by death. Mirroring the cultural qualities bestowed upon wood and trees, the corpse placed in an eco-coffin in a natural burial site symbolically propagates life from its decomposition. This is a deeply alluring and therapeutic notion for the living. Barton Glebe is a place where life is given to death, so that life can ultimately be borne of death again. An ideal that is symbolically replicated and amplified in the toad that lives on Victor's grave, the aim of the Trust to create a *living memorial* woodland and the planting of wild-flowers upon graves.

In this chapter, I also documented how people who visit Barton Glebe or use it as part of their professional services deal with particular emotions. One emotion was fear; fear associated with the bereaved expresses "a sense of uncertainty over what has happened, [and] what will become of the dead" (Davies 2002[1997]:40), for which some took solace from Barton Glebe's consecrated status and others took solace from

*returning to nature.*<sup>248</sup> For the funeral professionals it was a fear invoked by eco-coffins to jeopardise their staging of a funeral. Fear and anxiety lie at the very heart of people's decision-making in opting for woodland burial. Those interviewed would admit to being anxious that they would ultimately lie in a neglected grave, burden their next of kin with grave maintenance and costs, or add to the distress and grief of their survivors; feeling-states that were felt to be diminished by the decision to have a woodland burial. These decision-making factors operate as core values. The following chapter identifies the range of core values operating in natural burial; from those who provide natural burial, to those who use it as part of their professional services and those who choose it in arranging a funeral.

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<sup>248</sup> See Chapter 8.

## Chapter 6

### A Value-laden Practice

The previous chapter focused upon the emotional geography of natural burial. By looking at how emotions are socio-spatially articulated and mediated in natural burial I argued that the associated nature symbolism and non-human environment of Barton Glebe offers hope that death is not the end and not out of place in the order of things, bestowing comfort upon the bereaved and the pre-registered. This observation constitutes one value-laden reason why people are drawn to Barton Glebe. This chapter continues by presenting the range of motives that led people to pre-register or choose Barton Glebe on behalf of the deceased. I have identified recurring categories of values implicit in people's reasoning for supporting Barton Glebe and/or natural burial, viz., environmental, romantic, family, aesthetic, consumer and religious-spiritual values, all derived from interview and fieldwork data. While no two people may draw upon or share all of these values this profile, nevertheless, contributes towards an understanding of the values and moral orders individuals invest in natural burial.

This chapter's empirical evidence supports the claim that "people's experience of a natural burial ground as a place of ceremony, commemoration and communion with the dead goes well beyond its greenness or its aesthetic appeal, and is highly personal" (Cowling 2010:29). Multiple values are conferred upon this practice and motivations are complex (Clayden and Dixon 2007:241), perhaps inevitably making natural burial a contested practice *and* concept, with this chapter concluding, for example, that the auditing of graves by the Trust demonstrates how it attempts to safeguard and assert *its* values invested in its burial provision. Typically, environmental and aesthetic values are most often in conflict, with the former more readily asserted by the Trust and the latter a focus for the bereaved. The tension evident in the extent to which particular values are exercised creates a value-judgement that some natural burial sites are more 'natural' than others. This is partly fostered by a conflict of interest between commercial and ethical/environmental motives for engaging with natural burial.

Despite the fact that those interviewed appear not to share overriding values in common, which could suggest natural burial's broad-based appeal, the values that emerge are highly significant and personal to those holding them as individuals forge connections and make comprehensible interpretations both of the specific natural burial ground and of the general concept. It is in this way that I concur with Davies's claim that in some instances today we are seeing people construct a death-style from the categories of values they used over the course of a lifetime in constructing a meaningful lifestyle, where a retrospective fulfilment of identity (Davies 2005a, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b) can also be achieved by interring or scattering the deceased's remains at Barton Glebe.

It lies beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in discussion on the nature of values and belief as such; however a few points of definition are essential. This chapter refers to 'values' in their sociological sense rather than from a linguistic or economic understanding (see Graeber 2001:1-22). Sociological values are "conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life" (Graeber 2001:1). These conceptions influence people's decisions to engage or not engage with natural burial because of personal values regarding what is proper (idiomatically referred to as *dignified*) and desirable in death and disposal.

Core or "focal" values are "self-justifying in the value system" (Albert 1956:226) and are concepts or ideas "invested with moral charge" (Davies 2006a:15). This is because values socio-culturally represent what is "desirable"; a notion not only concerned with want but also with what is 'good' and 'proper' for ourselves and others (Kluckhohn 1962:289, Graeber 2001, Powers 2000). Therefore values necessitate a process of judgement in creating a hierarchy of worth (see Graeber 2001:1-22). In order for an individual to display "value-congruent behaviour" (Biel and Nilsson 2005:178), a degree of self-awareness is required and this I later argue is evident in the reasoning of those who are pre-registered at Barton Glebe who actively seek integrity between their values and behaviour.

Embodiment theory is particularly concerned with how values are embodied and therefore practised in everyday life (see Csordas 1994). An example of the

embodiment of values is observed in the claim that “many environmentally significant behaviours are matters of personal habit or routine” (Stern 2000:415). Davies (2006a) suggests that the average Briton’s values in death are possibly changing because of sanctioned behaviours in daily life such as household recycling and energy-saving initiatives. This is demonstrated in the reasoning of a man who has stated in his pre-paid funeral plan that he wants a natural burial:

I suppose if you’d have asked me ten years ago I would have chosen a cremation but now, with greater knowledge and interest in carbon footprints and ecosystems and so on, one becomes aware that cremation isn’t as eco-friendly as we might have thought, so that actually burial in a readily compostable coffin and so on is better and to do it in a designated site.

Attempts to account for environmentally significant behaviour led Stern (2000) and his biological science colleagues to develop Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory, which claims values predict beliefs that in turn predict norms for individual pro-environmental behaviour. Though this theory is a bold attempt to understand individual behaviours with regards to values and beliefs, the concepts themselves (‘value’, ‘belief’ and ‘norm’) are never discussed. They are assumed and also assumed to be constant for all human beings. I am critical of the assumption that value, belief and norm are mutually exclusive categories. In daily life this is simply not the case and conflict can arise between different individuals or groups each with their own regimes of value, as this chapter concerning the values aligned with natural burial will demonstrate.

### ***Environmental Values***

I begin with this category of value as it appears the most obvious to align with the practice as any cursory glance over media reports or advertising in the funeral industry reveals.<sup>249</sup> Environmental values are often explicitly aligned with natural burial for the purposes of commercial advantage in which the provision is set apart from other disposal modes to sell a new ‘product’ that enhances a consumer

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<sup>249</sup> Clayden (2003), Harris (2007), Hickman (2009), Shamash (2005), Qureshi (2007)

‘choice’.<sup>250</sup> Further, Owen Jones, the pioneer behind the Arbory Trust, asserts that “environmental issues have captured the imagination more persuasively than eschatology” and criticises the Church for being “predominantly disengaged” from these issues (2008:153). I am not concerned with the relative ‘green’ merits of the practice<sup>251</sup> or the Church of England, but rather, with people’s implicit and explicit environmental values, specifically those who choose to utilise natural burial because of these values.

## Reforestation and nature conservation

...right from the outset the concept was to have it good for wildlife as well as good for people. (Forestry Commission Advisor to the Trust)

Here we have the explicit articulation of the perceived dual-purpose of Barton Glebe, a place to bury the dead and conserve ‘biodiversity’,<sup>252</sup> demonstrating how natural burial incorporates social and scientific agendas (Clayden 2004).

Green agendas demonstrate how a belief in scarce resources can lead to scarce resources attaining value and, in turn, creating or driving new cultural practices and value systems. For example, one reason great value and public spending has been invested in initiatives to re-forest parts of Britain with native deciduous woodland is because of a belief that Britain has inherited a post-industrial deforestation legacy.<sup>253</sup> Clayden argues that natural burial was originally “seen as an opportunity to re-create regionally appropriate native woodland that would enhance the environment and local identity” (2004:70), and be a means of addressing concerns over the United Kingdom’s sparse native woodland cover. Similarly, Hofmeister (2009) argues that the cultural value placed upon ‘wilderness’ has increasingly grown in Europe at the

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<sup>250</sup> See West (2010:203-263) who provides extensive advice on how to market natural burial and suggests 15 promotional messages to convey in advertising, most of them espousing environmental values.

<sup>251</sup> These are complex to ascertain because pro-environmental behaviour and values fall between *impact* and *intent*: “people may act in ways that are proenvironmental in intent but that in fact have little or no positive environmental impact” (Stern 2000:415).

<sup>252</sup> For a review of the often conflicting constructions of value encapsulated in the term ‘biodiversity’ see Cooper (2000).

<sup>253</sup> See Forestry Commission’s Bulletin 112 ‘Creating New Native Woodlands’ by Gordon S. Patterson at:<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/publications.nsf/pubsbycategorynew?Openview&restricttocategory=Bulletin> [Retrieved 15/12/09] and the Tree O’Clock campaign organised by the Woodland Trust: <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/Pages/default.aspx> [Retrieved 17/12/09].

end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century precisely because it has disappeared as a geographical and material phenomenon.

The environmental preservation or enhancement possibilities are perhaps one reason why local authorities were keen to support natural burial provision, offering implementation evidence of ‘sustainable’ development in accordance with Local Agenda 21.<sup>254</sup> Indeed, the perceived fostering of natural habitats for local flora and fauna is advertised as a positive outcome for people utilising natural burial sites, with site providers keen to advertise their environmental credentials. One large, commercial site actively encourages educational nature days for children and extensively lists its biodiversity activities on its website to support the image of an environmentally-friendly mode of burial that fosters biodiversity programmes and protects local habitats.<sup>255</sup>

‘Green’ rhetoric is most explicit in the advertising of natural burial sites and aligned products such as biodegradable coffins and caskets. For the majority of those interviewed in this research however, environmental references were more likely to surface in romantic values expressing *a return to nature* or *giving something back*, albeit with a few notable exceptions. David, for example, has a friend interred at Barton Glebe and has pre-registered himself. He describes himself as being *pretty green without being fanatical about it*:

I don’t like PC greenness and so on, but I do like to be green. I don’t like wasting fuel. I don’t like polluting things. And the idea of woodland being preserved and with graves in it seemed like a very good thing!...a few woodlands and things are not *bad*. I mean England hardly has any now apart from the New Midland wood which they’re now putting up. You know, it’s a good thing to have woodlands around for all sorts of reasons.

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<sup>254</sup> “At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the United Nations agreed that the best starting point for the achievement of sustainable development is at the local level...two thirds of the 2500 action items of Agenda 21 relate to local councils. Each local authority has had to draw up its own Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategy following discussion with its citizens about what they think is important for the area. The principle of sustainable development must form a central part of the strategy.” Cf. [http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Sustainability/Older/Local\\_Agenda21.html](http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Sustainability/Older/Local_Agenda21.html) [Retrieved 21/01/10] Also cf. Green (2003) who raises issues for the management and long-term plans of Britain’s ‘nature reserve burial’ sites (as she refers to them) from the perspective of someone working in the public sector concerned with resource management and exploring the potential of natural burial for meeting the aims of LA21 and central government.

<sup>255</sup> For example, cf. <http://www.woodlandburialparks.co.uk/Our-Surroundings.ice> [Retrieved 21/01/10]

David makes a connection between woodland burial and opportunities for re-forestation. He anticipates that by being buried at a woodland burial site, he is also preserving it. He does not perceive his decomposing corpse to be a source of pollution for the woodland, which was one reason why the Forestry Commission Advisor opted not to bury people amongst trees and so developed the glade format. However, it is not only corpses that are perceived to be sources of pollution but the process of cremation as well.

### **Reduced pollution and energy consumption**

I had always thought cremation would be what I want. But gradually as the years went by...I started thinking about cremation! All this *pollution*: the wood, the coffin, it's all just burnt and added to the toxic waste whatever, not quite, but you know what I mean. (A pre-registered woman)

This woman's exclamation that cremation represents *all this pollution* suggests that for her, cremated remains represent a toxic body rather than a sacred body. For her, having a woodland burial avoids creating *toxic waste* and the body can remain sacred. It is not only those choosing woodland burial who articulate concerns about the toxicity of the cremation process (see Owen Jones 2008, Speyer 2006, West 2005, 2008, 2010). The Government has also implemented nationwide regulations for crematoria through the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) measures adopted under the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999 subject to European Law (Chamberlain 2005, Morrow 2005). Concerns regarding an activity's *impact* upon the environment have filtered down from government rhetoric into individual consciousness in daily life, as the Forestry Commission Advisor to the Trust indicates:

...you know, I like to think that my wife would come and walk the dog in here [Barton Glebe]...much better than traditional town cemeteries and of course most of the rural churchyards are full up nowadays, so yeah, it's all about that getting back to nature experience and the fact that your final impact is lessened and we all think about our carbon footprint nowadays....

Government initiatives for lowering carbon footprints seem to have penetrated the funeral industry as in the introduction of mercury abatement initiatives for crematoria. Highlighting the air-borne emissions from crematoria is capitalised upon in

advertising for seemingly ‘greener’ practices and consumables from within the funeral industry: ‘Let your last footprint be a green one’<sup>TM256</sup> is a salient example of how advertising from within the ‘green’ sector of the funeral industry takes the preoccupation with carbon footprints to the grave in order to sell a product.

The pioneer of natural burial in the UK, Ken West writes retrospectively that:

When I first introduced the concept of woodland burial in Cumbria in 1999 [sic], global warming and carbon footprints had yet to be recognised...As woodland burial evolved to become natural burial, being buried under a tree or wildflowers became, for some, a personal statement in support of the environment and their opposition to the problems of conventional burial and cremation. (2008:104)

In the funeral industry, there is debate over the relative ‘green’ merits of various company products and disposal practices, which ultimately places natural burial providers in opposition to cremation and other burial provision.<sup>257</sup> This is not strictly the case for the Arbory Trust, but for those with a commercial interest in natural burial, securing ‘green’ credentials has commercial advantage. Moreover, the evolution of West’s original idea for natural burial, which was predicated upon a pragmatic decision to create an “alternative” in disposal options, has over time become something else entirely. The development of natural burial nationally has, through the course of social change, fostered a sales pitch in the ‘green’ funeral industry that focuses upon the ideology of ecological sustainability.

An eco-coffin provider invested in research in order to claim on the company homepage “our coffins use less energy at crematoria”<sup>258</sup> and a natural burial provider makes several ‘green’ claims to attract custom in an interactive ‘Essential Guide to Green Funerals’ on its website.<sup>259</sup> Similarly, Green Fuse contemporary funerals are members of the Association of Green Funeral Directors<sup>260</sup> and publish ‘10 tips for a

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<sup>256</sup> Eco Coffins Ltd.

<sup>257</sup> For discussions on the ‘green’ merits of various disposal modes cf. Cowling (2009), Joyce (2009), Owen Jones (2008), Thompson (2002), West (2008, 2010).

<sup>258</sup> Ecocoffins@ <http://www.ecocoffins.com/> [Retrieved 22/01/10]

<sup>259</sup> Native Woodland natural burial sites <http://www.nativewoodland.eu/index.php?page=slideshow-guide> [Retrieved 22/01/10]

<sup>260</sup> The Association intends to implement “a star (or acorn) rating system to encourage healthy competition amongst its members as to their greenness as well as to help show the public which FDs [sic] are genuinely the most environmentally caring and aware.” <http://www.greenfd.org.uk> [Retrieved

green funeral’ in which they encourage potential clients to “make a carbon offset from your estate”, “avoid chipboard veneer coffins” and “choose burial rather than cremation.”<sup>261</sup> The Natural Burial Co-operative’s homepage has links entitled ‘the truth about conventional funerals’ and ‘incineration/cremation’ outlining the negative aspects of formaldehyde, the consumption of non-renewable fossil fuels in cremation as well as listing the perceived detrimental air-borne emissions of cremation upon the environment (Joyce 2009). The Natural Burial Co-operative, an American online Centre for Natural Burial, claims that “the high heat of cremation converts our body’s nutrients into air pollution”<sup>262</sup> and suggests choosing natural burial where “perhaps a molecule from your body will end up in a berry that a bird eats.”<sup>263</sup> Commercial interests attempt to convince and invite us to “use your funeral as a conservation tool”<sup>264</sup> with no mention of religious authorities that have, until the last century, provided the framework through which death and disposal are managed, understood and practised.

However, the environmental views and beliefs expressed by those utilising natural burial provision, as opposed to those with commercial interest in the practice, are often more contiguous with romantic values especially because of the emic connections made between natural burial practice and notions of ‘integrity’ and ‘authenticity’ (Davies 2006b:240). As identified by Stern:

Environmentally beneficial actions may also follow from non-environmental concerns, such as a desire to save money, confirm a sense of personal competence, or preserve time for social relationships. (2000:415)

As this chapter will demonstrate, this is essentially what is happening in the uptake of natural burial. Whilst there are those who engage with natural burial because of perceived environmental benefits, many more do so because of meaningful social

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23/08/10] For information on ‘Membership Criteria and Code of Practice’ cf. <http://www.greenfd.org.uk/code-of-practice.shtml> [Retrieved 23/08/10].

<sup>261</sup> Green Fuse help sheet 4, *10 tips for a green funeral: Make your final statement for a more sustainable world by choosing a green funeral* <http://www.greenfuse.co.uk/pdfs/4-ten-tips-for-a-green-funeral.pdf> [Retrieved 22/01/10]

<sup>262</sup> <http://www.naturalburial.coop/about-natural-burial/incineration-cremation/> [Retrieved 22/01/10]

<sup>263</sup> <http://www.naturalburial.coop/about-natural-burial/conventional-burial/> [Retrieved 22/01/10]

<sup>264</sup> <http://www.naturalburial.coop/> [Retrieved 22/01/10]

relationships, a desire to save money and the allure of the opportunity to be a source of new life; an empowering notion discussed at length in Chapter 8.

### ***Romantic Values***<sup>265</sup>

Veldman's (1994) historical critique of the 'greening of Britain' post 1945 claims that the early Green movement was an example of, and reinforced by, a romantic protest against post-war affluence. Veldman likens the cultural development of the Green movement to the fantasy literature of Tolkien and C. S. Lewis and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which she argues are all examples of post-war romantic protest, inspired by and perpetuating romantic values. Her analysis of this cultural history demonstrates how romantic values are often implicit but central to the British middle classes.

The romantic tradition supplied these protestors with the concepts and criteria they needed; its long history of suspicion of the scientific method, revulsion against the social and cultural by-products of industrialization, and effort to restore humanity's links with the natural world proved easily adaptable for the fight against technology and technocracy. (Veldman 1994:5)

Traces of this romantic tradition keep re-surfacing in idioms and rhetoric in relation to natural burial, therefore, I argue that the British cultural practice and instigation of natural burial is currently<sup>266</sup> also part fostered by middle class romantic values: particularly notions of anti-materialism, a desire to restore moral vigour and authenticity.<sup>267</sup> For example, one man's comment that woodland burial *is about as far away from the industrialisation of death as you can get*, resonates with Veldman's identification of romantic values, as does Alistair's opinion that natural burial grounds have *a greater pastoral, naturalistic element to them*. Veldman concludes that the "romantic critique" of contemporary Britain offers "continuing vitality...amidst changing economic, social, and cultural conditions" (1994:3).

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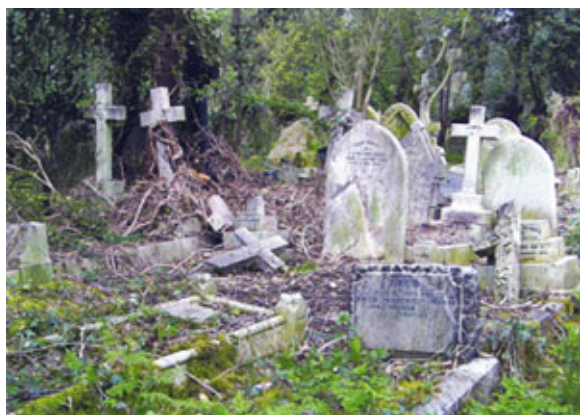
<sup>265</sup> In reference to a world view rather than a period in history or a particular approach in art. For a critical cultural history of romantic values in Britain see Veldman (1994).

<sup>266</sup> "Currently" because as natural burial gains popularity and therefore a wider range of supporters with regards to class and ethnicity for example, the values embedded in the practice are bound to change.

<sup>267</sup> Similarly, Walter and Gittings claim those who are choosing private land or garden burial are "middle or upper class" (2010:168).

Where, only a century ago modernity, industrialisation and the age of progress were the source of moral vigour and enlightenment for elites, so today those with romantic values see sources of erosion in modernity.<sup>268</sup> Consider the changing associations with Victorian cemeteries: for some people, what was originally landscape designed to inspire reflection and encourage recreation is now associated with dilapidated, neglected modernist false hopes. This is a cultural perception that the Natural Death Centre and some natural burial ground providers have been quick to draw upon.

The advertising below suggests that as time passes there is a shift from a wasteland of neglect that reflects in its decay “our own transience”, to a landscape abundant with growth promising continuity, renewal and ultimately symbolic immortality (Lowenthal 1985:175). Where once Victorian values stood proud inscribed in stone, they now topple, neglected in overgrown cemeteries, in which the passage of time not only reveals changes in the landscape but also in values.



*If only the Victorians had thought of  
Woodland Burials!*

*Which of these places would you choose  
as your final resting place?*

Figure 24: Pro-woodland burial advertising  
Source: Copyright held with Woodland Burials<sup>269</sup>

<sup>268</sup> Beck's analysis of Germany's ecological protest argues that advanced industrial society fosters a yearning and search for its antithesis: 'nature' becomes "the bolt-hole of anti-modernism, keeping open to its dissidents (those weary of modernism and convinced anti-modernists alike) the option of modernism as a variant of itself." (1995:39).

<sup>269</sup> These two photos and captions are taken from *About Woodland Burials* [Retrieved 11/11/09] see <http://www.woodlandburials.co.uk/about.html>

Romanticism first came to influence death narratives in the nineteenth century particularly in focusing upon ruins and nature, just as witnessed in the contemporary advertising above. Nineteenth-century grave memorials began to depict motifs that emphasised nature's regenerative, transcendent and cyclical qualities (Tarlow 1999:136-137); notions that constitute a cultural legacy apparent in natural burial's allure in Britain today (Clayden *et al.* 2010), which encapsulates "romantic Rousseauian nature symbolism adapted to an English love of deciduous trees" (Walter and Gittings 2010:177).

### ***Simplicity, no frills and back to nature***

Veldman identifies anti-materialism as an aspect of the romantic critique, which I suggest re-surfaces in the *no fuss, simplicity* ethos and appeal of woodland burial and aligned preference for eco-coffins. However, an alternative, social interpretation of the cultural idiom *no fuss* is prompted by Jupp (1993) in referring to Woodburn's anthropological fieldwork among the Hazda (1982):

...when death involves major social readjustments and the risk of conflict and disorder, death beliefs and practices will be more elaborate and more ritualized than where such adjustments involve no reallocation of authority or of assets but are largely a matter of personal feelings. (Jupp 1993:190 citing Woodburn 1982:206)

So Jupp argues that the modest procedures and requests for simple funerals in contemporary English death practices is indicative of the fact that "death typically takes place in retirement and old age" (1993:190).

Janet's preference for a modest funeral is also connected to a moral judgement about the value of money. She has pre-registered for a grave space at Barton Glebe and alludes to a desire or belief in an existence without money or at least where money is deemed to have little value, for money is not her *priority* in life and morally she believes it should not be for society either:

You know, I'd go for a cardboard coffin because I think that it's eco-friendly because you're not cutting down trees and that sort of thing.<sup>270</sup> I

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<sup>270</sup> The irony here of course is that cardboard originates from wood pulp.

also think, on one level...like everything else...celebrating important moments in our life has become *extortionately* expensive! And to me, these things are *part* of natural life, so to me, it's about simplicity. I don't think that's got to do with money. We need money to live, I'm not saying we don't, but it's not *my* priority in life. I don't think that should be a priority of our society and we need to get *back* to a simple way of living and being that resonates with the *whole* of creation. And I think, that does it [woodland burial] – to a certain extent.

Janet's sentiment resonates deeply with romantic critiques of industrialisation, capitalism and mass production, all of which are understood to oppose and threaten moral values in romantic discourse and thus, threaten those livelihoods and identities constructed within and through romantic thought. By avoiding excesses of commodification by choosing *simplicity* for her burial, she is consciously attempting to restore and/or further relations between herself and the *whole of creation*, as well as with her immediate environment (Dickens 2004:110). Her comment also suggests a sense of belonging that extends to 'society' and 'nature' so that, rather than perceiving her own identity through religion, community, profession and class for example, she locates her belonging within the *whole of creation* (Vandendorpe 2000:29). Identity and belonging are integral in the romantic notion of *returning to nature*.

Those familiar with or considering natural burial often articulate that they *like the idea of being in nature, put back to nature*.<sup>271</sup> Take for example, this exchange between a husband and wife who are considering pre-registering:

**Liz:** Well, I just think it's natural that you go back to the earth. It's how things are: everything is born, lives, dies and they go back to nature. It's like in India, you know, where you scatter your ashes on the Ganges - you just go down the Ganges.

**Peter:** Or you just let the vultures come down.

**Liz:** Yes! Exactly.

A funeral director, who is also a self-employed civil celebrant, also articulates this sentiment of an inevitable but harmonious union between humans and the earth:

There's [sic] so many people conscious of ecology these days. They quite like the idea of becoming part of nature again. Amazingly it's not just young people; it's people you know in their 80s and 90s who feel like

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<sup>271</sup> A woman considering pre-registering with the Trust.

that...But what a wonderful thing! You've become part of the earth that's sustained you. That's a lovely thing. And you cost the ecology of the world very little.

To *become part of the earth that's sustained you* appears to hold great appeal to those who engage with natural burial, but why is this so? Romantic notions of human or society interconnectedness with nature and cycles of life are implicit in desires to be *blended back to nature* and choosing a mode of burial that represents *just going and becoming part of the earth*.<sup>272</sup>

I have no empathy with regimented cemeteries...or *burning* or cremation and having your ashes dissipated *somewhere*...like your own back garden. That doesn't really appeal to me. I think I would probably be *blended back to nature*. If I had my choice I think I'd be staked out naked and be stripped bare to my bones by birds of prey and that sort of thing but unfortunately that's illegal! So I think I'd just like to be buried in a woodland setting and just blend back with nature. (Founder Trustee)

I think also, people would describe it [woodland burial] as minimum fuss, just something simple: the idea of just going and becoming part of the earth, and there's no marker – nothing to show where you've been. It's kind of slipping away quietly without making a fuss. (Humanist celebrant)

I would argue that the appeal of *becoming part of the earth* suggests a desire for *slipping away quietly* from the social world in order to seek 'authenticity' without the *fuss* of obligations, duties and ritual which society demands; to go back to *how things are* as Liz articulated above.<sup>273</sup> To locate one's authentic self in an authentic life is an emic ideal implicit in the desire to *just blend back with nature*. In a questionnaire from an anonymous 83-year-old woman who has registered for a grave space at Barton Glebe, in response to "What appeals to you about woodland burial?" she wrote:

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<sup>272</sup> It could be argued that these sentiments echo Freud's (2003[1940]) death drive; a force that has impetus towards dissolution and dissociation; from organic life back to an inanimate state or return to the organic. Take this sentiment often expressed in relation to natural burial's concept: *We will all die, we are all buried. It's part of what life is. You know, we go back to what we were* articulated by a pre-registered user.

<sup>273</sup> Davies (2002:59) offers a cultural comparison of obligation by citing Ortner's (1978) ethnographic work on Sherpa culture, which argued the ideal of a 'good' life was the absence of debt to another person. Equally, natural burial allows some people to go with less social obligations and debt so that the essence of a good life is achieved, which is to reconnect with values that really matter in life; to *slip away quietly without making a fuss* as the Humanist celebrant identified above.

In the woodland I feel Martin Luther King's words: "all life is interrelated and all men are interdependent." I feel part of the natural world too; far removed from the fast moving, noisy environment which pressures us today. One is able to reconnect with values that really matter in life.

Like Liz and the Founder Trustee, this woman discerns a connection or interdependence between human beings and planet earth. There is also a sense that this woman recoils from the *pressures* of modern life, also shared by another pre-registered woman who felt that in response to *feeling rather tired...I thought how nice to just lie down under the trees*. There appears to be a desire for temporal and/or spatial distance, freedom almost, from perceived social pressures and felt demands. Subsequently, Barton Glebe appears to offer a refuge from daily life, becoming a place of liminality.

The *natural world* that the woman above refers to is not nature *per se*, but projections of a nature that constitute utopias, wish-fulfillments and a yearning for the antithesis of advanced industrial society. Nature becomes a means to discover and foster "self-evident truths" (Beck 1995:53). In this way, the natural world at Barton Glebe can assume a spiritual dimension for those who are bereaved or pre-registered.<sup>274</sup>

...very simple but quite spiritual – very peaceful. I think it looks very gentle and green and just very relaxing, and certainly when I drive past it most days, I always look! It's funny really! And I very seldom see anyone there, so it just looks like a peaceful haven. (Local resident)

It's not like the hustle and bustle of everything around. As soon as you walk through those gates you seem to enter a different world. (Arthur, pre-registered)

Arthur's comment highlights how the *spiritual refreshment* of Barton Glebe is attained through a temporal and spatial separation from daily life and confers a quality upon the landscape that is beyond words and thus the burial site becomes a *peaceful haven*, devoid of the obligations, responsibilities and stresses of day-to-day life.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> I should stress that this is not unique to natural burial, Vandendorpe (2000) argues that the mixing of cremated remains with soil or water permits spiritual rebirth of life from death and survival.

<sup>275</sup> Arthur clearly articulates a separation between Barton Glebe and the usual realms of his daily life. This raises the question whether Barton Glebe is a place of separation or a transition, cf. Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967).

In an anonymous questionnaire an elderly woman stated she had chosen Barton Glebe because she felt *a deep sense of pleasure from the spiritual refreshment it gives...In Barton Glebe one can feel close to life which has gone before, touching us within ourselves: an indefinable something*. Barton Glebe's natural landscape presents an opportunity to give material form to the immaterial qualities of 'life' therefore a means of talking about ineffable qualities of life, death and beyond.

Prendergast *et al.*'s (2006) ethnographic research concerning the ultimate destinations of human cremated remains argued that those who privately dispose of ashes are "drawing upon cultural repertoires" such as "the legacy of nineteenth-century Romantic values" in a contemporary trend "towards the re-enchantment of the everyday world" (2006:895). There is an element of re-enchantment evident in the practice of woodland burial.<sup>276</sup> These dispositions and values are inextricably tied to romantic critiques of science and capitalism's perceived culpability in nineteenth-century industrialism, in which one effect was "the centuries-long nostalgia for rural life in Britain" (Davis 1979:99 citing Williams 1974). David's comment below epitomises this 'British' nostalgia:

I like the idea of leaving my bones in England for a generation, or two or perhaps five or something! I just like the thought of it. It's not quite "some corner of a field that is forever England" but you know, there's something of that. You know, this is my country. (David, bereaved and pre-registered)

David's comment that Barton Glebe is "*not quite some corner of a field that is forever England*" but you know there's something of that is rooted in a socio-historical motif of 'Great' Britain: war patriotism, romantic heroism, the beauty of youth in fighting for the green fields of home encapsulated by Rupert Brooke's (1887-1915) idealistic war poem 'The Soldier.'<sup>277</sup> David's cultural reference reveals how he perceives his own identity, *this is my country*, bound within Barton Glebe, a mode of burial located within *forever England*. King (2009) compared the advertising

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<sup>276</sup> Though as this chapter demonstrates, romantic values and re-enchantment do not explain the whole phenomenon's appeal.

<sup>277</sup> Berberich (2006:207) argues: "the English countryside has been used as the most effective evocation of Englishness: in times of war and peace alike it has been used, by the English as well as by foreigners, to express both nostalgia and hope, a sense of belonging, a yearning for home. The English landscape was held up to the soldiers of both world wars as 'what they were fighting for'.

strategies of the 'green' and 'traditional' funeral markets. One conclusion she drew was that the main theme in the green funeral market advertising focused on "nature," in which:

Suppliers of green funeral products are promoting an air of calm and peacefulness to consumers by placing their products in quintessentially 'British' backgrounds. This also helps to evoke a feeling of localness and, by extension, a continuation of contact between the living relatives and the deceased. (2009:86)

### **Nostalgia:**<sup>278</sup> **One avenue of analysis**

In recalling shared nostalgic sentiments people can evoke continuity between the living and the dead and between past and present by creating a continuous narrative of history. This is what David is doing by referring to 'The Soldier' and what green funeral advertising wants to achieve by utilising *British* visual motifs. Davis's (1979) sociological analysis of nostalgia argues that 'nostalgia' functions in the social world to create a continuity of identity. Shared nostalgic sentiments create collective identity or 'generations' stemming from shared lived experience of the past (e.g. nostalgia shared amongst all who experienced the Blitz for example), because "nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity" (1979:49). Nostalgia acts as a process engendering generation-definition (1979:101).<sup>279</sup> The life cycle, in passing from adolescence to adulthood, or late adulthood to old age for example, can also generate "subjective apprehension" within us by the very fact one has to pass through a transition (1979:53). Therefore by evoking nostalgic sentiments one can, Davis argues, create a buffer against the potential threat of discontinuity in one's identity. In his discussion of nostalgia in old age, Davis argues that "the nostalgia of the elderly acts, politically and historically, to conserve and restore much of value" in the culture concerned (1979:68). A structural-

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<sup>278</sup> 'Nostalgia', the desire "to return home", derived from Greek (*nostos* a return home and *algos* meaning pain) by a Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer, in the late seventeenth century. Hofer generated the notion of nostalgia as a condition of homesickness (Trigg 2006:53, Lowenthal 1985, Relph 1976:41-42). Cf. Davis (1979:1-29) and Trigg (2006 see Chapter 6) regarding the historical shifts in the meaning of nostalgia.

<sup>279</sup> Similarly, Halbwachs's 'autobiographical memory' "is always rooted in other people" reinforced through social bonds between people who have a shared lived experience, resulting in a collective memory integral to historical continuity (1992:24). Halbwachs's 'collective memory' acts as a social process providing historical continuity in identity, just as Davis's (1979) reading of nostalgia and its social process of 'generation' creation does, by forging continuity from the past into the future through shared experience and memory.

functionalist account for the “nostalgic reverie of the old”, Davis claims, would conclude that nostalgia serves “to insulate” older people “to some degree from the severe feelings of rejection and uselessness they would otherwise experience by virtue of their precarious position in the social structure” (1979:68). This function is especially applicable to those societies that privilege youth over seniority and/or thus, do not provide social structures for the elderly. However, Davis’s argument has some utility in accounting for how nostalgia at the end of one’s life serves to bolster a sense of continuity in identity carried from life into death in the inevitable mortal transition:

Nostalgia’s chief aim is to assuage the uncertainties and identity threats engendered by problematic life transitions...in the case of the elderly their nostalgia, rather than being a transient or episodic response to a problematic life situation, tends to be assimilated into a larger and more continuous process of reminiscence and assessment, termed by some gerontologists the Life Review. (1979:69)

### **Remembrance in nature and *giving something back***

The Life Review consolidates the past, present, as well as any unresolved issues, in a process that constructs continuity of identity. The social psychiatrist and psychohistorian, Robert Jay Lifton (1974, 1976), developed the theory of symbolic immortality to explain how and why “healthy individuals seek a sense of life continuity, or immortality, through symbolic means” (Vigilant *et al.* 2003:173). He argues the attainment of this is “an essential requisite for mental health and the realization of a vital and enduring self” in confronting our own inevitable mortality (Vigilant *et al.* 2003:173). Achieving symbolic immortality therefore “is one possible way of assuaging the certainty – and oftentimes fear – of death by transcending the most potent conception of what death signifies, namely the severed connection to the present and future and to the world of the living” (Vigilant 2009:924). Symbolic immortality is inherently a means by which, in facing mortality, human beings can bring “a sense of ontological order to the challenges and uncertainties of life” (Vigilant 2009:925). Lifton was not conflating a need to transcend death with denial but rather arguing that the “need to transcend death...represents a compelling universal urge to maintain an inner sense of continuous symbolic relationship, over

time and space, with the various elements of life” (Lifton 1974:685).<sup>280</sup> Lifton proposed five pathways for humans to achieve symbolic immortality<sup>281</sup> and any individual can pursue one or more of these in seeking to “attain a sense of continuity” (Vigilant 2009:925, Lifton 1974). They are: Biologic, Creative, Religious, Natural and Experiential.

...the pursuit of symbolic immortality gives meaning to our existence by preserving our connection to others in material ways in this life while ensuring our continued symbolic connection to others once we have left this mortal coil. (Vigilant *et al.* 2003:173)

Lifton suggested that the varied ways human beings have created “a sense of deep connection” between themselves and nature allows the perception of self to become “part of a larger bionetwork” under the ‘Natural’ pathway (Vigilant 2009:926). This notion is encapsulated in natural burial advertising that promises *a return to nature* fostering a connection between one’s decomposed body and the potential to give life to a tree for example. A pre-registered man stated in his questionnaire that the reason woodland burial interests him is *because in the natural decomposing process nutrients will be released into the soil to sustain nature and so, I can be sure my body is helping in the future.* This man articulates continuing utility beyond his physical death from his remains and therefore, symbolic immortality. Whereas the lady below anticipates a similar form of reciprocity from gifting herself to *replenish the earth*, but uses emotive language in articulating her understanding of ‘nature’ that goes beyond the material concept to speak of relationships between the human and non-human, suggestive of romantic values and an enchantment with the world. Her rhetoric espouses a belief in natural burial enhancing continuity and embodying a deep connection with the larger natural environment, reflecting key components of Lifton’s natural symbolic immortality theory.

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<sup>280</sup> My reservation with Lifton’s work is his assumption that there is a “universal urge” to secure symbolic immortality. Such a generalisation is typical of the human cognitive sciences preoccupied with elucidating universals in cognitive behaviour, and the death denial concept to which symbolic immortality is aligned, maybe little more than academic “failure to recognize and acknowledge new (or previously marginalized) ways of making sense of mortality.” (Howarth 2007b:265)

<sup>281</sup> Not immortality itself since “even in our unconscious lives we are by no means *convinced* of our own immortality”, rather a “*sense* of immortality” that symbolises one’s “ties” to other human beings, the past, history and future (Lifton 1974:685).

For me, it's about being buried *naturally* with very little protection and being able to be part of nature and nature's lifecycle and for all that transition of nutrients and energy and life and soul, whatever you believe, that is all very free to move around and be reused, re-energised and re-vitalised. Whatever happens to your spirit and your soul that's how I feel. It's about being able to replenish the earth and the tree thing for me is just a symbol of all of that, because trees are marvellous really, they're life really and fresh air and freedom and fullness, and dignity and grace and all of those things. Whereas going through a pair of curtains into an incinerator or being shelved in a rather grotesque gilded coffin, somehow seems a bit false and not so natural.

Lifton's symbolic immortality theory is not only self-evident in this lady's desire to *replenish the earth* and be a part of *nature's lifecycle* but it is also capitalised upon in the marketing of natural burial by appealing to a human desire for continuity by literally promising symbolic immortality as, for example "a place where life goes on".<sup>282</sup> At another natural burial site the purpose of the place is marketed as allowing one to create a "living" memorial, so here not only can one harness Lifton's natural pathway to achieve symbolic immortality but also the biologic mode in which the created memorial acts as a symbol of continued existence in the memories of one's offspring. Additionally, through the planting of a tree upon a grave in the hope of establishing a new woodland, one is also pursuing the creative pathway towards symbolic immortality, in which one is, albeit marginally, part of the anticipated future accomplishment of a reforestation project or nature reserve. One is promised continuity in the landscape<sup>283</sup> as well as a "living memory"<sup>284</sup> in which "the memory

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<sup>282</sup> Colny Wood Burial Park. See <http://greenfinder.co.uk/companies/eco-funerals-green-burials> [retrieved 23/08/10]

Other advertising slogans from within the natural burial sector include: "Your Funeral Footprint" (Anonymous 2009:12, Johnston 2004), "Giving Life Back to Earth", "What could be more beautiful than to become part of nature?" "Completing the Circle of Life" (Retrieved 19/01/10, from *The Centre for Natural Burial* <http://www.naturalburial.coop/>).

Hall's (2009) unpublished dissertation surveyed the rhetoric and layout of 16 natural burial providers' websites. Hall identifies the following themes as common to the sites in their rhetoric and visual advertising: tree planting as an alternative memorial to 'traditional burial', belonging and place evoked through visual landscapes, continuity evoked through the seasons and symbolic landscapes embodying social values. Hall concludes that all the websites implicitly express hope.

<sup>283</sup> For example, an anonymous questionnaire respondent who has pre-registered at Barton Glebe along with his wife confided that "Somehow, we feel our 'presence' will live on in such a place..." Moreover their younger son "was concerned that the environment should be managed to benefit future generations. He died in 1991 before Barton Glebe was established, but his ashes will be interred with whoever is first to die."

<sup>284</sup> These natural burial providers are inadvertently creating and fostering a new cultural concept when they refer to 'living memory'. They are assuming that memory is important and that it can be viewed as 'dead' or in some negative way. Subsequently their provision allows one to foster a positive form of memory in 'living memory'. There is an implied opposition between living memory as dynamic and symbolised by trees, contrasted with 'dead' memory as inert encapsulated by stone memorials.

of a loved one will always be remembered...as the woodland develops and evolves it will turn into a lasting tribute to all who rest here and for all future generations to enjoy.”<sup>285</sup> Again, the notion of gifting one’s self to a project perceived of value for wider society and one’s offspring is alluded to, so that through choosing natural burial one can “leave this world a better place” (West 2008:108).<sup>286</sup>

Although natural burial marketing invariably draws upon the notion of creating a “living memory” and a ‘natural’ place deemed of value for one’s offspring to visit, for those interviewed mention of one’s offspring invariably focused upon kinship obligations dictated by cultural expectations of grave visiting and maintenance.

### ***Family Values***

People’s reasons for choosing natural burial reveal socio-cultural obligations to visit and maintain graves by close kin.<sup>287</sup>

If you bury somebody, someone has to look after the grave – there’s nothing worse than an abandoned grave! (A widow)

When the next of kin or close relatives are geographically dispersed, deciding where one’s final resting place should be and whether one’s choice presents further obligations on close relatives becomes an issue; an issue seemingly circumvented by choosing to have a natural burial:

From a personal point of view, the reason why *I* want to be in a woodland burial site is that my family...they’re not going to have to come and pretty my grave up: they’re not going to have to put flowers...The fact that my sisters don’t have to worry about making sure the grave’s alright or that it’s tidy<sup>288</sup> because I mean, I’ll have the wild-flowers that are *there* when

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<sup>285</sup> ‘Living Memory’ Olney Green Burial

[http://www.olneygreenburial.co.uk/natural\\_living\\_memory.asp](http://www.olneygreenburial.co.uk/natural_living_memory.asp) [Retrieved 19/01/10]

<sup>286</sup> See Chapter 8 for further discussion.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. *Neglected graves* page 168-169 of this chapter.

<sup>288</sup> People still value “tidiness” in natural burial despite the fact that in woodland or natural burial this value expectation is made invisible by not having an obvious grave to tend: neglect is made invisible if the grave is made invisible. However a tidy grave is a microcosm of the social order; dirt meanwhile is, according to Mary Douglas’s (1966) dictum, “matter out of place” disrupting the social order of things. Porteous aligns English landscape traditions for the picturesque and pastoral scenes with “the English tendency to prefer the tidy, neat, and kempt, best exemplified in the rash of best-kept village competitions and the once-ubiquitous signs ‘Keep Britain Tidy’” (1996:101).

it goes to meadow! So I think that's quite nice: that's one of the reasons I *know* I want to go there! Because my parents and my brother are down in Berkshire and my husband's down in Berkshire as well, so it's a nightmare to have to get down there: it's a hell of a journey to make. But obviously at Christmas and times like that, then I do. (A civil celebrant)

...there is *not* the upkeep of a grave. Whereas in a churchyard you do tend to look after the grave...it's not the same. It's not an issue for me whilst I'm alive but when there is no family left erm, there's erm, no one to look after it! I mean there are people who normally look after the churchyard and tidy it up, but I mean, it's not the same. Whereas *here*, there is no longer any worries about looking after the grave. When I'm gone, if the children don't want to come, then they don't *have* to. (Stella: widow and pre-registered)

Stan is in the process of making his funeral arrangements and his views reflect Stella's:

...I didn't want to inflict a burden on the family to keep the place tidy. So a woodland burial site is natural, left to grow *naturally*. So that's *another* reason: people can be buried in an area where they can forget it, forget going and having to look after it all.

A priest for the local parish in which Barton is located also commented on the expectation of grave maintenance and how Barton Glebe ameliorates this concern:

...you know my parents are going to be buried there [Barton Glebe] and part of their thought was...knowing that I'm an unmarried only child – with a woodland burial their remains will be respectfully dealt with but it won't *matter* that there's nobody there to lay flowers on it afterwards because that's not what you do with a woodland burial. So I think that's something that's perhaps not immediately obvious but is important to people.

Perhaps older subscribers to woodland burial articulate a strong expectation upon grave visiting because of a cultural legacy of their heritage and life experience in which they have maintained graves in cemeteries and churchyards. Moreover, there was a tendency for those who are pre-registered or considering pre-registering for a grave space that have children, to perceive grave visiting as burdensome to their offspring, especially if they want to be buried as opposed to cremated. Those without offspring, spouse or siblings tend to fear the possibility of a neglected grave.

Amy is 69 and unmarried with no children. She was attracted to Barton Glebe after attending a friend's funeral there because she perceived it as *ethical* with no *neglected grave*. The perceived lack of a neglected grave appealed because she has no children. After attending her friend's funeral at Barton Glebe she changed her pre-paid funeral plan. Initially:

I went for cremation because I didn't want an unattended grave. But when I heard about Barton, well, flowers can grow over me and I can fertilise the field!"<sup>289</sup> I put down for a cremation you see, because not having any children, I didn't want a neglected grave...And then, eight years ago at the beginning of this week, a friend across the road, her husband died and he had a woodland burial at Barton. One of the first...I was very...[pause]...*taken* with the idea because somewhere like Barton there's no neglected graves so I changed my mind and I thought: I want a woodland burial!

Unlike Amy, Ben has children. He is 62 and has re-married. When I interviewed him he was under going chemotherapy for prostate cancer. As a result he had taken out a pre-paid funeral plan. He sees his pre-arrangements at Barton Glebe as one less obligation his children have to conduct because he feels he has caused *quite enough disturbance as it is*.

I thought I'd caused my family, well, my children quite enough disturbance; what with the divorce and hospitalisation and my sister, when the time comes, will be able to do the funeral arrangements...I thought I'd be cremated...with the scattering of ashes there wouldn't be a site, well, grave to maintain! My children are in diverse parts of the country and could be –certainly not Cambridge – and I thought, well maybe they might want to visit the grave or whatever like some people like to do so I thought I could ask the council if I could get scattered on Parker's Piece...I have an elder daughter and a son – and they were both *abhorred* by the idea of cremation! Both of 'em! And both quite definite. So then that meant it was burial, but burial *where*? So I looked a bit round Cambridge but they all looked, I dunno', stuffed full and crowded! Then Bonny came up and said: well why don't you have a burial like grandma was planning? – though she didn't have it in the end – which was a *green* burial. So that's what they call it isn't it? 'Green burial'? So I said: "Oh well, I'll see what the nearest one to Cambridge is!" Well as the crow flies, it's actually not very far! Just across the M11. Barton Glebe. And it turns out that a) it's administered by the Church of England from the Bishop's house in Ely and b), it's their first site. Well! It didn't take a lot

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<sup>289</sup> Again the implicit notion of continuity sought through gifting one's self to 'nature' becomes apparent. See Chapter 8.

of deciding really! It's convenient and near,<sup>290</sup> my daughter liked a green burial and I thought that was alright and there it is!

Meanwhile, Jane is a French Catholic aged 77. She has re-married and has children and step-children geographically dispersed in England, Italy, France and America.<sup>291</sup> Like Ben, she articulates a sense of not wanting to burden her children, something she feels she has done prior to arranging her funeral:

I was absolutely obsessed with trying to sort things out for them because life hasn't been that easy: you know, there's been quite a lot of commotion and traumatic experience throughout our life, with my divorce and so on.

Despite being Catholic:

I don't like burial. I don't like coffins...[cremation] is quickly done, it's perhaps not very environmentally friendly. I mean if you could be burnt, that would be fine, like they do in India. Besides that, burial is all very well, but if everyone were buried there would be no space. So you have to be dug up and put somewhere else afterwards: it's awful! No, I just don't like the whole system of a coffin. I don't like cremation really either!

Though she is not in favour of cremation or burial, what appealed to Jane about natural burial was the potential invisibility of the graves; especially having offspring in several countries meaning:

...it is very difficult to visit the tombs of the people you loved, and you say: "Oh yes, yes, we'll go and visit", and then you don't because you have to travel miles.

### **Neglected graves**

Jane's past experience of visiting *tombs* makes her mindful of the perceived duty of grave visiting by kin; however, her children and step-children are spread across four

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<sup>290</sup> The importance of locality is discussed on page 171-173, this chapter.

<sup>291</sup> In sociological literature, social fragmentation is stipulated to have begun in earnest during the twentieth century. Western populations, it is often assumed, are highly geographically and socially mobile because kinship patterns changed dramatically in the twentieth century with the rise of single-parent and second-family households (Howarth 2007b:230). However, I am not convinced by these generalizations as there are trends in developing countries for individuals to live abroad in more affluent countries in order to send remittances home for example, complicating the generalisation that western cultures are geographically mobile. I also think the quantifier "western populations" is too vague; how can it be defined?

countries so she does not wish to burden them either with the guilt that they did not *travel miles* or with the demand that they should *travel miles*.<sup>292</sup>

Jupp recorded that one of the “active choices” for cremation is the perceived solution to people’s “fear of neglected graves” (1993:185+). Jupp conducted his research before the first British natural burial ground had opened. I would argue that this solution has now been transferred to natural burial (when known and available to individuals). When pressed, people would often tell me that if they had not known of the Arbory Trust’s provision they would prefer cremation over cemetery burial, others had changed their pre-paid funeral plan from cremation to woodland burial after learning of Barton Glebe.

Woodland burial appears to present a solution for people’s fear of a neglected grave or being a burden to survivors regarding grave visiting or maintenance precisely because the objective of woodland burial at Barton Glebe is to have a ‘natural’, non-maintained grave. Here the implicit cultural assumption that an unattended grave is testimony to a forgotten memory becomes redundant. Wildflower meadows and “trees are true symbols of life and eternity; graves are symbols of death and fading memory” (Rival 1998:9). How subtle it is that in natural burial the grave’s position fades as the trees and wild-flowers mature, thus again, death is sequestered by life and eternity, for what will survive is a tree or flowers rather than a grave. I argue this is the perfect materialisation of symbolic immortality through nature creating continuity from death back into life and where, for some visitors, the tree or wild-flowers have the capacity to do the work of memory.<sup>293</sup> Nevertheless, a non-maintained grave presents an enduring concern for people, perhaps because there is an element of shame associated with a grave that receives no visitors, for it suggests one’s continuity or symbolic immortality ceases in a forgotten memory.

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<sup>292</sup> By way of cultural comparison Tremlett (2007) argues that because Taiwanese “tree burial” has an absence of social markers, because there are no headstones, that this burial mode is indicative of atomization and mobility in contemporary Taiwanese society.

<sup>293</sup> Cf. Chapter 5, planting and memorial behaviours under *Grief and memorialisation*, page 111-118.

## Disputes over disposal preferences

Having written at length about those who feel positive towards woodland burial it is not to say that there is no debate amongst family over a person's expressed preference for this form of burial. Though Barton Glebe may satisfy, indeed overcome a number of fears or criteria in people's decision-making regarding their preferred mode of disposal, there are those for whom their preference is not always shared by kin, most commonly the spouse. This situation is not limited to natural burial as funeral directors know well:

You know, if you get two or three people in a family, there's *always* some degree of disagreement and it's generally because memories *fade* you know: "Oh I remember Dad saying this two Christmases ago, that he wanted cremation" and somebody else will say: "Well, I spoke to dad six months ago and he said burial!" But there's nothing written down! And I think a lot of it is down to the people who're *left* having a battle in their own mind about what is right and what is wrong, and it's generally about people's own prejudices you know: "I can't bear the thought of dad being cremated!" "I can't bear the thought of Dad being in the *ground*!" So there's always that going on [whereby there may be disagreement amongst family over the deceased's mode of disposal] You know, there's a *compromise*. One of the compromises with this woodland thing is that "Yeah, we'll have the wicker coffin but we'll have a cremation as well": so, in a *way*, balancing out the needs of the people left behind. [Area manager of a funeral company]

A local resident described dissonance between her personal preference for woodland burial and her daughter's unfavourable opinion of it as a result of attending the funeral of a friend at Barton Glebe who died in her early twenties. Contention can also exist between spouses but their differences are often reconciled by the expressed disposal preference of *whoever goes first*. Jupp's sociological research on cremation claimed: "The general rule was that marital partners usually chose the same mode of disposal as their partners" (1993:184), but what we do not know is the extent to which this outcome is a process of compromise. Since the Trust accommodates both the interment of ashes as well as whole body burial, those spouses who are divided over their preferences for burial or cremation can find a compromise at Barton Glebe, as both preferences can be accommodated and adjacent burial plots can be pre-purchased. There was also a case where one spouse desired burial in order to erect a memorial in witness to their faith and the other spouse abhorred any memorialisation and so preferred to be cremated and have their ashes scattered. Barton Glebe was the

outcome of compromise. The wife could have a wooden plaque in witness to her faith and the husband could have an unmarked grave.

### **Location**

It is not only dependent kin who factor into people's reasoning for woodland burial, but 'location' too. Location<sup>294</sup> in people's narratives alludes to both a geographical and an emotional sense of location, understood by both a temporal and spatial closeness to 'home' and also as a place of continued memory. The attraction of Barton Glebe being close to home and therefore, one *assumes* potentially more accessible to bereaved visitors, supports a sociological claim that:

...Dedicated burial grounds of whatever nature are conducive to societies that are relatively fixed geographically and stable socially. These may be characterised by unilinear lines of descent whereby the dead are placed in the local graveyard or cemetery, visited by the living and form part of the nexus between the society of the living and the world of the dead. (Howarth 2007b:228)

The "society of the living and the world of the dead" associated with churchyards and cemeteries, also impacts upon the relative demand for natural burial (i.e. the location of a natural burial ground in relation to its proximity to other disposal provision is important), as the Archdeacon who formerly served in the Diocese of Ely explains:

I think having a woodland burial site near a *major* city centre, as Cambridge is, is a *major* advantage. If you had a site in my part of the Diocese, which is the most rural part – I'm talking about my Archdeaconry which tends to be going up to King's Lynn and the Wisbech fenland area, you could easily find a piece of land there, but I *don't* think it would have the same sort of appeal or attraction that it does in Cambridge. For a start, there's just not the size of population that would warrant a site like that unless there was a *very* long term commitment to that site - you know, just because of the geographical spread of the population you might only have two or three funerals a year. And I think in many rural areas the parish church and churchyard – an *ancient* churchyard – is still a powerful magnet for people to be buried in: whether that's burial strictly or whether that's burial of ashes. And again, where the churchyard remains open – and in a lot of my rural parishes the

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<sup>294</sup> See pie chart in Appendix 7 illustrating the reasons why people choose Barton Glebe. Location and landscape were among the most commonly given reasons according to the postal questionnaire responses.

churchyards are remaining open – then *that* is probably going to be attractive for people who have lived in the village and associated with the village for a *long* time. The centre of a population that has *loose* affiliation to parishes, where people don't actually *belong* to an area as such, actually having a burial site *outside* of the city that people can belong to, whichever parish they belong to, is attractive...

Certainly, in visiting the other natural burial sites in Cambridgeshire, Barton Glebe has a good take-up rate by comparison and I often wondered if this was because of the site's easy access from Cambridge.<sup>295</sup> Two other natural burial sites in Cambridgeshire, both privately owned, received less custom and one of these sites barely receives custom during the winter months, which is usually a busy time of year in the funeral industry. One site is situated just outside a small market town with a relatively stable core population in which families can go back some generations, according to the local funeral director. The other natural burial ground is located in the rural countryside, to which one funeral director took me, to illustrate what she understands the situation to be:

...we work in a very rural area. So I think we're quite fortunate in that people then *do* have their local churches and everybody knows everybody still, and so if they want burial then without saying they go to their local churchyard... Lots of the little villages around where we are have all got parish churches and they've all got open churchyards you see. So we don't do that many [woodland burials] and for those reasons I think.

When this funeral director drove me from the village in which she is based, to the privately-owned woodland burial site, she kept reiterating *for many in rural East Anglia, churchyards are still open and glorious. Why then would you opt for a woodland burial site?* This funeral director's understanding is influenced by her clients' rootedness to a community and/or place, but there were people I interviewed who felt no connection to Barton Glebe; they were 'newcomers' with no lived history in the location or they had always lived their life in another region of Cambridgeshire. What bought them to Barton was that it was deemed a *peaceful* and a suitable burial place unavailable to them in the village, town or city where they resided. Some spoke

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<sup>295</sup> A survey of natural burial sites in relation to proximity to alternative provision, the take-up rate at each site, as well as the geographical distance people travel, would provide valuable data that would contextualise natural burials use in relation to alternative disposal modes and locations. A. Clayden's unpublished presentation 'Distribution and Diversity' given at the First National UK Natural Burial Conference, held in Sheffield on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010 stated that natural burial sites offering: a) on-site facilities b) continuity of care and c) high landscape quality were the most popular. The Trust's provision meets these criteria.

of disliking the priest of their local church, others claimed that their local churchyard or cemetery was full or neglected.

A funeral director and the founder of an eco-coffin company both claim natural burial is not a parish-bound practice. They argue that if someone desires a natural burial they will be prepared to travel to another county to have one. The St Albans site in Keysoe certainly has a significant number of graves utilised by people residing outside of Bedfordshire for example.<sup>296</sup> Unfortunately, the burial records maintained by the Arbory Trust do not have a reliable record of where the deceased lived prior to interment, and often Cherry Hinton Hospital was listed, thus giving no indication of prior place of residence. A survey of individual natural burial sites focusing on the geographic spread of those interred and the visitors they receive warrants further research.

## ***Aesthetic Values***

### ***A peaceful, tranquil place***

The location of Barton Glebe is regularly associated with peace and tranquillity:

I just know it still is the place for me!...You know when you just go somewhere and you just *know* like when you go to look at a house or somewhere, you know *that* is the house! You just get those first few seconds: I've never had it before! You know it's been a trauma the last seven months coming to terms with what's happening, but I actually know where I'm going to be at peace! And I'm going to be *resting* and it's *beautiful* and it's *...natural* and it's just *tranquil*! (Rosie has a terminal illness prompting her to pre-register)

A widow commented that *we thought it was very beautiful, we could hear the birds singing and we thought that would be a nice place to be buried*. However, it is not only clients who are attracted to the *tranquil* nature of natural burial, but also the funeral professionals themselves. A civil celebrant describing funerals at St Albans woodland burial ground states:

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<sup>296</sup> See Appendix 12 for St Albans burial statistics.

...it's lovely with that breeze so you can just hear a rustle; it's just a very comforting sound and then of course when the flowers come out it's just lovely! It's just lovely. It's *so* natural, it's like woodland!...You can't really ask to be buried anywhere more peaceful....so tranquil up there....it's not difficult to describe: it's just a beautiful, peaceful place and I can't think of anywhere *better* to be!

These sentiments are inextricably linked to romantic values and cultural associations of nature that allow for a therapeutic construction of nature.<sup>297</sup> Romantic sentiments bestowed upon natural places are evoked in the names of natural burial grounds around the country: 'Greenhaven', 'Eternal Forest', 'Green Lane', 'Oakfield Wood', 'Birdsong', 'Springwood' and 'Acorn Ridge' for example. These names constitute a grammar of discourse inherent in natural burial that draws upon romantic and aesthetic qualities in 'nature'. These names, far from accidental, also constitute the material process of creating a natural burial site's landscape as well as endowing these places with meaning (Creswell 2004:97). To call a natural burial site 'Oakfield Wood' for example, is to creatively conjure up and impart a certain character to the place.

### ***Basic and simple***

A widow told me how her husband would not have wanted a lot of *pomp and ceremony*; had he known about woodland burial before he died she thinks he would have preferred this mode of disposal. The owner of a private woodland burial ground claims: *we don't try to sell it as anything other than what it is you know, which is a natural burial ground: no frills, you know*. Is a lack of *pomp and ceremony* idiomatic of the same sentiment behind *no frills*? Yes and no. If a lack of *ceremony* and *no frills* or fuss is expressed by the bereaved then both expressions allude to a desire for something that is neither too expensive nor replete with the commodities and rituals demanded by consumer society. However, when providers of natural burial speak of *no frills* they are implicitly alluding to a perceived lack of obligation on their part to exchange services in return for custom. In this context *no frills* and *basic* are metaphors for the absence of services, mainly maintenance procedures, in natural burial practice. *No fuss* is therefore a cultural idiom for desiring or providing commodities and services that are low cost and/or low maintenance. As the founder of an eco-coffin company explains: '*No fuss*' is a clever phrase to use because it means

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<sup>297</sup> As discussed in Chapter 7.

*not too expensive. It's a more polite way of talking about money.* Here we see a cultural idiom, *no fuss* embodying subtle variation in meaning dependent on the interests of the speaker. For the owner of a natural burial ground *no fuss* suggests minimal services and grounds maintenance, whilst for the consumer of the site's provision, the same idiom can suggest a purchase that is not too expensive or a desire for minimal memorialisation.<sup>298</sup>

One aligned cultural notion is that *less is more*, often commodified in the marketed concept of 'organic' food, 'downsizing' or 'back to basics' as lifestyle choices. *Less is more* has a material and a spiritual dimension as well.<sup>299</sup> Perhaps for the widow who claims her husband would not have wanted the *pomp and ceremony*, the 'spiritual' aspect of *less is more* operates here, since it is implied that there is a degree of authenticity in negating *pomp and ceremony*. Weber's (1930) correlation between a Protestant ethic of thrift and a denial of consumer excess resonates in comments made in interviews regarding the attempts to keep the funeral *simple* and *no fuss* as well as the mode and place of disposal. Even across the Atlantic the sensibilities of taste in cremation practices "have swung back and forth between austerity and ostentation, the plain and the gaudy" (Prothero 2001:209), despite American cremation historically being rooted in Protestant values (Cutting 2009:367 citing Prothero 2001:209-211). Natural burial appears to appeal to those who wish to see some distance from "ostentation" and "the gaudy" in funerary practice.<sup>300</sup> An understanding also shared by ritual specialists such as the civil celebrant below:

I suppose I see it [woodland burial] as an alternative to the conventional burial but with an eye to ecology...[pause]...without the showiness if you like. With the gravitas of the actual ceremony but with the marking of that spot in a much more natural way....if I wanted to be buried, that's how I'd choose to be buried. I think aesthetically it's more pleasing.

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<sup>298</sup> Part of the power of a cultural idiom lies in its potential for multivocality therefore. See Turner (1967).

<sup>299</sup> See Dickens (2004: 100+) for a discussion on environmental values and anti-commodification, in which he lists farmers' markets, locally created money systems and LETS schemes as pathways of resistance to commodities and consumerism. I would argue that for some natural burial users, natural burial practice should be added to this list.

<sup>300</sup> There is a 'class' issue here too (see Dickens 2004:123+): for *what* we consume and *how* are vital ways in which social classes are identified (Bourdieu 2004[1979]).

## Contemporary sensibilities of taste?

Although not exclusively available or sold for natural burial, eco-coffins are powerfully symbolic of this disposal mode. Like the landscapes utilised for natural burial and the concept itself, eco-coffins are natural, but *not quite*. Eco-coffins, like the concept of nature in natural burial, are ‘natural’, but not in a ‘wild’ malevolent fashion. The coffin and the landscape both rot but look good beforehand. Eco-coffins and Barton Glebe’s woodland are both manufactured. ‘Eco-coffins’ symbolically embody the relativity of ‘natural’ in natural burial practice; thus they participate in that which they represent.

West describes biodegradable coffins as the outcome of “artistic and technical innovation” in the funeral industry so that now, biodegradable coffins are “a funeral icon” extending beyond natural burial (2010:26-27). Anecdotally, it was stated a number of times by funeral professionals that the preference for eco-coffins in the UK is not bound to the practice of natural burial; rather an increasing number of eco-coffins are sold for cremation.<sup>301</sup>

But what I have been aware of is people using more and more eco-coffins but not necessarily in woodland burial!...I think the idea of using different coffins is part of that personalising of funerals, so if people have a connection with nature – which a lot of people do as they’re involved with wildlife trusts or what have you – the idea of using an environmentally friendly coffin is more appealing – and they’re quite attractive as well I think! [A Baptist minister]

Some people don’t actually care whether our coffins are eco-friendly or not, that’s just a bonus, it’s the design they like. And yet other people want something that’s eco-friendly and very simple. (An eco-coffin supplier)

A Humanist celebrant who has conducted numerous natural burials since she started in the industry ten years ago, also thinks eco-coffins are *more appealing*:

I’ve definitely seen an increasing number of eco-coffins at crematoria and I’m all in favour of them: I think they’re lovely! I think they look nicer. Visually they’re more agreeable. But I don’t like cardboard coffins *and* I understand they’re not very ecologically sound!...I think the aesthetics, you know the beauty of them, is also important.

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<sup>301</sup> Any cursory glance at a coffin and casket supplies catalogue provides evidence that the seemingly ‘natural’ and ‘biodegradable’ have been aligned with urns for cremated remains. Green certified suppliers present an array of biodegradable urns for use on land or depositing at sea. <http://www.inthelighturns.com/biodegradable.html> [Retrieved 25/01/10]

Eco-coffins are not aligned solely with natural burial practice perhaps because they encapsulate more than just the materiality of a new cultural practice. Eco-coffins also represent contemporary sensibilities of taste in which the fashion, food and home wares industries have also been moving towards more ‘natural’, organic, ‘fair-trade’ products, packaging and manufacturing processes. Products and materials produced from small-scale, skilled and environmentally-friendly processes sell at a premium, especially products that claim to be handicrafts or originate from a ‘cottage industry’. The same applies to eco-coffins and is epitomised by the family-run Somerset Willow company who advertise their coffins as being “intricately hand woven.”<sup>302</sup>

Moreover, by refusing to consume the funeral industry’s standard coffins, purchasers of eco-coffins can use the coffin to *make a real statement* at the funeral, as one eco-coffin supplier suggested. It is a purchase that is promised to set the buyer or deceased apart from perceived consumer standards and homogeneity.

So the coffin’s not just like a McDonald’s meal: it’s not just the same every time, it’s not just the standard coffin that the funeral director wants to sell you. The fact the family can seize back some control of the whole process, and again it comes back to choice: they can get more choice, take more control and have what they think reflects the person’s life, much more so than just a standard chipboard veneer coffin. And it’s two things working in tandem: people *wanting* more choice and the industry providing *much*, much more choice... our slogan is: ‘let your last footprint be a green one’ in that, yes, it is environmentally beneficial to have an environmentally friendly coffin over a chipboard coffin but the actions of one person doing that isn’t going to have a huge impact – obviously if the masses start doing that, it will have a big impact – but where it *does* carry a lot of weight I think, is that it makes a *real* statement at your own funeral if you choose an environmentally friendly coffin to future generations: you’ve gotta’ look after the world. (An eco-coffin supplier)

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<sup>302</sup> ‘Natural Woven products: environmentally friendly woven coffins’ <http://www.naturalwovencoffins.co.uk/> [Retrieved 25/01/10] Consider also, the bespoke hand-made felt shrouds produced by two felt makers who market themselves as “part of a long tradition, making use of past knowledge but taking it forward into the 21st Century” with their company Bellacouche. They align their products with “life cycle textiles”, “thinking outside the box” and “staying close to nature” <http://www.bellacouche.com/> [Retrieved 25/01/10]. This sensibility of taste and espoused values are arguably class-based. Cf. Bourdieu (2004 [1979])

Also aiding the rising demand for eco-coffins is a general view that they are cheaper than more 'traditional' designs, just as there is a perception that natural burial is cheaper than 'traditional' burial and cremation.

## **Consumer Values**

### **Cost**

In a North American online survey an overwhelming majority of participants (69.2 per cent) thought "conventional burial" would be "significantly less expensive" than the cost of a "green burial", yet when green burial was compared to cremation the respondents were divided with regards to expectations of cost: 32.5 per cent thought they would cost "about the same", 33.7 per cent thought green burial would be "slightly less" and 30.2 per cent thought green burial would be "significantly less expensive" than cremation.<sup>303</sup> Joyce on the other hand asserts the contrary: "green burials confront the high costs of conventional burials" (2009:528). This research cannot offer a conclusive answer to whether natural burial is generally cheaper or more expensive than alternative disposal provision. However this research does show that 'cost' is not only a monetary concept; it is also a concept bound to identity and notions of 'taste'.<sup>304</sup>

I'd want an eco-coffin...I'd want to go *simply!* We're not glittery people, we don't want to be. [Liz is considering pre-registering at Barton Glebe]

Here we have an explicit conflation of consumption preference with the construction of self-identity: a fundamental means through which individual and group identities are created and maintained in modern society (Dickens 2004:143, Bourdieu 2004[1979], Illouz 2009). This woman's desire to go *simply* in seeking lower costs to avoid ostentation encapsulates anti-materialistic, romantic values. By aligning material thrift to a subjective self-appraisal, an implicit alignment between 'self identity', desired mode of disposal and consumption are being inextricably woven together in a reflexive evaluation of self. Liz's comment represents an attempt to confer continuity *and* integrity from her life values onto death in articulating a desired

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<sup>303</sup> These unpublished statistics are reproduced with permission from The Natural Burial Co-operative, Centre for Natural Burial <http://naturalburial.coop> [Retrieved 22/05/08].

<sup>304</sup> For example, Kearl (2009:877-78) claims "affluent Americans were more likely to choose less expensive funerary options...than those of the working class."

'death-style' (Davies 2005a, Green 2008), facilitated and encouraged through media and advertising.<sup>305</sup>

For others, a desire for a cardboard coffin represents political, consumer resistance (Dickens 2004) to a value judgement that the funeral industry has wrongly commodified a ritual act:

...[woodland burial] *should* be accessible because the whole process of dying is expensive...it's horrendous to think of that and I know the undertaker has to make a living, but in the end I just want a cardboard coffin, because I mean what's the point? And anyway, I would never want one of those big, brass-handle things. It doesn't disintegrate and I think that's important. I think it's going to be expensive anyway, even with a cardboard coffin! I hate all that! I don't mind giving money if I have it, but what do people with no money do? It's just horrendous that for some people they have to think about all that [money] before they die you know! (Jane is pre-registered and has a friend interred at Barton Glebe)

Speaking on behalf of his industry, an independent funeral director and civil celebrant offered his opinion on consumer expectations of cardboard coffins:

When people come in wanting a cardboard coffin, they always want one because they think it's cheap, but when they come in they get absolutely blown away by the prices. I mean they retail for about two to three hundred pounds with our normal mark-ups, which is a lot of money for people to pay. I mean I can buy a veneer for a *fraction* of that cost and sell it for a reasonable mark-up and people are quite happy to pay that, because they're getting something solid for their money.

An eco-coffin supplier rightly identifies the conflicting perceptions of consumers who want *something solid for their money*:

We try and price ourselves so that we're comparable to chipboard veneer. A lot of it is perception and the fact that it's cardboard means a lot of people think it's a supermarket box! A lot of what we try to do in our market is to educate because a cardboard coffin is as expensive, if not more expensive to produce because it takes more time. But there's still the perception that a chipboard veneer is a more premium product than a cardboard coffin. So that's one of the challenges we've got.

Below is an exchange between a married couple who have pre-registered at Barton Glebe:

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<sup>305</sup> For example, see Qureshi (2007) in the Guardian Observer.

**Caroline:** It's simple...

**David:** It's probably as cheap as any.

**Caroline:** Although, they do say that cardboard coffins are more, *as* expensive as wooden ones I've read! Whether that's true I don't know.

Yes! Erm....it's...*natural*

Here again, one can identify the perception of a *simple* product or practice with lower cost and being *natural*. Time and again one can observe the conflation of “simplicity” with “natural” in natural burial advertising and the attitudes of users. “Simplicity” and “natural” are loaded constructions within romantic values, capitalised upon in ‘ethical’ or ‘green’ consumerism.

### **Ethical consumerism and ‘natural choice’**

There is a dazzling array of consumer choice, even in the context of funerals. Choice is viewed positively by the Arbory Trust Administrator who claims:

...People have become more aware of their choices. We've found that they are therefore not afraid to take them. And this new style [woodland burial] is therapeutic and it is lovely people have a choice and are freer to take them [in funerals].

Consumer choice and preference for ‘green consumption’ demonstrate how individuals (as consumers) can act upon felt responsibility towards themselves and the planet (ethical consumerism), whilst also feeling empowered in engaging with articulated environmental risks (Connolly and Prothero 2008). Green consumption is often seen as a “politics of choice” that can “unambiguously form part of a strategy for environmental reform” (Connolly and Prothero 2008:117, Dickens 2004). However, as this research demonstrates, though there is an element of moral responsibility implicit in people's decision-making in which environmental values *can* be expressed through market-based processes such as consumption patterns, natural burial is not exclusively the domain of green consumption choices; there are many other consumer attitudes evident in this practice. In addition to providing a “responsible dignified choice” (Owen Jones 2008: 156), natural burial can also constitute a consumer ‘experience’.

The “hypersensuality of the contemporary marketplace” (Howes 2005:290), tied to the ‘experience economy’<sup>306</sup> (Pine II and Gilmore 1998) commodifies ‘nature’, particularly ‘woodland’, to offer a funeral experience deemed ethical, therapeutic, authentic and personal in creating a statement about the deceased and their integrity to environmental issues (and by extension, humanity). Natural burial therefore becomes much more than simply “an *alternative* to the municipal cemeteries which are soulless”, as a founder of the Arbory Trust originally conceived their aim.

The “sensual logic of late capitalism” operates through *hyperesthesia* (Howes 2005). The rampant branding of the senses and ‘experiences’ being sold as, and appealing to, a composite of the five senses, makes consuming the ‘natural’ appealing. A ‘natural’ product is akin to an authentic product, and by extension one engages in this consumption through the ‘authentic’ experience in making a statement about the order of things and/or the way they should be:

Despite its variety of uses and its potential for misunderstanding, the concept of nature seems to do its work by pointing to a quality of givenness, whether in the way things are, the way they used to be, or the way they ought to be. (Habgood 2002:141)

Natural burial may once have been conceived as an ‘alternative’ choice in burial provision but, after almost 20 years since the first site was established it is equally about seeking a spiritual or authentic experience as an ethical consumer, for natural burial is also an example of consumer re-valorization to “the endless innovation in the ‘senses’ (meanings and uses) of things” (Howes 2005:298), especially ‘nature’.

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<sup>306</sup> Pine II and Gilmore (1998) demonstrate how businesses in ‘late capitalism’ are “staging experiences” as commodities. A few private companies offering exclusive woodland burial and funeral ceremonies on their sites epitomise how the site of “consumption, rather than production or exchange” is where money is to be made (1998:299). By commodifying ‘woodland’ and ‘experiences’ in a Disneyland-like fashion, these companies can charge high fees for their “natural and more meaningful alternative to traditional burial and cremation” (<http://www.woodlandburialparks.co.uk/> [Retrieved 28/01/10]). I would argue that natural burial is an example from within the funeral industry of a themed, memorable experience engaging all five senses to be sold in the late capitalist market-place. Natural burial is an outcome of colonising our imaginations through ‘Disneyfying’ the environment (see Dickens 2004:138+), and cf. Sanders (2009) for a discussion of commodifying funerals as “events” and “amusement”.

## ***Religious - Spiritual Values***

Some of those who had pre-registered had actively chosen Barton Glebe because it was consecrated and endorsed by the Church of England; a few people expressed how the Trust's concept bore out their faith, so they did not see woodland burial as compromising it,<sup>307</sup> and others had interred a spouse at Barton Glebe because it expressed a continuity with the deceased's faith and/or life in the Church.

The environment is important and I try to get to concern groups concerned with various areas of social responsibility. One of the things I do in my retirement is I convene the Church and Society forum which is part of my church – the United Reformed Church, so I do consider social issues and social responsibility as being a crucial expression of part of one's faith I suppose. (Jim is pre-registered and a member of the United Reformed Church)

For those who identified themselves as having no faith, all felt that they were not prevented from utilising Barton Glebe simply because it was a consecrated Church of England affiliated site. The priest who serves Barton parish believes this is because natural burial represents:

... a circle of life kind of thing that even if people are not religious they can identify with our kinship to the natural world. We are part of the natural world and to go back to it in that way [natural burial] seems appropriate.

For those with a conviction of faith, God's creation is often associated with natural burial.<sup>308</sup>

[Woodland burial] probably reinforces my faith really, because you're very close to *creation*. I dunno! But I have no problem with woodland burial: none whatsoever...every time I go I think "Oh! This is lovely!" When I see the flowers I think it's lovely and it's *so* peaceful. (Stella is pre-registered and her husband's ashes are interred at Barton.)

For *me*...[pause]...choosing a *woodland* burial site as opposed to...erm, a *traditional* cemetery, was *really* about the fact that this is much more

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<sup>307</sup> Of those interviewed, the faiths represented were Anglican (including First, Second and Third order Franciscans), Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, Salvation Army, Quaker, Unitarian, 'Pagan', Humanist and Atheist.

<sup>308</sup> Davies (2008b:26) predicted that this would be so: "The theological tendency, where it exists, is likely to relate more to the earth than to the cross...to engage the doctrine of creation than of salvation and to envisage salvation in terms of the natural processes of life and death."

in...[pause]...in contact with the whole notion that we're part of the whole of creation you know. It's *not* about these great monoliths and what goes on after. It's much more simple...[pause]... it, it, it fits in with my understanding that we are one with the whole of creation. You know, we go *back* into that oneness with creation again as far as I'm concerned. (Janet is pre-registered and was in a religious order for twenty years overseas)

These comments regarding creation and a kinship extended to the non-human supports Owen Jones's suggestion that Barton Glebe's woodland plan, with open glades managed for the benefit of local flora and fauna, enables people to feel "a little closer to our imaginings of heaven (as a restored Eden) than a graveyard or a municipal cemetery" (2008:153). 'Nature' has become a locus through which some people choose to project their continuity and express hope. It is not that there is "a renewed sense of the sacred located within the natural world" (Owen Jones 2008:156), but that natural burial is a dynamic means of framing symbolic immortality and revitalising hope, where once hope was predominantly expressed through a religious narrative. 'Nature' proves to be a dynamic symbol because people's understandings of life and death are encapsulated in the transience of flowers, the effects of the seasons upon growth and the vitality of an animated non-human world.

Barton Glebe's provision is understood to allow people of all faiths and none to *identify with our kinship to the natural world...to go back to it in that way seems appropriate* and permits being *very close to creation*, for example. These sentiments can be understood within a diversity of religious traditions and none and this is why I believe religious values were not commonly articulated. They did not need to be, since religious values are not threatened, nor explicitly fostered through natural burial practice.<sup>309</sup> However, the 'natural' world aligns with religious-spiritual values so that people can perceive 'truths' of their faith or spirituality being validated in the 'natural' order. Subsequently people are able to make claims that natural burial *roots the community in what really matters*.

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<sup>309</sup> Similarly, Jupp's research on cremation versus burial preference concluded that religion played a minimal role: "Religious preferences were rare" (1993:179) in people's decision-making.

## ***Concluding Thoughts***

### **Value coherence and ‘death-style’**

As already mentioned in relation to choices made in death and disposal, Davies (2005a, 2006b) speculated upon the extent to which contemporary life demonstrates a continuation of ‘lifestyle’ into ‘death-style’ asking whether the values of daily life influence more abstract values that, in turn, motivate changes in life-cycle rites. Does environmental awareness, which galvanises eco-lifestyles, lead “to a congruent concern for eco-death-styles” (Johnston 2004) for example?

Giddens identifies a ‘lifestyle’ as “a cluster of habits and orientations” (1995[1991]:82) that reinforces our individual sense of ontological security, habits, values and behaviours that offer a cohesive narrative of meaning-making about our lives. ‘High modernity’ Giddens argues, presents human beings with a “plurality of choices” (1995[1991]:82) in which we are, he argues, less able to draw upon more singular sets of dispositions that came with the orders of ‘tradition’: “In a world of alternative lifestyle options, strategic *life-planning* becomes of special importance” (Giddens 1995[1991]:85). This is no less true in death. Some interviewees were considering their mode and place of disposal and taking steps to ensure their preferences were met through funeral planning and pre-payment plans, which I interpret as a demonstration of Giddens’s “life-planning”. Rosie, for example, chose Barton Glebe because of its proximity to her beloved parrot sanctuary.<sup>310</sup> Rosie wants her funeral *to be a celebration of her life with animals and birds* and she has chosen a cardboard coffin *because the birds like to play with cardboard boxes!* I argue that Rosie’s reasoning demonstrates she is engaging in “the reflexive constitution of self-identity” (Giddens 1995[1991]:85&86); as are Arthur and Ivy below, who explicitly construct a continuity between their lifestyle and desired death-style in the course of their life-planning by pre-registering with the Arbory Trust. Barton Glebe was the *natural progression* because of a perceived self-identity and lifestyle orientated around *country life*:

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<sup>310</sup> West asserts that: “the burial of pets is a potential marketing niche for natural burial sites” and mentions a site in Cornwall that already offers such a service (2010:66, see also Jamieson 2010). Limited natural burial grounds and pet cemeteries offer this option, which Rosie would have chosen had she known about it.

We're both into country life as you can imagine living here because go out of our front door due north, and there's nothing for five miles! We're both very keen on birds, as you can tell from all those bird feeders and the wildlife what have you, so it seemed a natural progression to go and be buried in a wood!

Individuals not only seek continuity for themselves through a reflexive constitution of identity in lifestyle and death-style choices, but also on behalf of the deceased when deciding their mode of disposal and place of memory (if the deceased did not express a preference when alive). This is what Davies (2005a) refers to as the retrospective fulfilment of identity facilitated by contemporary death rites in Britain. For example:

He'd be happy with Barton. He *delighted* in things. Victor had this sense of God abundantly pouring forth in things. And I feel Uttoxeter cemetery with the kerb stones, Victor would've *hated* to go like that. I feel the idea of a toad living on his grave and all these little insects buzzing and crawling around, you see, I think Victor would've *loved that!*

This widow reflexively articulates a continuity between the place and mode of burial with her husband's personality and life values. The fact that *he delighted in things* and *saw God abundantly pouring forth in things* is materialised in the living, natural world of Barton Glebe and encapsulated in the toad and insects. By placing his remains in Barton Glebe she retrospectively fulfils Victor's identity and creates continuity between his lifestyle and death-style (Davies 2005a, 2006b). Similarly Andy, who buried his grandmother at Barton Glebe and presided over her funeral service, demonstrates how people seek a 'retrospective fulfilment of identity' (Davies 2005a) in which a person's identity values held in life are honoured in death. This can be expressed in the choice of disposal mode, the extent to which a funeral is religiously framed or not, the location of interment, aesthetic preferences in funeral consumables and conceptions of continuity beyond the grave. In Andy's opinion, the retrospective fulfilment of his grandmother's identity is encapsulated in the concept of woodland burial, which was *suitable* for her:

...once we'd got the concept of a woodland burial, *that* seemed incredibly fitting because my grandmother's life in the last few years involved going out around the garden putting down chickens eggs for the foxes, nuts for the squirrels, feeding the birds, *watching* the animals coming down to the feeding stations, and...*gardening*...nature...she was happiest when she

was out in the middle of nowhere... So, it just seemed ideal: we could bury her in a way that was suitable to her...

Andy and the widow articulate a “post-mortem identity” authentic to a life lived through life in nature (Davies 2006b) and thus are able to discern a continuity of identity for the deceased. Again, we observe how symbolic immortality is sought or fulfilled by nature; but that is not to say it is necessarily secular and/or replacing a religiously-informed eschatology (cf. Davies 2005a), for the widow’s husband spent much of his life in a monastic order.

### **The social coherence of values**

The cultural values invested in and associated with natural burial revealed in this chapter, though diverse, are all united in the fact that they exist and circulate within a web of social relations. The various core values are indicative of an individual’s social relations and with which they perceive to hold social kinship. The environmental values that informed preferences for Barton Glebe arose from individuals’ perceived interdependence, connection with or responsibility towards the planet and subsequent generations of human beings. Romantic values, I have tried to show, hold social relationships in a tension because society is perceived to confer obligations and foster materialistic relationships. There is an implicit desire to root *community in what really matters* and to improve social relationships by way of getting to the *true things of life*. Family values however, were expressly concerned with reducing or overcoming a sense of burden upon surviving close kin, be that through socio-cultural expectations of funeral planning, grave maintenance or visiting. Aesthetic values are also conferred and exist within a web of social relationships, for what is considered ‘good taste’ is influenced by the web of social relationships within which one is situated. Similarly, consumer values are inherently social for what one consumes and how they do so, socially identifies them (see Bourdieu 2004 [1979]). Finally, the religious-spiritual values informing preferences for Barton Glebe reflect the social relationships one maintains with a religious institution but also a person’s valued relationship to God. Sociologically, all the core values identified in this chapter can only exist, and therefore be brought to bear upon natural burial preference, because they are established and perpetuated by social relations.

Though diverse, the values invested in the practice are the means through which natural burial becomes defined and set apart from other disposal modes and burial places. The table below is an attempt to identify certain key conceptual binary oppositions that are implicit in the values identified in this chapter. These binary oppositions are themselves values, as one aspect is deemed of higher esteem or worth than the other. Schematically, this table represents the complexity of cultural values invested in natural burial and warrants further research where I suggest romantic values are highly significant. This table of ranking also represents an attempt to delineate the territory of natural burial, to therefore define what constitutes the practice and concept. This research suggests that conceptually, natural burial is often associated with environmental values and attracts pre-registered users for a number of romantic reasons. Yet in practice, as this chapter has identified, natural burial is equally about family and consumer values.

Figure 25: A table of symbolic and material expressions of values invested in the concept and/or practice of natural burial

<b>Positively Valued</b>		<b>Negatively Valued</b>
Natural burial <sup>311</sup>	Elements	Cemeteries, crematoria
Life		Death
Trees, wild flowers, animals		Headstone, non-biodegradable plaque
Eco-coffin, shroud		Chipboard coffin, plastic urn
Wild-flowers		Cut flowers, plastic flowers
Animals, landscape		Stone or plastic memorials, personal ephemera
Nature		Techno-science, modernity
Glades, randomness		Plots, serried ranks, rows
Non-maintained grave - obligation free		Maintained grave - obligation

<sup>311</sup> I cannot confidently place private ash scattering or churchyards in this dichotomy as churchyards are often romantically valued whilst ash scattering is valued for a variety of reasons.

Egalitarian	Belief or	Hierarchical
Life and death combined		Life and death separated
Personal, unique	Emotions	Anticipated, formulaic
Allurement		Non-place
Authentic		Contrived
Facilitates positive emotions		Facilitates negative emotions
Anti-consumer		Consumerist
Simplicity		Ostentation
Cathartic, positive		Isolating, soulless, negative
Tasteful, modest		Tatty, brash
Expressive, creative		Conformist, restrictive
Peaceful, secure		Disruptive, insecure
Regenerative		Sterile, polluting
Multi-purpose utility		Sole-purpose utility
Humanist, holist		Materialist, anthro-centric
Natural death		Sanitised death
Going back, cyclical		Moving on, linear

### **The threat of compromised values**

Although the *emotions* and *elements* of these binary oppositions constitute symbolic or material expressions of particular values that are energised through the concept and practice of natural burial that is not to say that all those individuals supporting Barton Glebe will identify with the complete list of material and emotional expressions given above.

Natural burial is, to some degree, a contested practice because those establishing the sites and those who choose this provision bring to it an array of values. Values become acutely contested when the values of subordinate groups are encompassed in

the collective concerns of a larger, more inclusive group. This is why the Arbory Trust have found that as the number of burials or reservations increases annually, they have had to get 'tougher' on permitting visitors to conduct activities based on their personally held values, which conflict with the Trust's. Benches can no longer be erected, plastic items are more thoroughly removed from graves, and trees are no longer allocated to individuals under sponsorship. The Trust has had to define its memorialisation boundaries as its provision is increasingly utilised and as a result, sometimes subordinate other people's values invested in the practice. For the Trust, environmental values, which dictate its aesthetic values, are superior to all other values in defining their provision. In some ways these gradual changes in management were inevitable as the Trust's success grew, but there will always be others for whom these rules and regulations are questionable.<sup>312</sup>

One means to safeguard and ensure the integrity of a set of core values is by creating and maintaining a boundary around them, and this the Trust pursues by asserting rules and regulations as prohibition and avoidance strategies. For example, assertion of boundary maintenance by the Trust in order to protect its core values is explicit in the July 2008 Newsletter:

Now that we have completed the clearance of all ornaments and other non-permitted items from graves, we must turn our attention more particularly to the plants on the site. We have a Wild Flower Guide<sup>313</sup> to indicate what is permitted, and we will now be beginning a thorough audit of all plants to ensure that what is planted is in keeping with the natural woodland appearance we are creating, and is in line with the Guide...As with the ornament clearance, we do hope you will be understanding if you find that plants are removed from a family grave. It is not a process intended to cause additional grief, but it is intended to ensure that the Rules are properly enforced again for the benefit of all...Although it is

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<sup>312</sup> Cf. Kathy's comment for example in Chapter 5, page 119-120.

<sup>313</sup> When considering the significance of flowers in gift-giving Goody claims that "wild flowers are essentially the play things of children", domesticated flowers being for adults (1994[1993]:292). Here we have a distinction between the wild and the cultivated/domesticated; distinctions that fall under a hierarchy in gift-giving so that the most prized is the purchased flower, followed by the cut garden flower and finally, the wild flower (Goody 1994[1993]:312). So it is interesting that upon first glance woodland burial practice reifies the 'wild' over the 'garden' or cut flower. Perhaps the value attached to this hierarchy is itself changing? Wild flowers are increasingly rare and some are protected species. Perhaps this confers their changing value in contemporary Britain, replacing what was once the luxury value of cut flowers? However, even if the value status of wild flowers is changing I suspect there will still be socio-cultural groups in Britain who will instinctively feel that to mark a grave with wild flowers is simply disrespectful to the deceased.

somewhat early to be thinking about Christmas, this is our opportunity to mention the adornment of graves at that time with seasonal decorations...Tempting as it may be to bring a little tinsel, balloons, baubles, or even a small tree, they are not appropriate, and will be removed.

It is hardly surprising that the ground staff at Barton Glebe are preoccupied with the removal of polluted objects because they threaten the purity of the values enshrined in the Trust's provision. Similarly, many of those who have pre-registered for a grave space at Barton Glebe speak of headstones and plastic grave items as being *abominations*, *monstrosities* or *tat* because these objects embody cultural values and practices in death and disposal that they do not wish to identify with. It is at the point where different hierarchies or moral orderings confront each other over shared territory that boundary-maintenance becomes crucial, often resulting in disputes amongst groups with different values. In relation to Barton Glebe this explains firstly, the emails from individuals who disputed the Trust's decisions on what could or could not be removed from graves, arising from perceived threatened values, and secondly, the feelings of disappointment expressed by the bereaved that funeral directors try to avoid by preparing clients' expectations of natural burial in advance of a funeral.<sup>314</sup>

As the Trust's newsletter demonstrates, "ethics and aesthetics are not always reconcilable" in natural burial (Cowling 2010:24); an issue that surfaced time and again in natural burial providers', users' and affiliated professionals' comments:

...there's a *balance* between *true* woodland burials – people who *want* all that eco – but I think it's half and half because some people *want* it, but then they add on things that are not *compatible* with the eco thing (Area manager of a funeral company)

The only *true* woodland site I have seen is [redacted] [named natural burial site]! And it's a *managed* woodland, so they're looking after the trees as much as they're looking after the graves. And they're *very, very strict* on what you can have there, even in terms of the flowers you can have in the floral tributes. But rightly so as they're keeping it as a managed woodland. Maybe you can call yourself a woodland burial site if your *vision* is that

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<sup>314</sup> Discussed in Chapter 5, page 126- 131, under *Managing disappointment*.

it'll be a woodland! But I know there are those that *are* woodland sites, those that'll *become* woodland sites and then there are those that I can't actually *ever* imagine being woodland! (A civil celebrant who conducts funerals at natural burial sites)

It's supposed to be a woodland, you know, you don't want bits of, I mean I look around and look at what people have done and I tut tut to myself sometimes – you know, somebody's planted *quite* inappropriate flowers and I do a little tut because I think *they're* not wild flowers! (Beth, whose mother and sister are interred at Barton Glebe)

There's one or two that have crept in recently [graves that look like managed gardens] words will have to be said, but I try to wait a little bit of time and then I will have to write to them or try to contact them and say: *look*, this *isn't* what's done...it's not *meant* to be a garden, it's *meant* to be completely natural...I don't let on that there's a period of grace but *I* would not find it easy to immediately pounce on someone as soon as they're mourning the loss of a loved one and say: I'm sorry but you can't do this, this isn't what it's about...the odd little bit that appears around an anniversary or birthday, *fine*, so long as it gets cleared away pretty quickly, otherwise my man will remove it. On the whole it's not badly abused: there are some up there who seem to think daffodils are natural, wild flowers! [chuckles] Somehow I'm finding the best way for them to have an accident! [smiles] (Owner of a privately run natural burial site)

These comments show how the practice of natural burial, rather than the concept, involves a constant tension between the anonymity and collectiveness of graves sought by the Arbory Trust and other providers, and the sentiments of the bereaved with regards to how they make meaning and invest value around an individual grave. Weller foresaw this tension when natural burial was still in its infancy:

The idealists of woodland burials have visions of a rural idyll. But the reality of behaviour by the bereaved has not been considered. Numbers will want to mark the grave and even where traditional headstones are banned, grave markers, flower vases and other monuments will appear. (1999:4)

Landscapes are “self-consciously designed to express the virtues of a particular political or social community” (Schama 1996:15) and Barton Glebe is no exception. The ‘authenticity’ of each British natural burial site, as the comments above demonstrate, is directly proportional to the perceived ‘naturalness’ of the site.

I can *see* the appeal at [redacted] [named natural burial site] because that seems to me, to be the essence of what a woodland burial is all about: to bury *in* woodland *between* the trees. I can see that. But I don't really see where some of the other sites are actually coming from or what they're trying to achieve!

A natural burial site located within mature woodland that bans any form of memorialisation upon graves constitutes the greatest display of integrity to ecological values and some would claim, the perceived original value driving this burial innovation.

Values are transformative and “ultimately, [a] value’s significance lies in its capacity to interpret – and perhaps to change – the world in which it circulates” (Eiss & Pedersen 2002:287).<sup>315</sup> West’s (2008) pioneering natural burial provision in Carlisle provides an example of how ecological values motivated advocacy for change in burial provision. Similarly, the original values of the Trust that drove the development of Barton Glebe subsequently created an opportunity for ensuing values by those who then used the Trust’s provision. So whilst the Arbory Trust’s original core value was an environmental one, viz., to establish a native woodland, over time people have been drawn to Barton Glebe for an array of reasons aside from this (e.g. a family value in which people do not want to burden next of kin with grave maintenance or visits, especially when their offspring are geographically dispersed). Additionally, whilst cremation was originally valued for utilitarian reasons (hygienic and efficient bodily disposal), people have come to value cremation for the opportunity it presents to dispose of cremated remains in highly personalised, significant places (Davies 2005a,b). Only time will tell if natural burial provision becomes more definitively aligned with particular core values or if the practice will accommodate increasingly diverse values making the practice more inclusive, whilst not forgetting, however, that natural burial providers are partly beholden to the pace of change in public attitudes (Cowling 2010:26).

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<sup>315</sup> Values also constitute “the practice of truth” in making meaning in life (Davies 2008a:15).

## **Summary**

This chapter has identified different cultural values that are invested in or conferred upon natural burial, from those with vested professional interests to those who utilise the provision. The array of values highlights the different ways natural burial is experienced and conceived as it ought to be and therefore, indicates some implicit moral projects embedded in the practice that can be a source of tension. Typically, environmental and aesthetic values are most often in conflict, with the former more readily asserted by the Trust and the latter a focus for the bereaved. The tension evident in the extent to which particular values are exercised creates a value-judgement that some natural burial sites are more ‘natural’ than others. This is partly fostered by a conflict of interest between commercial and ethical/environmental motives for engaging with natural burial.

The various cultural values identified in this chapter constitute models of meaning-making around death and dying.<sup>316</sup> In the following chapter it will be observed how some of these values also influence the construction of places identified as natural burial grounds. This chapter has shown that where there are values there is ranking, but what is ranked superior in a natural burial ground, in defining it as a distinctive place, is not what might be expected. It is not necessarily the dead but ‘nature’ I argue that is granted sovereign status in a natural burial ground.

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<sup>316</sup> Cf. Neimeyer’s (2000, 2001) quantitative, clinical research on meaning reconstruction in bereavement that he argues is an activity central to the grieving process, which is currently influential in grief therapy. See also Neimeyer *et al.* 2002 and 2006.

## Chapter 7

### Place-making, Memory and Identity

This chapter elucidates what is distinctive about Barton Glebe and natural burial more generally as a place for the dead, by asking how natural burial grounds are defined in relation to churchyards, cemeteries (private and municipal) and gardens of remembrance. In doing so, I argue that natural burial grounds appear to be therapeutic landscapes in the context of death. This designated quality of place is facilitated by: a) death's mutedness and closer proximity with life because death has diminished visibility or sovereign status in natural burial grounds facilitated by the lack of grave memorials and/or their impermanence, which consequently grants a sense of exclusivity for bereaved visitors; and b) the aesthetic veneer of the natural landscape with concomitant socio-cultural, romantic constructions of 'nature' generates an understanding that nature is peaceful, restorative and positively aids wellbeing. Exclusivity and well-being conferred by the 'natural' landscape allow bereaved visitors to feel more at ease and less inhibited in natural burial grounds compared with more traditional places for the dead. In this sense I argue that natural burial grounds are therapeutic landscapes for mourners in twenty-first century Britain.<sup>317</sup> Finally, as part of Barton Glebe's therapeutic quality, the perceived nature and value of a grieving visitor's relationship to the deceased becomes inalienable from the landscape. The natural elements observed, heard, felt and touched constitute a relationship between the living and the dead, so that Barton Glebe not only evokes a particular human relationship, it becomes it, as this chapter will now demonstrate.

#### ***Space and Place***

Place is 'space' made meaningful by human occupation, relations and activities taking place within it (Cresswell 2004, Relph 1976, Tuan 1974). 'Place' is the antithesis of

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<sup>317</sup> That is not to say that everyone and anyone will share the view that these places are therapeutic, for positive therapeutic evaluations vary across individuals, time and culture for example (see Milligan 2007). However, those who have chosen to pre-register or who visit Barton Glebe suggest that it has therapeutic qualities conferred by the natural elements of the place, as the discussion on emotions and nature illustrated in Chapter 5.

'non-place'<sup>318</sup> because it is a composite of history, relationships, identity and, unlike location, invites participation with its environment (Sheldrake 2001:9-12). 'Place' is a socio-spatial concept invested with significance derived from moral value, emotional charge and narratives of human history, identity and memory (Sheldrake 2001, Watkins *et al.* 2010); subsequently "place is space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious" (Sheldrake 2001:1). As a cultural category, places can therefore emerge as sites of contestation over identity between different social or cultural groups. This includes issues of ownership, power, history, authority and therefore of ultimate 'reality' or 'truth' (Sheldrake 2001:4).<sup>319</sup> Because places are also subjective in framing individual embodied experiences I refer not only to the visual landscape, but also to the 'soundscape' and kinaesthesia of Barton Glebe and because "the identity of places is multisensory", as are the sources of our memories (Porteous 1996:41, Hallam and Hockey 2001).

The cemetery, churchyard, garden of remembrance or natural burial site demonstrate how "the hermeneutic of place progressively reveals new meanings in a kind of conversation between topography, memory and the presence of particular people at any given moment" (Sheldrake 2001:17). This is an act of place-making where a myriad of associations and memories are invested in a place by people who therefore reconstitute that place and vice versa. Burial places are highly mutable over time because they are constantly reconfigured by the living in terms of their sacredness, function, appearance and ownership (Rugg 2000). Nevertheless, the rural churchyard dominates the British "popular imagination and iconography of death" despite the fact that burial formats, be it a lawn cemetery, a garden of remembrance, rural churchyard or natural burial ground, "overlap and interweave historically and culturally" (Worpole 2003b:63):

...the parish churchyard has come to represent a deep and enduring emblem of social and cultural continuity. It has provided many people with a pastoral vision of death, and even community. (Worpole 2003b:63)

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<sup>318</sup> According to Augé a 'non-place' is "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (1995:77). I find this concept useful in considering the qualities of place that is known as Barton Glebe. However, Augé's theoretical discussion oversimplifies the sheer textured richness of the individual narratives of those occupying his designated non-place, such as an airport.

<sup>319</sup> For example, Stonehenge, Lourdes and the 'countryside' are often cited as contested places. Cf. Blain and Wallis (2004), Gesler (1996) and Hetherington (1998).

## ***Placing Memories and Identity***

Despite Worpole's observation however, not everyone has access to a parish churchyard; it may no longer be open for burials or deemed an inappropriate burial location for a variety of reasons. Under these circumstances, how do the bereaved locate a place of death that valorises memories as well as the deceased's and their identity? Barton Glebe attracts non-local custom and I would like to discuss Kathy's experience by way of example in addressing the question posed above. Kathy tragically lost her husband during renovations to what was to be their retirement home, having only recently moved to Cambridge. As a result she felt rootless<sup>320</sup> in Cambridge because her memories and shared history with her husband were invested in another geographical place:

...after [redacted] [he] died I used to go so frequently [to Barton Glebe] because my house wasn't really liveable in and [redacted] [his] grave felt the closest thing I had to a *home* when I first moved here. I used to go two or three times a week initially...I used to go quite often out there...it was the only place I felt *rooted* in any sort of way.

Though Kathy told me that she does not believe her husband is present at Barton Glebe, her husband's grave provides a root and a *home* in Cambridge whilst she adapts to a new life without her husband and a new social and geographical place. Her memories of him are constituted through the grave. This also explains the impetus she felt to garden her husband's grave as we saw in Chapter 5, for gardening the grave is both therapeutic and symbolic of making spaces become places through human engagement with the natural landscape. By gardening the grave it gained added significance and subsequently became a meaningful place. The therapeutic quality of feeling *rooted* was a consequence of interment itself (cf. Bloch 1971) and making the grave a defined place.<sup>321</sup> Through sustained significance and memory the grave

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<sup>320</sup> In an unpublished paper entitled *Natural Burial: Its local interpretations and implications for a 'good send-off'* kindly made available through personal correspondence with natural burial researchers at Sheffield University, it is revealed that those bereaved who visit a natural burial ground in Sheffield but themselves are not 'local' to the city, express that they feel "rooted" to the city once someone they knew is buried: "so for them, being 'local' was partly facilitated by a burial option that made tangible links with the earth itself...identity is malleable, eventually becoming fixed and enduring through the integration of the body and the land" (Hockey *et al.* 2010:6). Bloch (1971) similarly argued that the Merina of Malagasy fixed kinship only upon a body being interred in a tomb (cited by Hockey *et al.* 2010:6). For the Merina, those 'incomers' who use a natural burial ground in Sheffield and for Kathy above, self-identity and a sense of belonging are facilitated by the unity of the living and the dead in a fixed place and at the time of burial (see Hockey *et al.* 2010:8).

<sup>321</sup> In stark contrast to her 'home' at the time that resembled a building site. She was living in the shell of a house under renovation, whilst nurturing the ambition it would become a home over time.

became an authentic environment and, coupled with a strong sense of place, achieved a therapeutic quality (cf. Williams 1999b:74). So whilst the parish churchyard endures in a British, romantic iconography of death, people can make their own enduring places of memory, which provide continuity of identity and sense of *home* or being *rooted*.

Another example is Ceri, a widow who sponsored a tree for her husband at Barton Glebe. She did so because she decided she should have a geographical location to place his memory for her children's benefit, as a place of remembrance. Since she had scattered her husband's ashes in a north eastern coastal town she had no fixed place to locate his memory for her children's benefit (as she reasoned it). Ceri's decision to sponsor a tree in her husband's memory provides *a good bridging* and fosters continuity of memory and identity. She also endows the tree with added significance because it is numbered and the number corresponds to her house number. This coincidence further enhances a link between the memorial tree and the family home, which Ceri takes reassurance from with regards to her decision to sponsor a tree and her selection:

...the idea of the tree came afterwards I suppose. It wasn't [redacted] [*her husband's*] idea. I suppose it was me and the kids. With it being in the crem and with him being scattered...in a way it was to plant something living. It was for the kids and interesting enough, they don't want to go there that often; we went on father's day. I went on our wedding anniversary and his birthday, but it's not somewhere they [the kids] ask to go really...So yeah, it seemed like a good bridging from not having anything here apart from the book at the crem, but a crem is not anywhere I would go anyway. It's not somewhere you can go and sit, whereas I would go to Barton. We tend to go to just see the change of seasons and what's happening to the tree, which is not growing very fast I must say! But oaks don't do they? They're so slow. But it seemed a good place...it's something there for the kids if they, but actually, interestingly enough the number [*on their sponsored tree*] is our house number! So I thought: "Oh! We made the right choice really."

Ceri's memories and continuing relationship with her late husband are embodied by the memorial tree. Her desire to *plant something living* is to perpetuate a continuity of identity in 'living memory'. Her memories and identity inevitably change and are reinforced by the changing appearance of Barton Glebe's landscape, the tree included, as they both grow. Trees foster transgenerational continuity (Macnaghten 2004:232), but in Ceri's case her husband's tree also provides spatial, as well as temporal,

continuity precisely because her husband's tree is *a good bridging*. Belinda, on the other hand, creates a bridging or continuity between Barton Glebe's topography and landscape and her life experiences. In doing so, Barton Glebe becomes a metaphor for life itself; place is both a heuristic device for understanding her lived experiences, as well as for eliciting memories:

I mean it's not very grown up but with a bit of imagination you can imagine how it might look and especially as it's not flat, because in Cambridge it's difficult to find somewhere a little bit hilly like that. But it's lovely with that little lump at the far end because it gives it a sense of space and a sense of...[pause]...you know, life goes on like that, up and down!

### ***Creating a Sense of Place***

There appears to be an emergent cultural classification of natural burial sites in the United Kingdom that focuses on the landscape's appearance and composition as an indicator of how 'natural' and therefore how 'authentic' the provision is. An authentic natural burial ground connotes with one in which the natural context is genuine and unadulterated although this is an unachievable standard, since the moment nature comes into contact with culture it is no longer natural and unadulterated. Thus, there remains a tension in natural burial grounds in which, to varying degrees the natural element is an artifice. The degree to which the 'natural' context is manifested is pivotal in creating an authentic place on the one hand or an inauthentic place on the other. The latter is aligned with placelessness (Relph 1976) derived from the 'natural' elements being superficially manifested or mediocre in the natural burial ground.<sup>322</sup>

The relative success of Barton Glebe's topography is enshrined in the "character" of the place derived from an "aesthetic integrity" that contributes to the landscape's cohesiveness (Porteous 1996:102). Aesthetic integrity is enshrined in the Arbory Trust's ambitions to create deciduous woodland comprising native trees, as well as the choice of lodge design and materials selected by the Trust. The lodge was specifically chosen because of its natural materials and 'rustic' look. Rather than providing a shelter and ritual space that was aesthetically more modern, utilitarian or

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<sup>322</sup> For a detailed phenomenological discussion of place and placelessness, the realisation of the authentic and inauthentic place in human consciousness and architectural design and planning see Relph (1976, especially chapters 5 and 6).

urban for example, the ‘rustic’ lodge was understood to be more ‘in keeping’ with the cultivated landscape at Barton Glebe.<sup>323</sup> A “condition of placefulness” (Worpole 2003b:194) is achieved at Barton Glebe because the architectural and landscape planning of Barton Glebe was consciously informed by the “specific culture of the region” (Worpole 2003b:194). This focus upon aesthetic integrity in designing Barton Glebe reflects national British prescriptions and procedures concerning place-making: “national park regulations...confine the use of building materials to those available, and long used, locally” and Porteous contrasts this with America’s<sup>324</sup> “bogus assemblages of historic artefacts” (1996:102); an evaluation based upon an aesthetic value judgment. The conflicts over graveside memorial modes and materials epitomise contested understandings of the authentic and “bogus” in relation to the material culture of natural burial and its perceived aesthetic integrity to the overall landscape and values invested in the place.<sup>325</sup>

Slater links the commodity and design of places to “the power of illusion inherent in theme parking” (2007:239). To an extent the illusion of the natural is an integral part of creating a natural burial site. Those sites that have a high media profile are examples of successful illusion-making and “theme parking” because they succeed in creating the illusion of an ‘authentic’ natural burial ground (i.e. the place fulfils people’s socio-culturally-informed expectations of woodland).<sup>326</sup> These providers even grade the quality of their theme-park experience by charging different rates for grave reservations, depending on where one is buried in the forest or woodland and the views one is privy to from the particular chosen grave location in the woodland; so place is also a commodity (Zukin 1991). It can be designed and produced by ‘experts’ or professional ‘specialists’ in order that it may be consumed through market forces. This is a facet of many places designated as natural burial grounds in England. The success of commodifying woodland or a ‘woodland’ experience by “judicious landscape planning” (Worpole 2003b:191) is evident in the fact that a number of

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<sup>323</sup> There is a paradox here however, because like Barton Glebe itself, the ‘rustic’ wooden lodge is not naturally-occurring either. Both have been created to form something of utility to humans that enshrines particular romantic values (cf. Rosie’s reaction to the lodge in Chapter 5, page 131). The same is true of the natural-but-not-quite landscape because people are allowed to plant flowers but they have to be ones that would naturally occur. So there is a tension between cultivated nature and naturally-occurring nature.

<sup>324</sup> Porteous’s vague level of generalisation rather than mine.

<sup>325</sup> See Chapter 6 page 188-192, *The threat of compromised values*.

<sup>326</sup> Again this relates to the ‘experience economy’ as discussed in Chapter 6.

funeral professionals spoke of a particular natural burial ground as being *the only true woodland burial site*. Other sites were merely poor imitations of woodland or meadow and so, as we learnt in Chapter 5, funeral directors particularly, will ‘prepare’ clients’ expectations by warning them that they *need to have vision* in order to avoid disappointment from un-met expectations upon first visiting a natural burial ground.

The Arbory Trust sought out the expertise of the Forestry Commission in designing Barton Glebe’s layout and topography. The Forestry Commission Advisor not only used his expertise to advise upon tree species and planting formats but also in designing the size, depth and shape of the glades. Burial within these glades available by purchase, offers the consumer the opportunity to invest the deceased’s identity within the landscape of Barton Glebe as I will now demonstrate.

### ***Burial Location and Identity***

Spatial arrangements encapsulate social relationships and identities (Augé 1995:58) and the spatial arrangements of the dead within a cemetery or churchyard have similarly been shown to replicate the relationships of the living (Prior 1989). Prior’s study on the social organisation of places for the dead in Belfast claimed “the private plot is in many ways the prime monument to the modern way of death”; a way of death that encompasses “processes of individualisation and isolation” (1989:117). Spatially, this is evident in the topographic landscape of the cemetery, graveyard or garden of remembrance. Moreover:

By announcing the individuality of those who lie beneath, the single granite headstones express more than mere sentiment; they express disciplinary order itself. (Prior 1989:118)<sup>327</sup>

Despite being less visible, masked by the lack of overt grave monuments and the seemingly random layout of graves, “disciplinary order” is still present at Barton Glebe. Nevertheless, Barton Glebe is ostensibly less bureaucratic than a cemetery, offering an illusory escape from the “contractual world which dominates the living” (Prior 1989:118):

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<sup>327</sup> Prior is referring to Foucault’s notion of ‘disciplinary order’, therefore, the dead are still subject to disciplinary mechanisms by the living such as surveillance, confinement and bureaucratic records.

It's *certainly* a nice place to visit. We don't visit as often as we should...I don't know what it is – I can't explain – it always seems to be out of this world! It's not like the hustle and bustle of everything around. As soon as you walk through those gates you seem to enter a different world.<sup>328</sup>  
(Arthur, bereaved and pre-registered)

This certainly enhances the allure of the place and encourages people to believe, as one bereaved visitor to the site articulated that *woodland burial is about as far away from the industrialisation of death as you can get*. Barton Glebe is often associated with being a peaceful sanctuary in contrast to the uniformity, commercialisation and bureaucracy perceived in daily life that some articulate is epitomised in cemetery provision.<sup>329</sup> It is rather paradoxical then that despite the lack of visual markers delineating segregation of graves, one still has to enter a contractual agreement to purchase a grave space,<sup>330</sup> which is subsequently recorded on a site map and in a land survey. The Ministry of Justice (2009) recommends in published guidelines for operators of natural burials grounds that all graves be located with accuracy, particularly in the event of a request for exhumation. The Ministry of Justice suggests that this be achieved by: 1) surveying each plot and keeping a record of the coordinates on a digital site plan, 2), using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), which requires devices attached to memorials or located in the ground, or 3) using fixed markers for triangulation. In addition to these, an offsite copy of the plan should be maintained. So although pre-registered users express a desire to go naturally and fade into the landscape, whilst escaping the bureaucracy of life and getting *as far from the industrialisation of death as you can get*, societal powers, in this case the Ministry of Justice, want to microchip graves. Technology therefore also belongs to this created 'natural' burial ground. So despite some natural burial users expressing romantic ideals such as escaping the *hustle and bustle of everything around*, the

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<sup>328</sup> Again the perception of Barton Glebe as set apart from daily life emerges, as a liminal space that is 'betwixt and between'. By entering through the gates of Barton Glebe one makes a transition to another temporal, spatial realm. The fact that Arthur *can't explain* the quality of Barton Glebe serves to emphasise its ambiguousness, a key characteristic of liminality. See Turner (1967:93-111) and Van Gennep (1960).

<sup>329</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>330</sup> There are legal distinctions between grave 'space' and grave 'plot' purchase, particularly in the context of pre-registered users. A 'plot' refers to actual ownership of land by the bearer whereas 'space' refers to access *but not* ownership. Therefore, in pre-registering for a grave space at Barton Glebe, one is legally entitled to access a particular grave; however, ownership of the grave remains with the Trust.

powers and authority of Britain will not let them do that without accounting for them first. Here again, as we saw in Chapter 6, there is a conflict of values between the ideals perhaps of those interred at Barton Glebe and the rules and regulations enforced by society and/or the living, who control the dead and can impinge upon their ideals.

Not only do legal frameworks of 'government' impose upon natural burial users, but the providers themselves can exert influence. Another Cambridgeshire woodland burial provider tries to influence people's grave location preferences for example, through the introduction of differential grave space prices:

The burials at the top and the burials at the bottom [of the field] were *really* originally to give *choice* and then it became apparent that not everybody wants to walk all the way to the top, so then we gave people the option of being down at the bottom [near the car park]. We were really, trying to encourage [burial] from the bottom up [of the field] and that's why we tried to discourage people from going up the top by putting a higher price in the end to try and discourage everybody from going to zoom up top [of the field]...but I think it's slightly having the opposite effect, I think, as there's still a little bit of the snobbery value in paying a little bit more.

Differential grave prices are not uncommon in natural burial sites, which usually see those areas within the site that overlook places of natural beauty or historic interest allocated the highest purchase price (see also Clayden *et al.* 2010). Again this is another means through which the deceased's social and economic status can be replicated in natural burial. Whilst segregation is more overtly visual in cemeteries, both by the proximity of the grave to places of high profile in the cemetery landscape and also indicative in the design and material of the headstone or tomb, segregation can also be implemented in natural burial. The *snobbery value* rests upon the social and economic status one can secure by paying *a little bit more* as witnessed in British cemeteries in the nineteenth century. Although natural burial sites appear more egalitarian in the absence of headstones and ostentatious memorialisation, in practice this association is relative. The status that came from a prominent grave marker has been replaced in some cases by the position of a grave in relation to the scenic view it affords or its purchase price. That is not to say that the purchase of a grave and its location is not about wanting the best for the deceased, but this sentiment is itself socio-culturally enacted around notions of status and identity. For example, one could argue that the top and bottom of the green field burial site referred to above, spatially

encodes social segregation (*snobbery value*) and cosmological orders. Applying some anthropological symbolic analysis one could argue that the top of the field connects the deceased to god and the heavens and moreover, that being spatially higher in burial symbolises the deceased's former high status; at least visitors need not know that status was secured by choosing a grave in which the bereaved paid *a little bit more*. Whilst Barton Glebe does not have differential prices for graves, there is still an element of status symbolism encoded within the spatial layout of the site. Those glades that are closest to the road and its traffic in South Glebe are closest to profane, ordinary life. As one walks up the main path connecting all the glades in South Glebe towards the North Glebe one is walking in a transitional space towards the sacred, highest point of the burial ground on the ridge at the top of the field in North Glebe. This is the furthest point from the road and affords visual advantage over a wide area. Moreover, because of the distance one has to walk to reach it, fewer visitors frequent this area of the natural burial ground. It thus has special status within the site, as the Trust Ranger recognised when she exclaimed: *You'd be a fool if you didn't want to be up there after seeing the view!*

### **Choosing Glades and Grave Space Location**

In a churchyard, cemetery and garden of remembrance, the spatial arrangement of graves is consciously designed and planned for and this is no less true of Barton Glebe, albeit visibly more obscured to the visitor. The Forestry Commission Advisor explained how he designed the layout, in particular the glades for burial, in Phase I.<sup>331</sup>

I wanted something organic in shape and another of those learning experiences that emerged after the fact, is that people like their loved ones to be buried in the little niches, the little bays and alcoves that have been created by the wavy edge of the woodland. We hadn't anticipated that but *again* there's just this feeling of comfort and nestling into the wood. So those have been really popular so we've exaggerated that in the second phase's planting more than we have done in the first one...

The Forestry Advisor told me why he designed the glades like he did:

Firstly, they're aligned east to west to maximise sunlight into them. Secondly, it needed to be possible to extract timber in the future without ever running over a glade (about year 30 or maybe a bit earlier to do some

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<sup>331</sup> South Glebe

coppicing to enhance structural diversity)...That was always part of the concept, that this was going to be a *working* woodland, that you could get other benefits from it...Thirdly, I was fairly sure people would want a variety of choice in shape and size of glade. The smaller glades would shadow over earlier which might appeal to some people and they'd also look more woody so they'd be more attractive to people earlier on compared to the other glades<sup>332</sup> ...for a while you can imagine there's a comfort in the trees enveloping that space but it won't take too long and it'll start to feel claustrophobic. So we wanted a variety of shapes and sizes...and it had to have a natural feel. The original inspiration for some of the shapes was from...a map...of Polish wind blow patterns on a Polish woodland and I used that to apply the first shapes to the glades and then I applied some artistic licence.

Quite clearly, Barton Glebe, whilst utilising natural materials, is constructed by humans to enhance a *feeling of comfort and nesting* for the bereaved and pre-registered to benefit from. These qualities of feeling are conferred by the *natural feel* the Forestry Advisor is consciously creating. So equally the areas planted with whips<sup>333</sup> around the glades were also very considered in planting design, as the Forestry Advisor illustrates:

The actual design of the species here is again trying to mimic natural systems, so rather than have a matrix of lots of different species spread across the entire site, they're clumped together in species groups. Therefore, there are clumps of ash moving into small leaf lime and yet over there you can see a clump of birch which moves into oak and holly. Now they're not exclusive: you'll find odd bits dotted in there with them like holly, but natural processes tend to clump species together in drifts, so again we've designed it like that. But the disadvantage with this scheme is that if the soil is not suited to a particular species in a particular location then you get a lot of deaths and it becomes very noticeable. Whereas if we'd gone for a very generic mix then there'd be enough of something to come through and we would have avoided it.

The design encapsulates mimicry of natural processes: *natural processes tend to clump species together in drifts, so again we've designed it like that.*<sup>334</sup> Again one

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<sup>332</sup>On the same day this interview was conducted, the Administrator of the Trust had told the other staff that glade five should not accept any further burials for the time being as it was quite busy: they were told to tell people it was closed because it was full, which is not strictly true. The Administrator thinks glade five is popular because of its small size, therefore, it is more enclosed and possibly *feels* more comforting as a place to dwell in.

<sup>333</sup> See *Whip* in *Glossary*.

<sup>334</sup> This is also true of gardening: "The apparently "natural" appearance of the garden tends to disguise not only its manufactured origins but also those historically embedded social processes of visibility that directed its production" (Slater and Peillon 2009:96). Also gardens, like maintained graves in natural burial grounds, are constantly "undermined" by the growth of plant ecosystems (Slater and Peillon 2009).

observes the paradoxical alignment between natural processes and human design in natural burial, as with the tension between *slipping away quietly* amongst nature and the Ministry of Justice's recommendations for grave marking. However, natural and human processes converge and influence each other in users' glade preferences:

The other nice thing which we hadn't anticipated is that people associate particular glades with particular species, so that makes them more or less attractive to people who are going to get buried....I suspect this is pretty innate. It just might be a broadly visual impact: "I like the look of this!" They're not saying: "Oh! Ash! Uncle Charlie's wooden leg was made of ash!" You know it's not gonna be as tangible as that, but I'm certainly aware from what [redacted] [the Administrator] has said that some people like the silver birch up there particularly in certain times of year. It's a good sort of winter tree that one. It's got lovely bark, but the ash is pretty boring during the winter! So you can imagine that people who are coming for winter burials might go for the birch grove: they're not thinking: "I like birch", it's just there's some attributes of birch that they're drawn to....

The Forestry Commission Advisor interprets these preferences for particular glades or species as a visual phenomenon in a visitor's gaze upon the landscape. However, the aural and kinaesthetic are also important modes of engagement with place.<sup>335</sup> The Administrator had her own conclusions regarding glade preferences, which I recorded in my fieldnotes as:

Glade one is liked for access because it is near the car park, glades six and seven are liked because they are furthest from the road, glades seven and eight are liked because of the silver birches (since they grow quickly they are taller than all the other trees on the site at present) and glade four is liked because it looks over a particular local town.

The Trust Guardian's comment that *nobody would go to a crem or cemetery to choose their own plot, would they?* resonates with an image of cemeteries, churchyards and gardens of remembrance consisting of graves or memorials in rows on a grid system restricting choice in burial location and orientation.<sup>336</sup> Barton Glebe appears to facilitate greater choice for clients in this regard:

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<sup>335</sup> See *Birdsong and 'sound scapes'* page 217-218, this chapter.

<sup>336</sup> It must be stressed that not all natural burial sites offer the same degree of choice; great variety exists between providers. However pre-registration at a natural burial ground necessitates a specific kind of pre-engagement in which one can exercise choice.

...you can face which ever way you want! And that meant a *lot* to me, to be able to face whichever way *I wanted* to face. Not to be faced regimentally and all in lines. (Rosie is pre-registered)

...we walked around and we knew we didn't want to choose a spot too close to the road as it would be too noisy, so we went halfway in the middle. We thought we wouldn't go right *down* in the bottom because we thought in years to come if we want to go and I can't walk that far...so that's how we chose it! [the interment location] (Stella is widowed)

I mean we wanted a plot furthest from the road because I want to rest in peace. (Ivy is pre-registered.)

Ivy and Stella's desire to choose a location away from the road supports findings from acoustic ecologists who conclude that urban dwellers value 'natural' sounds over 'mechanical' and 'people' produced sounds.<sup>337</sup> The "consistent preference for natural "sounds" (e.g. water) over mechanical "noise"" (Irvine *et al.* 2009:156) is perhaps a reaction to the fact that increasingly urban soundscapes are "characterised by the dominance of monotonous, background sounds, such as traffic and construction" (Irvine *et al.* 2009:156). Though it remains unarticulated by site users in this research I believe that a profound, unconscious allure to Barton Glebe exists precisely in the value visitors place on natural sounds. Barton Glebe implicitly becomes a place of *peace* or *tranquillity*, whereas the constant mechanical sounds in the soundscapes of daily life (Irvine *et al.* 2009) increase the desirability of places characterised by natural soundscapes. Moreover, the experiential sounds of Barton Glebe reinforce the cultural idiom of *rest in peace*.

Kathy's choice of grave location, unlike the previous two examples, was not an easy choice to make. It caused her some anxiety so she went twice to Barton to choose a grave location:

...I sort of changed my mind over that time. I went by myself the second time and [redacted] [the Administrator], I remember, said to me: "Oh! He *could* be planted there!" As we went round looking I looked at her and she said: "Oh! We get the trees and the bodies muddled up sometimes!" [giggles] ...[slight pause]... but I *like* the idea of him being planted. Oh yes! And Victor has the willows behind him and I knew he'd like the willows. I just like the feel of that little bit really. It felt more sociable but not *bang* in the middle where there are many graves. I think *now*, when I

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<sup>337</sup> These are the three categories of sound identified by Schafer (1977), with cars being an example of 'mechanical' sound and birdsong for 'natural' sounds.

go back there, I think Victor *could've* been in the middle now that there's more graves in the middle but it...oh! I know! **It didn't feel private for me to go grieving.** And that felt quite important, on the edge it felt a little less exposed for me to visit as well... All I can remember is the noise of the traffic [at Barton] and we spent *ages* listening to traffic at different points to see where it wasn't so noisy, and we *chose* somewhere round the back [her first choice] – at the back there's a wide grass pathway with a row of trees and on the other side I chose a patch because it's a long way - and all the birds were in and out of the trees as well – but Victor was immensely sociable...I phoned them [Arbory Trust] up and said: “actually I'm not happy”. And [a friend] took me back and we re-chose a space in one of the glades. Originally I had chosen a spot because you couldn't hear the traffic and it was quiet. But it was quite *formal* along that little bit because it's a straight mown thing with a row of trees and then on the other side a wild bit starts and it was going to be in the wild bit. But I suddenly thought: it just *doesn't feel* like Victor! Victor was very sociable and the glade he's in...the big one! He's just on the edge 'cos there's been lots more people buried and the inside of the glade felt very exposed actually and now it's quite full of other graves. But Victor is just on the edge. And it's south-facing and...I just wanted him tucked near an edge really. **But Victor's very sociable. It's the biggest, most populated of the glades I think.**

The bold text illustrates a tension in identity and needs that led Kathy to review her initial preference for Victor's grave location. She needed somewhere *private* but she also recognised that he was *very sociable* and therefore that he should be located in the *most populated of the glades*. Kathy implicitly suggests that the grave's location is an embodiment and materialisation of her late husband's identity. One also learns how the *little niches, the little bays and alcoves that have been created by the wavy edge of the woodland* that the Forestry Advisor speaks of, do provide comfort for the bereaved because as Kathy says: *on the edge it felt a little less exposed for me to visit as well*. She recognises her husband's sociable nature and therefore, consciously chose his grave in the *biggest, most populated of the glades*, whilst also recognising that she needed somewhere *private... to go grieving*. Kathy's first choice was secured by the presence of the willows and birdlife; however, in the end she resolved to change the location because it *didn't feel like* her husband. In order for her husband to be *planted* in the landscape, to meld with and embody it, the landscape must also be symbolic of her husband. Again we see how human imagination and the natural world conspire to grant a sense of continuity, for “nature carries symbols that affirm the culture or self” (Milligan 2007:264). The embodiment of ideas about who we think someone is and our relationship with them is encapsulated by landscape preferences

and interpretations. Just as Lévi-Strauss concluded that totems are “good to think” in that they are symbols of human kinship and relations because the chosen non-human species’ “perceptible reality permits the embodiment of ideas and relations” (1964:89), so the landscape at Barton Glebe is “good to think” because it can embody ideas of who we think the deceased was and how we understand our relationship with them.

Nevertheless, the landscape can also be problematic in securing a fixed location of identity within a place (the grave site) because of its ever-changing appearance through the seasons, so people occasionally use markers in the landscape to navigate their way to a grave or they can lose it altogether.

I think that’s one of the issues that there’s been at the Arbory Trust: that people can’t find where their loved ones are. It looks so different when you go back the second time! When you go there for the burial there’s a huge heap of earth and you think you’ll *always* remember where this is, but you go back a second time and it all looks the same! And I know of people who’ve found that quite upsetting when they’ve gone back and the office hasn’t been open so there’s been nobody to ask and they can’t find the grave! (Civil celebrant)

In this way Barton Glebe’s landscape can also induce anxiety because of the seasonality of the landscape that invokes individualised and temporal responses in mourners. So, whilst for one bereaved visitor the natural landscape is therapeutic precisely because it promotes a sense of peace and well-being, for another visitor it may prove to be stressful and prompt anxiety particularly when plant growth threatens to obliterate the location of a grave. A number of the bereaved commented that they found visiting Barton Glebe more emotionally challenging in winter whereas spring was a pleasurable time to visit (cf. Milligan 2007). Thus the therapeutic potential of Barton Glebe varies as different individuals experience the place at different times and in different ways (cf. Gesler 2005).

Despite the official opinion expressed by the Arbory Trust that “The exact position of a grave becomes less important as time passes, and families are content simply to return to Barton to remember loved ones in the natural surroundings”,<sup>338</sup> this is

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<sup>338</sup> <http://www.arborytrust.org/Barton.htm> [retrieved 18/05/09]

definitely *not* the case for everyone.<sup>339</sup> This is because there is a tension in the relationship between place, identity and grave location in natural burial. Kathy was keen to find a specific grave location at Barton Glebe that best embodied her husband's identity and her relationship with him. This embodiment of human identity and relations with the natural landscape means that to lose sight of the grave's location through rampant natural growth or diminished grave memorialisation over time, is to lose a part of the deceased person and a part of the bereaved person's relationship to the deceased. This is why grave marking still takes place in natural burial grounds and the specific location of a grave is so important to many bereaved visitors, irrespective of providers' regulations and aims. So, whilst for some it may be *a little bit liberating, spiritually liberating, being buried in a woodland grave where your grave gradually subsides and you become part of the ultimate meadow that it's going to be maintained as,*<sup>340</sup> there is concern that this attitude towards graves is an oversight in the practice of natural burial:

This is a short-sighted aspect of its conception, which forgets that a cemetery is not merely a place to dispose of dead bodies but to memorialize and honor human lives. A majority of society will not accept no memorialization; widespread acceptance will thus be impaired (Thomas Friese of 'Perpetua's Garden: Cemeteries for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century')<sup>341</sup>

Aside from being an opportunity to "memorialize" someone, memorials can also help others to locate graves, so they have a practical function as well as an emotional one. Whilst memorials may be frowned upon, for some visitors they are extremely useful. In my field notes I noted that a family visiting Barton Glebe located the grave by its proximity to another's memorial bench. I also recorded how these same visitors felt the Trust were exercising *double standards* in having erected signs in and around Barton Glebe indicating glade names and reminding visitors to keep their dogs on a lead. Again, a conflict between natural(ness) and authority arises as with the situation in which pre-registered users desire to *return to nature* but burial authorities advise that all graves are electronically tagged.

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<sup>339</sup> See Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>340</sup> A Founder Trustee.

<sup>341</sup> Cited in Charles Cowling's 'The Good Funeral Guide' Blog: <http://www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk/2009/06/best-in-show-1.html> [Retrieved 20/02/10] and see <http://perpetuasgarden.org/> [Retrieved 20/02/10]

By describing the previous issues that ensue at Barton Glebe, this ethnographic detail serves to illustrate theoretical claims that place is not a pre-existing, bounded aspect of geography, rather it is a process that occurs within the temporal, spatial, cultural, social and bodily domain, as well as being engendered in memories and identity (Cresswell 2004:82).

### **Anonymity vs. Memorial: Tree sponsorship and identity**

The Trust Administrator wants to move away from *this idea of ownership* held by the sponsors of memorial trees. She feels that it is a constant challenge in her role managing Barton Glebe and staff-visitor relations. The Trust took a decision not to permit people to sponsor an individual tree that subsequently they can perceive as theirs or the deceased's, but rather to adopt a tree in the abstract without claims to a *particular* tree. Similarly, the Trust have moved from an 'x-marks-the-spot' style of grave reservation and introduced a reservation procedure where those registered can request a glade but not a particular fixed location, unless someone holds a reservation attached to an existing grave. This attempt to lessen the perception of individual ownership with regards to graves and memorial trees is shared by the owner of a green field site, also in Cambridgeshire:

We don't put labels on our trees. We try to keep it as *natural* as possible I suppose because the other thing, if it's going to be a woodland and it's going to be a managed woodland long-term, so if we *have* to cut any trees down we don't want anybody identifying that as their Aunt Ethel. So we explain to people that we're doing it for this reason as we'll have to ultimately thin our wood and manage it and we don't want to offend any individuals by encouraging them to think they're *their* trees. We're building up the cemetery as a site as a whole.

Despite attempts to get natural burial site users to perceive the deceased as part of the entire landscape, for many bereaved visitors continuity of the deceased's identity and memory are dependent upon the perception of a subjective presence where often "the selection of the memorial tree represents a key opportunity to sustain the memory of the deceased" (Clayden and Dixon 2007:254). Trees have "presence" and thus capture

our imaginations in symbolically anchoring a sense of longevity and identity (Clayden and Dixon 2007:254):<sup>342</sup>

Individual trees were considered important primarily because they enabled both the bereaved and the pre-purchase respondents the opportunity to celebrate and honour an individual life. (Clayden and Dixon 2007:255)

Clayden and Dixon's observation is validated by this widow's choice of memorial tree for her husband at Barton Glebe:

I wanted an oak. I mean, [redacted] was not a big man *at all* physically, but emotionally he was and I like oaks and they're gonna be there an awful lot longer than us. The kids, they didn't mind which tree – they thought an oak was quite good and the shape of it looked exactly like a Christmas tree, because we always have a fresh tree every year. And we walked round and had a look and it was an oak that was standing slightly on its own...There's a whole load of oaks as you go up on the right but we decided if we had one of those then ours might get knocked down albeit in 200 years' time or something! And then we found these two and there was just one slightly to the side, but ours was the nicer looking one and then it was surrounded by these other trees and it just seemed, you know, it was towards the end; you couldn't see the road, but it wasn't quite at the fields. It was a nice shape! And we both [mother and youngest daughter] looked at it and thought: "yep! That's it!" And we managed to find it and go and get the lady [Trust Administrator] back to the tree and the fact that we managed to find it again was a good sign! And I'm a great one for believing just trust your instincts, and that was what we decided!

An oak tree was chosen for its emblematic quality of strength, size and longevity, whilst also symbolic of the deceased's emotional qualities. The oak tree both signifies the deceased as well as visually acknowledging and honouring him. Responses to the postal questionnaire in which I asked: "Have you sponsored a tree at Barton Glebe? If so, was there a special significance to the tree you chose?" also yielded explicit associations between the deceased's identity and species of tree. For example, ash trees are perceived as the tree of life whilst conifers celebrated Scottish heritage. The truth behind these claims of association are not important here; what is important is that they are made in the first place.

As visitors to Barton Glebe have demonstrated, Worpole's claim that "it is not the grave site that provides the focal point of meaning but the woodland itself, which

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<sup>342</sup> See Chapter 5.

orchestrates and resolves the deeper emotions” (2003b:194) is only partly true. Whilst the Trust and some bereaved visitors *do* perceive the woodland rather than a grave as the focal point for memory, equally many other site visitors do not.<sup>343</sup> Worpole is articulating a position more often expressed by site providers than bereaved visitors. However, I have found during the course of this research that site providers are usually initially lenient about mourners’ memorialisation behaviour, offering them a ‘period of grace’, though this is implicit rather than explicit and left to the discretion of individuals rather than sanctioned.

Perhaps the central issue is *who* or *what* gets “sovereign status” in the landscape of a natural burial ground (Worpole 2003b:193)? For those natural burial providers and users who prioritise the eco-values of natural burial above all else, then the “human animal” (Worpole 2003b:193) is subsequently not granted sovereign status because memorials are seen as superfluous, sometimes contradictory to the practice. However, for those who set up provision because it was seen as viable income generation, or for those who simply want to be buried but do not have access to a churchyard or cemetery and/or do not like the burial provision available to them, then humans are still unconsciously given sovereign status in these new places for the dead. Subsequently, memorialisation is still seen as necessary, desired or expected as a result of a cultural history that bears witness to remembrance of the dead through the erection of monuments. The importance placed upon knowing the exact location of a grave and memorials arises from the fact that these are expressions of the living’s relationships with the dead.

### ***Redefining the Boundaries between Life and Death***

In this section I argue that distinctions between life and death are more ambiguous in natural burial grounds compared to other burial places, subsequently enabling the living to re-articulate the place of death and its relationship to life in natural burial sites.<sup>344</sup> This, I argue, is part of the appeal of natural burial grounds; for example, a

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<sup>343</sup> One reason this may arise is because the deceased may have chosen or specified Barton Glebe rather than the bereaved deciding upon Barton Glebe for the deceased’s final resting place. Thus, some bereaved visitors may be initially very unfamiliar with the practice and concept.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Howarth (2000:134) who argues more widely that the boundary between life and death is becoming “dismantled” in contemporary Western Society because of ever greater diversification in how people deal with their grief and try to maintain continuity with the dead.

pre-registered woman stated: *I wouldn't want to be part of something that seems to separate life from death and I think cemeteries do that.*

There are two channels through which the ontological categories of life and death are brought closer together in natural burial grounds: firstly, through the physical and non-human aspects of the place itself and, secondly, through human activities and modes of engagement within these places, often seen as therapeutic. I will address both of these channels for re-defining the dichotomy of life and death where death has been naturalised to some extent, permitting the activities of the living to come closer to places occupied by the dead. Natural burial grounds ambiguously place life and death closer together but not on equal terms, for death is muted as life is emphasised.

### **The therapeutic non-human place**

Nature's physicality at Barton Glebe is shown to be replete with life and death, but as we learnt in Chapter 5, the living aspects of the natural world at Barton Glebe are more often emphasised by the bereaved and pre-registered than death. As a result, a landscape of hope can be cultivated in a mode of 'ecological hope' (Davies 2005a) and continuity of identity and memory. That is not to say that for some bereaved visitors their loss is not emphasised by the vitality of the natural world or that the life of the natural world is felt to be more significant compared to the life lost of someone dear or indeed, that people's attachment to Barton Glebe is static or always pleasurable.<sup>345</sup> However, in Chapter 5 we repeatedly saw how the life symbolism conferred by the natural world granted a sense of *peace* or *comfort* to visitors.

Churchyards, cemeteries and memorial gardens also inhabit the natural world; however the presence of death is just as visibly marked in these places in erected headstones, tombs and plaques, often in serried ranks.<sup>346</sup> The spatial organisation and

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<sup>345</sup> Cf. the notion of *ambiguous place attachment* in Watkins *et al.* (2010:371).

<sup>346</sup> A concerted effort has been made to preserve and/or enhance wildlife and habitat diversity in churchyards in the Living Churchyard and Cemetery Project. Originally a project for Anglican rural parishes, this project is driven by appreciation for the environmental significance of churchyards "retaining or restating a link between the sacred and the natural" (Palmer and Palmer 1997:83). There are parallels between the ecological value perceived in the Living Churchyard project and natural burial: both ancient churchyards and natural burial sites are seen as opportunities to retain biodiversity, perhaps more so in ancient churchyards because of lichens and butterflies flourishing in the absence of insecticides and pesticides (Worpole 2003b:75). However, the key difference between ecological projects vested in churchyards and natural burial grounds is that of intentionality. In many cases natural

materiality of these markers are constant reminders of human intervention in demarcating appropriate places for the dead, separate from the living. Barton Glebe on the other hand, has less conspicuous memorials set in a dynamic seasonal landscape in which anyone is welcome to use the place to walk their dog and wander along the paths between the glades. In this sense the landscape could be said to be therapeutic (cf. Gesler 1993, 2005, Jones 2005, Morris *et al.* 2005, Williams 2007), but only for as long as the landscape exudes vitality and life; there is little of therapeutic value in observing tree saplings withering on their stakes or wild-flowers wilting with an infection. Observing the vitality of the natural world confers some security that puts visitors at ease and grants a *cosy feeling*;<sup>347</sup> subsequently the natural landscape at Barton Glebe is therapeutic because it is perceived as comforting.<sup>348</sup>

I suppose in a sense, what I'd expect is, just very much like in any other quiet place where people can just sit, relax and just be. That it's not out of place. The sort of place where somebody could just take a book, or their sandwiches and just sit down! Not *radically* different from another part of nature that you were comfortable to just sit and be in. Now, I might be very disappointed! (Though she is pre-registered, Janet has never visited Barton Glebe.)

Ivy is bereaved and pre-registered. She describes Barton Glebe as:

...a very nice, peaceful place, reminiscent of a...flowery meadow or woods if you like, where you can be buried peacefully without any sort of adornment. It's just thoroughly peaceful, and to sit there and reflect is...something really quite *special* I think. It just gives you a really nice cosy feeling I think. A comfortable place to be!

Ivy associates the *peaceful* quality of Barton Glebe as a place where she can *reflect*. Her encounter with the place fosters a shift in her cognitive and sensory perception so that the place has a *special* quality set apart from everyday routines, where she can secure a slower rhythm, stillness, and reflect.<sup>349</sup> The valorisation of the therapeutic

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burial grounds were intentionally created for perceived ecological benefit and all were created to mimic the 'natural' to varying extents, whereas churchyards have become natural places deemed ecologically valuable through neglect.

<sup>347</sup> Ivy. Bereaved and pre-registered.

<sup>348</sup> By comparison, the adoption of natural burial in America (cf. Harris 2007) melds with American wilderness constructions of landscape, as opposed to the "tamed nature" more commonly envisaged in English landscapes (Porteous 1996:104). Therefore, it would be interesting to learn to what extent and how bereaved Americans found their natural burial landscapes therapeutic.

<sup>349</sup> See Milligan (2007:261-62) regarding the capacity of 'nature' to restore and provide reflection and diversion.

value of stillness is capitalised upon in the travel industry's advertising of retreats in reference to tranquillity and renewal (Conradson 2007). Renewal is also symbolically replete in the 'natural' world at Barton Glebe. For instance, we learnt in Chapter 5 how a widow took great comfort in a toad living upon her husband's grave and other visitors spoke of Barton Glebe as encapsulating life's dynamism, its *holistic rhythm*, human *kinship to the natural world* and embracing the *circle of life*, despite the fact that they were grieving. Barton Glebe is therapeutic because its naturalised landscape provides a contemplative environment to mourn in a natural landscape that is *visibly not* a cemetery, but rather a place in which abundant life in the 'natural' world is the main *feature*, as opposed to memorials to the dead.<sup>350</sup>

I think it's a question of people wanting a burial but wanting it in a *nicer* environment than a cemetery that's full of stones and hundreds of other people! Very *obviously* a cemetery! Maybe people like the idea that there are graves dotted around amongst trees and you're never *absolutely* sure where a grave is and I think that's part of the appeal *and* the natural surroundings. And actually, it is one of the things I focus upon when I do a woodland burial; we do talk about these beautiful surroundings where the squirrels will play and what have you, because it's part of the *feature* of it I suppose. (A civil celebrant)

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<sup>350</sup> There are some parallels here which could warrant further research between the "feature" of the living world and Gaia theory for Primavesi argues that the heliocentric universe, a perspective of Gaia, is accepting of death and thankful for life because "life and death together are seen not only as aspects of the larger body of human society but of the larger body still of the whole community of life on earth" (2003:103-104). So whilst mourners will feel the loss incurred through a death, there is a shift of focus from an individual human's death to the living environment and the continuity of life around. Whatever non-human living thing is used as the "feature" for this in a funeral service is not important, rather what is important is that this feature is a symbol for the dependency of life and death and their integral place in the world.



Figure 26: A view from the main pathway in South Glebe  
Source: Author's photo taken April 2009

There is concern that masking death in nature is psychologically problematic, as it could be another expression of the human denial of death. According to some, death must be integrated with life and that this is only possible with death's visible integration in the world of the living using burial markers:

For many green burial may yet be another subconscious attempt to deny or exclude death by making it invisible, in this case by trying to *hide* death within nature, rather than *visibly integrating* it into nature's cycles...[This is] true for all forest, woodland, or conservation cemeteries where the visibility of the dead resting there is eliminated. As I have said elsewhere, this will result in beautiful but anonymous forests, not green cemeteries.<sup>351</sup>

However I disagree that Barton Glebe denies death. What the Trust has done is create an alternative temporality and place in which people can grieve, which is to a large extent facilitated by the 'natural' landscape. Since the landscape is not conspicuously marked with rows of headstones, curb sets or plaques, admittedly rendering the dead

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<sup>351</sup> *Denying death in green burials?* December 10<sup>th</sup> 2009 Perpetua's Garden [Retrieved 02/03/10]:<http://perpetuasgarden.org/green-burial/integrating-death-in-green-burial/>

more invisible, a sense of being liberated or outside of daily life's bureaucracy and pace is conveyed for there are fewer "external intrusions" (Conradson 2007:36).<sup>352</sup> For this reason I argue that Barton Glebe is also a therapeutic landscape that fosters restoration, reflection and hope. I should add that the pursuit of a therapeutic place or practice in the event of death can also be found in other cultural practices around the world. For example the Hadza conduct the *epeme* dance shortly following a death because it is an attempt to "establish and maintain a state of well-being and good order"; a psychological state more valued at the time of death when death threatens to bring chaos (Woodburn 1982:191).

### **Birdsong and 'sound scapes'**<sup>353</sup>

Birdsong and the presence of birds is an integral aspect of place-making at Barton Glebe. A bird survey is conducted throughout the year by one of the Trustees. The observation of particular species of birds and/or the aural detection of their song is recorded in order to designate the specific habitat of Barton Glebe (e.g. arable land, meadow, woodland) because the Trust are interested to know how long it will take for woodland birds to establish themselves.

If you're talking about green field sites this is *still* unique in that we are now demonstrably within a woodland: there's bees buzzing in the background, there's larks flying overhead and you look about and you are in a woodland, *even though* it hasn't gone ten seasons yet. Any other green field woodland burial sites I've been to, you've got a few trees planted in a field. They're *not woodland* burials. They're field burials and they're fine. Again that's a niche that particularly farmers are exploiting and best of luck to them, but you know, that's not what I signed up for when I was thinking about woodland burial. It's never going to be woodland ultimately! (Forestry Commission Advisor)

The detection of willow warblers was welcomed by the Arbory Trust as evidence that their vision to create deciduous woodland was finally being realised. Therefore,

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<sup>352</sup> See *Romantic Values* in Chapter 6.

<sup>353</sup> A term associated with a Canadian composer and environmentalist, R. Murray Schafer, referring to "any acoustic field of study" (1977:7) in which "significant features of the soundscape [are] those sounds which are important because of their individuality, their numerousness or their domination" (1977:9). Schafer identified a soundscape as having 'keynote' sounds, 'signal' sounds and 'soundmarks'. It is the keynote sounds which are important here for they are the sounds of a landscape that originate in the landscape's geography and climate (1977:9) and Schafer argues "help to outline the character of men living among them" (1977:9).

particular species of bird became explicitly part of Barton Glebe's place-making. The willow warblers that were colonising the taller willow trees were regarded as evidence that Barton Glebe had finally been colonised by its "first 'bone fide' woodland bird." Barton Glebe was now no longer reclaimed arable land with a grand design, but a "young, developing" wood.<sup>354</sup>

For visitors, particular birdsong can be an aural trigger for memories and creates a sense of familiarity or tranquillity that becomes integral to the evoked impression of place when retrospectively recalling Barton Glebe.<sup>355</sup> A widower recounted how he remembered skylarks flying above his wife's grave at her funeral and that others present at the funeral had noticed it too; thus skylarks became integral to this widower's identification of place.

Barton Glebe's natural soundscape helps to create an immersive environment for bereaved visitors through, for example, the aural perception of leaves rustling on the breeze and birdsong. These sounds are culturally regarded as being able to convey a sense of peace and calm, hence audio sales of, for example, bird and whale song in British high street retailers. The natural acoustic environment at Barton Glebe is an integral component to its perceived authenticity as young 'woodland' and as a 'natural' place for "sound is atmosphere" (Tonkiss 2003:304). Birdsong is part of the atmosphere authenticating the *natural* burial ground. Schafer (1977) refers to the sounds created by nature, which are not necessarily consciously heard, as 'keynote sounds'. In many parts of urban Britain the keynote sound is that of traffic, but for the widower above his keynote sound for Barton Glebe is the song of skylarks. Sound permits places to come to us in memory<sup>356</sup> (Tonkiss 2003:303) because "as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place" (Feld 2005:179).

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<sup>354</sup> *Barton Birdlife 2009* by Dr. Thomas, see Appendix 3.

<http://www.arborytrust.org/Documents/Birds%20in%20Barton%202009.pdf> [Retrieved 21/02/10]

<sup>355</sup> A research project at Aberdeen University called 'Listening to Birds: An anthropological approach to bird sounds' seeks to understand how bird sounds become a part of people's everyday lives. See [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/birdsong/an\\_anthropologist\\_listens\\_to\\_birds.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/birdsong/an_anthropologist_listens_to_birds.php) [Retrieved 25/02/10]

<sup>356</sup> Tonkiss refers to the memories kept or triggered by sounds in the landscape as "sound souvenirs" or "aural postcards" (2003:306).

## The therapeutic human place<sup>357</sup>

The Administrator of St. Albans Woodland Burial Trust said in an interview:

I have had people come to me and say: “Well, they won’t let us do that, or we can’t do that somewhere. We wanted to go into our local church, but there’s not room for me or my husband”. That’s very often one of the things. “They won’t let us have music by the grave, they won’t let us do this, we can’t reserve next to each other” ... I’ve been to friend’s funerals and they’re just so soulless and morose and awful, and I’m not exaggerating this, but a burial up there [the woodland burial ground] isn’t! It isn’t, and I can’t put my finger on why it isn’t. I think it’s because people are having what they want. I think *that’s* what it is! People are *able* to do what *they* want to do. And they don’t *feel* inhibited *there*, whereas in a graveyard they can. Certainly, “oh! I can’t walk on that grave there!” Those *taboos*, whereas walking through there [the St Albans ground] you don’t actually feel like you’re walking through a graveyard, you’re walking through a forest or a wood. A wood! And I think it’s all those *little* things that put people *more* at ease and therefore give them, they go back and have picnics up there! On people’s birthdays families have gone up there and had a picnic with the children in the summer and...[slight pause]...would you do that in a graveyard or in a cemetery? Probably not, but you can up there.

The suggestion that the living would not ordinarily have a picnic in a cemetery for example, but that it is somehow facilitated and acceptable in natural burial sites, is not simply one provider’s rhetoric for advocating natural burial. Bereaved visitors to Barton Glebe have made similar comments in suggesting that there is less inhibition and greater latitude for individual expressions of grief. Take Kathy, for example:

I used to go and *lie* where my grave is next to Victor and I’d take a sandwich quite often actually, but I don’t do it now. There’s a little shop in Barton and they do take-away coffee and I sometimes used to go early in the morning on my bicycle and buy a croissant or something and they do take-away coffee, so if you’re very careful you can balance it in your bicycle basket and I’d just go and sit and have my coffee and croissant next to Victor’s grave. Or I’d take a sandwich out and just go and lie there and *read*! If there’s somebody else around I don’t do it, but most of the time there isn’t somebody around, so, you know, if it’s a nice day I just take a sandwich out there. It was mostly in the first year. I don’t do it so much now. I only did it once or twice last year. But actually, it is a *place* that I *love*! I used to lie down where I’m going to be buried and I’d be thinking: Gosh! This is where I’ll be!

Additionally, a widow describes below, the frivolity that can erupt when visiting Barton Glebe with grandchildren:

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<sup>357</sup> See also *Place, Nature and Positive Emotional Expression* in Chapter 5, page 131-139.

I've taken my grandchildren over there and they just run around and create mayhem and they don't know what it means but they talk about it and say "this is granddad's place" and I think that's great! I mean, that was the whole idea of what it's all about.

These comments emphasise how there are social and cultural constraints and opportunities acting upon a place regarding its designation, use and degree of influence upon human behaviour and emotion. Ken West's original motivations that saw him set up the first natural burial ground in 1993 have facilitated an opportunity over time for people to invest their values in these latest places for bodily disposal.<sup>358</sup> Barton Glebe is as much about informality as it is about environmentally-sensitive practices since the absence of architectural and traditional constraints in this burial ground creates a less controlled environment for informal behaviour: A widow can take a sandwich and read or lie beside her husband's grave whilst children can run around and *create mayhem*.<sup>359</sup> Just as the architecture of crematoria "has allowed a broad band of cultural commitments to find expression in their own decade or stylistic period and, in so doing, to make some firm assertion on the nature of life and death in ways that have not been determined by the direct patronage of churches" (Davies 2005c:146), the same now applies to natural burial grounds. In Chapter 5 I described how visitors commented that Barton Glebe allowed *emotions to be played out much more naturally* and that this was positively valued by them. Whereas at *crematoria you can't chat, can't be normal, but at a natural burial site I would hope people can be normal* is an opinion shared by many pre-registered Trust clients. Barton Glebe appears to enhance options for public and private rituals and grant greater freedom in visiting behaviour. The diminished number and visibility of graves creates opportunities for this, in comparison to the image of municipal cemeteries:

...in a cemetery you're invariably being buried *so* close to the next person that we're all standing on someone else's grave and people find that quite difficult sometimes....I always think that cemeteries are made up of individual little beds, whereas in a green burial site there's so much room between them [the graves] and one could just go and sit on the *grass* next to mum there and be able to *feel* close. And I actually think people go

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<sup>358</sup> Similarly, cremation was originally valued for its efficiency in bodily disposal but over time the procedure and place created an opportunity for the removal of ashes and their private disposal by the bereaved.

<sup>359</sup> Such behaviour has also been observed in Dutch natural burial grounds (Klaassens and Groote 2010).

more to visit at a green burial site than they would do in a churchyard.  
(Funeral director)

Perhaps the reason a higher frequency of visits are made to natural burial grounds is because it is not seen as *a chore*?

You know, I went to Colny wood and I thought: this is *perfect*: bluebell woods, the RSPB are there and there were kids racing about looking for Easter eggs. You know, it's a place you want to go! You don't think: "Oh gosh! I better go and clip round the grave and lay some flowers: it's not a *chore*, it's actually somewhere that you want to go." (Founder of an eco-coffin company)

I've also been up to Colny Wood with my husband on a day I wasn't working and just walked around the grounds because they're so beautiful and I've seen families just sitting at graves having a picnic! And I just think there's something very special about that. You know, that continuity of life and that people can feel *comfortable* to go into a cemetery and have a picnic with their relatives; how beautiful, and you never see that at municipal cemeteries! (Civil celebrant)

The association of a natural burial ground with informal behaviour and feeling comfortable serves to bolster the allure of natural burial sites as people are put more at ease and this aids the creation of a therapeutic environment. By creating a place for behaviour that is sometimes far from sombre, life is once again reaffirmed and hope permeates many narrative vignettes of mourners' grave visits to Barton Glebe. Here again we learn how the geographical proximity of the dead with the living in a place that does not discourage the activities of the living such as dog-walking, reading, picnics and child's play, and in a landscape and soundscape that accentuates the natural world, has perhaps brought the conceptual categories of life and death closer together. It has certainly made the distinction between them more ambiguous in this latest place of burial and in doing so, the designation and function of burial places are being gradually contested and redefined. For example, unpublished research at Sheffield University<sup>360</sup> from a national survey of natural burial grounds claims that natural burial grounds often have a utility beyond burial: some are investors in social capital or enterprises, others permit the grazing of livestock in the burial ground,

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<sup>360</sup> See *Back to Nature? The cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial* research project at the University of Sheffield led by Andy Clayden (Principal Investigator), Jenny Hockey (Co-Investigator) and Trish Green (Research Associate) [Retrieved 26/08/10]  
<http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html>

whilst others intend to generate revenue from coppicing in the future. Nevertheless, though not all natural burial grounds may grant exclusivity to the dead and mourning because they are places created as a resource for local communities to enjoy and /or as an alternative source of income for the owner(s), the living are still not willing to get too close to death. So rather than ‘naturally’ leaving a corpse out in the open to decompose at the whims of the elements and animal kingdom, the corpse is still interred and so rendered invisible, so that the living can return to the burial ground to sit or walk a few meters from the corpse residing below ground. So whilst I argue that the activities of the living and the place of the dead are brought closer together in natural burial grounds as opposed to cemeteries, the living still maintain a distance from the dead by rendering them invisible in these naturalised burial grounds.

### ***Defining the Place of Natural Burial: Distinctions and commonalities***

...Burial space is essentially mutable: its meaning does not remain static over time; and its significance is not uniform over all cultures. Even at a basic level, the significance of such space alters as time accrues between the living and the dead. (Rugg 2000:259)

Nevertheless, Rugg (2000) identifies six distinct spaces for interment in Western European culture: churchyards, cemeteries, mass graves, war cemeteries, pantheons and burial grounds. The categories Rugg uses to aid definition are: physical characteristics, ownership, purpose, sacredness and ability to protect the deceased’s individual identity. When applying these variables to Barton Glebe and other natural burial sites I have visited,<sup>361</sup> distinguishing a natural burial ground from Rugg’s other six identified spaces becomes difficult because firstly, there is great variety amongst natural burial sites and secondly, these natural burial sites share *some* of the characteristics common to *some* of Rugg’s variables for cemeteries, churchyards and burial grounds, but not all of the characteristics or variables.<sup>362</sup> If one is to follow Arffman’s (2000) four-fold functional definition of a cemetery as having a hygienic function, providing a place for sorrow and “contact with eternity” whilst marking social status, then all but the latter distinctive function are shared by *all* natural burial

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<sup>361</sup> 17 sites as of March 2010.

<sup>362</sup> See *What makes a cemetery a cemetery?* diagnostic table published by the University of York Cemetery Research Group at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/crg/cemeterydef.htm> [Retrieved 09/03/10]

sites; indeed some natural burial sites *do* mark social status as well.<sup>363</sup> A distinction between natural burial grounds and other burial places in Britain becomes more elusive when accounting for the fact that some natural burial provision is offered within existing crematoria and cemetery grounds, as was the case with the first ever natural burial site in Carlisle. Moreover, some visitors to Barton Glebe said they thought the place was *just like a churchyard* because of its consecrated status.

Despite the great variety of ownership, regulations and locations of natural burial sites I do think there is a defining characteristic. Be it the woodland setting, an arable field set aside to develop into an overgrown meadow, or a copse surrounded by landscape vistas – all landscapes I’ve encountered in natural burial grounds – they ‘naturalise’ what is essentially a burial ground. The aesthetic veneer of a natural landscape with varying degrees of human activity inscribed upon it, is the most persuasive means by which natural burial sites achieve their dual purpose: first, as a burial place and secondly, as an aesthetic place for passers-by, dog-walkers and bereaved visitors. A naturalised burial place encourages therapeutic moods such as tranquillity and reflection. Here we encounter historical continuities in society-nature relations in which landscapes are designed for spiritual uplift, therapy and recuperation.<sup>364</sup> Loudon’s garden cemetery designs were believed to foster moral vigour and reflection (Worpole 2003b:57-58), as were picturesque parks and gardens of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Slater and Peillon 2009:95, Slater 2007), the American ‘rural cemetery’ movement (Park 1994, Schantz 2008) and the pursuit of gardening itself for leisure or therapy by *all* social classes offering an “escape” from life’s circumstances (Constantine 1981). Natural burial sites are to a large extent twenty-first century therapeutic landscapes<sup>365</sup> for the grieving because, for example, natural burial *touches*

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<sup>363</sup> This is dependent on the degree of memorialisation permitted at a natural burial ground and/or whether there is a range of prices for grave space. Permissive individual grave memorialisation and a sliding scale of prices for grave spaces relating to different areas of a natural burial site ensure the deceased’s social status can explicitly be marked.

<sup>364</sup> Historical examples include monastic ‘healing’ herb gardens from the eleventh century onwards, Greek and Roman spas, public parks and gardens, as well as healing gardens attached to hospitals and hospices. Worpole claims that: “The spiritual or ‘healing’ properties of landscape have, in recent times, begun to be re-absorbed into the vocabulary of civic culture” (2003b:58) and I would also extend that to the resurgence of popularity for allotments and city farms as a focus for social cohesion projects with asylum seekers, young offenders, and those with mental or physical disabilities, amongst many other targeted groups. Cf. Rubino (2007) for example.

<sup>365</sup> A concept credited to Wil Gesler (1993,1996, 1998) and integral to geographies of health. For the theoretical evolution of this concept see Williams (2007: 1-12).

*something in people which they don't know is there.*<sup>366</sup> In our cultural milieu natural burial grounds are understood as therapeutic landscapes *par excellence*; a quality that during the nineteenth century was bestowed upon the English joint-stock cemeteries inspired by Père-Lachaise in Paris. However, churchyards, cemeteries and crematoria have come to pass for a number of those interviewed in relation to Barton Glebe as *soulless* and/or *neglected*:

I find seeing a churchyard with a load of gravestones very *depressing*. And they get so neglected. Nobody looks after them. And I think that's *so* depressing. I mean, don't get me wrong, I love churches, but outside, when you see all these down and out sort of graves it's depressing. But when you look at the Glebe up there, and I remember we went on the open evening there, and we walked around and there was this lovely, lovely, lovely place where somebody had planted their own seeds and it was just all wild flowers. And to me, that's what it *should* look like! And you know, does it really even matter that you haven't got these tomb stones and that, which are really...I mean they do fall to pieces! As I say, that to me is back in Victorian times. (Rosie is pre-registered)

A cemetery would never appeal to me *at all!* It's just...it's just...well, not *anything!* It's not associated with the church, and it's not associated with anything particularly beautiful really. It's just a lot of grave stones isn't it? But I mean, this tree thing is *lovely!* There's an *atmosphere* when you're there of peace and with trees...longevity! (Belinda's husband's ashes are interred at Barton Glebe)

It would appear that burial modes prior to natural burial have come to represent inanimate landscapes, whereas for those who visit or who have pre-registered at Barton Glebe, it represents a place which is animated: so contrary to the cemetery as a *monument to death rather than remembrance of the living person.*<sup>367</sup>

In the same way people were buried in churchyards, then in cities churchyards filled up with no land available to expand around the church so then we get separate cemeteries. Then cemeteries fill up, new technology allows cremation and crematoria, then people begin to feel that cremation is a bit soulless perhaps and then recognise that its environmental impact is very negative. People begin to care about the environment a bit more and as I say, there's a spirituality without

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<sup>366</sup> A widow describing the effects of visiting a natural burial site.

<sup>367</sup> Andy, whose grandmother is interred at Barton Glebe. His comment could also imply that some people seeking woodland burial do not want to be part of the detritus of history in old gravestones as a churchyard or cemetery might intimate? Perhaps some people do not see themselves as part of such an order of things, or at least not enough to draw them there when other newer options like natural burial offer more compelling attractions, such as a *living memorial* or a *return to nature*?

particular religious affiliation, which would find a crematorium soulless, so again, alternative burial sites are popping up. So I think they kind of evolve out of each other!

This is an insightful comment by the priest serving the parish Barton Glebe is located in, for she reminds us of the socio-historical contingencies that have led to the creation of new places for the dead in our history and that: “the nature of burial space is not immutable” (Rugg 2000:272). For example, some churchyards once full or abandoned are now being retrospectively cultivated as public gardens and wildlife habitats for rare species. Worpole (2003b) lists some examples: the Begraafplaats Te Vraag in Amsterdam is a 19th-century cemetery now maintained as a public garden; Lambeth churchyard in London and Little St. Mary’s in Cambridge are also kept as public gardens. So despite the enduring “landscape aesthetic of the churchyard” (Worpole 2003b:77) that is deeply embedded in cultural landscapes for the dead, churchyards are being appropriated for other uses. Further, cemeteries:

...may acquire the characteristics of local parks. The ownership of the site may change, and management practice will alter as each generation defines its key reasons for seeking to dispose of the dead in a particular type of cemetery landscape. (Rugg 2000:272)

Thus any definition of natural burial as a place for the dead is inevitably subject to change, but quite what direction the mutability of natural burial sites will take over the following decades or century remains to be fully anticipated.

### ***Concluding Thoughts and Summary***

I have argued that the distinction of natural burial, as a place for the dead, rests upon which aspects of death are expressed and which are denied or muted in natural burial grounds. Barton Glebe is a place where human and non-human life cycles are marked and the passing of someone’s life is reflected in the seasonal landscape. I argue that humans are not *necessarily* granted sovereign status as is customary with cemeteries, but rather a human construction of the ‘natural’ world is given sovereignty facilitated by the explicit lack of *visible* permanent grave markers or the location of graves themselves. Psychologically, this permits a sense of exclusivity to bereaved visitors.

Whilst Worpole’s suggestion that natural burial grounds grant sovereign status to nature rather than the dead (2003b) has been a useful heuristic device to highlight a

distinction between natural burial and other forms of burial provision, Worpole's use of 'nature' needs to be qualified here. What is understood to be nature and taken to be its sovereign status in natural burial is actually an aesthetic veneer of the natural landscape itself judiciously planned, planted and managed. This chapter illustrated that the natural world at Barton Glebe is one that is not too 'wild', since human beings intervene to prevent the ruthlessness of 'nature'. Some users felt discouraged from choosing grave locations too near the main road because of traffic 'noise', but at the same time did not want to be too far from the main path. Thus humans interact with nature to enhance their own well-being rather than letting nature run its own course. The naturalised burial place is one created by human intervention and a tension persists between the cultivated and the natural.

The aesthetic veneer of the 'natural' landscape, together with subtle grave markings, lessens death's impact on the visible landscape and grants a sense of exclusivity for the bereaved visitor. It is only when stumbling upon a wooden grave marker placed flush to the ground, hidden amongst the grass or wildflowers, or seeing a newly filled-in grave that the presence of corpses below ground becomes visibly acknowledged. The lodge and signage are in keeping with a naturalistic landscape by adopting a 'rustic' look and the resounding non-human soundscape adds 'authenticity' to one's experience of this natural place of burial. Whilst the visual reminders of the dead and customary material culture are lessened or absent in this naturalised landscape, which begs the question of contemporary death denial, many who visit Barton Glebe or who anticipate being buried there, express that the place is therapeutic where one feels relaxed. I argued that this was partly due to the lack of architectural forms restricting human behaviour and movement. For example, cemeteries and churchyards often have clearly defined graves close to each other but at Barton Glebe, the occupancy of land below ground is not necessarily reflected in what is visible above ground so that mourners can lie beside the grave they are visiting and feel uninhibited in having a picnic. This is because Barton Glebe permits a pretence of exclusivity for visitors. For example, Kathy would occasionally read a book beside her husband's grave because she can render the other graves invisible in the absence of conspicuous grave markings and therefore deny the presence of the other corpses below ground. This is why Kathy feels comfortable to read a book, though I am sure she would not do so if anyone else were on site. When someone feels a place to be exclusively their own,

they can behave as if one were in one's own private space, such as the home. Thus, what is rendered visible and invisible at Barton Glebe constitutes Barton Glebe being a contemporary therapeutic landscape. Barton Glebe provides an alternative to all that is understood to be *soulless, artificial, depressing* and *neglected* about cemeteries, churchyards, burial grounds and crematoria in the twenty-first century. For some interviewees, cemeteries and crematoria occupy inanimate earth, whilst natural burial grounds exemplify an animate earth; a condition that creates the possibility for therapeutic notions of reciprocity in and beyond the death of a corporeal body. Thus 'nature' can be understood as "a community of living subjects held together by an intricate gift economy – wherein each being, each life is nourished by a host of others, and then gives of its life in return" (Abram 2001).<sup>368</sup>

The semi-naturalness of Barton Glebe not only creates a therapeutic landscape, but the naturalised landscape for burial replete with life and life-giving properties, becomes symbolic of the bereaved visitor's relationship to the deceased. Barton Glebe becomes the very relationship itself. The perceived value of a grieving visitor's relationship with the deceased becomes inalienable from the landscape. The natural landscape of Barton Glebe creates a place for the bereaved to "evoke what is most precious" (Sheldrake 2001:1) viz., their continuing, exclusive, inalienable relations with the dead through continuing bonds (Klass 1999, 2006, Klass *et al.* 1996):

██████ [his] grave is still unmarked, and I find it doesn't worry me. Or rather, it's marked by all the little wild flowers I've been planting intermittently. I still go there quite a lot, but only when the weather's nice - overtly mostly just to see how the flowers are getting on, but at another level, I think, to in some way stay centred in the love ██████ [he] gave me, and to acknowledge that connectedness I still have with him...I still feel very rooted in ██████ [his] love, even though he is no more, and for me, I think because of the move from the home where we had lived together, his grave and the whole place became a profound symbol to me of rootedness and connectedness, and that has continued. The toad is still there; I seem to manage to disturb him each autumn when I'm planting bulbs, and he seems to survive!<sup>369</sup>

Kathy's candid description of her grave visits illustrates that: "to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world" (Relph 1976:38) In

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<sup>368</sup> An issue addressed in the following chapter in relation to reciprocity.

<sup>369</sup> From personal correspondence with the widow who kindly granted permission to reproduce her text here in April 2010.

visiting the grave to *stay centred* on her husband's love, Kathy is creating a new 'home' for herself in the world, in which home is "an irreplaceable centre of significance" (Relph 1976:39). Her relationship with her late husband brings added significance to Barton Glebe because Barton Glebe as a place gains significance from the relationships between persons encountered within it (cf. Relph 1976:39). More importantly, Barton Glebe provides a new arena in which those grieving can restructure the possible disorder, disconnectedness and homelessness brought on by loss through death, for this is what Kathy is doing in her visits, as well as reaffirm her relationship to all that is inalienable to her identity and understanding of the world, namely her relationship with her late husband. If Relph is correct in claiming "a deep human need exists for associations with significant places" (1976:147) and if "significant places" are therefore authentic to those who dwell in them, then it seems logical to argue that some individuals in contemporary Britain are illustrating Relph's claim by seeking an alternative to the inauthentic, non-place or placelessness they experience at other customary places for the dead. The development of natural burial is, in part, an attempt to re-locate and authentically place death and inalienable relationships. Turning to the final chapter, we will learn how inalienable relationships constitute not only the focus of grave visits, but also people's motivations to *return to nature* and *give something back*.

## Chapter 8

### **To *Return to Nature* and *Give Something Back*: Idioms of reciprocity, symbolic immortality and salvation**

This thesis has been discussing the concept, practice and historical trajectory of natural burial in the UK in relation to ethnographic data from one particular natural burial ground called Barton Glebe. As an anthropologist, I have been particularly interested in analysing natural burial as a cultural phenomenon, therefore, exploring the implicit cultural values, practices and assumptions that have fostered natural burial's emergence and increasing appeal. In this regard, I have drawn attention to discourses on the nature of 'nature', romantic values, nostalgia, changing attitudes towards cemeteries and crematoria, the impact of geographical mobility and environmental discourse upon burial practices and memorial needs, amongst many other themes and converging points of discussion.

In this final chapter however, I narrow the focus of discussion to analysing the notion of gift-giving and reciprocity that has repeatedly surfaced in both concept and practice narratives, particularly from the perspective of pre-registered users. This epilogue presents a mode of analysis that illuminates how some people in Britain today attempt to make sense of their own mortality and/or death using readily available motifs in natural burial practice, to *return to nature* and *give something back*; idioms discussed briefly in Chapters 5 and 6. However, before analysing these motifs I would like to refer to the poem below, which sets the context for a discussion on reciprocity and gift-giving in relation to natural burial.

Don't lay me in some gloomy churchyard shaded by a wall,  
Where the dust of ancient bones has spread a dryness over all,  
Lay me in some leafy loam where, sheltered from the cold,  
Little seeds investigate, and tender leaves unfold,  
There, kindly and affectionately plant a native tree,  
To grow resplendent before God and hold some part of me,  
The roots will not disturb me as they wend their peaceful way,  
To build the fine and bountiful from closure and decay,

To seek their small requirements so that when their work is done  
I'll be tall and standing strongly in the beauty of the sun.<sup>370</sup>

Ayers's poem captures the sentiment of reciprocal nourishment, one which is commonly alluded to by many of those who support or have a commercial interest in natural burial. To be buried in a natural burial ground is commonly perceived as using one's body to nourish the soil and for that fertilised soil to nourish new life. A concomitant reciprocal sentiment also alluded to by Ayers, is that by nourishing the earth one nourishes one's spirit or soul before God or humanity. As stated in the previous chapter, for some people, churchyards, cemeteries or crematoria have become inanimate places in which *the dust of ancient bones has spread a dryness over all*. Natural burial grounds on the other hand, are understood or anticipated to contain the animate earth in which *leafy loam* nourishes a multiple array of life-forms. Therefore, natural burial practice is replete with metaphors that allude to this burial form's life-giving potential, reciprocal relations between humans and nature, as well as opportunities for gift-giving by the pre-registered user.

This chapter argues that the allusion to gift-giving provides a creative means for the pre-registered and bereaved to imagine continuity beyond death and affirm meaningful relations as well as the values of the living. Natural burial also offers a new creative outlet for seeking and framing salvation, albeit framed in a broad sense. This conclusion is drawn from analysing the motive of pre-registered users to *give something back*. I have identified explicit gift-giving/reciprocity rhetoric and symbolism in individual motivations for choosing natural burial in the form of a desire for *going back to nature; giving something back; fertilizing the soil; to be of use or going back into that oneness with creation*.<sup>371</sup> This emerging pattern of statements prompted analysis of what is being articulated about natural burial in relation to bodies, the earth and human imagination in death using the language of reciprocity and gift-giving.

The appeal to gift-giving/reciprocity is also encapsulated in the marketing of natural burial. In choosing to be buried in a natural burial site one can be seen to be making a

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<sup>370</sup> 'Woodland Burial' by Pam Ayers (2006) *Surgically Enhanced* London: Hodder & Stoughton

<sup>371</sup> These are particularly the sentiments of the pre-registered.

last statement and undertaking an altruistic act, even in one's death. 'Let your last footprint be a green one' is an advertising slogan trade marked by an eco-coffin supplier and encapsulates a marketing tendency to associate natural burial with the notion of *giving something back* in an ecologically sensitive manner. *Giving back to nature* offers hope and promises a kind of immortality, as well as the pleasure of woodland for future generations. These marketed promises of gift-giving can be explicit in the advertising of natural burial provision:

A green burial is a natural way to celebrate a life, a way of giving back to nature and the environment a gift for our children, grandchildren and all future generations, the gift being a memorial woodland.<sup>372</sup>

As people become more aware not only of their responsibility to the environment but also of their ability to choose where their ultimate resting place will be, more and more are turning to woodland burial, where their impact on the environment is considerably less than that of cremation, and where they know they will rest in a beautiful, natural setting which their family and friends may return to with pleasure.<sup>373</sup>

Natural burial is marketed and perceived as a burial practice exemplifying reciprocal relations in which one can offer one's self to "the landscape and generations to come"<sup>374</sup> by choosing to have a natural burial and/or sponsor a memorial tree. Likewise, a bereaved family in choosing a natural burial and/or sponsoring a memorial tree on behalf of the deceased are also "offering not only a gift to the one who has passed away, but to the landscape and to generations to come."<sup>375</sup> Natural burial is predicated upon an implicit contract being imagined between the deceased, the landscape and present and future kin because one may "celebrate a life by giving new life."<sup>376</sup> In abstracting these categories to a higher social order this thesis suggests that natural burial reconfigures social relations between the dead and the living and their place in the world. I argue that the allusion to gifting one's self or the deceased

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<sup>372</sup> Olney Green Burial website *Why a green burial* [Retrieved 22/07/09]

[http://www.olneygreenburial.co.uk/natural\\_why\\_green\\_burial.asp](http://www.olneygreenburial.co.uk/natural_why_green_burial.asp)

<sup>373</sup> The Arbory Trust's homepage [Retrieved 22/07/09] <http://arborytrust.org/>

<sup>374</sup> *A Tree as a Living Memorial* [Retrieved 06/05/10]

<http://www.nrbgrounds.co.uk/memorials/trees.html>

<sup>375</sup> *A Tree as a Living Memorial* [Retrieved 06/05/10]

<http://www.nrbgrounds.co.uk/memorials/trees.html>

<sup>376</sup> *Why Green Burial?* [Retrieved 06/05/10] <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=924>

Further research should ask what sentiments or emotions are encapsulated in this advertising appeal to "celebrate".

to 'nature' and subsequently providing "an important gift for our children, their children, their grandchildren"<sup>377</sup> invites a notion of gift-giving to social values beyond the individual hitherto only available in the idea and practice of giving one's body to medical research. For example, the woman below, in explaining her consideration to pre-register at Barton Glebe, articulates the altruistic associations inherent in this mode of disposal:

I think I'll most definitely have a woodland burial, I mean I am a Christian, but for me it's much more about the spirit side and the rejuvenation and the giving something back...It's [woodland burial] linked to charity and giving isn't it, because it's perceived as a very good thing to do, because you're not damaging the environment. (Local resident who intends to pre-register at Barton Glebe)

Natural burial rhetoric therefore assumes an implicit moral imperative. However, what does it mean to give to future generations, to the environment, to give new life, or to see reciprocity and a moral imperative in conjunction? What are the received notions to do so? Is it really about charity as the woman above mentioned?<sup>378</sup> I suggest that the moral imperative is actually a social demand. The living are obligated to society, keenly felt by some of those who chose to pre-register at Barton Glebe, and who subsequently perceive natural burial as an opportunity for salvation in its broadest sense.<sup>379</sup>

The French sociologist Marcel Mauss has greatly influenced anthropological interest in the nature of the gift and reciprocity with his seminal work *The Gift: Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (1974 [1954]). Mauss argued that gift-giving was nearly always "obligatory and interested" (1974 [1954]:1) creating an obligation to reciprocate. He argued that reciprocity and exchange create and reinforce social contracts. In other words, social order in solidarity is created and maintained through gift-giving and exchange between giver and receiver. A social bond is created between the giver and receiver because Mauss argued, a part of the

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<sup>377</sup> E.g. the natural burial site is also a nature reserve or a re-forested area. Quote from *Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground* [Retrieved 06/05/10]

<http://www.midlandsgreenpages.co.uk/companies/woodland-burials/sun-rising-natural-burial-ground/>

<sup>378</sup> By way of cultural comparison, Mims claims that a Tibetan corpse offered to the birds constitutes a "final act of charity" (1999:136).

<sup>379</sup> See Amy's reasons for choosing Barton Glebe in this chapter, page 243.

giver is retained in the gift. Although it is claimed Mauss was more empirical than Durkheim by working with comparative ethnographic data, Durkheim's sociological focus upon the totality of social phenomena is evident in the scholarship of Mauss (James 1998, Karsenti 1998). Mauss's analytical focus upon gift exchange allowed him to demonstrate how it "constitutes a totality of human experience" (Sykes 2005:3) because gift-giving "establishes and confirms a relationship between people and in this way has been described as a kind of cornerstone of society" (Sykes 2005:1), because "how people give and receive is a matter of what kind of relationships they imagine they make and keep with each other" (Sykes 2002:59).

Mauss identified four obligations that he argued created and maintained social solidarity: the obligation to give, to receive, to reciprocate and to give to gods. It is this 'fourth obligation' - to give to the gods<sup>380</sup> - that is of interest here because I understand the category, 'gods', as a category by which humans acknowledge a dependence and which tells a story of how particular socio-cultural groups understand their origins; be that framed with regards to a particular divine being, nature, or the environment and humanity at large. Therefore, to give to the 'gods' is to affirm one's core values. Chapter 6 explored the core values invested in the practice of woodland burial whereas this chapter concerns how giving to or honouring core values grants a sense of continuity with regards to personal identity in the face of death.

Rhetorical formulations of the body or deceased as a gift offering new life fosters the notion in the living that natural burial allows one to "leave this world a better place"<sup>381</sup> because one's *body is helping in the future to replenish the earth* through its 'natural', unfettered decomposition in the soil. In this sense, natural burial could be described as a "gift event" because it encapsulates "an exchange between...[the living] and earth and within the earth community" (Primavesi 2003:111), where the corpse is understood to be a fertile source for new life given as a gift in acknowledgement of the resources consumed by the former living person. The giver is the deceased (and perhaps the family) and the receiver is existing and future life; be that the deceased's surviving kin or the soil as a receiver of nutrients.

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<sup>380</sup> An example offered by Davies (2002 [1997]:86) is that of traditional Hindu cremation practices in which cremation is understood as a type of sacrifice: "a kind of voluntary offering of the body to the deities" (see also Parry 1994).

<sup>381</sup> West (2008:108).

Primavesi argues that *Gaia* theory fosters a shift of perspective from the earth being subordinate to human activity and purpose to humans being in a reciprocal relationship with the earth in recognising the earth as a gift (see 2003:98-99 ‘Heaven on Earth’). This shift of perspective moves from a homocentric universe to a heliocentric one. Primavesi argues that in the latter, death is accepted by humans who are then thankful for life, whilst the homocentric universe sees human beings foster a sense of being exempt from death by imaging an immortal life elsewhere (e.g. heaven). Therefore, life and death are combined in mutual dependency in the heliocentric universe (2003:102-104). However, where the analogy with Primavesi’s theological discussion of *Gaia* and gift practices becomes tenuous in relation to natural burial, is that no one interviewed in relation to Barton Glebe or any providers’ websites referred to “the earth community”, which is a concept derived from a heliocentric worldview advocated by Primavesi (2003:111).

This is perhaps because natural burial is a token, symbolic gesture of what life *should* be about, rather than what it *already* is. Pre-registered users’ allusions to gifting their bodies to the earth, nature, woodland or future generations is inherently an ethical statement concerning wider society and/or the future of humanity as well as a value statement. Natural burial articulated as a mode of gift-giving, be this from the perspective of users, site operators or advertising, ultimately promotes itself as a practice that is more ethical in the life of the living, because it is understood as a disposal practice in which *one is able to reconnect with values that really matter in life.*<sup>382</sup>

In this chapter then, I shall demonstrate *how* natural burial encapsulates gift-giving to societal values and the inalienable qualities of life and one’s identity and therefore, how natural burial practice can grant a sense of salvation for some users; “an act of atonement for a life that consumed far too much energy” but “a gestural act at that” (Cowling 2010:27). However, unlike Cowling, I argue that natural burial’s potential

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<sup>382</sup> The opinion of a pre-registered woman. See also Chapter 6 *Religious-Spiritual Values*, page 182-183.

for the living's atonement goes beyond simply environmental salvation; it is also deeply symbolic of individual redemption and atonement for guilt.<sup>383</sup>

### ***The Body as Waste versus the Body as Gift***

In natural burial the corpse is seen as a highly fertile object since there is a compelling notion that the body is able to fertilise the soil to nurture new life from death. This is a symbiosis that resonates with creation since the corpse is “a fertile element returning to a fertile world” (Davies 2008b:119-120).

Using ethnographic examples from around the world, anthropologists Bloch and Parry (1982) discuss recurring instances of fertility and regeneration in death rites. The renewal of fertility observed in death rites can be conferred through increased “fecundity of people, or of animals and crops, or of all three” in which, Bloch and Parry conclude, the focus for revitalisation will depend upon that which is “*culturally conceived* to be most essential to the reproduction of social order” (1982:7 original emphasis). One could argue that in natural burial the fertility of the corpse is literally and imaginatively bestowed back to the soil in order to revitalise and ensure sustainability of that on which society depends: planet earth. At a time in cultural history when there appears to be a heightened sense of risk and the “irreversible artificiality of nature is...confirmed precisely by its conservation through ecological intervention” (Beck 1995:37), one could argue that the life crisis of death is imaginatively subverted by using it as an opportunity to slow down, change the course of, or prevent, a planetary crisis. Quite literally, in natural burial, “death is a source of life. Every death makes available a new potentiality for life, and one creature's loss is another's gain” (Bloch & Parry 1982:8, see also Primavesi 2003).

For example, by offering himself as *worm food*, Andy changes the status of his body; it is no longer waste that needs disposing of, rather a gift that contributes towards *helping the cycle of life*. His *holistic* conception of death, life and the demise of his physical body also creates or sustains the opportunity for continued enchantment or re-enchantment in the world, by imaginatively re-appropriating intimacy with other

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<sup>383</sup> Amy being an example; see this chapter, page 242-246.

forms of life. This is in contrast to a perceived distancing of humans from the wider living community in contemporary life (Primavesi 2003:109-110):

...burial at sea is quite holistic – going back to the elements and food for fishes...it's not quite as easy as a woodland burial though...I always liked the idea of sky burial that the South American Indians used. What it is, is that it's going one step further, it's actually *feeding* the animals, and of course in American mythology, it's their spirit people that are in the form of animals so I can understand it perfectly you know. Why shouldn't a few crows have a good feed off you? Again, it's helping the cycle of life. You go in the dirt and be worm food, what's the difference between worm food and crow food? (Andy)

The body in this sense is not seen as 'waste' but actually as a 'gift' for propagating new life forms or bestowing life-giving properties back into the earth so that future generations may reap the recreational benefits of a protected natural habitat, for example. Moreover, understanding the corpse as a gift detracts from what can be seen as morally abhorrent with the funeral industry viz., the corpse as a commodity. The funeral trade is economically sustainable because human bodies are used as commodities. However, some natural burial users are implicitly transforming the commodity system of exchange that the funeral industry operates within, to a system of gift-giving and reciprocity by alluding to *giving something back*, and *going back to nature*, using a mode of disposal that is popularly characterised as *simple* and involves *no fuss*.<sup>384</sup>

A particular notion of dignity in death is also being created and performed here, particularly by pre-registered users. It is a notion of dignity that is constructed as oppositional to conspicuous consumption and commodity exchange by negating or challenging industry profit in desiring a *simple, no fuss* mode of disposal in which the deceased is symbolically *giving something back*. Similarly in the transfer of human body parts such as blood and major organs, an ethical debate concludes that it is only "through 'gift' or 'donation'" that dignity is not compromised from one person to another because donations are understood to be distinct from commodity exchange (Mitchell 2004:123-124). On the other hand "the sale of body parts such as hair and fingernails have often been explained by recourse to the logic of waste. These body

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<sup>384</sup> For a discussion of the cultural values and meanings behind these idioms and metaphors see Chapter 6.

parts it is argued, are “abandoned” by the living, functioning body, and may thus be sold...The sale of waste tissue is acceptable; the sale of integral organs is not” (Mitchell 2004:124). This is perhaps because the organs still have the capacity to offer life to someone else, therefore, they are still animated with life-giving power.<sup>385</sup> Equally, the sale of a means to *return to nature* with an opportunity for the deceased to *give something back* is acceptable, but the enduring system of selling commodities and services through a professionalised death industry attracts criticism.

Baudrillard argues that death must be warded off “in the interests of life as value” where “life as positivity” sees “life as accumulation, death as due payment” (1993:147). This is partly a consequence of the social nature of death and the social contract that underlies it. Baudrillard’s thesis analyses death within the political economy of the Western world in which he argues that, with ‘natural’ death:<sup>386</sup>

...the dead have just passed away and no longer have anything to exchange. The dead are residual even before dying. At the end of a lifetime of accumulation, the dead are subtracted from the total in an economic operation...they serve entirely as alibis for the living and to their obvious superiority over the dead. This is a flat, one-dimensional death, the end of a biological journey, settling a credit: ‘giving in one’s soul’, like a tyre, a container emptied of its contents. What banality! (1993:164)

Yet this research demonstrates that natural burial practice is contrary to Baudrillard’s argument, for natural burial is empowering to some of those who engage with it precisely because the dead *do* have something to exchange symbolically. The pre-registered in particular, offer their life-giving potential to create something of value for the living in the form of propagated life in trees, meadow, soil or woodland, albeit a wish-fulfilment rather than a biological reality. Natural burial need not be

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<sup>385</sup>To what extent are natural burial and organ or blood donorship parallel phenomena operating with the same allure to offer one’s self as a gift in an act of ‘recycling’ the corporeal body after death? I draw an analogy between those Filipino citizens who offer their kidneys for transplantation as an “act for the public good” (Shimazono 2008:35), those who give blood in England in “a desire to help” (Titmuss 1973[1970]:256) and those who choose to have a natural burial in order to contribute something positive for future generations’ enjoyment and benefit (this research).

<sup>386</sup> However I am critical of the lack of empirical evidence used to illustrate his argument and his uncritical use of terms such as ‘Western’, ‘traditional’ and ‘primitives’. Baudrillard generalises on such a level of abstraction as to nullify the effects of socio-cultural and historical particularities. His argument would be all the more compelling if he were to show how the reality he presents operates despite geographical, historical and cultural differences.

Baudrillard's banal marking of "the end of a biological journey" but an empowering experience in *giving something back* to society and/or earth, contributing to the living whilst remaining congruent to the deceased's individually-held values. This is because natural burial is a practice above and beyond simply an "economic operation".

### ***Natural Burial and Relating to the Gift***

Mauss's *The Gift* demonstrates that "human relationships cannot be contained wholly within usury forms of exchange", challenging an assumption that "human relationships aim towards only utilitarian ends" (Sykes 2005:3). Gift-giving on the other hand allows the giver to consolidate or create their relationships (Sykes 2005:60) and this is no less true in the notion and symbolic act of *giving something back* via natural burial. To give can be empowering and to give to one's core values is to provide and reaffirm meaning in one's life and death. Natural burial:

...can also give deep psychological satisfaction to people who feel that through their death they are supporting the collective good of humanity and often expressing their philosophy in life. (West 2010: xviii)

Natural burial is, therefore, a mode of burial that allows the pre-registered user in particular, to consolidate their relationships and core values; however, what precisely is being given and to whom?

The 'fourth obligation' is an aspect of Mauss's gift-theory which is often ignored and is under-theorised (Godelier 1999, Osteen 2002a:240). It is the obligation to make gifts to the gods or nature or "to men in the sight of gods or nature" (Mauss 1974:12, Godelier 1999:13, Osteen 2002b:9), whereas the other three obligations, to give, to receive and to return, are much more widely known and theorised across disciplines, but not without a degree of contestation (cf. Parry 1986 in particular). Gifts:

...embody the doubleness of all societies, in which there must be both sacred and profane things, both objects freely exchanged and objects preserved from exchange...we might say that gift practices tell conflicting narratives: on the one hand, they expound a narrative of transfer and exchange, of hierarchy, aspiration, and freedom from history; and on the other, *they retell a narrative of continuity with nature and the past, a story*

*of human interconnectedness and humility before the transcendental. It is this second narrative that has too often been ignored in Western accounts of gift practices, and that any fully satisfactory theory of the gift must seek to restore. (Osteen 2002b:9-10, my emphasis)*

Godelier (1999) however, was keen to emphasise the importance of the fourth obligation in discussing gift-giving behaviour. Firstly, Godelier recognised that human beings of all societies “make gifts to beings they regard as their superiors” (1999:13), but this does not necessarily mean the recipient is another human being. The recipient could equally be a conceptual category such as society, God, the clan, one’s core values; anything that is beyond monetary value and the individual. Secondly, Godelier argues for the distinction between ‘alienable’ gifts given in reciprocal exchange and ‘inalienable’ gifts offered to the Gods under Mauss’s fourth obligation, that can never be given in exchange or fully separated from the original giver.

Godelier shows how inalienable things serve as an ‘anchorage in time’, relating people to their past and to their origin, as they ‘concentrate the greatest imaginary power and, as a consequence, the greatest symbolic value’ (1999:32-33). Accordingly, while contractual exchange and non-contractual transmission make up the undercurrent of social life, it is the inalienable elements that help ‘constitute an essential part’ of the identity of specific groups (1999:120). (Davies 2002:195 citing Godelier 1999)

Subsequently, in referring to Godelier’s notion of the ‘inalienable’ gift in relation to those who are interred at Barton Glebe, one is, theoretically, arguing that a part of the deceased is retained in the gift of their own corporeal body to the soil; both literally by becoming part of the soil and symbolically, through a continuation of the deceased’s identity with that particular piece of ground. In this sense, “part of the giver is retained in the ‘gift’, and the giver retains some rights over it” (Davies 2002:196).

The deceased or pre-registered user gives of his or her self to something that imaginatively and symbolically transcends them. This could be a sense of the divine (cf. Barbara’s notion of God’s creation), to society and its values (*giving back to nature* in order to nurture the earth for future generations or repay debts to society) or to sacred origins (*going back to nature* to the soil from which human life is

nourished). Sacred origins can either be understood as an origin in religious narrative or a secular origin residing in myths of where human beings once came; nourished by the earth, to return back to the earth (see Osteen 2002a:241). Cultural comparison yields numerous variations of the “principle of return” in burial as consolidating cultural ideas of a “return to the country of origin”, particularly common in the Pacific and Southeast Asia (van Baaren 1989:99). It is also worth noting that a few of the bereaved saw Barton Glebe as containing vestiges of the deceased who chose to be buried *right there at the beginning*<sup>387</sup> when Barton Glebe was first established, almost implying that they are the original owners.<sup>388</sup>

In natural burial I suggest that the sacred object conceived as the inalienable gift of the fourth obligation is the deceased, whose decomposition becomes symbolic of renewal because of imagined life-giving properties.<sup>389</sup> This then makes *giving/going back to nature* a symbolic act that acknowledges “the relationship of dependence, indebtedness, and gratitude that humans entertain with the imaginary beings” (Godelier 1999:175). Some of the Trust’s pre-registered clients choose to give themselves back to their ‘gods’, their core values, in the symbolic act of *giving something back* through *returning to nature*, to a religiously-framed or secular origin in ‘earth to earth, dust to dust’.<sup>390</sup>

The unreciprocated gift of life belongs not to the profane world but belongs to “a quest for salvation from it” by the giver, according to Parry (1986:482). Certainly some of those who had chosen to pre-register at Barton Glebe saw the opportunity to

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<sup>387</sup> Barbara: bereaved and pre-registered.

<sup>388</sup> This comment raises the issue of time in relation to the inalienable, though unexplored in the context of natural burial. Davies (2002:201) argues that the inalienable gifts of the Eucharist occur “out of time”, whilst reciprocal exchange occurs “in time” for example.

<sup>389</sup> Davies identifies life as an inalienable gift in Albert Schweitzer’s theology of ‘reverence for life’ (1907 and 1919): “It is the depth of our existence, it links us with others in the society that gives us history, language and culture and that bestows an identity upon us...to see life not as something we possess by right but as a gift enables us to appropriate it ‘bit by bit’ and day by day. The liturgical and worshipful alignment of life as gift and Christ as gift offers an incredibly powerful cluster of resource [sic] for developing such a Christian ethic of life.” (2008b:70)

<sup>390</sup> Davies argues that this phrase is used quite differently within the context of woodland burial compared to the Christian doctrinal interpretation in which “humanity was made from the same earth as everything else” whilst also disobediently falling into sin (2005a:82). In woodland burial this positive and negative dust changes its meaning he argues because: “The ‘earth’ that returns to the earth is not the sinful son or daughter of Adam and Eve, but the natural human body that had once been formed by earthly, natural processes, and now continues those processes through death” (2005a:83).

*give something back* as absolving them from the burden of a self-awareness focused upon having taken from life.

In this sense, this thesis also concludes that in some instances, pre-registrations for a natural burial are as much about salvation and redemption as they are about self-imposed responsibilities by the living in “settling a credit”<sup>391</sup> (e.g. funeral costs) before death so next of kin do not incur the responsibility. Therefore, I propose that the “unremittable debt” (Osteen 2002b:12) that human life owes to a ‘god’ or society is observable in decisions to pre-register at Barton Glebe because natural burial is perceived as a personal act of atonement from guilt, fostering natural burial as a means to salvation; as well as an opportunity to *be of some use* and set an example, demonstrated in the discussion below.

## **Salvation**

Parry (1986) argued salvation or redemption lies at the heart of the unreciprocated gift to the gods. However, bearing in mind that Barton Glebe is affiliated to the Church of England,<sup>392</sup> salvation has a particular narrative meaning in the Judeo-Christian tradition which:

...tends to treat all exchanges as versions of the unremittable debt that humans owe to God for the gift of life; all other gifts – whether between kin, between strangers, or between individuals and their own communities – are simply faint echoes of this original endowment...Christian morality depends upon an ethics of intention wherein the “unreciprocated gift becomes a liberation from bondage...a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation (Parry 1986:468)”. (Osteen 2002b:12)

Stan is in the process of making his own funeral plans at Barton Glebe. He articulates how he would like to *be some use* after his death because of his awareness that he has had *the benefit of life on this planet*. Subsequently he acknowledges that humans owe something to *the spirit* and each other because of this, and his motivation to pre-register at Barton Glebe is an expression of this view. It was Stan’s comment that *when people die they’ve had the benefit of life on this planet so that when they die*

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<sup>391</sup> Baudrillard (see 1993:162-166).

<sup>392</sup> In the sense that it is consecrated and occupies church-owned land obtained with assistance from the Diocese of Ely.

*they might help the younger generation coming after them in some mysterious way* that prompted consideration of the possibility for salvation/redemption in natural burial practice because of an interpretation of *use* that concerns intentions rather than the physical body. Previous examples have shown that utility in natural burial is more often understood as the potential *use* of the body in its decomposition to provide food or nourishment to the soil and thus contribute to a cycle of life.<sup>393</sup> Stan is not referring to *use* in this sense, rather it is the intended action, not the involuntary decomposition, which is of ‘use’. His intentions are about influencing others: *we like to influence other people in how they conduct their own lives – I’m talking about the people you leave behind*. By giving himself to *be of some use* Stan is consolidating his relationships with those who will survive him. Also, by using his own body, Stan somehow desires to bring about change and influence and this is where I argue moral opportunities for redemption/salvation occur; arising from the need to make meaning in life and death in relation to how we perceive ourselves in the world (Davies 1984).

Davies identified that “eco-friendly” burial encapsulates “salvation behaviour” (2008b:120) because, he argues, the motivation for choosing natural burial stems from future welfare concerns for the planet. Certainly I found that salvation was encapsulated in some people’s motivations to utilise Barton Glebe, though not necessarily in relation to future welfare concerns for the planet. Take Amy for example, who has pre-registered at Barton Glebe: Amy wants to *put something back* by gifting herself to the woodland and *the badgers*. However, her gift is not as altruistic as it first seems even though altruism endures as a fundamental conception of the nature of gifts (Benson & Carter 2008:2), for Amy is not solely giving herself anonymously for the public good (cf. Shimazono 2008:36). She is actually reciprocating the ‘gifts’ of *the state* that she has felt indebted to during the course of her lifetime. Amy is seeking salvation or redemption from her debt to society by repaying it through the gift of herself. This secular salvationist ethos arises from Amy giving herself back to the prime values of society in seeking redemption from being a

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<sup>393</sup> See Andy’s appraisal of woodland burial as going *in the dirt to be worm food* on page 236 of this chapter.

*drain on the state.*<sup>394</sup> In giving herself *back to the earth* Amy acknowledges reciprocal relations that conferred gifts onto her during her lifetime:

So I'm happy about it you know. I've been out there [to Barton] and I've seen where I'm going to go. It appealed to me because it meant that I wouldn't have a neglected grave somewhere and I felt I was putting something *back* to the earth really. Do you know what I mean? Because all my life, because I've been poorly, I've been on invalidity benefit 'cos my body hasn't *done* what I wanted it to *do*, so I had to give up work early erm...[pause]...I feel like a *parasite* sometimes. You know, a drain on the state. But I feel at *least* I can put something back [laughs] to the badgers. I like to think I'll have badgers running around me 'cos as you can see I'm mad about badgers.<sup>395</sup>

Similarly Harris, who has written a book tracing the history of natural burial in America, draws conclusions that mirror Amy's motivations to pre-register:

In their last, final act, the deceased...have taken care in death to give back to the earth some very small measure of the vast resources they drew from it in life and, in the process, perpetuate the cycles of nature, of growth and decay, of death and rebirth, that sustain all of us. (2007:2)

Worpole (2003b:44) writes how, in his opinion, the *Gaia* concept "is a clear expression of the view that social and cultural systems ought somehow to be in harmony with the natural ecology of the world. In such a view, death is not a punishment, or a casting out into dark oblivion, but reconciliation with the natural world, through a return to earth." Maybe therefore "a return to earth" constitutes one of the numerous "contemporary examples of modern moral repair" that the anthropologist, James Green (2008), speaks of. These moral repairs:

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<sup>394</sup> Similarly the philosopher and cultural ecologist David Abram (2001) writes that if humans are to be nourished by the earth then we must ultimately offer nourishment to the earth in return. This prompts the question, currently unaddressed, if *to return to nature* constitutes a desire for a new ethic in death. If so, where is that ethic located? Abram asks how humanity can enter reciprocal relations with nature, in which a practice of right relationship can only come to fruition if there is common ground between human persons and the natural world, he argues. To bring about this ethical relationship Abram (2001) argues it is not only humans who influence 'nature', but nature is influencing humans to create an understanding of 'society' that extends beyond the human world and is located in the 'more-than-human-world' (Abram 1997, 2001). Natural burial is a potent cultural practice for energising a new ethic in death that acknowledges a holism: of the human and non-human. Abram (2001) states: "Nature is something that we humans look at from outside, not something that we are in and of." Yet to *return to nature* is to embody being "in and of" nature in a reciprocal, ethical relationship of renewal and dependence in which agency is not only the domain of humans (Abram 2001).

<sup>395</sup> She has many toy badgers on her bed and many badger related objects on her shelves.

...exemplify the salvationist hope that we should at least try to manage what ails us, even if we cannot conquer our failings altogether. Death is a most fertile site for engaging that struggle; cloning, cryonics, and organ transplantation are just a few of the technologies employed by those who hope to beat the game. Although secular maneuvers, they are inspired by imaginings of cosmic consequence, of salvation some-where somehow. (Green 2008: 25)

Green (2008:26) identifies “salvationist themes” as being “recognizable in seemingly secular contexts” in contemporary American modes of dying because, for Green, death practices:

While occurring in a world where traditional religious codes have become optional, are still informed by an ancient, persistent, and religiously inspired redemptive ethos which shapes how we understand the value of life and solemnize its ending. (2008:30)

These “salvationist themes” are replete in woodland burial practice at Barton Glebe precisely because people are attempting to understand or reappraise their life more fully as they grieve or face their own mortality. To *return to nature* is an “eschatological imagining” (Green: 2008:202) that brings “a state of cognitive and effective well-being within the currently available system of world interpretation”, therefore it *is* salvation, if one utilises Davies’s definition based upon the sociology of knowledge and plausibility processes rather than specific religious doctrine (1984:32-33). Davies argues that salvation “is grounded in human perception of the particular context of life in which a person finds himself” (1984:32) and so for Amy, it is perfectly plausible to her to seek redemption from her feelings of guilt with regards to not having worked in paid employment for most of her life. She feels indebted to those who have supported her in her community and church and she also takes solace in life from the company of toy badgers who litter her flat. These bonds and social relations are an inalienable aspect of how Amy understands herself and therefore these relations she honours by giving back a small portion of what she took in this life by symbolically *putting something back to the earth... at least I can put something back to the badgers*. This is a self narrative that is plausible to Amy because it makes sense to her life experience and allows her to achieve a sense of well-being and continuity. Thus salvation is “a form of self-perception” and permits “access to that power which increases the individual’s sense of significance and worth” (Davies 1984:8-9).

This salvation ethos is also present in the narrative of those who champion natural burial and its provision. If salvation is partly an attempt to harness culturally desirable qualities of meaning-making, “significance and worth”, then one means of achieving this is to make one’s death purposeful. An example, which I refer to again later, is uttered by the Founder and Executive Director of North America’s Green Burial Council who claims green burial “allows people to know that their final act on Earth has really contributed to a positive purpose”. But why is an appeal being made to the idea that one’s “final act”, by way of a green burial should have a “purpose”? I argue that there are two reasons explaining the latent assumption by the living that funeral rites should be purposeful:

Firstly, to make meaning out of death brings comfort both to the dying and bereaved because a meaningless death threatens life values and thus, can precipitate ontological chaos. Therefore a construction in which the mode of burial is deemed positively purposeful generates positive meaning-making for the dying and/or bereaved by utilising a cultural assumption that a meaningful, fulfilled life is a positively purposeful life.

Secondly, this rhetorical framing by the Executive Director of North America’s Green Burial Council, is the salvation ethos articulated. Solemnizing the end of life and making positive meaning from death can be achieved by making a purposeful contribution to life. The North American green burial advocate and Amy are both creatively involved in semantic reflexivity that leads to salvation because salvation is “an extension of the human drive for meaning” (Davies 1984:164). Moreover both Amy’s rationale for choosing woodland burial and the advocate’s appeal for people to do so confer a sense of moral responsibility. Amy feels she has eluded her social responsibility to work during her lifetime, giving rise to her sentiments about being *a drain on the state*. The advocate’s appeal to green burial as a way of ensuring one’s *final act...has really contributed to a positive purpose* implicitly acknowledges a social contract.

There is a cultural assumption at work here, one that perceives a meaningless life to be a life in which a person has taken from society but offered nothing in return. At the

eleventh hour, this advocate is implying that one can redeem oneself by at least having a burial which assumes less impact upon the environment, less consumption of resources and a protection of green spaces for the living: it is never too late to *give something back*.<sup>396</sup> It is this construction therefore of a meaningful life predicated upon a social contract, which frames natural burial as an act indicative of moral responsibility. To those who have an ecological outlook this will be a moral responsibility to the planet, to others I spoke to there is a moral responsibility borne of personal faith to respect God's creation, whilst the majority feel moral responsibility towards their surviving kin, in minimising distress and burdens as a result of death.

### ***Symbolic Immortality and Continuity***

To *return to nature* also expresses a continuity from life to death to life again, by giving one's corporeal body as a gift to the soil in order to sustain new life and ultimately for the corpse to be survived by nature. To *return to nature* is an acknowledgement of how the natural world sustains human existence, so to *go back to nature* is to *become part of the earth that's sustained you*, as one funeral director put it.

Lifton's (1974, 1976) theory of symbolic immortality<sup>397</sup> is germane to the discussion of reciprocity and salvation since what is implied by those who give themselves to nature, God or future humanity, is a continuity of that inalienable part of themselves beyond their corporeal body. In the case of natural burial this is literally, symbolically and figuratively achieved through the 'natural pathway' towards symbolic immortality. The natural pathway provides a mode of transcendence to achieve symbolic immortality because the deceased is "survived by nature" (Lifton 1974:686); 'nature' also being a conduit for the bereaved visitor's continuing bonds with the deceased (Klass *et al.* 1996, Neimeyer *et al.* 2006). These notions are explicit in the narratives of the bereaved, the expectations of the pre-registered and in some providers' advertising. Take for example Barbara, who is pre-registered and whose husband is interred at Barton Glebe:

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<sup>396</sup> It would be interesting to explore by way of a historical comparison, if there are any parallels here with the 'death-bed' scene.

<sup>397</sup> Also see Kamerman (2003), Vigilant & Williamson (2003), Vigilant (2009).

...I mean, I'll be happy when I go if there's a nice piece of woodland there, which people will say: "okay, so they were part and parcel of the creation of that!" Much better than having an unkempt gravestone which nobody looks after and all the letters drop off!...And there's a continuity about something *living* which, you know, sort of lives on through planting trees and trees carry on, which I think is a lot nicer than a piece of stone.

Here we have an explicit articulation of symbolic immortality imaginatively realised through the natural pathway identified by Lifton. For Lifton, the attainment and pursuit of symbolic immortality is not to deny death, rather it represents "a compelling universal urge to maintain an inner sense of continuous symbolic relationship, over time and space, with the various elements of life" (1974:685). This is an idea that elsewhere in this chapter has been interpreted as a sense of the inalienable in relation to one's identity and life history. Immortality in Lifton's theory is "man's symbolization of his ties with both his biological fellows and his history, past and future" (1974:684). This chapter has been articulating this very notion but in relation to the fourth obligation in gift-giving and reciprocity. Symbolic immortality is a concept derived from clinical psychology, whilst the 'fourth obligation' is derived from anthropology's tradition of cultural comparison. However, both terms of analysis capture how humans can meaningfully articulate an infinite past and a future because symbolic immortality and gift-giving materialised in *going back to nature* constitute ineffable understandings of life and death.<sup>398</sup>

Lifton developed his theory from clinical work he had undertaken with survivors of Hiroshima. He makes an observational note about the natural pathway in his theory that "the theme of eternal nature...is very vivid among the Japanese, and was one of the most important kinds of imagery for survivors of the atomic bomb" (1974:686).<sup>399</sup> How curious then, that Japan is one of the few countries outside of Britain where one can have a 'tree-burial'. Is this further evidence that natural burial practice is an prime example of Lifton's natural pathway to symbolic immortality and that there are specific cultural perceptions of nature that facilitate the instigation of natural burial

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<sup>398</sup> For a comparative historical and cultural survey of immortality see Ries (1989)

<sup>399</sup> Curiously he continues by claiming: "It is not only in Shinto belief, but in the European Romantic Movement and in the Anglo-Saxon cult of the great outdoors – indeed in every culture in one form or another" (1974:686). Whilst I would interrogate his claim of the *universal* pursuit of symbolic immortality through the natural pathway, I concur with his comparison to the Romantic Movement, for as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, romantic values are certainly invested in the British practice of natural burial.

provision in particular countries and not others? It would certainly seem so and certainly warrants further research.

Some much needed cultural comparative research on natural burial is currently under way. Boret's (2010) anthropological research on tree-burial in Japan (*jumokuso*)<sup>400</sup> claims that this recent burial practice "provides individuals with the prospect of ecological immortality, in which one's own death is an instrument for the regeneration of life within a cycle of nature".<sup>401</sup> This is a prospect that Boret argues comes from a fundamental cultural shift from "social immortality" (the ancestral grave system) to "ecological immortality" (tree-burial) in contemporary Japan. I would suggest that Boret's designation of ecological immortality go slightly further viz., that of using one's corporeal body as a source of earthly regeneration is not the *only* designation of ecological immortality. This mode of immortality, as Lifton argued, is *also* about the imaginative location of identity within nature after the decomposition of the corpse, so that a *continuity of self* is perpetuated within nature: To *return to nature* also concerns "relational emplacement" (Smith 2005:219). As I argued in the previous chapter, this location of the deceased within nature allows the bereaved visitor to understand the natural landscape to symbolically *be* the deceased. The natural burial ground materialises the inalienable relationships between the living and the dead.

Boret argues that Japanese tree-burial fosters the replacement of 'social immortality' by 'ecological immortality'. Despite significant cultural differences between British and Japanese constructions of wood and forest (Knight 1998) as well as ecological concepts, by way of comparison I would argue that *both* forms of immortality (i.e. social and ecological) are present in British natural burial practices. This is because firstly, ecological immortality embodies the reciprocal element in giving one's self for nourishment to the soil and as a source of renewal or new life. Secondly, the grave,

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<sup>400</sup> Via personal correspondence in which Boret kindly sent an unpublished chapter of his forthcoming doctoral thesis. Boret writes about the cultural precedents that have fostered tree-burial in Japan; particularly the once deeply-rooted Japanese concept of *tama*, the life-giving element of an individual, without which people are considered empty or dead. The notion of *tama* shares commonalities with the notion of the dead being used as fertilisers in Japanese tree-burial, Boret concludes.

<sup>401</sup> From an abstract of Boret's paper entitled 'When Life Crisis meets Environmental Crisis: Imagining Death and Ecological Immortality in Japanese Tree-Burial' presented at the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) 2010 conference in Maynooth, Ireland. [Retrieved 09/05/10] <http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=590>

irrespective of its visibility, remains inalienable from the identity of the deceased, so that social immortality exists in the memories and relationships forged with the grave location or wider natural burial ground by the bereaved. In this way, social immortality is granted, no matter how fleetingly. Therefore, perhaps it is too reductionist to perceive one mode of immortality replacing another in the practice of natural burial? Stella's anecdote below, demonstrates how her husband's identity is emplaced at Barton Glebe; most memorably her husband's social immortality has become bound to the life-giving symbolism of eggs:<sup>402</sup>

I must tell you a little story: we were walking to the burial site and the ashes container was in a nice paper bag. My son was walking in front and carrying it with his daughter, and she really had a fit [giggles]. She said: "Dad, what are you carrying in this bag? An Easter egg?" Because it was just after Easter! [laughs] You see! It was very natural! And my husband as the resurrection, with the egg! I think it was absolutely amazing!

Resurrection and continuity are themes also emphasised in the advertising and media coverage of natural burial. Joe Sehee, Founder and Executive Director of North America's Green Burial Council states green burial *allows people to know that their final act on Earth has really contributed to a positive purpose*. The narrator in the online film from which this statement is taken then says that via green burial *a person's death may be tied directly to environmental rebirth!*<sup>403</sup> What this media coverage suggests is that by purposefully giving one's self in the *final act* of being buried in a natural burial ground, *environmental rebirth* results: another clear example of securing continuity and symbolic immortality via the 'natural pathway'.

This rhetoric exemplifies a general trend of mortuary rites comparatively discussed by Bloch and Parry (1982) who argued that through stressing "cyclical processes of renewal" eternal order is maintained despite death. Bloch and Parry also suggested that in Western cultures<sup>404</sup> the individual stands in opposition to society because of an "ideological stress" on an individual's "*unrepeatable* biography"; subsequently, the

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<sup>402</sup> The Swiss anthropologist Bachofen documented the significance of eggs in some Roman funerary games and on tombs as symbols of "fertility and femininity" (cited in Bloch and Parry 1982:1).

<sup>403</sup> Sehee's quote at 09:18 minutes and narrator's quote at 09:56 minutes in the video 'Green Burial – KQED QUEST' [Retrieved 24/04/10].

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTzQ0GOelHk&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTzQ0GOelHk&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>404</sup> In my opinion this is an inadequate classification that fosters the belief in homogeneity of cultural forms. However, I use this term here because it is the level of description used by Bloch and Parry in their discussion.

death of an individual poses no challenge to society's continuity. Bloch and Parry argue that one effect of this epistemology is to render the symbolic connection of death with fertility much weaker than in cultures or societies where the individual is understood as integral to a whole (1982:15). Contrary to their conclusion however, I would argue that natural burial reinforces a direct symbolic connection between death and fertility of the soil and, by extension, other life-forms. To what extent natural burial therefore constitutes a cultural shift away from the dominance of individualism is uncertain. However, it could be argued that the reappearance of this symbolic coupling between death and fertility in natural burial practice is fostered by ecological movements that present a view of life as "under permanent threat of extinction" (Beck 1995:4). Subsequently, an opportunity to *give something back* to life has renewed meaning and, becomes re-valued.

To *return to nature* materialises a social relationship with nature, yet what 'nature' is being articulated (Beck 1995: 36)? Beck would argue that it is a "natural blend" (1995:37); a product of the extent to which, in his opinion, 'nature' has become socially internalised in post-industrial society where "the allure of ecology" is "a modern experience" (1995:40). An example Beck offers to support his thesis that nature has become socially integrated in our society is the sense in which the word 'nature' is often articulated in a context where "the subject under discussion is the shaping of life in society and the provision of social norms" (1995:39). It is worthwhile reflecting upon this claim in relation to Barton Glebe and natural burial more generally, for it certainly seems that the natural, 'nature', is a human social projection; a wish fulfilment and/or utopia (Beck 1995:37).<sup>405</sup>

As we have already seen in this chapter, one way nature provides the gratifications of human desires in the context of natural burial is through a human projection of symbolic immortality in nature, in which the corporeal body is perceived to offer new life to the soil. This is a desire expressed in the poem at the beginning of this chapter. The poet desires a natural burial because it permits the natural world to *hold some part of me*; therefore, contrary to some commentators' opinions (Worpole 2003a),

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<sup>405</sup> Cf. Chapter 7 in which the landscaping of the glades with their *niches* and *wavy edges* provides comfort for the bereaved and a means to locate the identity of the deceased within the 'nature' of Barton Glebe (e.g. page 85 & 207).

natural burial does not necessitate oblivion. Also, natural burial is not an individualistic practice but is inherently communitarian and unifying because the practice provides a symbolic opportunity for people to give to society and future life. To secure continuity and well-being, which are often threatened by death, there needs to be a correlative reinforcement in the external world of the individual concerned. Thus nature is readily appropriated to provide reinforcement. Nature becomes a utopia which promises to fulfil the desire of the poet to *hold some part of me*. To borrow from Beck (1995:55), the desire for inner emotional-psychological stability and healing in confronting death is reinforced in an external projection of nature as therapy and as enduring. This is achieved through a particular cultural construction of nature: a romanticism of nature in the context of death. Possibly Romanticism endures because of an environmental crisis presented as cultural fact (Beck 1995:48) and a condition of advanced industrial society that encourages people to yearn for its antithesis (Beck 1995:53, Veldman 1994).

I have been arguing that woodland burial provision at Barton Glebe demonstrates Lifton's thesis with regards to human constructions of symbolic immortality in nature, in which the dead are survived by nature. However, I am critical of Lifton's non-critical use of 'nature' in his otherwise very pertinent theory. Beck adamantly argues that all natures are now artificial, a "natural blend", because of the extent to which nature has become the "socially internalized furniture of the civilized world" (1995:37). He argues that when guiding principles for the conduct of human life become obsolete, threatened or problematic then there is a tendency for nature to appear "as a passageway to 'consecrated' self-evident truths; as an endangered store of unbreakable rules to be discovered, guarded and cultivated" (1995:53). This research on human experience with death at Barton Glebe demonstrates a clear enactment of the phenomenon Beck describes. 'Nature'<sup>406</sup> is a nebulous, relative concept that permits endless identities to be constructed in relation to it. It is an elusive, relational concept readily used by humans in making meaning of life and death since people can construct a nature that suits their individual needs and life experience. Therein lies the potential for natural burial provision to gain further uptake in Britain, but that is another discussion.

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<sup>406</sup> Arguably the "Western concept of 'nature' is always ...a repressed or domesticated nature" (Baudrillard 1993:162).

## ***Locating a Spiritual Dimension in Life and Death***

In *A Brief History of Death*, Davies demonstrates how “the history of death involves a history of the value of a human life” (2005a:68, Bowker 1991). This is no less pertinent a claim with regards to the cultural development of natural burial and prompted Davies to consider the impact of ecological thinking upon contemporary attitudes and beliefs regarding “death, disposal and destiny”: an impact he argues that is reconfiguring “human hope” (2005a:68). For Davies, this is part of a wider “customary change” in which death is no longer a religious concern but a ‘spiritual’ one (2005a:68) producing “a revolution in world-view” (2005a:77) in which there is:

...a move from debates about God, religion, authority of church traditions and the eternal destiny of humanity to a preoccupation with the world as a living space, to ethical activity within it and to the likelihood of its having a sustainable future. The focus of attention shifts from the past to the present and from any eternal future in heaven to a long-term future for humanity on earth. Personal survival and immortality have become subsumed into the survival of the human species amidst other species. (Davies 2005a:77)

Analysis undertaken in the previous chapters lends support to Davies’s reflections on changes in contemporary attitudes to death and dying. However the interview evidence from participants engaging with this new cultural practice called ‘natural’ burial suggests that the focus of a changing world-view is not as clear-cut as Davies implies. It is not sufficient to conclude that God has been replaced by the earth, or heaven eclipsed by sustainable futures for humanity. The ontological imaginings elicited by and brought to bear upon natural burial appear to be far more complicated and ambiguous; just as with the concept of ‘nature’. Not surprisingly, the diversity of expression in practice makes the application of ideal type constructs a fraught task. Therefore, I suggest that Davies’s “ecological framing of identity” (2005a:79) needs some explication to avoid the misunderstanding that his argument is simply that God and religiously framed destinies have been eclipsed by the planet and human species’ survival.

Not all those I interviewed would recognise themselves in the contemporary meta-narrative put forward by Davies (2005a), since a general consensus that an environmental crisis was imminent or unfolding was absent and therefore cannot be

used to fully explain people's choices for natural burial. On the basis of this research, I suggest it is more appropriate for the 'ecological' or 'environmental' dimension to be identified as 'nature'. Nature both provides a material means of articulating affinity to one's origins (as in identity, prime aspects of being and core values) and materialising the ineffable and inalienable, with or without God. Davies's "ecological framing of identity" need not be secular for it can also be another means of drawing closer to God and *God's creation*, as one pre-registered woman enunciated. I therefore disagree with Davies that "an ecological framing of identity" necessarily produces "its own form of secular eschatology" (2005a:79-80); rather, it can be a way of *relating* to secular *or* religious inalienable truths because 'nature' is the mode through which ontological imaginaries are processed and, depending on the individual, 'nature' can be god-given, earth-bound or both. Thus those attracted to natural burial are not necessarily atheists, since the cultural practice of natural burial that utilises nature as a rhetorical device encompasses many ontologies.<sup>407</sup>

Natural burial and personal faith are not mutually exclusive as we have seen in previous chapters and evident in the fact that a number of those interviewed had either had a religious funeral service for the deceased or had decided upon one for themselves in the course of making arrangements to be interred at Barton Glebe. However, natural burial and personal faith are also not dependent upon each other, so likewise, atheists feel equally comfortable at Barton Glebe. Why is this? Does this suggest the influence of the postmodern paradigm? I believe not. Rather natural burial fosters a holistic understanding of humanity's place in the world, irrespective of whether one aligns with an eschatological or a retrospective fulfilment of identity (cf. Davies 2005a).<sup>408</sup> However, because natural burial nurtures an "intrinsic relationship between the human body and the world as a natural system within which the ongoingness of life is grounded in the successive life and death of individual animals and plants, indeed, of all things" (Davies 2005a:87), what is symbolised and reaffirmed in this practice is the depth of our relations beyond ourselves and therefore

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<sup>407</sup> For example future comparative research on possible (neo-) pagan, Muslim and Jewish natural burial practice would be insightful as these are all categories of persons who are suspected of being attracted to natural burial by those I encountered during research. There are cultural assumptions underlying these claims that need to be explored.

<sup>408</sup> It is interesting to note that in the postal questionnaires, irrespective of whether the respondent was bereaved, pre-registered or both, there was a unanimous response that one's views on life-after-death did not relate to woodland burial in any special way (see Appendix 9, Section F1 & F2 on page 286).

to existence. And this is where Davies's claim to 'spirituality' as the new mode with which to articulate death and dying is grounded, because this research suggests that what is understood as 'spiritual' by those who visit Barton Glebe is the affirmation of "the depth and quality of life" (2005a:84 citing McGinn 1993). Bowker (1991) was critical of those theoreticians who argued that religion was borne of death, thus acting as a panacea for death's disruption and chaos. Bowker's assertion that religions were not a "compensation" for death led him to conclude that religions were about "the assertion and the affirmation of value, up against the boundary of death" (1991:39). Irrespective of individual, personal beliefs, Barton Glebe provides an arena for the affirmation of value for the living. To *return to nature* is not to deny death but to affirm the value and sanctity of life and relations in spite of death.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

It could be argued that contemporary Britain now has an ecological understanding as well as a mythic one, of how people are "participants in natural life cycles...that what we give to nature affects what nature gives to us..."; an understanding that has been conferred scientifically, socially and spiritually (Primavesi 2003:123). In this sense the innovation of natural burial could capture people's imagination because it is germane to political and scientific discourses on environmental destruction. Nevertheless, in this thesis I have been suggesting that natural burial indicates more than this if we analyse the allusions made in connection to natural burial in relation to gift-theory.

Gifts of the 'fourth obligation' materialise a narrative about how particular people perceive their interconnectedness, continuity with the past and "humility before the transcendental" (Osteen 2002b:9-10). I have been arguing that if we understand natural burial's marketed allusions and pre-registered users' desires to *give something back* as a contemporary, cultural example of gift-giving to 'gods' (core values), then natural burial presents an opportunity for people to pursue continuity and integrity to their core values, be they environmental, religious or family orientated. Godelier rightly asserts that, unlike when Mauss (1974[1954]) was writing *The Gift* a number of contemporary, post-industrial societies no longer rely upon the basic social

structures of society being produced and reproduced through gift exchange (1999:207). Rather:

The giving of gifts has become...a subjective, personal and individual matter. It is the expression and the instrument of personal relationships located beyond the spheres of the market and the state. (Godelier 1999:207)

I have been arguing that this *is* what *giving something back* encapsulates in natural burial: the inalienable relationships constituting the identity of the deceased or pre-registered user, as well as affirming the ineffable qualities of life itself that stand outside of commodity exchange. Those who have chosen to *return to nature* are giving voice to a meta-level of existence: the value of life. The value of life and all that is inalienable from people's identities is symbolically and performatively realised in *going back to nature*. Natural burial also gives material expression to the belief that death is necessary to life in a manner that provides hope and comfort for the bereaved and empowers the place of the dead in modern society. They do not have to be forgotten in neglected cemeteries and toppling headstones. The dead assert their value to the living by securing areas of tree-cover or meadow-field within which the living and the wider natural world may prosper. Natural burial imaginatively empowers the dying, the dead and the bereaved by perpetuating the significance of the relational, dependent and enduring aspects of life in a more-than-human living world. Therefore the dead can continue to exist in nature, whilst for the bereaved, natural burial remains a material and cultural death practice that engenders emotional attachments to aspects of the natural world that have become their continuing relationship with the deceased. Grave visits, even to a burial ground like Barton Glebe where graves are not visually apparent, are the practice of inalienable relationships. Cowling was too impulsive when claiming that:

...a natural burial ground is not a memorial landscape. It does not speak of those buried in it, and for this reason it may fail to satisfy the emotional and spiritual needs of those left behind, for whom environmentalism is not enough. (2010:29)

On the contrary, this research has demonstrated precisely how the 'natural' landscape and wildlife of Barton Glebe does provide emotional and spiritual sustenance to the

bereaved and how the bereaved materialise the inalienable relationship they have with the deceased and their ineffable understandings of life and death within ‘nature’. Barton Glebe comes to be a place that embodies and is the practice of core values and inalienable relationships. Therefore, Barton Glebe very much speaks of those who are buried there. We do the dead and the bereaved associated with Barton Glebe a disservice if we conclude that the cultural practice of natural burial is about the pursuit of environmental values only. I trust that this thesis has demonstrated that Barton Glebe is much more besides this. Barton Glebe *is* a memorial landscape, it is just that memories at Barton Glebe, rather than being anchored by an inscription on a headstone, are anchored and perpetuated by the ‘natural’ world; a toad, badger, skylark’s song, bluebells and leaves falling off a tree are all conduits for memories.

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### ***Future Research***

This research represents the first ethnographic case study of a woodland burial ground in England. Its aim has been to present a detailed descriptive account of how and why people engage with this newest option in British disposal practices. At the time of writing there are two germane pieces of research also in progress: an ethnographic case study of ‘tree-burial’ in Japan<sup>409</sup> and a survey, multi-site study concerned with the cultural, social and emotional implications of natural burial in the UK.<sup>410</sup> In addition to these significant forthcoming pieces of research there exists only brief reflection upon natural burial in: a) volumes concerned with contemporary modes of death and dying,<sup>411</sup> b) short journal articles and two Masters Dissertations<sup>412</sup> and c) in a case study of London cemeteries (Francis *et al.* 2005). The latter, in my opinion, could have made much more of the woodland burial survey data in comparative discussion.

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<sup>409</sup> Doctoral research conducted at the Europe Japan Research Centre, Oxford Brookes University by Sebastien Boret: *New Buddhist “natural” funerals in Japan* [publications forthcoming]

<sup>410</sup> For details see Natural Burial Project at Sheffield University [Retrieved 08/05/10]  
<http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html>

<sup>411</sup> Cf. Davies (2002[1997], 2005a), Green (2008), Harris (2007), Joyce (2009), Owen Jones (2008), Woodthorpe (2007b).

<sup>412</sup> Cf. Clayden (2003, 2004), Clayden and Dixon (2007), Green (2003), Rempel (2007) and Scott (2003).

In addition to these works, this thesis has sought to inform academic understanding of natural burial by producing extensive ethnographic data that raises several issues worthy of further consideration in future research. In Chapter 5 onwards, I argue that natural burial permits the bereaved or those making advanced funeral plans to affirm life values prompting the question of whether natural burial is a practice that embodies a new ethic in death. Further research surveying the ethics in modern death and dying would be fruitful, in order to ascertain how natural burial is new, different or retains continuity with other ethical engagements with death. Ethics is a theme that has been generated by the research data yet until now it remains unaddressed in relation to natural burial grounds<sup>413</sup> though others have discussed ethics in relation to ‘nature’ and/or place.<sup>414</sup>

Additionally, this research begs the question of *who* exactly is utilising natural burial provision with regards to age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religious affiliation (if at all) and from what parts of the UK (or beyond) people are coming from in order to patronise a natural burial ground. This research also creates the need to establish the percentage of annual funerals in the UK that involve a natural burial and whether this is for the interment of ashes, whole body or ash scattering, as well as also being the location for a funeral service. Only with such survey data can researchers reliably say *who* is driving this socio-cultural change in burial, if indeed it is a significant practice numerically to warrant being referred to as a significant cultural change in burial practice at all. Whilst this thesis presents ethnographic description of a new cultural practice and burial innovation, a quantitative study is needed in order to ascertain the numerical significance of the attitudes and behaviours recorded in this study. As I highlighted in Chapter 1, diverse ownership leads to diverse management practices and therefore warrants comparative investigation into the extent to which natural burial represents a unified concept across geographical locations and cultural spheres; all the more pertinent since the concept has influenced

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<sup>413</sup> Though Davies (2005a:84-88) has briefly begun this process in considering ecology, ethics and spirituality in relation to natural burial in developing his notion of ‘ecological hope’, which could fruitfully be taken further in a sociological or historical study. See also comment in footnote 394 on page 242.

<sup>414</sup> For example, Smith (2005) in emotional geographies and Abram (1997) in phenomenology and cultural ecology.

a handful of other nations to create their own natural burial-style provision. Comparative research is the obvious next step following on from this project.<sup>415</sup>

Finally, in mentioning mode of practice, one limitation with this research is that time and practicality meant I was unable to observe, document and therefore analyse the types and possible range of rituals that accompany interments at Barton Glebe. This has meant the omission of serious consideration of natural burial grounds as places of ritual and performance. Further ethnographic research on natural burial that primarily focused upon the funeral rites that take place in these burial grounds would provide necessary insight into the form and content of contemporary rituals around death. Such research should interrogate the notion that modern death is secular and personalised, and therefore contribute to established debates within the sociology of death and dying and death studies.<sup>416</sup> To what extent is natural burial aligned with facilitating secular and/or personalised funeral rites by the British population? Concurrent with this enquiry, the relationship between natural burial and notions of 'spirituality' should also be more adequately addressed.

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<sup>415</sup> See also footnote 407 on page 253 with regard to comparative research conducted with different faith groups.

<sup>416</sup> Cf. Davies and Walter (2008), Denison (1999), Emke (2002), Schafer (2007), Sheppy (2003) and Venbrux *et al.* (2009). See also comment in footnote 376 on page 231.

## Glossary

Since anthropologists have traditionally retained indigenous terms for translation and interpretation in cultural analysis, I am similarly alert to inherent indigenous terms used in reference to natural burial and the Arbory Trust's provision, hence the inclusion of this glossary.

### **Burial ground(s)**

Historically, these were established by non-conformists adjacent to their chapels. They were not consecrated. This term is utilised generically in this thesis to refer to a place of burial, rather than referring to a specific *type* of burial place as identified by Rugg (2000).

### **Cemetery**

Cemeteries were initially established to meet the needs of non-conformists (e.g. the Rosary Cemetery in Norwich, 1819) but were also deemed a solution to unhygienic, over-crowded urban churchyards in the early nineteenth century. The first Garden cemeteries, initially developed by private companies and later run by public authorities, appeared after 1800. Publicly funded cemeteries remained rare until the 1850s Burial Acts (cf. Francis *et al.* 2005, English Heritage & English Nature 2002:7-9 for further historical and legal detail). Linguistically, a cemetery implies a 'resting place' or 'sleeping place' (Firth 2005: xvii) rather than a specific geographical landscape such as 'burial ground'.

### **Churchyard(s)**

Historically, this refers to burial land surrounding a church, which was principally designated and used for burial in England from the eighth until the nineteenth century. Most churchyards in England and Wales are Anglican (Dunk and Rugg 1994:9). For nonconformist denominations see 'graveyard' and 'burial ground'. For information on the 'Living Churchyards Project' see Worpole (2007).

### **Garden of remembrance**

These became officially recognised in the 1920s and replaced the fashion for columbaria in the grounds of crematoria, as a place to inter or scatter cremated remains.<sup>417</sup>

### **Glade(s)**

A glade is an open area within woodland, particularly referring to grassy meadow clearings under the canopy of deciduous trees. This technical understanding of ‘glade’ mirrors the geographical landscape and planting patterns created by the Arbory Trust with advice from a Forestry Commission Advisor.<sup>418</sup> However there are also less technical, rather romantic associations with this geographical term, which appeal to some people’s sensibilities and influence their expectation and understanding of the Arbory Trust’s woodland burial provision.

### **Glebe**

This term, like the one above, refers to an issue of identity and is highly pertinent to this case study because the woodland burial ground is located on Glebe land hence, the site is called Barton Glebe. This term is assigned to property owned by the Anglican Church. Until 1<sup>st</sup> April 1978 Glebe property belonged to individual church incumbents (usually a priest), thereafter, Glebe property fell under the ownership of “the Diocesan Board of Finance of the diocese to which the benefice owning the Glebe belonged.”<sup>419</sup> Glebe encompasses a broad range of property; it could refer to houses, pasture, farms and shops for example. Barton Glebe woodland burial ground is a former arable field that was managed by a tenant farmer who rented the land from Ely Diocesan Board of Finance. Effectively this land was gifted to the Arbory Trust – itself affiliated to the Diocese of Ely – for a small fee. Though the land is being used for different purposes it is still legally owned by the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance.

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<sup>417</sup> For further information see Grainger (2005b).

<sup>418</sup> To see a ground map of these glades and their landscaping see Chapter 4, page 68 and 93.

<sup>419</sup> *Glebe* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glebe> [Retrieved 16/08/09].

### **Graveyard(s)**

Historically, these are small burial grounds used by a particular nonconformist congregation (Dunk and Rugg 1994:9). Linguistically, the term simply refers to an enclosure containing graves (Firth 2005: xvii).

### **Natural**

As with ‘woodland’, this term has many cultural, geographical and social associations. This research demonstrates that these associations have a large influence in people’s motivation for opting for natural burial, despite the fact that the often romantic and aesthetic notions that constitute understandings of what is ‘natural’ are highly politicised and contested (cf. Beck 1995). Generically, this term refers to anything that is naturally occurring and is often used as a synonym for that which is non-human. However, cultural understandings of what defines ‘natural’ are highly ambiguous and contested. Throughout history, and across religions and political spectrums, ‘natural’ has assumed a variety of definitions and associations.

### **Whip**

This forestry term refers to an unbranched tree seedling usually planted out when it is two or three years old. In general usage, a whip refers to a slender unbranched young shoot or plant.

### **Woodland**

This arboreal term has a number of historical and cultural motifs in British culture in addition to referring to land densely covered with trees (see Chapter 5 of this thesis, Ackroyd 2002, Bloch 1998, Jones and Cloke 2002, Rival 1998, Daniels 1993, 1997). As with ‘natural’, it has many romantic associations.

### **Woodland burial**

I utilise this term to define the Arbory Trust’s burial provision and site’s landscape. There is an argument that burial without a headstone or grave marker in a biodegradable casket containing (ideally) a non-embalmed body should be referred to as ‘natural burial’, since the landscapes in which this burial practice can be found vary

enormously, from set-aside pasture and wildflower meadows to newly planted glades and existing, mature woodland. I concur with Clayden and Dixon (2007) that the term ‘woodland burial’ is misleading and does not represent the diversity of sites encompassed by this burial mode. However, I make deliberate reference to ‘woodland burial’ in relation to the Arbory Trust’s provision because a) the Trust designated this term to their provision, b) the Arbory Trust are pro-actively trying to create a native woodland – a goal that informs one of the aims of the Arbory Trust – and, c) this is also how the site is known and advertised to those who utilise its provision. Despite consciously referring to ‘woodland burial’ when discussing the Arbory Trust’s provision, when discussing the national provision of this mode of burial, I refer to ‘natural’ burial since the term is more generic in that it does not specify a burial ground’s landscape.

# Appendix 1: Arbory Trust Rules and Regulations<sup>420</sup>

## Rules of the Burial Ground

In order to ensure that the Ground is maintained as a woodland burial ground, in keeping with the Trust's aims, it is necessary to enforce certain rules and regulations as follows:

1. The planting of trees and other plants is authorised by the Trustees alone. No gardening of the woodland is permitted.

2. Cut flowers can be placed on graves but the Trustees reserve the right to remove them as part of routine care after a period of time. Artificial flowers are not permitted.



3. The form of graveside ceremony must be dignified but not necessarily explicitly Christian. The Trustees or their representative must approve the form of ceremony (and the person conducting it). Any form of service authorised by any recognised Christian Church would automatically be acceptable for use at the graveside.



4. The coffin or casket must be made of biodegradable material, either wood or cardboard. As far as possible the use of preservatives is discouraged.

5. The grave can be marked initially by a wooden plaque. There will be no long term visible markers but all graves will be discreetly recorded by the Arbory Trust so that their location

can be determined exactly.

6. No exhumations will be permitted under any circumstances except by lawful authority.

7. The Trustees are legal owners of the whole woodland.

8. Refunds are made only in exceptional circumstances and entirely at the discretion of the Trustees. Where a refund is



<sup>420</sup> Taken from *Rules of the Burial Ground* <http://www.arborytrust.org/rules.htm> [Retrieved 21/07/10]

approved, normally half of the original registration fee (currently £375) is retained and treated as a donation towards the objectives of the Trust to establish woodland burial grounds.

The Trustees reserve the right to vary the Rules and Regulations at any time.

**Below is a summary of the way these Rules are currently enforced, with practical, day-to-day requirements:**

One must remember that we are creating a natural woodland environment, where graves blend into the meadow glades leaving only wild flowers to add to the natural beauty. Mementos do not form part of that long-term vision. We acknowledge that a short-term (wooden) marker is often important, but it is not intended that there should be anything left permanently to visibly mark a grave in due course. We do hope you will help us by following them- and if you have any questions, please ask and we'll be happy to help.

In order to encourage a classic native woodland environment, only wild flowers authorised by the Trust may be planted on graves. A leaflet is available for guidance.

All plaques or markers should be **natural wood only** (with no brass or plastic attachments or mounting posts) and should be roughly the size of an A3 piece of paper. There is an example in the Lodge (visible through the window if locked) as a guide to size. Markers should be placed flush to the ground to enable a mower to pass over it. Any plaque not complying with these requirements will be adjusted without further reference.

No oasis or floral tributes with wire, plastic or tape or artificial flowers are allowed. Cellophane, ribbon and foil must be removed from cut flowers.

To maintain a natural woodland landscape, no ornaments, greetings cards, balloons, birdhouses, lanterns or vases or other such items are allowed. This includes stones, flowerpots or stakes, ropes, ties or other 'garden' items.

We remove unauthorised items quickly, for the sake of all who support the Trust and for all who visit.

In order to avoid a multiplicity of styles, only benches authorised by the Administrator are allowed to be placed following consultation as to size, design and location. It is unlikely that any more benches will be permitted in the current phase of development.

Benches that are deemed to present a safety hazard will be removed, and not automatically replaced. A replacement policy will be decided upon in due course by the Trustees, to ensure an appropriate layout of bench locations, and their spacing and style.

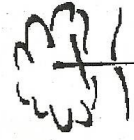
## Appendix 2: Arbory Trust Wildflower Planting Guide 2010<sup>421</sup>

The Arbory Trust  
Woodland Burial Ground  
Barton  
Cambridge

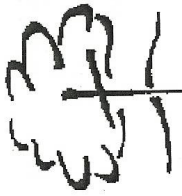
Wild Flower Planting  
Guide  
2010



www.arborytrust.org



THE ARBORY TRUST



THE ARBORY TRUST

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The Arbory Trust is a company limited by guarantee.  
Registered office as above.  
Registered in England No. 3788484 Charity No. 1079635

The Barton Glebe Woodland Burial Site is a very special environment. It is indeed a man-made environment but the aim is to create as natural a woodland as possible. All the trees are native not only to Britain, but to this very specific location.

The Glades in which the burials take place will eventually be grassy meadowlands amongst the woodland.

For these reasons, we do state that if you wish to plant anything at the site, **ONLY** native plants that are suitable for a meadow situation are allowed. These are low growing perennials or bulbs, and **NOT** larger shrubby plants that could be destroyed under the agricultural mower.

Native plants may sometimes appear less 'showy' than their commercially cultivated garden cousins, but they are generally tougher and so will fare better at the site, support a greater variety of insects, moths and butterflies and be more in keeping with a 'natural' environment. It is important to remember that the site is neither a park nor garden and 'formal' gardening is not appropriate.

Most garden centres have a good selection of native plants nowadays and there are even some Nurseries that specialise in supplying native flora and many do so by post.

Many seed companies produce packets of Wild Flower Seed that will also be available at the garden centre. (See 'The R.H.S. Plant Finder' published yearly by Dorling Kindersley for invaluable information regarding stockists.)

Please check with Imogen if you are unsure whether anything you want to plant is suitable or not, and also if you need any further advice.

<sup>421</sup> Downloaded from the Trust website and scanned.

<http://www.arborytrust.org/Documents/Wild%20flowers%202010.pdf> [Retrieved 21/07/10]

SUITABLE PLANTS FOR BARTON GLEBE.

The following list is a selection of some commonly available native plants. Please select plants by their botanical name in Latin wherever possible to ensure accuracy.



Bluebell - *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

Common dog violet - *Viola riviniana*



Cowslip - *Primula veris*

Daffodil - *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*



Daisy - *Bellis perennis*

Field Forget-me-Not - *Myosotis arvensis*



Field Scabious - *Knautia arvensis*



Foxglove - *Digitalis purpurea*



Harebell - *Campanula rotundifolia*



Herb-Robert - *Geranium robertianum*



Lady's mantle - *Alchemilla xanthochlora*



Lily of the Valley - *Convallaria majalis*



Lesser celandine - *Ranunculus nemorosa*



Meadow buttercup -  
*Ranunculus ficaria*



Meadow Crane's Bill -  
*Geranium pratense*



Ox-eye daisy - *Leucanthemum vulgare*



Pasque flower - *Pulsatilla vulgaris*



Primrose - *Primula vulgaris*



Ragged-Robin - *Lychmis flos-cuculi*



Red campion - *Silene dioica*



Red clover - *Trifolium pratense*



Scarlet Pimpernel - *Anagallis arvensis*



Snakeshead fritillary -  
*Fritillaria meleagris*



Snowdrop - *Galanthus nivalis*



Solomon's Seal -  
*Polygonatum multiflorum*



Sweet violet - *Viola odorata*



Teasel - *Dipsacus fullonum*



White clover - *Trifolium repens*



Wild marjoram - *Origanum vulgare*



Wild Thyme - *Thymus polytrichus*

## Appendix 3: Barton Birdlife 2009<sup>422</sup>



### Birds at Barton Glebe in 2009.



Our site has continued to develop although ecologically it is still very young woodland. The quick growing trees such as silver birch and willows have shot up over the last couple of years and further growth of the understory of brambles and hawthorn has been noticeable. The glades are now quite well vegetated with an ever increasing diversity of plants and are mown 2/3 times a year. We have continued to monitor the birdlife regularly and I will try and summarise the main observations over the last year or so.

#### Phase 1.

The mature hedges bordering the 3 sides continued to hold most of the breeding birds. Up to 3 pairs of robins, wrens and blackbirds, 2 pairs of dunnocks and whitethroats and a territory holding lesser whitethroat were present this year. The commonest hedgerow birds were 6 pairs of chaffinches (the commonest breeding bird) and 5 pairs of yellowhammers. None of these species breed in our woods yet but are increasingly using the glades and woods for feeding on seeds and insects and also for song posts. The taller willow trees have been colonised by- yes! You have guessed it - willow warblers! 4 pairs sang and held territory amidst them this year and they must be regarded as the first 'bone fide' woodland bird colonising our woods. They are specialists in colonising young, developing woods. Interestingly, a pair of great tits nested under the eaves of the pine end of the Lodge and a pair of blue tits similarly at the opposite pine end. They are such opportunists! The adults could be seen endlessly flying to the hedges in search of caterpillars for their young.

The glades themselves held 2 pairs of breeding meadow pipits and for the second year running we had a 'territory holding' singing tree pipit for about a month. Breeding was not proven but it is an unusual record for Cambridgeshire. The vegetation is now too luxuriant for skylarks but they continued to sing over the Glebe whilst nesting in the surrounding farmland. Up to dozen or so goldfinches and linnets were present in small groups feeding on seed plants in the glades but they did not breed on site. We saw red-legged and grey partridges on site but there was no proof of breeding this year.

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<sup>422</sup> Downloaded and scanned from the Trust website:  
<http://www.arborytrust.org/Documents/Birds%20in%20Barton%202009.pdf> [Retrieved 20/07/10]

We had regular visits from a green woodpecker feeding in the glades, up to 2 kestrels hunting for voles, a sparrow hawk hunting the hedges for song birds and our first sighting of a buzzard.

Over last winter there were up to 120 fieldfares feeding on the copious supply of hawthorn berries in the hedges and there were mixed flocks of between 20 and 40 greenfinches, goldfinches, linnets, skylarks, meadow pipits and reed buntings feeding on seeds in the glades and young woods. There was a whinchat and a stonechat seen on passage too.

### Phase 2.

Prior to the tree planting this autumn/winter the ground was seeded with a special grass mix. Growth was slow and the cover in summer was very open. The field held 6 pairs of breeding skylarks but the volume of their singing suggested more! Surprisingly, a pair of lapwings bred but their clutch of eggs did not hatch, probably due to the attentions of the resident magpies or carrion crows. We have a couple of pairs of each nesting in the larger trees in the hedges around the Glebe. Red legged and grey partridges, pheasants, wood pigeons used the field extensively and towards the end of 2009 there was a spectacular flock of about 80 goldfinches feeding on the weed seeds in the company of some 20 skylarks. Such a large 'charm' of gold finches is remarkable these days. The rather 'gappy' hedges surrounding the field held 2 further pairs of breeding yellow hammers and a pair of whitethroats.

### My favourite Barton bird.

It just has to be the yellowhammer (or yellow bunting). They are present every time I visit. The males have bright 'canary yellow' heads and breasts and are to be seen singing from the tallest trees in the hedges and increasingly in our developing woods. The females are browner and streakier. I have to use my imagination to make their song fit the 'little bit of bread and no cheese' scansion as described in the field guides. They nest on the ground in long grass quite near to their song posts. . Over the last 25 years or so breeding yellow hammers have declined by over 50% nationwide and are now a red listed species 'of conservation concern' to our national authorities. We seem to have a fairly stable population of about 7 pairs of breeding birds on our land over the last 3 years, over all and they seem to be thriving. That really gladdens my heart.

*Dr Gareth Thomas. Trustee.*

## Appendix 4: Arbory Trust Tree Sponsorship<sup>423</sup>

### CONTACT FORM

Please tick as appropriate:

- I would like to leave a legacy to the Arbory Trust and require more information [ ]
- I would like to become a Friend of the Arbory Trust and enclose a cheque for £25 [ ]

**Gift Aids** if you are making a donation please consider completing the following:

I would like to Gift Aid the enclosed donation

of.....to The Arbory Trust and

all donations since April 6 2000 and all future

donations to The Arbory Trust until I notify you

otherwise. My details are as overleaf.

Signature.....

Date.....

All cheques should be made payable to  
'The Arbory Trust'.

THANK YOU



THE ARBORY TRUST

### Address for all correspondence:

The Arbory Trust  
Bishop Woodford House  
Barton Road  
ELY  
Cambridgeshire  
CB7 4DX

Telephone: 01223 303874  
Website: [www.arborytrust.org](http://www.arborytrust.org)  
Email: [enquiries@arborytrust.org](mailto:enquiries@arborytrust.org)

Administrator: Deryn Coe  
Arbory Trust Guardian: Elizabeth Goster  
Arbory Ranger: Imogen Loke  
Arbory Assistant: Elizabeth Matthews

The Arbory Trust is a company limited by guarantee.  
Registered office as above.  
Registered in England No. 3788484 Charity No. 1079635

The Arbory Trust

Tree Sponsorship

&

Donation/Gift Aid form



[www.arborytrust.org](http://www.arborytrust.org)



THE ARBORY TRUST

<sup>423</sup> Retrieved 21/07/10, from the Trust website:  
<http://www.arborytrust.org/Documents/Tree%20Sponsorship%20&%20Donations.pdf>

In addition to the income received for grave spaces, the Arbory Trust relies on money received either from its tree sponsorship scheme, or from generous donations, in order to further its work. To date, we have been fortunate enough to build our Lodge as a result of donations, and an additional area of tree planting was created in 2007.

There are various ways to support the Trust, and these are outlined below.

### Tree Sponsorship Scheme.

The Arbory Trust does not plant new trees on request. We operate a Tree Sponsorship scheme, whereby individuals may sponsor any of the existing trees. In the past, we have placed a numbered wooden stake adjacent to trees that have been sponsored, but with an increasing number of such stakes appearing, we realise that they are beginning to detract from the natural environment. Now we simply issue a certificate confirming sponsorship, stating the location and type of tree, and in whose memory (if desired) the tree is sponsored. There is no physical sign at the ground to indicate the sponsorship of a tree. Anything that is placed in order to mark a tree out will be removed. It is suggested that individuals consider taking their own bearings perhaps with a photograph to note its location if desired.

Tree species include small-leaved lime, ash, pedunculate oak, field maple, hazel, birch, aspen, hornbeam, Scots pine, holly, white willow, woodland hawthorn, wild service, spindle, wild cherry, and crab apple.

If you need help to identify or choose a tree, our Ranger will be happy to assist you. Please come on a Wednesday morning between 9 & 11 am, or call to make an appointment for another time.

The fee for each tree sponsored is £50. In order to proceed, simply complete the following form, and together with a cheque for £50 send this to our administrative offices in Ely. The certificate will then be issued.

All monies received by way of sponsorship go towards the maintenance and development of the woodland.

### Donations

The trust welcomes donations towards the general purposes of the Trust, as well as more specific donations for the extension of the Lodge and improvements in its furnishing. Gift Aid should be used wherever possible, to maximise the value of any gift.

### Legacies

For some, it is easier to consider a legacy in favour of The Arbory Trust in their Will. Please consult your solicitor as to how to proceed, or contact the Administrator for further information.

### Friends of the Arbory Trust

For the sum of £25, this provides the opportunity to support the scheme without making a major financial commitment. No special privileges are attached, but you will receive our newsletter.

## Application Form

Please complete your contact details below

Name.....

Address.....  
.....  
.....

Post code .....

Email: .....

Please tick as appropriate:

• I would like to sponsor a tree [ ]

It is a(n) .....in .....Glade

and is sponsored in memory

of.....

• I would like to make a donation for:

The general purposes of the Arbory Trust [ ]

For the Lodge extension & furnishing [ ]

If yes, amount enclosed.....

• I require an acknowledgement of donation [ ]

[Continued over...]

(Please complete the Gift Aid form overleaf if you are

## Appendix 5: Arbory Trust Historical Milestones

A brief chronology of milestones and management changes are presented below:

### 1997

In January enquiries were made with regards to planning permission sought through South Cambridgeshire District Council.

### 1998

Draft deeds were written and awaited approval by the Trustees for establishing the Arbory Trust. In June, Professor David Bellamy was approached to become a Trustee. In October, the tenant farmer who occupied the location that is now known as Barton Glebe wrote a letter to the Trustees in resistance to the Trust's proposals. Also in October, a revised report by the Forestry Commission was produced regarding obtaining and maintaining woodland burial sites through the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS). The Diocesan Secretary wrote a financial appraisal for the Arbory Trust. In November, the Companies Act 1985 Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Arbory Trust was established. In the same month Dr Julie Rugg wrote to the Bishop of Ely stating her reservations towards private sector provision of woodland burial sites and the Diocese of St Albans, Oxford and Durham showed interest in setting up similar woodland burial provision.

### 1999

February saw the first meeting of the Arbory Trust Working Group. The Working Group was formally established in April 1999 when the Trustees agreed that a sub-group comprising Mr Hugh Duberly (as Chairman), Sir Francis Pemberton, the Revd. Peter Owen Jones and Dr Matthew Lavis should be established to appoint an Administrator and prepare a business plan. When the first Arbory Trust Administrator was appointed in September 1999 she (and her successor) became key members of the Working Group.<sup>424</sup> Membership has barely changed since 1999, however, upon Owen Jones's appointment to a parish post in Chichester he resigned from the Working Group and Dr. Gareth Thomas, a Trustee (formerly of the RSPB), joined the

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<sup>424</sup> Essentially, the Working Group acts as an executive sub-committee of the Arbory Trust and has been instrumental in implementing and driving the development of the woodland burial site at Barton Glebe.

Working Group following his retirement. In March David Bellamy replied to Bishop Sykes that he would be “delighted to become a Trustee of the Arbory Trust”, as did the Right Revd. Geoffrey Rowell. In April, the Revd. Hugh Searle, then Anglican vicar of Barton Parish, raised concern on behalf of Barton Parish Council prompted by an article that appeared in the Cambridge Evening News based on a ten minute interview with Peter Owen Jones. July marked the deadline for applications for the Arbory Trust’s first part-time Administrator, who subsequently assumed the position in August of the same year.

**2000**

In August, the Arbory Trust officially became a non-profit making Trust and the first nine glades in South Glebe were planted, however, two burials took place ahead of tree planting. The 16.28 acres in possession of the Arbory Trust were planted from the autumn with 9,000 trees.

**2001**

In July, the Arbory Trust was able to undertake burials in the newly planted burial site.

**2002**

On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October the (then) Bishop of Ely, Bishop Anthony, consecrated Barton Glebe.

**2005**

On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September the Memorial Lodge was dedicated by (then) Bishop Anthony. The original Administrator was replaced in this year by Mrs Deryn Coe.

**2006**

On 21<sup>st</sup> June a decision was made to man the Memorial Lodge on Wednesday mornings so that members of the public could have an opportunity to make face-to-face enquiries with a member of the Arbory Trust.

**2007**

A further 280 trees were planted and the existing nine glades of South Glebe were each named after a wildflower. From January, an Arbory Assistant was appointed to give advice regarding the identification and maintenance of trees and plants on site. The Arbory Trust began producing pamphlets so that those without internet access could gain information to their services. The Lodge

began to be used for small funeral and/or memorial services as well as for the provision of refreshments after graveside committals. The Arbory Trust decided to cease provision of 'X-marks-the-spot' reservations and to refuse all requests to plant new memorial trees. From July the Arbory Assistant created a Wildflower Guide for visitors and users of Barton Glebe and the former Guardian left the Arbory Trust. A position was then advertised for a new Guardian; a post filled by late summer.

## **2008**

The Memorial Book became available for display in the Lodge from January and the Trust website was revised and updated. The instalment of new benches was no longer permitted. Around July, although decorations were never permitted on site, the Arbory Trust publicly referred to its regulations regarding prohibited Christmas decorations on graves in the newsletter. The Arbory Trust reiterated the need to be firm with site regulations including daffodil planting. The Trust also began "a thorough audit of all plants to ensure that what is planted is in keeping with the natural woodland appearance we are creating..."<sup>425</sup>

## **2009**

Plans to expand the existing site into Phase II (North Glebe) providing nine extra burial glades were published in the April newsletter. Plans were also announced for enlarging the lodge and the plans were unveiled to the public at the annual Open Evening on 10<sup>th</sup> June. Signs were erected on site to remind visitors to keep dogs on leads and to shut the entrance gate upon departure, a move that has not gone without comment by some visitors to the burial ground. The extension site, a former arable field on the northern edge of the existing site was tilled and grass seeded to create woodland undergrowth in preparation for tree planting to commence in 2010.

## **2010**

The Arbory Trust celebrated its tenth anniversary of woodland burial provision on 16<sup>th</sup> June. The anniversary also saw the official opening of the lodge extension by Prof. David Bellamy. All graves are now marked

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<sup>425</sup> From the Summer Newsletter 2008.

electronically and North Glebe is planted with many young whips in spiral guards ahead of burial, which should commence in 2011.

## Appendix 6: A Service for the Consecration of a Burial Ground<sup>426</sup>

### 1. The Opening Sentence

‘I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me, even though he dies yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.’  
(John 11<sup>25-26</sup>)

### 2. The Bishop welcomes the congregation and explains the nature of the service.

### 3. A Hymn, or a Psalm

(Suggested Psalms: 23; 130; 139 vv.1-11)

### 4. A Reading

(Suggested Readings: John 19<sup>38</sup> – 20<sup>9</sup>; 1 Corinthians 15; Ephesians 3<sup>14-19</sup>; 1 Thessalonians 4<sup>13-18</sup>)

### 5. The Prayers (led by the incumbent)

### 6. The Bishop shall be invited to consecrate the burial ground:

‘Reverend Father, we request you to consecrate this burial ground for the people of this parish.’

### 7. The Bishop shall signify his assent and the Registrar (or if he is not present, the Bishop) will read the sentence of consecration

### 8. The Bishop shall pronounce:

‘By virtue of our authority in the Church of God, we do now consecrate and set apart from all profane and common use this ground to be a resting place for the bodies of those who have departed in the Lord, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### 9. The Bishop shall be led by the churchwardens and the incumbent to the ground which is to be consecrated. He shall walk round this area, stopping at intervals to mark the ground with a cross and to say these words:

‘Bless O Lord this ground which we consecrate in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’

### 10. Final Prayer and Blessing

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<sup>426</sup> This is the form of service used by the Bishop to consecrate Barton Glebe. It was kindly made available by the Ely Diocesan Secretary, Dr Matthew Lavis.

11. The Bishop will return to the church where the documents are signed by the Bishop, the incumbent and another beneficed member of the clergy. (See n. 4 below.) If possible, the documents should be signed in public, but inclement weather may make this impossible.

### ***Notes of Guidance***

1. This service is infrequently performed, and it is hoped that the following notes will be of assistance. The consecration of a burial ground is a legal act and before proceeding to arrange the service, the incumbent should ensure, in consultation with the Registrar, that the various legal and other requirements have been completed. In the case of a local authority cemetery, the Petition for consecration is made by the Cemetery Authority.
2. The consecration of a burial ground (be it the extension of a churchyard; or a new churchyard) is usually performed after a short service in church. However, if the burial ground is some distance from the church, the whole service takes place in the burial ground.
3. Under normal circumstances the Registrar will attend, and will bring the legal document, but should this not be the case, the incumbent should ensure that he possesses the legal documents and that there is another beneficed member of the clergy present to act as witness. The Registrar must attend the consecration of a new churchyard and that of a local authority cemetery. No Registrar is required at the consecration of a churchyard extension.
4. It is a legal requirement that another beneficed member of the clergy *or* the churchwardens of the parish concerned are present to act as a witness, if the occasion is the consecration of an extension to a churchyard (as opposed to an area of a cemetery not in church ownership). In the latter case, the Registrar is not required to attend.
5. In many circumstances the consecration of a churchyard takes place on a weekday afternoon; as this marks a significant event in the life of the local community, and is likely to be the result of much planning and preparation, it is important that those who have been involved – representatives of the congregation; the Parish Council; the donors of the land and others are invited to attend.

## ***Final Prayers and Blessing***

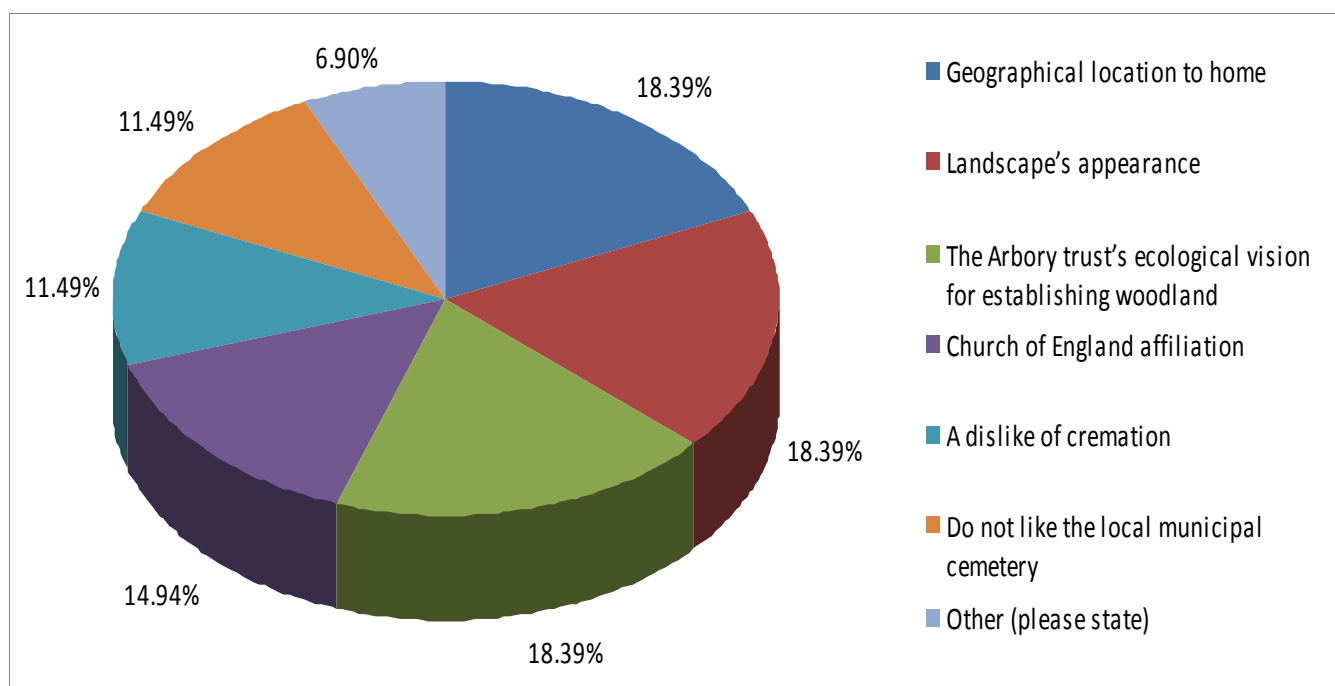
Eternal Lord God,  
you hold all souls in life;  
shed forth, we pray you, upon your whole Church in Paradise and on earth  
the bright beams of your light and heavenly comfort;  
and grant that we, following the good examples of those  
who have served and loved you here on earth and are now at rest,  
may at last enter with them into the fullness of your unending joy;  
through your Son Jesus, who is the Christ, and reigns with you for ever.  
Amen.

Heavenly Father,  
through the mighty Resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ,  
you have freed us from the power of darkness  
and brought us into the Kingdom of your love.  
Grant that as he was raised from the dead  
by the glory of the Father,  
so we may walk in newness of life;  
and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be upon this community, now and always. Amen.

[God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit bless, preserve and keep you in  
his love, now and for ever. Amen.]

## Appendix 7: Reasons Why Barton Glebe is Chosen

Geographical location to home, Barton Glebe’s appearance and the Arbory Trust’s ecological vision for establishing woodland were the most commonly selected reasons for choosing Barton Glebe woodland burial site according to the 23 respondents who returned postal questionnaires. Some were bereaved, others were pre-registered and some fell into both categories.



This pie-chart is compiled from the multiple choice options that postal questionnaire respondents were given to question **C2. Why was Barton Glebe chosen?** Of the six respondents who selected ‘Other’, the reasons given were:

1. “Difficulty of finding a burial site in London.”
2. “The relative interred loved the natural countryside.”
3. “My grandma hoped for one! It was requested.”
4. “I found contentment in Barton and friends.”
5. “Environmental. Cremation is a waste of wood by burning the coffin etc.”
6. “A lovely situation. The landscape appeals.”

However, I would argue that some of these responses belong to the other categories represented in the pie chart.

## Appendix 8: Letter of Introduction to Funeral Professionals



Durham  
University

Department of Theology  
and Religion

Shaped by the past, creating the future

Dept. of Theology and Religion  
University of Durham  
Abbey House  
Palace Green  
Durham DH1 3RS  
Mobile: 07503451382

Email: [h.j.rumble@durham.ac.uk](mailto:h.j.rumble@durham.ac.uk)

04/01/09

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to you to request your assistance in my research at Durham University in the Department of Theology and Religion under the supervision of Prof. Douglas Davies.

My doctoral research involves a qualitative case study of Barton Glebe woodland burial site in Cambridgeshire. The working title of my research is 'Woodland Burial: A case study of contemporary burial innovation in a British Christian context'. I am very keen to speak to you, preferably face-to-face, as I would like to understand what woodland burial means to those who encounter this mode of disposal in their professional capacity: be it as a funeral director, manager of a cemetery or a crematorium etc.

I ought to stress that I am an independent researcher within the University of Durham and this research is not for the commercial gain of Barton Glebe. All professionals, such as yourself, who I rely on for informed research, remain anonymous. Additionally, my research plans are approved by an independent University ethics committee before I undertake interviews.

I realise that the nature of your work means that you can rarely plan too far in advance and that your time is precious, therefore I shall telephone and ask if you are willing to participate and be interviewed for my research project in late January / early February.

Should you have any concerns or questions you wish to raise with me beforehand, then please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone or email.

I look forward to speaking with you and all the best for the coming new year.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H. J. Rumble".

Hannah Rumble

Abbey House Palace Green Durham DH1 3RS  
Telephone +44 (0) 191 334 3940 Fax +44 (0) 191 334 3941  
[www.durham.ac.uk](http://www.durham.ac.uk)

## Appendix 9: Questionnaire and Cover Letter



### Woodland Burial Questionnaire

Thank you for considering this questionnaire. I am extremely grateful for your help, especially knowing the sensitive nature of this topic. I very much hope that the outcome of this research will be of value and help to others facing bereavement in the future and for future development by the Arbory Trust.

Please feel free to write as much as you like, adding supplementary pages where necessary. More importantly, please contact me if you want to discuss the research or have any queries. The completed questionnaire should be sent in the return addressed envelope or attached in an email to: [h.j.rumble@durham.ac.uk](mailto:h.j.rumble@durham.ac.uk)

All information provided by you will be anonymous in my research. The information you provide will not go to any third parties and I should reassure you that Durham University enforce strict ethical codes for all social research. Thank you once again for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Hannah Rumble

Department of Theology and Religion

University of Durham

Abbey House, Palace Green

Durham DH1 3RS

**A. General Information:** It would be helpful to know the following details in order to be able to compare findings. Therefore, would you mind telling me your:

---

**1 Age**

**2 Gender**

**3 Occupation**

**4 Current Religious Affiliation (if any)**

**5 Previous Religious Affiliation (if different)**

**6 Are you:**

- a) A friend of someone interred at Barton Glebe?
- b) A relative of someone interred at Barton Glebe?
- c) Registered with the Arbory Trust for a grave space?

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

*Tick more than one box if appropriate.*

## **B. Your views on woodland burial**

---

**1. How did you first learn of woodland burial?**

**2. In your opinion, what is woodland burial?**

**3. Please describe what appeals to you about woodland burial.**

**4. Please describe what does not appeal to you about woodland burial.**

**5. Do you know of any other woodland burial sites? If so, can you name them or tell me where they are?**

---

---

**6. Are you aware of any differences between woodland burial sites? If so, please describe them.**

### **C. Your experience of woodland burial and Barton Glebe**

---

**1. How did you first learn about this particular burial ground?**

**2. Why was Barton Glebe chosen? Tick as many reasons as apply below:**

a. Geographical location to home

b. Price

c. Landscape appearance

d. Church of England affiliation

e. Because of an individual/individuals already interred at Barton Glebe

f. The Arbory Trust's ecological vision for establishing woodland

g. The local churchyard was full

h. A dislike of cremation

i. Do not like the local crematorium

j. Do not like the local municipal cemetery

k. Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. Is it important to you that Barton Glebe woodland burial site is run by a Christian Trust? Please state your reasons.**

**4. Is it important to you that the woodland burial site is consecrated? Please state your reasons.**

---

**5. The Arbory Trust has regulations to ensure the conservation of local wildlife and for appropriate planting. Is this important to you?**

**6. The graves are without tombstones or permanent markers. Is this important to you?**

**7. Given your experience of Barton Glebe would you encourage others to choose woodland burial, or do you prefer the option of cremation or cemetery burial? Please indicate your preference.**

---

**D. Those with family or friends interred at Barton Glebe (only complete this section if this applies to you, otherwise please go to page 6)**

---

**1. What is your relationship to the person(s) interred at Barton Glebe?**

**2. Would you describe the funeral as religious, secular or neither?**

**3. Where did the funeral service take place? (E.g. a church, a crematorium, the graveside, Barton Glebe lodge or at home?)**

**4. Who officiated at the funeral? (E.g. a priest/minister, civil celebrant, family member?)**

**5. Has your attitude towards woodland burial changed as a result of having a friend or relative interred at Barton Glebe?**

**6. What do you think were the main reasons why your friend or relative had a woodland burial?**

---

---

**7. Have you found the Arbory Trust and the Barton Glebe woodland burial site helpful in your bereavement?**

**8. How often have you visited Barton Glebe after the funeral, if at all?**

**9. To what extent do you maintain involvement with the Arbory Trust and Barton Glebe? Please give details.**

**10. Have you planted any flowers (in accordance with the Arbory Trust guidelines) or placed a wooden marker on your friend/relative's grave? Please give details.**

**11. If you planted any of the flowers permitted by the Arbory Trust, was there a special significance about the flowers you chose? Please give details.**

**12. Have you sponsored a tree at Barton Glebe? If so, was there a special significance to the tree you chose?**

**13. If you have not sponsored a tree, was there any particular reason?**

---

**E. Those with reserved grave spaces at Barton Glebe (only complete this section if it applies to you, otherwise please go to page 7)**

---

**1 Before reserving a plot at Barton Glebe did you look at other natural/woodland burial sites? If so, which ones?**

**2 Have you made any plans for your own funeral service?**

**3 If you have made funeral plans, would you share some of your intentions with me? (E.g. Type of service? Location for the memorial service? Choice of music?)**

**4 Have you decided between being buried or being cremated (and have your ashes interred)?**

**5 If you have chosen burial, do you have a preference for a particular type of coffin? Similarly, if you have decided to be cremated, do you have a preference for a particular type of urn? Please give details.**

**6 Is it important to you that the woodland burial site should be owned privately, by a trust or charity, or a local authority? Please indicate if you have a preference and explain.**

**7 Do you think woodland burial appeals to a particular type of person, faith or generation?**

**8 Does it concern you if people of different or no religion are buried within the same woodland burial site? Please give details.**

**9 Why do you feel that woodland burial is the most appropriate option for you?**

**10 Do you feel any affinity to the landscape and location of Barton Glebe? Please explain.**

**F. Your views on the after-life (this section is for everyone to complete)**

---

**1. Do you hold any views on life-after-death? Please give details.**

**2. Do these views relate to woodland burial in any special way? If so, please explain how.**

**G. Additional views and comments**

---

**Please use the space below to raise any other issues or thoughts you may have which have not been covered by this questionnaire. Personal responses are gratefully received.**

---

**I am willing to be contacted by you in order to participate in a follow-up interview**

**Please give your name and preferred means of contact below if you ticked the box above:**

**Name**

**Address**

**Email**

**Telephone /Mobile number**

---

Finally, your contribution is vital to my research project so thank you for taking the time and effort to complete this questionnaire, without which my research would not be possible.

## Appendix 10: Interviewees Consent Form



Dept. of Theology and Religion,  
Abbey House, Palace Green,  
Durham, DH1 3RS.

April 2009

Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my doctoral research project on woodland burial carried out as a postgraduate researcher at Durham University.

I would be grateful if you could sign this letter to indicate that you agree to be interviewed on the understanding that all personal information will be anonymous as far as your identity is concerned.

Many thanks.

Yours Sincerely,

Hannah Rumble

Participant's Name:

Participant's Address:

Participant's Signature:

## **Appendix 11: The Collaborative Doctoral Award and ESRC-AHRC Religion & Society Programme**

It is important to mention the circumstances in which this thesis was first developed with regards to knowledge production and funding. I was extremely fortunate to be offered (following a short-listing and interview) a funded doctoral position through a Collaborative Doctoral Award with institutional support from the ESRC-AHRC's Religion and Society Programme. The aim of the programme is to fund research concerned with the interrelationships between religion and society by fostering "collaborative research across the arts, humanities and social sciences; to build capacity in the study of religion; to engage interested parties beyond the academy; to further understanding of religion in a complex world."<sup>427</sup> The Religion and Society Programme is structured around seven research themes<sup>428</sup> exploring the complex interface between religion and society.

Though this thesis is not explicitly concerned with Christianity or questions orientated around religion, the very fact that the case study woodland burial site is consecrated and managed by a Christian charity with Church of England affiliation, inevitably means that some issues and themes arising from interview data were of relevance to debates regarding the place and form of religion in contemporary British society. For example, the very fact that those involved in the instigation and running of the case-study woodland burial site are affiliated to the Diocese of Ely, and the fact that the consecrated status of this woodland burial site was crucial for some visitors, means that this research is able to offer a highly pertinent illustrative example of how 'religion' (in this case the Christian, Anglican faith) is changing its practices to embrace relations with a wider public and institutionally creating a constructive role in the welfare of the environment and the local communities through which it serves.

There is no exclusive faith or group who use Barton Glebe and the Trust's burial provision; both individuals with a faith and those who claim to have none utilise this woodland burial ground. Nor did the research elucidate a definitive set of after-life

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<sup>427</sup> <http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/> [Retrieved 07/08/09]

<sup>428</sup> For further details refer to: [http://religionandsociety.org.uk/research/programme\\_specification](http://religionandsociety.org.uk/research/programme_specification) - [Retrieved 10/08/09]

beliefs held by those who engage with this modern mode of burial. This research illustrates how complex, ambiguous and fluid are the relationships and roles between the religious and secular communities that engage in natural burial. It also demonstrates how some of those who work within the Church of England are prepared to change practices and challenge conventions to achieve wider relevance in contemporary society. For these reasons I argue this thesis fulfills some of the programme aims of the Religion and Society Programme and can offer nuanced illustrations to facilitate a more informed understanding of contemporary modes of ‘religion’ and ‘society’ and their multifaceted inter-relationships in the context of death and funerals.<sup>429</sup>

### ***The Nature of ‘Collaboration’***

For this research project a founding member and Trustee<sup>430</sup> of the Arbory Trust assumed the position of second supervisor for the three-year duration of this doctoral research. The nature of a collaborative doctoral award demands that there is collaboration between an academic institution and a non-academic partner to foster knowledge partnerships and exchange, as well as enhancing the relevance of academic research for utility by groups and organisations outside academe. The purpose of a collaborative doctorate is to foster research between an academic department and a non-academic ‘partner’ to the benefit of *both* parties. This raises the question of the nature of a collaborative doctorate and/or its status in relation to a conventional doctorate.

‘Collaboration’ entails working towards a common goal and operating jointly on a project or activity and often implies joint ownership on a project. However, collaborative research can lead to an acute ambiguity regarding the ownership of a research project and where the authorship really lies. Therefore collaborative research magnifies the political and ethical processes of the research process because of the

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<sup>429</sup> For further detail with regards to specific questions that the programme aims to address under the seven identified themes cf. Religion and Society Research Programme Specification (February 2007) [http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research/programme\\_specification](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research/programme_specification) [Retrieved 07/08/09]

<sup>430</sup> His is Dr Matthew Lavis, currently Diocesan Secretary for Ely Diocese. He is a former graduate of Durham University and this is where he first met the principal supervisor of this thesis, Prof. Douglas Davies. For further information on both supervisors see: [http://www.ely.anglican.org/about/whos\\_who/matthew\\_lavis.html](http://www.ely.anglican.org/about/whos_who/matthew_lavis.html) [Retrieved 15/08/09] <http://www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/staff/profile/?id=663> [Retrieved 15/08/09].

broader association, official status and higher funding revenues afforded through collaboration. The research process and subsequent findings are never neutral; they are constitutive of, and reflect, micro-politics from different group concerns.

The collaboration of the Arbory Trust in this research was primarily motivated by their curiosity in the people they are serving (e.g. Trustees have repeatedly expressed an interest in the organic ‘community’ formed in relation to Barton Glebe by some of the bereaved). However, anticipated research activities and expectations were re-drafted and changed throughout the course of the research process, both for the researcher and partner. This was partly because the collaboration resulted in consciousness-raising so that the final direction and outcome of the project was changed greatly from the original funding application that was collaboratively written and submitted by the academic supervisor and the non-academic partner.

An example of the kind of consciousness-raising I am speaking of is represented by the production and inclusion of Chapter 4 in this thesis, documenting the history of the Trust and the development of the woodland burial ground. Had I been a ‘regular’ doctoral student conducting research to an agenda mediated by myself and my supervisors I would not have necessarily written in such detail as to warrant a full chapter on the topic. Moreover, the non-academic collaborative partner articulated that this chapter was essential to the thesis. Nevertheless, I would not ordinarily have been able to write such detail regarding a charity’s history had the collaborative partner not granted me access to their legal and personal correspondence, as well as minutes of meetings that can be traced back to the mid 1990s. This also demonstrates how the nature of a collaborative partnership is not only reflexive, but also responsive and demonstrates how collaboration effects what *can* and *will* be written.

Having collaborative status for this doctoral research has facilitated extra financial support for research expenses; allowed me to feel I belong to a larger community of junior researchers by attending AHRC-funded conferences for other collaborative students in the Arts and Humanities; as well as providing instant access to research participants with whom the collaborative partner already works. Thus, I was able to

utilise the success of the Arbory Trust's rapport to initiate interview and questionnaire opportunities.

Retrospectively, some of my independence in the research process has been compromised whilst gaining a wider network of academic and professional contacts, as well as easier access to professional and bereaved interviewees and much needed financial support. As in all aspects of the research process, especially ethics procedures, collaboration is contextual and involves reflexive, responsive behaviour that often involves negotiation. The problem is that it is not always easy to articulate or even know from the outset of research on what one is willing to negotiate. This is complicated by the fact that, as in conducting any social research, boundaries and aims change over time.

## **Appendix 12: St Albans Woodland Burial Site Statistics**

As has been expressed by a number of founding Trustees the original vision of the Arbory Trust was “to establish a Trust which acts as an umbrella structure to allow other/all dioceses to offer a woodland burial site.”<sup>431</sup> At a meeting with the Diocesan Synod in November 1997 it was recorded that the Synod gave: “tacit support to the following: Woodland burial is something the Church should promote, It should be promoted on a national level, Ely should take the lead and establish the first diocesan woodland cemetery, The Bishop should establish and lead a board of Trustees to make this proposal a reality.”

Letters of interested were sent to the Arbory Trust from various dioceses in 1998 and those archived include: the Rt. Revd. Dr. John Saxbee – Bishop of Ludlow, the Revd. P. Illingworth on behalf of the Bishop of Norwich, The Archdeacon of Lichfield in Staffordshire and the Revd. T. Cook in Dorchester (Salisbury diocese). Despite these expressions of interest, a national level of provision does not currently exist, however, two sites have been established (though not managed or owned by the Arbory Trust) through sustained dialogue with the Arbory Trust. These sites are located in Durham and Keysoe and a brief word will be said about the latter:

### **St Albans Woodland Burial Trust<sup>432</sup> – Keysoe, Bedfordshire**

The Reverend Charles Royden of St Mark’s church in Bedford has had contact with the Arbory Trust since 1999 and attended a meeting of the Trustees held in Westminster on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1999. At this meeting the Revd. Royden was reported to have told the Revd. Owen Jones that, whilst establishing the site under the Arbory Trust “were not possible, he would hope to work with the Trust working towards the same standards.” It is not known what reservations Revd. Royden had in mind, nevertheless the St Albans Woodland Burial Trust were able to purchase and consecrate a site in Keysoe in 2006.<sup>433</sup> The consecrated land now belongs to St

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<sup>431</sup> From a presentation to Diocesan Synod in November 1997.

<sup>432</sup> See: <http://www.woodlandburialtrust.com/> [Retrieved 17/07/10]

<sup>433</sup> To see photos of the consecration ceremony see:  
<http://www.woodlandburialtrust.com/consecration.htm> [Retrieved 04/06/09]

Albans Woodland Burial Trust, which is a subsidiary of St Albans diocese, however, St Mark's church in Bedford manage the burial provision.

Unlike Barton Glebe, St Albans woodland burial site is not located upon glebe land. The 2.2 acres of land at Keysoe is "bang in the middle of 66 acres owned by the Equestrian Centre...so it's private land which has been given to us, so the rights are with us now but the access land is still with the Equestrian centre."<sup>434</sup> St Albans Woodland Burial Trust holds a 999 year lease made by the Church solicitors of St Albans.<sup>435</sup> The trees were already planted when the Trust acquired the site; hence why the burial ground at Keysoe is more advanced than Barton Glebe with regards to woodland growth.

The site is very much associated with the energy of St Mark's church and its community-based activities, though, as with Barton Glebe, anyone can use this burial provision. The site Administrator said in an interview that their provision is currently mainly taken up by people from Bedford and North London. The Administrator added that, like the Revd. Owen Jones, the St Albans Woodland Burial Trust would never have been established without the energy and vision of the Revd. Charles Royden, Chair of the St Albans Woodland Burial Trust. The St Albans Woodland Burial Trust, like the Arbory Trust, is run as a charity and are expanding their glades and seeking to develop a native woodland in conjunction to offering burial provision.

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<sup>434</sup> From an interview with the St Albans Woodland Burial Trust Administrator.

<sup>435</sup> Diocesan support meant St Albans Woodland Burial Trust received a loan from the Diocese, which has to be paid back over four years with minimal interest, in conjunction to a small loan received from the Methodist circuit covering day-to-day running costs.

## **St Albans Woodland Burial Data<sup>436</sup>**

### **Burials from June 2007 to April 2009**

Bedford	11
Others <sup>437</sup>	16

### **Internment of cremated remains from June 2007 to April 2009**

Bedford	11
Others <sup>438</sup>	7

### **Funerals**

27 religious services  
18 others (secular/humanist)

### **Enquiries<sup>439</sup>**

Bedford	48	Bury St Edmonds	1
Dunstable	3	Peterborough	1
Harpenden	6	Watford	2
Hitchen	3	Hemel Hempstead	2
Berkhampstead	1	Sandy	1
St Albans	5	Bournemouth	1
Brackley	3	Toddington	2
St Neots	3	Harrow	1
Hatfield	1	Slough	1
Bristol	1	Biggleswade	1
Cambridge	3	Gerrards Cross	1
N London	4	Luton	4
Harlington	1	Bath	1
Somerset	1	Kings Langley	1
Chesham	1	Porchester	1
Oxford	1	Bishop Stortford	1
Radlett	1	Welwyn Garden City	1

### **Reservations**

Burials – Bedford clients 23, others 11  
Ashes - Bedford clients 15, others 6

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<sup>436</sup> These statistics were kindly provided in an email attachment from the Administrator of St. Albans Woodland Burial Trust, dated 10.05.09.

<sup>437</sup> St Albans 2, Luton 2, Letchworth 1, Hatfield 1, Baldock 1, Rushden 1, Slough 1, N. London 2, Cheshire 1, Flitwick 1, Welwyn Garden City 1, Sandy 1, St Neots 1.

<sup>438</sup> Middlesex, N. London, Bristol, Hemel Hempstead, Toddington, Radlett, Dorset.

<sup>439</sup> Those recorded with geographical location and number received.

## Appendix 13: Transcription Coding Themes and Sub-Themes

The following categorisation was used to interpret interview data, and was built inductively working from major categories in the first place, then complicating these with relevant sub-themes.

### Cremation

Pro

Attitudes:

- Dislike of
- Perception - Quick and clean
- Perception – clinical / austere
- Pollution
- Production lines
- Ashes internment
- Less space
- Secular

### Burial

- Dislike of
- Fear
- Burden on next of kin
- Headstone maintenance
- Sleep / Rest
- Witness / Faith

### Cemetery

- Neglect
- Association
- Dislike of
- Full

### Churchyards

- Dislike of
- Full
- Neglected

### Woodland Burial (WB)

- Misconceptions
- Expectations
- Concept
- Woodland cemeteries
- Barton Glebe – expectations
- Positive act
- Pioneering

- Challenging the funeral industry
- Media coverage
- Needs
- Local Authority
- Users – age
- Marketing
- General Public
- Other Sites

### Motive

- Peter Owen-Jones
- Woodland burial
- Industry
- Arbory Trust

### Funeral

Attitude:

- Keep simple / short
- Too many emotions
- They're all the same!
- Celebration – Cheerful

- No women
- At crematorium
- At WB site
- At Church
- Secular
- Religious
- Personalisation
- Memorial service
- Incongruence
- Ritual dissonance
- Expense (inc. flowers & extravagance)
- Empowerment
- Arrangement

### Funeral plans

- Music – hymns/psalms
- Music – Non-religious
- Coffin design
- Coffin price
- Service location

Size  
Idiosyncrasies / personal  
Easing grief  
Simplicity  
Expense / Economics  
Funeral Plans - investment

## **Coffins**

Sensibilities of the mourners  
Expense  
Design  
Wastage  
Barbara Cartland  
Eco:  
    Qualities  
    Design  
    Profit  
    Manufacturing

## **Shrouds**

Sensibilities of the mourners

## **Graves**

Neglected  
Upkeep / children  
Choice of location/orientation  
Headstones  
Memory  
Dislike of decoration  
Space  
Planting behaviour  
Expense

## **Memorials**

Memory  
Location  
Anonymity  
Trees  
Scattering ashes – non permanent  
Taboo  
Change  
Bereaved's participation - continuity  
Paupers Graves

## **Attitudes re. WB**

Changing – society  
Changing – individual  
Changing – attending a WB

Of family  
Of friends  
Of bereaved  
Anticipating needs of bereaved  
Of spouses  
Negative reactions:  
    Invention of tradition  
    Children's sentiments  
    Land use  
    'Pagan'  
Positive reactions:  
    Continuity  
    Expense - cheaper  
    Simplicity  
    Authenticity  
    More natural  
    Romantic

## **Personalisation**

Lifestyle  
Celebration  
Self

## **Choice**

Lifestyle  
Class  
Networks  
For non-believers  
Expense  
Of Customers  
Decision-making:  
    Pragmatism  
    From personal experience  
    Emotive / spiritual / value-  
driven  
    Seeking reassurance of choice

## **Location re. NBG**

Mobility  
Local  
Association  
Atmosphere  
Glebe land / consecrated:  
Positive  
Negative  
Security of land / perpetuity  
Facilities

Burial format  
Ecology  
Memorialisation regulations  
Degree of choice  
Planting rules

## **Landscape**

Seasons  
Peace/tranquillity  
Choosing a location at Barton Glebe  
Therapeutic  
Barton Glebe's design / planting  
Dynamic

## **Ecology / Nature**

Love of  
Returning to  
Flora  
Fauna  
Trees - longevity  
Birdsong  
'Nature' discourse  
'Green'  
Bird enthusiast  
Conservation / preservation  
The seasons

## **Arbory Trust (AT) Regulations**

Monuments / Plaques  
Planting  
Grave objects  
Too restrictive  
Changing regulations  
Contradictions

## **AT Memorial Book**

## **AT Staff**

Attitudes of  
Availability

## **AT Visits**

Visiting behaviour:

Planting  
Idiosyncratic  
Walk / walk dog  
Doing  
Duty  
Reflection  
Picnic  
Reading

Frequency

## **AT Open Day**

## **Faith**

And WB - attitude

C of E affiliation:

Good  
Bad  
Indifferent

Evangelical  
Anglican  
Catholic  
Pentecostal  
Baptist  
Methodist  
Salvation Army  
Atheist  
Pagan  
Quaker  
Humanist  
Unitarian  
United Reformed Church

## **Grief**

And effect of the seasons / nature

Grave visiting needs

Grave planting needs

And time

And place

Solace: Afterlife

Continuity in nature  
Continuity in memory  
Salvation  
Reciprocity  
Life and death cycle  
Gift-giving  
Symbolic Immortality

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