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FROM DEATH-BED TO REMEMBRANCE

The death-bed scenes and burial of the body followed definite procedures, though these changed over time and some parts are much better understood and documented than others. Ultimately the liturgy and procedures concerning Christian death and burial were derived from late Roman practice (P. Brown 1981) and were then further developed in France by the Frankish kings between 750 and 850 (Paxton 1990). The monastic movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries then spread a more standardised burial liturgy across Europe. Following Rowell's account, the liturgy of the Cluniac order can be described in detail (Rowell 1977: 64-5). When a monk felt the moment of death approaching, he would summon the abbot or prior to hear his confession and to receive extreme unction. The dying monk was brought into the presence of the whole chapter to confess publicly his sins, whereupon he would be absolved. He was then taken back to bed where he received extreme unction. This was given by the priest for that week, who came to the bedside in procession with servers, holy water, cross, candles, and the rest of the community. Whilst the dying man received communion, psalms were recited, after which the staff of the infirmary watched over him and a cross and lighted candles were placed at the head of the bed. At the moment of death the man was laid on sack-cloth and ashes, the ashes being in the shape of a cross (pers. comm. D.Crouch) and signifying penitence. The cloister door was beaten to assemble the community to the bedside and then the creed, litanies and prayers were recited. At the time of death the prior commended the departing soul with prayers. This procedure also was followed by other monastic communities besides the Cluniacs. When Archbishop Anselm was on the 'point of death,...he was lifted from his bed onto sackcloth and ashes' (Southern 1979: 143).

After death the Cluniac community went to the Lady Chapel and sang Vespers for the dead followed by Matins, followed by the collect

Omnipotens sempiterna Deus. Bells were then rung, and a second cross, holy water, lights and incense were carried to the body. The body was washed and then clothed in a hair-shirt and hooded habit, and placed on a bier by those of equal standing in the community. The hands of the dead person were joined across the breast, presumably as if in prayer. Between the preparation of the body and the burial the body lay in the church on a bier and there was a continual recitation of psalmody until burial, only interrupted by the offices and the Mass. The night was divided into three watches, assigned to the two sides of the choir. The next morning Mass was offered for the dead, and the deacon censed the body after the censing of the altar. When Mass ended, the body was carried to a place of burial whilst the community in procession chanted psalms. At the grave the body was censed by the priest and sprinkled with holy water. It was then buried and earth was cast upon it. The procession returned after the burial to the tolling of bells (Rowell 1977: 64–5).

If the person was particularly holy, balsam might be applied to the face. The preparation of Anselm's corpse illustrates that the anointing could be a vehicle for a miracle. Initially it was decided just to cover Anselm's face so that it should 'be saved from corruption' but this was extended to Anselm's right hand—because he had written so many good and heavenly things—but in the end there was so much that Anselm's entire body was covered two or three times over (Southern 1979:143–5). If persons were accorded burial in their clothes, such as high-ranking churchmen, royalty, or, at least in one case, a pilgrim, then they were dressed and taken into the chapel.

Evidence for burial practice within monastic communities is substantial, which contrasts sharply with the paucity of documentary evidence for lay burial practices in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Some evidence has survived that the more holy and penitent laity did at least lie down on sack-cloth and ashes. Durandus stated, 'some penitents, and dying men, put on sackcloth and lay themselves down on ashes', which he ties into the biblical quotations of sprinkling ashes on the blessed and penitent (Neale and Webb 1843:180). At the time of death St Louis of France was also laid onto sack-cloth and ashes (Shaw 1984:394). In Germany, Caesarius of Heisterbach recounts many deaths where sack-cloth was commonly used, but without the accompanying ashes. One feature mentioned by Caesarius many times was the beating of 'the board of the dead', which presumably equated with the cloister door being beaten (Scott and Bland 1929:240). At some point,

probably during the late twelfth and thirteenth century, the customs began to change and the use of sack-cloth and ashes was abandoned.

Normally the immediate signs of a person's death could be distinguished, either through infirmity or illness, before death occurred. This allowed time for the necessary preparations to take place. A sudden death was feared. Two popular beliefs to prevent sudden death on a particular day included looking at St Christopher (hence the saint was often painted on the wall opposite the church door so a person could see him whilst walking past) and seeing the raised host, which resulted in people running from church to church to see as many elevations as possible. These precautions afforded protection only on the day that they were seen.

The dying person was responsible for leaving both the material and spiritual estates in good order by the writing of a will. In the case of the Vicars Choral in York wills were normally written a week to ten days before death occurred (Harrison 1952:308), whereas 50 per cent of fifteenth-century Norfolk testators made their wills between three months and two years before death (Maddern 1995:162), and noble family members often wrote their wills years in advance (Rosenthal 1972:23). In many artistic depictions of the death-bed scene the will is being written as the person lies dying; this may have been common in practice for there was only 'a narrow gap' (unfortunately undefined) between the writing of wills and the granting of probate from Bury St Edmund's (Dinn 1995:154). The will and testament allowed the deceased to gain spiritual benefits for the soul and control the distribution of funds to family and friends. The will, however, can be a deceptively difficult document to evaluate. It is often silent about many aspects of the person's life, including long-term religious provision for the soul, for example already established chantries or alms-houses. One finding is that wills from Bristol were only 'used for the detailed prescription of funerary services and little else' (Burgess 1987b:858). This view seems to be contradicted by an analysis of wills from Bury St Edmunds in 1304 where only 18 per cent (235) made any mention of the funeral at all. The largest percentage of wills mentioning funerals were those of secular priests (seventy testators, of which thirty-three—or 47 per cent—mentioned funerals). This high percentage may be a combination of the increasing amount of detail in wills over time and because of the lack of children to arrange a funeral (Dinn 1995:153). Funeral arrangements only occurred in a minority of wills from Bury St Edmunds, which probably indicates that the ceremonies were so well known that they did not need to be specified, or that arrangements were

made orally. However, it has been suggested that the primary function of a will may have been to pass on property (Burgess 1987b:858). The will itself was not given much spiritual efficacy, but acted as a sign of the testator's willingness to pass on property and goods, and sever links with the material world. Through wills younger generations were provided for and the family inheritance maintained (Maddern 1995), although the will also kept alive the memory of the testator's soul.

The alternatives to a written will were for the dying person to give a nuncupative, or verbal, will or to die intestate. In such cases the disposal of the deceased's money rested largely on trust. Honesty, however, was not universal and occasionally fraud was discovered concerning wills. A common fraud was when executors kept back money destined elsewhere. At Lyminge, between 1292 and 1294, Thomas Carlisle, the son and executor of his father's will, was reported to have kept back money supposedly destined for the hospital of St Thomas at Canterbury, and the hospital of poor priests (Woodruff 1917:160). Similarly a brother and sister were charged with keeping 8d. left in a will which was meant for the chapel of Well (Woodruff 1918:74).

The dying were well aware of the temptation of executors to keep the money or not fulfil their duties. In the description of St Patrick's purgatory one of the groups of people punished were the executors who for a 'long time...they delay and not fulfil death's will' (Easting 1991:92). In the fifteenth century, William Ormesheade, an Alderman of York, included in his will a section about the executors:

And this I pray, that if the said executors shall be negligent [in selling property and praying for souls] then they shall answer to me...before the most high Judge, and shall fall under the penalty of excommunication which is appointed by Holy Church, and put forth against those who impede the last will of the deceased.

(Cook 1918:15)

In extreme cases testaments were sometimes forged: in 1383 William Clopton organised the writing of a false will two weeks after the deceased had died so that he could acquire the manor of Newland in Essex (Leadman and Baldwin 1918:73). This act weighed so heavily on one of the participants that he eventually confessed and the case was brought before the King's Council.

When death approached, it was the duty of the family, doctor or friends to call the priest, who would come with the sacrament whatever time of day or night. Normally if the sickness was not urgent the priest

would be informed and he would say Mass in the parish church. It was extremely rare for a Mass to be said in the house of the sick person, although in the case of monks or nuns the Mass was sometimes said in the 'house' to which they belonged. If the case was so urgent that there was no time for a Mass the reserved sacrament, which had been consecrated at a previous Mass, could be taken to the sick. After Mass the priest would then carry the consecrated host in solemn procession through the streets to the sick person's house. At this point the consecrated Eucharist was exposed to the natural elements and rules were laid down about its transportation through the streets. In 1200 the Council of Westminster ordered that when carried to the sick the Eucharist was to be carried in 'a clean and decent pyx...with a clean cloth over it, with a lamp and cross preceding it' (Rubin 1992:78). The pyx was a small closable box, often made of ivory or precious metal, for carrying the host. Many parish churches, for example Willesden in Middlesex, had a pyx specifically for the journey to the sick (Rubin 1992:80). Archbishop Pecham laid out the rules for the visitation of the sick. The parish priest was to be vested in surplice and stole, and accompanied by another priest, or at least by a clerk. The priest was to carry the Blessed Sacrament covered by a veil in both hands before his breast, and was to be preceded by a server carrying a lit lantern. The server rang a handbell to give notice to the people that 'the King of Glory under the veil of bread' was being borne through their midst, in order that they might kneel or otherwise adore him (Gasquet 1907:203–4). Margery Kempe described how the Sacrament was taken to the dying in King's Lynn 'with light [*lyte*] and reverence, the people kneeling on their knees' (Meech and Allen 1961:172). An alternative to the lamp might be lit candles, for in 1364–5 John Belle, the chaplain at Alne, was accused of carrying the Eucharist through the parish to sick people without lighted candles before him (Myers 1969: no. 450).

Lyndwood, the fifteenth-century author of sermons, adds that people should be told to follow the sacrament with 'bowed heads, devotion of heart, and uplifted hands'. They were to be taught also to use a set form of prayer as the priest passed, for example: 'Hail! Light of the world, Word of the Father, true Victim, Living Flesh, true God and true Man. Hail! flesh of Christ, which has suffered for me! Oh, flesh of Christ, let Thy blood wash my soul!' (Gasquet 1907:205–6). On the return journey, should the sacrament have been consumed, the light was to be extinguished. In this case there was no need for the people to kneel. The visitation of the sick (or lack of it) was occasionally mentioned in visitation returns. In the 1290s the chaplain at Deal was accused of not

visiting the sick, and when asked 'said bad words to them' (Woodruff 1918:85). This was a rare occurrence, however, and visitation of the sick and the last rites were seen as very important duties which were carried out conscientiously.

Sometimes a priest was not present, as at an accidental death, in which case the Church taught that a dying person could make confession to a lay-person if no priest was available. Although a lay-person did not have the power to absolve sins, it was taught that God would grant absolution by special dispensation of His grace. If death was so sudden that there had been no opportunity to confess to anyone at all, it was assumed that a person had made peace with God before death. Some leniency of thought was also shown to suicides (see Chapter 4) even if they were not mad. Some theologians still argued that if there was any sign at all that suicides had repented before death, they could still be prayed for, even if they were considered to have been damned by self-slaughter. Excommunicates could also be prayed for and reconciled by a priest if they were in danger of death. With these safe-guards and potential for leniency it was exceptional for the Church to refuse Christian burial to a baptised member.

In the vast majority of cases a priest would have been present at the death. On arrival the priest started the *Ordo Visitandi*, which began with the gesture of holding the crucifix before the dying person. This had two results. The first was to comfort the person and show that Christ hung there 'with arms extended to embrace, with head bowed to kiss the sinner, his pierced side exposing his heart of boundless love' (Duffy 1992: 314). The second result was to drive away demons which lay in wait for the soul. This was well attested, as in the case of a Franciscan friar from Shrewsbury who, as he lay dying, was surrounded by devils. They came in through the windows and doors and asked him questions he could not answer. It was only when the dying friar was given a cross that the demons rushed away (Wenzel 1989:233).

The priest was then to ask a series of seven questions, known as the 'seven interrogations': 1) if the dying person believed in the articles of faith and the Holy Scriptures, and rejected heresy; 2) whether he recognised that he had offended God; 3) whether he was sorry for his sins; 4) whether he desired to amend, and, if God gave him more time, by His grace he would do so; 5) whether he forgave all his enemies; 6) whether he would make all satisfaction; and lastly 'Believest thou fully that Christ dyed for thee, and that thou may never be saved but by the merit of Christ's passion, and then thank... God with thine heart as much as thou mayest?' (Peacock 1902:69–71, Gasquet 1907:206). The

questioning was intended to be rigorous, as there was not only the belief that the Devil could take advantage of any sins or incorrect beliefs, but also that any sins unconfessed at death would be made public at the Last Judgement before the whole assembled universe (Owst 1926:339).

After these questions, the extreme unction and the sacrament (called the *viaticum*) were given. The dying person was then thought to be in a shadow world between life and death until bodily death occurred (Dinn 1995:153–4). The anointing of the extreme unction was considered ‘health giving to both body and soul’. It also saved the corpse from being used by the Devil: Mirk described how the Devil took an anointed corpse and rode it around a town to the astonishment of the population. Even a pious hermit was not safe—even though his soul was saved, the Devil gained power over his anointed corpse (Erbe 1905:295). Durandus described the anointing, and the rules that applied to it: it could be administered by a single priest if others could not be found (which suggests it was normally administered by two or more); the person should be at least 18 years old; a sick person could only be anointed once a year (even if ill many times); and it must be requested and not forced upon anyone. Furthermore, there was a prescribed method of anointing—the unction should be applied to many parts of the body or limbs, especially the head where the ‘five senses chiefly reside’. If the person was confirmed, the temples should be anointed, and not the forehead. A priest was treated differently, and the backs of his hands should be anointed, and not the palms (‘inside’), because ‘they were anointed on the inside at his ordination’. Durandus finally tackles what should happen to an anointed person who recovered, or died. If the person recovered, ‘the anointed places should be washed, and the water used thrown onto the fire’; but should the man die, ‘his body ought not to be washed because of the recent unction’ (Neale and Webb 1843:179–80).

The biblical justification for the last rites came from the Epistle of James, Chapter 5, 14–15 which states that the Lord shall raise the sick. This was understood to mean that the administering of extreme unction conferred the forgiveness of sins. Anointing also absolved the sins of people unable to speak or make confession. The importance of the last rites was twofold: the first was to show that the person had perfect belief in Christ and the teachings of the Church; the second was to strengthen the soul to withstand the fiends that would soon assail it.

Around the dying person there were often many people, for example the priest, family, friends and doctors, who had their roles to play, but the dying person was also expected to take an active part. At set times the person was expected to reply in a standard or formulaic way to questions

or actions. It was also expected for real emotion to be shown, especially reverence and humility, which in Henry VII's case was expressed as 'many knockings and beatings of his breast' (Duffy 1992:324). The dying person was not a spectator, but a key player. To die well was so important that manuals (called *Ars Moriendi*) were written to describe the 'craft' of a 'good' death so that it would profit the soul. These manuals were very popular and followed many of the same themes, although there could be differences of content between them.

As death approached, the manuals advised that it was 'most necessary' to have a 'special friend' to pray for the soul and to counsel the sick. The friend could also remind the dying person of the Passion, or read some of the stories of the saints, and make sure a crucifix was at least in sight. To further deter the evil spirits who were waiting to attack the weakened soul, holy water could be sprinkled on the dying person. Both the dying person and friend could help more by saying prayers, which would also assuage the physical pain. That weeping and crying were considered acceptable at death is shown by the reaction of people to Margery Kempe, for 'though they loved not her weeping or her crying in their lifetime, they desired that she should both weep and cry when they should die, and so she did' (Meech and Allen 1961:172). Others at the death-bed might include someone to write the will—for as we saw wills were often made only shortly before death—and family members. The death-bed scene was therefore full of action by a potentially large number of people and some manuals warned against the resulting distraction of the dying person (see below). William of Malmesbury recorded that when Fulbert, the Bishop of Chartres was dying, so many people visited the house that there was scarcely enough room to hold them all (Stevenson 1991: section 285). Caesarius related how in a monastery the brothers did not go to the bedside 'in procession' but rather stood 'round the bedside in no particular order, just as they ran up' (Scott and Bland 1929:243). By the mid-twelfth century this seems to have changed with the monks arriving at the bedside in a more orderly procession.

The *Ars Moriendi* portrayed an idealised death, but in reality each death was different in detail and circumstance, although all technically followed the same basic pattern. A few death-bed scenes were recorded in detail, especially those of monarchs or high-ranking clergy. One such was that of Cardinal Wolsey whose death-bed scenes were described by his 'gentleman-usur' George Cavendish (Lockyer 1962:219–34). After his dramatic fall from power, Wolsey was taken ill and was given an upstairs room in Leicester Abbey which was darkened by having the

windows closed, but lit by 'wax lights burning upon the cupboard'. At first Wolsey was very angry at being asked to be confessed and absolved, but he eventually agreed and his confession lasted an hour. Outside events were still crowding in on him and a large part of the description gives Wolsey's conversations with Master Knighton about money which the king sought, and heretics. (These themes could fit into the general death-bed schema of setting one's worldly affairs in order and proclaiming the orthodoxy of one's faith.) It became obvious by the failing of his tongue, and when 'his eyes were set in his head', that death drew near, and 'Then we began to put him in remembrance of Christ's passion, and sent for the abbot...eal him [administer extreme unction]... and [the abbot] ministered unto him all the service belonging to the same' (Lockyer 1962:227). Also in the room were Cavendish and 'the guard' who were witnesses to the death.

Cavendish stressed the role of Christ before Wolsey's death, and the Christocentric approach was a key part of the last rites. Christ's own death was prominently displayed before the dying person in the form of the crucifix, and Christ was constantly called upon to intercede for the soon-to-be-departed soul. Not only intercession, but also Christ's presence between the soul and the judgement of God the Father or devils was prayed for. The dying also took Christ's literal body in the form of the sacrament. In the later Middle Ages the Blessed Virgin Mary and saints could also be invoked, both during the last rites and in the preamble to wills, but it was Christ who was central. This emphasis upon Christ is remarkably similar to a death-bed scene recorded in the eleventh or early twelfth century by Anselm. In his work *Admonitio Morienti* Anselm gave a list of questions and responses to be said to and for a dying monk (Migne 1853:636–7). After stating that the monk is glad that he will die in his habit, and that he has led a bad life and wants to correct his faults, the interrogator puts forward a case where God the Father acts as a stern judge. Christ is able to save the soul by interceding and placing himself between God and the soul: the soul says 'Lord God I place [literally "throw", *objicio*] between me and your judgement the death of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Christ's saving power is also invoked for other faults, such as the soul's sins, his 'bad merits', and the Lord's anger.

At the point of death there were two conflicting views. The first was that the behaviour at the time of death was crucial to the destination of the soul. This 'Final Moment' (often so with capitals), depended upon the dying person's mental attitude as to whether the soul would be saved or damned (Wunderli and Broce 1989:262). In a striking image the Reformer Miles Coverdale likened it to the firing of a gun in which a

single lapse in concentration results in all the preparations being in vain. One mental lapse at the point of death could result in despair, raging, blaspheming and swearing: ammunition enough for the Devil to seize the soul (Wunderli and Broce 1989:266). A 'good death' — emphasised by the popular *Ars Moriendi*—accepted bodily suffering patiently and without complaint, which in turn led to salvation. The importance of the Final Moment was that it gave the hope of salvation to every Christian, irrespective of the life led up to that point. The fate of even the most sinful soul could be saved in the last moments, although the opposite meant that it was technically possible for a life full of Christian virtue to be lost at the last moment through mental lapse. The importance laid upon the 'Final Moment' was potentially contradictory with the second popular theme: that the soul itself was fortified by all its actions during its entire life, and the prayers and actions of those left behind. These and the last rites could help it against the Devil, though it was left to angels to protect the soul, a feature which was often incorporated in medieval tomb design (Plate 3). The angels actively fought the devils who lay in wait for the small naked soul. The soul was therefore a passive participant in the centre of a combat between angels and devils. The angels were armed 'for that by help of them good men been often secured and defended in war and in battle of body and of soul' (Trevisa 1938:479).

Although the immediate battle after the soul had left the body was artistically easy to illustrate, in reality the precise moment of death was not always easy to determine. There were several factors which complicated this. The first was the miracle stories attributed to saints who brought people back to life after they had died: these were ultimately derived from the biblical example of Lazarus (see Chapter 3). Many can be dismissed, especially in the saints' lives, as a miracle motif, although the account of the abbot who shouted in the ear of a dead monk 'I ordered you not to die until I came' whereupon the monk revived has a more truthful ring (Scott and Bland 1929:245). However, some cases did exist where the dead came back to life of their own accord, sometimes whilst they were lying in their coffins. Normally in such accounts the dead revive to warn the bystanders, as in a case cited by Caesarius of Heisterbach: a rich cleric had died and was placed on a bier, when he suddenly sat up and in the hearing of all said 'The just judge had judged and condemned...and given over the condemned into the power of the wicked' whereupon he fell back and died (Scott and Bland 1929:278). A well attested case was that of Henry IV, who was thought to have died and was covered by a sheet, whereupon the future

Henry V took the crown which was lying by the bedside. However, this was a bit premature and Henry IV revived and demanded to know why the crown had been taken whilst he was still alive. The encounter was memorably dramatised by Shakespeare in *King Henry IV, Part 2* (IV. v. 20–90). A more dubious claim was made by a noble lady who announced she had been raised from the dead. Unfortunately her only witnesses were found to be ‘mendacious sluts’ (Sumption 1975:72). Whatever the truthfulness of such accounts, it was wise to make sure the person was truly dead before burial.

There were several methods to test whether a person had died. In some cases a feather or mirror may have been used in front of the mouth or nose to determine whether a person was still breathing (also depicted in Shakespeare’s *King Henry IV, Part 2*). An alternative may have been a piece of straw. One preacher’s story relates how when a priest’s former mistress ‘wanted to touch him to see whether he was still alive, he said: “Step back, woman, and take that straw away.”’ (Wenzel 1989:657). There were visible indications of death as well, and poems, categorised as the ‘Signs of Death’ were ‘the most popular of all Middle English death lyrics’. The ‘Signs’ became a commonplace in both literature and sermons and were effective ‘through their grim accumulation of disagreeable detail’ (Woolf 1968:78–83):

When the head trembles,
And the lips grow black
The nose sharpens,
And the sinews stiffen,
The breast pants,
And breath is wanting,
The teeth clatter,
And the throat rattles
The soul has left
And the body holds nothing but a clout—
Then will the body be thrown in a hole
And no-one will remember your soul

(Wenzel 1989:719)

A sub-category of ‘Signs of Death’—which were copied into medical treatises—were those which detailed tests to determine whether a person would live or die. These tests included mixing urine with milk, or putting mugwort under the head of the dying person. Although the

'Signs' were initially medically inspired, they also were powerful moral verses to remind people of death (Robbins 1970).

Once death had been confirmed, the body had to be buried. The first action was to lay it out. This could have the practical advantage that people could see that the person had died, which was especially useful for political enemies. In Wolsey's case the mayor of Leicester and the brethren viewed him 'to prevent false rumours that he was not dead but still living' (Lockyer 1962:228). It was normal practice to wash the body, although in Wolsey's case this does not seem to have happened.

After death had occurred, the family, executors and friends could proceed to the burial, although the preparations were lessened if the deceased belonged to a religious guild. Guilds have been described as 'burial clubs', but although this was important it was just one function of many (pers. comm. D. Crouch). Each guild had different procedures, but the 1389 constitutions of St Michael on the Hill, Lincoln, show the care taken of guild members after they had died. At the member's death the Dean was required to go to the house with four wax lights, called 'soul-candles' and fulfil the usual ceremonies. A more prominent display of guild allegiance was also dictated:

the banner of the guild shall be brought to the house of the dead, and there openly shown, that men may know that the dead was a brother or sister of the guild; and that this banner shall be carried, with a great torch burning, from the house of the dead, before the body, to the church.

(Myers 1969: no. 624)

In 1529 Margaret Pepis of Cottenham left 8d. to every guild in the town 'So that they come with their banners to bring my body to burial' (Bainbridge 1994:196).

The body was usually kept in the place where death had occurred—normally at home. In one of the earliest surviving wills in English, dated 1434, Margaret Ashcombe, a widow from London, asked for 'two tapers to stand at my head while my body resteth in my house of dwelling...' (Furnivall 1882:96). If the body remained in the house overnight, a wake or 'night watch' could take place. In 1395 Robert de Crosse of York requested a 'night watch' and in 1535 R.Olyver, also of York, requested that there was to be no 'revel of young folks' during the night watch. At some point the body was appropriately dressed: in some cases this may simply have meant a shroud and such shrouding was usually performed by women. In 1514 Alice Bumpsted left 2d. to each of the 'two women

that shall sew my winding sheet' (Dinn 1995:154). In a small vignette by Simon Marmion the shrouding was also performed by women. The body lay on a bed with a lit candle at the head and the shroud was sewn along the centre and would eventually cover the whole body (Litten 1991:59). In the Bedford Hours (c.1423), the shroud has been tightly wrapped around the body. In an English example of a stained-glass burial scene from Leicester the shroud was a large piece of cloth, put over the head and then tied at the feet. In the middle of the chest was a small cross (Clarke 1962). The shroud could be a source of dispute between the dying and the living. Several medieval stories survive about such disputes. In one a wife orders the maid to take an ell and a half of linen cloth to sew her husband's shroud. When questioned by her maid that this was too small, the wife replied 'Why should we sew that much for the rot'. Her husband then joined in, referring to the shroud as his 'shirt' (*camisam*) saying that it was too small. His wife answered: 'Shut up fool... I know you have a long hard way to go, and I have done this so you won't get your shirt dirty in the mud' (Wenzel 1989:543). In his burial sermon, John Mirk also described the shroud: 'Then has he a white sheet on him, showing that he was clean shriven and cleansed of his sins by contrition of heart and by absolution' (Erbe 1905:294).

It was very rare for a child to be portrayed in funeral art or on monumental brasses before the early fifteenth century (Page-Phillips 1970:9–15), and the first child shown shrouded can be dated to 1467 (Litten 1991:61). From the very late fifteenth century until 1552 (when the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI was introduced), babies who died under one month old might be shown wearing their 'chrisom'. The chrisom was a band of linen cloth tied across the forehead of an infant after baptism to stop the chrisom oil—which consisted of olive oil and balsam, applied after immersion in the font—running down the forehead and on to the swaddling clothes. Should a child die before it was one month old, the chrisom cloth was incorporated into the funeral swaddling clothes (Litten 1991:61).

There were two alternatives to a simple shroud, both of which were applicable only for the very rich. The first was for the person to be dressed in clothes of appropriate rank: Wolsey was dressed in, and probably buried with, 'all such vestures and ornaments... such as mitre, crozier, ring and pall, with all other things belonging to his profession' (Lockyer 1962:228). The second was for the body to be embalmed: the body of Jane Seymour, was 'leaded, soldered and chested' (Byrne 1981: 180). Both of these methods were rare and only occurred for the highest ranks of society.

Once shrouded or dressed, the body may have been put in a coffin or laid on a hearse. It was at this point that the attendants to Jane Seymour 'put off their rich attire, doing on their mourning habit' (Byrne 1981: 180). Presumably it was when the body was put into the shroud or coffin that other sections of society also put on their mourning clothes. If the person was wealthy enough, the coffin could have been made specially and buried with the person. In an early Tudor example, a coffin was described as being 'waxed' for Richard Hunne, a rich London merchant (Cooper 1996:243). For the poor a simple coffin was sufficient for the funeral service, but they would probably have been buried only in a simple shroud.

The body was usually moved from the house quickly 'lest the people there should die of its stench' (Wenzel 1989:719) and moved to the church. In the thirteenth century there was still a debate about whether certain categories of person could be carried into the church. Durandus disagreed with some authorities that the body of a woman who died in childbirth must stay outside the church for her obsequies, because 'otherwise it would be as if she died in fault'. He did agree, however, that the body of anyone who died a violent death should not be borne into the church 'lest the pavement become polluted with blood' (Neale and Webb 1843:106). Whether normally the body would simply be stored in the church until burial or be visible to people is unclear, although it could be politically useful to show the faces of the dead in church, as noted above. Polydore Virgil recounted that after the Battle of Barnet the Earl of Warwick and his brother were 'suffered to lie in coffins the space of two days' in St Paul's Church before burial so that all men might see they were dead and so no impostors could claim to be them (Ellis 1844:147).

The movement of the body to the church might make a procession. At the front of such a procession a bell was rung; in the thirteenth century the parishioners of Worth and at Deal were called to account because the bell was either cracked or missing (Woodruff 1918:82, 85). There were differences in procession according to the status of the deceased. If the deceased lived in an ecclesiastical house which followed the 'Uses of Sarum', a definite formula was prescribed. The procession passed through the middle of the choir and out of the south door of the church.

The priest... [and] the attendant walk in albs, the choir however in black copes; and when the procession shall arrive at the appointed place, the priest shall sprinkle the body itself with blest water; then

he shall incense it. Afterwards they shall return into the church, and if it be a canon whose body is borne, it shall be carried into the choir; but if not, it shall be left in the church outside the choir [i.e. the nave], the prayer having been said.

(Jones 1883:145)

If the deceased was a member of a religious guild, members might carry torches and the guild banner in the procession, as in the case of St Michael on the Hill in Lincoln. Testators sometimes specified in wills who was to be in their processions: in 1517 the York goldsmith William Wylson requested the four orders of friars, whereas John Wirrall the fishmonger specifically requested the Grey Friars in his will of the same year. The processions to church were an outward sign of power and prestige, as well as being a powerful reminder that prayers should be said for the soul. In 1524, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, was buried at Thetford. His body was escorted from Framlingham to Thetford by a procession of knights, gentlemen and friars in the company of four hundred men in hooded gowns (Marks 1984:255). The carrying of the body did not always take place during the day. When Stephen Scrope, second Lord of Masham died, he gave instructions that his body was to be carried to York on the River Ouse on two consecutive nights (Hughes 1988:59). If the transportation of the body was over a long distance, the body might rest overnight in a church; the body of Sir John Paston was placed in the church of St Peter Hungate, Norwich, on its journey from London to Bromholme (Richmond 1984:196). The processions, especially the impressive ones, were a combined symbol of the unity of the household, which onlookers could participate in, and a 'triumphant voyage of the dead man's soul' (Hughes 1988: 59) which would be helped by the torches, bells and prayers. An impressive procession also helped the surviving family emphasise their continuing influence on earth.

By the sixteenth century, rigid rules of etiquette had been devised for the processions and the clothes connected with mourning. Sumptuary laws concerning clothes in general, and mourning clothes in particular, became common in the fifteenth century. Hoods could only be worn over the face by the nearest relations to the deceased, or those carrying out ceremonial duties, such as banner or canopy bearers (Taylor 1983: 77). Ordinances were issued for Henry VII's funeral, which were repeated throughout the sixteenth century. The outward signs of mourning were very important and if the proper attire was not available a person could be excluded from the ceremony. At the funeral of Queen

Jane Seymour a girl could not take part because she had no formal burial gown (Byrne 1981:180). A person's status was shown by the amount and style of mourning dress. Arthur Lisle, who served in the households of Elizabeth of York and Henry VII, attended both funerals. For Elizabeth of York's funeral he had the correct allowance of material—5 yards—of mourning livery as befitted an esquire or gentleman. His two servants who followed him shared 6 yards of mourning material. When Henry VII died, Arthur had probably risen to be a Squire of the Body and he had the regulation 9 yards of material, and his three servants also had 9 yards between them, for the funeral procession (Byrne 1981:148).

The act of carrying the body into the church was often a sign of prestige, especially when a saint or important person was involved. At St Hugh's funeral in Lincoln in 1200:

The king of England and the rest of the magnates raised the illustrious load on to their shoulders. It was no small matter of congratulation for anyone to be granted the privilege of carrying the body of one whose merits could save from destruction the souls and bodies of those who rendered him this service and secure their admission into the kingdom of Heaven.

(Owen 1971:40)

In fifteenth—and sixteenth-century York, the pall-bearers are occasionally specified in wills, and of those specified almost all were aldermen of the city. The normal number was six, with the standard payment being 8d., although John Beisby of York was more generous with a total of 6s. in 1535. In Bury St Edmunds, the normal number was four, and priests always chose other priests to carry the bier. There are several instances of god-children being requested to carry the body of a god-parent, indicating that the god-children were reciprocating their joining of the Christian Church by helping their god-parents to join the community of the dead (Dinn 1995:154–5). An alternative was to reverse this and have several paupers carrying the coffin, presumably as a sign of humility. John Lord Neville had twenty-four paupers carrying the hearse with his coffin on (Hughes 1988: 59). For the ordinary person it is assumed that the coffined or shrouded body would have been carried by family and friends, or on a cart.

After the body was carried into church the mourners would not have seen the shrouded body, except in extreme circumstances when it was politically expedient. Normally the body was placed in the hearse which was a metal stand or 'special funeral cart' (Dinn 1995:154) with a coffin

sometimes incorporated within it. The hearse was normally part of the equipment required by a parish; it could be free of charge, as was a re-usable parish coffin. Wealthy people often had their own more elaborate hearses instead of the simple parish one. For the duration of the service the hearse would probably have stood before the high altar in the chancel. Two medieval hearses have survived. The first—a semi-circular metal stand—encloses the body of Sir Richard Beauchamp, who is buried in the Beauchamp Chapel in Warwick. The second, complete with ‘pricks’ for candles, surrounds the Marmion tomb at West Tanfield in North Yorkshire. The hearse was given prominence by having a pall, or hearse cloth, draped over it, and lighted candles or tapers on it. Some palls were brightly coloured or had pictures on them, and in 1504 the priest William Place asked for a ‘black cloth stained with the image of death...to be set upon my hearse in the day of my burying’ (Dinn 1995: 154): this also indicates that the hearse cloth may not have been used before the day of burial itself. The usage of hearse and pall may have varied from place to place. The Beauchamp hearse could have been easily covered by a pall, but the size and the sharpness of the candle-holders at West Tanfield probably resulted in the pall being laid over the coffin (Plate 4).

A basic hearse cloth was a standard item of parish equipment, but if individuals wanted to be especially remembered by prayers at funerals they could donate a more luxurious one. Very few examples of hearse cloths or ‘palls’ now survive, although the London Livery companies have eight Medieval or Tudor examples. All are made of Italian velvet brocade and embroidered with English work of c.1500, with a central panel of a pomegranate and foliate design. A particular example was given by Mr Husee in 1539, which was described in the contemporary Vintners’ Company Ordinance Book as ‘an hearse cloth of gold with the arms of the Vinters [*sic*] and the arms of the said Mr Husee’. In return for this gift the chaplain was to pray for the souls of ‘Mr Husee, his friends and all the brethren and sisters of the Vintners’ four times a year, for which he got 4d. (Byrne 1981: 354).

Once the body lay before the altar the Office of the Dead could take place. A manuscript from Lincoln Cathedral shows a service in progress. A priest reads from a book whilst two clerks either read or sprinkle water. The coffin is draped in a hearse cloth and the candles are lit. The hooded mourners stand at one end of the coffin, (front cover). The Office consisted of two parts. The first was on the afternoon or evening before the day of burial. This evensong of the dead was known as the *Placebo* after the opening word of the service (Psalm 116:9). During the

night there might be a vigil over the body by the priests or clergy of the church, or in wealthier cases by paupers or other mourners. Early next morning Matins and Lauds, said as one office, were sung for the departed. This was called the *Dirige* (from which the English word 'dirge' derives) as it was the first word of the first anthem of the service (*Dirige Dominus meus in conspectu tuo viam meam*). Another service, such as the Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Mass of the Trinity, was occasionally said. After breakfast a solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated. Increasingly through the fifteenth century the offices and Mass were sung ('by note'), although it was not yet universal (Burgess 1987a: 184).

Only then was the body interred: usually three days after death (Burgess 1987b:841). There were other possibilities. In Bury St Edmunds the body seems to be buried the day after death ('While the body was still at home, the liturgical celebrations began on the evening before burial with *Placebo*', Dinn 1995:154), and sometimes the period was longer. Nicholas Strelley requested candles to burn around his coffin and five paupers to watch over it for seven days (Hughes 1988:60), and it took nineteen days for Jane Seymour to be buried (Byrne 1981:180–1). The burial of the person does not seem to have been important in comparison to the last rites or the funeral service itself. There are few exemplar stories dealing with the burial: although there are stories of bodies being exhumed, these outnumber the stories about burial itself. Burial, however, was taken seriously by the church and irregular burials were reported. In the Hereford visitation returns of 1397 several cases were mentioned of irregular practice, including the stealing (*spoilavit*) of three corpses from another parish (Bannister 1929a:287). A case of cursing was also reported, when the vicar said 'Lie there, excommunicate, in great opprobrium', etc. to the corpse of John Boley while it was being buried. A further two cases were reported of the corpses being buried without a mass or obsequies of the dead, and one where a chaplain refused to minister to the corpse 'without just cause' (Bannister 1929b:447, 458). Sometimes the conscientiousness of priests over burial meant that other business was delayed. At some time between 1292 and 1294, Robert, the parish priest of Bridge, was suspended from his duties for not appearing before the bishop:

Afterwards Robert...came running in great haste into the hall of the lord bishop of Hereford at Wymelyngeswelde, and asked to be restored, and since he offered a legitimate excuse, namely that he had a corpse to bury, the aforesaid sentence was relaxed...

(Woodruff 1917:175)

At the same time at Wodechurch, Roger the chaplain failed to appear also because he 'hath a corpse awaiting burial', with another one needing to be buried the next day (Woodruff 1917: 147).

The act of burial was surprisingly little represented in English art, even though it was one of the seven corporal Acts of Mercy. (Many more depictions are found in continental manuscripts— which may result from differing survival patterns (Fiero, 1984)). One fine English depiction is from a series of painted glass roundels from Leicester, which were probably made c.1500. The body, fully shrouded, with the shroud tied at the legs, is being lowered into a grave which has been newly dug, and has a scattering of bones beside it. The priest carries a sprig of hyssop with which he sprinkles the body with holy water as it enters the grave, and also touches it with a processional cross. The symbolism of the hyssop comes from Psalm 51:7 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow', and Mirk in the fifteenth century described the sprinkling as depriving the fiends of power in the grave (Erbe 1905:295). An acolyte stands beside the priest holding open a Breviary, from which the priest reads. Behind the priest stands the benefactor who holds a lit candle and a rosary, and is hatless. (The burial roundel is the only time he appears hatless out of the five surviving roundels.) The widow is also attending and watches the body being lowered into the grave (Clarke 1962:25). It is unfortunate that the other remarkable set of the Works of Mercy, at All Saints North Street, York, does not include a burial scene.

Books of Hours and miniatures depicting scenes of burial show that the body could be physically lowered into the grave using different methods. In the Bedford Book of Hours the body is being placed in the grave head first by a person actually standing in the grave. In a drawing by Simon Marmion the body is being lowered in using a rope around the shoulders (Litten 1991: 58–9).

At some point during the proceedings a funeral sermon may have been given. Large numbers of sermons survive: from the single sermon for a local important person, for example, John de Colpepir of Pembury, knight of the shire of Kent (Devlin 1954:xix); to large collections for kings or important religious people. The sermons were occasionally repeated in a different language, especially if different groups of mourners were involved. The sermon at the burial of Sir Hugh de Courtenay in 1341 was first given in Latin and then in French, the latter presumably for the nobility (Owst 1926:265). Sermons for national

figures were often delivered throughout the country and formed part of a collective grief: many sermons remain for Edward I (D'Avray 1994:71–9). Some sermons were given in the presence of the body; others were given elsewhere at different times and are classed as memorial sermons. These might be preached either at different geographical locations, or a month after death (the 'month's mind'), or on the anniversary of the death (Powell and Fletcher 1981, D'Avray 1994:12). The content could be straightforward or made more challenging by use of biblical or classical illustrations.

The bare outline of the services was standard, but there was great potential to individualise the service through sermons or the instructions left in the testator's will. Services could be personalised by the number and type of mourners, lights, bells and Masses. Different people emphasised various elements: the Earl of Warwick wanted different Masses on different days of the week, for example 'Sunday of Trinity, the Monday of the Angels, the Tuesday of St Thomas of Canterbury' (Rosenthal 1972:27–8). A similar request was made by John Beisby in York in 1535, who also asked for seven different Masses, which included Corpus Christi on Monday, All Saints on Tuesday and the Requiem Mass on Wednesday, to be said by the Franciscans. An alternative was to request seasonal changes: the Earl of Arundel requested changes of prayer between summer and winter (Rosenthal 1972: 27–8). Popular Masses often requested at burials were those of St Gregory, which was especially beneficial to the soul, and the Five Wounds. An alternative was for the Mass which was 'loved most in life' to be said as this would 'help him most when he is dead' (Erbe 1905:296). If a Mass was to be said or sung thirty times, (usually one a day), it was called a 'trental'. In Bury St Edmunds the standard charge for the trental of St Gregory was 10s. Trentals could also be divided, and it was not uncommon for money to be given for half trentals (that is, fifteen Masses). John Mason, a glover of York, left five shillings to the four orders of friars for half a trental each, which resulted in sixty Masses for his soul.

The more money a person had, the more impressive the funeral was, although occasionally a testator deliberately reversed this. The trend of rejecting the pomp and splendour of funerals was especially popular around the early part of the fifteenth century. One obvious influence was the beliefs of the Lollards, a contemporary heretical group (Lambert 1992:243–83) who rejected many of the teachings and worldliness of the Catholic Church. Except in extreme circumstances it is difficult to prove a connection between Lollard belief and funeral practice. In 1415 at Much Marcle in Herefordshire, Thomas Walwayn willed that his

interment 'be held without pomp, which may not profit my soul' and in 1422 Lady Peryne Clanbowe requested to be poorly buried, without great cost (Furnivall 1882:22, 49). In York a rector of St Helen-on-the-Walls went further than most by 'forbidding my executors to prepare for my body a wooden coffin or any other covering except a sheet in which to wrap my body' (Palliser 1980:9). Except for these deliberate reversals, funerals were normally as impressive as a person could afford.

The most noticeable of the many important elements within a funeral were the number of mourners, the sights and sounds of the lights and bells, and the generosity of the testator. The number of mourners could be increased by additional priests and the charitable payment of the poor, who in turn were expected to attend the funeral, or to pray for the soul if too infirm or ill. At the funeral some of the poor could expect to receive gowns (sometimes bearing the insignia or heraldic device of the deceased), money or charitable gifts of food or drink. In Bristol, John Bannebury requested twenty-four priests and twenty-four paupers to attend the services on the day of his burial (Burgess 1987b:843). The poor were an important part of the funeral, as it was thought their lowly and humble status meant that their prayers for the departed were especially beneficial. Torches stood around the hearse, and were often also borne in the procession with the body to the church. William Huby, a horner in York, specifically mentioned that four torches were to be carried in his procession in his will of 1531. As with the wearing of funeral livery, the poor were also involved in carrying torches, eight being bequeathed money to bear torches at the funeral of Bartram Dawson of York in 1515, who also specified that eight torches should burn about his body on the day of his burial. Twelve pence was given for three torches by John Chambelleyne, a butcher of York, in 1516 to 'burn around my body in time of my dirige and mass'. Another specific request, this time by Robert Lee the haberdasher, was that 101lbs of wax should be split into 5lbs to burn in the church and 5lbs around the body. Torches were also distributed more widely: to the parish in general, to the 'crafts' and to individual saints, for example the unusual bequest of torches to St Sitha made in 1531 by Thomas Glasyn, a capper of York.

Bell-ringing was also an important part of the service for two reasons. The first was to pronounce that the person was dead so that people would pray for the soul. The bell also indicated the exact status of the deceased: the numbers of strokes indicating the social status. For persons of note 'half an hour or more; for poor persons only a short time. Also less for children than men or women' (Bainbridge 1994:197, quoting Rye 1887-8). The second reason was to frighten off devils. This is

spelled out in a section of *The Golden Legend* concerning the processions of 'The Greater and Lesser Litanies':

In this procession [of the Lesser Litany] we carry the cross and ring the bells to make the devils flee in terror...and so the demons who are in that murky air [are] sore afraid when they hear Christ's trumpets—the bells—and catch sight of his standards—the crosses. It is said that this is the reason for ringing church bells when storms are brewing, namely, that the demons who stir up the storms should hear the trumpets of the eternal King and flee aghast, letting the storms die down.

(Ryan 1993a:287)

The bells at funerals were to drive away the devils which might be attacking the departed soul. The importance of bells was such that, in some cases, the ringers were paid more than some of the clergy carrying out the service (Burgess 1987a:188).

The bells were one method of proclaiming the death over a wide area, and another was to pay for a bedesman or bellman. (The word 'bede' derived from the Anglo-Saxon word for prayer.) The bedeman's task was to walk around the town or area either exhorting the people to pray for the departed, or to proclaim the obit, thus praying as he walked. This might have happened at the point of death (Dinn 1995:154) or during the burial service. In Bristol it was usual to appoint a town official (such as common beadle or town crier) as a bedesman, for which he was paid 4d. The alternative name of bellman came from the fact that many rang hand bells as they walked (Burgess 1987b:848). Rather than walking around the town an alternative was for prayers to be said only within church: in 1514 Alice Bumpsted left money for four 'bead women' to go to church on her burial day to pray (Dinn 1995:156).

Prayers, torches and bell-ringing were important elements but there are other aspects which are much more obscure; notably the role of plants or flowers. In the late sixteenth century (after the Reformation), mourners carried small branches of bay, rosemary or other evergreens; coffins were 'covered in black with bunches of yew and rosemary tied to the sides' and garlands could be placed on the graves of virgins (Macquoid 1966: 149–52). It is tempting to project these practices back into the Middle Ages, though very little textual evidence has been found. Occasional archaeological excavations of coffins have discovered plant remains deliberately buried within them and exceptional references do exist, as when a lily was said to have grown from a monk's grave (Ryan

1993a:201). The lily was a symbol of the Virgin, for whom the monk had a particular devotion, and it was used as a literary device to signify that the monk was in heaven.

Grief—feigned or real—was part of the normal expression of emotion after a death: it was normally shown by weeping. William of Malmesbury describes William the Conqueror ‘weeping most profusely for many days, [which] showed how keenly he felt [his daughter’s] loss’ (Stevenson 1991: section 273). At St Hugh’s funeral the King of Scotland wept bitterly (Owen 1971:40). When a boy fell from a church tower the spectators shed many tears and the parents grieved by wailing, tears and much noise (Raine 1879:329). Sometimes the emotion felt was part of a desperate desire on the part of the on-lookers to elicit some response and make the dying person see the sacrament or cross. In 1538 Alice Gysbye was probably in a coma and the priest and others present ‘did cry and call many times unto the said Alice to look upon the sacrament then standing by her and knocked her upon the breast...’ (Wunderli and Broce 1989:269). This action of beating someone on the breast may have been commonplace, for Henry VII also had ‘many knockings and beatings of his breast’ (Duffy 1992:324). There was also a contradictory attitude to grief, as often shown in the *Ars Moriendi*. The family was instructed not to be at the bed-side because their grief would distract the dying person from the spiritual tasks; grief also implied a lack of faith in the deceased’s salvation (pers. comm. D. Tankard). Grieving was not always so passionate. Edward IV was only ‘right sorry’ for the death of the brother of the Earl of Warwick, which may not be surprising as he had fought against him. Occasionally grief was feigned: then the corpse normally had its revenge, especially if murder was involved. The Duke of Burgundy was present at the funeral of the Duke of Orleans dressed in black, ‘showing very great mourning, as it seemed’. But the spectators said that the blood of the corpse flowed out of the body, which indicated foul play, and it transpired that the Duke of Burgundy had ordered the murder (Myers 1969: no. 95).

The colour most often connected with dying was black. Black cloth was used in the house and in church. In 1451 a wealthy testator who died ordered that the church at Somerby by Brigg be put into mourning, ‘the priests array the altars and over sepulchres with black altar-cloths and the “coverlid” of black and the cloths of gold ordained thereto’ (Owen 1971:103–4). In the Stonor Papers a memorandum gave details of the hangings required for a funeral—probably that of Thomas Stonor in 1474. It recorded ‘black cloth for the house’; and in Pirton Church, Berkshire, the high altar was to have black ornaments on it,

with silver candlesticks, censers and basins; the rector's choir clothes were to be black and white; and around the chancel and church were to be black hangings. Presumably in the centre of the chancel or church stood the hearse with the coffin. Over the hearse and coffin was a black cloth hanging to the ground, over which was a white cloth of gold with a cross of silver and gilt standing on it. Four tapers were around the hearse, with other lights on the high altar, on other altars and about the burial place, which was probably in the church (Kingsford 1919a:143).

Black was also the normal colour for mourning clothes. In the fourteenth century, widows during mourning wore a 'black and simple dress' (Wenzel 1989:601). At the burial or funeral black was also the norm (Hughes 1988:60). In 1436, Thomas Bracebrig, a rich citizen and merchant of York, bequeathed to ten poor men a gown and hood each made up of 3½ ells of black cloth, which had a white woollen lining. White linings to dark-coloured cloaks were common and may have had symbolic significance, although no reference has been found. The cost of making these gowns lay with the executors (Cook 1916:8). Black gowns with white linings were still popular in York in the next century, for Sir John Gilliot, an Alderman of York, who made his will in 1509 gave the thirteen 'poor folk' who held the torches a lined gown and hood (Raine 1884). Although black was the norm, other colours could be used. At the anniversary of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, there is a strong possibility that the gowns were blue and white—the livery colours of Lancaster (Lewis 1937). In 1513 John Shaw, a merchant of York willed, 'to a poor woman a white gown in honour of our Blessed Lady' who was to wear it at his funeral. Other York people also specified white. Rauf Pullan, a York goldsmith, who made his will in 1540, requested white gowns for three men, and three white kirtles for women; and a former York mayor, John Shawe, in 1538, requested twelve gowns, either black or white, for twelve poor men at his funeral.

The gowns may have been kept by the poor men after the burial, although when gowns were made for the anniversary of Blanche they were reclaimed after the services, possibly for use in other years or by Lancaster's retainers (Lewis 1937:190). Sometimes the wording is ambiguous. Sir John Gilliot of York bequeathed gowns to the thirteen poor people holding the torches, but bequeathed sixty similar gowns (hoods are not specified) later in the will. These may have included a redistribution of the thirteen, or have been additional.

Other items could be distributed to the poor. Sir John Gilliot gave sixty shirts to the bed-ridden poor in 1509. In 1429 John Northeby, a citizen and merchant of York, requested the poor be given twenty pairs

of shoes and twenty cauldrons of sea-coal (Cook 1915:17). Bracebrig similarly leaves twenty shillings for forty pairs of shoes to the poor. Gifts to women could be specified separately, as ten shillings was left for twenty pairs of shoes to poor women. Bracebrig also left fifty shillings for ten cauldrons of 'sea borne coals' to be given to the poor, which were to be distributed so that each should have one 'mett' of coals. Bracebrig left 6s. 8d. for the carriage of the coal to the houses of the poor (Cook 1916:11–12). The bequests of shoes and coal might reflect earlier beliefs—St Cuthbert wore shoes in readiness to meet Christ (see [Chapter 4](#)), and charcoal burials are known from earlier centuries (see [Chapter 7](#))—although more practical considerations such as keeping warm and dry were probably more important. Bracebrig also bequeaths twenty shillings to buy up fallen branches (Cook 1916:12) which would then be given to the poor, presumably as firewood. Similar requests were also made around the country: in Bristol John Richard left pairs of shoes for twenty-four paupers, as well as bread and thirteen gowns of Welsh russet (Burgess 1987b:840).

The giving of gowns and other gifts was part of a unified system. The attenders and benefactors of the gifts were expected to pray for the person's soul, and so the more gifts given, the larger the number of prayers. On the social side of the equation, the impressiveness of the display revealed the social standing (real or sought) of the deceased or the relatives. The mixture of religion and social symbolism meant that funerals formed a focus for social interaction. The funeral was a formal occasion, and through the processions, services and procedures the order and hierarchy of the community was both defined and reinforced.

After the burial there was usually food and one or more meals for the people involved, which could also be a social statement. There appears to be little religious symbolism in the content, although the bread and ale often given to the attenders and poor at the funeral might be a reflection of the bread and wine of the Mass. Details of one such meal have survived in the Stonor Papers (Kingsford 1919a:143–4). On the day of burial, 'at the deriges' bread and cheese were given to the poor men, and the priests and gentlemen were given lamb, veal, roasted mutton and two chickens in a dish. For the following morning's breakfast the priests and other honest men were given a calf's head and boiled (*sode*) beef. Dinner was a much more elaborate affair. The meal was divided between two groups: the poor men and the priests in one group and gentlemen and more wealthy in the other. The poor men (whether 'men' is only men or includes women as well is not specified) received 'umbils' (that is, offal) of beef, roasted veal in a dish and roasted pork. The richer people

and priests had two courses. The first course was a potage of capons, mutton, geese and 'custard'. The second course included a potage of broth (*jussell*), capons, lamb, pig, veal, roasted pigeons, baked rabbits, pheasants and *gelie* (chicken?). A list of necessary spices was also included, including saffron, pepper, cloves, mace, sugar, raisins, currants, dates, ginger and almonds.

The tableware, guests and servants had to be organised. Tableware included silver spoons and salt cellars for the most worshipful gentlemen, and cups, bowls and pots. To cook the food, cauldrons, pots and rakes were needed for the cooks, as well as a 'convenient place for the Kitchen'. Servants included the bottlers, a porter and 'a man to oversee the sad [*sadde*] purveyance of the church'. The list comes under the heading 'In Pirton Church' and it appears that the meal was held at the church. To cook the food a kitchen was set up in a 'convenient place'. Unfortunately there are no costs included, but the meals were obviously designed to impress and cannot have been cheap. The money spent on food, drink and tableware for John Trevelyan's funeral in 1492 was 935d., which was almost equal to all the other funeral expenses put together (1366d.). The most expensive single payment was for the priest's oil at £4 10s. (1080d.), followed by the wax, which cost 360d. The largest food or drink expenditure was of 480d. for a pipe of wine from Alson Tyeds (Collier 1857:96–7). Of course the wealthier the deceased, the more money was spent. In 1542, £6 3s. 6d. (1482d.) was paid to John Skerynge, a waxchandler of London, for the provision of 'wax and other stuff' at the burial of Lord Lisle (Byrne 1981: 187).

There were numerous costs connected with a funeral, and unless the testator had decided on burial 'without pomp' (which may not have been followed by the executors of the will), generally the richer the person the more expensive the funeral. For the poor, guilds or the parish church may have had a common fund from which to pay the necessary expenses. In the 1389 guild regulations of Holy Trinity in St Botolph's, Aldersgate, any brother who died that 'hath nought of his own to be buried with...then that he be buried of the common box' (Westlake 1919:69). For the wealthy there were expenses throughout: those determined by the will, the fees for the priests and church officials, such as the bell-ringer who was often a clerk, and any expenses for the meal afterwards. Although the priest could not demand payment for burial, some contribution was expected. Vicars in the bishopric of Exeter in the mid-fifteenth century could expect 'one penny from all oblations made at burials in the chancel, church or churchyard' and payment for the month's mind or anniversaries: 'all the pence from the reading of obits

from the pulpit...and at trentals and anniversaries' (Dunstan 1967:303). When disputes arose between chapels and mother churches, burial payments often had to be resolved to lessen the loss of revenue to the mother church. One such settlement occurred between the church of Churchstow and the outlying chapel at Kingsbridge in November 1425.

Before every burial there one penny is to be paid to the rector [of Churchstow], together with the mass-penny after the gospel and offertory, when the oblations are offered; one third part of all gifts or bequests made by reason of any burial is to be paid to the rector, the other two thirds to the chapel; no lights belonging to the chapel, either of fraternities or the new one of All Souls or any other, are to be carried at funerals without the rector's licence and prior payments to him of an indemnity of two pence.

(Dunstan 1963:144)

Decisions also had to be made about the placing and cost of the grave. In the churchwardens' accounts of St Mary at Hill in London (Littlehales 1905) preparation of the grave usually varied from 24d., for an ordinary grave in either of the two churchyards (called the 'pardon' or 'great' churchyards), to 160d. for burial within one of the better parts of the church. These were generally standard amounts, although occasionally 8d. was paid, presumably for a very poor person, or 16s. 8d. was paid by a richer person. A document of 1498–9 lists the amounts received by the clerk, which gives a rare insight into how the standard burial fees were broken down after they had been paid. From a payment of 160d. or 80d. for a grave (*pyt*) in the church, 24d. would be paid to the clerk. Out of the normal 24d. fee for a grave in either of the two churchyards, the clerk would receive 8d. for a man's (that is, adult's) grave and 4d. for a child's. This differential presumably reflected the amount of work involved in digging the grave. It is unlikely to reflect the variable importance of an adult soul against a child's soul as 2s. was the standard burial fee of both adults and children in the churchyards (Littlehales 1905: 231).

The burial fees are given in more detail in the 1522–3 accounts, where although the overall burial amounts remain the same, the clerk's proportions have risen. The most expensive burials were in the two chapels of Saint Stephen or St Katherine (160d.): the clerk's fee had risen to 40d. The church was then further subdivided into areas which varied in cost. Burials outside the choir door of the chapels 'unto the west side of the aisle going north and south' paid 10s., and the clerk received 30d.

The cheapest area for burial in the church was in the nave (sometimes called the 'church body' in the accounts) 'from the cross aisle to the west end of the church' which cost 6s. 8d. for which the clerk would get 20d. (Littlehales 1905).

From the churchwardens' accounts the receipts and costs can also be analysed. For example, in 1477–9 the three most expensive burials (each costing 160d.) were all for people buried in the church. These were for Sir Thomas Wilkynson, priest, Thomas Crulle, and the son of William Prune. Puzzlingly—and maybe significantly—the fourth most expensive burial (at 40d.) was 'for the burying of a strange man in the churchyard'. This is odd, for whilst strangers would have expected burial, their costs were usually very low. Quite why this 'strange man' was accorded an expensive burial is unknown, but it may be an example of burial as part of the Acts of Mercy (see [Chapter 1](#)). A further example probably occurred in the 1487–8 accounts when Margaret Bull paid 24d. for the burial of a 'strange child' and in 1512–13 a church memorandum was recorded for collecting alms for the burials of poor people and other deeds of charity (Littlehales 1905:284).

Part of the fees for burial included the mortuary fee, which was also called the principal, corpse-present or foredrove. The mortuary fee was technically not a fee at all, but a voluntary gift of the testator for forgotten tithes. There are few details about when the mortuary was given and presumably there was some lee-way as to whether before, during or after the funeral. The fee was normally an object and generally was the man's best animal, such as horse or cow, and the lady's best piece of cloth. The 'gift' was often a prestigious one, especially from the wealthier in society. The mortuary fee, just as any other gift or right, could be abused or challenged. After Edmund, Duke of York, died in 1402 he was buried in the friary church at Langley. He was reputedly buried without any divine service being said for his soul (which would have been most unusual) and a further complaint was made by the local parson to the prior. The parson required from the prior 'the fourth part of the duke's armour and horse which will be offered for the principal and other oblations whatsoever to be made, as the common right of the Holy Church demands, and the prior denies him, saying he shall have nothing of this' (Myers 1969: no. 437). Mortuary payment was often deeply resented. A *cause célèbre* on the eve of the Reformation occurred in 1511 when Richard Hunne, a wealthy London merchant, refused to hand over to the cleric the christening gown of his five-week-old son, who had just been buried. The case went to court but Hunne was eventually murdered in 1514 (Cooper 1996, Brigden 1991:98–103).

Occasionally the organisation can be discovered through the accounts. For the funeral of Henry VI the expense claims of two people have survived (Myers 1969: no. 191). Hugh Brice was paid £15 3s. 6½d. (3642½d.) for funeral expenses (such as wax cloth, linen and spices) as well as the 'wages and rewards' of men carrying torches in the procession from the Tower to St Paul's, and then on to Chertsey. Richard Martyn was paid a total of £18 3s. 2d. (4358d.) which was divided into two halves. The first was for 'expenses incurred within the Tower at the last departure of Henry', for soldiers watching over the body and for the barges and crew to row to Chertsey. The second part, for £8 12s. 3s., was for obsequies, Masses and charitable works. This sort of logistical organisation is not often recorded. It is likely that these men were members of the royal household of Edward IV, as the burial was a politically sensitive one. It is possible that the people who administered the funds of permanent foundations also administered the anniversaries for which the foundations were funded. Many nobles and royalty gave churches permanent endowments of property to fund services and anniversaries, and the foundations had permanent officials to administer the often large sums (Lewis 1937:182).

At the end of the fifteenth century, there was no evidence that specialisation had occurred (although the role of the College of Heralds was increasing, see [Appendix 2](#)) and the organisers were probably members of the appropriate households. Undertakers, who organised funerals, only emerged in the seventeenth century (Gittings 1984). However, the organisation of large funerals must have been a feat of logistics with many people playing a part.

The dead were not suddenly forgotten immediately after the funeral and there could be a period of intense activity where the focus of the living was on the recently dead. One reason for this was the belief in the timing of prayers. Theologically one Mass helped all souls equally, but popular belief required that a high level of Masses should be said soon after the death, which then tailed off. People could found chantries before they died, and Thomas Love of Norwich wanted the first ten Masses of a trental said whilst he was dying. Bishop Wakeryng requested a thousand Masses to be said on the day he died and John Shouldham of Norwich wanted twelve 'annuals' of Masses (presumably equivalent to twelve years of Masses) to be said in the single year after his death (Tanner 1984:101–2, 106). Services were often carried out on the eighth day, after a month, or on the anniversary of burial, and prayers and services were sometimes said in the intervening periods. The eighth-day remembrance could take the form of a meal or a service, and in 1535

John Shawe of York requested in his will 'a dinner on the eighth day after burial to which the Mayor and Brethren are invited'.

More common was the 'month's mind', possibly because in traditional belief the soul was still regarded as lingering in the vicinity of the body during the first thirty days after burial, a situation needing extreme caution (Gittings 1984:162–3). Some testators requested daily bell-ringing for a month, others requested Masses or a daily *Placebo* and *Dirige* (Loades 1994: 209). Conservative testators provided for this 'trigintal' period by ordering a black cover for their coffin or grave (Cressy 1989: 104). At the end of the month it was usual to have a secondary service, dole, and funeral feast for the soul. It was not uncommon in wealthy households for the month's mind to be as grand as the original burial. The month's mind of John Trevelyan was a third more expensive than the expenses connected with burial. The original expenses, totalling 2301d., consisted only of food and direct burial expenses (priest's oil, buckram for the hearse and wax). The month's mind consisted of a wider range of items and cost in total 3166d. Food and drink were again important and included fish, wheat, chickens, pigs and bread. Brewers cost 5s. and two people were hired to help in the kitchen. There was, however, a wider range of expenses for the month's mind than the original burial (assuming that a full set of both accounts exist), and the additional expenses included the 'making of the hearse' and wax (347d.); the making of the black mourning gowns (96d.); and the expensive purchases of the black livery cloth itself (1912d.). Just to make sure John Trevelyan was recognised, a dozen 'papers with arms' (that is, coats of arms) were bought for 48d. The month's mind seems to have been visually a much more spectacular affair than the burial. Torches were also carried, and the poor people attending the ceremony were paid 204d (Collier 1857:96–7).

A year after the death or burial an anniversary service—which could be called an anniversary, obit, yearday, earthday or earthtide—could be held (Dinn 1995:161). In some cases 'the rich frequently benefited from more than one anniversary annually' (Burgess 1987b:846). There could be potential problems if the death occurred on a particularly holy day (such as Easter) when it would be inappropriate, and some people asked for specific days. In 1506 John Cropley asked for his obit to be celebrated on 16 April every year (Dinn 1995:163). The service was to be an exact repetition of the funeral with the obsequies and the Mass (though without the body or burial) (Burgess 1987a:191). Following the funeral liturgy the *Placebo* was said on the evening before, followed by the *Dirige* and the Requiem Mass. By the early sixteenth century, it appears to

have been standard to celebrate the services with music, chanting or singing (Burgess 1987b: 846–7). Many elements of the original burial service were also in evidence, such as the hearse draped in the hearse cloth, bell-ringing, bedesmen to walk round the town and lit candles around the hearse; the candles being the responsibility of the vicar to provide. Alms-giving was also important and could cost as much as half of the total expense in the wealthier cases (Burgess 1987b: 847). The scale of the anniversary could vary enormously, ranging in Bristol from a meagre 2s. to £3 (Burgess 1987a:192) and in Bury St Edmunds from 1s. to £2 (Dinn 1995:161).

In the more important households hundreds of pounds could be spent on each anniversary. Fortunately, a detailed set of accounts survives for the expenses of one anniversary service for Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster in 1374 (Lewis 1937). This set of accounts is the only survivor from a service which took place annually between 1370 and 1399, when the Duke himself died. The only other expenditure given in the other years are the costs of the services, which keep steady at about £40 per year until the late 1370s and then tail off to around £10 in the 1390s. The services were all held in St Paul's Cathedral, with at least fifty-one priests and other people, as well as bell-ringers and other servants of the church. St Paul's was draped with black cloth, brought from the Duke's home in the Savoy. Twenty-four poor men dressed in the gowns of Lancastrian livery stood round the tomb holding torches. Whether the service was open to the public is unclear, though the bell-ringing would certainly have encouraged people to pray for the Duchess's soul. The payments in 1374 total £45, in four parts: the supper at the Savoy (847½d.); refreshments at St Paul's (423d.); the preparation of the church (4803d.); and alms and payments for the clergy and the poor (2382d.). The largest costs in the preparation of the church were for the wax and torches, and the gowns of the poor men. The cloth for these gowns was bought and made up, and then worn by the poor men during the service. However, they were then reclaimed and taken back to the Savoy, as revealed by the costs of carting them back. This adds to the theory that the gowns were in the livery colours of blue and white, for after the service they could be reused, whereas black gowns would have been more difficult to reuse.

As well as individual anniversaries, the guilds and voluntary fraternities organised group anniversaries for their members, often near or on the feast day of the Saint subject to their devotion. The fraternity of Corpus Christi in St-Mary-in-the-Fields, Norwich, 'celebrated daily masses for its members, and observed an annual procession in the octaves of Corpus

Christi with a collegiate mass and a dinner' (Rubin 1992:242). The Masses for particular groups and anniversaries for individuals were part of a larger system to help the soul through Purgatory: from the death-bed, to the funeral services and then periodic remembrance. The physical death of a person was but a stage on the soul's journey, but although life on earth was transitory it made a crucial difference to the soul's ultimate destination. All the actions around the death-bed and at the funeral were attempts to help the soul reach its desired goal: Heaven.