

Introduction: Death, Memory and commemoration in the English Midlands, 1600-1900

Questions of death, burial, memory of the dead, and sites and forms of commemoration have driven an increasingly vibrant research agenda for social and cultural historians over the last two decades. It is now clear that the iconography of gravestones has a distinct periodicity, linked to changing beliefs and regional traditions but also to much wider changes in thinking about memorialisation of the dead.¹ We have also come to know more about the controversial and contested history of burial forms. A relatively linear sense of ‘progress’ from individual, shared or pit burial, through cremation and to the plurality of burial forms in a multi-cultural modern Britain has given way to a sense of intensity of debate about funerary practice, the early presence of plural forms and the complex emotional and exogenous factors shaping attitudes towards funerary form at the individual, class or regional level. Julie Rugg, for example, argues that the emergence and receding of normative funerary practice is essentially cyclical and that within the constraints of familial budgets those left behind had to balance the need for memory and consolation with the scale and directional power of the increasingly dominant funerary industry.² In this context the death of children has become a particularly important strand of research. Very early senses that parents with large numbers of children could not afford (in terms of time, cost or the ongoing needs of childcare or heirship) to engage in extensive grief and commemoration have given way to a landscape in which the death of children for all classes and periods was an iconic moment in family history and might precipitate complex funerary arrangements and strong ongoing memory and memorialisation. A renewed interest in the history of emotion has given us new tools to think about this issue even before a concept of ‘childhood’ was fully defined and bounded by age in the nineteenth-century. In turn, a focus on children leads us into complex questions of the role of faith in understanding family health and mortality, spaces of grieving and consolation as well as spaces of burial, and questions of the particularly gendered forms and expressions of grief and memory.³ In the same vein, historians have begun the painstaking task of piecing together the

¹ K. Snell and R. Jones, ‘Churchyard Memorials, “Dispensing with God Gradually”’: Rustication, Decline of the Gothic and the Emergence of Art Deco in the British Isles’, *Rural History*, 29 (2018), 45-80, and R. Jones and K. Snell, ‘Angels in English and Welsh churchyard and cemetery memorials, 1660–2020’, *Family and Community History*, 24 (2021), 85-119. For a particularly good local example of this sort of study see P. Davies, *Graveyard Symbolism: The Churchyard and Cemeteries, Great Yarmouth* (Great Yarmouth: Privately Published, 2018).

² J. Rugg, ‘Constructing the grave: Competing burial ideals in nineteenth-century England’, *Social History*, 38 (2013), 328-45, and J. Rugg, ‘Consolation, Individuation and Consumption: Towards a Theory of Cyclicity in English Funerary Practice’, *Social and Cultural History*, 15 (2018), 61-78. See also the review article: E. Garrett and K. Rothery, “‘Let’s Talk of Graves’”: Mortality and Graveyards, c. 1700-c. 1950’, *Local Population Studies*, 102 (2019), 15-20.

³ For a selection of what is now a large body of work on these themes see K. Barclay, ‘Grief, Faith and Eighteenth-Century Childhood: The Doddridges of Northampton’, in K. Barclay, K. Reynolds, and C. Rawnsley (eds.), *Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), 173-18; L. Murdoch, “‘The Dead and The Living’”: Child Death, the Public Mortuary Movement, and the Spaces of Grief and Selfhood in Victorian London’, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 8 (2015), 378-402; J-M Strange, “‘Speechless with grief’”: Bereavement and the working-class father, c.1880-1914’, in T. Broughton and H. Rogers (eds.), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (London,

fractured evidence that tells us how children themselves thought about and remembered death in the family.⁴

Considerable work has also been done on the boundaries between public and private grief, remembrance and memorialisation. The trend for public funeral display to be cut back towards the end of the Victorian period is (as Elizabeth Hurren shows us in this special issue) did not gain as much traction as is often believed amongst ordinary people, but we can trace a decline in the pomp, ceremony and frequency of the ‘public funeral’ for the wealthy and worthy. Even here, however, the desire for public commemoration of a life well lived and contribution well-made could lead to substantial public spectacles which simultaneously fulfilled the need for grateful memory, communal grief, a desire for spectacle and entertainment and popular interest in the novel and the grand.⁵ Nor should we forget that the fraternal, communal and mutual/co-operative organisation provided a continuing mechanism for celebration and memorialisation of the dead, both at or near the point of death and over the long term. Early modern traditions of memorialisation of particular individuals by organisations such as the London Companies or the Masonic Orders carried on though the period covered by this special issue and were captured, extended and refined by new organised groups such as trade unions and co-operative societies in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries.⁶ Even outside this organisational framework, the emergence of new local and national ‘personalities’ ensured the continuance of public funerary traditions. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of the stars who became synonymous with sports such as football, rugby and boxing, where death (even death some time after retirement) could result in outpourings of public grief and demands for elaborate and extended public mourning and funerals.⁷

Particularly painful deaths (in an emotional sense) might also be remembered and aired in other ‘public’ forums than the street and graveyard. Thus, in a strikingly powerful chapter, Pamela Michael shows how private grief in suicide cases, grief shaped and infused simultaneously by senses of personal loss and familial, religious and community shame, shifted uneasily between private and public realms in the forum of inquests, newspapers and other ‘spaces’ created by administrative necessity and requirement.⁸ At the opposite extreme, secular

Red Globe, 207), 138-49; and J-M Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴ H. Newton, “‘Rapt Up with Joy’: Children’s Emotional Responses to Death in Early Modern England”, in Barclay, Reynolds and Rawnsley, *Death, Emotion and Childhood*, 87-107.

⁵ For a good example of this desire see B. Roberts, “‘A Tale of Two Funerals’: Civic Ritual, Public Mourning and Community Participation in Late Nineteenth-Century Middlesbrough”, *Cultural and Social History*, 13 (2016), 467-82. See also the survey by J. Wolffe, ‘Royalty and public grief in Britain: An historical perspective 1817-1997’, in T. Walter (ed.), *The Mourning for Diana* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 53-64.

⁶ See for instance L. Branch, ‘Fraternal commemoration and the London Company of Drapers c.1440-c.1600’, in E. Tingle and J. Wills (eds.) *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 115-136; D. Weinbren, *The Oddfellows, 1810-2010: Two Hundred Years of Making Friends and Helping People* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2010); and J. Callow, *Our Mary: The Life of Mary Turner 1938-2017, President of the GMB Labour Movement, Campaigner and Trade Union Activist* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2019).

⁷ For a notable rendering of this trend see M. Huggins, “‘Reading the Funeral Rite: A Cultural Analysis of the Funeral Ceremonials and Burial of Selected Leading Sportsmen in Victorian England, 1864-1888’”, *Journal of Sport History*, 38 (2011), 407-424.

⁸ P. Michael, ‘From Private Grief to Public Testimony: Suicides in Wales, 1832-1914’, in A. Borsay (ed.), *Medicine in Wales c.1800-2000: Public Service or Private Commodity?* (Cardiff:

deaths for a cause attracted considerable attention and ensured memorialisation in popular and private memory that could literally last centuries, as for instance in women suffrage activists who died while fighting for the vote.⁹ Such activists often have a continuous place in the historical imagination and professional history writing. Others whose lives were the subject of public spectacle were confined in death to the medial sphere. Their eventual burial was silent and memorialisation potentially fragile and transient. Nowhere is this clearer than for people living with physical deformities or mental conditions that attracted the attention of the medical profession. Often (eventually) committed to institutions, their unclaimed bodies could be sold on for anatomisation by the institutional authorities or be sold on by impecunious relatives to medical schools. Even those who in life maintained their independence might end up in death being the stuff of anatomisation, with bodies dissected to such a degree that only assorted body parts were eventually confined to the ground.¹⁰ Even in these cases, however, an increasing focus in justifying public spectacle on the essential humanity of ‘freaks’ ensured that public and written memory of the individuals involved was recycled and re-invented notwithstanding the absence of a body, funeral and grave.¹¹ A casual reading of the life-writing coming into the public domain from the early modern period onwards reveals a strong seam of popular memory for named individuals with notable physical or mental conditions.¹²

We have also perhaps come over time to a better understanding of the ways in which death, funerals and memory could be occasions (often simultaneously) for divisiveness as well as cohesiveness. Catholic burials in seventeenth-century Lancashire provided a locus for public statements of religious presence and a mechanism for community building at the same time as they might stoke local tensions ‘baked in’ to local religious and governance politics.¹³ Controversial and contested Unitarian claims to local political, social and cultural influence might likewise be crystallised by events like funerals.¹⁴ The ‘rights’ to be buried and commemorated in different parts of the church or churchyard were touch-papers for conflict

University of Wales Press, 2003), 40-64. On the more general importance of the coronial court for the public memory of the dead see E. Hurren, *Hidden Histories of the Dead: Disputed Bodies in Modern British Medical Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁹ G. Gullickson, ‘When Death Became Thinkable: Self-Sacrifice in the Women’s Social and Political Union’, *Journal of Social History*, 51 (2017), 364-86, and C. Collette, ‘Emily Davison: Dying for the Vote’, in Q. Outram and K. Laybourn (eds.), *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present* (Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2018), 139-63.

¹⁰ E. Hurren, “‘Abnormalities and deformities’: The Dissection and Interment of the Insane Poor, 1832-1929”, *History of Psychiatry*, 23 (2012), 65-77.

¹¹ H. McHold, “‘Even as you and I’”: Freak shows and lay discourse on spectacular deformity’, in M. Tromp (ed.), *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain* (Columbus (OH): Ohio State University Press, 2008), 21-36. See also N. Durbach, ‘Monstrosity, Masculinity and Medicine: Re-examining “The Elephant Man”’, *Cultural and Social History*, 4 (2007), 193-213.

¹² C. Gabbard, ‘Deformity, Life Writing, and the Overcoming Narrative’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 50 (2021), 301-07. See also D. Turner, “‘Not So Deformed in Body as Debauched in Behaviour’”: Disability and “Marginality” in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England’, in A. Spicer and J. Stevens Crawshaw (eds.), *The Place of the Social Margins 1350-1750* (London: Routledge, 2017), 39-56.

¹³ L. O’Halloran and A. Spicer, ‘Catholic burial and commemoration in early seventeenth-century Lancashire’, in Tingle and Wills, *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration*, 89-114.

¹⁴ H. Smith, “‘The blessedness of those who are persecuted for righteousness sake’”: The Role of “Candour” and the Priestley Riots in Birmingham Unitarian Identity, 1791-1815’, *Midland History*, 35 (2010), 174-90.

throughout the period covered here, but wider issues such as the closure of churchyards, the organisation of burial plots, the opening of new churches and the rights and responsibilities of religious groups operating outside the Church of England in burial terms were also consistent points of tension.¹⁵ At the level of the family and kinship group, death and burial often fostered conflict where there were personal resources to be distributed, something intensified in the case of unplanned deaths. Emily Fine's study of the depiction of Mary Honyard reveals the intense and costly legal mechanisms that could be promoted by contested inheritance, and numerous other authors have provided case studies showing that little changed over our period.¹⁶ Entails and other restrictive practices in terms of wealth and property transmission were designed to (and did¹⁷) create conflict between the dead and those left behind. In this special issue Diane Strange shows how the fate of children and the resources attached to them created a fertile ground for legal contests between interested parties, even in cases where the resources involved were puny, in effect creating a post-mortem tension between the dead and their surviving friends and relatives. Yet, contests over resources were also familiar further down the socio-economic scale and where these magnified in the minds of participants an ensuing tragedy could create an ambiguous memory and memorialisation of the dead. In their study of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Colonial courts, for instance, Hurren and King relate the story of a young man who was denied promised money and good on the eve of his wedding and thus shot himself rather than reveal the family conflict to his intended wife the next day. His death created division between the mother and father and an emotionally complex memorialisation stretching in to the future.¹⁸

This, then, is a rich literature, which has moved us decisively away from the mechanics and demography of death and to an ever more complex sense of its material culture, emotional landscape and afterlives of memory and memorialisation, the latter reflecting an increasing intersection between history and memory studies always apparent in oral history but now extended. To it we might add wandering corpses, literary representations of internment and disinterment and the complex symbolism of the material culture of funeral practices for an understanding of the quality of belonging across the social scale.¹⁹ In this broad context,

¹⁵ J. Barry, 'The organization of burial places in post-medieval English cities: Bristol and Exeter c. 1540–1850', *Urban History*, 46 (2019), 597–616, and J. Morgan, *The Burial Ground Problem in Leeds c. 1700–1914* (Leeds: Thoresby Society, 2013). For a more general overview that emphasises the ubiquity of such tensions, see T. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ E. Fine, "'The Law of thy Mother': Contesting Inheritance in Seventeenth-Century England', *English Literary Renaissance*, 51 (2021), 270–302. On the particular problems raised by sudden death see R. Helmholz, 'Deathbed Strife and the Law of Wills in Medieval and Early Modern England', in M. Korpiola and A. Lahtinen (eds.), *Planning for Death: Wills and Death-Related Property Arrangements in Europe, 1200–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 239–57.

¹⁷ R. Poertner, 'Family Fortunes: Marriage, Inheritance and Economic Challenges in Scotland c.1660–1800', in C. Beardmore, C. Dobbing and S. King (eds.), *Family Life in Britain, 1650–1910* (Cham (SW): Palgrave, 2019), 23–46.

¹⁸ E. Hurren and S. King, 'Courtship at the coroner's court', *Social History*, 40 (2015), 185–207.

¹⁹ J. Boulton, 'traffic in corpses and the commodification of burial in Georgian London', *Continuity and Change*, 29 (2014), 181–208; T. Tomaini, *The Corpse as Text: Disinterment and Antiquarian Enquiry, 1700–1900* (Martlesham: The Boydell Press, 2017); T. Hitchcock, 'The Body in the Workhouse: Death, Burial and Belonging in Early Eighteenth-Century St Giles in the Fields', in M. Braddick and J. Innes (eds.), *Suffering and Happiness in England*

however, detailed work on the Midland counties has often been fleeting or absent. The current special issue seeks to remedy this situation. To some extent our articles focus on the themes and complexities outlined above. Carol Beardmore, for instance, visits the life-writing of a Derbyshire GP, Edward Wrench. He kept detailed personal and professional diaries and we encounter a man working in a relatively isolated rural community who saw death on a regular basis both amongst his patients and his own close family. The lives of such professional men have only relatively recently been given the systematic attention they deserve²⁰, and Beardmore paints a picture of someone who was neither detached nor unemotional about death. Wrench mourned and remembered his children and questioned his inability to keep them and his patients alive notwithstanding the age of scientific advance in which he practiced. Elizabeth Hurren emphasises the cyclical nature of funerary practice, looking particularly at the use and meaning flowers in burial and commemorative culture. She concludes the rise of the Crematorium, surges in sudden mortality associated with flu, and the changing living standards for working-class people in the Midlands led to a revival in the importance of flowers for a ‘good’ funeral after more than a century in which floristry had receded as a motif of burial customs. Caroline Archer-Parré deals with the death and extended remembrance of the famous Birmingham printer John Baskerville, a story retold and re-invented over some 250 years. Like many men in the provincial elites of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England, Baskerville created an imposing monument to his life and a site for his burial in order that he might lie undisturbed and be remembered as a civic worthy.²¹ In one sense he was to be disappointed - his remains were moved multiple times such that he remains in posterity the ‘thrice buried’ printer – but he was actively remembered in a way that bears comparison to the early modern philanthropists who paid for prayers and sermons to be repeated in a regular cycle. Steven King continues and builds upon the historiographical trend to reconstruct the emotional landscape of grief and the structures and processes of memorialisation for ordinary people, a shift away from longer term interests in these matters for the elite and aristocrats.²² Focusing for the first time in this period on the dependent poor, he argues that the dependent poor sought (largely successfully) to impose upon welfare officials an expectation that they should be allowed to remember and memorialise their dead relatives. More than this, and in some ways a connection to John Baskerville and Ian Atherton’s article on John Duncalf also in this special issue, he suggests that the stories of the dead poor could be remembered and retold in the medium and long term too.

Yet if these are familiar themes, albeit played out in the new Midlands context and with new or reconsidered archival material, our articles individually and collectively also mark advances and avenues for future research. Firstly, in methodological terms we are asked to reflect on the relative balance in the text of a diary entry, newspaper article or letter between

1550-1850: Narratives and Representations: A Collection to Honour Paul Slack (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017), 149-72.

²⁰ See: <https://victorianprofessions.wordpress.com/tag/victorian-professions-project-dr-kim-price/>

²¹ M. Craske, ‘Edmund Burke, the funeral monument and the making of a providential elite’, *Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture*, 5 (2019), 51-82. For a rendering of the way in which parents might link their own remembrance to that of their children see P. B. Phillippy, ‘A Comfortable Farewell : Child-loss and Funeral Monuments in Early Modern England’, in N. Miller and N. Yavneh (eds.), *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 17-38.

²² Still perhaps best exemplified by P. Jalland, ‘Death, grief and mourning in the Upper Class Family, 1860-1914’, in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), 171-87.

reportage and the emotional construction of memory and grief, a crucial boundary for the study of this theme but one assumed or sometimes ignored in current studies. Our studies also point in methodological terms to the momentary complexity of memory and memorialisation. In Diane Strange's article on widows forced into the Court of Wards and Liveries to obtain custody of children (and their assets) when a tenant of crown lands died leaving his heir a minor, the legal process and wider complexities of inheritance and testimonial integrity might seem to be at the forefront. Yet the process of legal conflict also required voluntary and involuntary memory of the dead; widows were literally forced to account for their husbands and their lives or achievements, whether they wanted to or not. At the other end of the social spectrum, paupers sought to voluntarily remember and memorialise the dead, but at exactly the same point in time their precarious situation meant that the settlement laws might kick in and force involuntary memory of both the dead relative and other dead ancestors. We can also ask in methodological terms what 'active' versus passive memory might look like. Was the provision of grave or funeral flowers a passive act of remembrance or an active focus of memory? Were the moving of John Baskerville's body and associated textual and symbolic rituals passive acts of memory or active forms of remembrance? Did the appropriation and re-appropriation of the story of John Duncalf, Ian Atherton's Staffordshire labourer whose limbs rotted off after he had denied stealing a bible, represent active remembrance of the man or a form of agonistic memory through which community cohesion was contested and settled?²³ The need for a more subtle methodological framing – especially one rooted in the wider discipline of memory studies where the questions posed here are routine – is clear.

Secondly, our articles point to the importance to cultures of grief, memory and remembrance, of 'telling the dead'. Storytelling is central to the articles on John Duncalf and John Baskerville. The former in particular both told his own (shifting) tale to the many people who visited him as he lay dying with his rotted limbs, but also had it subsequently and frequently appropriated 'in a series of afterlives'. Here Duncalf and his story (one which changed subtly in terms of claimed fact and emphasis) became totemic for religious, regional, medical and popular audiences. More widely in our articles, we see that stories often had to be told multiple times, for instance in court settings or to multiple officials in the case of the poor. There is little evidence for stability in this storytelling. Some were deliberately shaped and changed for the audiences to which they were addressed, so that the memory of those who were the subject came to be reinvented as well as simply resurrected. Others simply shifted in the retelling. As Elizabeth Hurren notes, for instance, the meaning and memory of a funerary flower display changed subtly where the 'story' was told by a newspaper and thus passed into wider public circulation. Even where the narrative remained in the control of a single individual, the nature of the stories they revisited or re-told themselves might shift over time as memory faded or, in the case of the Derbyshire GP Edward Wrench, as changing medical and scientific circumstances and knowledge put a new perspective on one's own place in the death of a relative. Such transitions speak to the tri-partite mode of storytelling – original ownership; reinvention; the settled story – that are the province of ethnographers and anthropologists, but which more rarely makes into historical research.²⁴

Our articles also capture collectively the importance of legacy for the dying and their families. This is obvious in the case of John Baskerville and literal in the case of heirs who

²³ A-C. Bull and H. Hansen, 'On agonistic memory', *Memory Studies*, 9 (2016), 371-75. See also contributions to P. Pickering and A. Tyrell (eds.), *Contested Sites: Commemoration, Memorials and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

²⁴ On this sort of perspective see A. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995). See also T. Evans, 'How Do Family Historians Work with Memory?', *Journal of Family History*, 46 (2021), 92-106.

remained minors at the death of their father. Yet all of our contributions deal to some degree with this matter, especially where legacy and lineage became entwined for those left behind. Edward Wrench explicitly saw his diary as both a part of his own legacy but also a document setting out the memory of dead children and relatives that would then pass through the family. The paupers who are the focus of Steven King's article could expect only the legacy of sorrow and struggle, but the fact of having to tell and re-tell the stories of dead children and relatives gave a chance for reinvention – the development of a narrative legacy – while some of those paupers had been sufficiently distinctive in life to be the currency of future life-writing in death, a sort of conversational or communal legacy. It is unclear if John Duncalf meant for the stories that he variously constructed and embellished while he lay dying to be part of his legacy but the appropriation of his story and its re-framing by the different parties who told and used it, speaks to the way in which the death and burial of a single individual can become a legacy and resource for those with social and cultural fights to start and win. Such perspectives are an important corrective to some recent trends which prioritise collective memory and collective legacy in understanding of the national psyche.²⁵

The symbolism of remembrance is a fourth collective direction for our writers. We are used to speaking of the tombs of the elites, the funerary practices of the middling sorts and the nature of immediate and extended mourning. The complex relationship between small symbolic acts or experiences and the construction of enduring memory or the nature of commemoration is less often explored. How, for instance, might the presence of the vultures surrounding wardship cases (lawyers, money lenders, suitors for widows and those who would step in to purchase a wardship if given the chance) affect the memory and commemoration of a dead husband and father? How might the ability or inability to get a particular flower of a particular colour for a working-class grave in a Midland town affect subsequent construction of memory, both of the event and of the person buried? How might the particular mode of John Duncalf's death – the involuntary separation of rotting body parts such that he was less than a man when he died – have affected the invention of the stories about him as opposed to some other form of death (plague, madness ...) that left the body whole? These small questions elaborate rich areas for further research and also demonstrate the extraordinary complexity of questions of memory, memorialisation and commemoration for this period.

Finally, most of our writers deal with the way in which memory and commemoration of the individual – whether immediate or delayed; forced or voluntary; latent or active – had an importance over and above that individual. The paupers who insisted on burying their children in a place of their choosing, in an individual grave and with some form of headstone or memorial board were not *merely* paupers. Their efforts and attitudes speak centrally to the contest throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries over who should and could have power in the welfare bargain at times of emotional and practical extremis. Families seeking out the right number, form and colour of flowers to line the graves of their loved ones both testify to the finely balanced funerary sensitivities of the late nineteenth and early –twentieth centuries but also speaks to the issue of power over and control of the body in this period. John Duncalf was distinctive in the manner of his death and the fact that his story was so often 'taken up' subsequently reflects both his moment and the symbolic potency of being seen to rot. But his story was essentially curated for much wider purposes of power, control and religious symbolism. In this sense, his story is not so very different to the stories of agonising deaths and

²⁵ As for instance in commemoration of the First World War, though even here the matter is complex: See contributions to A. Halewood, A. Luptak and H. Smyth (eds.), *War Time: First World War Perspectives on Temporality* (London: Routledge, 2018), and L. Tradii, "'Their dear remains belong to us alone': soldiers' bodies, commemoration, and cultural responses to exhumations after the Great War", *First World War Studies*, 10 (2019), 245-61.

neglect which drove the nineteenth century movement to reform workhouses, where a single story might take on a potency somewhat above the ‘worth’ of the individual in life.²⁶ The cases of the widows who ended up in wardship suits throw light on the nature of women’s power and public presence, the struggle for the definition of childhood and the complexities of money supply and notional ‘wealth’ in the early modern period, as we might expect. But they also speak to early modern constructions of masculinity, the changing shape and meaning of notional and biological kinship and the role of forced memory in constructing and reconstructing early modern reputations.²⁷ In turn, the mobile body of John Baskerville adds colour to the life of a famous Midland figure and tells us something about the nature and longevity of public commemoration. It also, however, speaks to wider questions such as the strength of civic power versus that of the individual, the tenuous relationship between class, memory and respect, and the sheer physical development of Birmingham as it drove forward a national industrial revolution.

In this special issue, then, we deal with both the familiar and unfamiliar. On the one hand we have the well-connected GP or the famous Midland printer. On the other we have the obscure pauper or the often nameless families who revived funerary flower cultures after a hiatus of more than a century. We traverse courts of law but also more problematic courts of public opinion. And our writers deal with complex questions of (immediate, delayed, reconstructed, and contested) memory as well as memorialisation, funerary practice and commemoration. Collectively, the articles mark a new direction for the study of death, memory and commemoration for an area of the country that has figured lightly in the historiography until now.

²⁶ See for instance S. Shave, “‘Immediate Death or a Life of Torture Are the Consequences of the System’: The Bridgwater Union Scandal and Policy Change”, in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2013), 164-91. Also K. Price, “‘Where is the Fault?’: The Starvation of Edward Cooper at the Isle of Wight Workhouse in 1877”, *Social History of Medicine*, 26 (2013), 21-37.

²⁷ Heirs and widows for instance might rely on the reputation of dead fathers and husbands for the opening or continuation of credit lines, so memory really did matter in such cases. See C. Muldrew, ‘Class and credit: Social identity, wealth and the life course in early modern England’, in H. French and J. Barry (eds.), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004), 147-77.