BERNARD SMALE

DEATHWORK

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FUNERAL DIRECTING

PH.D. 1985
SUMMARY

Funeral directing is a service occupation seeking to sell skills for income. Directors offer to act as caretaker of the dead and to construct a fitting disposal ceremony – the funeral ritual. This is a most significant symbolic act, yet little is known about the people into whose care the duty is entrusted. Their services are almost universally employed and they perform their most important activities in full public view, yet their work-routines, attitudes and aims are a matter for conjecture. No sociological study of the occupation has been undertaken in the United Kingdom.

This research investigates both proprietors and workers by observation, participation, in-depth interviewing, historical analysis and cross-cultural comparison. It utilises a Symbolic Interactionist perspective and a Dramaturgical focus, and employs a conflict model of social control to examine the form of constraint experienced by members. An ethnography of funeral work is presented and the development of a funeral director is described. The study is interpretive, examining the manner in which occupational roles are conceived and presented, and the type of client-relationships developed by funeral services.

The historical development of 18th Century tradesmen to contemporary entrepreneurs is traced and the rewards available to successful contenders is assessed. The search for collective occupational status in the United Kingdom is compared to that already achieved in Newfoundland, and the ambivalence attached to the performance of funeral directing in the United Kingdom is outlined.

The occupation is shown to be a successful example of a capitalist free-market business enterprise, in which goods and services are sold to customers for profit. Overt commercialism is concealed behind a claimed professionalism to reduce client unease concerning the appropriate role for those who handle the dead on their behalf.
The occupation is characterised by high profits, secure market, competitive individualism, dominance of small family businesses, weak collegiate control, low level of occupation specialism and unsophisticated intellectual knowledge. Present market dominance is unlikely to face challenge in the foreseeable future, but continued market monopoly will not necessarily eradicate current status ambiguity.
DEATHWORK - A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FUNERAL DIRECTING

CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Page 1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY
Chapter 2 Page 61 THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF DEATH AND DISPOSAL
Chapter 3 Page 143 FUNERAL DIRECTING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM - THE SEARCH FOR A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY
Chapter 4 Page 194 FUNERAL DIRECTING IN NEWFOUNDLAND - A COMPARATIVE STUDY
Chapter 5 Page 227 AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF FUNERAL WORK
Chapter 6 Page 366 BECOMING A FUNERAL DIRECTOR
Chapter 7 Page 403 FUNERAL DIRECTORS AND PROFESSIONAL IDEOLOGY
Chapter 8 Page 443 A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF FUNERAL WORK
Chapter 9 Page 473 CONCLUSION

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE TRANSFORMATORY EXPERIENCE OCCASIONED BY DEATH
THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE FUNERAL
18 ILLUSTRATIONS TO SHOW CHANGING FUNERAL PRACTICES

APPENDICES

No. 1. RESPONDENTS ANALYSED
No. 2. INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED
No. 3. BUSINESSES CONTACTED
No. 4. VARIABLES CONSIDERED
No. 5. RESPONDENTS - DETAILED INFORMATION - Not Published held by Researcher

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS Held by Researcher

No. 1. MOURNER'S CARDS
No. 2. BRITISH DOCUMENTS
No. 3. NEWFOUNDLAND DOCUMENTS
No. 4. N.A.F.D. PUBLICATIONS
No. 5. RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS
No. 6. ORIGINAL TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEWS AND TRANSCRIPTS
APPENDICES - CONTENTS

Appendix 1 - Respondents

(A) Respondents by status, totals and assigned number
(B) Total number and sex of respondents
(C) Number of respondents actively engaged in practical funeral work
(D) Respondents by geographic location and type of settlement

Appendix 2 - Interviews

(A) Total number of interviews
(B) Number of taped interviews
(C) Number of co-presence untaped interviews
(D) Number of telephone interviews
(E) Number of interview refusals
(F) Number of potential interviews not realised

Appendix 3 - Funeral Directing Businesses

(A) By number of funerals conducted per year
(B) By trading circumstances

Appendix 4 - Variables examined in interviews

Appendix 5 - Respondents - Detailed Information - Not published held by researcher
REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

| No.1 | Mourners' cards - for coffin cord-holding positions (Scottish) |
| No.2 | British Documents |
| (A) | The Price Commission Report No.22 Funeral Charges 1977 |
| (B) | DHSS Research Report No.6. Families, Funerals and Finances 1980 |
| (C) | DHSS Leaflet D49, What to do after a death 1979 |
| (D) | The Social Security League Funeral Reform circa 1945 |
| (E) | National Association of Cemetery and Crematorium Superintendents' Memorandum on Planning for Post-War Reform in the Disposition of the Dead 1944 |
| (F) | Independent Order of Oddfellows (W M Bowder) Dealing With Death 1980 |
| (G) | National Extension College (C M Parkes) Facing Death 1980 |
| (H) | United Synagogue Laws and Byelaws of the Burial Society (Chevra Kadisha) 1975 |
| (I) | Office of Fair Trading Funerals 1979 |

| No.3 | Newfoundland Documents |
| (A) | Embalmers' and Funeral Directors' Act 1975 (Copy) |
| (B) | Embalmers' and Funeral Directors' Licensing Regulations 1981 (Copy) |
| (C) | Emblamers' and Funeral Directors' Board Questionnaires Funeral Homes |
| (D) | Embalmers' and Funeral Directors' Board Examination Questions for Funeral Directors 1981 |
| (E) | Embalmers and Funeral Directors' Board Examination Questions for Embalmers 1981 |
No. 4

National Association of Funeral Directors -
Publications

(A) Selected copies of NAFD Trade Journal The Funeral Director - Annotated to show Themes selected for inclusion in Chapter 3.

(B) NAFD Literature (Selected Copies)

(C) BIFD Membership Application Form

No. 5

Relevant Publications

(A) Independent Funeral Journal The Funeral Service Journal (Selected copies annotated to show selected themes)

(B) Federation of British Cremation Authorities Journal Resurgam (Selected copies)

(C) Cremation Society of Great Britain Journal Pharos (Selected copies)

(D) Florida Consumer Information Bureau Journal Thanatos (Selected copies)
APPENDIX 1 - RESPONDENTS

(A) By Status, Totals and Assigned Number

TOTALS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Status</th>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
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<td>6 Academics</td>
<td>1 - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Bereaved</td>
<td>7 - 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 9 Branch Managers (Co-operative Societies)</td>
<td>13 - 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 9 Branch Managers (Non-Co-operative Societies)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chevra Kadisha (Jewish)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Clergy (Christian)</td>
<td>23 - 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Co-operative Society General Managers</td>
<td>27 - 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 1 Coroner's Clerk</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Crematorium - Cemetery Superintendents</td>
<td>32 - 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Editor</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 3 Embalmers</td>
<td>37 - 39</td>
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<td>1 Memorial Book Publisher's Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 2 Mosque Superintendents and Funeral Directors</td>
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<td>2 National Association of Funeral Directors Officials</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 31 Operatives</td>
<td>48 - 78</td>
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<td>* 25 Proprietors and Funeral Directors</td>
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<td>104</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Rabbi</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Secular Society Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 6 Trade Union Officials</td>
<td>107 - 112</td>
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<tr>
<td>* 2 Wives and Secretaries to Proprietor-Funeral Directors</td>
<td>112 - 114</td>
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* = Practical Funeral Experience - TOTAL 79

(B) Total, number and sex of respondents

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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>114</td>
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(C) Number of Respondents Actively Engaged in Practical Funeral Work

79 i.e. 68% of total number interviewed
(D) Respondents by Geographic Location and Type of Settlement

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<td>Belsize Park</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chalk Farm</td>
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<td>Sutton</td>
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<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>Village</td>
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<td>Willenhall</td>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>Conurbation</td>
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APPENDIX 2 - INTERVIEWS

(A) Total number of interviews 137

(B) Number of taped interviews 32

(C) Number of co-presence un-taped interviews 76

(D) Number of telephone interviews 3

(E) Number of interview refusals 2

(F) Number of potential interviews not realised 2

(G) Length of principal interviews

Minimum : 1½ hours
Maximum : four hours
Majority : two hours
(A) By number of funeral conducted per year  
(Approximate - by respondents's information)

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<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Fewer than 250</td>
<td>15 firms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between 250 and 1,000 per year</td>
<td>20 firms</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 1,000 per year</td>
<td>5 firms</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>40 firms</strong></td>
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(B) By trading circumstances

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<td>Family controlled private company</td>
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<td>Large public company</td>
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<td>Co-operative societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious organisation</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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## APPENDIX 4 - VARIABLES COVERED BY INTERVIEWS

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<td>Many workers</td>
<td>Few workers</td>
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<td>Family business</td>
<td>Public business</td>
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<td>Management</td>
<td>Workers</td>
</tr>
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<td>Employers</td>
<td>Employees</td>
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<td>Well established</td>
<td>Newly established</td>
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<td>Trade union oriented</td>
<td>Trade union excluded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High social status clients</td>
<td>Low social status clients</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent control of business</td>
<td>Loss of control of business</td>
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<td>NAFD membership</td>
<td>Non-NAFD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nearing retirement</td>
<td>Newly arrived</td>
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<td>Qualified</td>
<td>Unqualified</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Conductors'</td>
<td>Non 'conductors'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Only occupation</td>
<td>Latest occupation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ascribed role</td>
<td>Achieved role</td>
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<td>Secular orientation</td>
<td>Religious orientation</td>
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<td>Workregions open to scrutiny</td>
<td>Restricted access to work regions</td>
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<td>Private reward goal</td>
<td>Public service goal</td>
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<td>Contented with occupational role</td>
<td>Discontended with occupational role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionally oriented</td>
<td>Commercially oriented</td>
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# THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Research Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Background to the Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Form of the Investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Sociological Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dramaturgy and Social Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Research Design</td>
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<td>(b) Respondents' Accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>(c) Observation and Participation</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>(d) Methodological Problems</td>
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<td>(c) USA Statistical Analysis of Funeral Directing</td>
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<td>(d) Theoretical Analysis</td>
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<td>(e) Professionalism</td>
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<td>(f) Attitudes Towards Death</td>
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<td>Interpretive, Ideological and Analytic Paradigms</td>
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<td>The Social History of Death</td>
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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

THE RESEARCH TOPIC

As individuals, funeral directors offer to provide a unique personal service for the bereaved, immediately death occurs. Collectively, they operate as an occupation, anticipating the call that will be made on them, and offering goods, skills and services through openly competitive businesses. They are retailers of commodities necessary to move a dead body through specific stages to a final disposal. Most groups in society call on them to take charge of the body once death has occurred, irrespective of religious, ethnic, political, economic or regional commitment.

They actively seek to handle the dead, and to treat and present them in formally specific sequences. They offer a comprehensive service which adapts to secular, sacred, economic and social demands. Those who hire them will normally only see the outward consequence of their service since their work-practices and actual working areas are concealed from all except those claiming a legitimate work involvement with the dead, such as doctors or embalmers. The occupational skills and techniques which are part of their regular daily work are not open to public view, and the customers (or clients), who employ them come to judge their competence on the basis of a small but highly visible part of their total work. What goes on in the concealed areas of a funeral 'home' must be guessed; what degree of dignity, care, expertise or efficiency is commonly exercised remains unknown. It is the performance of the particular firm when the body is viewed in the funeral home or when the funeral itself is staged, that makes or mars the credibility of the funeral director. It would appear that most people judge the occupation from their particular experience of it and on the basis of the formal presentation of the disposal ceremony.

Even in the U.S.A., where funeral services in general, and directors in particular, have been the subject of a satirical criticism unknown in Britain, (Waugh 1948, Milford 1963), few sociological studies of the funeral occupation have been undertaken. The most detailed, and relevant to this study, was carried out by Habenstein (1954). His
interactionist approach revealed a high degree of role-uncertainty and status ambiguity existing in the occupation. He argued that concern over the separate virtues of a business or a professional orientation divided members, and that the sacred-secular, symbolic-practical aspects of death were not successfully resolved.

No similarly detailed investigation into the funeral business has been carried out in Britain and this research rectifies that omission. It investigates the manner in which a social identity and an occupational role are created, sustained and presented. It examines the actual work that members of the occupation routinely perform, and assesses the degree of skill and level of competence involved. It traces the historical developments of the occupation and the aspirations voiced by its chosen representatives. It exposes the hitherto concealed working conditions and identifies the division of labour on which the structure of the occupation depends. The criteria for judging competence is noted and status positions are observed for competitive or supportive interaction. The occupation is examined in several ways; firstly from the self-reporting of participants; secondly from the direct participation and observation of the researcher; thirdly by a cross-cultural comparison; fourthly from analysis of relevant sociological, historical and occupational literature. Primary and secondary material are combined to place the occupation in the social context of death-related behaviour.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The stimulus to undertake the research developed from an awareness that, in the increasing volume of literature focussing on death, funeral directors were rarely examined with any serious intent. Funerals happened, and funeral workers existed, apparently as dependent variables, produced by causal factors operating outside their control or influence. Funerals were frequently regarded as 'functional' in that they fulfilled specific social needs relating to both individuals and the total community.
The most widely reported examination of death, grief and mourning in Britain (Gorer 1965), argued strongly that this 'function' was being eroded and that death was now the most potent taboo in contemporary Western cultures. He maintained that the dying are removed from family contacts to die alone in bureaucratically organised institutions; that the bereaved are shunned by the rest of society because onlookers feel embarrassed when confronted with a grief they cannot relieve; and that funerals fail to fulfil the social functions of healing and defining which they exist to perform.

Such a comprehensive attack on current attitudes and behaviour in which a socially maladaptive society is identified, raised the question of how an apparently successful occupation, such as funeral directing appeared to be, could survive. If it produced a ceremony regarded as inadequate and maladaptive by participants and researchers alike, how did it come to be accorded such social acceptability across all sections of society? It was the publication of such sweeping generalities, echoed and given wider currency by Aries (1976), that gave particular relevance to an investigation into the actual role and performance of those in the business of creating funerals.

THE FORM OF THE INVESTIGATION

Primary data can provide fresh and vivid information and reflect the actual concerns of those involved in the occupation, but it requires ordering, structuring and explaining — in short it must be interpreted. To merely report that 'first he did this, then that' or to repeat the words used by the participant without any attempt to arrange, select or place in context, is tedious and does not advance the readers understanding. Therefore, basic to this investigation is the belief that the theoretical analysis should be firmly grounded in, and be logically developed from, the empirical data, and that the data does not, and cannot 'speak' for itself. Interpretation is essential, but the theoretical structure produced by the researcher should derive from the empirical data, and not be a mould into which evidence is forcibly compressed.
The focus of attention in this study is the self-defining capability presented by members of the occupation, which comes to be accorded the status of funeral directing. Social action arises out of meanings which come to define a particular form of social 'reality' and since only humans can attribute meanings, not 'occupations', it is to those individuals who regularly work at defining a funeral, that attention if directed. As has already been noted:-

"In so far as one wants to know what people think and believe about their world and themselves, there is no substitute for asking them directly" (Turner and Martin 1981 p19)

and since what funeral workers think about their work influences what is perceived by the public in a funeral ceremony, it is to their 'explanations' that we must turn for 'raw' data.

Nevertheless, their current behaviour should not be artificially separated from historical antecedents nor from the symbolic ceremony in which their work is given public expression. Members are not totally free to construct whatever form of social 'reality' they consider suitable; they will be inhibited or guided by agencies outside their control which set boundaries to their self-expression. Therefore, in this study it is considered both necessary and logical to examine the historical, economic, cultural and symbolic universes they inhabit, each of which will add a further dimension of explanation.

The investigation centres on the basic question - 'what is going on?' and seeks to give an answer which will expand the existing knowledge of the occupation and provide the basis for further study. It does not claim to provide a 'true' account, but an 'interpretation' which fits the evidence and is not internally self-contradictory. A search for the real 'facticity' of human behaviour is to be regarded as misplaced endeavour. Separate senses of reality are inferred, negotiated and constructed by social actors, each seeking to have their definitions accepted by others. It is not possible to reduce them to a 'real' phenomenon which contains the 'essence' of disparate constructions, nor
should the sociologist attempt to do so. To do so would entail a transformation of the meanings attributed by the actors to the world as they perceive it.

The research presents the negotiating and defining activity presented by the actors as basic data to be balanced against the actual practical activities they perform. Funeral directors and their employees present their own individual and collective definitions of the reality of their work, and the appropriate role of the observer is to record them, juxtapose one with another, and to distinguish patterns of interaction, not to be constantly on the alert to distinguish a reliable 'fact' from a distorting 'falsity'. This view of the sociologist at work emphasises an empirical agnosticism, which regards the giving or withholding of the category 'fact' as a socially conditioned activity, not as the consequence of an appeal to an objectively existing reality. In other words 'facts' do not exist independent of the mind that perceives them, waiting to be accurately or falsely perceived. They are, instead, to be regarded as the outcome of negotiation between contending parties, each with their own presentation to produce, in a situation of unequal power and differing perspectives.

The contention that pure objectivity in observation is unobtainable; that value free conceptualising is impossible and that unbiased questioning is unrealisable, does not stifle investigative analysis. It emphasises the need to concentrate on the occupational world of funeral directing as seen through the eyes of many participants and to present them in a sociological perspective which emphasises the manner in which social roles are sustained and resolved into relatively stable patterns of interaction.

It will not have escaped the reader's notice that assumptions have already been made about the occupation which are not based on members accounts but which antedate the research. For example, that is is unique; that stratification of work tasks exists; that members are not totally free to define their work in whatever way they perceive as appropriate; and that the occupation is composed of successfully
competitive business units. This is an indication of the evaluation that all social actors make when making sense of their world, and which effectively forestalls the ability of a researcher to start without preconceptions. The research should indicate the validity of holding such beliefs.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The sociological perspective which most closely satisfies the requirements of interpretive analysis is Symbolic Interactionism, a form which is itself open to a variety of interpretations. This is not the appropriate place to summarise the extensive literature on its various manifestations, but it is necessary to explain the reason for its choice. Firstly, however, it must be made clear that it is the work of 'creative sociologists' which has most powerfully influenced the patterns of sociological thought adopted by the present researcher. This term, used effectively by Monica B Morris (1977), embraces perspectives which are frequently separated for analytic purposes and which are strongly demarcated by many who are unwillingly included in its comprehensive title. She includes under this heading phenomenologists (Husserl and Schutz), existentialists (Kierkergaard and Sartre); the sociologists of knowledge (Berger and Luckman); ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel and Cicourel); marxists (Marcuse and Paci); and Symbolic Interactionists such as Mead, Blumer and Goffman. All of them, she claims, share a humanistic-culturalist approach rather than a positivistic-naturalist approach, in which the common assumptions are:

'(…) that human beings are not merely acted upon by social facts or social forces; that they are constantly shaping and 'creating' their own social worlds in interaction with others and that special methods are required for the study and understanding of these uniquely human processes' (Morris 1977 p4, p8)

In setting this work in the framework of symbolic Interactionism, it must be noted that the boundaries between it and bordering approaches
will be overstepped because, in some circumstances, their individually distinctive contributions overlap.

The aspect of Symbolic Interactionism developed in this study originated in the 'Chicago School' of sociology, particularly productive in the 1920s when the work of Thomas, Park, Dewey and Mead inspired a tradition of empirically oriented research. This orientation was developed by Blumer (1969) who coined the term 'Symbolic Interactionism,' and who wrote:-

'To catch the process (of interpretation) the student must take the role of the acting unit whose behaviour he is studying (---). To try to catch the interpretive process by remaining aloof as a so-called 'objective' observer and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectiveness - the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it'. (Blumer in Rose 1971 p/b p188)

It is extremely difficult to fulfil Blumers dictum because the observer, however well intentioned, can never know with certainty or 'catch' with accuracy the interpreting process of the acting unit he is observing. Furthermore, as Blumer rightly notes;-

'The human individual pieces together and guides his action by taking account of different things and interpreting their significance for his prospective action. There is no instance of conscious action of which this is not true. People do not act toward culture social structure or the like, they act toward situations' (ibid p182)

This is as true for the observer as it is for the acting unit he is engaged in observing. The interpretive process is a precondition for meaningful action whether this be the funeral director at work or the sociologists recording his activity. The concepts formulated by Mead
such as the 'significant and generalised other' the 'I-me phases of the self' and the importance of role taking are reinforced by Cooley's imagery of the 'looking-glass self'. Together they emphasise that humans have the potential to become the object of their own actions and thereby to guide their actions by what they observe.

'Human society is made up of individuals who have selves (that is, make indications to themselves);
(...) individual action is a construction not a release;
(...) group or collective action consists of the aligning of individual actions, brought about by the individuals interpreting or taking into account each others actions; the three premises can be easily verified empirically
(Blumer in Rose 1971 p184)

Using these guidelines, funeral workers are seen to interpret the actions of others and to scrutinise themselves as though viewed by an 'outsider'. By taking into account relevant others, both within and outside the occupation, they construct a reliable self and a suitable performance that becomes, through repetition, a patterned social activity. They and their customers act 'as if' there is a prescribed role to be enacted, failure to do so resulting in loss of credibility among themselves and uncertainty in the performance of funeral roles. They are, however, devising performances and constructing appropriate selves whilst in social situations, not merely enacting prescribed behaviour.

It is Goffman who suggests that, whatever his other concerns, an individual is obliged to come into play when entering a situation and to stay in play whilst in it. Failure to do so indicates cultural distance and disregard for the setting and its participants (Goffman 1968 p25). A significant aspect of this study is to examine the ability of the funeral director to define the setting and the appropriate performance, more effectively than the bereaved or the mourners. The regularity with which he enters into play in a setting largely of his own devising, may provide him with a greater sense of security, and a consequent social
ease, denied his customers. Even so, information control is desirable and funeral workers rarely possess sufficient assurance to direct the outcome of each encounter with complete confidence, since they lack total knowledge of participants and settings. The everyday 'reality' of a funeral is not, therefore, waiting to be discovered or exposed, since it is the outcome of the defining interpreting and reflexive facilities of the performers, each of whom has problems of self-presentation. Judgements must be made before actions can be made and:–

'(…) in imputing an identity to an individual, discreditable or not, the wider social setting and its inhabitants have in a way compromised themselves, they have set themselves to be proven the fool' (Goffman 1968 pl61)

Therefore, the capacity to 'place' other people with certainty is constantly undermined by the ability of actors to devise new role performances in keeping with audience expectation, especially since:–

'The actor is not the occupant of a status for which there is a neat set of rules (…) but a person who must act in the perspectives supplied in part by his relationship to others whose actions reflect roles he must identify. The idea of role-taking shifts the emphasis away from the simple process of enacting a prescribed role, to devising a performance on the basis of an imputed other role, (…) hence the tentative character of the individuals own role definition and performance is never wholly suspended' (Turner in Rose 1971 p23)

It is for these reasons that this research emphasises the micro-social world wherein the symbolic presentation of perceived selves produces social interaction. Social life is to be regarded as precarious, episodic, improvised and interpretive even though appearing to be stable, continuous, ordered and prescribed. It is at this level that society is actually created, when 'society' is regarded as an aggregate of individuals operating as members of groups who share significant interpretations of a collective 'reality' - concerning language, dress,
belief, diet, ritual and, according to Goffman, 'body idiom' (Goffman 1963 p35). This form of symbolic interaction develops the creative, defining and organisational potential available to human beings, as they strive to impose a sense of meaning on an otherwise inchoate world of events.

Within the Symbolic Interactionist framework it is the Dramaturgical approach that is given most emphasis in this research. Funeral workers are examined as actors with first-draft scripts, make-up rooms and rehearsal halls, supportive casts and demanding directors, stages to strut and positive roles to sustain. They have entrances and exits to negotiate, 'props' to handle, and interpretations to project. They are crucially concerned with 'impression management' and the presentation of occupational selves that will be authenticated by knowledgeable audiences. (Goffman 1959 p183)

If, however, the micro-social world of events is where the action is (Goffman 1969 p105), it is the wider social world of events, where constraining influences are generated, which will severely modify the constructive drama of the small stage. Coercion, manipulation, dictat and persuasion originate in powerful centres of interest about which local actors have limited knowledge and against which they have inadequate defence. The structured, centralised, and bureaucratically organised nature of British society enables the interests of dominant groups to be reflected widely, and the power exerted by the few in elite positions can significantly influence every local stage. However, power, regarded as the ability to modify the action of others even against their own inclination, is ultimately based on coercion (Weber in Gerth & Mills 1948) and the defining potential available to small, cohesive, determined groups has been well defined by Michels (1966). Funerals can be examined as ceremonies determined in their style and content by pressures exerted from economic political and religious elites rather than by funeral directors. The defining ability available to small groups who occupy elite positions has been exposed by many investigators for example the Glasgow University Media Group on the mass-media (1976), Illich on education and medicine (1971, 1976), Scheff
on medical services (Tuckert and Kaufort 1978), Mills on the power elite (1959) and Knight on the masonic brotherhood (1984) among many others.

Even though a micro-social examination of elite groups would reveal, in all probability, the same form of dramatic interaction as to be found in groups over whom they exercise control, the difference between them lies in the range and effectiveness of their interpretive processes. It is the combined influence of such powerful disseminating units, to be found in education, religion, government and commerce, that creates the structured appearance of social existence, against which individual interpretations of death and disposal must be matched. A comprehensive account of funeral work in Britain must acknowledge the persistent influence of institutional pressures which act to modify, constrain, prescribe or direct the everyday performances given by the central actors in the funeral drama. Funeral directing is, therefore, to be studied as the outcome of the creative potential of people with common tasks to achieve, and as an occupational activity given significance by a social 'reality' antedating and superseding any particular setting.

Even though the structured and ordered nature of social existence is constructed by human creativity, it is responded to by those observing its apparent objective permanence as if it possessed an independent facticity. Response to death, and acknowledgement of its impact are presented in dramatic form, with culturally acceptable symbols merging with the particular interpretations offered by distinctive individuals.

DRAMATURGY AND SOCIAL THEATRE

Poets, playwrights and prophets have likened the world to a stage and many have been thought perceptive for doing so. The sociologists who explore the similarities between the 'reality' of the world experience and the 'artifice' of the staged reproduction are often accused of labouring the obvious. This may be due to the sensitive command of language expressed fluently by poets and the prosaic, descriptive, language favoured by many sociologists.
When studied closely many poets and playwrights are seen to be likening the world of events to a puppet stage, on which mankind struts, oblivious to the hidden purposes he is acting out. The contribution of some sociologists has been to question the limitations of such a view, and to emphasise the autonomy, singularity and creativity available to sentient performers. For example non-sociologists have noted that:

'The world's a stage on which all parts are played' (Middleton 1624)

which appears to leave the question of compulsion open but:

'All the world must practice stage-playing. We must play our parts duly (Montaigne 1588)

strikes a note of limitation and of compliance with pre-determined regulation. Furthermore:

'God is the author, men are only the players. These grand pieces which are players upon earth have been composed in Heaven' (Balzac 1652)

leaves little originality in the hands of the actor. Shakespeare also emphasised human limitations by the effective use of the one word 'merely' when he had Jacques comment:

'All the world's a stage, and the men and women merely players' (Shakespeare, 'As you like it' 2.7.139)

A sociological account of man as actor does not impose a similar clause concerning determinism, nor does it rest on the necessary assumption of God as the First Cause. It does not relegate playing a role to lower importance than devising a role, since both are possibilities open to human actors.
Dramaturgists, in particular, analyse human performance without presumptions concerning man's origin, necessity or destiny, seeking instead to uncover the manner in which choice of role and method of presentation are decided. Shakespeare's comment should perhaps be recast as has been suggested:

'The world's a stage - as Shakespeare said one day. The stage a world - was what he meant to say' (Holmes 1836)

The stage represents the world of events experienced by human performers. Dramaturgy should not be regarded merely as a metaphor for real life - it is a descriptive account of everyday life. Life is drama, and it is the stage which reflects its incongruities and passions. As the 'self' develops as a consequence of an ability to observe one's own behaviour as though an outsider, so society develops by staging reproductions of its significant activities. By reflecting on its collective peculiarities, members of society are better able to judge the consequences of playing out particular roles. Observing the artifice of staged performances encourages greater sensitivity to the 'real' world of social drama.

Dramaturgy is less a metaphor than a critical exposure. Once the normality of role-taking is accepted, then the dramaturgist may become uneasy company to accommodate since it becomes increasingly difficult to identify an inner, unchanging identity. If, as it has been noted:

'I take the world to be but a stage where net masked men do play their personages' (Du Bartois 1591)

what if death intervenes before a final mask is removed? Who then is the 'real' identity? The one most frequently presented; the one most effectively sincere; the one least often challenged? It is, furthermore, discomforting to appreciate that:

'If this world be a stage, what hours we give to tedious make-up, in the tiring room!' (Erskine 1920)
and that posturing is absurd when:-

'Life's little stage is a small eminence, inch-high, the grave above! (Young 1742)

This research accepts the work of Goffman as the pinnacle of endeavour in dramaturgy, especially as presented in his early works. (Goffman 1968, 1969). Nevertheless, he was careful to admit that:-

'The claim that all the world's a stage is sufficiently commonplace for readers to be familiar with its limitations and tolerant of its presentation, knowing that at any time they will easily be able to demonstrate to themselves that is it not to be taken too seriously (...) And so here the language and the mask of the stage will be dropped. Scaffolds after all are to build other things with and should be erected with an eye to taking them down. This report is not concerned with the aspects of theatre that creep into every day life. It is concerned with the structure of social encounters (...)' (Goffman 1959 p224)

He appears to give credence to the critics, noted below, who place him as structuralist rather than interactionist. Furthermore, his epistemological evasiveness and cultural relativism make it difficult for supporter and critics alike to 'place' him with a degree of confidence that he will remain in his assigned location. His insight into the degree of manipulation involved in sustained social encounters is quoted with approval in this work, even whilst his mocking aside on the relevance of stage imagery is challenged.

Ditton (1980) has collected under one cover cogent criticism of Goffman. For example, Randall Collins regards his work as an almost functionalist version of interactionism and says:-

'The central themes of most of Goffman's early works are Durkheimian' (Collins p178)
and George Psathas concludes that he is structurally eclectic and conceptually confused in that:—

"He shows relatively little development of concepts which can be used transsituationally to analyse (...) the grounded assumptions made by social actors about themselves others and situations which provide the facticity of the world of everyday life" (Psathas p54)

Psathas regards these shortcomings as the failing of (all?) field researchers in the symbolic interactionist tradition (ibid p53). Readers, he suggests, are unable to examine the criteria used to make categories of group situations and are therefore forced to accept such classifications without further examination (Psathas p74).

Gonos places Goffman's sociology as an attack on the new middle class of white collar employees in corporate or government organisations, viewed from the lumpen-bourgeoisie, the 'old' middle-class of small, independent entrepreneurs. He attacks Goffman by asserting that:—

"(...) the theoretical principles of Goffman's sociology constitutes a version of structuralism (and) represents the theoretical advancements of a very particular class position in the post World War Two period in America. (He seeks) to defeat humanism in the sanctuary of (...) everyday face to face relations and to do this he isolates the structures that govern face to face relations, and studies them as natural objects. (His) problematic thus promotes the study, not of observable interaction or everyday life as such, but its eternal structure and ideology; not of situations, but their frames" (Gonos pp135-7, 160).

Functionalists, marxists and ethnomethodologists emphasise Goffman's shortcomings and anyone following in his footsteps must be prepared for equally critical responses. However, support is voiced for his sociological concerns. Hepworth commends aspects of his work for their theoretical strength and methodological usefulness and sets him firmly in 'the accepted canons of the profession' (ibid p80). Mary Rogers
demonstrates his contribution to power, hierarchy and status, areas in which he is said to offer little of value, and notes the usefulness of the dramaturgical approach in understanding contemporary life (ibid pl27). It is possible that the abiding usefulness of his contribution to sociology may not be the structuralism that his critics identify, nor the usefulness of his perspective in complementing other sociological perspectives that some supporters note, but his 'perspective by incongruity' noted by Ditton (ibid p2). He can be regarded as an existentialist, exposing the manner in which self-creating beings, not initially endowed with a character or goals, choose them by attributing 'meaning' to the activity they apprehend around them. One produces ones character(s) for oneself in a social crucible where the pressure of social conformity influences the emergent self. The roles that one takes on may appear incongruous when viewed dispassionately. This study emphasises the creative potential available to human actors and in doing so follows the lead given by Goffman.

'In their capacity of performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged (...) the very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light, of being a socialised character, forces one to be the sort of person who is practised in the ways of the stage' (Goffman 1962 p222).

Even here he can be seen to be acknowledging the pressure to conformity exercised in society, ('being a socialised character', 'living up to the many standards'; 'forces one to be'). More pertinently for this study, when he does comment on funerals, it is to stress the ordered and obligated aspects of their structure, rather than the defining potential of the actors who devise them and feature regularly as their central participants:-

'Some social occasions, funerals for example, have a fairly sharp beginning and end, and fairly strict limits on attendance and tolerated activities. Each class of such occasions possesses a
distinct ethos, a spirit, an emotional structure that must be properly created, sustained and laid to rest, the participant finding that he is caught up in the occasion whatever his personal feelings. These occasions, which are commonly programmed in advance, posses an agenda of activity, an allocation of management function, a specification of negative sanctions for improper conduct and a pre-established unfolding of phases and a high point' (Goffman 1963 p19)

However, the funerals 'sharp beginning' is, for funeral workers, merely another scene moving the activity forward to the ultimate symbolic disposal. Goffman does not investigate the important differences that exist between the experienced designers of funerals who have seen it all before and the unpractised mourners who are, indeed, caught up in the occasion. The occupational cognoscenti have the time, experience and willingness to programme this specific occasion and to be largely instrumental in designing an 'agenda of activity'. It is the purpose of this study to investigate the details of the moral and occupational career which finds expression in the creation of such special social occasions, not merely to expose the social structure of all funerals.

THE METHODOLOGY

The system of rules, principles and procedures that regulate this investigation, that is, the methodology employed, is as follows:-

1. The generation of theory from empirical investigation

2. The utilisation of a Meadian-Blumerian Symbolic Interactionism as an interpretive perspective.

3. The deployment of a Dramaturgical approach to analyse the creative potential of role-taking.

4. The comparative study of funeral work in one other 'Western' society
5. The reliance on observation, participation and respondent interviewing as suitable and reliable research methods.

6. The juxtaposition of the acting units and the observer's accounting, with analysis of relevant literature.

7. A belief that the sociological explanation of funeral work is interpretive, not definitive.

8. That reliance on the search for unbiased objectivity in the study of human social action is unwarranted.

9. That the apparently ordered nature of social occasions can be explained by reference to the unequal distribution of interpretive power.

10. Sociological research into social behaviour is most effective when conducted at the micro-social level.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Consequent on the advantages and limitations examined in detail in the previous pages, the research design adopted to study funeral directors and their co-workers is:

1. Observation of, and participation in funerals in order to record the occupational practice presented by different funeral businesses over several years.

2. Observation of, and participation in, the creation of funerals and the daily work-practices associated with funeral businesses over several years.

3. One month's investigation into the funeral practices adopted in Newfoundland, Canada.
4. Examination of the official records of the National Association of Funeral Directors, the only existing funeral proprietors association in Britain

5. Close reading of academic literature relevant to all aspects of death, especially sociological theses presented in the USA.

6. Open-ended interviews with approximately 150 members of the funeral occupation or death-related occupations.

7. Interviews with the recently bereaved concerning funeral experiences.

(A) RESEARCH METHODS

(i) To attend funerals by invitation or to join them (where appropriate) without invitation - to observe common practices adopted by funeral workers and behaviour considered 'appropriate' by mourners.

(ii) To enter funeral premises and there to observe work-practices, division of labour, hierarchy, statuses and body-handling skills - to interview informally and at length directors and their staffs in their working environment

(iii) To interview and re-interview, funeral directors and their staffs in their home environment, if this is separate from their work environment

(iv) To tape-record all interviews whenever practicable and transcribe them into written record

(v) To regard all interviewees who had direct experience of funeral work as 'respondents' - respondent interviewing to form the core of the empirical evidence
(vi) To become an uniformed, full-time member of a funeral firm and to carry out the normal duties of a funeral worker.

(vii) To regard the 'accounting procedures' used by respondents as a basic source of raw data to match against the actual social performances they exhibited.

(viii) To present the investigator role in whatever manner most closely fits the expectations of each respondent.

(ix) To ensure that the sample of respondents accurately reflects the diversity of operation and attitude in the occupation as a whole.

(x) To monitor significant media presentations of funeral work whether gossip, comment or analysis.

(xi) To compare and contrast not only Newfoundland as a whole, with England, but to examine the current similarities existing between the capital (St. Johns) and the isolated outports of the coast.

(xii) To examine the occupations trade journal for indications of leadership, direction and control.

(xiii) To examine Judaic and Muhammadan funerals for a comparative analysis with Christian and secular practice.

(xiv) To incorporate the specifically relevant contributions made by contemporary social historians to the study of funeral practices.

There are no accurate statistics concerning funeral directors from which to take a representative random sample. The sample investigated was produced by seeking out individuals and firms who would reflect the diversity existing in the occupation. Variables such as origin,
location, size, status, public or private company, age and sex of
director, new entrant or retiring veteran, religious or secular
orientation were examined without attempting the impossible task of
weighting them to accord with an imagined reality of funeral business.
The total work incorporates the primary field research with a
theoretical analysis of occupational, historical and cultural change.
The field work covered approximately seven years during which time
little change of any magnitude took place in the occupation.

(B) RESEARCH GOALS

The central question addressed by the research is 'what is going on' but
this must be focussed on a time, a place, a circumstance, a social
occasion, or on specific individuals. For example, to explain what is
going on in the private work regions of a funeral home will require that
the formal hierarchy and the personal motivations of the funeral workers
will be given prominence; however, if the funeral ceremony is to be
examined, then what is going on will depend not only on the funeral
workers but on where it takes place, under what system of belief, the
number, status and intention of the mourners, and on the symbolic
purpose it is intended to serve. The interpretation given by a funeral
director in the presence of his workers may differ radically from that
which he is eager to provide in the privacy of his home. To reconcile
so many disparate interpretations and to seek unity of intention when
none may exist, would be to produce answers of dubious worth. Therefore
answers to several questions are sought, each question subsumed in the
general investigation into 'what is going on in the funeral occupation'?

QUESTIONS
The questions that need to be answered are:-
(a) PRACTICAL DATA BASE
1. How many Directors, businesses and workers are there?
2. Do either Directors, businesses or workers have any formal
organisational protection – if so what aims are pursued?
3. Do occupational or gender statuses exist in the occupation?
4. What qualifications can, or must, be gained to practice as a 'funeral director'?
5. Who employs funeral directing businesses and what charges or tariffs are made?
6. How many deaths occur each year and how do the bereaved find a funeral director?
7. Has the occupation been studied by any Government agency. If so what conclusions were reached?
8. Is funeral directing an economically profitable occupation?
9. Do occupational archives exist. If so have they been studied and recounted. Do any previous studies of the occupation exist?
10. Is there a formal or informal structure to the occupation?

(b) RESPONDENTS' ACCOUNTS
1. What criteria are used by members to identify their occupational role. What are the consequences if different criteria are used by different members?
2. How are occupational roles constructed, sustained, developed and terminated?
3. How is the employer - employee relationship defined by both parties to the contract?
4. What meanings do funeral directors give to funerals and to which system of belief do they look for guidance?
5. What relationships do funeral workers identify between their work and their personal role-performances?

(c) OBSERVATION AND PARTICIPATION
1. What is the most suitable role-performance for the researcher to enact at each occupational encounter?
2. What influence or effect does the observer role have on the social occasion being studied?
3. How does the 'acting unit' interpret and act toward the observer role?
4. What criteria can be used by the observer to identify or classify phenomena to be labelled lies, truth, errors, assumptions or guesswork?
5. Does what the research observes to be 'going on' continue to go on when he is no longer an observer?

(d) METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS
1. What goes on appears to be service work. Are labels such as 'profession' or 'business' appropriate to explain the occupational performance?
2. Does an historical examination of death-related behaviour increase our understanding of contemporary funeral work?
3. Is an analysis of ritualism necessary for a clear appreciation of funeral workers ceremonial importance?
4. Does a close involvement with actual work practice and behaviour aid clear vision, or confuse with irrelevances?
5. Would a positivistic social survey have revealed more of what goes on in the funeral world than an interpretive social participation?

THE BEGINNING OF THE RESEARCH

The research began by contacting one funeral director who had been interviewed on television. Nearing retiring age, he was presented as a 'typical' English Director who spoke wisely and with dignity. He provided a base from which to begin, and the account he gave offered a pointer to the next respondent. By using each successive director as a further link in the chain of interviewees, the 'snowball' developed. Not only would one individual recommend another member of the occupation so that particular lines of investigation could be followed, but the significance of chosen variables could be examined and new respondents deliberately sought for special contribution. The pattern of investigation developed as the research widened. The research design was sufficiently open to allow all aspects of the occupation to be studied, and flexible enough to encompass unforeseen attributes; for example the originally uncooperative attitude of the official spokesperson; the divergent worker orientations; the lack of historical evidence; and the degree of non-cooperation presented by many reputable directors.
Throughout the research it was apparent that the social occasion of a funeral was not the creation of present actors alone, but the outcome of a dialectic between the creative potential of participants and the ordering, controlling, defining influence of institutions, such as the established Church of England. Dynamic conflict analysis, which emphasises the unequal distribution of defining power that exists in open market societies is used in this study to account for tensions. It complements the Interactionist perspective but does not negate it, since institutional power can be examined as an outcome of human role-taking and negotiation of contending interpretations. A micro-social exploration of elite groups operating at the top levels of powerful organisations would reveal within them the same dramatic interaction as is to be found in the groups over whom they exercise control. They are influential in creating the appearance of structured reality to which all actors give due regard.

METHODOLOGICAL MODIFICATIONS

The first respondent opened both his house and his funeral home and gave the researcher an immediate insight into the hitherto unseen world of events common to the funeral director. From this beginning, contacts were established to similarly oriented directors. However the original aim of participant observation could not be achieved for very practical reasons, namely, the director lived in Leeds and was nearing the end of his occupational life with too few funerals to supply observable funeral activity. Belief in the suitability of participation continued however, particularly in light of the impressive accounts gained in this way, presented by Sudnow (1967) Goffman (1963) and Ditton (1977) among many others.

Rapidly it became apparent that participant observation was not feasible at that time, since each proprietor approached refused entry to his business. Part-time and full-time, voluntary or paid work was equally firmly denied. Refusal was justified on one or several of the following grounds:-

25
(a) high unemployment enabled employers to reject any applicant who did not meet all their specific requirements.

(b) funerals were unforeseeable, therefore I would be wasting everyone's time merely waiting around for one to be ordered.

(c) I was not the most suitable height, age, size etc., to get in with the existing staff.

(d) only short-haired, clean-shaven, formally dressed and compliant applicants would be considered.

(e) there was no vacancy and I would be 'in the way'.

(f) I was not trained, nor experienced, and there was no one free to instruct me.

(g) To be present when clients were interviewed would be an 'invasion of client privacy' and totally unacceptable.

(h) there was no need to participate in the work itself since the proprietor would give me all the information I could wish for; observation was, similarly, unnecessary.

(i) this was a competitive business, and private and confidential information must not leak out to competitors or to hostile journalists.

(j) working with dead bodies required tact and composure, both of which I might not possess.

It was virtually impossible for me to gain access to any funeral directing business at this time, primarily, I believe, for one reason only; that an 'outsider' would observe the hitherto closed and inaccessible world. Whether I am correct in making this assumption or
not, I was evasively but firmly refused permission to become a participant.

Subsequently I have found that such obstructions were barricades set deliberately to prevent access, but that once within the business premises each rule or reason claimed to preclude entry and involvement was overlooked. Furthermore, I was accepted by proprietors, managers and workers in a friendly and informative manner, quite at variance with the original response shown to my first formal approach. The fundamental barrier was the business front which, once breached, was seen to be the protective stockade to keep out foreign investigation. As suggested earlier, public scrutiny appears to be an anthema to funeral directing proprietors, and leads them to defensive concealment.

Whilst searching for a more accommodating response among proprietors, I was forced to modify my intention to use direct participation as the central investigative method. I therefore significantly increased the amount of respondent interviewing and observation, and left participation to a later date. This required me to talk with everyone who had first hand experience of death and funerals and to build a composite picture from their information. As they recounted events, they portrayed not only physical circumstances, but their own interpretations of what had happened. Not only did I see the events through their eyes (see Blumer above) but I became receptive to the nuance, suggestibility, emphasis and intention of the respondents themselves. Each successive 'account' could be matched against previous interpretations, and simultaneously, indirect evidence was made available. Bodily mannerisms, voice inflection, formal work activity, informal home behaviour, personal life-styles, marital relationships, political affiliations and career aspirations, all became resources which 'flooded' the narrative they provided. I was led from one respondent to another by chance remark, formal introduction and relevant connection. The loss of direct personal participation in one or two business establishments was more than balanced by the increasing range of informants. Each respondent revealed new objects of attention and introduced informants who provided alternative assessments.
Patterns of conflict, disagreement, bargaining and competition became visible; between the private trade and the Co-operative Societies; Trade Union and proprietors, small family firms and large trading organisations, 'professional' and 'business' orientations, traditional and experimental servicing methods. By using a tape-recorder, it was possible to hold the actual accounting performance given by may respondents, but this technique was frequently more valuable as a 'blind' for subsequent 'truthful revelations'. On several occasions the respondent would begin an interview by assuring me that the presence of a tape-recorder would in no way inhibit his or her faithful rendering of events, but an hour later say 'is that thing turned off now' and when assured that it was, deliver himself of a hitherto unrevealed attitude. A Muslim Superintendent in his Mosque, or an embalmer whilst at work; a proprietor alone among a score of shrouded bodies, or a dissident worker in fear of being overheard; the richness of detail available in such circumstances and the diversity of interpretation provided, widened the scope of investigation. The term 'interview' can cover many methods and techniques. In this study it refers to a face to face interaction in which one or more persons construct answers to open-ended questions from an interested 'other'. The situation which imposed meaning on the interview interaction could be formal or informal, planned or spontaneous, serious or joking. The range and type of question was not carefully duplicated, even though similar questions were included whenever appropriate. I was seeking the unforced reconstruction of events, attitudes, behaviour, action or messages as perceived by the respondent, not precise answers to structured questions which presupposed what a 'good' answer would be.

This was 'raw' data, given by respondents in the form chosen by them, not refined to fit interviewer preconceptions. It was spontaneous and vivid even though it may have been intended to mislead, camouflage, vindicate or condemn. This process of data collection resembles the 'theoretical sampling' commended by Glaser and Strauss (1968 p45) whereby collecting, coding and analysing data suggests what data to collect next and where to find them. The general area of study is already decided (funeral work) and the most fruitful lines of
investigation mapped out (Directors, employees, embalmers, doctors, clergymen) but the most relevant methods, to employ and the most suitable locations to attend only emerge as the study proceeds. A foothold on the research is made but subsequent advances are not based entirely on a preconceived theoretical framework. By listening attentively as respondents tell their story, an explanatory theory can be generated and subsequent research lines indicated to test the emergent ideas. Sequential interviews will be required with no clear idea of when the sequence will end. When the investigation ends, the researcher will accept that other plausible theories can be presented to account for the data he has provided but unlikely to agree that he has misunderstood the meanings demonstrated by those he has listened to so carefully. Glaser and Strauss make this same point in supporting the degree of trust placed by a researcher in his own interpretive analysis:-

'Researchers will readily agree that their own theoretical formulations represent credible interpretations of their data, which could, however, be interpreted differently by others, but it would be hard to shake their conviction that they have correctly understood much about the perspectives and meanings of the people whom they have studied' (Glaser and Strauss 1968 p225).

So-called 'objective' methods, such as collecting and analysing a far larger number of answers to pre-coded questionnaires, do not lead to greater credibility in the type of theory generated. Credibility must take into account the meanings held by the respondents, and distant researchers can only guess at what meanings may exist for them to question. Because new insights develop as the investigation proceeds, field work research can be directed to whatever source will materially corroborate or reject the new ideas, a flexibility denied more positivistic research methods. Indirect participation is a valuable research activity.

*Indirect Participation* involved interviewing respondents in their work-place or in their homes; accompanying them in work situations;
and observing them in their daily routines. It allowed the signals of the respondent, the content of the messages, background expectancies, interacting others and the specific environment (physical, emotional, attitudinal) to be observed and recorded. The immediacy of participant observation no longer appeared to be so vital a research device, since it had been replaced by indirect participation with a far larger number of respondents than originally planned. A funeral worker does not spend his entire working life handling bodies nor apparently, wish to spend it talking exclusively to 'insiders'. To be one of the team has undoubted advantages to offer, but to be perceived as an interested outsider who could be introduced to the subtleties of funeral work gave pleasure and interest to many funeral workers.

Therefore respondent interviewing became a major research technique. It is ideally suited to examine the manner in which individuals perceive institutionalised norms and statuses and the assessment they make about their own role-contingencies. They can be observed taking on and shedding roles in both public and private places, as they sought to convince the observer of their authenticity.

Motivational differences were revealed, developed from the ideological basis which many offered as a basis for their occupational role. It appeared that the ideological hegemony exercised by significant elites permeated the occupation at both the individual and the collective level, and influenced the strategies pursued throughout the occupation. Many respondents acknowledged the pervasive pull of a 'professional' ideology, leading to an eventual privileged occupational status, whilst others argued for openly competitive individualism leading to a successful 'business' status; both regarded by their adherents as desirable occupational goals.

Many used a form of 'historical justification' whereby present tendencies were accounted for by identifying antecedent pressures or causes. The Victorian era was frequently singled out as being one of the most significant periods affecting present day funeral behaviour, either because its over-sentimentality and profiteering had caused a
swing toward a barren secularity, or because its real values were still appreciated by the sensitive. It was as a consequence of their historical reflections that the social history of death gradually assumed a larger importance in the research design.

Ill-informed and derogatory remarks were frequently encountered concerning the 'American Way of Death' which was shunned as though a corrupting influence by many directors. In America the practices adopted by the occupation were under attack for extortionate pricing and a Federal investigation of the occupation was in progress. The 'Report of Regulatory Agencies of the House of Representatives 1976' dealing with the confrontation between the Government representatives and those of the occupation, showed that the funeral directors managed to extricate themselves from a difficult position by arguing that greater Federal control would actually increase client exploitation. They argued, successfully, that they should be allowed to put their own house in good order without Government intervention. I decided, therefore, to visit the USA to make a small comparative study and relate the findings to the British scene. Lacking contacts in the USA and being unable to finance such a costly venture, I sought a comparable situation and was offered the possibility of spending a month in Newfoundland. In that Canadian Province there were similar funeral conditions to those existing in the USA and mainland Canada, but also its separation from continental North America had created a specific individuality. Furthermore, there had already been an anthropological study of funeral rites in the very isolated 'outports' where social conditions changed very slowly, and a visit to the community that had been the focus of the study would show what changes, if any, had taken place. By a close examination of the three funeral homes in the capital, and by an assessment of the remote outport, last studied in 1966, I could gain comparative material to match against the British sample. The most striking difference between Newfoundland and Britain would turn out to be the post-war Government legislation which gave to Newfoundland directors the legal and occupational status sought unavailingly for eighty years in Britain.
Therefore the research design was modified in the light of the experiences which the research itself produced. Greater emphasis on respondent interviewing and indirect participation; the increasing use of historical scholarship; and the development of a comparative study, were three early modifications.

**SOURCES AND STIMULI**

The foregoing account might seem to indicate that this work is a development of my own ideas, owing little or nothing to outside sources. The opposite is the case since I have received constant stimulus from the theories, studies and indicators provided by informed writers whose work has a bearing on death. Very few indeed were concerned with funeral directing as their central focus of attention and, of those, only a minority were sociological in approach. My great debt is to the theorists and investigators who inspired me with their original and creative ideas which widened the horizons of my research.

**RESOURCE LITERATURE**

A seminal work which has stimulated controversy since its publication in 1965 is Gorer's study of death, grief and mourning in Britain (Gorer, 1965). It was a sample survey, by questionnaire, of 1628 people and was largely statistical in presentation, describing in detail the informants' experiences. Only one, very short, chapter dealt with funerals and the work concentrated on the psychological needs of the bereaved. The book is full of cues for further research; for example, the claim that a contemporary denial of mourning is connected with callousness, and the present fear of death with urban vandalism. This is a direct provocation for social investigation. His conclusions are dogmatic, motivated by his personal experiences of mourning. His strictures on contemporary death-related behaviour are questionable, but he encouraged debate on a hitherto poorly researched area of social life. As noted earlier the most significant sociological contribution to the study of funeral directors and funeral customs is by Robert Habenstein. His interactionist perspective shed light on the historical
development and presentational roles of directors but his work was carried out in the USA (Habenstein, 1954). Later, in collaboration with Lamers, he examined the cultural variations to be found in funerals throughout the world, thereby emphasising the value of comparative studies (Habenstein & Lamers 1960). His individual study emphasised the language of death, client ambivalence and occupational roles, and he set his work within the sociology of occupations. In these respects this work runs parallel to his, and his analysis of the occupation's search for professional respectability and status gave me indications of how to perceive their counterparts in Britain.

(A) DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS

Support for the analysis of funerals as theatre and directors as actors has been given by Turner and Edgley in their dramaturgical analysis of the American Funeral (Turner & Edgley 1976). They perceived funerals as the outcome of members collaborative interactions wherein laymen and specialists contributed unequally to the social occasion, and consequently their approach is more closely aligned to this research than any other. It is a limited study, confined to only fifteen funerals homes in the USA and to their burials only. They based their conclusions on unobtrusive observation of mortuary practices, in-depth interviews with directors and staff and content analysis of the in-house manuals giving advice to workers on how to perform successful funerals. Their findings duplicate the conclusions reached as a consequence of this research in Britain and their words are significantly similar:—

'(... ) backstage and frontstage behaviours are viewed as part of a social drama, supported by the unique business of performing funerals and (by) the public who use these services (... ) judicious rhetoric, behind the scenes preparations, flexible facilities, control of social settings, and staged impressions are orchestrated to perform a successful funeral' (Turner & Edgley 1976 p377)

They note the ambiguity attached to the term 'dramaturgy' and the variety of stand points taken by dramaturgists to emphasise social
Theatricality. They acknowledge their own use of dramaturgy to be 'a metaphor, perspective and strategy for viewing life, not as life itself' (Turner and Edgley p390) and regard the work of Burke (1939, 1945, 1970) and Goffman (1959) as most closely related to their own study.

The crucial difference between their work and this study is that they enter a caveat regarding the use of a metaphorical argument:

'To say that funerals may be seen as performances does not suggest that they are performances' (ibid p389)

It is central to this research that funerals and all other social occasions are performances. It is only necessary to observe the distinctive roles and statuses available in a family setting and the manner in which individual members select how to perform them at various times and in particular settings to appreciate how appropriate the term 'performance' is to that which we refer to as everyday life. The term 'performance' should not be construed as carrying overtones of deceit, falsity, impermanence or duplicity even though each characteristic may be employed. Since performances require audiences and settings, which in turn exert an influence on propriety, suitability and transition, roles may have aspects of ascription attached to them but can still be 'taken up' by actors on the basis of the imputations they make about others' responses. Throughout Turner & Edgley's work there is an abundance of observed dramatic activity, including a significant quotation:

'Ritual is then theatre; an assured way of communicating significations (...) funerals are dramas of death and living with death - they involve transformation of identity for the living and the dead' (Perinbanayagam 1974 p538)

Transformations of identity leads to the assumption of new roles, which in turn requires enactment before judgemental audiences. What was once appropriate as wife, joint householder, husband's partner, pair nominee for dinner attendance or sexual cohabitee, ceases to be so when a
woman's husband dies. Performances are the stuff of life – the stage duplicates them and presents, artificially enlarged, the precarious and satisfying dramas of everyday life.

(B) USA RESEARCH THESES

Three unpublished theses studied funerals as an integral part of their research, and one of them focussed attention on the 'orientation' of funeral directors (Crouch 1971). Crouch argued that his identification of four types of director 'fitted' his readings of the literature and of the interviews he conducted, and that he could not identify an homogeneous community of practitioners. He, in line with Habenstein, suggested two significant 'orientations', one toward 'business' and one to 'professionalism'. His typology showed:

1. High professional - low business career orientation = PROFESSIONALISM
2. High professionalism - high business career orientation = DUAL ORIENTATION
3. Low professional - high business career orientation = BUSINESS ORIENTATION
4. Low professional - low business career orientation = NEITHER ORIENTATION

He came to these conclusions by testing the links between 'professionalism' and

(a) educational background and occupational organisation

(b) size of business and work priorities

(c) role strain

and argued that the funeral directors' self-image is shaped by

(i) the actual tasks performed
(ii) the agreed image they jointly wish to project

(iii) the reaction they received from 'others'

His primary concern was with directors' work-orientation because he regarded 'professionalism' as an orientation to work based on a complex of occupational values. The dimensions of professionalism that he identified were; the felt importance of the work; the commitment and calling and sense of service; the work autonomy and the degree of organisational control, experienced by the funeral director. He identified the significant and generalised 'others' which shaped their sense of occupational identity. He tested a sample of directors against these hypotheses, and constructed a table to show the degree of 'fit' between the variables listed as (a), (b), (c) above, and the 'orientation' of the observed directors.

He found that a sense of professionalism did not increase with business size, (he hypothesised that it would); that work orientation was not systematically correlated with educational background, (denying his prediction); and that role strain was greatest among directors who felt themselves to be professional in work orientation, (confirming his hypothesis).

This interesting and largely statistical study uses an ideal-type analysis of 'profession'; regards 'professionalism' as an orientation held by an individual practitioner; and analyses the degree of fit between self-regard and working practice, to provide a typology of funeral directors. (Interestingly, he states that the 1963 National Opinion Poll's Research ranked the occupation of funeral directing as 72 (Physicians 93), which was above that of Actor, but below that of Typist!). The present research differs from his in that it does not set up hypotheses and construct 'relevant' tests to establish their significance, in the positivist method common to the natural scientists, nor does it use the definitions of 'profession' that utilise human traits as do so many works to be found in the literature. It does share with Crouch his emphasis on 'professionalism' as an attitude which
motivates people to act in certain ways, but which is not necessarily tied to an 'objective' classification of their occupation as a profession.

Bowman (1954), in the second thesis, used a functionalist perspective to analyse funeral construction and funeral directors' performance and to outline the unifying, adaptive and integrating aspects of the funeral. He also used statistical data concerning the numbers of funeral directors related to the total population, the deaths per director and the unequal distribution of funerals between them. His work reinforced the contributions made to death-related behaviour by Malinowski and Durkheim and did not, therefore, provide directly relevant material to this present study.

In contrast, Wood (1977) chose to study ministers of religion, by intensive interviewing, in order to understand how they communicated to the bereaved the 'current paradigm of death' – namely an open, shared, visibility. She sought to contradict Aries concepts of modern deathwork, wherein he emphasised what he regarded as a shameful and fearful denial of death. She traced 'the real truth' by becoming involved with Kubler-Ross and her support of hospices in which the concept of 'death with dignity' was central to their effectiveness. She used a symbolic interactionist approach, approving Glaser and Strauss' concern for 'grounded theory' to be the basis for interactionist methodology.

In addition, one very small-scale study of the funeral trade in Britain has been conducted on the basis of individual research, but it was confined primarily to an examination of Trade Union data (Walster 1975). The investigator experienced the same unco-operative response from individual funeral directors as I did, and the same lack of collaboration from the spokespeople in the NAFD. The sociological aspects of this study are negligible, and repeat without analysis or criticism Gorer's celebrated 'Denial of Death' theme.
Throughout the voluminous literature on Death, there is relatively little focused on the sociological aspects of the funeral ceremony and even less on the occupation of funeral directing. When the funeral director himself is investigated he features most conspicuously in psychological examinations of grieving, or in comparative studies of 'professional' behaviour in death-related occupations. For example, Fulton studies the potential for conflict between clergymen and funeral directors, but based his analysis on a 35% return of 1,800 clergymen (no funeral directors!). He finds that the clergy do not meet with the directors socially even though in continuous contact, indicating, he believes, a tension or confusion in their relationship. In passing he notes that the clergyman associates with the director as a professional and in many instances, almost on a par with a doctor or a lawyer, yet as noted above, N.O.P. had long ago showed funeral directors to rank far lower than these prestigious occupational roles. Nevertheless, he does indicate the possible difficulty besetting directors in reconciling the professional-business dichotomy of their role (Fulton 1960). In a book which he edited (Fulton 1965), he included a study of his own which was based on a mere 15% return of 10,000 questionnaires, in order to find out attitudes of the American public toward death, funerals and funeral directors!

This is a further example of an attempt to understand funeral work through statistical analysis and, as with similar research, is of low statistical significance and offers relatively poor levels of analysis, e.g. 'the study showed that exactly one half of the householders (questioned) viewed the (funeral director) dualistically, that is, as a man who combines professional service with a business service' (ibid p94). Blocks of data expressing the proportion of respondents favouring one response to another, without fieldwork to expose the 'meanings' they attributed either to the questions or to the actuality of funeral work, are of very limited value. In Fulton's book (1965), the contribution by the anthropologist Mandelbaum, (who examines the socially cohesive functions of funerals): and by Lloyd Warner (who emphasises the role
conflict experienced by funeral directors in maintaining, simultaneously, a sacred yet unclean performance), are both useful. They generate possibilities for further research, whereas limited questionnaire response such as employed by Fulton (1965) does not advance our understanding of what funeral workers actually think, seek and do nor of how client relationships are negotiated.

Vanderlyn Pine comes from an American family of five generations of funeral directors, and is now a Professor of Sociology. His book, influenced by Hammond's 'Sociologists at Work', brings together a large number of contributors, but once again accepts that a 'trait' model of professions is a suitable base from which to approach the role of the 'semi-professional' funeral director (Pine 1975). His reference to directors as 'caretakers of the dead' is apposite, particularly if one appreciates how much practical and attitudinal control caretakers of establishments can contrive to possess. For example, in schools, colleges, civic halls and privately owned blocks of flats, caretakers frequently come to define, for the occupants, the style of performance desirable within them. They appear to represent an unstated, but powerful code of behaviour which reflects bureaucratic, administrative and hierarchical concepts of 'appropriateness'. Pine's choice of phrase may be suitably accurate, if we allow that funeral directors similarly have more power to define 'appropriateness' of death-related behaviour than their occupational role would appear to provide.

In acknowledging my debt to these writers and to similar others contained within the text, I have to note that it is for stimulus to action rather than for theoretical bases on which to build. This is not the case with the specific contributions made by van Gennep (1908); Larson (1977); Johnson (1972); Bocock (1974); Abel (1979); Aries (1976); Goffman (1963) and Glaser and Strauss (1965 and 1967). Their contributions to sociological theory and to research have greatly influenced this work.
For example, Glaser and Strauss (1965) claim that '(...) fieldwork allows researchers to plunge into social settings where important events (about which they will develop theory) are going on 'naturally'. The researchers watch these events as they occur. They follow them as they unfold through time. They observe the actors in the relevant social dramas. They converse with or formally interview the actors about their observed actions. (...) when (they) are convinced that their analytic framework forms a systematic substantive theory, that is, a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form possible for others to use, (...) then they are ready to publish their results. (...) using comparison groups maximises the credibility of theory by (a) detailing precisely the many similarities and differences of the comparison groups, and (...) hence to what kind of social structure (their) theory is applicable (...) and (b) the constant comparison of many groups (...) (generates) the hypotheses (to be) integrated into the substantive theory'. (Glaser and Strauss 1965 pp289-90).

This is the research method I sought to follow, wherein I, as the researcher, continually applied to my own work the 'discounting process' they (Glaser and Strauss) had assigned to readers of the finished work, namely; correcting a theory because it showed a one-sided research design, adjusting conclusions to fit different social structures, invalidating conclusions due to their indecisive fit with existing experience, and finding the theory inapplicable to relevant structures outside funeral procedures. As they note elsewhere; 'The form in which a theory is presented does not make it a theory, it is a theory because it explains or predicts something' (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p31). The theories (explanations) that I present should 'fit' the evidence I provide about the occupation of funeral directing, namely the routine occupational and personal behaviour of all those people intimately connected with funeral construction, not merely those called 'Directors'. In this manner I seek to achieve the generation of substantive theory from empirical research. By 'substantive theory' I mean, relating to an empirical area of sociological enquiry, not 'formal' theory in the sense of relating to a larger conceptual area of enquiry such a 'occupational mobility'. (See
Glaser and Strauss 1967 p32). I am concerned to explain one, circumscribed, occupational milieu, not to generalise about categories of occupations, (except insofar as the status of 'profession' is analysed). I work, therefore, at 'grounded theory', that is, the attempt to discover theory from systematic and analysed social research (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p1) wherein, as a field-worker I trust the analyses I make because they are based on my own formulated hypotheses (see 1967 p225).

Nevertheless, no-one comes to study society with a completely blank perceptual field and the intellectual sensitivity of Berger (1970) and Berger and Luckman (1969) motivated me to see the social world as a consequence of human conceptualisation rather than as an ethical-normative 'structure' moulding its human participants irrevocably. It was the realisation that the dramaturgical approach provided not merely an appropriate language through which to categorise the social world, but an analytic extension of daily social behaviour, that motivated me to use its vocabulary. Goffman's extended use of this approach especially as presented in his early writing (1963 and 1968), significantly influenced the way in which I approached this research. Whilst I accept the validity of the criticism made of him (most significantly in Ditton 1980) and note particularly the reservations made by Glaser and Strauss (1967 pp138-9) about Goffman's 'circumstantial sampling', I experience the world in a manner I believe to be similar to Goffman's. When Glaser and Strauss comment that '(...)

Goffman's use of comparative method may be summarised as: make comparison of an array (of diverse phenomena) to illustrate theory generated and integrated mainly by a kind of internal logic', I accept their (implicit) criticism, and their claim that, whilst his theory is grounded it is difficult to be precise about to what degree, and exactly how it is grounded in his research. Nevertheless, to which sociologist does one turn for the perfect analysis? With each successive exposure of weakness or inadequacy the impossibility of finding a completely satisfying analysis is demonstrated. Therefore, the important decision is which boundary of inadequacy to work within. Throughout this research, the limitations of examining and explaining social behaviour
with the grammar of dramatic activity is fully accepted. It is a guide and a bridge-making enterprise, which, nevertheless, possesses an internal logic to buttress its micro-ecological setting. As Auden noted in another context:-

'(...) in grasping the character of a society, as in judging the character of an individual, no documents, statistics, 'objective' measurements can every compete with the single intuitive glance. Intuition may err, for though its sound judgement is, as Pascal said, only a question of good eyesight, it must be good, for the principles are subtle and numerous, and the omission of one principle leads to error; but documentation, which is useless unless it is complete, must err in a field where completeness is impossible'. (Auden on Henry James, quoted by Hoggart in Goffman 1979).

Goffman's intuitive glance is set within a multitude of concepts difficult to 'ground' with certainty, but it has invigorating potential for understanding everyday life.

(E) PROFESSIONALISM

The literature on 'profession' and 'professionalism' is extensive but, disconcertingly, much of its relies heavily on the supposed 'traits' possessed by practitioners in specific privileged occupations. Among more recent contributions, however, are a few which rejected such speculations and focussed instead on the economic power, elite status and historical antecedents of occupations accorded 'professional' status in contemporary Britain. Most stimulating and incisive were, Abel (1979); Johnson (1972); Larson (1977) and Portwood and Fielding (1981). Johnson's short book, with an assessed bibliography, was instrumental in directing me toward 'collegiate control' as a defining characteristic. Abel's article alerted me to the type of questions which should be answered if such occupational dominance was to be examined without consensual preconceptions. Larson's work strengthened my assumption of economic dominance as a basis for professional status,
and provided an historical weight of evidence that was impressive and convincing.

(ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH)

van Gennep (1908) crystallised the functional analysis of funeral rites, and in his analysis of the transformatory process associated with bereavement, I found a useful starting point for linking the director's role to the mourning role. The development of his work by Hertz (1960) and his emphasis on the transitional stage experienced in bereavement, further strengthened my tentative assumptions concerning the importance of a stage-managed ceremony which symbolised the status change experienced by the closely bereaved. From this plausible explanation I moved to questioning the ritual ceremony itself and was led immediately into controversy by reading Aries (1976). The enormous historical range of his settings and the intellectual audacity of seeking to establish 'turns of mind' (mentalities) which 'placed' death in different historical locations, prompted me to search for refutations and counter-themes. These were most cogently expressed by Whaley, and by Cannadine in a fascinating and erudite collection of writings (Whaley 1981). Whaley criticises the incautious sweep of generality which characterises Aries' work and quotes sufficient sources to alert the reader to the possibility that no such 'trains of thought' can be validated, interesting though the intellectual concept may appear at first sight. Cannadine's thorough examination of attitudes to death existing in the decade before the First World War and the grief that followed its end in 1918, makes a convincing refutation of both Aries' generalisations and of the contemporary espousal of Victorian 'openness' to death. The book is a model of concise information infused with intellectual perception. It is not based on first hand empirical evidence, but on careful analysis of existing literature. It was influential in reinforcing my belief that good research work should include relevant material from any source and should utilise information gained from 'formal' theorising, even though the aim of my research was to produce 'substantive' theory.
There is no British sociological literature which concentrates specifically on funeral directing as an occupation, or on funeral directors as designers of funerals. It is from social historians such as Whaley and Cannadine (1981) and more especially Gittings (1984) that I have received most help in tracing the place of the occupation in the development of funeral ritualisation.

**INTERPRETIVE, IDEOLOGICAL AND ANALYTIC PARADIGMS**

The manner in which a death is perceived by the living, accorded status by institutions and encompassed within ritual, forms the background to this study. Occupying the foreground is the one occupation which claims to serve the needs of the bereaved and to construct the ceremony of disposal.

Death is interpreted in a variety of ways, and the taboos and rituals which reflect its impact on the living, mirror not only the beliefs and customs, but the location of power in each separate culture. In Britain, directing a funeral has become the prerogative of one, relatively small, personal service occupation.

I focus attention on the manner in which one biographical rite is routinely accomplished, and the role of one specialist occupation in producing it successfully. It is an ethnographic account of the practical decision-making and theoretical assumptions which coalesce to produce it. Therefore, due attention is given to the evaluative judgements and normative expectations which allow a 'successful' performance to be 'brought off'. The assumptions held by different groups within the occupation such as proprietors, managers or employees, may not coincide and therefore the reports they provide to account for their daily work may differ considerably.

Participation is an effective method of obtaining information because it provides an opportunity for protective barriers to be breached, or for them to be gradually lowered as uncertainty about the observers' motives are reduced. Over-involvement with members can lead to identification
with their particular experiences; hostility to their goals or to their
behaviour can cloud clear vision. Nevertheless, the depth of detail,
the range of experiences and the emotional richness available through
such constant attendance are highly rewarding, and allow the observer to
view the public from 'inside' the firm. Wherever and however it is
obtained, it is the accounting procedure of the people actually doing
the work that creates an understandable world of events for the
observer.

It has been suggested by Goffman (1968 p169) that, in such a situation
as a funeral, the bereaved person may be regarded as an 'ingroup
deviator', who, though not adhering to the social norms regarding
conduct and personal attributes held by the group of which he is a part,
has the deviation discounted, so that he is not permanently redefined,
regarded by Faris (in Douglas 1973 p56) as a culturally acceptable
'outsider'. A common sense accounting would probably assert that,
though most participants would acknowledge the existence of certain
basic ground rules operating to govern such delicate interaction as a
funeral provides, many of the guidelines would appear to be
non-obligatory, even problematic, for the unpracticed performers.
Therefore, the funeral director alone would appear to possess the
necessary self-confidence to allocate roles or provide definitions which
the unrehearsed performers could follow, and it is this form of
situational proprietary that observation and indepth interviewing can
identify. Consequently, if we assume that he must take possession of
the body, (an object capable of carrying both sacred and polluting
elements), and act so that his presence is not regarded as molestation,
defilement or irreverence; that he must have adequate technical
facilities to meet the demands made on him; and that he must
'carry-off' his assignment with appropriate dignity; we must allow that
he may experience considerable practical and emotional strain. Such a
presumption will direct enquiry to his methods for controlling the
situation in such as way as to maintain occupational 'face', and
situational propriety.
THE INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

To investigate the directors' assumptions without undue distortion, the interpretive paradigm is widely used in this study as identified by the ethnomethodologist Wilson, (in Douglas 1971 pp66-69). As interaction is to be regarded as an interpretive process wherein role-taking involves devising a performance on the basis of an imputed other role, then the tentative nature of each individual's role-definition is obvious since he can never be wholly sure of others' intentions. The role of the other can only be inferred, not known for certain, therefore testing inferences about others' performances is a continual element in social interaction. Meanings can evolve during the course of interaction and my work is to establish what patterns of meaning underlie respondents' interpretations as they give them to me. Consequently, my own recounting is also a documentary interpretation of situations in which actors regularly find themselves, and of the social action they knowingly or unwittingly develop.

Through this perspective individuals are seen to impose meaning on their social world, and develop rule-keeping behaviour to ease, and eventually to structure, their daily encounters. The meanings they attribute to others' behaviour will be constantly reworked and modified to account for the diversity of performance which the observe. The manner in which directors present themselves publicly is the consequence of weighing-up alternatives, a cost-benefit analysis of potential social performances. Human interaction is thereby regarded as 'negotiable', a process of trying out alternative performances and noting the response each receives from relevant audiences. It is impossible to know what degree of mental monitoring of interaction underlies each successive modification of personal behaviour; what is open to observation and analysis are the behavioural performances that directors, and others in contact with them, actually demonstrate. 'Behaviour' includes action and language - both are symbolic of social exchange.

This does not assume that the subjects under observation utilise such a viewpoint, but that the analyst uses the perspective to focus attention
on the presentational aspects of social interaction. The usefulness of
this approach is derived from the discrepancies that are revealed
between the subject's interpretations of his social activity and the
(possibly contrasting) interpretations given by the observing analyst.
(See Messinger in Meltzer 1975 p72). Both have access to the same
lexicon but make different use of it. The management of the self and
its public presentation is mediated not only by the use of language
skills, but by significant gesture and supportive equipment, which come
to form the basis of an ordered, permanent public face. This approach
may be criticised for encouraging a merely descriptive ethnography which
exposes the particular, the transitory and the unique aspects of human
behaviour and from which no wider generalised statement can be deduced.

Nevertheless, it is precisely the episodic, situational aspects of
social life wherein most people live out their daily encounters and
where 'meaning' is both tangible and tenuous. Therefore an interpretive
paradigm focuses attention on what actually happens when a social world
is precariously negotiated and documented. Observed 'objectively' using
a consensual focus, a 'social reality' deserving our trust does appear
to exist, independent of the motivations of particular actors, and its
apparent concreteness seems to resist the temporal manipulations of its
members. The value of the interpretive paradigm is that it calls into
question the apparent stability of social occasions, and the
dramaturgical approach emphasises the negotiated aspects of social
interaction operating on all social occasions.

The emphasis placed on the minutiae of daily life should not blind
observers to influences which emanate from structural origins outside
the immediate control of participants. The competitive impulses which
influence occupational manoeuvres; the specialist division of labour
which encourages professionalisation of occupations; the 'necessity' to
encapsulate biographical change within ritualistic performances; these
and other significant pressures impinge on the daily routines of funeral
workers, and ensure that they are not totally free of cultural
constraints. For example, women are allocated subordinate positions in
most aspects of death work, (embalmers, forensic pathologists,
gravediggers, mortuary attendants, coroners' clerks, exhumation officials and crematorium furnace attendants are all predominantly male) and this gender constraint reflects the wider conceptualisation of women's biological and psychological attributes held within society. It is necessary, therefore, to supplement the interpretive paradigm with a wider sociological perspective which more positively takes notice of the uneven distribution of power in society. By emphasising the manner in which social control is enforced through controlling ideologies such as gender role, the interplay between occupational performances given by funeral directors and the institutionalised expectations widespread throughout their society can be emphasised.

**THE IDEOLOGICAL PARADIGM**

Funeral work-roles are thereby seen to be a consequence of two disparate, but overlapping centres of influence - the pre-existing dominant ideologies of the society and the constructional capabilities of social actors. The former, I will argue, are significantly controlled by powerful social groupings, whose individual members retain privileged positions by the manipulation of ideas. Through institutionalised channels such as the church, armed services, Parliament, local Government, civil service, professions, education, mass media and, particularly, commercial and industrial organisations, the acceptability of competition, routine, hierarchy, leadership, specialisation, tradition and male dominance is promulgated. Service occupations are particularly vulnerable to such pressures since they seek to sell their skills where non-conformists attitudes would be highly visible. They are, therefore, very sensitive to market influences which are presented as practical realities to which directors will want to comply and, in fact, need to if they are to survive economically. The latter, however, allows groups and individuals, to conform, modify, overlook, reinterpret or even challenge the foregoing presuppositions, but at a social cost. Within their particular locations they not only project their personal and idiosyncratic interpretation of the social world they inhabit, they demonstrate the designing and creative potential available to social actors wherever they place themselves. We
respond to our social world as though it were an objective social fact, as a monolithic absolute which shapes and moulds its members whilst itself only changing in response to a social consciousness, derived from but distinct from, its members.

If, instead of accepting a social abstraction, (a general social consensus), we suggest a differential access to specialist information, and a differential distribution of power in society, we may observe that rules develop as a consequence of ignorance and powerlessness, not as a consequence of shared values. Daily life appears to exist on the basis that claims to 'truth' and 'fact' are verifiable, and that without observers making specific claims to authenticity, no meaningful social existence would be possible. The patterns of social relationships which are thereby constructed, reinforce the belief that certainty is objectively and subjectively verifiable. Shared definitions develop into ground rules, by which the problems associated with social interaction are routinely resolved. However, just as it is impossible to give equal attention to all sound which washes around us, and we select that which we believe to be of significance, so we disattend to the inaccuracies, implausibilities and gaps which occur in our cognitive perceptions. In this way we concentrate more effectively on those configurations of thought which provide plausible interpretations of a knowable 'reality'. Although we regularly live out the assumption that 'truth' exists, and that 'reality' can be unambiguously defined, a moment's refusal to act out the daily confirmation of this belief will show just how fragile is the assumption. Mundane social interaction only continues because we constantly forego the ability to radically re-define others' 'accounts' of the 'real facts'. In return for this intellectual neutrality or social timidity, we gain continuity of exchange and a shared definition of what is happening. Interaction, therefore, becomes routinised firstly by holding in check differing perspectives on the sense of the event, and then by accepting 'frameworks' which 'place' what is happening within agreed patterns. The widely accepted patterns, therefore, may not be composed of the truly 'random' contributions of each social group, whereby every members' interpretive skill has an equal chance of influencing the total
awareness; instead, the patterns may be significantly shaped by those with the greatest power to enforce their view on unresisting or uncaring publics.

It is as a consequence of this possibility that, throughout this work, stress is placed on the manipulative abilities possessed by some groups in society, and the importance of ideology in promulgating their beliefs. 'Ideology' is here used not to denote false belief, but to refer to a cohesive, self-sustaining system of ideas. In opposition to Marx, who argues that ideologies mask specific interests, it is employed in this work in neutral terms to refer to a 'family of concepts' (see Plamenatz 1970 and Geertz 1973). This definition can be developed further, either by using Mannheim's ideas to show the differences between the 'particular' ideologies of special groups (such as that held by small business men), and 'total' ideologies ('Weltanschauungen') which express total commitments to a way of life. Furthermore, by emphasising hegemony it is possible to explore the degree to which ideologies are used to 'distort', to 'emphasise' or to 'justify' specific interpretations of the supposed real world' (see 'Hegemony', Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought 1977 p298). 'Ideologies', therefore, are cohesive and intricate combinations of ideas which are used not only to explain (the world) but, overtly or covertly, to win adherents. Funeral directors can be examined as recipients of ideologies exerting pressure on them to conform, rather than conscious supporters of a common consensus of values.

THE ANALYTIC PARADIGM

The reports I make on funeral directors at work are based on my sense perceptions, mediated by cognitive evaluations and affective responses. To regard such reports as 'facts' there needs to be agreement between relevant observers that they are in accord with specific, negotiable criteria. Such an agreement cannot be taken for granted since there may be as many 'interpretations' of social action as there are participants in it (or observers of it). Such differences in interpretation may be attributable to differing social values, or emotional states; to
conflicting motives or variation in technical knowledge; to differences in body chemistry or neurological adaptability; or to acuity of sense-organs. Interpretation presupposes a perceptual frame of reference - a perspective. Data can only be said to be verifiable 'true' insofar as there has been prior agreement on the definition of the terms and values within which the data is given meaning (see for example Atkinson's work on Coroners' definitions of 'suicide' in Cohen 1971). Such definitions are frequently unstated and taken-for-granted, but they are the basis on which agreement or discord rests. The negotiation of disparate definitions among observers can produce a shared agreement, but this must be regarded as a tentative and impermanent basis of knowledge, since later evidence may seriously challenge the achieved consensus.

Ayer (1971) sought to show that a careful analysis of language will uncover the futility of accepting statements without critical analysis of their structure and meaning. In his 'verification principle' he demonstrated what he regarded as two types of genuine propositions, 'analytic' and 'synthetic', casting all other statements in the role of meaningless utterances that were not literally significant, but at best expressions of feeling. He claimed that for a proposition to be significant it must either be true by definition carrying its own verification, as in logic or mathematics (analytic), or be verifiable by sense experience, i.e. empirically refutable (synthetic). However, such a classification does not stipulate whose experience is 'relevant' nor satisfactorily prove that verification can ever by 'conclusive', not yet show that the verification principle can itself be verified.

As Gellner points out (1959), Ayer's analysis in separating sheep from goats among linguistic entities, though useful as a caution against sloppy statements, and though undoubtedly stylistically elegant was pedantic. In Gellner's view 'unverifiable' formulae are embodied in language used by scientists and 'verifiable' ones in the mythology of 'primitives'. In scientific literary, imaginative or metaphysical language the overlap between empiricism, tautology and ethical premise continues to confound those who seek to give to each a separate discrete
domain. Much of what is now accepted as valid scientific explanation, had its roots in unverifiable hunches, value judgements, professional bigotry and plain misunderstanding of evidence. The high status accorded to 'fact', therefore, should be regarded with caution, and as transient and frequently unwarranted, since value judgements are frequently embedded in statements claimed to be ethically neutral, thereby rendering them impossible to verify empirically.

The artificiality of the 'atomic' approach, supported by Ayer, which concentrates on artificial entities such as 'propositions' or 'statements' is strongly criticised by Gellner because, he argues, the use of language and the significance attached to its nuance, subject matter and articulation, are closely embedded within the culture that fosters it. It cannot be understood as an object of study divorced from its cultural utility. Gellner writes 'the concept of moral neutrality is an absurdity, even though some would argue that it would be possible if a 'perfect language' existed, in which the 'pure' facts of the world could be recorded without prejudice'. (Gellner 1964). Neutrality, in this situation, would consist of not going beyond these facts, nor outside the specialised language. He is arguing that some values are inescapably built into any language, and that the 'pure' model proposed by some philosophers, wherein values can be added to facts, or withheld from them at will, is not be found in the social world. Using one pattern of language rather than another cannot but commit the user to a particular stance; therefore every language carries with it an opportunity cost. My contention is, therefore, that there can be no neutrality, no place above or beyond the conceptual battle, wherein the uncommitted observer can record without evaluation.

Hindess (1973), in his critique of Ethnomethodologists, argues that

'Unless the sociologist is to be accorded the capacity, denied to ordinary mortals, to describe objects and events without the intervention of background expectancies or of tacit knowledge, then his accounts must be subject to precisely the same type of limitation as those of other observers. In that case his remarks

52
cannot be taken on faith as an accurate portrayal of 'what happened'. (Hindess 1973)

He argues that the ethnomethodological position leads to 'a complete relativism and to a necessary agnosticism with respect to the possibility of an objective knowledge of the world (...) what is at stake is the possibility of an objective knowledge of society'.

It is precisely the degree to which man can ever obtain an 'objective' knowledge of social life that is at issue. Whilst both social life, and the attempted 'scientific' investigation of its apparent concrete reality, proceed on the basis that such knowledge of the world is possible, this is essentially a practical and predictive device to aid survival. That it succeeds so well is attributable to the ingenuity of man's exploratory and inventive powers, not proof that an objective knowledge is actually obtainable.

Group life is a consequence of acting units developing performances suitable for the situations they encounter. This human facility entails interpretation by individuals, and the 'team suppression of candid self views'. (Goffman 1969 p143). Differing interpretations are held up for evaluation and those with the greatest potential for group self-interest, or, those that more closely reflect the intentions of the most powerful, create the framework within which everyday experience is given meaning. 'Reality' is thus the perceived outcome of negotiation or imposition, neither of which may be given a similar status by those with other problems to attend to, or with different goals to achieve.

This study, therefore, emphasises the relativity of knowledge. It is not presented as a disclosure of an objective reality, hitherto concealed. Since I claim that there is no unchallengeable basis for saying that my report is a true account of reality and, furthermore, that any claim to objectivity is encompassed with negotiated and subjectively assessed parameters, my recounting must be regarded as a consequence of an 'objective agnosticism'.
This study opens with a close look at the manner in which death and ritualised disposal has been perceived in different centuries, and the circumstances in which funeral specialism has developed. Funerals have been strongly influenced by religious doctrine, superstition, aristocratic power and economic exploitation, and the present style of portrayal reviled by some and ignored by many, cannot be divorced from antecedant 'traditions'. Ignorance of what was actually performed in the past, and too great a reliance on sweeping generalities to cover inadequate research need to be countered by some clear-sighted historical research. The next chapter, therefore, provides a sociological account of the social history of death and disposal and an interpretation of the current authority of funeral directors. It examines the development of the occupation from 18th Century carpenters and furnishers to 19th Century undertakers, and from their uncertain business stratagems to the contemporary funeral entrepreneurs of the 20th Century.

The following chapter shows the manner in which the occupation has sought higher status and greater public prestige during 80 years of development as revealed in its official Journals and Records. These contain constant reference to the ambiguity experienced by members who seek to break their historical connection with tradesmen and gain instead a professional location.

Their lack of success is contrasted, in the succeeding chapter, with the degree of occupational success achieved by directors in Newfoundland. A cross-cultural comparative study indicates the rewards to be gained when political and economic control is established by statute. As noted later in this study, such a degree of market control is an essential component of 'profession' yet the comparative study illustrates that an entrenched commercial location may be the most suitable status for funeral directors.
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58
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<thead>
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## CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF DEATH AND DISPOSAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>The 'Undertakers' of Roman Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>The Place of Macro-Historical Interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>The Death of Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Secular Power, Religious Piety and Social Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>The Development of Heraldic Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>The Decline of Heraldic Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>The Emergence of Undertaking as an Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>The Commercial Exploitation of Disposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>The 'Victorian' Attitude to Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Urban Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>19th Century Developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Social Class Extremes (A) The Middle-Class Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Social Class Extremes (B) The Working Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>'Victorian' Death Re-Assessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF DEATH AND DISPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

The manner in which death and the disposal of the dead has been responded to by human kind is chronicled in a wide variety of texts but rarely has it been mapped with any degree of precision. References to death, grief, mourning, disposal and remembrance are scattered throughout historical, religious, archaeological and anthropological texts, but only in the last thirty years has there been a sustained attempt to produce coherent interpretations of the social history of death and disposal. In attempting to provide explanations some authors appear to have simplified the complexities of historical evidence and to have thereby produced an account of historical development that is superficially very convincing. However, as will be shown below, such total histories, though intellectually stimulating, are plausible only so long as the contradictory evidence that is scattered throughout existing texts, is undervalued. The following account does not seek to replace such histories with a different causal account, but rather to challenge them and to argue in favour of careful, detailed accounts of each separate aspect of death-related activity. One area of death work that has been significantly overlooked, and underrated, is that of funeral construction and body disposal and it is to the historical antecedants of the contemporary funeral director that this chapter gives most attention. A large body of work on death is available for research but most of it has been provided by scholars utilising either religious, anthropological or historical frameworks and in many of them the values and sentiments of the authors imbue their accounts with evaluations which colour their reports. More regrettably, from the viewpoint of this author, many such works of scholarship, valuable in other ways, pass over funerary practices with scarcely a mention and this tendency is still noticeable in recent texts which are highly regarded for their comprehensiveness. Examples in which such omissions occur include; Bloch's highly regarded Feudal Society where, in Volume One, there is no reference to burial customs (Bloch 1967); Huizinga's masterly reconstruction of the waning of the Middles Ages devotes one chapter to
death but does not include detail on the manner in which responsibilities at time of death were performed; and in recent times, Horn (1980) and Wrighton (1982) which, in combination, deal with one hundred and seventy years of late Medieval England, barely mention death, funeral ritual or mourning. Walvin (1984) deals more extensively with the conditions of the poor and notes their relationship to religious belief and funeral practice, yet gives no more than isolated reference to the manner in which funerals were produced and controlled. He does comment, however,:-

'(...) few of the problems of health seemed worse, more grotesque and dangerous than the difficulty of disposing of the dead. Yet few historians have attempted to treat the problem of death and dying in these years as one of the most taxing and sensitive issues troubling the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century' (Walvin 1984 pp35-6)

References to death are to be found in a very wide range of phenomena from myth, legend, poem, song, dance and ritual, to graves, tombs, memorials, artefacts and texts; the difficulty facing the contemporary sociologist is firstly to separate the various strands of the very diffuse evidence and secondly, to recognise the influence of the religious or historical framework within which such evidence is commonly enclosed. Furthermore, the majority of sociological studies which embrace the topics of death and disposal have utilised the predominantly functionalist perspective common to anthropologists such as Radcliff-Brown (1922), Malinowski (1935), Leach (1954) and Evans-Pritchard (1956). Death ritualism has been regarded either as a mechanism for the release of tension (Malinowski) or for the creation of emotions which will reaffirm essential social values (Durkheim (1915).

Furthermore, the social history of death and disposal has usually been recorded and chronicled by the most articulate and learned members of society who have not shared the life and death experiences of the majority of humankind, especially the funeral circumstances of the unfavoured poor or the segregated sick. They have written extensively.
of the funeral splendour of kings and prelates and reported with meticulous care the ceremonies accorded warriors and leaders, but have written of the socially impotent from the position of advantageous onlooker, noting almost as an aside the mourning experiences of the dispossessed. Throughout history the poor, the sick, the outcasts and the deviants have regularly received cheap, hasty and largely undetailed disposal and more contentiously, assumed to have acted with the same motives and attitudes as their influential leaders. An ingenious method of rectifying this tendency has been offered recently, wherein the death rituals accorded kings, criminals and traitors, saints and heretics, have been examined at a particular historical period to show the treatment given to each quite different social category (Finucane in Whaley 1981).

During the last thirty years the funeral ritual and the eschatology of past centuries has been rigorously examined and many studies devoted to the close studies of particular practices or specific periods. As a consequence, the funeral circumstances experienced by the non-elites are becoming visible and can supplement the available information on social hierarchies. By comparing historically distinct periods and culturally separate communities it is possible to observe the range and diversity of funerary behaviour, not only between epochs, but within but one society at a given time. Consequently, different aspects of death such as preparation, dying, grieving, disposal, mourning and remembrance can be seen to require separate investigation, see for example Stannard (1977) on 17th Century Puritan Death; Cunnington and Lucas (1972) on costumes for death; Vovelle (1976) on statistical studies of death in Paris; Jones (1967) on funerary artefacts and design; Fulton (Ed 1965) on death and identify; and Curl (1972) on the Victorian 'celebration' of death.

Regrettably some excellent reflections on death have been strongly affected by the intrusion of a nostalgic sentiment which expresses regret for the loss of 'genuine' or 'natural' death. Viewed in this way, contemporary attitudes to death are said to lack the specific virtues that a total commitment to Catholicism engendered throughout
Europe until the emergence of 'individualism' and the Reformation. Funerals, it is argued, fail to provide the solace and support required by both the bereaved and the total society when death occurs. Aries (1976) seeks to trace the historical evolution of 'individualism' which encouraged the decline he identifies, and Gorer (1965) 'exposed' its damaging incursion into Britain. They both seek to prove that a denial of death is now common, which precludes appropriate mourning and prevents death from being accepted as a stage of human development, regrettable, inevitable, but understandable. In general such critics of contemporary behaviour identify a psychological imbalance between human needs and their social resolution, and seek to show the manner in which funeral symbolism can perform a positive social function by repairing the rent in the social fabric caused by a death. Their analysis of death-related behaviour has received widespread publicity, and considerable support from both academic and lay sources.

The thematic presentation adopted by writers such as Aries and Gorer is criticised in this study, not only for its attempt to provide a monocausal theory to account for the diverse activity occasioned by death, but because the evidence provided is contained in a conceptual mould that is too rigid for the material it contains. In contrast, this study argues for a more eclectic approach in which the detailed study of comparative groups offers a greater diversity of evidence. Cannadine provides an example of this approach and writes:-

'(This essay) suggests that the conventional picture of death in the nineteenth century is excessively romanticised and insufficiently nuanced; that it makes assumptions about the functional and therapeutic values of the elaborate death-bed, funerary and mourning rituals which are unproven; and that it ignores significant developments - both ceremonial and demographic - at the end of the century.

At an even more general level, this essay suggests that even in countries as superficially similar as Britain, France and the United States, there may be fundamental differences in chronology,
in technical developments and in general attitudes. It suggests that the history of dying, of death, of grief, of mourning, of bereavement, of funerals and of cemeteries, are all distinct subjects the relationship between which is at best complex and at worst obscure' (in Whaley 1981 p242).

It is maintained in this study that his strictures hold true for most historical periods, not merely the 19th century.

Aries, Gorer and Gittings (1984), all place strong emphasis on 'individualism' as an historical phenomenon which has broken a hitherto consensual attitude toward death and disposal. If, as they claim, an increase in differentiation and segmental behaviour carries the probability of dysfunctional consequences for both society and family, then funerals should be studied as contributing factors in producing disequilibrium. The evidence they provide to support their claim is open to criticism on several points but particularly on the scale of the historical generalities provided by Aries. As Whaley comments:-

'The question of whether it is possible to make effective generalisations about the character or spirit of an age, as revealed in generally shared attitudes, is one of the most thorny problems with which historians have been faced in recent years' (Whaley 1981 p9)

His further analysis of Aries 'mentalities' or 'streams of thought' goes further than this first cautious note and reinforces the criticisms levelled against Aries in this study. He writes:-

'It is possible to criticise both Aries methodology and his emotional involvement in the subject. Indeed to some extent his work can be read as an extended polemical tract for the present, complicated by the addition of a mass of diverse and often confused historical evidence' (ibid pp8-9)
Gorer's work, similarly, is polemical and his moral stance is unmistakable when he compares contemporary funeral practice unfavourably with past societies and with non-Judeo-Christian societies:

'To the best of my knowledge, there is no analogue from either the records of past societies or the descriptions of present societies outside the Judeo-Christian tradition to this situation in which the majority of the population lack common patterns or ritual to deal with the crises inherent in man's biological nature'

'If I am right in tracing a connection between the denial of mourning and callousness, irrational preoccupation with and fear of death, and vandalism, then it would seem correct to state that a society which denies mourning and gives no ritual support to mourners is thereby producing maladaptive and neurotic responses in a number of its citizens' (Gorer 1965 pp110&115)

Gorer emphasises the need to provide some form of common secular support for those bereaved who do not feel able to endorse the Christian ritual - a 'civil mourning' analogous to the invention of 'civil marriage' (ibid pl16). However, the central theme of his book is forcibly presented when he comments:-

'As an anthropologist I knew that the vast majority of recorded human societies have developed formal rituals for mourning. Typically there are communal ceremonies from the period immediately after death until the disposal of the body (...) if a custom, such as this, is very widespread throughout human societies (...) it seems reasonable to assume that the custom is congruent with species - characteristic human psychology; and, as a corollary, those aberrant societies which lack such a custom are failing to provide their members with the support which most societies make available' (ibid pl5).

Aries' and Gorer's works have been frequently quoted and endorsed by commentators in widely diverse disciplines and by journalists in both
the specialist and popular Press. They appear to express a common sentiment that finds contemporary funeral rituals unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, this Chapter questions the entire basis on which their argument rests, for it may not be true that the majority of people in Britain feel more unable to cope with death than their early predecessors did - the evidence about early centuries is only gradually becoming unravelled and it is certainly being assessed in ways that emphasise diversity and complexity rather than consensual simplicity. Furthermore, the background circumstances which provided fertile ground in which funeral directors could grow has not been traced before, nor has the significance of their contribution to a changing form of funeral ritual been assessed. The social history of death is open to a greater diversity of reading than Aries' or Gorers' work would have general readers believe.

THE 'UNDERTAKERS' OF ROMAN TIMES

Proper disposal of the dead is held to be of great importance in almost every society of which there is record, even though in most of them it would appear that only those above subsistence levels actually received their due respect. It is the funerals of monarchs, aristocrats, the wealthy or worthy and the powerful, that have left the most enduring record of disposal ceremonies. (See Fritz in Whaley 1981 for interesting details of Royal funerals in England 1500-1830). Severe consequences were believed to accompany disregard of burial rites, for example, a curse from God (Jeremiah 16.4); the soul will not find rest (Suetonius 'Caligula' 59); the soul will not enter the Elysian fields (Tertullian 'De Anima' 1.vi). Proper internment has been constantly emphasised, for example:- it is a sacred duty, (Sophocles 'Antigone' 1454); God himself buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34.6); even enemies must be buried (Euripides 'Supplices' 524); and unbelievers (Muslim fiqh); and burial must be provided for all from whom it has been withheld (II Samuel 21.12-14). In Euripides (Helen 241-243) it is said that there must be a ceremonial burial of 'empty clothes' of those whose bodies have not been recovered from the sea; so great is the interdict on lack of due ceremony.
Internment or inhumation, appears to have been practised since the Middle Paleolithic Period of history, either with direct contact with the earth or in a coffin or tomb, and cremation since the Neolithic Period (see Glob 1975 for details of bog exhumations). The oldest burial sites have been dated as 3415BC (Lambourne Long Barrow) and Lecca records the mummification and burial in Egypt during the Neolithic Period, around 4500BC (Lecca 1976).

William Tegg (1876) detailed the wide variety of rituals which accompanied disposal at different historical periods and also includes references to some of the earliest masters of ceremonies who were required to marshal the performers and audiences into appropriate activities.

'All Roman funerals were solemnised in the night-time, with torches, that they might not fall in the way of magistrates and priests who were supposed to be polluted by seeing a corpse, so they could not perform in sacred rites until they were purified by an expiatory sacrifice. There were public and private funerals (...) private or ordinary funerals were always at night (but) later on public funerals were celebrated in the afternoon.

The order of the funeral procession was regulated and everyone's place assigned him by a person called a 'designator' - an undertaker or master of ceremonies attended by lictors dressed in black (...) Musicians first, mourning women hired to lament and sing funeral songs or praises, players, buffoons dancing and singing, freed men of the deceased imitating the words and actions of the deceased with caps on their heads, friends, family, women tearing themselves (...)' (Tegg 1876 p49 : emphasis added)

The mention of 'lictors', who were attendants to consuls or magistrates, and the reference to 'freed men of the deceased', obviously places this account in the context of important personages, rather than of the 'hoi polloi'. Nevertheless, it is noted elsewhere that:-
'In the days of Constantine (4th century AD) companies of runners were established with definite duties of charity to the dead. They worked in groups under the general direction of the 'decani' or overseers (Coffin without payment was provided for those who needed one)' (Puckle 1926 p33 : emphasis added)

'Designators' and 'decani' bear small resemblance to the 'undertakers' of the 19th century and the 'funeral directors' of the 20th century because they were primarily operating under the control of officials superior to them. Only when a secular and commercially oriented funeral service developed in the relatively recent 18th century were profit-seeking groups able to operate as masters or ceremonies without supervisions.

In spite of the proclaimed intention to inter all their dead with fitting ceremony, most societies failed to keep to their intentions and throughout Europe successive generations allowed the poor to be as impoverished at death as they were neglected in life. The widespread presence of 'carrion pits' (Schindanger) in Germany; 'pits for the poor' (fosses aux pauvres) in France; and 'pauper pits' in Britain, provide eloquent testimony to the disposal allotted to the lower levels in society. Such social distinctions were in operation two thousand years ago when both Greek and Roman cities, in successive periods, forced the dispossessed to occupy communal graves outside the urban limits, fearing the spread of disease from the increasing number of improperly buried dead.

'We have good reason to believe that the burial of the poor constituted, even at this period, in large cities, a social grievance though not an acute problem (...). Their bodies were often not properly cremated. To call a mans ancestors 'half-burned' was a well understood insult (...)' (Wilson and Levy 1938 p6)

'(...) slaves and the poor were buried in a general cemetery, the 'Potters field' of Rome' (Encyclopaedia Brittanica Vol15 p1015)
The formal methods of disposal that have been identified by researchers have not been so commonly practiced as was at first believed. When reference is made to the spirit of an age being manifest in its funeral rituals, it is more likely to be referring to the customs practised by the elites, which were usually not the common experience for the mass of the society. Certainly such rituals reflect the myths, customs and beliefs that existed at the time, as do all rituals that serve to specifically recognise changes in social status such as initiation, betrothal, marriage and birth. Nevertheless, the degree to which such beliefs were widely shared and acted on is open to question. To interpret the presence of weapons, jewelry and goods in a grave of antiquity is a hazardous undertaking; even more, the apparently deliberate dismembering of the body before burial as practiced about 5000BC in Egypt. (Lecca 1976). The Vedda in Sri Lanka, certain Plains Indians of North America, the Parsees of India (Towers of Silence) and Tibetan Buddhists practice air disposal but in significantly different forms. Only the Tibetans dismember the body, grind the flesh and the bones, mix them with meal and scatter them on holy hillsides for the birds to consume. How differently oriented such a practice is from the burial platforms of Indonesia is difficult to assess, and the prevalence of each practice throughout each particular society requires considerable time to assess. It is not merely our separation from such practices due to cultural differences that should give cause for hesitation, since we can be none too sure of the circumstances in our own cultural history, for example:-

'The most obvious source of error is the fact that much evidence about the past concerns only the behaviour and attitudes of the nobility and upper classes (...). The poor are silent and faceless. What passes for social history has a recurring tendency (...) to drift into being the history of upperclass behaviour and attitudes (...). The mistake made over and over again by historians, sociologists, moralists and journalists is to confuse (...) this history of what people were compelled to do, or expected to do, and what people actually liked doing. The difficulty is that the evidence which has come down to us consists very largely
of the pressures, ecclesiastical rulings, tax edicts, workhouse records, blue books on famine and poverty'. (Mount 1982 pp135-129)

Mount's words refer to the misinterpretation of 'family' throughout historical records but they are equally applicable to the misreporting of death and disposal ceremonies. As Harrison notes:-

'(...) we do not know what the church's teaching meant to labouring people. Even after the service was in English (1549) the popular apprehension of Christianity was not necessary the same as the official expectation'. (Harrison 1984 p157)

and the further we go back in time the more uncertain the evidence, as reflections on the Sutton Hoo wooden ship make clear:-

'The richness and craftsmanship of the artefacts forced a revision of our view of the early Anglo-Saxons as a primitive culture. But the act of revision is fraught with difficulties, central among them strangely enough is the fact that the experts cannot agree whether there was ever a body in the grave. If there was, who was he?' (Wood 1981) p61.

What may be accepted is that the disposal of the dead was regarded as a 'problem' by the powerful since so many regulations and interdicts have been uncovered in Western Europe. As urban populations increased in size and density and as Christian beliefs were superimposed on pagan practices, the disposal of the dead was increasingly regulated to segregate burial grounds from domestic settlements. For example, the Roman Law of the Twelve Tablets in 450BC forbade city burial to all but a favoured minority of citizens, to prevent overcrowding of burial sites; during Hadrian's rule in the 2nd century AD, the more prosperous Romans formed private burial clubs to ensure 'proper' burial for themselves with professional criers, mourners and attendants; uncontrolled burials were prohibited by the Theodosian Code of 381 AD; by St. John Chrystostum in 390 AD; by the Justinian Code of 530AD and, probably for the first time in Britain, by Archbishop Cuthbert in 680
AD, who sought to control who was to be buried in consecrated ground of church or churchyard.

By the third century AD in the Roman-dominated lands of the Middle East the responsibility for ensuring proper burial was moving away from the immediate family and into the hands of paid functionaries operating under civic or religious decree, and burial and cremation was increasingly separated from the domestic household and located where authorities deemed it to be proper or allowable. During these first three centuries, the early Christian Communities interred their dead in their own private meeting places, burying them in caves or crypts of the buildings where they worshipped. Some of these catacombs were large and contained many bodies, they could not therefore have remained unknown to the authorities and must have been tolerated if not officially acknowledged. As these early communities evolved into an Organised Church they extended their responsibilities to the dead, and with the increasing demand to be buried close to holy men the enclosed space around the sepulchres became cherished sites. Consecrated 'churchyards' slowly developed, but with growing urban populations and increasing numbers of Christians more people sought burial in holy ground than could be accommodated.

The activities of the Christian Church introduced profound changes in funeral practices and indeed in popular attitudes towards burial and the disposal of the dead. (Wilson and Levy 1938 p12). Christian teachings on death, purgatory, prayer, resurrection judgement, disposal ritual and sacredness permeated the Western world and decreed the parameters of funeral behaviour, at least formally, for the next thousand years. It is to the apparent loss of this Judeo-Christian ritualism that Gorer seems to be referring (see above), although his supposition that it has continued relatively intact to the present century would appear to be unsubstantiated.

For the Romans every place of burial became holy since the body itself consecrated the earth in which it was laid, but for Christians the corpse was consecrated by being interred in sacred earth. Communal
sepulture was prescribed, replacing the domestic or local internment sought by Romans who could afford it. Gradually the Christian Church increased its surveillance of funerary activity and controlled the many officers who were charged to carry out the numerous tasks associated with burial. In the early fourth century there were special vocations to give solace to the sick, parabolani; to dig graves, laborantes; to carry coffins, lecticarii; to carry coffins down to the catacombs, sandapilarii; and to deposit coffins in the ground, fossarii. The 'collegia funeratitia' or 'pauperum' had existed to ensure that the poor were given proper burial (literally the 'committee for the poor') and the decani (Called by Justinian 'chief of the corpse-bearers') provided general supervision. It is plausible, therefore, to regard such officers, operating under the control of the Church as '(...) the forerunners of the modern undertaker' (Wilson and Levy 1938 p8 : emphasis added)

Demographic factors associated with urban development meant that by the seventh century AD, rules controlling burial were constantly ignored, and decrepit, overcrowded, polluting and hazardous cemeteries existed throughout Europe, especially in Britain. As noted below, Britain lagged behind other European countries, notably France and Germany, in seeking to rectify their foul condition. America also took steps to control cemeteries before the Chadwick Committee (1843), finally forced political action in Britain.

Rural cemeteries tended to be better kept but in very many cases layer upon layer of bodies occupied the same site, a thin layer of soil being deposited on the most recent additions. Most cemeteries were used for a variety of purposes other than burial and were regarded as valuable local amenities. They were used as routeways, meeting places for talk, gambling, games and dance; for carrying on business, for drying clothes and grazing animals. In the twentieth century they still provide areas of solace and quietness in otherwise noisy and busy urban settlements. They also preserve an historical record of changing fashions, traditions, beliefs and sentiments that the contemporary style of lawn cemeteries will never provide.
The changing circumstances of funerals since the fourth century AD are difficult to trace and to interpret because, as noted above, they are not comprehensively chronicled. Historians frequently omitted reference to funeral practices, or merely included passing references to them as though they were too obvious to require comment. It is interesting to note that at the very time when death is a 'taboo subject' (according to Aries, Gorer et al) an increase in academic interest in all matters relating to death, is seeking to rectify that omission. Aries and Gorer might regard the present flood of literature on death as scientific 'reification' which further separates humankind from the emotional and social reality of death. An alternative explanation is that contemporary researchers are disinclined to accept on trust the more dogmatic generalities that have, until recently, been regarded as true knowledge. The contemporary willingness to focus attention on micro-social events has led to redefinitions of the past and to heightened awareness of contrast and diversity lying hidden beneath the superficial homogeneity and consensus. Contrary to Aries and Gorer, death is widely discussed now, but framed in scientific, medical and ethical boundaries of knowledge in addition to the religious and personal confines within which it was channelled by Christian orthodoxy. Death is no longer omnipresent, cutting into every day experiences and is not, therefore, perceived as a constant threat to present 'reality', as it may have been in Medieval times. The inward contemplation of death may be no different now than it was then, since what people do and say openly is frequently a consequence of what they feel should be done or said; the 'evidence' is not available to allow certainty. As Mount comments:

'I hope (...) to refrain from the temptation to build up comparative (...) structures to represent what the French call (...) mentalities' (Mount 1982 pl1)

Whoever can become caretaker of the dead, controller of funeral specialism and master of ceremonies has the potential to create a
profitable service occupation, and can flourish in a society which encourages competitive individualism, large markets and secular rationality. The capitalism of industrial Britain has proved to be a fertile matrix in which such a specialist occupation can develop and by the late 18th century circumstances favoured the development of artisan - trader - business man and eventually, by the 20th century, the proto-professional and entrepreneur. For over a thousand years the influence of Catholic Christianity was possibly the most dominant factor in deciding the common form of funerals and the manner in which they were conducted, even though the degree of commitment to formal and orthodox Catholicism among the non-elite varied considerably from region to region within the country (Wilson and Levy 1938 p9; Gittings 1984). The commercial exploitation of disposal developed largely as a consequence of Baronial secularity. It is to this vast span of time that Aries directed his attention, concluding that attitudes of mind (mentalities) directed the manner in which death and disposal was perceived and particular practices accepted. He identified a denial of death dominating the late 20th century and producing an imbalance between nature and social action. His work is a masterly sweep of history but its conclusions are only acceptable if 'individualism' is to be regarded as the crucial mainspring, operating since the 12th century to produce social change, and if a macro-social perspective is regarded as essential to explain social behaviour. If, however, we are asked to accept that a growing awareness of individual separateness and destiny only developed since the 12th century AD and that the energy of Protestantism led to its pervasive influence, how do we deal with evidence which suggests that such individualism was characteristic of 8th century BC Greece?

'the shift in social attitudes to death in the archaic period was a very complex process and any attempt to summarise it inevitably involves distortion (...). The most important aspect is a more individual perception of death, the affirmation of ones individuality in death which now appears primarily as the end of ones person and ones life, rather than an episode in the history of the community and the life-cycle: the feeling of ones personal
identity to which death appears to put an end is stranger than the feeling of death as a collective phenomenon through which the life-cycle operates. (...) with this goes a certain recession in the easy acceptance ones end and a greater anxiety about it and concern for survival in memory, and hope for a happy after life, and finally a certain loss of familiarity with and distancing from death' (Sourvinon-Inwood in Whaley 1981 p37)

Aries would seem to be placing the development of individuality almost 1000 years later!

We can observe, however, that the growth of urban populations, changes in political control, the impact of religious belief, variation in economic practice, the development of civic law and the acceptance of scientific rationality among many other factors, significantly influences the manner in which death is perceived and ritual enacted. Monocausal explanations underestimate the complexity of social interaction and thereby provide an unwarranted symmetry.

Gorer's contention that:-

'without some such belief (as the Christian doctrine) natural death and physical decomposition have become too horrible to contemplate of discuss' (Gorer 1965 p173)

is a statement of personal belief; so vast a generality as to confound any form of empirical validation. The logic of his assertion, that a denial of death is now a dominant social attitude, is to regard contemporary funeral directors as mere purveyors of false sentiment and barometers of a social malaise, rather than as the active creators of acceptable fashion which this study suggests they are.

Both he and Aries identify 'streams of consciousness' to which members of society unconsciously respond; a metaphysical concept of dubious merit. In place of such a grand design which can be used to explain virtually all social ritual, this study identifies the particular
activities performed by significant individuals and groups whose social performances help to make funeral ritual. The contemporary funeral director seeks to create a social climate in which to exploit a commercial advantage. He is but the latest in a line stretching forward from the heralds of the College of Arms, artisan painters and furnishers, to the undertakers of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Before looking more closely at Aries, it should be noted that his wide historical sweep is one of the few truly macro-historical surveys. Many who write about death-related topics are more circumscribed in their time scale and prefer to concentrate on generations or periods. The enormous output on death in recent years has already been noted but among those which should claim the attention of contemporary readers are Waugh's (1948) satire on American burial practices; Mitford's (1963) exposure of mortuary millionaires; Hertz's (1960) anthropological studies and Habenstein and Lamers (1963) study of funeral practices throughout the world. Farberou (1963) edited a book on 'taboo topics' in which Feifel contributed a psychological account of death and Parkes (1972) considered the psychological impact of mourning. Glaser and Strauss' celebrated analysis of the awareness of dying (1965) can be complemented with Sudnow's (1967) micro-social investigation of the social categorisation of death. Fulton (1965) compiled a book focusing attention on the relationship between death and human identity and Stannard examined the Puritan way of death in America in an extended essay on religion (1977). Morley (1971) and Curl (1972) both focussed their attention on Victorian death, the former on funeral panoply and the latter on styles of dress and memorabilia. These examples are but a fraction of the diverse and specialised studies produced in recent years and can be considered as contributions to the social anthropology of contemporary societies, fitting studies to be related to the pioneering contributions of the more widely recognised names such as van Gennep (1909), Durkheim (1915), and Malinowski (1926). The suggestion that in highly mobile and materialistic societies, death has become the most dangerously taboo subject (Aries:Gorer) is certainly contradicted if the academic literature is taken as but one indication of contemporary interests in death and the ritualism of funerals.
Aries identifies five major variations in Western attitudes to death which overlap and coincide with each other but, nevertheless, produce a long-term chronological development (Aries 1976 edition). His main proposition is that man's relationship with nature, and therefore with death, has become increasingly distorted as a consequence of significant changes in human attitudes.

The first attitude he describes prevailed from the time of Christ and expressed a total harmony of the living and the death. The act of dying was not dramatised but was accepted as a destiny to be accepted only, within the confines of the family, certain that the spirit would eventually gain a peaceful haven. He calls it 'Tamed Death, and quotes from the Round Table stories, Tristan and Isolde, the Song of Roland, Don Quixote, Bach and Tolstoy to illustrate the religious piety and passivity that enclosed the act of dying. Death was ritually organised by the dying person himself and was, in effect, a public ceremony since the bedchamber became a place to be entered freely by all who knew the dying man, including children. Therefore, the dying man controlled the death-bed scene, playing his role as central figure with accepting passivity. (Aries does not examine or discuss the dying women. Are we to assume that their experiences were identical to that of the man; if not in what way did they differ; why are they, like the poor and dispossessed, so conspicuously absent from his imagery of the past?

He claims that during the 11th and 12th centuries, significant modifications occurred amongst the intellectual and social elites who had become passionately attached to the joys of individual existence and did not accept death passively, as a transition from an earthly to a spiritual home. They were fearful of a day of personal judgement, in contrast to the communal Resurrection believed in by previous generations. The stress laid on 'individualism' led to ostentatious funerals which expressed the ideals of social status and material wealth and emphasised personal achievement. The death-bed scene was now, he
believes, one of anguish and fear. This interpretation is echoed by Gitting (1984 p10) who writes:

'It seems reasonable to suggest that the more stress is laid on the uniqueness of the individual, the harder it becomes to contemplate the exit of a particular person since one who is unique can, by definition, never truly be replaced.'

Therefore Aries maintains that by the beginning of the eighteenth century there were two prevailing but contradictory attitudes to death in Europe. The first uncomplicated, natural attitude, expressed the collective destiny of all humanity within a religiously patterned death-room ritualism whereby the dying individual departed easily into a certain future, accepting the biological and spiritual inevitability - his TAMED DEATH. The second was a fierce resentment at the termination of a sensual and intellectual life, and the fear of a personal judgement. This he calls THE DEATH OF THE SELF, and is to be contrasted with the former as 'unnatural' even though the dying person is still at the centre of events, presiding over his exit as in the past. This attitude represents the change from ET MORIEMUR ('and we shall all die') to LA MORT DE SOI MEM ('one's own death').

Aries claims that this second 'over-personalised' concept of death was transformed between the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries by the increasing reliance upon rationality and reason, so that by the 18th century enlightenment, it became what amounted to a third attitude, A DENIAL OF DEATH, which in fact foreshadowed the present, totally unsatisfactory late 20th century attitude to death. Death was increasingly regarded as a transgression which tears the living from their developing life - a break. Whereas it had been accepted because it was so commonly experienced, now, Aries, claims, it was confronted with emotional outbursts of passionate denial.

The fourth stage he calls THY DEATH and was related to the experience of smaller family units within which the death of the individual member had a disastrous effect. The death which was feared was the death of
another family member, and this attitude was, he claims, less a consequence of religious change than of the socio-economic revolution which produced a highly industrialised and urbanised society after about 1750. He claims that by now the dying trusted their kinfolk to carry out all their instructions after their death and that this led to the secularisation of wills telling the surviving kin of their personal wishes. The dying still wrote or left a religious testament emphasising their faith, but added to it a personal attempt to exert a post-mortem influence through their survivors. He takes issue here with Vovelle (who will be considered later in this Chapter) who believes that the underlying reason for change was what he terms 'dechristianisation'. Aries believes that the changed status of the next of kin is of great importance since they now become the focus of attention during death rituals, replacing the dying person.

The final stage that he identifies is linked to the decline in beliefs concerning survival after death and the increasing influence of medical definitions and controls. He calls it **FORBIDDEN DEATH** whereby mankind in Europe and North America attempts to suppress the now frightening knowledge of its own mortality, having lost in the aftermath of World War Two that natural acceptance of biological reality which was the characteristic feature of the medieval world. The place of death has been displaced from the home and family to an institution containing unknown specialists; ritual ceremonies are limited in time and space and importance. He writes:-

'Death has been dissected, cut to bits by a series of little steps, which finally make it impossible to know what step was the real death (...) funeral rites are modified (to ensure that) the society notice to the least possible degree, that death has occurred (...) solitary and shameful mourning is the only recourse, like a sort of masturbation.' (Aries, ibid, pp88-9)

It is obvious that, from this perspective, the role of the funeral director is to channel death through a contrived ceremony which reflects the emotionally barren society that Aries identifies. Either directors
regret the decline of the meaningful death and try to rectify its passing by clinging to the traditional representations of Christian belief, or they merely act as formal representatives of contemporary social values without comment or involvement. In either case, they are relatively unimportant figures in funeral ritual.

Unfortunately the specific links in his argument have not yet been tested and may never be tested because he fails to explain how such attitudes are generated - he consistently regards culture as an independent variable, and never considers it as a reflection, or agent, of material forces. His polemical, nostalgic and moralistic approach denies his critics the opportunity to refute or to analyse effectively the details of his universal claims. It is difficult to assess the degree of variation or diversity that may have existed within the general attitudes he identifies; what forces instigated change or maintained constancy; why dechristianisation was not centrally significant.

As Whaley makes clear (Whaley 1981), many French scholars have sought to develop and to criticise Aries' mammoth work, among them Chanu (1976) who shares his insistence that the reason why we should study the history of attitudes toward death is because we are ourselves in the midst of unprecedented crisis in our relation to death. His studies included analysing serial sources such as wills for exhibiting new attitudes to death, and considering the role of changing demographic patterns. His thesis is that there is a more or less direct correlation between rising life expectancy and the increasing denial of death, both of which he claims have been features of Western society since 1700. Mortality rates have declined from about 35 per 1000 in 1750, to 22 per 1000 in 1870 (with a life expectancy of 40 for a man), and to 10 per 1000 in 1980 (with a life expectancy of 71 for a man), i.e. 570,000 deaths per annum of 57 million. Whaley argues that Chanu's detailed study of wills and of changes in mortality rates are an interesting, but basically inconclusive, attempt to provide a monocausal explanation for Aries' generalisations. Chanu has been challenged by, for example, Francois Lebrun who, in his detailed study of Anjou in the 17th and 18th
centuries, showed clearly that changes in attitudes did not relate to demographic trends (Lebrun 1971).

Whaley supports Lebrun in his denial of Aries' sweeping historical generalities, intellectually interesting though they are, and draws attention to the work of Michel Vovelle who studies Catholic Provence in the 18th century in great detail. From Vovelle's studies it became clear that attitudes to death were, apparently, linked with a very wide range of social, religious, economic, and regional variables which permitted no simple causal explanation to be drawn. Furthermore, there was no way of knowing if similar complexities would be present in Protestant areas of Europe, thereby emphasising the futility of seeking generalised 'mentalities'. Whaley substantiates the views expressed earlier in this study, namely that if it is difficult to establish general patterns within specific regions, it is totally unjustifiable to make wide-ranging claims across regions and countries, such as are made by Aries.

Aries argues for the existence of identifiable attitudes, reflected by vast numbers of people across immense areas of land with common values and beliefs underlying them and that:-

'the old attitude in which death was both familiar and near, evoking no great fear or awe, offer too marked a contrast to ours where death is so frightful that we dare not utter its name' (Aries ibid pp 1 & 13).

But the accounts of Medieval attitudes to death are sketchy and little is known of the actual behaviour of ordinary people. When they became ill some apparently overstated their symptoms, some fled the site of contagion, others sought holy relics, some made pilgrimages and others shared stoicism and acceptance (Finucane in Whaley 1981 p41)

Detailed accounts of village life in the Medieval times are still relatively few in number and many of them are challenged for authenticity. For example, Huizingas' famous reconstruction of that
period portrayed it as a time possessed with a sense of transience and mortality which no other age matched for the stress laid on the thought of death. He also portrayed it as being imbued with highly strung emotions, thundering passions and oscillation between asceticism and a frantic search for pleasure. McManners argues that Huizinga's account is an unbalanced interpretation of the evidence and reflects Huizinga's own elitist attitudes rather than a realistic appraisal (McManners in Whaley 1981 pp114-5)

Furthermore, recent support for Vovelles evidence, that unravelling the past involves linking death with a wide range of variables, has come from Mcfarlane and Duffey of Cambridge University ('Timewatch' BBC TV March 1984). They argue that though death was a familiar sight in Medieval times, the conclusions drawn from this situation by many writers, are wrong. They cite a study showing death by 35 years of age to be common, with marriages lasting 15 years before being broken by death, and with 60% of children in London dying by the age of 5 years, but argue that such facts did not mean that strong ties of affection and love were unlikely to have developed, nor was death necessarily greeted with calm or indifference. Macfarlane notes that in contemporary societies in which mortality is high, individuals grieve as deeply as do individuals in those societies where mortality is relatively low such as modern Britain. A wider range of evidence from the past is gradually being uncovered or reassessed, and personal documents such as autobiographies, letters, poems, plays, journals and family records, demonstrate that the depth of meaning and sense of loss experienced then fully equals anything expressed in contemporary societies.

If it is accepted that the manner of disposing of the dead reflects cultural values, and that death rituals are used to establish and maintain a secular and spiritual order, how can historians, anthropologists or sociologists establish what aspect of social order was emphasised or how uniformly were the pressures for social conformity experienced among the populace? The generalisations presented by such as Aries or Huizinga must be greatly modified in the light of the more
detailed investigations by writers such as Lebrun, Vovelle, Whaley and Stannard (1977).

The 'evidence' is scattered thinly and widely, which helps to explain why the broad generalities presented by Aries have been so widely accepted. His ideas act as a connective tissue, holding together fragments of information and giving them a unity they might otherwise lack.

Almost without exception, scholars stress the power of the established militant Catholic Church to impose its version of reality on vast numbers of people in Europe and for its interpretation of death to become dominant. However, in Britain, as in France, the social order was controlled by the frequently warring nobility who used funerals as they did marriage and procreation to reinforce their secular dominance, rather than to merely echo Christian sentiment. Funerals throughout the Middle Ages reflected a wide variety of influences ranging from pagan customs antedating Christianity; formal Catholic teaching; the re-enforcement of dominant lineage; civic and military allegiances; the relative importance given to age, sex and habitation; local custom and the maintenance of social hierarchies. By narrowing the focus, the historian and the sociologist will be aware of complexity and contrast, and therefore, less likely to accept broad generalities which, whilst firing the imagination, tend to do so at the cost of critical scepticism.

SECULAR POWER, RELIGIOUS PIETY AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Two disparate strands of development are relevant to the historical study of death and disposal; one is the funeral pomp and splendour of the powerful as they used ritual to exercise control over contenders for power and over the powerless; the second is mundane, local and traditionally oriented disposal, carried out by friends, family, neighbours and workmen, nominally within the bounds prescribed by the Church. The former was controlled for the aristocracy by the College of Arms and stressed established authority at the expense of private loss;
the latter emphasised personal relationships. This is clearly expressed by Finucane when he writes:-

'In contrast to the rites associated with the death and burial of ordinary laymen (...) the death ritual of kings (...) were as complex and evolutionary as the ideal of kingship itself. Put quite simply, by the end of the Middle Ages, the practical and theoretical foundations of monarchical power in Western Europe were far stronger and an aura (...) of absolutism surrounded kings and princes. Consequently, the public birth to death ceremonial associated with such figures had been encrusted with symbols of power and respect. By the later medieval period, the royal or noble funeral was an occasion not only of formalised mourning, but also a great ceremonial triumph, a final public 'appearance'" (Finucane in Whaley 1981 p45).

As David Cannadine shows in a closely argued examination of the treatment of war dead in the 20th Century Britain, Aries' historical picture maybe as mistaken as the nostalgia which underlies it is misplaced. (Cannadine in Whaley 1981). He claims that the impact of the First World War on attitudes to death has been grossly underrated by sociologists and historians, and that interwar Britain was more obsessed by death than any other period of modern history. His alternative historical perspective suggests that Aries is totally wrong in his assessment of 'tamed death' and that it is better to grieve and to die now than in any previous epoch! Furthermore, he argues if there is a 'denial of death' attitude, then Aries is incorrect when he locates it as developing the the last forty years, (Aries 1976 p81), because such an attitude existed in the decades before the First World War (Whaley 1981 p193). Moreover, he suggests that present attitudes are an improvement upon medieval attitudes and, therefore, to be welcomed. Then, death actually governed daily existence and was a common occurrence. Now people live a healthier and fuller existence, and life is longer and more varied. Death is less prominent and comes at the end of rich existence which may, therefore, result in death being more acceptable as a final termination of endeavour.
Finally Vovelle, (Whaley 1981 pl2) referred to earlier, characterised a development he called 'dechristianisation' by which he meant the decline in the militant 'total' Christianity which dominated Europe especially between the years 1500 to 1700. The Reformation, he argued, has effectively changed the form of Catholicism known during the Middle Ages, wherein it held absolute sway within Western society. As religion gradually became divorced from the state, private rather than public, and expressive of individual piety rather than total social order, the Church lost its hold over the manner in which death should be ritually presented and spiritually explained. As death was regarded in different ways, so the burial rites were open to new practices.

His work can be seen as a further reinforcement of the view expressed throughout this work, namely that attitudes to death reflect a vast range of variables including demographic trends, theological systems, the structure of the family, urban growth, the role of women, the power structure of a society and the development of commerce and technology. They may appear to be incomprehensible and complex, but they are indicators of social change, the component parts of which are but hazily understood. The search for understanding should explore their interrelationships and not be diverted by free-floating concepts such as Aries' 'mentalities', which are only occasionally, and without due explanation, linked with verifiable social activities.

By examining the actual funeral procedures widely practiced in Britain since the medieval period, it will be possible to trace the emergence of the modern funeral directors. Social control, specialisation, commercialism and secular rationality, have been integral to their rise from obscurity to dominance in funeral affairs. Individually they have established a personal career by modifying traditional activity in such a manner as to ensure continued profit; collectively they have projected an image of neutral purveyors of acceptable ritual, servicing clients rather than handling bodies, reflecting tradition rather than creating fashions.
Even though the term 'Undertaker' has been more readily associated with the lower socio-economic groups in Britain, and frequently undertakers have been regarded as seedy and disreputable, their emergence as a successful occupational group was consequent on their employment by the wealthy and prestigious in their society. Their commercial success was dependent on the failure of the Heralds of the College of Arms to restrain themselves and forego excessive exploitation of aristocratic funerals. Heralds had developed from humble origins but had risen to an exalted status under the protection and control of the Earl Marshal of England. Even though funerals were but one part of their jurisdiction they obtained high status and lucrative income from their control over funeral protocol, expenditure, precedence and costume. Undertakers gradually usurped their established position and in making funeral provision their only source of income moved gradually from artisan to entrepreneurial businessman.

By encouraging common patterns of consumption among the bereaved, they were able to extend their credibility as masters of ceremonial and purveyors of essential services. The emergent pattern had a series of gradations, whereby each social group could manifest its own influence and status at a funeral, (shown most convincingly during the Victorian period when the funerals of the wealthy and those of the poor were both extravagant replicas of long outdated baronial ceremonies). As Tegg was to note during this period of excessive display:—

'(...) the origin of the pomp of modern funerals is a mere caricature of the ancient baronial burials. The mutes who stand at the doors represent the two porters of the castle with their staves in black; the man who heads the procession, wearing a scarf is the herald at arms; the man who carries the plume of feathers on his head being an esquire who bears the shield and casque with its plume (of feathers); the pall-bearers with batons represent the knight companion at arms; and the men walking with wands, the gentlemen ushers with the wands' (Tegg 1876 pvi).
By encouraging mourners of every social group to emulate the ceremonial style of long dead aristocracy they were able to exploit them financially and to infuse the art of imitation with an aura of respectability. The herald at arms who led the procession, is replaced by the top-hatted undertaker, reflecting the change in control from the Court to the market place.

Similarities can be seen between the manner in which both Heralds and Undertakers exploited the market for funerals. However, Heralds imposed strict conditions of propriety on the aristocracy (and the wealthy who copied them), to such an extent that secret deviations by many of their prospective clients, and a growing body of artisans seeking to usurp their prerogative, gradually undermined their control. Undertakers claimed to be respecting the traditions and customs of antiquity without which the bereaved would show insufficient respect for their dead, but they encouraged such lavish over-spending on funerals that they were disliked, criticised and eventually superseded by more covertly exploitive funeral directors. In both cases funerals were exploited to ensure conformity to common patterns of consumption.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HERALDIC INFLUENCE

Heralds themselves had a lowly origin, frequently regarded in antiquity as vagabonds, jugglers, performers and mere crowd-makers (Wagner 1967 p33). A significant change occurred in the 11th and 12th Centuries when they gradually became accepted as ancillaries to the newly emerging nobility of mounted warriors. This knighthood, or Chivalry, produced an hereditary entitlement but never became completely closed. It required men to carry and to display amorial bearings and the practice of presenting a formal public image of rank and status was also used by families for civil use and copied by wealthy merchants for attractiveness and snobbery. The Court of Chivalry and the Earl Marshal of England sought to keep amorial bearings to 'true' knights from 1347, and gradually the technical knowledge of knighthood acquired by the Heralds led to their elevation to a College of Arms. They were allowed to carry the armour, spurs, swords, gauntlets and casques of their dead
masters — possibly for the first time at the funeral of the Black Prince in 1376 (Gittings 1984 p106). The first recorded funeral attended by Heralds and other members of the College of Arms, was that of the Earl of Salisbury at Bisham in 1463. 'For their services, the two Kings of Arms received £3 and 10 shillings a day, and the Herald 40 shillings each (...) in the early 16th Century they began to be present at lesser peoples funerals too'. (Gitting pp36/7). Henry V after Agincourt, in 1417, had given them a formal letter recognising their duties and by 1467 the Kings of Arms were actually controlling the issue of Arms (ibid p39). Margaret, Duchess of Beaufort (1443-1509), mother of the future Henry VII, decreed what was to be worn at aristocratic funerals and Heralds were licenced by their own Kings of Arms to perform a wide range of funeral duties including control over precedence and attire.

By 1556 they began to compile detailed registers of the nobility recording sex, age, marriage, place of death and funeral details and thereby became the official repository of aristocratic record and the guardians of ceremonial etiquette. They became responsible for ensuring that protocol was strictly observed (ibid p197). The controlling influence of the College of Arms over all aristocratic funerals ensured that the political, religious, economic and social power exercised by the king and the court, was fully and publicly shown, yet as Gittings notes:-

'Paradoxically those people in Elizabethan England with the greatest wealth, the members of the aristocracy, arguably had the least freedom of choice concerning the funerals of themselves or their relatives. Their burials were closely controlled, either directly by the Queen and Lord Burghley, or through the College of Arms (...). A heraldic funeral was a tremendous display of the power of the aristocracy'. (ibid ppl66-8 : emphasis added).

Heralds ensured that only 'correct' escutcheons were presented; directed the order of precedence of mourners; decreed the vast amounts of black drapery essential for each rank of the dead; excluded wives from their husbands burial; and organised the mourners, who by their
number, reflected the prestige of the dead. Most significantly for their future demise they oversaw the paintings of flags, helmets, armour and shields which were to hang in the Church or home, and organised an array of workers who contributed their individual skills to the funeral ceremony. Even though the Monarch or the Earl Marshal decided where an aristocratic funeral was to be staged (frequently against the private wishes of the deceased or mourners), it was the Heralds who effectively controlled the total public presentation, gradually enforcing their own interpretation of correct procedures. In this manner they were able to exploit funerals to their own advantage since, not only were they paid for the services and travel time, but given hearse-trappings and sometimes extremely costly pall-cloths, as prequisites (ibid pl82). So keen were they to particiate at aristocratic funerals that a system of 'turns' had to be instituted to give each member a share of the expected bounty. Such funerals were increasingly expensive affairs and the prestige and income to be gained from attending them can be readily understood. Elizabeth I's funeral cost £11,000 (1603), James I, £50,000 (1625) and Mary II £20,000 (1694) (ibid p227).

The use of coffins was often restricted to aristocrats and the wealthy; they were sometimes deemed essential for church burials; their use was unevenly distributed throughout counties of England, and was frequently refused to the poor:–

'No person under the degree of Mayor (etc) shall be chested or coffined to their burial and if any carpenter (...) make any (...) coffin other than for the persons afforesaid expected, he shall be fined ten shillings' (Puckle 1926 p42)

'In 1580 the City Fathers of the Port of Rye decreed that only those given a lience by the Mayor should be chested (coffined) and carpenters and joiners should be fined 10 shillings for every coffin unlicensed' (ibid p42).

Senior heralds had been subject to 'visitation' since 1446, a 'roll-call' to ensure their suitability, but the lower levels of heralds
suffered fluctuating fortunes and strove to ensure their continued employment and profit wherever possible. Funeral control was but one part of their work but a potentially lucrative and prestigious employment.

In the early Middle Ages the corpse had usually been carried to the grave on the shoulders of the mourners if the deceased was not a wealthy person. If the corpse had to be carried some distance a wheeled transport had to be hired and, from the mid-15th Century, the word 'hearse' began to be used in its modern sense, originating from the French word 'herse' for a harrow-like farm implement on which the body may have been transported in rural areas. The heralds influence over the type of hearse, the encoffining of the body, the trappings to demonstrate rank and honour, and their employment of numerous trades people to provide the necessary paraphernalia, ensured that funerals, especially of the privileged, were of considerable social and economic importance.

THE DECLINE OF HEARLDIC POWER

However, the consequence of being forced to pay for elaborate and expensive funerals, and to be excluded from personal control over the ceremony, led many of the aristocracy to instigate night burials during the early 1600s. This enabled them to dispense with heralds and their fees, to avoid their restrictive regulations and, thereby, to exercise personal choice in those matters which troubled them most, for example choosing their own mourners, and preventing the obligatory cutting and embalming which involved the embarrassing exposure of women, naked, to the eyes of men. Furthermore, the exclusion of a wife from her dead husband's side, frequently enforced by the heralds, was avoided and funerals were able to express personal loss. Whereas the heraldic funeral emphasised the replacement of one noble by another to ensure continuity of aristocratic power, the burial by night reflected personal contingencies, with private loss as the central issue. This is seen by Gittings as a reflection of the new 'individualism' of the age (ibid p197), but the trouble with invoking 'individualism' as the underlying
force toward significant change, is to know exactly what the term implies. As Lukes (1973) makes abundantly clear, the term has a long and chequered history and may be used to emphasise human dignity, autonomy, privacy or self-development. These four unit-ideas are essential elements in the ideas of equality and liberty and the notion of the abstract individual is central to many versions of these doctrines (ibid pl38). Lukes, however, argues in favour of respecting persons in their concrete specificity through a humane form of socialism, surely not an interpretation of 'individualism' acceptable for Aries or Gittings.

The practical, prosaic reasons for the pressure toward change was that the dominance of the Heralds was becoming unpopular. Not only were the aristocracy seeking to evade their restrictive controls, but numerous tradespeople used by the Heralds such as painters and upholsters (furnishers), were trying to gain custom and income directly from the bereaved rather than being hired by the Heralds. The College of Arms had to fight a constant battle against illegal painters of funerary shields (Gittings p93) so that by 1679 the new Earl Marshal told Heralds to pull down false paintings and report perpetrations to him, to imprison or fine. Neither the College of Arms not the Company of Painters were able to force individuals to comply with the monopolistic instructions, even though both College and Company co-operated to ensure that, legally, no unregistered workers could operate.

We come, therefore, to the decisive period at the end of the 17th Century when undertakers are about to enter the stage and to institute changes which lead directly to the contemporary funeral directors. In retrospect we can see that heralds had gained a large measure of social control by exercising the authority of the crown through prescribed ritual. They manipulated tradition and protocol to enforce status differentials and to prescribe appropriate role-performances. They also developed specialisation, claiming to possess a knowledge and a skill denied to other groups and demonstrating it on a public stage with ceremonial panache. They exhibited a successful commercialism, wherein they dominated and exploited a particular market for personal status and
profit. Their resort to the legal system, rather than to the church, to support their right to maintain exclusive control over every aspect of the funeral indicates that legal rationality dominated the interpretation placed on funeral servicing - they sought and obtained legal injunctions against 'unqualified' practitioners. From their first formal control of an aristocratic funeral in 1463, they had increased their status and influence steadily until their apogee in about 1610 when the development of night burials indicated resistance to their dominance. By 1735, they exercised control only over exceptionally significant state funerals, ending almost 300 years of support for, and representation of, the monarchy and the aristocracy.

THE EMERGENCE OF UNDERTAKING AS AN OCCUPATION

The most significant date marking the change in funeral control is 1689 when, as noted by Wagner, the chronicler of heraldry:-

'(...) an ingenious painter, William Russell, has alarmed his fellow painters and changed the whole situation by inventing and founding a new trade. He set up as a coffin-maker and at length undertook to furnish everything relating to funerals which before had been provided by each respective trade. He thus become the first Undertaker, a trade which from its convenience soon found itself in great request. The development was to be looked for in an age which saw the parallel rise of the speculative builder with a team of craftsmen to his hand, where before had been only separate building trades. Having made the great invention, Russell hastened to outbid his colleagues (...) by proposing to pay Heralds to serve at such funerals.' (Wagner 1976 p302 : emphasis added).

This short paragraph indicates the arrival of a commercially oriented funeral occupation willing to act as designers and furnishers of funerals, free of allegiance to or direct control from monarch, court, aristocracy, church or College of Arms, and eventually able to employ their previous masters.
The most significant factor involved in the emergence of 'the undertaker' was the ability of tradesmen to take advantage of favourable market conditions and to transform themselves into businessmen - small scale entrepreneurs. Carpenters, joiners, painters, upholsterers, French polishers, furniture makers and wheelwrights were able to employ others to work for them and, eventually, the most successful among them founded firms which now dignify their work with the title 'Funeral Directors'. Many failed to manipulate the changing circumstances to their own advantage and throughout the 19th Century tradesmen sought to gain a few funerals to supplement their precarious existence.

One writer places their change in fortune as early as Queen Anne's reign (1702-1714) when he notes:-

'The Books of the Ironmongers Company record that '(...) an undertaker for funerals had buried one Mrs. Mason for the Hall' and that his contract had included supplying gloves, hatbands and rings to all invited' (Cunnington and Lucas 1972 p193 footnote).

William Russell, however, appears to be the first such undertaker to become established as a businessman employing others to work for him, as opposed to merely providing an occasional funeral when the opportunity arose.

The innovation ushered in by Russell occurred in London and it was a further 150 years before undertakers dominated the funerals of rich and poor alike, throughout most towns of any size in Britain. The change spread slowly and unevenly, with marked regional differences, especially between the North and the West of England compared with the South, until the early 20th Century showed common patterns throughout Britain. Even so, traditional practices whereby local tradesmen took on funerals as a supplement to their carpentry or furniture making has not totally died out, even in the late 1980s.

The emergent undertakers concentrated on material items of consumption such as hats, scarves, cloaks, gloves, palls, coverings, shrouds,
coffins, nails, plates, handles, vehicles and especially black mourning crepe and silk, which could produce an immediate profit. They deliberately limited the provision of food, which in past generations, had been one of the most important aspects of a funeral for rich and poor alike, as also had been the attendance of many mourners, frequently paid for by the deceased's money.

'No doubt to the majority of ordinary lay people in England (17th Century) the social rites of funerals, the establishing of relationships during eating and drinking which followed a burial, contained a far greater comfort for the bereaved than did the harsh uncertainty of the doctrine of predestination'. (Gitting 1984 p55).

'During the 16th and 17th Centuries, the largest single item of expenditure for a funeral, was the provision of food and drink for the guests. Usually this amounted to half the total cost of burying someone and could sometimes rise to as much as three-quarters or more of the complete expenditure. (ibid p97).

Even though Gittings argues that the rise of the undertaking occupation was dependent on the underlying thrust of individualism, 'the heraldic funeral (...) was totally unsuited to the needs of a society in which individualism was taking root (...)' (ibid p176) whereas in this study it is argued that the change developed as a consequence of economic and political factors which were not dependent on such an assumption, there is common accord on the impact of such a change.

'(...) within ten years (of the emergence of William Russell), undertakers had started to usurp the functions of heralds at funerals, acting as masters of ceremonies as well as supplying all paraphernalia. (They) began to dictate the form of the ritual particularly the quantity of trappings to be used, in very much the same way as the heralds had controlled aristocratic funerals in the 16th Century. Whereas the heralds control had only extended over a small, if powerful, section of the population, the
undertakers influence reached all social levels, even the poor' (Gittings 1984 p99: emphasis added).

The success of undertakers in exploiting the commercial advantages to be gained from furnishing a funeral has led directly to the present dominance of funeral directors. The 20th Century may come to be seen as their highest point before they also are replaced.

Many of the bereaved, caught in the elaborate 17th Century funeral welcomed the pomp:

'Mr. Pophams funeral (...) would surely make any man but a coward seek death to gain so stately an interment' (ibid p166)

and, similarly, many in the 20th Century welcome the kind and considerate control exercised by their local funeral director, regarding critics as churlish.

It should not be supposed that the College of Arms, or individual Heralds, acquiesced in the transformation they were unintentionally aiding - Russell's offer of £20 for two Heralds appears not to have been taken up and ten years later the Heralds were still trying to prosecute undertakers for marshalling funerals and obstructing the grant of a new Charter to the 'upholders company' to which undertakers had attached themselves. At the time Russell seized his opportunity, The Company of Painters were under pressure from the Heralds to keep their members in order, to which they plaintively made reply that their own difficulties were caused by:

'(...) the coffin makers undertaking the whole management of funerals, who had taken a great house in Cornhill for furnishing of funeral work; and in the arms painting, employed none but 'house-painters' i.e. painters not bound to official agreement' (Wagner 1967 p302: emphasis added)
The full aristocratic ritual was maintained for some internments until 1735 (Gittings p207) but 'even without Heralds the 18th Century noblemans funerals could be a magnificent affair (...) with undertakers (replacing) heralds as the organisers and masters of ceremonies (...) travelling to the provinces to perform duties just as a herald would have done, (but) whereas the herald's organisational duties were complete after an aristocrat had been laid in his grave, the undertakers managed, by encouraging the hire of mourning furnishings to extend their influence and profit for a whole year from the time of the aristocrats death' (ibid p209 : emphasis added)

The elements of social control, specialisation and commercialism, (noted above) were as integral to the undertakers' ceremony as they had been to the Heralds, but whereas the Heralds had exercised influence overtly and dominantly, relying on the real power of the Monarch and Earl Marshal to authenticate their privilege, the undertakers based their claim to occupational dominance on an appeal to consensual conformity and rational utility. All sections of the community were gradually drawn into common patterns of consumption marked by clear distinctions of status, which did not diminish until the latter part of the 20th Century.

The poor were increasingly exploited by the undertaking fraternity and encouraged to provide extravagantly expensive funerals, as will be shown in detail below. Undertakers gained a reputation for seeking a fat profit from selling their wares and services as necessities rather than as the 'fashion' they really were:-

'One woman who was keeping a 'chance child' from charity said she would like to send him (to school) but could not afford 2d a week as she paid 1d for a burial club for him' (19th Century letter Morley 1971 pp11-12)

Their services were frequently very unsatisfactory, and in the mid-18th Century the investigations into the chronically unsanitary conditions
experienced by the poor, threw increasing light on the unscrupulous undertakers and their underpaid workers who were:—

'(...) frequently unfit to perform their duty and have reeled in carrying the coffin (...) and after the burial we have been obliged to put (...) mutes and their staves into the interior of the hearse and drive them home as they were incapable of walking' (Evidence to Chadwick Committee 1843 quoted in Morley 1971 p27).

Since the poor were also criticised for aping their betters in stupid and thoughtless ways, they were liable to both exploitation and castigation:—

'If the poor were wise their funerals would be as simple as possible (...) the poor like funeral pomp because the rich like it'. (Quoted in Morley 1971 p23).

Poor people frequently feared the undertaker because he emerged at a time of grief and dislocation of social ties and was closely involved with an expenditure that could not be afforded. The touting for custom that developed during the 18th Century, reflected not only the manipulations of the unscrupulous seeking to exploit a captive market, but the somewhat desperate attempts of working men to obtain a living wage. An unusual example of competitive enterprise is recorded from the 18th Century when a undertaker wrote to a man awaiting execution in his prison cell:—

'(...) as you are to die on Monday and have not, as I suppose, spoke to anybody about your funeral, if your honour shall think it fit to give me orders, I will perform it as cheap and in as decent a manner as any man alive' (Quoted in Gitting 1984 p97).

Puckle (1926) in his many criticisms of undertakers, notes one such 'caring' specialist responding to a request for a plain coffin with '(...) you can't have anything else but polished oak in a road like this' whilst a second is reported to have said to a widow 'your
husband's noble figure is just fitted to a rosewood casket and it is only suitable for him'.

The undertakers' concern to emphasise a clearly stratified society descended uninterruptedly from the Heralds reinforcement of privilege, but differed significantly from them in that they emphasised the consensual conformity which embraced all social groups. They offered an infinitely graded presentation of a common tradition, selling conformity and respectability as assiduously as the coffin, which was the single most costly item. By the 19th Century, this is clearly captured in a popular book which gave advice on practical matters of daily life. No longer did it feel necessary to include food and drink in the term 'funeral' but the trappings associated with the burial itself are complex and costly and require several bearers and attendants, each fully and appropriately dressed even for a poor working-man's funeral. A lot more needed to be spent for a 'respectable funeral'; at least 20 men with wands, baton and scarves would be required, and with silk fittings would cost above 22 shillings per man (Cassells Household Guide 1874).

THE COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION OF DISPOSAL

There is scarecely a kind word to be found for undertakers, and their exploitive activities receive more notice than the supportive service they claimed to provide. For example, in the middle of the 19th Century we find:-

'The race of undertakers must be utterly and radically reformed; or if this is found to be impossible, abolished; men of great hardheartedness! Their present trade is driven by taking advantage of mental agony to extort exhorbitant prices. How is the widow in the first burst of her grief to haggle about hat-bands and scarves, and mourning cloaks and black kid gloves, with men whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone?' (Extract from 'Funerals and Funeral Arrangements' Ecclesiological society 1851).
'From the late seventeenth century onwards, the development of the undertaking profession began to curtail much of the executors decision-making power. Although nominally providing their clients with a range of options from which to choose, undertakers were able to bring considerable pressure to bear on those to availed themselves of this service, and it was the undertaker, rather than the client, who really called the tune' (Gittings 1984 p86 : emphasis added)

They should be regarded as a 'trade of convenience' which involved speculative incursion into specialist activities hitherto firmly in the hands of socially superior Heralds. They sought the entrepreneurial role, previously commanded by the Heralds whereby not only could they identify the necessities of a funeral, but also hire the craftsmen and tradesmen to furnish them, at profit to themselves.

In the early years of the 18th Century, undertakers successfully out-manouvred the College of Arms and the Company of Painters and of Upholders, partly by ignoring the legal forays mounted against them, and partly by active commercial adventurism. They upset independent Embalmers by seeking to do embalming themselves or by employing Embalmers at cheap wages. They obtained cheap rates from cloth producers on the promise of bulk orders derived from the customers they pressed to wear 'appropriate' mourning. They sought to include all social groups in their market and were gradually successful in doing so. They claimed to be merely reflecting traditional practices yet all available evidence indicates that undertakers 'created' styles of mourning funeral and disposal, or seized on particular activities which could be commercially exploited. For example, encoffining (chesting), black drapery, mourning dress, paid attendants, expensive transport and embalming, which were not essential for a Christian disposal but reflected secular materialism, were assiduously sold to mourners as necessary commodities.
The exploitive commercialism of undertakers is well documented in Wilson and Levy's book (1938) and even though they use such evidence to castigate undertakers in furtherance of their case for municipalisation of funerals, they are supported by the evidence given before the Chadwick Committee in 1843; by the Heraldic history produced by Wagner in 1967; by the comments in the Undertakers own journals since 1905, and by Gittings detailed social history of early modern funeral customs published in 1984.

Since their development in the early 1700s, they had sought to persuade the bereaved to provide 'fitting and proper' funerals, claiming the respectability of tradition as a justification. Yet walking funerals had been traditional since antiquity, as the complaint about excessive ploughing in Edward VI reign indicates:

'(...) greedy men (...) plough up so nigh the common balkes and walkes (...) that where their ancestors left of their lands a broad and sufficient bier-balke to carry the corpse to the Christian sepulture (now) men pinch at such bier-balks' (Wilson and Levy 1938 p92).

and the transition from shoulder to hand bier to horse-drawn vehicle and finally to vastly expensive motor-hearse has actually violated tradition and created greater costs. This has been partly due to siting cemeteries away from the centre of urban settlements and the reduction in communal involvement in a local funeral, but has been hastened and led by undertakers insisting on 'appropriate' expenditure to further 'social mimicry and fashion' (ibid p93).

Their emergence on the scene by 1695 is reflected in the first appearance of the word 'undertaker' in the Oxford English Dictionary of that year and marks the strength of successful merchandising. The undertakers profit depends in large measure on turnover of goods and even though such 'goods' have never been officially part of the Christian funeral ceremony, this has never prevented undertakers from selling them as though they were essential.
The requirements of the Roman Catholic Church for disposal were simply to be decently laid out; with lights beside the body, a cross on the body (or hands crossed), sprinkled with holy water and buried in consecrated ground, but as Puckle notes:-

'Here we have certain observances decreed which have no relation to mourning weeds, floral offerings, funeral repasts, plumed hearses or tombstones, whilst as far as ceremony is concerned, they merely apply to those rites which are (rightly or wrongly) enjoined by the living' (ibid p79).

Coffined burial is nowhere mentioned in the Book of Common Prayer, reference being made merely to the 'corpse' or the 'body' and 'laid into the earth'. Coffin burial has only been widespread in Britain for about 200 years though Roman lead coffins have been uncovered at Beddington in Surrey; stone coffins were ordered for monks by the Abbot of St. Albans in 1195; and parish coffins to carry the body to the graveside before placing it (uncoffined) in the ground were frequently used in the 16th Century. (See Wilson and Levy 1938 p82 for further historical evidence). Those wealthy enough to belong to Guilds and Corporations during the latter Middle Ages were fortunate in having their funerals administered or partly financed by their organisation so that the expenses were reduced by common effort. (ibid p82). This co-operative action was commended centuries later when Lord Passfield wrote:-

'It would be a good thing if, following the example of Medieval Guilds, these societies (viz Co-operative Societies, Trade Unions, Friendly Societies) each maintained a bier or hearse, a pall or other suitable trappings even possibly a carriage and horses, to be lent for the funeral of every deceased member (...)' (In New Stateman 13.3.1915 ibid p82),

and Puckle commented:-

'The gild supplied a hearse (...) also a pall, bier, candles etc., These articles were collectively owned and held always at the
disposal of those of the fraternity who might have need of them
(...)' (Puckle 1926 pp34-5 ibid p83)

The widespread use of an expensive coffin, heavy trappings, costly
attendants and impressive transportation for all sections of the
community is largely a result, therefore, of undertakers marketing
ability, rather than their transmission of common tradition. Only the
wealthy, the powerful or the aristocracy had regularly used funerals as
displays of conspicuous consumption and evidence from the USA, France
and Germany indicates that the commercialisation of funerals by
undertakers was a significant factor in establishing the need for
expensive funerals among the wider population in those countries also.
(See Bauer 1934 p21; David 1921 p58 in Wilson and Levy p90).

Even though carriages of some sort became indispensable with the
increasing distances of cemeteries and burial grounds from the homes of
the dead, the manner and style of the transportation was effectively
removed from the hands of the mourning family and the local community by
the total provision offered by the undertakers. Social differentiation
was emphasised requiring 'suitable' styles and expenses to reflect the
status of the deceased and the respectability of the mourners. Each
potential source of influence or profit was assiduously manipulated as
the following illustration will show:— In 1920 a lady presented a
wheeled-bier to the Guardians of the Poor at Bushey, Herts, for use by
the poor of the parish who had to pay the undertakers for the hire of a
horse-hearse and carriage. She also wanted to encourage the solemnity
and dignity of a walking funeral. The Undertakers Association wrote to
the Rector to say they would not use such a wheeled-bier and since they
held the contract for local Poor Law funerals, no funerals of the poor
would be provided in this fashion. The Rector wrote an indignant letter
to the local paper pointing out that this deprived the poor of the use
of public biers and forced them to hire expensive carriages and
thoroughbred horses. Shortly afterward the local undertakers requested
an increase in the contract funeral prices since wheeled-biers might no
longer be used! (Quoted in Wilson and Levy p84).
A later example from 1937 is provided by the undertakers themselves when one of their members urged them not to become a price-cutter and not to use cheap cars because:

'We all know that a Ford would take us from Blackpool to London equally well from a freightage point of view as a Daimler or a Rolls Royce car would. But what a difference (...) if we could afford it we should be proud to drive in Daimler or Rolls (...) simply because it dignifies our own personality. Therefore (...) consider how essential it is for you (...) to appreciate the tremendous publicity value that your cars have to your business'

(Undertakers Journal 15.10.1937)

Stone-masonry is a very profitable adjunct to funeral provisism and even though it was the cemeteries that insisted on certain types of monuments and specific qualities of stone to be used for memorials, the undertakers were quick to emphasise the dignity and solemnity associated with suitable rememberances. Tombstones were rarely used for commoners, being reserved for those of special distinction before the 16th century, and gradually spreading throughout all social groups during the 18th century. Marble and granite were designated as suitable for grave-monuments (The Arts of Graveyard Monuments 1925) and 'All first class graves must have, except in stated positions (...) a marble or granite monument' (Special Committee on Monumental Art in Britain 1938). (Both quoted in Wilson and Levy p98). Masonry yards have been attached to undertakers businesses since the early 18th Century and in contemporary funeral firms they provide a considerable part of their total income. Once again the 'tradition' that undertakers claim to be reflecting is, in reality, a relatively recent development largely created by self-elected leaders of design and fashion. In the 14th Century, a modest form of grave memorial was the 'leaping board' or 'bed head' when an oak or elm long board was laid horizontally over the grave, supported on posts either end, with the name and dates of the dead person painted on it. (Wilson and Levy p97). They would cost a few shillings and last about a century and were still being used in the late 19th Century. Rarely is wood used in contemporary cemeteries yet
when it is to be found, its functional simplicity contrasts favourably with the prevalent pre-cast aggregates that are widely used, ostensibly to save the cost of a more elaborate polish granite or marble stone.

As noted before the coffin, though relatively cheap to make, is the most costly single item in funerals and has been since undertakers successfully captured the urban market for funerals, (local craftsmen have retained the right to make coffins in rural areas and for long resisted the town custom of using the coffin to carry all the overhead charges). Nevertheless, an alternative has been available but has not been publicised nor pressed on the public. In the 1870s, Francis Haydon proposed the use of a perishable 'Earth to Earth' coffin, made of paper pulp or millboard in a framework of wood, with a wooden bottom, covered externally with a cloth, and with the usual fittings. When placed in the earth, such coffins disintegrated within a space of two to three weeks, allowing the earth to come into free contact with the body. This would allow a faster disintegration of the body and a consequent more intensive use of burial grounds (ibid p84). However, first the Heralds, and then the undertakers, emphasised the importance of chesting or coffining, to show respect for the dead and to make a statement of social status through the purchase of an expensive coffin and the trappings to furnish it properly.

Enough has been said to show that the type of funeral produced by undertakers from the beginning of the 18th Century had no foundation in Christianity which at no time encouraged, and at specific times actively opposed, the expenditure of large sums of money on disposal of the dead. Furthermore, the family and community had been enjoined by Christian teaching to take up the task of burying their own dead, and of doing it with simplicity and reverence, not hiring strangers to deal with every conceivable detail of disposal and to remove the dead body to hidden seclusion, only eventually to produce it boxed, sealed and covered. Many social changes have occurred during the two hundred and eighty years since undertakers emerged - the enormous growth of population (from about 8 million in 1801 to about 57 million in 1984), the extension of urban living; the development of extramural burial sites,
the decay of medieval guilds and institutions of commercial help; the decline of village communities; the rise of motor-transport; the increase of specialisation and the encouragement of secular rationality as a basis for social action. Possibly the most significant fact, has been the commercialisation of funeral service encouraged and justified by the undertaking occupation which emerged as an adjunct of these several significant strands of social change. Funeral expenditure was channelled into an increasingly common basic pattern, but one with significant opportunity for subtle social varities. If we consider the importance attached to the transitional rites associated with birth, initiation, marriage and death, we are forced to acknowledge the magnitude of the capture effected by undertakers. Disposal is the only ritual totally dominated by one occupation which derives profit, status and influence, by controlling its public presentation. And, as we shall see, the period of its greatest impact was marked by exploitation and incompetence - drawbacks which did not prevent its evolution into a pseudo-profession claiming both dignity and specialism. Undertakers in Victorian Britain were blatantly competitive and manifestly exploitive whereas contemporary funeral directors are discreetly exploitive. The change had much to do with the overpowering dominance exerted by the undertakers during the Victorian period when excessive expenditure and display characterised the funerals of all social classes. The present discretion of the funeral director may be seen as his attempt to reject the past and to be accepted as an emerging 'professional'.

THE 'VICTORIAN' ATTITUDE TO DEATH

The most recent historical period in which the activities of undertakers has been chronicled is the 'Victorian' era. Vague but powerful images of what it was like to live during that long period have become well established, but they derive as much from mistaken generalisation as they do from wishful thinking that such periods of the past lacked the tensions associated with 'modern' life. The events of those years are frequently regarded with misty nostalgia or by unjustified selectivity whereby variation and nuance are disregarded in favour of oversimplified generalities.
One such erroneous judgement centres around the supposedly 'Victorian' attitudes to death and to sex, which it is frequently claimed, separately epitomised acceptance and taboo. During this time, so the argument runs, death was ceremoniously and gloriously placed at the centre of experience whilst sex was hidden, controlled and degraded. Recent works have focused on the sexual attitudes which were prevalent during this long period and they refute the oversimplifications which have been fed to a general credulous audience. (Pearsall 1969). It is certainly time to dispel the equally superficial judgements concerning the 'Victorian' attitude to death.

It has been argued by many writers (Aries, Stannard, Gorer) that the high death rates prevalent during the 18th and 19th Centuries, especially among children and the poor, meant that everyone was vividly aware of death, both within the family and throughout their society. Grief and mourning, they claim, were an integral part of daily existence, and funeral rites and behaviour become elaborate, extravagant and ostentatious as people showed publicly, how powerfully the 'death of the other' touched their lives. Death was the central fact of existence and treated with the pomp deserved by so powerful an adversary. In contrast, especially during the 19th Century, sex was hidden shamefully away from public awareness. Carnal lust was denigrated as being immoral and distasteful and 'respectability' was conspicuously reinforced.

Contemporary existence is presented as a complete reversal of these attitudes, producing a balanced symmetry of argument which is superficially plausible. Death is now shameful and hidden, whilst sex is acceptable and open. Patients now die alone and frightened in institutions, not in 'the bosom of their family'. Mourning is a brief and private affair and death ritualism is perfunctory and inadequate. It is no longer accepted, but shut away from common observance. Such arguments, therefore, present a complete reversal of what was commonplace and what was taboo particularly in the Victorian period. The 20th Century is compared to the 19th and found wanting in both attitudes and behaviour.
I would contend, however, that by looking more carefully at what actually happened during the 19th and middle 20th Centuries, the contemporary period will not be regarded as lacking the taste of reverence of the previous century. Firstly, the excessively romanticised and oversimplified picture of 'Victorian' existence will no longer be tenable and, as a direct consequence, the generalised strictures placed on today's 'Elizabethan' death ritualism, will require re-assessment. Without doubt, present-day death-related performances are niggardly compared with those of one hundred years ago, but it is more important to relate them to other contemporary aspects of society such as urbanisation, motor transport, demographic factors, geographic mobility, occupational specialism, dechristianisation and family size than it is to make unwarranted epoch comparisons.

**URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

It is to the enormous extension of urban living that commenced in the 17th Century that we must look first to observe the antecedents to the Victorian social situation. The continuing conflict between intramural (within the city) and extramural (beyond the confines) disposal became critical as Christian churchyards became packed to the surface with bodies. A conflict developed between the social need for separate and hygenic burial sites and the religious traditions of holy churchyard burial. It took the Great Plague of 1665 to bring matters to a head since, in that year, 68,598 of the 97,306 deaths were from plague (70%) according to the relevant Bills of Mortality, although Defoe put total deaths at over 100,000 since Parish Registers were not an accurate record of events. The great burial pits that were dug emphasised the problem of burial within rapidly expanding cities and following the Great Fire of 1666, Wren had hoped to rebuild London with cemeteries well outside the city, but his plans were disregarded. At this time also, corpse-fees were demanded by parishes for passing a corpse across parish bournaries, making it cheaper to bury people locally, rather than where it would have been more hygienic. Corpse-presents were also paid to the sexton or rector (in addition to his normal burial fee) as a recompense for overlooked tithes or church offerings and William III
had, in 1695, imposed graduated taxes on every burial. These ranged from a minimum of four shillings for every person, up to a surtax on a Duke of £50. There were, therefore, deep rooted economic reasons for overlooking the appalling burial conditions and resisting changes. I will take but one example to indicate the overloading of churchyards over generations of time, since evidence extends right across the centuries. At St. Andrews, Widford, in Hertfordshire, which in total size was half-an-acre, and had been in use for 900 years before it was closed in 1903, probably 5000 people were buried. (Wilson and Levy 1938 p13).

People of the 20th Century who regard past centuries as the repositories of significant and satisfying ceremonies should be aware that the provision of large burial grounds within cities, controlled and contained by strict laws, is a very recent development, as are the specialist death provisions offered by doctors, hospitals, mortuaries, embalmers and funeral directors. The realities of the two hundred years leading to the Victorian period, indicate that helplessness, despair and neglect were common to vast numbers of people. Furthermore, France, Germany and the USA, were all ahead of Britain in clearing their pestilential churchyards. All Paris churchyards were closed by law in 1765 and a general disinterment of the catacombs took place in 1785. In Germany, 1724 was the date of municipal action to close and rebuild burial grounds and in 1806, similar action began in the USA. It was not until 1852 that the Burial Acts were introduced in Britain even though the evidence of decay had been visible for two hundred years. Commercial interests were powerful in resisting any change that might reduce their profits, as can be clearly seen in the 1678 'Burial in Woollen Act' which was passed to help the woollen trade by making burial customs more expensive (the body had to be wrapped in wool, not in silk, hemp, cotton, flax, hair, etc.). The following details show clearly how costly and unpleasant funerals could be in the 19th Century and how influential undertakers were in directing the form of disposal ceremonies.
During the early part of the 19th Century, there developed what is sometimes referred to as 'a flowering of Romanticism' wherein poetry, literature, drama and architecture expressed strong emotion and imagination (e.g. Tennyson, Coleridge, Byron, Pugin, Burges). Nostalgic ballads, keepsakes, mementos, intensely emotional painting, histrionically posed photographs, taxidermy, heavy funerary architecture and dull, layered, encompassing mourning dresses proliferated, primarily among the middle-class comprising the self-defined 'gentle-folk' of the period. Upper class funerals reflected this self-regarding sensitivity and were expensive, complex and ostentatious, requiring a large number of functionaries for their satisfactory performance. The disposal ritual was claimed to emphasise the respectable character of both the death and the mourners, but it significantly reinforced the social class differences that existed at work and at prayer. Duty had to be seen to be done. The 'congealed romanticism' as Morley (1971) describes it, was given public expression in a dramatic and theatrical presentation, yet the undertakers were frequently regarded as seedy, unscrupulous individuals, somehow seen to be at odds with the showy yet mournful ceremonial they led; exponents of taste whilst exploiters of grief.

The symbolic meanings attached to the items of funeral pomp in the mid-19th Century were heavily Baronial i.e. aristocratic, in tradition, as Loudon (1834) pointed out to undertakers of the time, (since they were, seemingly, unaware of the origins of the pomp and ceremony which they competed to provide). The most detailed information concerning the tradition, cost, performance and social consequence of funerals, was collected and presented by Edwin Chadwick in his 1842-3 Committee. It is from his detailed compilation that we can observe not only the heavy financial burden imposed on the poor and lower middle-class alike by costs derived from emulating the wealthy funeral, but the foul conditions which both the lower social groups experienced. The pressures within the poorer social groups to provide ostentatious funerals, which parodied those of the richer groups, were extremely powerful and fostered by the local undertakers. Middle-class
'leadership' was apparent in attitude, style and content of most ritualism although many of the less affluent found themselves pressured to provide undue extravagance. The newly affluent farmers and landlords, who were later to form a significant part of the expanding middle-class, aped the gracious living and lavish death ceremonials of the gentry at the very time that this sub-culture of styles was becoming diversified. They gave to the aristocratic styles their own distinctive hue wherein reflections of wealth, respectability and salvation were inextricably entwined.

Mr. Wild, a practising undertaker, gave evidence to Chadwick and in reply to questions concerning the heraldic array to be observed within a Baronial-style funeral, stated that the following duties and costs were common to lower middle-class tradesmen as well as to the more affluent in society:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>duty</th>
<th>cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mute slave bearers</td>
<td>18s to 30s each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fittings for mutes</td>
<td>2gns to 5.5s each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man with scarf</td>
<td>2gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man with feathers</td>
<td>3½gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man with baton</td>
<td>2gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man with wand</td>
<td>2gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hearse velvets &amp; horse feathers</td>
<td>10gns to 15gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pall</td>
<td>1gn to 4gns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore 20 men were required to produce a 'respectable' funeral - including 8 to carry a lead-lined coffin. In addition there should be:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>role</th>
<th>cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a clergyman</td>
<td>2gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a clerk</td>
<td>2gns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and a sexton</td>
<td>1gn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a consequent the cost of funerals in the 1840s was:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>role</th>
<th>cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adult labour</td>
<td>£5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child of labourer</td>
<td>£2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr. Wild claimed, in his evidence to Chadwick, that these expenses could be halved without sacrificing the dignity that was so eagerly sought. It is useful to compare these prices with the annual salary of £30 paid by St. John Rivers to Jane Eyre (1848) which was presented to the reader as a 'generous' sum. If Jane Eyre's funeral costs were approximately the same as those of a tradesman, (i.e. £50) she would require more than one and a half years' salary to cover the cost of a funeral suitable for a person in her social position. Today, with a funeral costing about £500 and an average wage for a tradesman of £7,000 per year, the costs would be about 7% of his annual pay, or about four months pay.

However, there appeared to be very few wealthy undertakers in spite of the high cost of a funeral. The 'characteristic' cadaverous hue, referred to in so many novels of the period, may have owed more to undernourishment through lack of income than to the 'noxious odours', that it was claimed, accompanied their work. The very heavy funeral expenses were partially the consequent of 'sub-contracting' which was widely prevalent at that time. Work accepted by a first undertaker was farmed out to carpenters, joiners, upholsterers, etc., all of whom expected to gain some profit from their involvement (reminiscent of the Herald's practice of hiring tradesmen which eventually contributed to their own displacement). The majority of undertakers had a hard time to gain profit if the figures for those registered in the trade for 1843 in London are correct (Chadwick p409). There were:

275 undertakers
258 undertakers and carpenters
34 undertakers and upholsterers
56 undertakers and cabinet makers
51 undertakers and builders
25 undertakers and appraisers
19 undertakers and auctioneers
7 undertakers and house agents
3 undertakers and fancy cabinet makers
2 undertakers and packing case makers

That is, 730 persons waiting for the chance to make a coffin or perform a funeral ceremony. Some only managed to gain one or two funerals each year to supplement their income from their other trades. It was almost impossible for any one individual to break this traditional pattern, wherein extortion was commonplace - more so because the trust funds of the middle-class were used to finance elaborate funerals and set a pattern which the poorer people were, indeed, to copy (Chadwick p408).

The sumptuary strain imposed on everyone by the desire for respectability was especially onerous for the poor, who accepted that it was proper to provide a 'fitting' funeral even at enormous costs to the survivors. A pauper's funeral was to be avoided at all costs, and to this end a host of Burial Societies grew up, whereby working people paid from a halfpenny to two-pence per week for possibly twenty years, so that when they died they would be given a proper funeral. It has been estimated that of the £24 million deposited by the working class in savings banks in 1843, over one quarter represented savings for funerals. On average they managed to save about £5 for the burial and about the same amount for mourning and other expenses (thereby doubling the cost given by Loudon and Wild as average for a labourer's funeral, see above). For example among the 120 Friendly Societies in Walsall at the time of Chadwick's enquiry:-

3 societies paid £16 for the funeral of the spouse
22 societies paid £10 for the funeral of the spouse
21 societies paid £8 for the funeral of the spouse
8 societies paid £7 for the funeral of the spouse
16 societies paid £5 for the funeral of the spouse
14 societies paid £4 for the funeral of the spouse
36 societies paid £3 for the funeral of the spouse

(The Chadwick p413)

The payments to the Burial Society were kept up even at the cost of insurance against illness, or for education, or even family food. Very many families were destitute for several years following the death of a main wage-earner and even the death of a young child could break a family who had to find 30 shillings for its funeral and whose weekly income was only 20 shillings (Reeves 1926 p69).

What has been widely overlooked, however, is the fact that the Secretary, or other official of the Society, was frequently an undertaker, and given, with the rules, the sole right to bury the deceased member. Moreover, as was regularly the case, the insurance money was not given to the family for several months after the death, nor was it likely to be sufficient to cover the costs. Therefore, the undertaker would provide a loan to the bereaved widow to tide her over the difficult period, and consequently have a beholden, and legally tied woman, who he could overcharge (Chadwick p406). A middle-class widow may well have had to find between £50 and £70 for the total funeral costs, and have to repay £5 per year for as many as ten to fourteen years. It is not surprising that undertakers were given a lowly status and it helps to explain why so much attention is given by contemporary 'Funeral Directors' to improving their social standing.

The purpose of funeral duties, outlined by Louden in 1843 was; to show that love of the deceased as demanded by nature; to honour the individual and all mankind; to demonstrate the care of the Church to comfort the living and to provide hope for the Resurrection. But as a Mrs. Stone was to write at the time 'Mourning is regulated by a power hardly less stringent that those Laws by which Royalty and the noblesse of France used to be governed. This power is Custom or Tradition'. Even though she thought this to be unduly restrictive she could still continue - 'There can be no impropriety, so that is be with good taste.
and modesty, in maintaining that distinction of style and expenditure to the grave which it has pleased Providence to appoint in Life'. (Mrs Stone 1858: emphasis added). She was merely giving support to Aexander's popular hymn of 1848:–

The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
God made them high and lowly
And ordered their estate

which was given an ironic twist by a Church tombstone inscription of the same time which read:–

Here I lie beside the door
Here I lie because I am poor
Further in the more they pay
Here lay I as well as they (Anon 1840 possibly 17th Century)

'Blessed are they that mourn' required the addition of 'And fortunate are those that can afford to do so' when, as the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine of 1876 could write, '(...) mourning clothes enshrine the fabric of society, and, perhaps, the French aristocracy had suffered in the Revolution as retribution for abandoning mourning dress in the preceding years'.

SOCIAL CLASS EXTREMES

(a) THE MIDDLE CLASS LEADERSHIP

The upper middle-class were genteel and mannered to an excessive degree in their funerary etiquette. As Mayhew shows (1851) in his quotation from a satirical sketch in Hods Magazine, the niceties of fashions were of great significance:–

Shopman: We have a very extensive assortment of mourning clothes including the latest novelties from the
continent. Watered silks, called 'The Inconsolable' to match the sentiment - new fabrics to meet fashionable tribulation - here is one that makes up very interestingly and sombre - in velvet if you prefer?

Lady: Is it proper to mourn in velvet, Sir?
Shopman: Oh certainly Madam. Here is a splendid black called 'The luxury of woe', only 18 shillings a yard, fit for the handsomest style of domestic grief. Quite different from the coarse material used by the poor.

Lady: Have you a variety of mourning?
Shopman: Oh infinite Madam - full, half, quarter, half-quarter - shaded off from a grief pronounce to the slightest nuance of regret.

Such satire cannot have been far from reality when we learn that, in the 1840s, Jays of Regent Street, employed a hundred staff merely to serve mourning clothes, and had attendants strategically stationed around the shop dressed in costumes considered suitable for all stages of mourning. Observing the carefully structured and mannered rituals of elite mourning, the middle class strove to copy them.

However, the Ecclesiologists of 1846 wanted a return to the more rigorous Christian tradition, wherein the position of the Clergy was re-emphasised, and reverence and simplicity would replace the concern to be fashionably correct. Nevertheless, they did not seek to abolish the differences that separated the social classes, which most people at that time appeared to accept as 'natural' but to reduce the paganism they felt allowed the vulgar, wordly emblems to proliferate. The mixture of cloying sentimentality and brash materialism that enveloped the prosperous sections of the Victorian social order existed alongside a variety of counter responses. These ranged from the growth of esoteric sects, an increase in Buddhism, the development of Theosophy and Humanism, the popularity of spiritualism, to the rise of scientific agnosticism, which Darwin's (1859) work came opportunely to support, even though he did not intend it to be so used. The robust vigor and certainty that characterised the posture of the middle-classes during
the early part of the 19th century was, as a consequence, gradually subverted, so that by the 20th Century, the apparent conformity was eroded. This was a slow process, since the Duke of Wellington's funeral in 1852 was of a grandeur and pomp unequalled before or since, and the Duke of Rutland's (1875) lying in state was apparently viewed by nearly four thousand people in two days. Gradually however it became inappropriate for any real character to resemble Mr. Mould in 'Martin Chuzzlewitt' who confided in Mrs Sarah Gamp: 'When (the ceremony) is performed on the very best scale (it) binds the broken heart and sheds balm on the wounded spirit - do not say that gold is dross when it can buy such things'. Undertakers therefore were firmly established even though frequently viewed with distaste. Those with ambitions were trying to lose their artisan connections and establish themselves as businessmen.

The population rose rapidly between 1801 and 1811 and midway through the 19th century the conditions existed in churchyards were appalling. Profits from private cemeteries were considerable, and only the wealthy could afford to buy space in them. overcrowd burial grounds, epidemics and concern for public health were investigated in Chadwick's enquiry, and as provincial and rural churchyards came to resemble the horrors existing in London, new plans were devised for interment, in order to change what one writer saw as:--

In foul accumulation, tier on tier,  
Each due installment of the pauper bier,  
Crushed in dense-packed corruption there they dwell,  
'Mongst earthy rags of shroud and splintered shell.  
(Anon, 1850)

Bodies protruded at the surface; animals and body snatchers removed them so frequently that stone slabs were laid to keep bodies in the ground and iron-pallisades erected to keep intruders at bay, and the 1832 Anatomy Act was introduced to prevent the removal of bodies for autopsies.
John Claudius Loudon, who had given so much evidence to Chadwick, designed many garden cemeteries which were to be parks for the living and the dead and recreational centres. He claimed that they were 'scenes not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches, to cultivate the intellect, but they would serve as historical records'. (Loudon, in Chadwick 1842-3) The last point is essentially true and many future historians will have good cause to criticise the increasing number of contemporary 'lawn' cemeteries, which lack any claim to historical record.

The Woking Necropolis Plan of 1850 proposed one huge cemetery for the whole country, run by the state, with towns linked to it by canal and railway. This plan was realised in part, but as a private company, since a State concern was viewed by many business-men with deep mistrust. It was at this time that many of today's successful funeral firms established themselves, even though it had been one hundred and fifty years earlier that adventurous undertakers had first obtained control of the elite funerals. Men with commercial knowledge realised that locally known firms could establish a comfortable and secure market. This was in contrast to the developments in the U.S.A. where, in 1838, the Wood Green Cemetery was opened under the trusteeship of the New York State, precisely because the private company idea was thought to be unsavoury. Similarly the prestigious Arlington National Cemetery has belonged to the U.S. Government since 1833.

The Woking Cemetery (at Brookwood) was to have been served by new railway stations built at London and Brookwood, but only the Woking, Gothic-style building was erected (with separate parts for Roman Catholics and Dissenters) (Curl 1972 page 143). Since it was costly to be buried there, it actually did nothing to alter the lot of the urban poor, whose death lead them to the grossly overfull urban burial grounds.

Public bodies controlled most cemeteries after 1860 as a consequence of pressure by reforming bodies, and they were concerned to dispose of bodies efficiently, not to encourage undue pomp and ceremony. They increased the pressure on undertakers to provide a less elaborate, less
costly funeral ceremony which would still find public acceptance. Cremations did not take place regularly until the Public Cremation Act of 1902 established the practice formally, although the first cremations had taken place in 1769 and 1822. The prime reason for its eventual acceptance by the middle-class were sanitary and economic, not the radicalism that its early proponents urged. Similarly, when Shelley was cremated on an Italian beach in 1822 this was not, in fact, the romantic gesture desired by Byron, but merely compliance with Italian quarantine law that decreed that anything washed up by the sea should be burnt to avoid the spread of disease.

Historically, in Britain, the cremation movement was middle-class, secular, philosophical and radical. The religious trappings which surround cremation today have been grafted on to it over the succeeding years. This is partially due to religious organisations relaxing their opposition to its use, but also because funeral houses conduct all their proceedings with a presumption of religious overtones. Modern crematoriums are, in many cases, starkly formal in outward appearance, and within contain a contrast between a functional austerity and a contrived religiosity. Many are physically cold and impersonally formal. They reflect the widespread emphasis that is placed on rational efficiency, economic viability and public hygiene, whilst simultaneously attempting to retain religious commitment through decor, furniture and symbols. This supports the view of Habenstein (1955) that the ambiguity existing between client and funeral director is a consequence of the conflict experienced in attempting to combine Christian tradition and contemporary secularity.

They stood in strong contrast to the romantic flamboyance shown most clearly in the Victorian showpieces such as the Highgate and Kensal Green cemeteries in London, and the Glasgow Necropolis. (Curl 1972) At Kensal Green the paint is peeling and the mould is growing within the cold smelly church, and the vaults, tombs and sarcophagi within the enormous cemetery are broken or overgrown with uncut vegetation, but in their time they epitomised the grandeur of disposal. The decaying tombs, broken statuary and concealing vegetation cannot disguise the
impact of Highgate which is now a historic showpiece of Victorian sentiment. Now, in the late 20th. century about 70% of all funerals utilise cremation rather than burial, and the processing of bodies in preparation for disposal is a profitable business, whilst the disposal grounds are uniformly plain.

Some observers, especially Curl (ibid 1972) believe that by lowering the coffin into the ground, the reality of death is made apparent, and a link is finally severed between the living and the dead. (The first models of crematoria had the coffin openly lowered into the furnace below). Modern cremation, however, entails the coffin moving out of sight in a silent and unobtrusive fashion. It disappears from sight and is not seen again. The final act has to be guessed; there is no visible consumption by earth, water or fire. A very similar ceremony is provided for all social groups and urban and rural distinctions are being lost. The higher social groups tend to show their status by keeping their funerals discreetly expensive. The best coffins are bought, and the most expensive burials or cremations arranged. Flowers are usually minimal and it has become socially 'correct' to send donations to charitable causes. The cortege is small, with few funeral workers employed. Aristocratic splendour and upper-middle-class extravagance have been replaced by the wealthy with an unobtrusive but costly elegance now that a 'good' funeral, (however interpreted), is within the grasp of most social groups. Funeral directors run what is virtually a cartel whereby each firm provides a similar range of goods and services to both rich and poor alike. They have been influential in producing a 'common fashion' which can only be improved without resorting to mere vulgarity, by exhibiting a refined taste.

SOCIAL CLASS EXTREMES

(b) THE WORKING CLASS

During the 'Victorian' period, the contrasts between the social classes was immense; in daily living, in working conditions, in expectations
and in death ceremonials, even though the 'prevailing culture' of the middle-class was accepted as the cultural attitude of the period. For example, as Chadwick again shows (p554), the number of funerals and the intensity of the misery associated with them varied by social class and within social class, as deaths within London and the provinces clearly indicated. The death-rate varied greatly between boroughs - the harsher physical conditions produced death rates of 1 in every 28 and 30 persons, whereas in the more 'salubrious' areas, the rate was 1 in every 56 and 64. The average age of death in London in 1842-3 was recorded as being:-

Gentry 44 years; Tradesmen 25 years; Undescribed 28 years; Labourers 22 years; Paupers 49 years. The apparently high age recorded for Paupers was due to (a) smaller proportion of children among them, and (b) a high proportion of aged adults in work-houses.

In consequence, the mortality rate was in some cases 60% higher in the unhealthy sub-districts, whilst at the same time the birth-rates within them were 48% higher. Nevertheless, across all Boroughs there was a uniform tendency to copy the upper middle-class funeral ceremonial, fostered strongly by the undertakers who regarded themselves as the transmitters of middle-class tastes.

Among poor people, there was an almost universal fear of being buried alive in the stinking cemeteries, and this, indirectly, was one of the contributory causes of death among them. (See Illustrations for method of avoiding premature burial). According to the evidence given to Chadwick, this came about because the dead body would be kept at home until putrefaction began, to ensure that death had really occurred, and it was from the cadaver that many people were infected and subsequently died. Of course, the complementary reason for delaying burial was the lack of money to provide a suitable funeral, and the body would rarely be buried in less than a week following death, and two or three weeks was not uncommon. It is about the fourth day (96 hours) that the average corpse begins to show visible deterioration, usually around the
ascending colon of the intestines, and many elderly undertakers alive
today can recount stories of puncturing decomposing bodies to allow
expanding gases to escape whilst the body was on view in the house.
This led, in the view of witnesses before Chadwick, to fear and
revulsion of the cadaver which was linked gradually with a disregard for
its former human status. As a consequence, the body would be mishandled
therefore spreading disease), items would be placed on it, bottles of
spirits hidden alongside it, and a lack of reverence shown to it when
the funeral did take place. Even when the body was revered by the
mourners, there was no guarantee that a respectful concern would be
generated within the hired funeral performers. The journey-men would
frequently return on the hearse, roisterous and drunken, singing,
shouting and showing little concern for the feelings of onlookers. They
were often to be seen drunk in the ale houses and would sometimes attend
the actual ceremony in this state (see Chadwick p411). In addition to
the normal bedlam of the crowded London streets through which a funeral
would pass, onlookers, children at play, vagabonds and street sellers
would all provide an accompaniment of comment and inconsiderate
behaviour. There was, therefore, throughout the middle 19th Century, as
a consequence of all these possibilities, a variety of responses to a
death. A desire for respectful interment of themselves and their
relatives was strong, and widely diffused among the Victorian poor, but
the social circumstances of their lives dictated that the actual
behaviour did not exhibit this sentiment. As a consequence of public
disquiet, the reform and simplification of funeral ceremonies was
introduced by the Metropolitan Interment Act of 1850. This allowed the
Board of Health to become involved in proving cemeteries and funerals at
fixed charges, much to the indignation of the undertakers, who foresaw a
reduction in demand for their services. This possibility was never
exploited by Central or Local Government and was rescinded in the Local
Government Act of 1972, without ever having been a challenge to the
undertakers monopoly of funeral provision.

In the rural districts, the population did not show the same disregard
for funeral proprieties as was common in the larger cities. This was
possibly due to the fact that it was more likely for the audience to
know something about the deceased or the mourners, whereas in the towns, the crowded populace merely saw the incessant passage of strangers, and had little sense of involvement with the ceremony or the procession. Furthermore, in villages it was, and is, the custom for local tradesmen to act as undertakers and thereby to provide a recognisable and familiar face at each ceremony.

Harrison (1971) suggests that the drinking that was common at working-class funerals, was linked to fatalistic escapism. There were good reasons for celebrating burials when disease, disaster and death were unlikely to be evaded for long. It provided one of the few occasions when the poor had some money to spend on something of consequence to register, even though the reality turned out to be desolate and short-lived. The money was obtained by borrowing at high interest rates from local money-lenders, pawning everything that was not essential and by spending Burial Club savings. Consequently 'extravagant' funerals among the working-class can be regarded as a palliative; they could provide little of lasting comfort and were more a reflection of a social impotence, expressed within the prevailing middle-class traditional ceremony than a pale reflection of the community involvement in eating and drinking of earlier centuries. The ritual enacted at working-class funerals was a feeble copy of the aristocratic model which was already passing out of fashion among its originators. This style, taken up by the middle-class, modified and enlarged to meet their own emotional and status needs, had regularly left a trail of physical hardship in its wake. The working-class copied the middle-class style of ritual in large measure, but the high cost of a funeral produced hardships that were fatalistically accepted as a consequence of giving the dead a good send off. However, it provided for them, as it did for all social groups, the opportunity to show publicly their concern to act correctly, to show respect for the dead and their own status responsibilities.

All too often, then, the 19th Century death was painful, agonizing, distasteful and foul. Frequently it was embarrassing for the mourners and onlookers, and for most of the population it ended in disgraceful
burial circumstances. Furthermore, it produced immense hardship among the surviving kin within the working and middle class alike, and the religious intention was frequently denied by the physical and economic hardships. The wide differences in experience between the social classes that existed in life, were doubly in evidence at times of death. The 'Victorian' period was characterized by variation - between urban and rural, religious and secular, rich and poor, the elites and the mass populace and finally between the early and late parts of the epoch.

In addition to these distinctions were the variations in style and degree of mourning clothes, and the influence that such heavy drab outfits had upon those who were forced to wear them. It is highly possible that the consequence of being imprisoned within them, sometimes for long months at a time, was not only physically uncomfortable, but actually harmed the mourners socially, by denying them a speedy return to normality. In fact, the enforced separation may have robbed many middle-class women of their will to recover since they were encouraged to remain obsessed with death and bereavement. They were not encouraged to come to terms with their loss, nor to seek a resumption or development of their social lives. Furthermore many people, both men and women, feared death, and the possibility of damnation and hell which was regularly preached by the more fervent Christians frequently stilled the critics of the obsessive mourning ritual. (Curl 1972).

VICTORIAN DEATH RE-ASSESSED

Basically, therefore, it can be demonstrated that the 'Victorian celebration of death' was a mixture of contradictory practices and experiences, wherein social class, sex, age and location, determined both the experience of death and the style of its dramatisation. Elaborate funerals and enforced mourning practices were a reflection, and assertion of, status, and the beneficiaries were those, such as undertakers, who derived profit from the conspicuous consumption that accompanied death. Courtaulds, for example, increased cloth production by 1500% in the twenty years between 1820-40 due, almost entirely, to the increased demand for black crepe, (Cunnington and Lucas 1972;
Morley 1971). The 'celebrants' were in reality those commercial enterprises who were able to exploit the burgeoning market for death paraphrenalia.

The economic consequence of death proceeded its arrival for all but the wealthy and even many of them were staggered by its labyrinthine ritual and its high cost. The reality of death confirmed apprehension since economic hardship could last for many years as a consequence of a 'suitable' funeral, and many women, especially those of the middle class, experienced the humiliation and loneliness of social relegation following the death of a husband. For the majority fear of a 'paupers' burial was realistic, since without their constant saving there would be insufficient money to provide a respectable funeral. The money they saved for funeral goods deprived them of other, and more basic, necessities, such as food, rent and education. To believe that the Victorian period epitomised caring, sober, dignified and religiously covenanted disposal is to fly in the face of massive evidence to the contrary.

As Cannadine succinctly summarises the situation:-

'It was not a halcyon era of grief in the sense that it was effectively assuaged but only in that it was commercially profitable. Moreover, it was of relatively limited duration, fully established by the 1840s but already in decline by the 1850s'

(Cannadine in Whaley 1981 p192)

CONCLUSION

This Chapter illustrates the contention that the present cannot be understood until it is placed in an historical perspective. Sociological investigation requires an historical framework within which change, conservation, interaction and interpretation are critically weighed and explained. It is of no lasting consequence to study the occupation of funeral directing without reference to detailed knowledge of the past. If the present situation is of interest, a reader will be prompted to
ask if it has always existed thus, and if not why not; when did it begin and who started it; why is it not other than it is and has it always been a male dominated, secular oriented, profit seeking business? The legacy of its ancestry, the manner of its emergence, the style of its development, are all the legitimate and necessary concern of anyone wishing to understand the occupational stance of the present incumbents.

This is not a plea for accepting an 'evolutionary' perspective whereby the present is seen as a logical and determined development of an earlier and less complex design. Nor is it support for 'necessity'; claiming significant aspects of the past to be irreducibly necessary for the present to have emerged. It is an assertion of a necessary collaboration between disciplines so that each illuminates the other in seeking to interpret what is at one time and place, regarded as social reality by specific social actors. The very term re-search implies that present experience requires an historical awareness. In this particular case, the intention has been to indicate the social, religious, economic and political aspects of social action which have created particular styles of funeral ritual. It has been argued that the emergence of undertakers as masters of ceremonies and their subsequent transformation into funeral directors, cannot be ascribed to one single cause, nor can they be seen purely as reflecting agencies, responding without creating. They entered the scene as hired workmen, exploited the growing demand for a less rigidly controlled ceremony which, superficially at least, encouraged a greater degree of mourner control, and then, developed a funeral market which encompassed the entire population from nobility to paupers, demonstrating innovatory skill that provided considerable status mobility. They can be seen to exercise a subtle form of social control by 'agenda setting' which maps out every eventuality in advance and ensures their own entrepreneurial significance is dominant. They epitomise the pseudo-scientific approach to problem solving and offer sanitised body-care and efficient disposal; they offer a secular service acceptable to religious and irreligious alike; they assert a specialism which is rarely questioned since its execution is away from public scrutiny. They represent the pure form of a capitalist market in operation since they are individualistic, competitive, profit-seeking,
small-business servicers, who both generate and fulfil consumer demand. One significant aspect is their individual and collective reticence to be regarded as what they surely are, namely businessmen. They appear to be still retreating from the unsavoury image created by the more unscrupulous of their forebears, and to prefer anonymity as a 'front' behind which to await the call which only they can satisfy. However, to finish in a manner appropriate to the central tenet of this chapter, it is necessary to question this explanation. A satisfactory alternative would be to suggest that there is no need for them to be openly assertive or controversial. The market is captured, the resources are ready, profits are comfortable with little effort required, the weak will falter whilst the strong will prosper - therefore 'status quo' is a valuable resource not to be tinkered with. They are not retreating from, or hiding from anything so obvious as an unscrupulous ancestry. They are merely preparing their resources for the call that will surely come. The aggressive marketing techniques suitable to other occupations would merely expose their limitations.

It is a long way, both chronologically and operationally, from the 'designators' and the 'decani' of almost 2000 years ago to the contemporary funeral director. Both accepted responsibility for the funeral ceremony and the disposal of the dead. The contemporary performer has shrugged off religious domination, has encapsulated all specialisms into his own provision, has common appeal to rich and poor alike, but above all, he is hired by price, not constrained by duty, kinship, belief or court sanction. Therein lies his independence and singularity and with it has developed a concern to obscure the present commercial orientation with overtones of a moral rectitude more suited to a controller of ceremony than a purveyor of goods. The change in attitudes which Aries identifies as the crucial reason for the historical variations in disposal ceremonies, had 'individualism' as the motivating force. Gittings supports this contention, and regards the loss of rural 'communities' as one of the most significant factors in promoting such a change in attitude. She argues that the disintegration of a society possessing a cohesive social structure, in which individuality is subordinate to the welfare of the wider group, is the
reason underlying the changes in funeral ritual. (ibid p90). Allied to this, and hastening its development both writers emphasise the declining influence of a total militant catholic ethic, and the rise of the more person-oriented Protestant belief. This, basically monocausal, explanation has been challenged because it does not give sufficient analysis of the term 'individualism' nor explain which of many aspects is to be accepted (Lukes). Furthermore, it does not give sufficient emphasis to economic factors which were channelled by the church for its own convenience, and which were significantly modified first by aristocratic power and then by service occupations such as heralds and later, undertakers. Kingship, industry, commerce, demographic change, medical knowledge, religious belief, urban development, paganism and magic are each related to structured changes in society and are not reducible to 'individualism'. To conclude with but one example to substantiate this claim we need only to look closely at the (conjectured) religious belief and the attitudes held by 'ordinary' people. Religion, it is claimed, gave them 'reasons' for natural events and 'answers' to grave questions. But as one critical historian notes:

'but how widely were these messages believed (i.e. fundamental messages of Protestant Christianity), it is one thing to know the theology; it is another matter to know the beliefs of the 'hearers'. (...) the evidence currently available on popular religion is so insubstantial as to hardly justify consideration (...) many labouring people held beliefs about the supernatural that were conspicuously non-Christian in character, and (...) they often tried to deal with these supernatural forces in ways that the Church vigorously condemned. (...) Magic, in fact, was a vital component of a plebian culture (...) it offered a wide range of practical techniques (...) intended to alter mans relations to the natural and social invironment. Peter Laslett has claimed in 'The World we have lost' that 'all our ancestors were literal christian believers, all of the time 'and that' their world was a christian world'; but such grand assertions should not be taken too seriously'. (Malcolmson 1981 pp83-84).
Grand theories break down the divisions erected between disciplines and draw together the fragmented evidence which is difficult to explain whilst isolated. Unfortunately cohesion is obtained by the unwarranted simplification of complex social behaviour.

The successful funeral director exploits the contingencies of his time; so did the Designators, the Decani, the Guilds, and the Undertakers, before him. He appears to be the culmination of successive attempts to lead, direct, marshall or control not only mourners but all who have concern with a funeral. He is to be viewed as one who utilises the secular, rational economic and social potential available to him to create status and profit for himself. At present no challenge to his occupational dominance in funerals is presented by central or local government, by consumer associations, or by restrictive legislation. By interceding between the dead and the living he effectively reduces the autonomy of the bereaved and thereby their potential to mount their own ceremony. This exercise in social control is both effective and self-propogating, since most bereaved individuals seek out funeral directors to relieve them of both their defining potential and their money. The funeral director is sensible to emphasise his total command of all matters deemed appropriate at a time of death, since as a consequence ignorance and discomforture combine to foster a sense of inadequacy among the bereaved.

The occupation is best regarded as a loose amalgam of self-interested practitioners, rather than as a cohesive and regulated association of specialists. Only in the 20th Century has a central committee developed, ostensibly to represent their interests in formal negotiations with other bodies, but primarily to improve their collective status. There remains a strong feeling of individualistic separateness, which is incompatable with the movement toward collective upward mobility. The loose structure, which at present prevails, would appear to encourage the expansion of the few economically powerful firms at the expense of the small, locally oriented family firms. The possibility of an occupation dominated by commercially successful public companies, in which the provision of funerals played a 'feeder' role to
the more profitable sale of chipboard, plastic and stonemasonry all directly linked to private crematoria and cemeteries, is high. This represents a significant development from the individual carpenter, painter or upholsterer who sold his labour to his social superiors and who had no control over the manner in which his services were deployed.

People who want to stay in business must influence the individuals who observe them and therefore as Goffman notes:-

"At some point or other (...) they feel it necessary to band together and directly manipulate the impression they give (...) Actions which appear to be done on objects become gestures addressed to the audience. The sound of activity becomes dramatised (...) they must expressly sustain a definition of the situation (...) in circumstances that have facilitated their developing an apt vocabulary'. (Goffman 1969 pp221-5 : emphasis added)

No verbatim accounts have been discovered which show how the artisans employed by Heralds convinced their social superiors of their adequacy. Starting from William Russell in 1698 it may be conjectured that innovative individuals ceased their trade activities and provided a supply of goods made by others. From handling physical objects, claimed to be essential for the proper observance of a funeral, they were able to make the decisive practical and attitudinal move to become a manager of affairs, a director of supplies, an arbitor of necessary expenditure. From the early 18th century, therefore, individual 'funeral makers' would have become more concerned to sell themselves to an audience than to sell the products of their labour. As both Wagner (1976) and Gittings (1984) indicate, within a mere ten years they were able to show a collective face to prospective customers which could more easily manipulate trade. The vocabulary they used to define both their own capabilities and the requirements of the ceremony must have been suitably expressive for them to have held their newly won adherence and to have extended their public. For 'tradesmen' to have gained and
maintained access to the aristocracy, respectable officials, businessmen, the wealthy and the influential, they would have to ensure that their definition of the situation survived denigration from those they were supplanting.

To bring off their performances in such a way as to convince audiences that they were appropriate to the matter in hand would require that they were seen to be serious in intent. Their motives for acquiring the role, and their possession of ideal qualifications for its efficient performance, would require confirmation by their audiences. Fabrications and unserious offerings would not receive the approbation necessary for the performances to be successfully maintained.

One significant factor would have aided their move to control funeral ceremonies, namely, the response to death exhibited by their audiences. Goffman's comments on methods of manipulating social situations are directly relevant here:-

'The audience senses secret mysteries and powers behind the performance and the performer senses that his chief secrets are all petty ones (...) often the real secret behind the mystery is that there really is no mystery; the real problem is to prevent the audience from learning this too' (Goffman 1969 p61).

Since the secrets in the case of funeral controllers, i.e., undertakers relate to what may easily be regarded as 'disturbing' or 'unclean' work, there is even more need for those who engage in handling bodies to present a front of legitimate specialisation which will deter the unqualified or merely curious from investigation of the supposed mysteries.

Moreover, if the undertaker can show them a successful accomplished ceremony his audience will be led to judge him, as Goffman suggests:- '(...) on the basis of something that has been finished, polished and packaged' (ibid p38) and which in reality contained little effort and no mystery. If the emerging undertaker could maintain solidarity with
fellow performers and keep some distance from the audience or witnesses, then he would have the time and space to develop a control over the situation that would not be easily overthrown by competitors. 'If a performance is to come off, the witnesses by and large must be able to believe that the performers are sincere. This is the structured place of sincerity in the drama of events'. (Goffman ibid p62 : emphasis added)

Whatever the scene to be played, therefore, the successful actor is the one who can convince his audience, and preferably co-actors also, that his act is sincere, his role and his perceived self are integrally bound together and the performance is right for the total production. It is not enough to merely possess the required attitudes; the standards of conduct anticipated by members of the social interaction must also be acknowledged and demonstrated, or reworked to fit the performance about to be revealed. When Goffman notes that 'All the world is, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify' (ibid p63) he understates what his words constantly emphasise, namely that giving adequate performances, maintaining a sense of appropriateness, devising a suitable role, exercising control over the impressions given to others and manifesting a pattern of conduct that will achieve a given status, is the common experience of human beings in society. Dramatic interaction constitutes the social world and inequalities of power, structural preconditions and mortality impose boundaries on unfettered choice of role. The emergent undertaker role devised and developed by the 'Williams Russells' of the 18th Century, has been refined, extended and polished to become the 20th Century director of funerals. The presentation of an occupational self that convinced audiences of its authenticity in the 18th Century must have required that dress, gesture, attitude, commitment and vocabulary were perceived by actor and witness alike as appropriate to the occasion. The necessity is the same in the 20th Century.

The structural aspect of such defining potential is effectively presented by Collins (when writing about Goffman's extension of Durkheimian sociology):-

133
'Ultimately then we have a functional model or a moral-cultural one. Unlike Parsons, Goffman does not find social order to be founded on internalisation of moral obligations; the obligations, rather, come because of the way we encounter pressures from each other in specific situations to help each other construct a consistent definition of reality. In order to live up to this external morality, one is forced to have a non-moral manipulative self as well' (Collins in Ditton 1980 p182).

The actual content of communication is less important than the expressive style in which it is presented, and the development of undertakers into a protective occupational group indicates that their individual performances must have been successfully presented.

An example of the manner in which funeral directors successfully define the funeral situation can be seen in their manipulation of the coffin. It is not as an economic cost that the coffin should be examined, but as a representation. A suitable 'box' is accepted by customers and observers as a representation of a formally correct procedure, carried out effectively and efficiently by suitably qualified practitioners. It reflects the secrets which are to remain concealed from audiences who do not wish to know of their details but who are willing to trust that they are necessary. The evidence of the symbolic box is that all is well with the funeral. It is the 'front' behind which the director and his staff are given licence to perform activities they wish to keep hidden from vulgar opinion and which allows them time and space to prepare an acceptable public performance. The coffin is, therefore, the symbol of customer and director collusion to create an acceptable reality which conceals all kinds of possible discord, dissemblance or dis-ease.

Viewed in this way, the contemporary funeral director is one whose techniques of persuasion are finely tuned to the possibilities inherent in an open market economy, but where pursuit of profit must be masked. This can be accomplished by gaining customer compliance in his own deceit. The manner in which funeral directors have operated since the
early part of this century to protect their collective interests is recounted in the following chapter.

It illustrates the tensions which exist between the dissimilar commitments expressed by individual directors, and between the corporate groupings such as public, private and Co-operative companies. The 'National Association of Funeral Directors' now claims to represent the individuals and the companies who provide about 80% of all funerals in Britain, but its ability to do so must be strongly questioned. Investigation into its origin and subsequent development shows that there has been constant concern within its ranks to convince its membership of the need to pursue common goals, and to produce a convincing and authoritative public image. The search for a collective identity has not succeeded, and behind the facade of a competent organisation, there are dissensions. The differences in attitude and performance that prevent the occupation from producing either a cohesive representative body or a similarity of intent among its members, are not readily perceived by customers. It is the fragmented nature of the occupation, and the manner in which divisions are healed or hidden, that forms the content of the following Chapter.
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138
<table>
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</table>
CHAPTER THREE

FUNERAL DIRECTING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
- THE SEARCH FOR A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>A Fragmented Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>'The Other Side of the Street' - The Co-operative Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>The Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>The Trade Union Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>The Voice of the Private Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>The National Association of Funeral Directors in Search of Higher Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) The Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) The Status Quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>An Established Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Comment on the 'Price Commission Report No.22 Funeral Charges'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FUNERAL DIRECTING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
- THE SEARCH FOR A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

Funeral provision in Britain is offered by businesses which vary in size from the sole-trader operating from his own house or small work-yard who provides perhaps one funeral each week at the most, to the large public company producing more than twenty every week of the year, from a network of branch offices. Between these extremes are the private companies which make up the bulk of the membership, and in which family ownership and involvement is dominant. Such firms range in size from those only marginally larger than the sole-trader to those which have expanded to swallow their smaller competitors and now provide twenty or more funerals each week.

The most commercially successful firms have diversified their business and are now concerned with coffin manufacture, stonemasonry, vehicle construction and car-hire, and the most prestigious family business has developed an Air Freight Company with international connections and high status clients. It should be realised, therefore, that an investigation into the structure of the occupation, and more importantly, into the behaviour and attitudes of those who work in it, must take into account the diversities which exist within it. There are now, for example, a few large public companies in which the provision of funerals is merely a part of a wide range of death-related work. They own crematoria, cemeteries, factories producing chipboard and plastic mouldings, in addition to the retail funeral homes which provide business outlets for their other trading interests. They exercise a considerable influence throughout the funeral trade due to their ability to buy smaller firms in areas they consider suitable for development.

There are, also, many autonomous Co-operative Retail Societies, each controlling a string of branch offices, which undertake to provide funerals, and which are serviced from a few centrally located depots. Significant links have been established between these retailers and the
Co-operative Wholesale Society which manufacturers funeral goods for sale to both the Co-operative and private retailers, but which also owns many funeral retailers itself. These do not trade as 'CWS' but under regional, or even family, names and are not, therefore, recognised as 'CWS' by customers.

The 'normative centre' of the entire occupation is claimed by the small and medium sized firms whose interests are voiced through the trade organisation called 'The National Association of Funeral Directors'. They are the businesses most at risk from take-over by the larger, and economically more powerful firms, whom they regard critically for offering soulless and impersonal service. There is a predominance of family firms in this sector of the occupation and 'paternalism' is an important factor influencing their relationship with the employees.

There is no legislation specifically controlling the running of funeral premises, nor are there statutory requirements to be met before anyone may set up practice as a funeral director. Moreover, no specific qualification, or expertise, is required before any layman can offer his services to the public claiming the occupational title of 'Funeral Director'.

Furthermore, funeral directors are not essential for the disposal of a body, and there is no legal prohibition on the private disposal of a body. Nevertheless, they have become accepted as necessary, not only by the bereaved, but by officials and organisations who have regular contact with the dead. The police, the ambulance service, hospital staff, mortuary attendants and doctors expect funeral directors to assume responsibility for dead bodies, and if they were to disappear abruptly from the public scene the loss of their valuable 'scavenging' contribution to public health and public sensibilities would be immediately visible. The regular employment of funeral workers and the immediate concealment of dead bodies gives some indication of the apprehension, distaste or fear which surrounds contact with the dead in Britain, and goes some way to account for the dominance achieved by funeral directors in controlling the movement of dead bodies.
In addition, however, there is widespread ignorance concerning death procedures and an unwillingness to prepare in advance for such necessities. The legal requirements concerning burial are contained in Public Health Acts, particularly that of 1936, but the great majority of its provisions are concerned with designated disposal sites, such as cemeteries, crematoria and churchyards, or with the proper registration of 'notifiable diseases' which are a hazard to public health. Since there are so few funeral societies in existence to inform the public of alternatives to funeral directors, it is left to one of the few publications dealing with death and funerals, to provide information on private burial. The one paragraph dealing with the topic emphasises the difficulty of actually disposing of the body without using a designated disposal site, and the inference throughout the book is that funeral directors are necessary. It notes:

'If you want to be buried in ground other than a churchyard or cemetery, the law stipulates that such private burials must be registered. Even if you are the freeholder of the land, you must ascertain from the deeds whether the land is restricted in the use to which it may be put. If you want to bury someone in your garden, you must obtain permission from your local planning authority and must give the local public health department an opportunity to object to your proposal. Finally, you must get approval from the Department of the Environment (...). But it is rare for a funeral to be carried out without the services of an undertaker.' (Consumer Association 1967 pp48, 59).

The researcher found, however, that none of the officials contacted during this study, who were connected with local departments of planning, health or environment, realised that a dead body could be buried other than in a formally designated disposal site, nor were they aware of how to respond should a request be made to them. Each referred the questioner to a funeral director, believing him to be the authority on disposal. Directors, themselves, did not know the legal requirements concerning a private burial, nor were they concerned to seek them out. An individual wishing to dispense with the services of a funeral
director would find the legal requirements relating to a death individually simple but collectively tedious, time-consuming and, possibly, unpleasant to perform since they constantly focus on the official details of the deceased. Such involvement with the impersonal and official registration of an individual who carried powerful affective meanings for them may be felt to be unbearable.

The combination of emotional distancing, practical ignorance and common acceptability may account for the regular employment of funeral directors, irrespective of the actual skills they possess or the complexity of the legal requirements surrounding death. As will be shown in detail later in this study, directors and their staff regard themselves as indispensable for the disposal of the body and the construction of a funeral, and severely criticise the few bereaved who seek to accomplish the task themselves. Funeral service workers will be shown to share their employers dislike of the bereaved who ignore the services offered by the funeral occupation. They demonstrate in very many cases, a supportive identification with the work-norms of the proprietors. They are characterised by long-service in the occupation, limited Trade Union involvement and semi-skilled manual work. This is frequently carried out in formal, clean and public circumstances more indicative of a 'white-collar' occupation.

In this chapter I examine the diversity of interests that are not readily observed by the public who use the occupation, and explore the efforts that have been made to create a unified body of practitioners from individually distinctive units. Their search for a collective identity is weakened by the disparate goals each group of practitioners seeks to gain, and by the significant differences in self-identity presented by members of the occupation, whether workers or proprietors.

A reference must be made to the only official investigation made of the occupation, even though its terms of reference were strictly limited to an examination of funeral prices. The study was conducted by the Price Commission and its Report covered the years 1972-76 (Price Commission Report 1977). Its conclusions were based on a sample postal
questionnaire sent to 435 funeral businesses of which only the 111 who provided details for the four consecutive years 1972-76, were used for statistical analysis (a 25% sample). The Report does not state how the sample was chosen, nor what proportion were members of the NAFD.

The Report was concerned to assess the 'fairness' of funeral pricing not to analyse the performance given by Directors or employees, nor the behaviour, assumptions or goals of those whose work formed the basis of the occupation. It acknowledged that the precise number of individual Directors or of funeral businesses operating in the United Kingdom is unobtainable, because not all firms who carry out funerals trade as 'funeral directors', and individuals who conduct funerals may not choose to call themselves by that title. Furthermore, many who trade as funeral directors do not join the NAFD and cannot be easily traced.

The Commission estimated that there are at least 3,700 funeral directors in the United Kingdom, that about 2,150 of them belong to the NAFD (about 60%) and they handle about 80% of all funerals. Furthermore, the Report states that about 80% of all funeral firms carry out five or less funerals per week maintaining that small firms still form the core of the occupation (ibid p4).

The total United Kingdom market for funerals was about 650,000 per annum (1977), distributed in the following way:

- **PUBLIC COMPANIES** 10% )
- **CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES** 25% ) of all funerals per annum
- **PRIVATE COMPANIES** 65% )

and these figures are similar to those given to me during this study from a wide range of informants.

The Commission received the abnormally high response rate of 94% to their postal questionnaire. This may indicate that respondents fully supported the aim of the survey and did not consider the questions in any way harmful to their occupational image. Alternatively, it may have
been due to the official status of the investigating body, even though it lacked powers of compulsion, or to a combination of both factors. The Commission did not detail the methods of investigation they employed, nor comment on the scale of the response. It concerned itself primarily with the self-reported financial circumstances of the firms who replied. The Secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection had referred the occupation to the Price Commission in response to complaints about the high charges made by funeral directors (Price Commission p3).

The Commission categorised firms by the average number of (self-reported) funerals conducted each year between 1972-76, and by the structure of the business, as follows:-

(a) Up to 250 funerals per year
   251 - 500 funerals per year
   501 - 1000 funerals per year
   Over 1000 funerals per year

(b) Co-operative Societies
    Public Companies
    Private Companies
    (ibid pp10, 13, 15)

It analysed them on the basis of their average charge for a funeral, on their presumed share of the market, on their turnover per £000 and on their profit per director and business. It conclusively demonstrated that profits:-

'(...) are generous if not on the high side for all but the small firms' (ibid p17) and

'The funeral director's average charge for the completed coffin (...) represents (...) a 'mark-up of over 100%, as the contribution to overheads and profit' (ibid p10 : emphasis added)
A careful reading indicates that the Report failed to accomplish its stated aim namely '(...) to redress the balance in favour of the client' (ibid p37) since it conspicuously avoided recommending measures to change what it referred to as '(...) higher profits than necessary (and) an absence of competition' (ibid p37). An examination of the Report's weaknesses are given at the end of this Chapter.

The Report did not emphasise the disparity between firms that have funeral service as their dominant interest and those that do not. Sole traders, for whom funerals are but a side-line to their regular trade, are not identified, nor are the public companies whose trading activities extend to encompass a far wider range of interests than that of the specialist private companies for whom funerals are central. Therefore the following categorisation is developed to encompass such differences:-

(ONE)

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<td>Retail</td>
<td>Small</td>
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<td>2. Private Company</td>
<td>Specialised</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Small to Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Public Company</td>
<td>Diversified</td>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>Medium, and Retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Co-operative Society</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversified</td>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>Large</td>
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NOTE

SUPPLEMENTAL : Refers to the provision of funerals as marginal to other trading operations

SPECIALISED : Refers to the provision of funerals as central to both business operation and self-identification

DIVERSIFIED : Refers to the provision of funerals as relevant to wider trading activities
In this form, size of business, trading orientation and type of business can be linked together in a manner not possible with the Price Commission Report, and the variations between businesses, all of which produce funerals, can be better understood.

Nevertheless, even this reformulation does not take into account the influence of family, which pervades the entire occupation and provides one of the most powerful motivations for entering and developing funeral service. The information provided in this study will confirm that kinship ties exercise considerable influence on the structure of the occupation as a whole, and specific firms in particular. Many children accept the duties imposed on them by ties of family loyalty with great reluctance, as recorded in later chapters, but the link between a family name and a given locality is one of the most fundamental aspects of the funeral occupation.

By separating sole-traders from private companies, (which sometimes do not differ significantly in the number of funerals they produce each year), it is possible to emphasise the difference in orientation that exists between the small one man business engaged in building, decorating, removals, sign-writing, carpentry etc., and the small family business in which funerals are the only activity. Many sole-traders cannot assess the proportion of their total income gained from funerals and many do not wish to classify themselves as funeral directors, nor to join the NAFD. Many cannot join the NAFD, though they would like to do so, because they lack the certain minimum conditions, such as a 'Chapel of Rest' demanded by the NAFD before they will grant membership. Such sole-traders are usually to be found in villages or small towns but cannot be accurately located, counted or financially assessed. They may
have to hire a hearse and limousine from the nearest specialised funeral director, (the 'carriage-masters' as they are known throughout the trade), since providing one funeral each week or fortnight, does not justify buying and maintaining such costly vehicles. Nevertheless, many of them show total dedication to the role of 'undertaker' as most of them still prefer to call themselves, and are proud of their local standing as 'honest craftsmen' whose integrity is recognised throughout their community. Selling oneself through ones labours is a constantly recurring theme throughout the occupation, and it is nowhere more convincingly felt and demonstrated than among the sole-traders and small family businesses where probity and dedication are believed to identify the 'proper' funeral provider.

The evidence that is presented in Chapter Five illustrates each type of business that is to be found in the occupation and examines the manner in which funeral directors not only regard themselves as occupants of a particular category, but also how they identify others who they regard with suspicion or distaste. In this chapter, however, the central issue is to trace the historical development of 'funeral director' as an occupational career; one in which the respectability of its representatives is presented as justification for a superior moral and occupational status. To the general public the term 'funeral director' refers to skilled resource available to be used at time of death. In the following pages we shall trace what the same words signify for those who claim the title and for those whom they employ. Behind the public mask of serious, well intentioned, skillful people ready and able to provide an immediate service at a time of deep unhappiness, resides a complex interplay of competing aspirations. There is not a single 'reality' to be exposed to view but a variety of contending definitions in which status, profit and probity are counter-balanced. Funeral directors seek to distance themselves from mere 'undertakers' failing to recognise that from the early 18th Century to the late 19th Century 'undertakers' flourished as masters of ceremonies and were not merely local craftsmen who undertook a funeral when specifically called on to do so.

152
The information contained below is a synthesis of the 'accounting' given by members of the occupation, most of whom are detailed in Chapter Five. The detailed history of the NAFD is derived from an examination of all the formal records of the Association held at their headquarters. The Trade Union details have been gained from the National Officials and from Branch Secretaries who were also examined as workers in particular businesses.

**A FRAGMENTED OCCUPATION**

The small businesses are in process of being taken over by larger family concerns, and, moving in to engulf them all wherever profitable, are the powerful public companies. These are few in number at the moment, but the Great Southern Group of companies in Southern England, Ingall and Parsons of Birmingham, and the North Cheam Trading Company (registered in the Isle of Man), epitomise the growth of diversified companies, whose interests lie beyond the relatively narrow confines of funeral service, for example in owning and controlling crematoria and cemeteries. Small businesses still predominate in Britain, but the volume of work captured by the big institutions, such as the Co-operative Societies and the Great Southern Group, is steadily increasing.

It was ownership that first brought individual funeral directors together in 1905. Some of them wished to form a trade organisation to protect their business interests, and to seek an improvement in their occupational status. In the past 80 years the organisation they founded has developed into the National Association of Funeral Directors (referred to henceforth as the N.A.F.D.), and it now claims to represent about 80% of all 'funeral directors'. Most businesses are family owned, and a few have developed into large organisations, owning a chain of funeral directing businesses. In many cases they have bought existing family businesses rather than open new premises. The N.A.F.D. have several categories of membership, so that ancillary services can be included, and since 1980 there has been a limitation of full membership to those who have obtained its own diploma within two years of joining
the association. The core of the membership is composed of private business employers, and it is business practice which occupies most of the association's energies and interests. The evidence gathered from the official journals reflects the association's central concern with business success and occupational status. It is on the evidence contained in the association's official journal and collected papers that the following assessments are made.

Following the end of the 1914-18 War, several Co-operative Societies introduced a funeral service for their customers, and encouraged them to begin saving with them in preparation for a future need. Customers were able to use the 'Dividend' facility for funerals as for every other purchase within the Co-operative Society. Private membership was therefore challenged by an apparently monolithic competitor, and was viewed with apprehension and frequently with hostility by the small family business man. Gradually Co-operative funeral directors sought, and gained membership within the N.A.F.D. and took part in N.A.F.D. Diploma Courses, when they were instituted. The Co-operative Societies conduct their business affairs as independent units within the Co-operative movement, and not all of them are successful with funeral servicing. However, the giant Co-operative Wholesale Society, centred in Glasgow, does provide goods to Co-operative funeral departments at lower prices when they are purchased in bulk, (and to buyers outside the movement also) and this led many private business directors to over-estimate the economic power of their Co-operative competitors.

The employees, who were needed to carry out the every day activities involved in funeral work could find themselves in widely different circumstances, depending on the type of commercial enterprise they entered. There were small family businesses in which owner-director and worker co-operated in every day activities and came to share a similar private-practice pride; there were large Co-operative branches in which both the director and the worker were employees, but separated by a hierarchical status distinction; there were large bureaucratically organised public companies in which employees would be working in small branch offices and therefore distanced from the decision-making
management. From 1917, employees who produced a wide range of funeral services by working as carpenters, joiners, carvers, masons, clerical workers, drivers, etc., sought to establish Trade Unions to protect their work interests. By 1965 a single Union had developed which had all funeral service occupations included in it, called the National Union of Funeral Service Operatives (N.U.F.S.O.). Employees, therefore, were generally referred to as 'operatives' if their working conditions and Trade Union membership was the focus of attention, but this term was rarely used by private employers, who preferred to speak of their 'workers' or their 'men'. Even the fully Unionised private businesses, and the Co-operatives (which are totally Unionised), rarely used the term 'operative', preferring to use terms such as 'worker', 'men' or the more specific titles of 'driver', 'bearer', 'garage hand' or 'coffin-maker'. N.U.F.S.O. was never able to get every worker in the funeral trade to join them, rather than a Union which stressed the particular skill they possessed. The Transport Union (T.G.W.U.), retained a hold on drivers, and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (U.S.D.A.W.), held on to many whose work was primarily clerical, especially women.

It is possible, therefore, to identify four separate interest groups operating under the general classification of 'funeral service', each seeking to influence the manner in which 'service' is to be implemented, and each identifying its own specific work-role.

Firstly, there is the Co-operative Movement in which common characteristics link the many autonomous Societies, and which is widely regarded by the other sections of the funeral trade as a monolithic competitor.

Secondly, there are the employees, the semi-skilled manual work force, who do the bulk of the body handling work but little of the face-to-face client negotiations. They are the 'men', the 'workforce', the 'Operatives', who sell their labour power to the proprietors.
Thirdly, there is the Trade Union (once N.U.F.S.O. now F.T.A.T.) which though well organised and efficiently led, is small in number and weak in workshop influence. The negotiating skills of its leadership has provided better pay and conditions of work for all members of the workforce but its ideological influence is not commensurate with its practical achievements.

Fourthly, there are the employers, the core of the occupation, the people (almost exclusively men), who are the funeral directors and regard themselves as the creators and representatives of the occupation. As owners of businesses and hirers of labour power they are the proprietors, those who make the occupation what it appears to be to the lay public.

The pressures deriving from these four disparate sources will be examined in the following pages, to indicate how their interests coincide or conflict in the production of funeral service.

There is, however, a basic problem of definition concerning the title 'funeral director' since it is used to refer to different aspects of a funeral role. Even though the classification is most regularly used to refer to proprietorship it is, nevertheless, constantly used to identify either a performance or a status without proprietorship, for example, it is used as:-

1. an Associational Classification, whereby membership of the N.A.F.D. is the defining characteristic

2. a Competence Classification, which necessitates the possession of a Diploma of Funeral Directing

3. an Activity Classification, whereby the title is claimed by, and accorded to, an individual who regularly 'meets clients', arranges and 'conducts' funerals, and acts in a leadership role

The fourth and most commonly used approach is the
4. **Proprietorship Classification**, whereby ownership of a funeral directing business is the defining characteristic

When the term 'funeral director' is used, it may refer to someone who fits within all four classifications, an 'authentic' funeral director might be a way to describe such an individual. However, an employee who is a Grade One Operative in a branch office, and who regularly 'conducts' funerals which he has personally organised, is regarded as a funeral director by the uninitiated client and by himself and his peers. No Co-operative funeral workers are owners, yet almost every branch office will have an employee, (with the Diploma in Funeral Directing from the N.A.F.D.), who controls all funeral procedures, and thereby is accorded distinction as a funeral director. Those who work in the occupation know the distinctions that exist, and the permutations that are possible. Those who use their services, possibly once or twice in a lifetime are rarely sensitive to the subtleties of title.

Throughout this work the term 'funeral director' has been primarily used to refer to proprietors, since that accords with general usage by clients and by the N.A.F.D. In my search to find exactly how many individuals publicly claim to be 'funeral director', I realised that:

(a) there are no official figures to show how many individuals operate as funeral directors, although, as mentioned above, the Price Commission Report No.22 - 'Funeral Directing', estimates at least 3,700 in the United Kingdom.

(b) there are no official figures to show how many businesses operate as funeral directors in the U.K.

(c) any individual can operate as a funeral director so long as he or she observes normal business regulations. No one who does so need gain certification of any kind, join any association, nor maintain any specific code of occupational conduct
It is similarly difficult to get complete information on employees. It is estimated by Trade Union leaders that about 7,000 people, predominantly men, work directly and permanently in the funeral service with another 7,000 employed in a part-time capacity; that about 4,000 of them are in Trade Unions and that of these, 3,000 are in the funeral workers union, (now assimilated into The Furniture Timber and Allied Trades Union - F.T.A.T.).

In the following pages I clarify the work situation of the interest groups that I have identified and examine in detail the N.A.F.D., which claims to speak on behalf of the occupation as a whole, even though it primarily represents the interests of the proprietors of private companies.

'THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET' - THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

It is estimated that the Co-operative Societies between them carry out approximately 25% of all funerals in Britain. They are widely regarded with hostility by the private sector who, mistakenly, regard them as part of one, monolithic, competitor. Furthermore, they claim, unjustifiably, that the Co-operatives offer uniformly low levels of service. In fact each Society is separately organised and financed and the standard of service is observably not inferior to the majority of those in the private sector.

Managers in Co-operative Societies not only deny these charges but argue that they suffer operational drawbacks not common to the private trade. They suggest that since all employees are Union Members their basic labour costs are higher than most private sector employers have to bear, since the private sector has many non-union workers. Secondly, they believe that they are forced to keep their premises to a higher health and safety standard because Co-operatives have their own Inspectors who regularly check premises. It is widely known throughout the occupation that Government Inspectors very rarely visit funeral establishments. The suggestion that the Co-operatives had a captive market, who were encouraged to buy funerals through 'Dividends', is
discounted. Officials say that this was not the main reason for members choosing the Co-operative and claim that if it was, historically, it has long ceased to be so.

Throughout this study it is argued that clients do not weigh carefully the choice of funeral director but rely heavily on personal feelings or the advice of others that they trust. In one of the few official investigations into how funeral expenses are incurred, and paid, this view is reinforced:-

'It is clear that financial motivations play little part in the choice of funeral director and that the bereaved is on the whole uninterested in the monetary details of the service he is buying. (...) quite clearly this is an area where what counts above all is the quality of service and reputation, and it is upon that reputation that the undertaker relies for his custom' (Families, Funerals and Finances 1980 p45 : emphasis added).

Furthermore, 36% of the bereaved questioned (total number 1,819) cited previous experience of the undertaker by themselves or their family as a reason for going to them; 33% had been recommended to go by somebody else and 22% knew the undertaker or one of his family personally, whereas only 4% 'always went to the Co-op' and 2% mentioned financial reasons (ibid p44). If the Co-ops can gain 25% of the market then on this evidence it cannot be as a consequence of possessing a captive market nor the attraction of a dividend, but as a consequence of reputation.

The bulk-buying facilities available to the Co-op retail outlets are minimised by Co-operative Officials who claim that the private sector could buy in bulk from the CWS if they wished. It is, therefore, economies of scale that give an advantage to some and not others; it is the size of the organisation that is the determining factor, not special Co-operative trading practices. Interestingly, the CWS owns very many retain outlets and some of them are funeral businesses, (such as those trading as the 'South Surburban Co-operative Society' in South London).
Nevertheless, its charges to its own retailers are higher than to the other co-operative retailers. The RACS, for example, can get a 2.5% discount on their own overall purchases from CWS, yet this is denied to the CWS owned branch offices. Officials provided 'proof' to support their claims to fair competition: in 1982 the massive London Co-operative Society faltered, possibly due to its over-extension from Watford through North London to Southend. It has been taken over by the Co-operative Retail Services, which was originally set up to help ailing Societies who did not wish to be swallowed by the powerful CWS. They stress, therefore, that being a Co-operative does not guarantee business success. The funeral services they provide are competitively successful, since (along with Travel and Milk), they alone were commercially successful in the old LCS and the funeral service is being expanded by the CRS as the new owners.

Nevertheless, this is a little disingenuous because the CWS is very powerful and does link the otherwise autonomous retail Societies together. It controls the Co-operative Banks, supports the entire Co-operative Movement in industrial and legal affairs, and, as mentioned above, gives trading discounts to most of its retailers, who are also affiliated to it. Furthermore, the CWS has 50% of the shares in the CRS and may well take over the London interests held by them. This interlocking pattern may well produce a structural stability which benefits all its parts. The strength of the Societies seemed to derive from their purchasing power, and the economies available to large scale transactions. Co-operative funeral managers are members of the Co-operative Funeral Service Managers Association (CFSMA) and this operates to maintain standards and to share information. The consequence of these combined factors is, in the view of the researcher, that all Co-operative funeral retailers offer a relatively similar service and facility to clients; that this service is certainly not of a lower standard than the private sector offers in the majority of its premises; and that the really poor quality services are to be found elsewhere, that is within certain private sector establishments which not only lack resources, but over-emphasise their standards. The more enlightened members in the private sector do not regard the
Co-operatives as the black-sheep of the funeral business but merely as resourceful and powerful competitors, who service the working class more than the middle and upper sectors of British society. Many funeral workers in the Co-operative Society take the N.A.F.D. Diploma (much to the chagrin of some N.A.F.D. members who regard such Co-operative members as the enemy within). Those Co-operative members that gain the Diploma, or the British Institute of Embalmers Diploma (B.I.E.) receive a £30 cash award from the Co-operative Society in which they work.

Surprisingly, perhaps, in the Agreement between the CWS and FTAT, the only stipulated requirements before a worker can be employed as a funeral director are:

(a) a valid driving licence

(b) Trade Union Membership

(c) Six months practical experience

As noted earlier, to be called 'funeral director' may require little effort, and demand only basic skills. However, to be a Senior Director in the CWS, the individual must possess the N.A.F.D. or British Institute of Embalmers Diploma. To rise further in the Co-operative Movement, promotion to the Grade of 'Official' is necessary, and this is an administrative, not a funeral directing, role.

There is, therefore, a considerable difference between employees in the Co-operative Movement and those in the private sector. The Co-operatives have a hierarchy of occupational achievement, whereby any employee can, theoretically, rise to top positions, and exercise a vote to decide policy. In practice very few do so, and many adopt a passive work-role, similar to that commonly found among employees in the private sector.
'Operative' is the technical, Trade Union term given to employees (Graded One or Two). They perform the bulk of the body handling work, coffin preparation, bearing, driving, maintenance and cleaning work without which there would be no funeral service. In the main they do not conduct funerals, nor deal directly with clients, nor claim to be 'Directors'. Nevertheless, those that do perform these tasks regularly are 'Directors' in the practical sense, since they meet the public, plan funerals and conduct the funeral procession, even though they are not owners of funeral businesses.

Many owners in the private sector refer to their own employees as funeral 'workers', since 'Operative' is the formal Trade Union term, and they wish to have as little to do with Trade Unions as possible. 'Operative' is defined as any person who fits the job description agreed between Union and Employer.

A Grade Two Operative automatically becomes a Grade One Operative when he can carry out the following two services:

(a) drive a vehicle and

(b) prepare a coffin

There are, therefore, very few Grade Two Operatives to be found in the occupation. Moreover, it is a Grade One Operative who is expected, in the absence of the Manager, to substitute for him, by conducting, and performing a Director's role.

Most employees spend their time in large garages, untidy workrooms, cold refrigerator rooms and sparsely furnished rest rooms. Part of their time, however, is devoted to picking up bodies from mortuaries, (since most people now die in institutions not homes), and lifting them into and out of containers. This is the work most carefully concealed from the public and, arguably, the most distasteful. Their public
appearance, fittingly dressed and suitably sombre, is only a small part of their weekly work. It is regarded by them almost as a reward for doing so many routine tasks in workshop conditions. Most operatives in small firms leave their routine tasks to carry out each funeral, then return from the spotlight to obscurity.

THE TRADE UNION FACTOR

Of the, approximately, 7,000 workers in the funeral occupation, about 42% are in FTAT, (The Furniture Timber and Allied Trades Union). Most of them are in full-time employment since the part-time workers tend to regard union involvement as unnecessary. In addition to those in FTAT, there are about 250 drivers who chose to join the TGWU, (The Transport and General Workers Union) and approximately 650 clerical and administrative workers, mostly women, in USDAW (The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers Union). Just over half the total workforce, therefore, are members of a Union, but they are unevenly distributed throughout the occupation. Whereas Co-operative firms are fully unionised, many small, privately owned firms, have perhaps one union member, and some proprietors go to extreme lengths to discourage participation in a Union, regarding it as inimical to their own proprietorial influence.

The first Trade Union formed to protect funeral workers was the BUFW (The British Union of Funeral Workers), in 1917, and this was enlarged in 1947 to become the NUFCW (The National Union of Funeral and Cemetery Workers). In 1965 this was replaced by NUFSO (The National Union of Funeral Service Operatives) and ultimately this was incorporated into FTAT to become its 'Funeral Section' with the General Secretary becoming a Section Organiser. He still effectively controls the daily affairs of the funeral workers, but is now both supported and circumscribed by his employment in the larger union.

The 750 London members of the funeral section of FTAT negotiate directly with the London Association of Funeral Directors (LAFD) and their agreements tend to be accepted nationally as the highest negotiating
levels. This situation developed because the NAFD opposes any form of national negotiation, which may weaken the bargaining power they have when dealing with purely local branches of a Union. (Moreover since the NAFD does not speak for all Directors, they cannot be assured of total support if they negotiate nationally.) FTAT concludes agreements with each separate Co-operative Society, (the CWS providing, in their view, the most comprehensive and satisfactory example of what can be achieved by negotiation), but would like to develop a national bargaining organisation for the whole funeral trade. This has been consistently and resolutely opposed by the NAFD.

When the Union, (NUFSO as it was at the time), called an overtime ban followed by a strike call in 1977, to further their claim for pay improvements during the Government's 'pay-freeze', they only obtained partial support from members. Many operatives felt uneasy when asked to deprive the bereaved of an expected funeral; others felt that this action hurt the relatives more than the owners, many of whom could store the dead in refrigerators and wait for adverse public opinion to be generated against the Union through a generally unsympathetic press. Within the private sector many workers sided with their employers and refused to strike. However, it has been suggested to me by several respondents that it was the failure of the Co-operative Operatives to support wholeheartedly the Union's call to action which was decisive. If they could not be relied on, then the Union's credibility was weakened. It was this weakening of confidence, (so critics of the Union assert), that convinced the Union leadership that they must conclude a merger with a stronger Union when the strike was over. However, the Trade Union officials tell me that the merger had been prepared for some time, (most of the coffin-makers were already members of FTAT), and that the timing, so soon after a seemingly indecisive strike action, was fortuitous. Furthermore, they argue that, as a consequence of the action, all workers actually benefited by obtained pay increases that would otherwise have been withheld. The merger was a necessary and logical development, not a hasty retreat, they claim.
A few workers have become Licentiate members of the NAFD because they have gained its Diploma whilst Grade One Operatives and have then acted in administrative and Directing roles. Many operatives willingly accept the paternalism that frequently prevails in family businesses, and emphasise the companionship that exists between them and their 'guv'nor'. They identify with the owners and are unlikely to side with the Union when controversy develops. They share with their employers a belief that working, as they claim, in a 'caring-service', loyalty to an ideal of altruism comes before commitment to a Union.

The 'committed' Trade Unionist frequently regards the owners as smooth operators, who, in seeking to exploit their commercial market, emphasise the similarity of worker and employer by encouraging a spurious common interest. The gullible or passive workers they regard a exhibiting a degree of 'false-consciousness', (none of them actually used this phrase - it is my condensation of their expressed criticism). They believe them to be ignorant of the true extent of their exploitation.

Workers who do not believe that a conflict of interests separates them from the proprietors are to be found throughout the occupation. They have worked alongside their employers and shared their experiences; are on friendly first-name terms with them, frequently having seen the older 'boss' succeeded by his son. Their work experience has commonly been gained as part of a small group, within which the significance of owner and employee is set aside in the interests of producing a funeral which will reflect credit on the firm. A good production will not only result in future work, but will ensure that morale is high, public 'face' is gained, and self-esteem protected. The fact that, on retirement, their loyalty to the firm is not rewarded financially, and that most of them will depend on a State pension, does not appear to weaken their sense of identification with those whose ownership of the firm ensures them a 'more than comfortable living', (according to the Price Commission Report No.22 ibid).

The Union, therefore, fights a difficult battle to gain and to keep operatives, when psychologically so many workers identify with their
employers. It has achieved significant material benefits, not only for its members but for all those manual workers in the occupation whose employers have concluded an agreement with the Union. The benefit of Union membership was stressed by one worker who said that in no way would he accept promotion in the CWS, since by dint of 'call-out' pay (a form of overtime for work outside normal hours) and other extras achieved by Union negotiation, he earned more than his Manager, who was on a fixed salary without commission. Many such workers adopt a 'pragmatic' approach to both Union membership and to their position as funeral workers, seeking self-advantage in whatever manner is practicable and giving no commitment to either Union or proprietor.

The factors which combine to limit the effectiveness of the Union can be summarized as follows:-

(a) small membership

(b) most workers are in family businesses with paternalistic overtones

(c) a high proportion of older, long serving workers

(d) a fairly high rate of resignation of young, new recruits who might be expected to challenge traditional practices

(e) the workers constant exposure to a 'service' ethic promulgated by their employers, which leads them to place work needs before self-interest

(f) in the private sector there is a tendency to take on part-time labour (particularly at times of economic pressure on the firm) which weakens collective solidarity since so few part-time workers join a Union

(g) many workers have come from jobs in which stressed hierarchy, rule-keeping, duty and service, such as Ambulance, Fire, Police and Security Services
(h) workers receive 'perks' to offset discomforts or hardships, such as
good quality clothes (suit, shirt, tie, cap, raincoat, socks)
suitable overtime payments, expensive vehicles to drive, slack
periods with little pressure of work, and public affirmation of
their usefulness

(i) a sense of 'camaraderie' developed by working together in small
groups to produce a jointly-staged ceremony

It is this last aspect of 'team performances' developed within small
firms in which all tasks are highly visible and frequently overlapping,
that is the most highly significant. It makes selfishness unpardonable,
limits the horizon of interests, and emphasises the central importance
of 'the firm'. In this way collective action in support of Trade Union
ideals is regarded with indifference or hostility. The combination of
psychological and practical pressures experienced by the operatives
reduces the likelihood of them regarding themselves as exploited or
dis advantaged. Employers do not need to show a cohesive and determined
face in order to repel assaults on their dominant position – they
survive as a consequence of a fragmented opposition. Fragmentation
within the occupation in general manifestly exists: it limits both
status improvement among the owners, and negotiating strength within the
Union. Nevertheless, the Price Commission Report said that most funeral
directors made a comfortable profit. This is due partly to the fact
that they employ a supportive work force who do not identify themselves
as oppressed workers in need of a strong, countervailing Trade Union.

In spite of the disadvantages and limitations accruing to the Union,
examined in detail above, the Union has achieved considerable advantages
for the manual work force, whether they participate in the Union or not.
It is not widely appreciated among the workers that during the
Government's 'Pay Freeze' of 1977, the LAFD offered to pay £2.50 in
response to the Union pressure for a pay increase. This offer was
limited, however, to drivers only, so long as they worked through their
dinner hour, (£2 as overtime and 50p for dinner). The Union called an
overtime ban, and then a full strike. This lasted for nine days, and
even though it was only supported by about one third of London's Unionists, it was successful. The television coverage of the strike was fair and supportive of the Union case; the newspapers were predominantly concerned to present 'human interest' stories, which frequently portrayed the Union as indifferent to the needs of the bereaved, and among them, The Daily Express was extremely hostile to the National Secretary. The Union leaders were frequently on Local Radio and, in a live debate with the LAFD representative, they were given strong support by the phone-in listeners.

The dispute was negotiated by ACAS who proposed that the increase should be £2.75 (not the £2.50 offered) and that it should be paid to every worker, including, therefore, non-drivers and office staff (mainly women). The strike was called off when both sides accepted the ACAS recommendation. The Union has maintained careful negotiations with the London employers and as an indication of their success, they have achieved better pay and conditions for their members than TGWU and USDAW have for their members who work in the funeral trade. Instead of picketing the funeral homes at the time of the strike the Union gave out leaflets, explaining their low pay and anti-social hours and, at railway and bus stations they received considerable public sympathy. One factor that helped them in their fight was the continuing fear of publicity among the owners. There has been, and remains, a deep-seated distrust of publicity among employers, who have never mounted an efficient presentation of their occupational claims. Therefore, even though the chief depot of the main London Co-operative did not support the strike, the other three depots did so. Even though two-thirds of the Union members in London did not strike, the tactics and well-argued case brought an improvement in pay and conditions which are still maintained.

In May, 1983, proposals were being considered to set up a Joint Industrial Council for the Funeral Service, (similar to the British Furniture Trade Joint Council which, since 1945, has established formal negotiating conditions between employers and employees within the entire furniture trade). If successful, this will significantly buttress the Union.
In conclusion, it would appear that, in spite of its difficulties, a small well-organised Union can achieve far greater success in securing improved working conditions for its members, than is apparent from a superficial reading. It has survived the fragmentation I referred to earlier, because its leaders are knowledgeable, and operate within a specifically limited area of negotiation. They are also able to keep in close touch with their members, since they are not too numerous to visit personally.

The Union leadership has sprung from workers with a long experience of funeral work and they know intimately the circumstances in which their members operate. They are not separated from the rank and file membership by the creation of a centralised bureaucracy of any magnitude and, since their members are constantly involved in every aspects of funeral work, they know the financial details involved in running a funeral business. Significantly, the Union leadership does not accept the self-evaluation of the owners. They regard them as business-men, willing to exploit the market in whatever way possible, therefore, the labour power of the work-force will be merely another, but highly sensitive, factor of production which they seek to control. The Union leaders believe that, with their detailed knowledge of the market, they can prevent the exploitation of their members, even without the wholehearted support of all members.

Working within a competitive market system both employers and Trade Unionists seek to obtain maximum returns on their input. The employers seek to conceal from the public any conflict that arises as a consequence of industrial bargaining, since a unified public face is essential for their claim to provide efficient service. The Union also seeks to avoid public confrontation with employers since a bad public image will harm the entire occupation and weaken their claim on workers allegiance.
It is now appropriate to focus on the central figures in this company of performers – the proprietors of private companies, who lay claim to control the collective identity of the occupation. They have combined to form a trade Association through which they hoped to gain business success and higher status. From 1920, the 'British Undertakers Association' began publishing a monthly journal, and it members committed their ideas to print. Consequently, since they wrote for contemporaries and not for posterity, they expressed their interests, fears, problems and goals as they experienced them at the time. By writing to the journal, those in the private sector of the occupation, who owned businesses and who wished to be represented by a Trade Association, have produced an informal but highly detailed record of historical change. Outlined in it is the self-regard and emotional stance taken by the rank and file, as well as the official position reached by Conference decisions. Consequently their letters, proposals, reports, complaints and fears, make the journal the only intimate source of knowledge of how funeral directors regarded themselves. This is raw data which has lain virtually undisturbed since each bound volume was added. My present work has been the first to examine it systematically, and the following extracts are provided to reflect the essential concerns of the members, as they saw them. The selection obviously reflects my personal interest and bias, nevertheless, the theme I pursue is firmly rooted in the material, and not marginal to, or imposed on it. No doubt subsequent researchers will focus on other interests, but the patterns they identify will not, I believe, substantially challenge that which I present, namely the preoccupation with status. Certainly, by compressing over seventy years of information into a few pages, no claim to comprehensive reporting will be made. Nevertheless, the common interest that I identify is not a consequence of my selectivity, but of the members own occupational definition.

The NAFD is now composed of 16 Area Federations and 82 Local Associations, with national headquarters in London, staffed by four
full-time workers, none of whom have been in the funeral business. It claims to speak on behalf of most owners (although that word is appropriate, the title chosen for the Association is 'Directors'). Many members merely use the Association 'instrumentally', as many workers use their Trade Union. The Association does not provide much information about itself, frequently seeming to regard questioners with suspicion. The Statistical Library at the Department of Trade expressed surprise that the NAFD did not feel the need to provide even them with information. Many respondents said they found it difficult to understand why an Association, seeking to establish its reputation, does virtually nothing to announce its existence on the national scene, nor to seek public support for its aims. How, therefore, does it come to be at its present position and what is its collective goal?

THE BEGINNING

On June 10th, 1905, a small group of practising funeral directors met in a Birmingham hotel to discuss the future of their occupation. One of them had called the meeting by contacting fellow Directors, suggesting that they form an organisation to protect and develop their work. Handwritten records were kept of this, and subsequent meetings, until 1915, but there are no records for the years between 1915 and 1923.

The first meeting resulted in the formation of the British Undertakers Association (BUA), composed of regional organisations loosely connected through the national association. From 1920 the BUA published a monthly journal ('The BUA Monthly') but no copies are available for the early period between its inception, in 1920, to July, 1923. It is from this journal, subsequently renamed, that the following extracts are taken.

From 1917 the British Undertakers Association was registered as a Trade Union in order to restrict entry to the occupation by undesirable exploiters but, following the discontents of the General Strike, voices were raised urging a change of status. This claim to higher status has been the central preoccupation voiced within the journal from that time up to, and including, the present date (1985).
In 1926, November, the Bradford Co-operative Society was using the 'BUA Monthly' to urge its members to be loyal to the Society and to use the newly opened funeral service it provided. In that same year, 1926, October, the 'Monthly' in discussing the origins of the occupation, suggested that the term 'undertaker' had been used since 1614 when certain people 'undertook' to get persons returned to Parliament for a fee, and therefore there was no historical justification for, (and no dictionary entry to support), using the term 'undertaker' for burying the dead! This was in opposition to the claim made earlier, 1924, (June p694), that in the sixteenth century 'upholders' were responsible for funeral estate monies, servants wages and 'Ancient Escutcheons' i.e. caring for and altering heraldic devices. This is the most probable origin of the title.

DEVELOPMENT

Whatever they felt their origins to be, in 1926, (November p102), the official voice of the BUA was asserting that they were a separate Union trying to get workers to patronise only those firms employing Union Labour. In retrospect, it appears that a real shift in outlook began the following year when in 1927, (March p184), space is given to the speech from the Throne which claimed the intent to 'revise Trade Union Law - to rid Trade Unions of the tyrannical control of extremists - but none of these proposals is opposed to legitimate Trade Union functions'. The General Strike was said to be illegal and, therefore, those who called one should lose immunity from being held liable under Trade Union Acts.

The BUA's Annual Conference in 1926 had postponed a decision to change their status for one year, but voices were already raised in the 1926, (August) edition of the journal, saying that it was wrong for 'Masters' to be unionised because Unions had low status and, moreover, the Government seemed committed to introduce legislation to restrict Unions' rights.

From 1923, (July), onward the constant search for improved status is reflected in letters and Editorials, for example:

1923 (July p361) 'Registration is important'
'(July p386) '(...) try to get a Bill (through Parliament) for Registration''

'(Sept p445) 'State Registration is essential, but would be turned down by Ministry of Health''

'(Dec p526) Proposed Bill for State Registration prepared by Messrs. Nodes, suggesting a Board with six members, three from Ministry of Health, three from BUA. Proposed letter to all MPs soliciting help

1924 (March p617) 'Registration will prevent pricecutting by limiting numbers, and not allow moneymaking sidelines. It will lead to specialisation'. 'Should we be called funeral directors not Undertakers?''

(March p674) 'The word 'undertaker' carries a stigma. We need intelligence, sobriety, gentleness, sympathy, quietness, and to be unruffled. Who are we? We are not funeral directors, not morticians, but funeral practitioners''

(June p709) 'We must enforce:-

(i) no man has the right to give away goods to injure competitors
(ii) no man has the right to sell goods at less than cost to injure competitors
(iii) (...) nor to sell goods in any way as will injure competitors''

(Dec p163) 'We will probably need a Private Member's Bill (to gain Registration)''
1925 (March)  First Reading Private Members Bill Funeral Undertakers Registration (Talked out on Second Reading)

1926 (March p199)  'We do want to restrict trade, we do want to remain a Trade Union'

(Nov p100)  'We really have no way of enforcing rules, moral suasion comes first, then Trade Union constitution could be used'

(November)  'The most frequent complaint against Undertakers is pricecutting. Minimum price setting is good, cheaper means something is sacrificed

1928 (Dec p129)  'The health of the community requires that undertakers perform a distinct social service, not a commodity to be bought and sold (...) personal, outside the range of ordinary consumer operations'

1931 (Dec p127)  'There are more Unregistered Companies in Britain than Registered but they are 'illegal' bodies in the sense that the Law makes no provision for them. They could neither sue nor be sued. Could not, theoretically, take a proper place in trade or commerce. The T.U. Acts gave some measure of protection and control but where a firm was concerned it is necessary to Register'

(Dec p128)  'Let's become an Incorporated Company'

1933 (August p22)  'The only way to achieve State Registration is by perfecting our Education policy'

A National Council for the Disposition of the Dead (NCDD), formed by the BUA plus crematorium and cemetery officials. Headed by Lord
Horder and containing coroners, surgeons, physicians, Sanitary Inspectors. It was a standing committee designed to achieve:

(i) **State Registration for Undertakers**
(ii) **Qualifications for Undertakers**

This was to be a prestigious pressure group.

1934 (Jan p131)  'We must sell ourselves and our skills properly'

(June p241) An approach from the NCDD to BUA for information on future policy to gain their joint goals.

1935 January TRADE UNION REGISTRATION ABANDONED

1935 (April p205) NEW CONSTITUTION, (DRAFT), FOR A 'NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS'

(Nov 21st) BUA ENDED - NAFD BEGAN

(December) New Journal introduced called 'The National Funeral Director'. (The word 'National' dropped in 1952.
New and present name: 'The Funeral Director').

The subject matter in the newly named journal changed very little. The emphasis on Regional affairs, which was very pronounced in the early years of the Association was no longer so prominent, but still well covered. The advertisements still stressed the physical apparatus required by the readership; expensive automobiles, coffins, furniture, and, increasingly, mechanical devices to lift, carry, transport, store or consume bodies. The Editorials show a remarkable similarity over the years, stressing constantly the need for the occupation to raise its public image, improve its educational stands and achieve Government and public recognition. However, within the Journal' there is little evidence of any practical and systematic attempt to raise either the skill or the education level of its members.
In 1937 a ten-shilling per head levy was imposed to pay for the cost of introducing a second Private Member's Bill in a further attempt to gain Registration. In the same month it was claimed:-

1937 (Sept p82) 'An Association is essential - it gives collective wisdom to each individual'

(Oct p108) 'The first funeral home in Britain opened by Nodes at Crouch End, London, consisting of chapel, vestibule and private viewing rooms, dedicated by Clergy'

1938 (Feb p193) 'We all need Chapels of Rest, due to flats and small accommodation (being used by most people)'

(Nov p189) 'We should advertise to educate (the public) who are bereaved, by both booklets and newspapers'.

The 1939-45 War brought a halt to pressures to change their status, and the occupation co-operated with the Government by keeping the price of funerals down to an agreed level. Following the end of the War, the pressures for reform and improvement continued and were accompanied by a wide variety of self-congratulatory analysis, in which funeral directing was equated with the 'spirit of service', 'professional service', 'meeting a social need', and 'ministering to the bereaved' (1956 January pp17-18 'The Economics of Free Enterprise').

1956 (March p33) is most revealing because here we have the report of a Select Committee of the House of Lords 8/4/56, who sat to consider Huddersfield Corporation's intention to introduce a Clause 45 in their new Corporation Bill:-

176
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSAL</th>
<th>HOUSE OF LORDS JUDGEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) to require the registration of 'funeral parlours'</td>
<td>unnecessary</td>
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<tr>
<td>(b) to register all who manage such premises</td>
<td>unnecessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) to have by-laws to improve workers' sanitary conditions</td>
<td>already operated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) to register and monitor each funeral establishment</td>
<td>F.Ds already do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) to have powers of entry and inspection</td>
<td>too strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) to provide penal ties to support (a) - (e)</td>
<td>far too strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FINAL COMMENT : 'A HARMFUL PRECEDENT'**

As a consequence of the Select Committee's ruling, the Clause was deleted. The article in 'The Funeral Director', which reported it was under the heading: 'A blow for Liberty'.

Meanwhile, in their attempt to raise the educational level of aspiring Directors, the NAFD had introduced in November 1955 its first National Examination.

1956 (May p105) reported simply: 'No students presented themselves' (for the exam)!
1959 (January) showed an improvement. Twenty-nine candidates took the Exam and eight passed both parts - the practical simulation and the written test. In the same year the number of firms who were members of NAFD was 2,552. (In 1983 it was approximately 2,300).

Throughout all the years of publication, a constant stream of exhortations and encouragements flowed from officials to their (seemingly) recalcitrant members. They were urged to renew subscriptions, participate actively in their Regional Associations and urge other to join, maintain and improve standards, stand firm against unjustified criticism, publicise their essential service, and become better educated. The impression gained from reading through the journals from year to year is that no real improvement in status was developing, and educational standards were academically low. Time and time again members discussed their occupational status, from Trade Union to incorporation in the Companies Act, and to State Registration. Speakers came from outside the occupation to inform them of their rights or their potential; their elected officials made calls for unity. For example, back in 1931, a guest speaker had urged action:-

1931 (Dec pp127-129 'In 1926 the whole of the country was held up (...) because one trade was persuading other Unions to down tools (...) it should have been made quite clear that (this) was illegal (...) it would be foolish for a body of employers or business men to (remain) registered under the Trade Union Acts unless they could reap some benefit by operating the power to interfere with the work of one of its members, for (...) bringing him to heel. The whole idea of the Trade Union Acts was to give protection to workmen against employers; a body of business men could not come into (this) category. The proper method is to become organised (...) under the Companies Act (...) and you will (then) get very near to State Registration within the lifetime of men in this room'
Efforts to get a Charter of Incorporation were rejected by members on the ground that the BUA was a business organisation, yet it was still registered under the Trade Union Acts until 1935!

1945 (August p71) 'Our public relations should) (...) stress the truths and facts ordinarily lost among the (...) misconceptions, (and counter the (...) threat toward socialised funerals (sic)

1946 (July pp14-15) '(...) funeral directing, or to use the term perhaps best known to the antediluvian minds of out-of-date practitioners - undertaking, is, and has been, a target for attack (...) for some time, (and) is indulged in at the expense of members of an occupation in every way as honourable as any learned profession. It has its own scheme of education (...) to ensure that its members are equipped with the most modern methods that educational research can obtain'

1950 (June pp596-7) Lord Mancroft on 'Public Service and Private Enterprise'. 'You are a private enterprise offering public service. You are not selling commodities. Like the doctor and the barrister you are in a position of confidence (...) Close your ranks (...) Every organisation has its quislings (...) no individual should give interviews to the press. That is a specialist job'.

Such sentiments are recorded again and again, but become wearisome by repetition. The uncertainty over status was once more raised in 1980 (April p195) when three options were considered by a sub-committee:-

(1) Stay as a Trade Association
(2) Become a Statutory Monopoly with a Register of qualified people
(Would not receive Government approval)

(3) Obtain a Royal Charter, granted to individuals not firms. The
individuals become a body corporate with a separate body of its
own.

Even though a Royal Charter was originally favoured by some spokesmen,
it was realised that it might take ten years to achieve (if at all),
would entail costly legal fees, would require good premises and higher
educational requirements, and necessitate redrafting the Rules. In
short - a hopeless task. The sub-committee recommended No. (1) - which
meant staying as they were.

Therefore in 1981 it remained both a voluntary organisation, which
operated as a trade protection association, and a (weak) pressure group
seeking to raise the occupational status of its members, who were
primarily owners of private businesses.

EXTENSION

However, in February, 1982, a remarkable change occurred. A new body
called the British Institute of Funeral Directors was formed (BIFD) with
the encouragement and financial aid of the NAFD. Membership is limited
to those who possess the NAFD Diploma irrespective of whether they own a
business or not. The BIFD is a Limited Company with Articles of
Association.

Many members of the NAFD believed that the Steering Committee, set up in
1981 to consider the feasibility of such a body, would report back to
Conference, before action could be taken. This, however, was a mistaken
belief. The Committee did not have to report back before it could act
on its own recommendation. Consequently a new body was formed which had
far-reaching consequences, without all members supporting its inception.
For the first time in the seventy-eight years of its existence, the NAFD
had produced an occupationally qualified group whose cohesion is to be
based on shared credentials. This cuts right across the employer-employee segregation, which made no distinction of occupational merit, but merely stressed private ownership. The possibility now exists for this new body to grow in numbers and develop in prestige, until it becomes the duly recognised and authoritative occupational association that its parent, the NAFD, has so conspicuously failed to become. That may be a long time ahead, if it transpires at all.

No matter how prestigious their Diploma appears to be to the uninitiated, it is in fact lacking any high degree of technical, theoretical, or specialist content. If all Directors with Diplomas had to pass also the BIE Diploma, and a test on Public Health, they might be seen to be developing a combination of skills which commanded respect among both their peers and the public. But there is no pressure for this additional certification to be gained whilst funeral directors seek to construct a funeral ceremony and little else. The introduction of a BIFD is a long overdue development in an occupation so manifestly concerned with its public image. Nevertheless, the unrealistic claim to professional status, made almost into an article of faith by succeeding spokesmen since 1905, is unlikely to be achieved by the belated establishment of an occupational 'elite', whose educational and technical skills have not been significantly raised. A reappraisal of marketing techniques and a willingness to adopt positive publicity might be more appropriate methods of gaining control over their trading position. Such a shift in emphasis, however, would challenge the ethos which sustains Directors, and provides them with a conviction of personal moral worth.

THE STATUS QUO

In Britain, funeral directors have sought occupational prestige through professional status and have failed to have their claim substantiated. They have been as unable to convince Parliament of their occupational merits as they have been of convincing their peers of their technical knowledge. The comfortable economic profit achieved by many of them is
due to an entrepreneurial manipulation of a practical need for their particular service and consumer ignorance.

In the journals there is evidence to show that directors had made an insufficient analysis of their market position. By concentrating on ownership rather than certification, they precluded the development of an accredited elite. By failing to develop an educational programme of sufficient merit, they allowed routine body-handling skills to be masked by an unwarranted veneer of technical expertise. By operating paternalistically, they precluded the upward flow of new talent from aspiring employees. By emphasising private ownership they allowed competition with Co-operative Societies to preclude a comprehensive, national development of occupational strategy. By regarding advertising as harmful to their occupational image, they overlooked its potential for increasing public awareness of their value. This laid the foundation for mass-media coverage which is couched, generally, in terms of humour, ridicule or exposure. Due to their inability to convince all members of the occupation that such an occupational organisation was in directors' own interests, uncertainties have prevented an influential, collective voice from being developed. As an occupational pressure group, the NAFD is characterised by both public and official indifference. A pressure group must, surely, have an enemy without for it to combat; an identifiable public to convert or convince and a collective interest to proclaim; a positive self-interest to protect; a collective image to forcibly present; one or more of these factors generate an attitude which encourages self-proclamation.

AN ESTABLISHED SERVICE

Commercial success has been achieved notably by a few very large public companies and by expanding family businesses. The former recruit employees from outside the occupation, seeking commercial business skills rather than funeral experience from their managerial staff. They do not appear to be constrained by a desire to gain control over the direction of funeral service, nor to seek Government support for licensing the occupation. They seek commercial profitability through
ownership of cemeteries, crematoria, stone masons and funeral directing premises, concentrated in specific geographic locations such as Southern England or Birmingham. They rarely open new premises but seek to expand by purchasing existing family businesses. They constantly search for offices coming up for sale which will fit the pattern of regional development, planned by directorial boards to maximise their profits.

The large family businesses are usually limited to funeral directing offices with stone masons attached as the most lucrative supportive trade in the funeral service. The most prestigious of such family concerns (R95 in Chapter 5), has gained a virtual monopoly of overseas transportation of bodies and operates a separate division of the firm dealing with the air freight traffic. This is a rarely examined aspect of death, but with the expansion of vast international organisations, such as the EEC and NATO, the migration of ethnic groups from country to country as workers, and the large numbers of diplomatic, military, administrative and commercial employees who are necessary to staff overseas departments, this is an area of funeral work which is rapidly increasing. Such family businesses have developed slowly, (in contrast to the rapid expansion of public companies such as The Great Southern Group of Companies), buying up local competitors whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself. Firms such as Ashton-Ebbuts, in South London, show by their name the conjunction of two, well-established, family businesses, each having expanded through the take-over of small firms. Most large family firms are still parochial in character and location, and tend to retain control through confining directorships to near kin. Caught between the trading power of both the large public company and the Co-operative Societies on one side, and the expanding family firms on the other, the medium or small family business is in danger of being squeezed out of existence. It is this sector which regards itself as the 'essence' of the occupation, which still conducts about one-third of all funerals, and through the NAFD exerts its influence as the moral voice of the funeral directing business. It is here that the most vociferous criticism is encountered levelled particularly at the large trading organisations waiting to buy them up. They have seen their occupation move from 'trade' to 'business', but
regret that it has not become 'professionalised'. Because they restrict their services to the provision of funerals within a small geographic area, there is frequently an unwillingness to look objectively at their trading position. On the present political scene, (1985), there is Government support for the 'ideology' of the small business. Individuals are said to demonstrate desirable qualities and traits within small but dedicated business units. The values of hard work integrity, specialism and competition are said to produce public service, wherein the needs of both individuals and society will be efficient met. Funeral directing exhibits many of these characteristic beliefs; it may almost be regarded as a model case of a general precept— that of the small business and its virtues. When studied carefully however, it shows an economic reality that differs greatly from the ideological assumptions. Small businesses find it increasingly difficult to compete against the large organisations which can exploit diverse but complementary resources, and use economies of scale to their trading advantage. Whilst the moral virtues of the small business is extolled, its economic frailty is exposed. Competitive individualism rarely survives corporate influence as can be seen in a recent case which concerned an attempt by one individual funeral director to raise his business one step higher. In May, 1983, the director concerned sought permission from Parliament, via a Private Members Bill, to construct a small crematorium on his premises. The Bill was vigorously opposed by the Leicester Council on the grounds that it would put unprecedented power into the hands of private concerns, and that it could be 'abused' in a future circumstance. However, private crematoria already exist in several parts of the country, but they are all owned by the large public companies mentioned earlier. The Bill was unsuccessful and emphasises the fact that large organisations can proceed when small firms are denied access, and that they are presumed to have a regard for public welfare absent from their smaller competitors. Nevertheless, in spite of such limitations, a family firm carrying out more than five hundred funerals per year is still buttressed against economic hardship or early take-over by a larger business. It can still provide a very comfortable living for the proprietors (as shown by the Price Commission Report No.22 presented as Reference Document No.2(A)). Public
unwillingness to assess the market before they need to use it, and their lack of discrimination at the time of bereavement, will continue to produce custom for the local family director. The greater the economic pressure on them, the more such directors seem to rely on, and to emphasise the virtue of, their individual personal qualities. Through their journals and records they emphasise their unassailable commodity, their substantial resource which cannot be tarnished, nor matched by their larger competitors. This is their gentlemanly altruistic service, their respectability and probity, which marks off the quality of their service from the mass-produced, impersonal activities associated with 'purely' commercial companies. The higher the economic threat posed to their secure life style, the greater the reliance they place on those personal qualities that cannot be measured in economic terms. Consequently many of the small businesses have proprietors and managers who are more complacent about their future prosperity than objective assessments of their trading would support.

It is their standpoint that has been so consistently voiced by the NAFD and has ensured that its policies and attitudes have not been geared to reappraisal or change. Most changes in funeral directing practice have developed piecemeal, sometimes due to outside pressure from Government agencies (for example displaying a comprehensive price list) and more frequently to innovative techniques introduced by manufacturers (for example refrigeration units and temporary preservation).

To the extent that funeral directing is universally acceptable throughout the country and is regarded as an inevitable corollary of death, it has succeeded in becoming an 'established' service occupation. Premises are ubiquitous, and have become an accepted part of High Street commerce. Funeral directing may be regarded as a 'marginal' occupation in terms of its everyday social recognition but it quickly becomes a central resource when a death occurs. Most directors have become an accepted part of their local business fraternity, and have constructed an occupational image which is in accord with personal service retailing. They may regret that their occupational status is more dependent on logistical skill than derived from professional authority,
but a comfortable trading profit and a prosperous life-style may well compensate for their failure to achieve the occupational status they believe they deserve.

**COMMENT ON THE 'PRICE COMMISSION REPORT NO.22 FUNERAL CHARGES'**

The only formal investigation into funeral directing as a commercial proposition was begun by the Price Commission in April, 1976. At that time the Government wished to protect the public against unjustified price increases, and referred specific practices to the Price Commission for their detailed investigation. The secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection, referred funerals and associated charges to the Commission, who gave him their report eleven months later, in February, 1977. The details in the Report, and its recommendation, reinforce the view that the occupation provides a good income for funeral directors, and that the larger the business the higher the profits to be made. The following selections from the Report indicate the scale of profits to be made, and the scarcity of critical comment provided by the Commission.

The reason for the inquiry is given as public complaints against the high cost of funerals and the fact that they are more elaborate than wished for (ibid p3). The Commission found that 'the cost of a funeral may be a real burden on poorer people' yet says 'there is no evidence in this country of the kind of abuse that has been so widely published in North America' and that 'funeral costs are low compared with elsewhere'. The Report does not make clear exactly what would constitute an 'abuse' in Britain, since it is obviously not 'the creation of a burden for the poor'. Furthermore, why the scale of reference should be North America or elsewhere, when it is inflation in Britain that was the reason for the referral of funerals, is not explained.

The information on which the Report was based was gained, primarily, from a questionnaire sent to 435 firms (a 10% sample of the supposed total of all funeral directors). An abnormally high response rate of 94% was not commented on yet such an unusual rate of return, should be
accounted for. It might, for example, indicate that the respondents provided information that they felt was complimentary to themselves.

The highest single element in the price charged by funeral directors is the cost of the coffin. This probably originated in the times when a coffin was hand-made from wood. It is now made of mass-produced, veneered chip-board, yet the 'mark-up' that the funeral directors make is 100%. This is the 'normal practice' adopted to recover overheads and to make the required profit. (ibid pp9-19).

The profits made within the occupation are given as:–

**Net Profit Percentage Margin 1975-6**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1975-6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-operatives</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Companies</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Private Firms</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(over 1,000 funerals p.a.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Private Firms</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(between 251-1,000 funerals p.a.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Private Firms</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(up to 250 funerals p.a.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ibid Tables 5, 6, 7, pp13-15)</td>
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**Average Net Profits for Funeral Directors**

(Before Directors' or Proprietors' remunerations)

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ibid Table 8 p16)</td>
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**Return on Capital of Funeral Directors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1976</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative Societies</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Companies</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ibid Table 9 p17)</td>
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</table>
The Report concludes that: 'It can be seen that both net profit margins and returns on capital in the funeral business are generous, if not on the high side, for all but the small firms', and that 'competition, in the normal sense of the word is almost entirely absent'. (ibid pp17&37). The table above shows clearly the scale of the profits achieved.

Further to these observations, the Report makes the comment that: 'Large firms generally charge more than small firms in spite of apparent economies of scale' and that in pricing policy, '(...) Directors gave most weight to achieving a particular percentage profit margin'. (ibid pp11&12).

The mildness of the Report's recommendations are startling; they do not 'fit' the evidence they provide. This can be clearly observed by comparing these two final extracts taken from within the Report:

(A) 'When all is said and done, however, the funeral trade is on the whole comfortably profitable and indeed might well be thought to show higher profits than necessary'. (ibid p37) 'Large private firms have significantly improved their (profit) margins, and all show what by any standards must be regarded as a generous level of profit'. (ibid pl : emphasis added)

(B) 'Our recommendations (are):-

(i) The funeral director should always give (...) a written estimate

(ii) The funeral director should display (...) his set price for a simple, basic funeral

(iii) The price should be set by the individual funeral director

(iv) There is room for some reduction in charges, at least on the part of the larger concerns (...) implemented by
holding prices steady or reducing increases that might otherwise have been made'. (ibid p1)

These extracts give a fair indication of the Report's findings, and illustrate the manner in which they have failed to discharge their claimed duty, namely 'to redress the balance in favour of the client'. (ibid p37).

The profits shown in their Report indicate a continued ability on the part of proprietors, companies, and Co-operatives, to maintain a prosperous livelihood from providing funeral services, whilst successfully avoiding negative sanctions of any description.

CONCLUSION

The funeral occupation is likely to be judged by onlookers on the basis of the few performances in which they actually participate, or on an assessment of the funeral processions they witness.

In the last eighty years, there has been a change in the structure of the occupation and a continuing uncertainty over status among funeral directors, that was unlikely to have been observed by the public. Such developments can only be perceived and understood if access to occupational records and journals is obtained and if those members who have the responsibility for making practical decisions concerning the future of the occupation, can be questioned.

The detailed study of the occupation from within has revealed the separate groupings and divergent attitudes which belie the uniformity presented on formal public occasions. The evidence, contained in previously unexamined records, shows how ineffective funeral directors have been in achieving their self-declared goals. Long discussions with proprietors, wageworkers, Trade Unionists and representatives of public and Co-operative companies, indicate the scale and the form of the disagreement that exists between them, as well as the measure of shared definitions that produces an apparently unified face to the public.
In funeral premises, unobserved by customers, professional and commercial identities are weighed and approved; business rivalries are consolidated and loyalties tested. This Chapter has shown how commitment to a particular view about funeral directing can lead to the construction of an individual self-image and a collective occupational presence. Observation of public ceremonies can result in a wealth of information on how a ritual is presented, but the background structure which determines the practicalities and the attitudinal direction travelled by participants, will not be revealed in this way. The historical fluctuations, the interplay between employer and employee, and the influence of Trade Union allegiance can only be satisfactorily explained by using archival material.

A comparative study of funeral work in an English-speaking society not too culturally dissimilar to that of the U.K., was sought, in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the U.K. presentation, and to examine the manner in which problems common to both cultures are resolved. It would indicate whether a commitment to a particular belief, or ideology, could produce a unified community of members and a satisfied witness of customers. Therefore a study was begun in Newfoundland, (to which access had been offered,) to compare the funeral occupation at work there with their counterpart in the UK. The intention was to study directors and their staffs at work, in both rural and urban conditions. The balance achieved between 'professional' and 'commercial' orientations could be assessed and the manner in which individuals presented themselves and their work could be observed. In addition the political, legal and social constraints, (or supports), which influenced the status of the occupation could be analysed, and comparisons drawn. The conditions found to exist in Newfoundland confirmed the necessity of gaining a political and legal franchise to operate free of competition if a 'professional' status is to be achieved. More importantly, they indicated that an openly stated commitment to a 'business' status can provide a near-professional respectability and provide a profitable commercial career for funeral directors.
The information gained in Newfoundland allows a comparison to be made between the day to day activities of practical funeral work common in each community. The manner in which English directors perceive their role and act to give it credence is in marked contrast to that demonstrated by their counterparts in Newfoundland. Both societies favour a competitive individualism, commercial success and service specialism and some of the Canadian characteristics have been introduced in a modified form into England, such as the concept of a funeral 'home'. However the English attachment to an illusory 'professional' status has led many directors to shun an overt commitment to a business orientation, where the attributes noted above would be given more positive expression. One director, (examined in more detail in Chapter Five) incorporated many of the methods common to Newfoundland in the refurbishment of his funeral premises, against the advice of his colleagues. The result was an increase in clients, income and reputation, yet his 'innovations' have not been widely copied, or accepted throughout the occupation in England.

The study conducted in Newfoundland can be used advantageously to compare, not only the manner in which a postulated dichotomy between a professional and a business location can be resolved, but the manner in which the day to day activities of funeral directors are routinely presented. It is not merely the cost of a funeral or the material provisions of a well-furnished funeral home that mark the difference between the two societies, but the goals that are sought and the practical manners in which they are realised. There is no occupational group in the UK against which the theory and practice of funeral directors can be measured. The study of directors in Newfoundland provides a basis for analysis which would otherwise be lacking. Therefore the following Chapter explores the role and practice of funeral directors in Newfoundland in urban and rural settings, so that the scene in the UK may be more clearly assessed.

The structure of the occupation in the UK, as detailed in the early pages of this Chapter is very different to that which has developed in Newfoundland (or mainland Canada and the USA). There is a greater
diversity of operation in the UK where sole traders are still
significant in rural areas and small market towns, and Co-operative
Societies challenge the private and public companies. As noted by the
Price Commission, competition has not reduced the costs of a funeral nor
have the 'economies of scale' produced by large trading organisations,
actually resulted in lower funeral charges. The orientation of funeral
businesses in Newfoundland is essentially 'specialised', and the
'supplemental' and 'diversified' categories, noted in the UK, do not
exist. The most 'successful' funeral directors encountered during this
research operating in England, measured on the basis of their own
estimation, their current trading position and the respect accorded them
by their peers, had channelled their involvements into efficiently
managed 'business' presentations. As shown in the following Chapter, an
open commitment to funerals as commercial activities does not harm the
self-image of the funeral directors, the collective face of the
occupation, or satisfaction of consumer requirements.
CHAPTER THREE - BIBLIOGRAPHY


I sought an English speaking society in which funeral directing had achieved a status markedly different to that presently gained in the United Kingdom. An opportunity arose for me to live in Newfoundland for one month and to study what appeared to be the professionalisation of funeral work. Newfoundland is primarily a country of bays, peninsulas, barren rock, coniferous forests and lakes. It has been settled in the most hospitable parts by Europeans since Cabot arrived in 1497, but even though it covers a similar area to that of the British Isles, its population today is only 500,000. It is the poorest province of Canada and still retains an inhospitable and raw look, with very few towns and a scattered population. Its main physical attributes are its rugged, ice-sculptured scenery and its clean air. The Capital, St. John's, has a population of only 150,000 and looks unfinished, with large areas of land undeveloped. Life in St. John's is centred around its harbour, which is the best anchorage in Newfoundland.

During July 1981 I had long interviews with three funeral directors who between them carried out all the 1,000 funerals each year in St. John's. I also investigated a director who created a new business in an 'outport' 250 miles from St. John's. This settlement had been the subject of an anthropological study in 1964 (Faris, 1966). Information on six further funeral businesses was obtained by indirect methods, such as examining official records and talking informally to officials of the Provincial Government. Altogether, I gained information on ten of the total of forty funeral establishments that operated on the island.

The most useful information was obtained from the City's Chief Health Officer who explained the economic and social changes that the island had experienced since it gained Confederation Status in 1949, and provided me with copies of the Governmental Statutes which had given...
funeral directors their legal status. He also gave me a copy of the questionnaire which was administered annually by the Health Department when they inspected the funeral homes, and copies of the examination questions which embalmers and funeral directors had to answer before they could become licenced to operate. (See reference Document No. 2)

My investigations revealed the extent to which funeral directors had gained control over their market in a very short time. They set standards and ensured their representation in the island's legislative body. The funeral businesses on the Island operate within Provincial Government Legislation which was largely instituted and framed by the funeral directors themselves in 1975. The Health Department inspects the premises annually, to check their standards, and thereby gives official sanction to the funeral directors' own rulings.

There is no uniformity in licencing throughout Canada, since each Province seeks to guard its independent status from the encroachment of Federal power. Therefore, what happens in Newfoundland is not duplicated elsewhere in Canada, but does mirror the movement towards specialisation that is to be found within all Provinces. Newfoundland was studied to examine the manner in which an occupational status was achieved, and to observe the role-performance presented by the Directors. Both developments could be matched against those discovered in the United Kingdom.

CREATING A FUNERAL HOME

The tradition of having a dead body exposed to view for a day or more, so that relatives, friends, and quite possibly the entire local community could offer their last respects to it, has been common on the island since the first British arrived in the early eighteenth century. This tradition still exerts a strong influence on contemporary funeral practices, in contrast to its relative insignificance in Britain.

The 'waking' of the body, which entailed the family or close friends sharing a vigil over the body before it was buried, and which many in
the community came to support, emphasised the responsibility of kin to kin and the sense of communal loss that was felt at the death of an individual member. Most funeral 'homes' are spacious, clean, modern and efficient. Not only do they present the body but they seek to duplicate the essential elements of a home wake by constructing an informal and open environment within which it is displayed. They provide the facilities for preparing and consuming food and drink, which is an important part of family life in its normal, private setting.

The three funeral homes in St. John's which carried out all the 1000 funerals each year have almost identical premises. Each possessed a modern-styled, open-plan chapel seating about 100 people, with contemporary decor and comfortable furnishings. Each home has 6 or more large 'waking' rooms which are comfortably furnished with carpets, Chesterfields and soft chairs. The doors were usually left open and anyone passing through the building could see the mourners sitting, talking, crying and praying or passing to and fro. The body was lying exposed to the view of those in the room, in a casket (never in a coffin), dressed in its best clothes, fully 'cosmeticised' and to the casual onlooker, merely sleeping.

Mourners came, stopped or left at will, during the entire twelve hours from ten in the morning until ten at night, without any formality exercised by the funeral home officials. I walked into one home, unexpected and unannounced, and moved freely without being questioned throughout the building, accepted by mourners and officials alike. Possibly because so many normal activities were in progress (telephoning, moving to and from the rooms, fetching items from cars), grief and distress were not the dominant emotions displayed. The sadness of mourning was apparent in certain rooms as I passed them but the multitude of commonplace roles that were enacted appeared to dissipate the constraints of mourning behaviour.

Most significantly, however, these informal and comfortable facilities were, in each home supported by a large rest-lounge which had an attached kitchen. In this casual encounter area there was provided a
cooker, a refrigerator, kettle, hot and cold water, a large sink, free tea and coffee, large and clean wash-rooms and lavatories. Visitors were encouraged to bring their own food and drink and to use these facilities for their convenience during the hours the premises were open. The owners were, effectively, allowing mourners to take possession, and for the kin to act as host to their visitors in a way that resembled their normal home behaviour. The wake was regulated by mourners once the director had prepared the body and displayed it to advantage.

The responsibility for preparing the body and for staging the disposal ceremony has therefore moved from lay individuals to a specialist occupation. Most significantly, it has taken over the wake, and in doing so has shifted the focus of attention from the deceased's home environment. Funeral directors have gone to great lengths to produce a substitute 'home' on their own premises (which is not matched and rarely contemplated in Britain).

Since the funeral homes were probably superior in design, quality and furnishings to those possessed by many of the mourners, they obviously were not intended to duplicate the homes of the clients. They were intended to provide a combination of commercial practicalities and 'home-like' attributes so that clients would not feel ill at ease within them.

The funeral directors I spoke with explained that they sought to meet their clients' expectations concerning a flow of visitors by keeping the body-handling practicalities securely hidden from view, but this is more likely to be a rationalisation of the need to keep the 'dirty work' hidden from customers' view. They provided informal social facilities so that the 'waking' conventions could be comfortably maintained. Long wakes in the family home have gradually been superseded by short wakes held in Chapels and Churches. The Churches have now relinquished control over the body and allowed funeral directors to add this ceremony to that of staging the funeral. Church members are now busy doing other things, and do not wash and dress the body, keep vigil over it, care for
the Church premises and marshall a stream of mourners during their visit of condolence. Long, overnight wakes have become a rare occurrence, either in a family home or Church.

The funeral directors, therefore, have invested large sums of money in buildings which can provide not only the practical necessities for body treatment along with the capacity to seat and conduct a religious ceremony, but the social conditions for a modified form of family wake. They provide a focal centre wherein every funeral role can be accommodated and every practical facility provided. The outcome of this planned economic venture, for those few who can support the initial financial cost, is highly profitable.

The bereaved appear to accept such homes in preference to their own because funerals are still regarded as being indicators of 'correct' social behaviour. Consequently, funerals must not appear to be cheap, tawdry or badly performed. By hiring a suitable, centrally located, tastefully furnished, freely open home, they can accomplish all the intricate social interactions that are required, and maintain personal control over the wake. St. John's has a growing and frequently mobile population, due to the deep-sea oil drilling and fish-harvesting operations that link them not only to Britain but to Japan and the U.S.S.R. Furthermore, there is a drift of population to the continental mainland, and small scale communities, with their own special forms of funeral behaviour, are rapidly disappearing. The emergence of funeral homes is but one consequence of the centralisation and specialisation that helps to create an industrialised society in which common patterns of consumption are created.

Each 'home' had, by law, to provide a casket room in which to display about 20 caskets, usually ranging from $800 to $5,000 (£333 to £2,080 - 1981). Most commonly mourners chose to spend about $2,000 (£833) on a casket and this price covered what the directors referred to as 'all amenities'. (Identical with the practice in the U.K.) The caskets varied in appearance from grey cloth (the cheapest), through
Paisley pattern, fur fabric, suede or corduroy covering, to polished natural rosewood, and finally to the most expensive models made of copper, bronze or steel. All caskets were very large by British coffin standards, being 6' 6' (inside measurement) with richly quilted interiors and a half-lid opening ('half-couch'). In some cases the entire lid hinged open on hydraulic springs, and contained a spring-interior matress, concealed lighting and cassette players. Moreover, all caskets were to be protected from contact with the rude earth upon burial by being placed in a 'shell' (in effect a wooden case, pre-set in the grave, into which the casket was lowered). Before the grave was infilled, the shells lid was lowered to protect the casket resting in it. These wooden shells cost a minimum of $600 (£250) but many mourners each year chose one made of steel, costing between $750 to $1,000 extra (£312 to £416).

The funeral director could also provide 'burial garments' (specially made clothes which gave the semblance of suits or dresses when seen from the front, but without a back to them), but these were rarely requested, probably because they were considered to be lacking in dignity. The director did, however, sell 'off-the-peg' suits and dresses to those unfortunate mourners who, by reason of time or location, could not provide the requisite best or new suit or dress with which to clothe the body, as was the normal practice for burial. In addition shoes, socks, tie, scarves and underclothes were all commonly provided by the clients, so that the body could be 'properly' dressed for its wake, and last journey. They also brought along a recent colour photograph to enable the embalmer to present a body that looked convincingly life-like.

All female bodies had their hair dressed before being waked, and 'cosmeticising' was always carried out. A body which had not been so prepared would have been viewed with disfavour by the mourners, and 'professional' distaste by the funeral firm. All bodies, therefore, were given the full treatment unless the bereaved specifically requested that it was not done.
THE MODEL FUNERAL HOME

Every year each funeral establishment is inspected by an official from the Department of Health and a questionnaire completed by him. This covers in great detail every aspect of the home, not merely those specialisms connected with the hygienic body handling and treatment. The inspection is, in reality, to ensure that the funeral directors' control over every business practice is enforced. The scrutiny includes monitoring the following aspects:

- the number of caskets on display with a clear presentation of price;
- the condition of floor, walls, ceilings, lighting and ventilation in the washrooms, as well as the provision of paper towels, soap and clean water;
- the condition of parking facilities, external signs and their wording;
- the personal appearance of the staff;
- the lowering device and the artificial grass for use at the graveside;
- the provision of guest books and floor stands;
- the mechanical condition and cleanliness of the vehicles (emphasis added) and thereby ensures that all funeral homes provide an almost identical service.

The Health Department, whilst ready to carry out such a check (which dealt with matters usually outside their interest), deliberately avoided either constructing the questionnaire or acting on its answers. Responsibility for these decisive activities rests with 'The Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board' (explained below).

The funeral home reflects not only the total control that the funeral directors have established over the physical disposal of the body, but their success in ensuring that their premises come to be regarded as a home. By sheltering the dead, and by welcoming the mourners and visitors, they have become indispensable at the time of death for
staging all aspects of the ritual, except the prestigious religious service.

There can be little doubt that they have effectively captured and held their market, primarily by ensuring that they provide every facility within their own premises, to which clients come and to which they invite mourners. The funeral directors have made their homes the central focus of attention. In effect they hire out the major part of their premises to the client, so that a large measure of informal direction over the wake is in the hands of the kin. (In England, the viewing of the body, the last remnants of the wake, is firmly in the hands of funeral directors). It is virtually impossible for a mourner to avoid seeing the dead person, and thereby participating in the waking, since the whole purpose of the 'reposing rooms', as they are frequently called, is to enable the closely bereaved to be visited whilst they are mounting vigil over the body. Friends gossip, children wander, visits are made to the washroom, and to the lounge. Here drink and food are consumed, not only by close family members who come and go all day, but also by the visitors who join them to bring support and solace. The atmosphere is relaxed, friendly, supportive and casual.

CAPTURING PROFESSIONAL STATUS

The Newfoundland funeral regulations represent a total victory for the embalmers and funeral directors, who seized the initiative at a crucial moment when the Provincial Government was seeking to improve Newfoundland's 'Backward Province' image during the early 1970's. In a move to raise standards the Provincial Government sought the advice of local businessmen. The existing funeral directors resented their relatively low status which, they believed, was due to the many 'lay' practitioners seeking to conduct funerals, and urged the legislature to introduce new codes of practice. They convinced the politicians, the legal draughtsmen and the business community, that funeral directors themselves could construct a training, educating, licensing and monitoring system, which, if given legal status, produce a competent and self-regulating funeral occupation. Furthermore, they produced a system
in which business profitability, occupational prestige and legal protection were all interlocked. They were so successful in their lobbying that the consequent legislation gave them legal power to operate, within a code of conduct devised by their own leading practitioners. Also, whilst Health Department officials were required to inspect all funeral premises, (a simple task), a Board, on which funeral directors and embalmers formed a majority was formed to control licensing, training and examining. Funeral directors were able to ensure that a 'funeral director' was deemed to be a person who 'operates for himself or under his own name or any other name for another person, an establishment for the purpose of furnishing to the public, funeral supplies and services' (Government statutes - see below). In other words, to be a funeral director meant by definition, to operate a business, - not merely to be competent as a specialist. An embalmer, however, was defined as one competent to practice embalming, whether self employed or as an employee, i.e. he was recognised as 'a specialist' not as a businessman. Nevertheless, he was accorded inferior status to the business-oriented funeral director.

It was in June of 1975 that the 'Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act' became law in Newfoundland. It established an 'Embalmers and Funeral Directors' Board' of seven members to be appointed by the Minister of Health; two embalmers, two funeral directors, and three lay members, one of whom was to be an official of the Health Department. Each could serve for between three to nine years, and, in the necessary quorum of three, only one had to be a lay member. Effective control therefore rested with the currently practising funeral directors who were elected to the Board. Their power can be gauged by noting the following selection from their rules:

- to prescribe the training and educational requirements before licensing;
- to establish a system of apprenticeship;
- to grant, renew and revoke licences;
- to prescribe the content and nature of exams;
- to determine fees;
to hear complaints against members for incompetence or misconduct
- to define what constitutes incompetence or misconduct (emphasis added);
- to prescribe the conditions of employment and remuneration of staff;
- to hold examinations;
- to prevent non-licenced individuals from practising in the Province;
- to regulate such additional matters as the Board thought necessary.
(All emphasis added).

Aggrieved individuals had recourse to the Courts, who would pronounce on the fairness of the Board's conduct in operating these rules. Punishment by the Board could be a $500 fine, one month imprisonment, or both if ratified by the Court. One embalmer has been found guilty, (though not punished), for carrying out a successful embalming whilst not licensed to do so. These severe sanctions are held in reserve to ensure that 'deviance' can be formally controlled. Funeral directors and to a lesser extent, the embalmers, have achieved a virtually unassailable legal dominance over their occupational culture, likened by them to that enjoyed by medicine and law.

They have achieved the power of a 'profession' but without the corresponding status available to doctors and lawyers who have received a public mandate to speak on many topics. Funeral directors have chosen a business status which is both stable and respectable. They achieved, in virtually one year, what their counterparts in England have been contemplating for 80 years. They demonstrate the effectiveness of a collegiate control which has enabled them to gain legal power in their market situation. As argued in Chapter 7, these are essential preconditions for the 'production' of occupational specialists who seek elite status. Whether funeral directors in the limited geographical context of Newfoundland will ever reach the elite status achieved by doctors or lawyers is to be doubted - but they stand at present in a position that would excite the envy of their British counterparts.

They have chosen the business fraternity as their occupational and normative reference group, not professionals.
By 1981 they ensured that suitably qualified funeral directors should take one apprentice each. Apprentices must spend one year training in a business, must provide a report from their employer which not only recounts the amount and type of work done, but also includes a statement of the suitability of the apprentice to become a director, and his eligibility to sit the examination. (Nowhere is 'suitability' clearly defined, therefore it can be open to wide interpretation by the practising funeral director).

Very similar conditions apply to embalmers except that they must have two years controlled apprenticeship and their licensing fee is $70 (£30). i.e. longer training for embalmers but lower status.

In spite of attempts to control standards, the educational level attained by aspiring apprentices need only be a Grade 10 (Grade 11 is nationally considered suitable for entry into specialised training). Only 1 in 7 passed the 1981 embalmers' exam, which had seven, relatively unsophisticated questions, in the written paper. Elsewhere in Canada a funeral director is also a qualified embalmer, trained at the Montreal College for two years, part time. Newfoundland's qualification, therefore, is not legally sufficient to open a business in the other Provinces. To rectify the acknowledged low standards of apprentices, the Newfoundland directors have instituted seminars at the Trade College, but they are of very short duration. Nevertheless, funeral directors are gaining a financial reward from training apprentices, since Federal subsidies are available to reward them for the one year training scheme. (From 1982 they were also able to attract a subsidy under the 'Provincial Apprentice Act' which had Federal Government support).

A syndicate from Houston, Texas, has been buying funeral homes in the U.S.A. It has now moved in Nova Scotia and Montreal, and is expected to investigate Newfoundland. It has proved to be a very lucrative business in the U.S.A., but it is doubtful if there is much possibility for
exploitation in Newfoundland, now that the resident occupation has achieved such stability. At least 4 funeral homes have failed in the last 10 years, and the present 3 businesses have the market effectively divided between them.

The Board has ensured that every funeral home shall have the same equipment, and, in doing so, have made items such as visitors' book, flower stands, lowering devices and wheeled trolleys necessities, not optional utilities open to individual preference. Consequently all funeral homes look alike and offer similar services. The situation is similar in Britain but as a consequence of emulation not organisational control. The homes in Newfoundland have a far greater capital outlay invested in premises and commodities than their British counterparts, and they appear to make higher profits than all, except possibly the most select, in Britain. All funeral directors that I spoke with agreed that it was a 'fairly profitable' business in which a $55,000 (£20,000) Cadillac was essential, and which would need in excess of $1/2 million (£200,000) to launch.

They provide a more client-orientated service than their English counterparts, particularly in their provision of space, comfort and time. The bereaved are offered a social space over which they have a large measure of control. The dead body plays an integral part in the day's activities, and the bereaved are given the opportunity of constructing the style of the wake.

This may, or may not, be 'better' therapeutically for the bereaved, but it appears to offer better value for money than the comparable service provided in England, if it is accepted that autonomy in mourning is worth paying for. The total cost of a funeral in Newfoundland is high by English standards, since $4,000 (£1,600) is not an unusual price compared to £500 on average in England. (1981 figures).

English funeral directors exert a far more pervasive influence over the manner in which the bereaved interact with the dead, but the bereaved in England may regard the cost of a Newfoundland funeral as too high merely
to have full control over mourning procedures. Furthermore, they may feel that since wakes have virtually disappeared from England, except among certain minority groups, there is no real comparison to be made. Nevertheless, the Newfoundland model shows that even though the funeral directors have a prosperous business due to the willingness of the bereaved to buy an expensive commodity, and they have taken business specialisms to an extravagant extreme, the client still has more involvement with the body and greater control over its presentation than is allowable in England.

It is difficult to be sure of the Newfoundlanders assessment of their funeral directors, since the only detailed conversations I had were with the Directors. Most of the mourners I spoke with seemed satisfied with the arrangements, but it was the freedom of access and movement within the home that suggested to me that the circumstances fulfilled their needs. However, it could be that the power of the funeral directors in the construction of both wake and funeral, had ensured that potential mourners learn in advance what will be expected of them when their time comes and merely go along with what is offered, as is the case in Britain. The paraphernalia of funeral ceremonies has been formulated, codified and then supplied by funeral directors to a degree undreamt by their artisan forerunners. An examination of the 3 homes in St. John's will illustrate the social relationships that are considered 'suitable' for a funeral.

HOME 1

The oldest, and most prestigious funeral establishment, began in 1804 as a carpenters, and is still owned by descendants of the original family. New premises included a strikingly simple wood and glass chapel; fully carpeted hallways, stairs and rooms; clean and efficient room layouts; and parking space for well over fifty cars. Only about 30% of the clients used the Chapel and, according to the director, they were usually the people with least religious commitment - the convinced believers used their regular church. Over 90% of all funerals had a religious ceremony, followed by burial since there is no crematorium on
the island. Over 90% had a wake in the rooms provided, and of the 400 funerals they carried out each year only about 10% were Roman Catholic. A 6-seater Cadillac was used, which carried the Minister only, driven by the director himself, who did not marshall the mourners, nor travel with the hearse. He took the minister to the church to await the arrival of the 15 or 20 cars which carried next of kin and mourners to and from the church. Only 2 men came with the hearse and they, together with the director, wheeled the casket into, and out from the church on a collapsible trolley, (considered 'unprofessional' in Britain). At the burial, by means of a strong but light-weight metal framework at ground level, the casket was pneumatically lowered into its awaiting 'shell' by unobtrusive foot pressures from the director. After the committal he left the mourners and took the minister back to his home. This marks a considerable difference in emphasis between the British and Newfoundland attitudes. In Britain, funeral directors lay great stress on their sympathetic handling of mourners at the time of the funeral, whereas in Newfoundland they leave the mourners to regulate their own performance. In Newfoundland they emphasise the need for an effective waking, and it is to this activity that the funeral directors give their involvement prior to the ceremony. Women officials were only to be seen as receptionists and as hair stylists – it was not considered appropriate for them to be publicly associated with the more significant aspects of the funeral. In Britain there are women who control all the arrangements for a funeral and are in personal contact with the clients, although there are very few who lead or direct the actual ceremonials. There were 4 funeral directors in this firm, one of whom was the owner, and 3 apprentices. The two young and newly licensed directors received a weekly salary, bonus, commission and some shares in the business. They were being trained by the senior director, who had been in the firm for 37 years. The possibility of becoming a shareholder in the firm and of progressing to become a funeral director is almost non-existent for wage workers in England where the social distance between proprietor and employee is constantly reinforced.
The second home, which started in 1938, was also a family business, and even though it carried out fewer funerals each year, about 350, it was staffed by Roman Catholics and carried about 90% of all the city's Catholic funerals. There is a strong Catholic element in the Newfoundland population, frequently placed as high as 50% of the total. Because of the similarity in dialect and the casualness of dress and attitude, it was difficult to discriminate between staff and visitor in the constant flow of people at the home. It is in this way that the homes differ most significantly from their British counterparts. In Britain the staff ensure that they look, sound and act in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for clients, even by foreigners. In Britain, their concept of 'privacy' for clients, generally results in brief, formalised and physically limited appearances of the bereaved at the funeral premises, which may be called 'homes', but lack the informality so much in evidence in the St. John's homes.

Since the funeral Mass is considered obligatory and the priest will be joined by large numbers of mourners, there is, in this home, a larger movement of people. All will, in some way, be associated with the religious procedures. Therefore there is a flow of visitors moving between the several telephones installed, the lounge, reposing room, car park and washrooms, with small knots of friends discussing daily affairs along the corridors. Informality and free access were the most noticeable differences from the British model, where visitors are few in number and come to visit the body, briefly, before the day of the funeral and are welcomed and attended by the Director, not the bereaved.

The third establishment started in 1931 as a furniture makers, and has now passed out of family control to 3 funeral directors who form a company. In addition to the 250, mainly Protestant funerals for paying clients they also 'undertake' to carry out hospital funerals for the indigent, or unclaimed, dead. They pick up between 6 and 10 bodies at
one time and bury them with one ceremony, which is usually short, and undistinguished by formalities.

This business is the only one to use television advertising - 5 times per week, for 30 seconds, at peak and trough viewing hours. A 'voice over' technique is used whilst the camera shows all the interior and exterior facilities. They are not sure what effect the 2-year venture has produced, nor why clients chose to come to them rather than their two competitors. All three firms co-exist apparently without friction and each admits to being 'profitable', without saying exactly what that meant in financial terms. This home is considered to be lower in status by the top two homes because it deals with the unclaimed dead and it is in those circumstances only that the phrase 'to undertake a funeral' is considered appropriate.

All 3 homes shared basic characteristics:

(1) High charges for service.
(2) Full preservation and cosmeticising of the body.
(3) The provision of a practical and comfortable base within which to stage a wake.
(4) Wide freedom of client choice in managing the wake, and movement to and from the cemetery.
(5) Separation of clergy and funeral director from the cortege.
(6) Service efficiency, informality and low visibility of the funeral directors.

CONSUMER REACTION

There is no present threat to the prosperity of funeral directors, but there is one remote possibility of future challenge to their absolute control. A pressure-group called 'Memorial and Funeral Planning Association' was begun in 1972 by a Hindu who wished for cremation facilities, and now has 200 members. They are insufficiently influential to produce change but their aim - to obtain simplicity and
dignity for funerals - may be gained by the manner of their attack on the established power of the funeral directors.

Firstly, they want to increase the number of lay members on the Board, thereby reducing the occupational dominance exerted by the funeral directors and embalmers. More significantly, however, their long-term aim is to move legal control of the Board from the Department of Health to that of Consumer Affairs. If this were to be achieved then the regulations which govern the facilities and services, the training and licensing, and the code of sanctions, could all be open to challenge. The chance of this happening is remote in the present situation. Most people seem to accept, as necessary and desirable, the central importance of the funeral home, and regard the service provided by the present funeral directors as essential. It is only the critical few who challenge the need to provide large caskets, burial 'shells', and very expensive vehicles. The desirability of cosmeticising, and clothing the body from head to foot, frequently in clothes bought specially for the funeral is challenged by very few clients.

THE NEWFOUNDLAND MODEL

There is in Newfoundland, as in Britain, a widely held belief that there is a 'proper way' of conducting a funeral and any significant departure from it indicates a reprehensible disrespect on the part of the mourners, funeral firm and especially, kin. Newfoundland directors have effectively led these attitudes and, as a consequence, have the economic legal, occupational, social and behavioural aspects of funerals firmly under their control.

Moreover, they have developed a career structure, whereby young men without advanced educational qualifications can rise from the lowliest positions to become directors and shareholders. This is in marked contrast to Britain where a wide social, managerial, and income distinction between workers and management is constantly maintained by the funeral directors. In Britain there are virtually no apprenticeship facilities for unskilled workers to become competent directors and,
significantly, no intention of creating them. The social divisions in Britain are manifest and accepted by most participants. In Newfoundland, family influence is still the most usual stepping stone to funeral directing, but many of those within the occupation encourage upward mobility by outsiders.

Throughout the Canadian funeral business, especially as seen in Newfoundland, there is an informality which contrasts strongly with the formality which permeates similar work in England. There is a strong vein of utility running through their provision of services. Clients have needs, and profit can be made by enlarging them. They see no necessity to cloak their transactions with false claims. They manage to convince their clients that they need to spend large sums of money on artifacts. They work assiduously to expand their services and to create a public support for costly wakes and burials. They provide marketing techniques and business codes of conduct without apparent strain.

Even more than in England they seem to distance the reality of a death. Embalming is one significant method of holding physical decay at bay; fully cosmeticising a body goes one step further by giving a life-like appearance to a corpse. Expensive mattresses, lighting, music, hermetically sealed caskets made of long-lasting materials heightens the unspoken expectation of durability and of resistance to decay. To place such a box within a second box to protect it from being soiled by earth suggests a conscious attempt to remove the awareness of corruption. To do away with body-shaped coffins and to replace them with rectangular boxes is to help deny what the box contains. Heavy, large, long-lasting caskets are expensive. This is a salesman's paradise, where to be conformist is to be moral and to spend is to show respect. They have gained a market oligopoly in which to exert considerable influence over the style and content of consumer needs. As market leaders they have astutely retained significant aspects of traditional behaviour and embellished them within modern settings. For example the wake, the box and the central importance of the dead body are positively emphasised, but a wide range of modern goods and services surround the manner of their presentation. Expensive preservative and cosmeticising; provision
of reposing rooms; hermetical protection and impenetrable boxes, and mechanical lowering devices have become part of every 'normal' funeral. They are expensive to purchase and profitable to provide.

Their apparent concern to protect and conceal could lead observers to conclude that within their culture death must be so feared that great efforts are made to distance it from human awareness. Certainly Aries (1976) and Gorer (1965) regard the existence of such attitudes as confirmation of their view that death is now the taboo subject in Western cultures. Nevertheless, we cannot know directly what attitudes to death are common among people who spend so much time and money seeking, apparently, to preserve a body from corruption. For example, there is every day evidence to suggest that in business institutions throughout Canada and the U.S.A., hygiene, cleanliness, comfort, efficiency, specialisation and mechanisation are highly regarded. This is to be seen clearly in the funeral homes that the Newfoundland directors provide, as outlined above, and we should not be surprised if the body-handling techniques reflected the same priorities. Furthermore, businesses seek to retain customer preference by assiduously developing their wares, in many cases with increasing refinement of an original model. The 'sophistication' of a modern Newfoundland funeral may reflect the successful marketing techniques of funeral entrepreneurs rather than a desire on the part of the purchaser to keep the reality of death obscured.

Each successive treatment of the body not only profits the directors but also has the consequence of removing the dead body and its accompanying aura of death further from the mourners. Whilst many may welcome the separation, or come to accept it as 'necessary', they have as a consequence to accept a relatively passive role when a funeral is required. Passivity in the face of organisational procedures may be mistaken for refusal to face reality.
PART (B) THE RURAL OUTPORT : THE IMPACT OF SPECIALISM

INTRODUCTION

Although the capital city indicates the direction in which funeral directing throughout Newfoundland will probably develop, investigation of the scattered rural population will indicate how this is likely to happen. Historically, life in the coastal outports has been significantly different from that experienced in the city and the pressures encountered there produced a markedly distinctive culture.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN REMOTE SETTLEMENTS

Small, isolated communities, with only one basic economic resource such as fishing, tend to produce patterns of social relationships which are significantly different from those which develop in large populations which exploit a variety of occupations and markets. Gluckman (1955) argued that within the small communities, what he termed 'multiplex' social networks developed. He suggested that when the population was small, and each member was known about and observed in every role he performed, a delicate balance of interaction developed. This could be seriously disturbed if the behaviour of individuals ceased to be conforming and predictable. When Faris (1966) studied one such isolated fishing community in a remote part of eastern Newfoundland about 250 miles north of St. John's in 1964, he interpreted their pattern of relationships within Gluckman's model. He claimed to have identified a series of rules which had the effect of binding the individuals into a community. There were many pressures which inhibited the overt expression of emotional behaviour, and strong prohibitions against aggressive or exploitive actions, both physical and social. Personal behaviour was expected to be calm, orderly, regulated and not idiosyncratic.
EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

The community was isolated from the rest of the island and only reached by dirt-road. All significant communication was by sea, therefore strangers were immediately known to everyone as soon as they were landed and were treated with reserve, suspicion and frequently with hostility.

The small population was totally Christian and he claimed that their belief was expressed with fear, superstition and much emphasis on ritual. The year was punctuated by special 'occasions' - which included mummers, scoffs, weddings and funerals - during which the normal prohibitions on behaviour were disregarded.

Anything connected with black was feared, whether it was a natural object, an animal or the dark of night. Mourning black therefore was expressive of these fears, and a symbol of threat and separation. Faris explained this culture by examining the historical conditions which led to a precarious and isolated existence and which fostered the growth of this shared symbolism.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

This settlement was one of the many that developed on the barren peninsulas of Newfoundland in the early eighteenth century. They were first established in the face of harsh British laws forbidding anyone to settle and fish the waters offshore. This was to ensure that the abundant catches were returned to England for processing and profitable sale, and also to keep good sailors available for the navy. Not only were fishermen forbidden to stay ashore, but any shacks that were built were liable to be burnt; no land could legally be inherited and women were forcibly removed.

As a consequence of inhospitable land, isolation and legal prohibitions, the only people to develop settlements were pirates, deserters, criminals and others who had good reason to stop in such hazardous conditions. Under these circumstances, strangers were justifiably
regarded with suspicion or fear and regarded as intrusive and disruptive.

By 1750 however, settlements had become established, but they were remote, hidden from prying eyes, and self-supporting.

1960

When Faris studied the settlement, which he called 'Cat Harbour', 200 years later, the population was still a mere 285; 80% were members of the United Church and the remaining 20% Jehovah's Witnesses. When a death occurred, he recorded, it was a loss of great significance to the entire community, and there was a fixed response which separated the bereaved family from the rest of the community. Death was regarded as an outsider - violating the tenor of the group. Mourners wore black clothes and ribbons, their houses were decked with black, as were their church pews, to symbolise the pollution that death had forced on them. They were therefore separated both physically and socially from the rest of the community, and were allowed to exhibit openly emotional, even extravagant, behaviour. They were permitted to disrupt the normal routines, imposed from birth upon all members, as a consequence of their tragic experience.

A special category of people, usually close kin, took care of all funeral arrangements such as washing and caring for the body, dressing it appropriately for the wake and carrying it to church and burial. These favoured few wore white ribbons as did pall bearers, lay readers and ministers. Their church pews were similarly marked off.

Faris, therefore, drew a picture of a small community with circumscribed responses to intrusion, whether by people or by death. The body was 'waked' in the family home, cared for by knowing others and viewed by the community. Ceremonial was performed by themselves, for themselves.
When I visited this settlement in July 1981, 17 years after Faris, a transformation had taken place. The principal cause of the change was a metalled road that had been built in the early 1970s linking many of the outports. As a consequence the main channel of communication changed from the sea route under the control of the community itself, to a land network developed by strangers. This meant that people could enter the community unobserved, unknown, unchallenged and transient. Moreover, the new route brought with it a commercialism previously unknown; as a consequence new buildings, automobiles, refrigerators, televisions, grocery stores, hire purchases and processed foods became commonplace.

The funeral arrangements began to change, but very slowly. The wake was moved from individual homes to the back of the church, but still controlled by members of the local group, and the bereaved were still segregated from the rest of the community. (This evidence was supplied by numerous residents of Cat Harbour including a teacher of 60 years local experience).

However, in 1979, a local man decided to leave his work as a nurse in St. John's, 250 miles away and to open a fully-furnished funeral home in Cat Harbour, in the style of those to be found in the capital. He became the only funeral director for 60 miles in either direction along the coast and the first in an outport anywhere on the Island. He survived the minute examination that his efforts received from a suspicious community which was experiencing change in all areas of life.

He became accepted within two years and now takes full charge of every funeral. He removes the body, embalms it and has two waking rooms to which mourners come and go, for twelve hours if needed. His funeral home is modern and comfortable, an exact replica of those in St. John's. Most people chose a casket around $1,400 (£600) and the flower arrangements, dressing the body, simple cosmeticising and service arrangements are all controlled by him. The religious ceremony is still
important, and the local church controls the 'defining' process associated with death, leaving him free to develop the market for funerals. In July 1981 a local sea-captain died when his ship foundered close to the shore, but his body was recovered and brought home. The loss of the ship aroused great public concern and an impressive funeral was considered necessary. It was to be carried out on shore because the laws of burial placed restrictions of the return of bodies to the sea for disposal. Consequently the new director was given the responsibility for staging the ceremony, and over 1000 people passed through his funeral home when the body was 'waked'. Overcoming his nervousness, he produced a suitable viewing and a well-executed funeral, and his occupational role became widely accepted overnight.

Within the span of two years, therefore, the traditions of two centuries have been replaced. In the original settlements the members controlled all aspects of mourning display and body-handling, and provided, from among themselves, willing members to perform every task. 'Outsiders' were not required nor welcomed, and every task was within their control. Now the wake is physically separated from both home and church and mourners are no longer marked off and excluded, but are present continuously during the wake. Black and white symbolism has virtually disappeared and the close kin of the bereaved are no longer expected to behave extravagantly and to be excluded from the other mourners. The community is losing its ties to the sea, and strangers are common. The tight-knit multiplex social networks have been replaced with open, diffuse and achieved relationships.

The original population depended on the sea for survival, and later developed limited arable and stock farming; since soils were generally poor life was frugal. Now the number of independent fishermen is reduced to about a score, and even though cod, turbot, flounder and catfish are taken and sharks' liver is a valuable catch, the diesel-oil necessary to fuel their boats has increased in price threefold in the last 2 years. Therefore many men and women go to work in the nearby fish-processing plant for six months each year and earn between $14,000 - $16,000 (£5,800 - £6,600). They then have six months without work
during which time they receive unemployment pay. The focus of the settlement has shifted from the shore to the inland road. People pass through, but stop on route, therefore the economic life is geared to immediacy and convenience, epitomised by the focal buildings of cafe, restaurant and petrol station. The inroads of a technologically based, urban society, have changed the economic, and thence the social structure of the 'outport' (and it is that in name only now). Convenience foods have replaced fish and vegetables; refrigeration replaced salting; holidays are no longer tied to seasonal activities; houses are built alongside roads not jetties; strangers mean trade not interference, and the service specialist has replaced the community layman. This transformation has taken place in 10 years.

**SUMMARY**

The death ceremonies reflect the economic change that occurs when the specialist arrives with his new techniques, elaborate equipment, and concealed work region. His right to handle bodies is consequent upon his occupational skill, not his kinship link to the dead. He is welcomed because he lifts 'burdens' from people who now seem ill-prepared to carry them - a previous generation would have seem them as solemn duties not as burdens.

He represents the introduction of the individualistic, market-oriented entrepreneur, who provides client-oriented services with a conscientious attention to detail. He has replaced the caring layman, who is now his prospective client. He offers a new interpretation of what is 'suitable' and 'acceptable', one which was originally developed for an urban environment and which is now being accepted by rural communities. He reflects the business approach to funeral provision which is now becoming common to all industrial societies.

In isolation the community developed what would now be regarded as a cultural homogeneity, within which traditional activities had utility and expressiveness. When new techniques penetrated their routines a different way of life developed. Specialisms have developed, each one
striving to reach a market and to expand the demand for its services. The funeral director may be regarded as one example of this transformation.

CONCLUSION

Some observers regard the dominance of the specialists and the limited participation of the bereaved as an indication of a 'denial of death' syndrome which pervades European and North American societies. Critics such as Aries (1967) or Gorer (1965) argue that a combination of scientific expertise and hedonism have separated modern man from the biological realities of human existence, and that contemporary funeral practices are social indicators of this 'malaise'. In challenging their analysis (which has been widely transposed into a platitude on the lips of countless commentators) I argue that funeral practices can be assessed neutrally. In both Britain and Newfoundland there is, I claim, a psychological and material cost to be borne by funeral directors as they seek to combine the competing claims of tradition and modernity and to resolve the tension between gentlemanly conduct and commercial profitability. In Newfoundland funeral directors have resolved the tensions successfully by publicly linking gentlemanly conduct to business competence rather than to professionalism even though they have achieved the legal and occupational power indicative of a profession. The collegiate control gained as a consequence of their political influence in the Provincial Legislature has provided them with the market power I claim to be essential for professionalisation, (see Chapter 7). Their social identity and their occupational identity combine without discord, and allow the presentation of a public 'face' showing business strength and commercial success.

They show no inclination to play down commercial success, in fact their premises have a rich and comfortable look. The back-region of body-handling is more extensive and more expensively constructed than almost any to be found in England and is very carefully shut off from public scrutiny, (in England it is likely to be exposed to view by opening, inadvertently, one plain door). Caskets are on public display
and cover the complete range of models. The waking rooms are large, comfortable and well furnished and in this facility they show a totally different approach to that generally encountered in England. It is not merely that in Newfoundland a wake is normal and therefore a room suitable for visitors to use throughout the day is essential - the crucial distinction is the attitude of the staff, especially the director, toward the needs of the bereaved. In England, the 'gentlemanly' behaviour of funeral directors positively limits the actions of the bereaved, and in visits to over 150 funeral premises I have encountered hardly any attempt to provide comfort for the mourners. In most funeral homes the meagre provision of a few chairs and a scarcely private room are offered to the bereaved in a relatively perfunctory manner. The implicit, (sometimes explicit), assumption is that a meeting of the dead and the living is necessary, but potentially disruptive to decorum, stability, tranquility and emotional control. In Newfoundland, gentlemanly behaviour extends to a presumption that mourners can act 'responsibly' when in the presence of the dead. In England there appears to be a presumption that the bereaved cannot cope without the paternalistic support of a funeral director. This cannot be explained merely by acknowledging that 'waking' is not common practice in England and that we should not therefore expect Newfoundland customs to develop. What I call the 'paternalism' of the English directors (Chapter 3) is, I believe, the consequence of trying to achieve an occupational status which rests on probity rather than on service competence. Due to the fact that the directors have so few skills to exercise and because their facilities are relatively meagre, directors in England seek to conceal their limitations behind an imposing professional 'front'. Clients are moved between office and viewing room and, thereby, offered the chance not only to comment favourably on the competence of the firm but to welcome the protective guidance of the director. Many of the bereaved who have used such facilities may regard them in a different way, but they will not have viewed such businesses when not mourning. They are unlikely to be aware of alternative procedures for viewing the dead, nor willing to challenge the controlling influence of someone who so consciously seeks to lead them. The need to construct an occupational front is demonstrated most clearly
when English directors lead the cortege. They present themselves as chief actors and production controllers and show total absorption in this central role. It frequently involves marshalling the audience into groups and ushering them into prepared positions. By structuring and formalising the scenes, the English director predisposes the client and other mourners to accept his manipulation. Having diagnosed his clients needs and led his team to perform a concealed but vital service, he presents a stylish ceremony, thereby ratifying his accomplishments as much as performing a ritual. The Newfoundland director, in contrast, is not part of the cortege, because he drives the priest to the service and back again in his own car, separate from the hearse and mourners. This could be viewed as a separation of the 'professionals' from others, but it is due to a common practice whereby the mourners congregate in their own cars behind the hearse and drive in a long procession sounding their horns constantly. Freedom of choice, ebb and flow, noise and self-projection are within the control of the participants themselves. The director has organised the stage setting and availability of 'props' but does not seek to present himself so publicly as the dominant actor. He is more concerned to produce the show (a commercial undertaking) rather than to claim a privileged status as central performer.

The St. John's directors have achieved market control by the following strategems:

(a) Professionalisation - collegiate control exercised through legislation.
(b) Market oligopoly - the successful exercise of commercial control, whereby a few businesses supply the needs of the total market.

They have not sought to be recognised as 'professionals' but claimed instead an occupational status based on commercial competence. They are both self-regulating and self-recruiting; provide a commonly accepted and widely used client service; are regarded as respectable and successful businessmen; and make renewable profit from their commercial orientation.
Though the objective of funeral directors in Newfoundland and the United Kingdom is the same, the manner in which they seek to achieve their goal is significantly different. As shown above, they sell goods and services to individual clients, but in Newfoundland directors are open to recruitment from below. The status they occupy reflects diligence, business acumen, monetary resource and commercial success.

In Newfoundland employees are encouraged to work hard for bonuses and commissions and then to purchase shares in the business. They are offered training facilities to achieve the occupational diploma, and finally they may gain incorporation into the firm. They are therefore able to move from a semi-skilled manual worker status to that of a white-collar middle class, managerial status, a development totally absent in Britain. This degree of open, upward mobility injects aspiring newcomers into the ranks of the commercially successful directors and gives public and occupational recognition to business endeavour.

In Britain the social and occupational distinctions between employee and employer are emphasised and recruitment from below is neither sought nor accommodated by proprietors. Newcomers to their ranks find it a difficult and costly task, as will be shown in detail in Chapter Six. Takeovers and mergers result in a change of personnel in the ranks of the directors, but they do not willingly encourage their own employees to join them, even though they have worked with each other for many years.

This marked division of labour is reinforced by the style of paternalism exercised by the proprietors over their own particular workers. The acceptance of this benign leadership by the majority of employees ensures that discord and hostility does not develop between themselves and their employers. Furthermore, they are encouraged to regard themselves as members of a team working together for the benefit of the bereaved. Leaders and lead are necessary components of such a combined team of workers and therefore this openly unequal distribution of rewards does not generate hostility.
It is the combination of an openly competitive system of upward mobility with a legally protected monopoly of work which provides the Newfoundland occupation with its distinctive character. To be engaged in 'business' is respectable; to be successful in commercial endeavour brings reputable status; to be legally protected whilst operating a market monopoly brings financial profit. Gentlemanly conduct provides assurance for the clients that they are to be treated individually and with dignity.

In contrast, the occupation in the United Kingdom has a high degree of ascriptive status separating higher status proprietors from lower status workers. The refusal on the part of many directors to openly acknowledge the commercial basis of their occupational existence encourages them to maintain a social, as well as a managerial distance between themselves and their employees. This ensures the perpetuation of discord within the occupation and its inability to achieve its desire for higher status.

The following Chapter demonstrates the divisions which exist in the occupation as it operates in Britain today. It shows, with detail provided by those who are current members, the importance of tradition, family, consensus and professionalism in the ranks of the employers, and emphasises the role of the employees in supporting the proprietors in their dominance of the occupation. By working with them, observing and listening to their accounts of what is going on in their daily activities, a clear view can be obtained of an occupation which seeks the same objectives as their counterpart in Newfoundland but with vastly different results.
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CHAPTER FIVE

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF FUNERAL WORK

PART ONE - THE OBSERVER'S ACCOUNT
  PRODUCING FUNERALS IN A MARKET ECONOMY

PART TWO - THE RESPONDENT'S ACCOUNTS
  (A) THE PROPRIETORS
  (B) THE WORKERS - A CONSENSUALIST MAJORITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>229</td>
<td>Part One - The Observer's Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Producing Funerals in a Market Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>232</td>
<td>Constructing a Reputation - The Director's Stagecraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>Understanding The Actor's View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>The Interpretive Process and its Consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>244</td>
<td>Defining a Particular Reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>246</td>
<td>A Structured Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>249</td>
<td>Part Two - The Respondent's Accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A) The Proprietors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>Consensual and Deviant Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>The Proprietor (R100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>253</td>
<td>The Consensualist (R65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255</td>
<td>The Deviant (R77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260</td>
<td>Addendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>A Professional 'English' Way of Death (R89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276</td>
<td>The Business Orientation - 'Putting The Show on The Road' (R30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAGE</td>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>Family Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289</td>
<td>The First Family - Business Consultants (R95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>293</td>
<td>The Innovating Family - Commercial Success (R94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>296</td>
<td>Family Paternalism and Business Strength (R83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>Family Citadel - Business as a Moral Commitment (R101/2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>307</td>
<td>Marrying Into a Funeral Business - Role Separation (R113, 84(a), R79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310</td>
<td>Marrying Into A Funeral Business - Role Sharing (R114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312</td>
<td>Commercial or Professional Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>324</td>
<td>Judaism and The Commercial Funeral (R22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>328</td>
<td>The Muhammadan Mosque and The Commercial Funeral (R44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>330</td>
<td>Sole-trader - The Craftsman's Business Style (R97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>333</td>
<td>Funerals As Big Business - The Co-Ops 23% (R30, 29, 28)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part Two - The Respondent's Accounts

(B) The Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>337</td>
<td>A Consensualist Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>344</td>
<td>The Pragmatists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>347</td>
<td>Team 'Easing' Situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>352</td>
<td>The Protectionists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>355</td>
<td>'Real' Death Work - The Embalmers Perspective (R37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>357</td>
<td>Attendant Roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>364</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART ONE - THE OBSERVER'S ACCOUNT

Funeral directors operate in a market condition of monopolistic competition where imperfect market conditions operate for consumers (see below). Because there is so little intrinsic difference between the goods or services they offer, and since there is a relatively slow 'throughput' of products, e.g. coffins and coffin sets, each firm will seek to maximise its profits by emphasising its own particular image. The decisive selling factors are reputation and location, hence the desire expressed by directors to gain a local prominence. Once established, they must ensure that consumer attention is focussed on their presentational skills. Their 'image' is the central resource that can be translated into profit.

Customers lack full knowledge of the market they wish to enter. They do not have complete freedom of movement or choice and, consequently, choose from a conveniently situated sample; they are not purchasing a standard commodity, such as sugar, and therefore lack experienced judgement. They rarely feel competent, or able, to compare services, and are not systematically price sensitive in choosing between alternatives. The facilities and goods they purchase are not voluntarily sought in the normal manner of customer selection and consequently the usual critical assessment of market value may be suspended. The economic criterion of 'value for money' may be considered inappropriate for such a sensitive purchase as a funeral. The market is stable and predictable and competition in the usual sense of 'loss leaders', innovation, brand image and advertising, is absent. Consequently, funeral directors enter negotiations with customers occupying an advantageous bargaining position. They may disclaim it or signify their intention to reduce its impact, but client ignorance and uncertainty is a major factor influencing director-client negotiation. (Price Commission 1977, DHSS 1980).
Many directors emphasise the care they take to give such information to their client as will help redress the imbalance between the two sides to the exchange. They now 'itemise' their services (their own term), on a price-list which is meant to be prominently displayed in their premises. Frequently this is not the case.

Directors now offer what they refer to as a 'basic' funeral which includes what they commonly regard as the fundamental requirements for a 'decent' funeral. They agree to remove the dead body; store, treat and encoffin it; present it for view; transport it in a hearse to a place of disposal; provide one limousine to move the chief mourners to and from the disposal site and offer their specialist skills, all for one inclusive price. The charge for the coffin is frequently 100% higher than its wholesale cost and they justify this 'mark-up' by claiming that the profit from the coffin will cover all unitemised costs. It has been argued in the previous chapter that the coffin is the symbolic centre of the funeral and can be used by the director to carry an otherwise unacceptable cost for the bereaved.

Directors take responsibility for paying other service occupations on their client's behalf, recording them on the account as 'Disbursements'. They pay doctors, clergymen, organists, choir, gravediggers, registrar, florist, newspapers, mortuary attendants and staff at crematorium or cemetery. Far higher costs are incurred if clients request better coffins; single graves; reopened graves; extra limousines; funeral meals or granite or marble tombstones. A 'total' funeral in 1985 can cost £1,000 if such extras are requested, yet the actual ceremony will not appear to be in any way lavish or ostentatious.

Though clients may intend to purchase a 'basic' funeral, they may quickly expand it when the reflect on what 'ought to be done'. Cremation requires that two doctors certify death and this raises the cost of the funeral. However, this can be off-set by providing a remembrance rose-tree rather than the usual grave head-stone.
Funeral directors attend to the following three aspects of funeral presentation:-

1. **THE PHYSICAL** - entailing occupational control of the body for its caretaking, treatment, preservation, location, presentation and transportation.

2. **THE ADMINISTRATIVE** - fulfilment of the legal, formal and informal transactions without which a funeral cannot pass through its allotted sequence of events.

3. **THE MORAL** - occupational responsibility to protect the body from improper use, public observation and vulgarity, and for ensuring proof of identity. (Presenting the wrong body or, worse still, disposing of the wrong body, is the most feared dereliction of duty.)

The combination of these tasks is not as daunting as it appears because Directors maintain close control over their work regions, thereby ensuring that behavioural deviance and administrative 'foul-ups' are known only to themselves. The 'presentational periods' when their handywork is on display are limited, to a private viewing and to a public ceremony. The former is usually limited in time, confined in space, restricted to the funeral 'home' and totally contrived and controlled by the director himself. Mourners have very limited time or space to consider alternative arrangements.

Funeral goods are rarely the objects of close scrutiny, since most purchasers forego their right to inspect the coffin and its fittings. They are even less likely to inspect the body in order to make a judgement on the effectiveness of the embalming service they have paid for. Most clients do not actually see the caretaking services they have hired, nor do they inspect the hearse to see if it carries a second, but hidden, body within it, to save the director the cost of a further visit.
to the same disposal centre. Were they to seek to do so, they would face an incredulous director who has many indirect methods of defence against what he would surely regard as a prying or voyeuristic affront. Furthermore the occupied hearse is rarely left unattended by his team of bearers. When it is temporarily halted, they stand in close attendance, as though to guard its precious content. Such a screen of people is also a defence against untoward intimacy by onlookers.

Customer judgements therefore will be focussed on the presentational skills of the funeral director and on the effectiveness of his team's performance. Whilst most clients may not wish to give second thoughts to the detail of his body-handling activities, they are likely to be acutely aware of imperfections in his ceremonal performance.

CONSTRUCTING A REPUTATION - THE DIRECTOR'S STAGECRAFT

Viewed as dramatic actors, funeral directors are concerned with a constant succession of first performances, since audiences are constantly changing and locations are significantly varied. The central concern for each director must be to ensure that every performance he stages is regarded as 'suitable' and that each is brought off successfully. Well practised team work provides him with assurance that he can present a public ceremony in accord with the occasion's sentiments. He must construct a performance which will be acknowledged to be 'appropriate' by performers and audiences alike, and one which will enhance his occupational prestige. Imputations of competence, sincerity and dignity are available to be awarded or withheld at the discretion of audiences. He is, therefore, significantly concerned with 'impression management' wherein his reputation stands or falls on the judgement of lay audiences (Goffman 1959 pp182-209). He depends on team support for his leadership role, and his public appearances can only be successful if the backstage preparations have been detailed and thorough.

A funeral cannot be performed a second time to redress a bad performance. It cannot be re-assembled or re-cast without serious
repercussions for all those closely involved with its creation. Once the decision to stage the ceremony has been taken, a flow of information passes between those who are to assemble. From the bereaved a chain of information extends outwards to link diverse groups to the planned ceremony. When family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, associates and distant acquaintances receive notification of the event, they set in motion their own supportive activities. An intricate order of precedence operates whereby who tells whom, and in which order, significantly influences the strength of the tie between the recipient and the ceremony. Whether an invitation to attend is explicit, or coded, knowledge of the forthcoming funeral creates expectations concerning duty, obligation, support and curiosity. To halt the physical and attitudinal preparations that have been set in motion is a disagreeable task, which self-respecting directors strive to avoid by careful planning.

The funeral director has logistic complexities to solve and matters of precedence to arrange as he plans the funeral presentation. In the private servicing area of the funeral premises marshalling procedures are designed to bring together the separate groups of mourners, entrance and exit techniques are established, and cues for action are agreed. Scene changes are planned to meet each successive shift of location and work-loads are allocated within the team. The responsibility for staging a public ceremony of such significance requires the director to take account of other service agencies if his planned flow of activity is not to be untimely halted. He must know bus-routes and traffic congestions, quiet roads in which to wait unobtrusively if ahead of schedule, and be aware of road repairs and diversions en route to collection points. The skilled director will know how to space the cortege so that the constantly encountered aggressive car drivers cannot cut in between the hearse and its accompanying cars thereby spoiling the ordered appearance of the total procession. When negotiating a large roundabout, the first limousine will 'take up station' slightly out of a direct line astern of the hearse, to prevent pushful car drivers from overtaking, and on a long, straight road, each limousine will attempt to leave insufficient space for leap-frogging drivers to infiltrate their
regular spacing. Such techniques are gained by experience, and funeral directors devote much attention to devising suitable plans of action.

It is not unknown for the police to stop a hearse transporting a body between different parts of the country, when the driver, free from the slow driving routines common to funerals, exceeds the speed limit. Rarely does this result in prosecution because the police are likely to share the common view that such unusual speed must be warranted by unusual need. On motorway service areas, hearses with coffins are left as discreetly as possible out of the line of public sight. On one notorious occasion, a hearse with its coffin and body were stolen whilst its driver and caretaker took refreshment. (R107). Since it is improper, and possibly illegal, to leave dead bodies unattended on a public highway, careful bargaining with the police was necessary to prevent the theft being reported. Had it become known that incompetent, or uncaring, funeral workers had 'lost' a body, then all the previous efforts to maintain the appearance of 'professional' service would have been at risk. Humour and criticism would have exposed the firm to public disquiet and no adequate response could have been provided.

In large firms, many bodies are prepared at one time for their last transportation and lie, shrouded and silent, each waiting for its respective funeral. Sometimes twenty or thirty are in one room, each with an identifying label tied to the large toe. Such a mute recognition of an individual life is all that exists to tell workers which body they should be processing. The greatest catastrophe that can befall a director is to mix up the bodies and each shrouded body is a potential time-bomb. In one such explosive event, the wrong body was cremated in the morning, leaving a distraught mourner to view a stranger instead of her husband. (R29). It is the nightmare of such an occurrence that gives rise to the careful identification procedures in the funeral home and at the crematorium. Conversely, each successful presentation produces a feeling of confidence and enables the funeral staff to present a relaxed appearance. The public ceremony epitomises the total combination of talent, hidden or professed, and for the funeral director the respectful silence, the release of breath, the
murmured words of thanks, are confirmation of a successfully, completed task.

Therefore, the back region preparations must be hidden from public view if the funeral director is to present an air of effortless control. No dress rehearsal is possible and the one and only performance must be accomplished without blemish. Mental rehearsals alone must be relied on to ensure that schedules are kept and dead bodies concealed. One maladroit action, one indecorous remark or one significant omission can bring down the carefully prepared performance.

In producing such a public spectacle, the director provides a platform on which to parade his virtuosity but, most importantly, he is actively making his reputation - the most marketable commodity he possesses. By distancing himself from the body-handling tasks which preceded his appearance, he can encourage the public to regard him as a dignified and competent master of ceremony, and thereby avoid contamination which might arise as a consequence of too close an association with the corpse. Clients rarely manage to see him with his hands dirty, his clothes awry.

The obligations of the support team are to sustain the credibility of the performance he leads. They must not indulge in action that will jeopardise the production. Casual dress, offhand manner, flamboyant gesture or loud conversation can disturb the otherwise acquiescent audience, who wait to be shepherded into pre-arranged groups. Team members must act as if they accept the moral line and tone of the performance and actively engage in sustaining it. This is achieved by remaining separate from the mourners, but close enough to them to be seen as integral to the scene. By giving loyal commitment to the team performance, they demonstrate total involvement with the 'meaning' of the ceremony, and not to any individual interpretations of their own. Joking asides, blatant smoking, over involvement with outside interests or mishandling of significant objects (flowers, wreaths or coffin), can cause mourners to be aware of competing interests and hold the director responsible for mishandling a sensitive occasion.
Work-group solidarity and leadership control thereby combine to present each successive audience, whether on public highway, at pick-up point, or at church, cemetery or crematorium, with significant cue to the type of performance being given. The public funeral begins at the moment the coffin enters the public awareness, and does not end until the mourners are safely back in their homes, and the work-team and its vehicles are once again discreetly concealed from public scrutiny. Only the conductor is fully aware of the changes of pace required to keep the show moving at the appropriate speed and only he is well practised in the techniques required to mediate between the bereaved, the public, disparate audiences and officials. By careful positioning, both physical and symbolic, he can exert an effective, but unobtrusive, influence over the development of the ceremony, without seeming to claim undue significance for himself.

It is possible that many participants in the funeral want to be channelled and controlled by a competent and disciplined outsider - they wish to be produced as much as the producer wishes to direct them. The 'meaning' attached to the ceremony may be diluted if they come to know too much of its construction. Disenchantment may arise among the bereaved and mourners if the mechanisms by which the ritual is moved are revealed, and their performances may thereby lack the desired conviction. A 'natural' execution of tasks is required, and that may only be produced when the manipulative capability of the expert is carefully concealed. As Goffman suggests:-

\[\text{(...) (the disciplined performer) can suppress his spontaneous feelings in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line, the expressive status quo, established by his team's performance, for a display of proscribed affect may not only lead to improper disclosures and offence to the working consensus but may also implicitly extend to the audience the status of team member. And the disciplined performer is someone with sufficient poise to move from private places of informality to public ones of varying degrees of formality, without allowing such changes to confuse him. Most (...) defensive techniques of impression}\]
management have a counterpart in the tactful tendency of the audience and outsiders to act in a protective way in order to help the performers save their own show. (Goffman, 1969: pp 191 & 201. emphasis added)

A crucial aspect of human interaction is 'mood', and this can be generated effectively by action. Therefore the focussing potential of the director is of central importance for the actions that those assembled produce. By back-stage body handling techniques which block off audiences sights which may produce moods of disquiet or revulsion, by logistic expertise, and by directorial flair, the funeral controller can regulate collective action in such a manner that 'appropriate' moods are more likely to prevail. If participants return home having experienced a mood they regard as 'in accord with' such a ritual, yet unaware of the mechanisms by which they have been induced, then the director may feel well pleased. He has avoided those 'negatively eventful' acts, which only draw critical attention to themselves when they are not satisfactorily accomplished (Goffman, 1963: p 7). The specific sanctions which could operate if he failed to perform them effectively, would significantly harm his reputation, and thereby reduce his occupational credibility.

In real funerals, Directors present real bodies to real audiences, and in doing so are open to be observed by all who care to attend. Daily performances are publicly available for any caring eye-witness to observe. Critical observers can see for themselves if they are prepared to enter other peoples ceremonies and to be reflective - neither task is as difficult as supposed by the unadventurous.

The words chosen by directors to account for their own performances use a dramatic imagery, comparable to the dramaturgical language employed by the observer. Acknowledging themselves to be an integral part of a dramatic performance they define their action in terms relevant to a theatrical framework. The sociologist can deliberately distance himself from his participatory role and thereby recount his own and others accounts with detachment significantly absent from the performers.
It is difficult to practise role-distance when 'caught up' in a funeral. I have been pressed to discard such attempts and forced to become a fully integrated member of the cast on several occasions. I have been urged by directors to become part of a group, and pressed into conversation supportive of the funeral occasion. I have been presented with moments of significance and expected to recognise their importance. Finally, I have been released into marginality, and allowed to disengage from the moving skein of departing visitors.

The casual onlooker perceives unified and committed activity. This is due to the controlling leadership of the funeral director. It is possibly as difficult for the central mourners to embrace the role to which they have been committed by a death, and which the conductor encourages them to act with due conviction, as it is for others to evade the supportive roles created by this dedicated and capable master of ceremonies. The 'closed' nature of the stage, the goal-orientated nature of the proceedings with openings, developments, climaxes, closing and disposal characteristics, produces a structured occasion which is difficult to evade. These are not merely 'ceremonies' requiring punctillious behaviour but 'rituals' in which people expect to show accord with emotionally powerful commitments. However, as in all performances, there is scope for inner detachment and emotional distancing by those caught up in the production but with the distinct possibility of being labelled 'deviant' if such hidden transgressions produce observable actions.

UNDERSTANDING THE ACTOR'S VIEW

It is the funeral director's own awareness of his constructive potential that must be examined, and the aim of this chapter is to present the ideas, emotions and attitudes of the members themselves. In marshalling their words into 'evidence' and by placing them in contexts not of their choosing, their intentions may become distorted. The veracity of reporting can never be fully established since no accurate replication can ever be undertaken. The intention is to interpret their words and actions and to uncover attitudes that motivate their behaviour. This
ethnography of funeral directors is based not only on what they say they are doing, but on a theoretical analysis of their accounting procedures and on observation of what they actually do. An outsider who listens, observes and participates may thereby interpret in a new way what is regarded by them as normal, everyday, practical, reasoning. As Ditton argues:

Naked experience is strictly unpresentable as it stands, it has to be theorised in order to be communicated. (...) It is useless to pretend to produce pure ethnography: one might as well come clean and admit to producing a theorised ethnography. (Ditton, 1877:p 11-12)

However, I was as ignorant of their work roles and separated from their daily lives as most other laymen. I had no sure framework within which to 'make sense' of what they did and no existing theory to explain their behaviour. I had, in the terminology of the ethnomethodologist, to study the 'documentary method' employed by those in funeral work as they accounted for and made sense of their social world. By selecting certain aspects of the infinite number of features contained in any situation, and then defining them in a particular way, they gave sense and order to their experiences, and regarded them as evidence of an underlying pattern. The process is then reversed and particular instances of the underlying pattern are then used as evidence for the existence of an underlying pattern. For example, funeral directors' common-sense 'told them' that the bereaved cannot sustain the disturbing aspects of handling the dead or of constructing a mourning ceremony. The bereaved were thereby expected to be 'out of touch' with the requirements of death ceremonial. Consequently they removed the bereaved from proximity to the dead and took responsibility for all aspects of the funeral. When the bereaved exhibited a willingness to be led the director saw his beliefs vindicated, and the underlying pattern he had discerned was confirmed.

It is likely, therefore, that sociologists will utilise the same methods to make sense of the world they observe, as do the subjects they observe.
(if the ethnomethodological premise is followed through). Garfinkel, for example, sees little difference between sociologists and lay members in their accounting techniques. However, it is not the intention of this study to expose a 'real world' of funeral directors, nor to make their occupational world appear stable and ordered. It is the manner in which members make rule-governed behaviour that is to be examined - how they construct an occupational 'self' and a funeral ceremony, which withstand counter definitions. Blumer refers to 'the manner in which people act towards one another as though they have in advance a firm understanding of how to act and how other people will act' (in Rose 1962 pl87). A tentative expectation becomes a confirmed reality as a consequence of acting out preconceptions. Funeral directors therefore 'make up' their role-performance, they do not merely 'slip into' prescribed behaviour.

THE INTERPRETIVE PROCESS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Throughout this work, the ideas and terminology developed by Erving Goffman are regularly acknowledged but not without due recognition of the criticism levelled at his contribution to sociological theory. For example Psathas writes that:-

'The failings of field researchers in the symbolic interactionist tradition (are that) insights are based on common sense understandings of daily life occurrences (and that there are) broad theoretical concepts and relatively little development of concepts which can be used transsituationally to analyse (...) the facticity of the world of everyday life. (Psathas in Ditton 1980 p54).

He then notes that:-

'(it matters) whether the subject is aware of the observer and deliberately does not orient his behaviour to the interpretation an observer might make, or whether he is unaware of the observer and therefore does not orient his behaviour to him (...) it can matter a great deal whether the observer (other) believes his subject
knew, or did not know of his presence. The confusion introduced by Goffman's use of the term 'observer' serves to obscure the differences between the two types of observer, and the different types of situations which may be involved'. (ibid p63).

In developing his criticism, Psathas claims that in many other definitions Goffman fails to distinguish between distinctly separate properties and:--

'(...) it is precisely this systematic ignoring of specific features (...) which leads to the same result, in Goffman's own work, which he attributes to others, namely, conceptualisations which, too quickly, intermingle matters which must be kept apart, at least, initially'. (ibid p72).

Therefore Psathas argues that:--

'(...) the apparent illumination in the reader's mind is based on his unquestioning assumption of common sense reasoning (...) the reader's impression that he has gained an understanding of previously perceived but un-understandable complex events serves merely to keep him ignorant of the basis of his 'understanding' and keep him dependent on Goffman to provide further 'illumination'. He is (...) unable to assess critically Goffman's method, or his epistemological assumptions since these are never discussed. The reader can only infer that he is fortunate to have a keen and insightful guide in Goffman whom he must trust to lead him by the hand to newer gardens with ever more exciting vistas of the fruits of human performances, presentations and interactions (...) (however) conceptual clarification may come only if close examination of interaction is first undertaken without regard to the substantive matter of what the actors are trying to accomplish, with a regard instead for interaction as a phenomenon on its own right'. (Psathas, ibid p74 : emphasis added).
This is telling criticism which argues for the necessity of distinguishing 'topic' from 'resource' and to which I shall plead 'guilty', as Psathas obviously believes Goffman should have done. Such a microsocial analysis of interaction was not the purpose of this study and would only have been possible if unlimited access to each participant had been gained. The close investigation into a, necessarily limited, number of interactive phenomena would no doubt have provided great insight into the daily creation of gatherings, but would have prevented me from attending many other interactions. In each subsequent observation I gained less than perfect understanding of the subjects' interpretive processes, but had I received them 'indexically', i.e. firmly located within the meaning structure of the subject, they would still have required 'interpretation' through my 'observer's' accounting techniques. The richness I have missed awaits a further investigator.

Nevertheless, it is Goffman's ability to show the mundane world in a new light, to expose a hitherto undisclosed world to its ignorant participants and to use old words in unexpectedly significant ways, which informs as well as excites his readers. He may well have become

'(...) more concerned with developing and assigning concepts and categories to the phenomena observed, than with analysing the properties of the phenomena themselves'. (Psathas ibid p74).

but he has restored to sociology, the power to excite the interest of readers. His powers of observation have been matched by a willingness to conceptualise and he has designed a stimulating vocabulary. With incongruous phrases such as:-

'The dead are sorted but not segregated, and continue to walk among the living'. (Goffman 1952 p505).

and
he demonstrates the ability of the cool observer to reshape the language of description. Performers are thereby invited to view their taken-for-granted world as though it were newly created. The stage looks distinctly 'unreal' to members of the cast who view it for the first time from down in the prompt pit or from high up in the fly-tower. They are used to eye-level appraisal of co-actors, not to 'distortions' of body angles created by close proximity to feet or to Olympian detachment. To regard a funeral in terms of a purely logistic problem (as seen from the crematorium's booking office) or to regard the hearse merely as a transport vehicle for carrying a second, (but hidden) coffin, is not commonplace observation. 'Putting the show on the road' may be acceptable comment among those in the occupation, but highly disturbing to mourners in their private grief.

Goffman is perhaps best suited to be, what Collins refers to as, 'an explorer of our social unconscious' (Collins in Ditton 1980 p201). This is not because he delves into hidden and unacknowledged depths, but because he suggests that we are socially unconscious of what is right on the surface. By focussing on what is normally disregarded we may become aware of the surface gloss through which we normally regard the world. In doing so we may become worried or comforted by our own self-awareness; unable to perform with the freedom allowed by ignorance. Funerals may come to be judged as failures - acceptance of routine may no longer be possible.

The precision with which Goffman brings sharply into focus that which we previously looked through creates a second jolt for many readers. Goffman asks that performers detach themselves, mentally, from the social behaviour they encounter and as a consequence of realignment, experience a shift in perception. The mundane thereby takes on the appearance of the exotic. Collins suggests that he:-
'(...) runs parallel to the ethnomethodologists, (except that he) asserts that solid ground does exist in the contours of the multi-levelled realities. There are therefore real cops and robbers (or innocent suspects'). (Collins ibid p203).

Real funeral directors and real mourners exist, but are usually looked past to the ceremony they enact, rather than observed as creative performers.

DEFINING A PARTICULAR REALITY

People usually know, or could know, on what level of reality they are performing, and they also have the ability 'to settle for' a clear account of reality much of the time. It is on the respondent's account of their own observed reality that this chapter relies. The taken for granted assumptions that they deploy in order to 'explain' the 'real' world of funeral activity form the basic level of explanation. I seek to reframe the pictures they present, and thereby to suggest alternative interpretations of 'what is going on'.

Most respondents cited in this study did not acknowledge their own defining capabilities. They claimed to be merely presenting the objective world of social events as it actually 'was'.

In some cases they were aware of my role as observer, although why I was observing may not have been clear to them. In other situations I was accepted as part of the work-force and privy therefore to the everyday activities of funeral work without carrying observer status. In further cases I was an unobserved observer who could see men at work without myself being seen, or if seen, not identified as 'observer' but as client or salesman. There were also interviews in which I was not 'observer' but 'researcher' with connotations of academic respectability shared by interviewer and respondent. In terms of Psathas' stricutures my own accounting procedures are suspect, since I have not developed a method whereby the distinctive characteristics of observer and subject are clarified beyond doubt in each separate encounter.

244
At times Goffman presents interaction techniques as though the participants had uncensored freedom to define the content, style and meaning of their social behaviour. There are, however, economic, political and religious restraints, which influence most aspects of game-pling and role-taking, and thereby 'shape' the strategic interactions he so closely monitors. A continuous background hum of coded information is sometimes filtered out by Goffman, so that he can give his full attention to the dynamics produced by selected performers. But as Collins remarked:

'(...) there are ultimate realities indeed (police-military) in the sense of controlling the sanctions before which all else will bow'.

(Collins in Ditton 1980 p204).

Due attention must be given to the coercive potential of controlling ideologies, especially that forged by those with economic power in a capitalist market economy. In this chapter the self-constructing potential of individuals at work is the centre of attention, but this should not be read as an indication that other, macrosocial, definitions have lost influence.

Primarily this work is a phenomenological reproduction of actual experience. Ditton notes the difficulty of reconstructing events without theorising since:

'(...) this is rudely organised theory masquerading as pure ethnography. True or false, to believe this style contains less theory (than 'analysis') is similar to the belief that some days contain less weather than others. Theory, like weather, is a zero sum concept; it cannot be more or less there, only more or less recognised and recorded. Naked experience is strictly unrepresentable as it stands, it has to be theorised in order to be communicated. Thus we are inevitably faced, as Rock (1973) astutely notices, with a programmatic tension between phenomenalism (naturalistic reproduction - ethnography) and essentialism (depicting fundamental social processes - analysis). (...)

245
perversely, this theoretical impossibility of producing pure ethnography legitimates the overt celebration of theory - impregnation'. (Ditton 1972 p12).

The ethnography provided by the researcher in this study is imbued with concepts derived from the dramaturgical analysis of action and the conflict model of social constraint.

A STRUCTURED OCCUPATION

There are no accurate statistics concerning the funeral service occupation, but combining the information gained from the Price Commission Report on Funeral Charges (1977); NAFD statistics on membership, and Trade Union details the following figures are commonly accepted among members themselves:-

1. 3,700 funeral directors, of whom 60% are members of the NAFD and who perform about 80% of the 650,000 funerals carried out each year.

2. 2,300 funeral directing businesses (not a reliable indicator of the number of firms that actually provide funerals).

It has been suggested, in Chapter Three, that four types of business can be noted, (sole traders, private and public companies and Co-operative Societies), and that the private companies can be regarded as the core of the occupation. In all businesses a variation in type and strength of commitment can be seen. Directors can be regarded as representative of a style of performance or of a particular orientation. They speak of their motivatious, goals, methods and commitment, allowing the following categorisation to be made:-

246
A TYPOLOGY OF DIRECTORS

1. ORIENTATION
   (a) BUSINESS
   (b) PROFESSIONAL

2. CAREER TYPE
   (a) FAMILY
   (b) INDIVIDUAL

3. SERVICE IDEAL
   (a) CLIENT
   (b) MUNICIPALITY

1(a) Business orientation emphasises the search for private profit through commercial competition.

(b) Professional orientation emphasises the provision of a special competence with altruistic probity.

2(a) Family career reflects duty and obligation to maintain and develop family interests.

(b) Individual career asserts the primacy of individualism in seeking a successful career and gaining personal status.

3(a) Client service expresses the belief that a client should purchase the personal attention of a specialist and thereby initiate a special relationship of trust.

(b) Municipal service requires that funerals should be provided for all citizens as a form of social service, and not purchased on the open market.

Commitment to any form of municipal funeral service was virtually non-existent among both owners and workers. Proprietors claimed that open competition increased efficiency, reduced costs and provided consumer choice. 'Client service, family businesses' dominate the occupation, frequently seeking to camouflage their commercial orientation with a claimed professionalism. This claim to 'respectability' was not duplicated among workers, even though the ideal of client-service was equally strong among them. From their responses to questions and from everyday behaviour, the following classification is constructed to summarise the workers location in the occupation:-
A TYPOLOGY OF WORKERS

1. CONSENSUALISTS
Workers who express the belief that proprietors and workers have a common interest and a joint function, namely the provision of a necessary client-service. Identification with the interests of the firm is high.

2. PRAGMATISTS
Workers who are instrumentally oriented and regard their funeral work as a satisfactory way of obtaining income and/or status. Their duties, the firm and client needs are subordinate to personal satisfaction. Identification with the interests of the firm various with circumstance.

3. PROTECTIONISTS
Workers who are strongly committed emotionally, attitudinally or practically to the collective interests of all funeral workers. Frequently strong Trade Unionists, they seek to defend workers rights against proprietors who are perceived to be exploitive of both worker and client. Identification with the interests of the firm is limited to providing honest labour to people in need.

There are about 7,000 full-time workers in the occupation and about the same number work part-time. Very few part-time workers are in a Trade Union but there are about 4,000 Trade Unionists throughout the occupation. 3,000 of these are in the funeral branch of the Furniture Timber and Allied Trades Union (FTAT) and others are in the transport or shop-workers union.

Many Trade Unionists are 'consensualists' and identify with their 'guv'ners' co-operating with them even at the cost of their working conditions. They regard the Union as a form of occupational insurance against any future threat to their working lives, not as a significant gesture of commitment to worker solidarity.
Many respondents do not completely 'fit' the definitions provided above but have not been forced to forego their individual perspectives. They have been presented fairly, but thereby reinforce the dominant patterns that have been identified. So few members, either employer or employee, supported municipalisation that its inclusion was in doubt. However, even though the prevailing emphasis is on competitive business enterprise, it is one that requires an equally powerful belief to oppose and denigrate. Municipalisation provides the distasteful 'ideology' against which competitive individualism is presented as morally and commercially superior.

PART TWO - THE RESPONDENT'S ACCOUNTS

(A) THE PROPRIETORS

As has already been noted, it is the small and medium-sized private companies which perform the majority of funerals. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin the respondent's own accounts of their work, with one of them who claims a moral respectability in controlling a commercially successful family firm. This is a most significant contribution because two further accounts have been obtained from inside his firm, one supportive and the other damaging in its criticism. His account presents the firm, himself and the funerals they provide firmly in a business orientation, protecting a family career and having client-service as their ideal. He presents his accomplishments with pride and conviction and is supported by one of his staff who provided a 'consensualist' account of the firm which matched that given by his employer.

However, both accounts were strongly opposed by a long-serving worker in the firm who, with his wife, offered a critical exposure of hidden irregularities commonplace in the firm. He may be regarded as the 'deviant' voice, providing a subversive account of a superficially respectable business.
Each respondent was unaware that other respondents were giving their own account, (counting the husband and wife as one respondent), and each was interviewed in a different situation. The proprietor gave his version of reality in the formal offices and chapel of his business premises; the consensualist in his own home well away from the funeral premises; and the 'deviant' from inside the tied-accommodation which was part of the funeral firm's building complex.

CONSENSUAL AND DEVIANT ACCOUNTING
THE PROPRIETOR R100

The firm was founded by the proprietor's grandfather, a builder who 'undertook' a funeral whenever required to do so. The proprietor, now 76 years of age, was gradually relinquishing control after 62 years in the business, and his grandsons of eighteen and sixteen, were taking over responsibility. The unbroken succession has built a successful establishment with consecrated chapel, gardens of remembrance, viewing rooms and stone masons, leading them to call it by the grand title 'Emporium'. Directorships are kept closely within the family and the firm has a local ascendancy over its two competitors. Three families of workers live in 'tied' houses within an enclosing perimeter wall. The architectural style is 'pseudo-Norman', intended perhaps to give an impression of historical order and established strengths. 'I learned the trade from Father, and found it easy to remain calm and efficient when the bereaved claimed my services. The public have a morbid curiosity about funeral directors, but, because we are sincere, are reverent and give a square deal, they also have a good impression of us. Any Tom, Dick or Harry can do it - its a business like everything else. We keep charges down (...) treat fairly (...) don't overcharge (...) and are satisfied with a fair profit'. (One which compares fairly with other similar businesses). 'We do lots of things (without payment) under that wonderful word 'service'. Death is a great leveller and we give the same service to rich and poor alike'.

Even though 'a large and successful public company has tried to muscle in', the firm has kept its local pre-eminence and does not intend to
expand further afield and compete with other well established directors. He is content to dominate the locality, 'where hospitals, police, nursing homes and coroners personally recommend me'. He claimed to 'find suitable replacements to staff through the local papers' and keep them by treating them fairly (...) only employing sensible people, no long-haired layabouts or punks! None of them wish to train as Directors and they are content to work nine to five-thirty, then overtime, whereas we Directors work twenty-four hours a day for seven days a week. Operatives don't have and don't want responsibility'.

This view is contradicted even by the employee who supported his overall attitude toward funeral work, who said that 'in most cases it is the workers who go out to collect a body at night or during the weekend, and it is they, not the director, who frequently make the first contact with the bereaved (...) (furthermore) (...) neither cemeteries, crematoriums, Registrars, nor coroners work outside nine to five on weekdays, so directors do not find themselves necessarily carrying the main burden of constant service to others'. Nevertheless, the picture of himself that the director projected was of an honest proprietor, leading a group of loyal, hardworking and supportive workers.

He has 'not considered it necessary to take the NAFD Diploma but had taken the Embalming Diploma instead'. Even though he acknowledged the value of educating directors, he argued, as did many of his colleagues who ran similar sized family businesses, that 'learning by experience is the main route to success'.

His social life was only marginally influenced by the joking reaction of friends and 'I takes their humour and forgets about it once I leave the office. Directors are respected members of the community now. I've been a Mason for thirty years and a past President of the local Chamber of Commerce; my eldest son is a Rotarian. Funeral directors are established."

Though not a deeply religious man himself, over 90% of the funerals he conducted had a religious ceremony, and he 'presented the ceremony
correctly, always wearing black, not like another Director, a pansy who wears grey (...) Daimlers are essential, 'Granada' low-loaders are inferior substitutes and are not seen by the public as suitable - not a real hearse'. He did not rush his performances, but felt aggrieved that so many mourners now came in their own cars. 'Its a damn nuisance - they mess up the smooth time-schedules we have planned'.

He will have nothing to do with Unions. The strike of 1977 failed, he claims, and his workers are satisfied so he is not concerned. When speaking with pride of new provisions, he spoke of a 6-berth refrigerator and a transformed body treatment room. When questioned he said that there had been no adverse criticism of his premises, either by statutory Health Officials or by his staff, the new equipment was merely part of his continuing efforts to improve services.

In reply to questions concerning an 'Old Bailey' case in which a local Coroner's Clerk had been convicted of accepting bribes from his firm, he said '(...) the officer blackmailed all funeral directors and I paid because I had to. The man was exposed because another funeral director complained that he wasn't getting a fair share of bodies. Of course we get work through the Coroner's Office (...) they obviously give work to those they know will give good service so it pays to be well-known. We behave in a professional manner, that is with skill and service. Yes, it's a secure business because there's always a need for it'.

His interpretations could not be easily challenged since he personally controlled the flow of information, both visual and spoken. The occupational front he presented showed an efficient and business-oriented service. The business provided a good financial return due to regular demand for the high quality work he offered. There was no worker dissatisfaction, no local competition and no health hazard. Business propriety and good service justified making a fair profit. This was his case.
His supportive employee expressed a deep personal commitment to his work, even though he had only entered funeral work two and a half years ago when he joined the firm. Following work as a computer operative and then as a repairer of musical instruments with his father-in-law, he suffered what he refers to as a 'nervous breakdown'. When he saw a newspaper advertisement for an assistant to a funeral director he applied, because he thought he would be able to offer help to people in distress. He liked the small-business aspect of the job and the sense of personal involvement projected by the owner.

His entry into the work was traumatic because it coincided with a breakdown of the refrigeration facility at the supplying Hospital. He had, therefore, '(...) to handle bodies in an advanced state of decay (which) upset me greatly, and I resigned within two days'. He was, however, 'encouraged to remain by assurances that such conditions were exceptional', and a rise of £10 per week in his pay. He claims that his employer regularly paid low wages to beginners, but paid higher than Union-negotiated rates once an employee had been accepted as fully dedicated to the work. Pay, he says, 'goes up, without the need for negotiation or pressure due to the generosity of the employer, who keeps rates in line with his nearest competitor'.

He believes that his work is socially useful and it has helped him to regain an equilibrium upset by his illness. He does not feel competent to become a director, although offered the opportunity to train for such a position, because he does not feel he would be able to cope with the emotional stress produced by bereaved clients. Nevertheless, in his view, it is the workers who regularly have early contact with the bereaved by attending to the dead body immediately after death has occurred, and are thereby able to help people by careful and considerate behaviour, especially during the night. It is here, he assets, 'that the reserved characteristic of the English inhibits an outward show of emotion which produces a harmful situation - a bottling up of emotion'. It is difficult to see exactly why he feels that his depressive illness
(as he called it) should inhibit him from fulfilling the task of funeral director, yet not deter him from what he regards as possibly the most tense and emotional task - that of attending an actual death-bed scene when the bereaved are in immediate need of his help.

He regards the firm for which he works as a model of propriety, giving good service for money. A 'do-it-yourself' funeral would be totally inappropriate in his view - 'it would not be proper, and would be foolish for a layman to attempt. Clergymen cannot be blamed for not knowing the dead, because fewer people go to church now. People want what they consider to be right at death, and I think that many of them are hypocritical - wanting a religious service yet not attending a church at any other time. Most funeral directors give a good service and there are no good grounds for criticism. We are always being thanked and there is no need for change. We give what is asked for - we are professional - we do our work with skill. Snobbery encourages undertakers to call themselves funeral directors, but people who criticise are biased beforehand'.

'The firm will not be expanded until the senior partner retires when probably the family members who are directors of the firm will try to enlarge it. The son, his wife and the grandsons of the present senior partner, all have particular aspects of the business in their control; the eldest grandson of eighteen controlling the profitable stone-masonry business. We do between 750-800 funerals per year and there is no discussion between workers and owners, who are very good employers. We are given a bonus at Christmas based on the number of funerals carried out during the year. We cater for all social classes, get many of our bodies from the local nursing homes, and its a myth that we need to keep in with the Coroner's Clerk if we want regular business. This is a well-run, profitable business, offering a twenty-four hour service, even though it has no real opposition and is in a virtually monopolistic situation. We have just spent £10,000 on refrigeration units just to keep up to date, not as a consequence of inspection. We are always told when it is necessary to wear protective clothing, and there have only been two changes of staff in his two and a half years, mainly due to
clashes with the only worker who is a trade union sympathiser and who acts as a foreman, due to his undoubted experience, even though not officially employed as foreman'.

The account given by this informant identifies one other worker as a difficult person to work with, due to his support for Trade Unionism, his assertiveness based on long experience, and that '(...) being Irish he had a quick temper'. This man alone marred the harmony of the work situation and '(...) the clash of personalities made life difficult (...) a blind eye was turned toward him because he was good at his job'. (See below R77).

If this view of the work situation is accepted (and it supports that given by the proprietor in most significant aspects), then criticisms of the firm can be discounted if they are only given by what may be justifiably regarded as one discontented isolate. Nevertheless, it may be through the eyes of such a 'deviant' worker that any hidden flaws that weaken the collective front may be revealed. The assumption that only those in accord with the prevailing work-norms (i.e. consensualists) can give objective accounts of occupational practice is not tenable. The 'biased' criticism of one who feels himself to be outside the value consensus prevalent at his place of work has as much claim on our attention as the spokesmen for conformity.

THE 'DEVIAN T' (R77)

From two 'deviant' workers (a husband and wife who lived in tied accommodation on the premises) a very critical account of this apparently trustworthy firm was given. (He is the 'difficult' worker, referred to above). They claimed to expose the concealed mechanism of business exploitation, and because the man was the self-appointed foreman of the firm and had worked there for sixteen years, his account could not be lightly dismissed. According to their joint evidence, the firm has achieved a local monopoly of funerals by a variety of dubious business stratagems including bribery and unsafe work practices. They regard the proprietor as an unscrupulous exploiter, who has operated
behind a veneer of utmost respectability for many years. His story contradicts everything so far offered by the proprietor and his supportive worker. Eighteen years ago the proprietor offered money to mortuary porters at local hospitals if they would wash and clean the bodies in their charge which were to come to him for funeral preparation. This offer contravened their conditions of employment but was accepted by them, therefore enabling him to influence their future behaviour. The respondent was one of the men bribed, and was subsequently offered work as an employee of the firm. For sixteen years he has been aware of the covert activities initiated by his employer, without daring to speak about it in case it cost him both his job and his house. This is his account:-

Influence was regularly brought to bear on everyone who could materially improve the proprietor's business prospects. Hospital Secretaries who have considerable discretion over the transfer and location of bodies; members of the Departmental Offices and the General Office; and the Bed Service Staff who have precise details of beds vacated, occupied and of patients' removal to the mortuary, were all carefully courted. Since hospital staff are forbidden to act as a commercial contact between the public and service occupations, his approach to them had to be informal and discreetly concealed as acts of 'appropriate friendliness'.

The simplest and most effective method of bribery (if such) was by the orthodox 'Christmas Gift', of cigarettes, cigars, spirits, wine, food and chocolate for the considerate 'help' given during the year. This was said to be a 'token of sympathetic support', to those who eased the movement of bereaved in the direction of this firm rather than its competitors.

When the police are called to a violent death they have to seek the practical services of a funeral director to remove and store the body until relatives can make decisions regarding its future. Usually, the funeral director called upon would be given the business for staging the funeral. Policemen were, therefore, regularly 'thanked', in the
appropriate way, for remembering which telephone number to ring when the occasion arose to call a funeral director.

'Of the 29 local nursing homes, seven will always ring this firm first because they have an 'understanding' with the proprietor, whilst many of the others have his telephone number displayed, as a consequence of the visits and contacts that he has developed over several years'.

The most notable breach of legality publicly levelled at the business was created by the bribery of the local Coroner's Clerk. In many cases this is a policeman, frequently a constable, on permanent loan from his station to the Coroner. In this case it was a retired police sergeant who regularly accepted bribes during his many years as Clerk. It is usually something of a sinecure with regular hours, no shift work, and a routine which varies but little, month by month. This clerk, however, was receiving money and gifts to ensure that Coroner's bodies were regularly dealt with by those who bribed him. He could also influence the bereaved in their choice of funeral director, or, in those cases where relatives were not available, promote business himself by holding bodies back until the director of his choice was available. He received £1 per body for handling it and £3 per body for each funeral carried out as a consequent of his favour. About 400 bodies per year came under his jurisdiction. This was eventually exposed when a rival director made a formal complaint that he was systematically excluded from a fair share of the market, in contrast to his competitor who was bribing officials (i.e. the firm now being discussed).

The consequent High Court trial found the constable guilty of giving business unfairly and he was fined for abusing his trust and accepting bribes. No charges were brought against this firm, who had bribed him, and who disclaimed responsibility for his favoured treatment of them. They claimed that they were forced into payment if they wished to survive and that the Clerk was on trial for 'demanding' - not them for 'offering'. The firm was criticised in the local Press but had no legal sanction imposed on it.
'A local hospital and rest home which takes many foreigners for major heart surgery, and consequently has a high death risk, has developed a close business relationship with this funeral director, so that from this and the other 'feeders' the business receives a steady flow of income'. They charge about £5 per funeral less than competitors but concentrate only on wealthy clients 'who will generally choose to have private graves which cost more than public graves, and who will usually have a more costly ceremony'. Overseas funerals for Arab clients now feature strongly in the business. Allied to this is stringency and 'corner-cutting' within the business operations to ensure high profit margins.

For example, 'by encouraging the bereaved not to view the body in the coffin ('Happy memories are best'), coffin furnishings are not provided although paid for by clients. The cheapest handles available are provided for cremation coffins, and, if possible, no price list is offered to clients nor prominently displayed' (violating both NAFD and colleague recommendations).

No refrigeration was available (before the recent expansion) thereby reducing capital costs and embalmers received £9 (1979) whilst clients were charged £25 (1979) for embalming.

Advertisements for staff were 'usually misleading, overemphasising the quality of work they would be doing, and most advertisements are now in local Job Centres, not in the Association 'Journal', aimed therefore at less discerning readership. 'Bad working conditions and low pay led to a high turnover of staff, but this didn't worry the directors so long as a core of efficient and skilled workers remain in place'. They achieved this result by providing tied accommodation. Three foremen and their wives live in flats on the premises and provide constant service by a rota arrangement. This informant had been employed in that capacity for sixteen years, living on the premises. Wives acted as receptionists and message-takers, with the informant's wife 'working between 9am - 2pm for £40 per week (1979). No union members were ever employed, so that the
management were under no pressure from outside sources to improve working conditions'.

The respondent found himself in a very difficult situation, whereby specific advantages were greatly outweighed by general drawbacks. 'The longer he remained in this employment the more difficult it was to break free and seek another work situation'. To lose his accommodation, to be nearing retirement, and to be limited in the work he could offer to a prospective employer, produced real fears. In this present business he gained from having his personal car-tax paid each year, and an adequate petrol supply to replace what he used on company business. He was paid two hours overtime whenever he was called out during non-office hours, and many hours of paid overtime were available. He had a flat on the premises for which he paid no rent.

He was asked to use his own car so frequently on company business because the directors used company cars for their own domestic use, that he had insufficient time, or inclination, to use the petrol that was owed to him. So frequently did he work overtime 'that a normal, average working week is 89 hours', and he regularly experienced heavy weeks of 113 hours. But above all he had no tenancy contract and no employment contract with his employers.

He is caught (he claims) by an employer whose public image conceals a harsh reality. The most crucial aspect of the firm's activities, however, concerns the health hazards they produce. 'Bodies are frequently left unenclosed and the embalmer's sink leaks'. It is in this sink that the respondent's wife was expected to wash her hands'. 'Two people have died of an undiagnosed viral disease and two more, including my wife, have heart troubles'. It is this last aspect which is forcing the respondent to seek work elsewhere, since specialists from Porton Down, the research unit now closed, have visited her in an attempt to diagnose the complaint.

'The legal provision of safety clothes for funeral workers attending bodies with specific notifiable diseases is lax'. The respondent was
told to collect one particular corpse from a nearby hospital, which, it subsequently became clear, had died from a notifiable disease, Malaria, at the airport. He refused to handle it without the necessary protective clothing, 'since I hadn't been told to wear it and it had not been made available to me. The body was hurriedly removed by unnamed officials, apparently to fly it out of the country, claiming that death had occurred in air transit, before the body was lodged at the hospital'.

In brief, this account of the underside of this well known and locally respected funeral directors, raises issues for debate. The respondent gave detailed information in the security of his own flat, without apparent rancour, and in response to general questions. In the openness of the business premises both he and his wife were discreet, his wife actually exhibiting great care to conceal the true purpose of my visit from any other staff members, since, if they should remember my visit, it would cause immense harm to her and her husband. They were not under notice of dismissal and, as already noted, had been satisfactorily employed for sixteen years. The fear of disease and mounting disgust at the business tactics, allied to moral indignation at the low ethical standards, pushed them reluctantly, and with fear for the future, towards resignation from their posts. They supported Trade Unionism but were not actively concerned with promoting collective action in defence of workers rights.

**ADDENDUM**

A follow-up interview reveals that the respondent's wife has been diagnosed as suffering from Multiple Sclerosis originating from 'an undisclosed viral source'. She has ceased working and the company have made her a £1,000 cash gift, plus a pension of approximately £4 per week (June 1980), neither of which are as a consequence of terms of employment. Her husband regards this as an attempt to buy their silence, but could be linked, he believes, to the poor hygiene in the embalming room. As already noted, the business had modernised its facilities, including refrigeration units, and has refurnished its
embalming area, consequently nothing of the 'suspect' area remains (1982).

A copy of a proposed contract of work has been circulated (in February 1980), which asks for comments before it is implemented. Its details have not been formally discussed by staff, and it has not been signed by either workers or management, nor yet implemented. These respondents are still seeking, with great circumspection, to leave the firm.

Viewed from the outside, the smooth performance, the respectable premises, the gentlemanly service, the family involvement, was most marked. This is a successful business, which, according to two of its employees, keeps costs low by exploiting the weak bargaining position of its employees, and keeps its profits high by manipulating its market in a manner which it would not care to see brought to public notice. By visiting the premises several times, and attending to the attitudinal clues given by each respondent, I became aware of the inconsistencies which weakened the claimed veracity of the proprietor.

Firstly, in the Old Bailey bribery case, his firm had been criticised for offering bribes and the details had been reported in the local press, yet he totally discounted any culpability. This weakened his claim to be presenting his firm's position 'fairly' and accurately.

Secondly, when asked circumspectly about his firm's health and safety conditions, no hint of death or illness among the staff was mentioned; no reflection on the need to improve on previously existing inadequacies was shown. By omission he would have me understand that new facilities were provided only to further develop the firm's already extensive provisions.

Thirdly, both he and his supportive employee constantly stressed the moral virtue of the Puritan ethic, and the economic rewards that would justifiably accrue to those who worked conscientiously. They gave no sign of acknowledging that a respectable public image and a satisfactory
profit could ever flow from disreputable practices — both of them discounted criticism by seeking to ignore it.

Fourthly, his critics spoke as harmed but unrancorous workers, who accepted that they were still contributing to the firm's continued success. Whilst feeling bitter about the harmful situation, they were still able to show an understanding of the total picture, a realism which was missing from the proprietor's account. The General Secretary of the funeral Union, FTAT, reinforced the fact that the proprietor refused to allow any form of Union activity in his firm and regarded outsiders with suspicion, claiming that his firm was above reproach. This case is indicative of the conflicting definitions which abound throughout the occupation. In large measure there is a 'fortress' mentality among many small and medium sized firms, composed of self-interest, self-justification and suspicion. As suggested in Chapter Three, this atmosphere envelops the employees and in many cases they reinforce its ideology. Consequently, any contrary view is seen to be destructive of harmony and indicative of envy or disloyalty. Many proprietors and their employees may have experienced a socialisation process whereby they move through stages of initiation, internalisation and changed self-perceptions to become competent at their chosen work. Consequently, they will seek to protect their self-placement from outsider attack or inner uncertainty. Therefore, '(...) it will be in the interests (of the individual) to control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this decision by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan' (Goffman 1969 p3). The potentially destructive information that insiders possess, as a consequence of sharing back-stage constructional activities, must be reduced to harmless and inconsequential gossip. The potentially abrasive assaults from inquisitive outsiders must either be redirected elsewhere by locating the problem outside the firm, or by sustaining a credible personal front. In this particular case the proprietor could not control the flow of potentially damaging
information which originated from 'those in the know'. Within his firm
he could not be frontally assaulted by ignorant outsiders, but could be
undermined by the sapping operations performed by those he would regard
as 'traitors'.

Each respondent, (counting the husband and wife as one account), was
unaware of the 'leakage' of information that originated from the others.
Each believed that they alone 'explained' the firm's activities and
were, therefore, able to control the impressions I received. The
proprietor constructed a positive image of a well-conducted family
business, and his supportive worker sought to label the only dissident
image as 'deviant'. In his view, discontented workers may be expected
to provide false information, should their opinions be sought. It would
not be justified for an observer to take the view of the 'underdog'
merely because it excites sympathy. If, however, we discount the
dismissive label of 'deviant', and juxtapose each account as a partial
and self-protective accounting procedure, then each can be 'weighed'.
If we allow the possibility that profits can be achieved by dubious
means, and that critics may be biased as a consequence of evidence, not
in spite of it, then the exposure of 'disorders' must weaken the
credibility of those whom claim to present the 'authentic' account of
the firm.

A funeral business that seeks to profit from unscrupulous activity has
problems of information control. It is open to the proprietor to
restrict the flow of potentially damaging secrets by hiring staff who
can be trusted not to 'blow the gaff'. To ensure that they play the
game according to his private rules he can buy the silence of the staff
by offering them wages slightly above the local rate, after a
probationary period of trial during which their loyalty to him is tested
by paying less than the 'going rate'. If they choose not to leave, then
a later inducement to remain with him and to become part of a supportive
team may well be 'tied' accommodation. This reduces the likelihood
that any adverse comment will be voiced that could jeopardise both job
and home. A corroborative team performance can be further ensured by
denying entrance, or employment, to potential dissidents such as
'trade-union activists', short-stay opportunists, aspiring board-members, 'naively honest' workers who might put principle before practice, or those with sufficient independence to resist financial inducements to 'fit in' with accepted practice. This inside attempt at attitudinal control is greatly facilitated by efficient 'stagecraft'. By preventing the public in general from seeing beyond the formal receiving area, and by providing such rooms or offices as they do see with decor of such bland or non-communicative neutrality, that little of dubious character can be revealed, the astute director can keep potential informers at a distance. Within such formally correct offices, incumbents will find it difficult to give oppositional performances even if they felt inclined to do so. Inner motivation and outward structure combine to present a facade which is widely accepted by staff and clients as the tangible 'reality' of the firm.

In the case just cited, the defensive screen was greatly strengthened by a high perimeter wall, which surrounded the entire premises, and enclosed work-shops, body rooms, chapel, offices, garden of remembrance, workers' homes and offices. It can be regarded as unusual in its degree of remoteness from everyday, casual encounters. By penetrating its castle-like exterior, its defensive and protective physicality was revealed. Most significantly, however, the defensive mentality becomes exposed as members produce justifications to account for occupational success.

The proprietor demonstrates the commercial success that is to be obtained when a business orientation is combined with developing a family career. The public face cannot be easily challenged unless the formal defences are breached and infiltration reveals the manner in which client and worker can be deceived. This example shows that a proprietor can create a prosperous and thriving funeral service so long as he conceals his business stratagems and offers his good intentions. He cannot be undermined, publicly, by one dissatisfied worker. He is an example of the success to be achieved by concealing the profit motive beneath:-
a) proper adherence to the 'traditional' ceremonial aspects of a funeral

b) the development of a personal 'trust' relationship to the client

A PROFESSIONAL 'ENGLISH' WAY OF DEATH (R89)

The proprietors of small firms may come to rely heavily on claimed personal qualities. They mine the resource of 'professional service' more assiduously as their technical competence is challenged. When premises become shabby and customers decline in number, they may develop a strong aversion to looking too closely at their present commercial position. Memories of better days when the business was thriving and respected, can produce a nostalgia which reassures them of their moral stature, and reductions in client favour can be interpreted as a temporary phenomenon due to market competition outside their influence.

One particular owner who exemplifies this approach sought to convince me of his long, honourable and competent service to the bereaved at their time of distress. Comfortably protected in his declining years by his past years of prosperity, he clung to his belief that he was still in touch with the needs of prospective customers, even though they now rarely sought him out. He had started as an apprentice to a carpenter and become owner-manager of his small funeral business near Leeds, thirty years ago.

His father had died suddenly, when he was fourteen years old, and he had been greatly impressed by the quality of care provided by the local undertaker. This man showed tact and understanding in his dealings with his mother saying to her:--

'You have lost a husband but you can lean on me. Even when the funeral is over you will have problems. I want you to feel that you can come to me'.
He therefore entered the trade with a desire to help other people in a similar way, even though, had his father been alive, he would never have been allowed to become involved in what his father regarded as low-status work. His Christian belief encouraged him to regard his work as a 'special kind of service' and even though this degree of commitment places him in a minority in the occupation, the majority still operative within a loosely bound Christian framework.

He identifies two elements which, when successfully integrated, produce the 'professional' funeral director. They are:-

1) personal contact skill

2) body treatment skill

Together they distinguish the occupation today from the 'undertaker' of previous decades. Whereas they dealt in a practical manner with disposal and gave limited solace to the living, he claims that funeral directors steer the living through the trauma of bereavement. His emphasis is placed on a 'personal service' to the living, in which 'professionalism' is reflected in the care, solicitude and skill with which he supports the bereaved. He believes that the competence of the present day director is to be measured by the degree of commitment he brings to this task - whether that is to care for a body or to satisfy the emotional needs of the living.

1) Personal contact skills

'It is the funeral director's task', he asserts, 'to bring the bereaved to face death'; to acknowledge its irrevocable nature and help them to 'let go of their dead'. In easing them through a painful situation he helps them to adjust to the status transformation thrust upon them. He seeks to accomplish this task by producing a fitting ritual in which the death of the body is made manifestly clear, both symbolically and physically.
The necessary skill is best learnt, he claims, 'by practical experience with veterans in the work situation, rather than by formal exam-oriented instruction at college. The official manual is a better source of information on how to crate a body for flight to India, but is totally inadequate in prescribing the most suitable way to advise a grief stricken relative'. In his view even though practical skills are essential, providing individual solutions to individual problems is the essential characteristic of the personal service to be offered. The over-commercialised business attitude of the Americans reflects their over-involvement with profits and, he believes, this is shown clearly in their marketing techniques against which he steadfastly sets his face, arguing that 'England requires higher standards from its funeral directors'.

They also provide an image of 'life' long after it is extinct, and they harm the bereaved by prolonging their ambivalence and delaying their acceptance of death. 'The further on the agony, the more unbearable it becomes', he claims.

In opposition to such overt commercialism he proudly offers his 'English way of death. By this he means a situation in which a sensitive funeral director 'gives support to the bereaved when they are exposed to depair at death'. This is to be accomplished with an 'inbuilt English dignity' which is an attempt not to embarrass others'. Directors must by their tact and concern, 'comfort the bereaved (...) ease them into a painful situation (...) whilst keeping concerned with, but not involved in, the grief of the mourner (...) they must encourage the bereaved to let go (...) to acknowledge that death has occurred (...) (and) as Christian faith has gone down, fear of death has gone up. If there is no Christian faith there is nothing one can say - one can only be kind in a practical way (...) the proof of the director's work is when the bereaved 'phones after the funeral for help of some sort (...) integrity and sincerity make it a calling'. (Emphasis added). 'To appreciate exactly what a client needs, even though he may not be fully aware of it himself, requires tact, training and experience of human behaviour in adversity. The key element in the service to be provided is 'integrity'
- it is this quality which allows a trust relationship to develop'. The bereaved will then allow a stranger, whose allegiance has yet to be substantiated, to enter his private world. Economic reward is a recognition that a caring service has been provided.

To achieve this position of trust he believes that the funeral director has had to throw off two conflicting work images, which have prevented the public from appreciating his true value. The first is that of a seedy, stained, unscrupulous, black-suited exploiter. The second is that of the honest, sturdy artisan, who could provide the physical necessities but was inadequate in the face of the economic and bureaucratic complexities of contemporary funerals. The present need, therefore, 'is for a trustworthy specialist who can help to carry a client through a major 'social problem', and in doing so reflect his society's values', concerning death and continuity. The funeral director, in his view, 'is the only occupational specialist suitable to perform such tasks efficiently, and if he regards it as a vocation he can provide a professional service comparable to that of a doctor or a clergyman'.

Dignity and integrity operate to prevent damaging the clients who are extremely vulnerable at the time of bereavement. Their deviation from normal behaviour must be discounted, or if possible presented to them as normal within an abnormal situation. Their group affiliations must be restored so that they do not become detached from the ongoing society. This, he claims, may be done, 'not by becoming an active therapist, but by giving appropriate help to each client as it is needed'. There was little evidence, however, to show that many clients had actually called upon his supportive skills. The letters of thanks he received were commendatory and sometimes warmly expressed, but he tended to read into them greater content than apparent to a neutral observer.
2) Body treatment skills

Body treatment skills have been developed by the technological advances of the last 60 years, so that what was once a 'mucky' business has become aseptic, and unskilled correctives have been transformed into 'professional' techniques. For example, in the 1920s he remembers, 'it was common for people to die at home, not in hospital. Those few who died in hospital were quickly transferred to home, since there was very little embalming or refrigeration offered in hospitals, and bodies merely rested on stone slabs in temperatures suitable for bacteria to rot the bodies just as effectively as if they were at home'.

He explains that 'the 'craft' of the undertaker was learned by young lads through experience of work with veterans, who, as carpenters, carried out most local funerals. When someone died all other work stopped in order to make a common-wood 'shell' based on the reported size of the body it had to enclose. This was taken round to the house by apprentices, along with a 'laying-out' board to ensure that the body remained flat as rigor mortis developed. If the body was to be stored overnight at the carpenter's shop, the apprentices would frequently enjoy themselves by hurrying back through crowded markets with the body in the shell, causing bystanders to jump like rabbits'.

Meantime 'an elm board had been marked out, using the original shell as a template, and adding a quarter-inch clearance all round so that shell and body would fit into the completed coffin. The whole day was spent making the coffin so that the French Polisher could, for twelve and six pence, produce a good shine, and the coffin was ready by nightfall'.

The body meanwhile had been prepared by a matronly neighbour who specialised in seeing bodies into and out of the world of the living. 'She would tie up the 'private parts' of men and plug orifices, close eyes, wash the body, comb the hair, cut nails and place clean sheets above and below the body. The top sheet would have about 20 pleats in it and be well starched'.
On the second day, saw, 'the body and shell were placed into the coffin (accompanied by silent prayers that it would fit), and laid out on trestles in the best room of the home for a day's 'wake'. It was left open for visitors to view unless the undertaker warned that it was 'going off'. This was accepted as gruesome but unavoidable. It was not uncommon for a lad to rush round to the undertaker asking him to 'come quickly as Auntie is going off and would you screw the lid down please'.

In such cases a bottle of disinfectant was poured into the coffin - 'a nice smell to clear a nasty one', or in cases of severe gas extension of the stomach 'a sharp penknife would be stuck into the body and with a 'woosh' the gas would escape, preventing a really nasty situation'.

This was the common set of problems facing the undertaker throughout the country. The rich in big cities received better treatment, and at the other extreme, remote farmers would wash, dress and lay out their own dead with equally good results.

'Three days was the optimum period; one to make the coffin, one to view the body and the third day to commit the body to the ground, for cremation was still in its infancy. The timing of the operation was controlled by the natural decay of the body, which, if untreated, would begin to show signs of decay within 48 hours, but earlier in many cases, depending on body chemistry, temperature and illness'.

These are the conditions which this funeral director recounted and wishes to obliterate, as, he claims, do all his contemporaries, even though they may not have actually experienced such rough and ready responses to death as he did.

Most of them acknowledge a common heritage, which influences them indirectly, through photographs, company records and verbal recounting. They reflect on a somewhat disreputable past by emphasising their technical skills and their moral commitment. Discreetly plain vans now remove bodies, without public awareness in plastic 'shells' which are
constantly re-used; embalming or refrigeration is normal whether it is asked for or not; 'Chapels of Rest' have replaced front-rooms and, consequently, 'the wake' has virtually disappeared; elaborate body-sets have replaced linen shrouds. Above all there is now a need to demonstrate specialised business competence in dealing with the bureaucratic procedures of an industrial society. Doctors, registrars, florists, masons and superintendents must be accommodated; Trade Unions and professional Associations need to be consulted; air-line and railway schedules must be understood; health regulations need to be observed. 'The modern funeral director can no longer be compared to an undertaker', he claims. 'He is now sufficiently respected to be invited to membership of the Rotary, Round Table and Masonic Lodge, and furthermore he is now asked to address school-leavers on the suitability of funeral directing as a profession career. Funeral directing has to be seen as a vocation for a small business man to succeed, because it is his personal integrity, and his skill in carrying out a difficult operation, that encourages people to seek him out in preference to the large businesses which threaten to take away his livelihood'. (Emphasis added).

This directors uses those parts of an inventory approach to 'profession' (outlined in Chapter 7), that support his self-image. But he emphasises that 'the essential component of funeral directing must be learnt by experience', not absorbed from academics, and that 'to offer a personal commitment is more honourable than getting rich'. He denies that esoteric knowledge, long formalised education, and organisational power, are essential prerequisites of the professionalism. He denigrates business size and market power, because they intrude between the needs of the client and the funeral directors response. 'Because success should come as a just reward for honest labours', it should not be the goal that is consciously sought.

He is emphasising that high status is a corollary of a public and individual service which borders on altruism. As he sees it, the core of professionalism is a solicitude for others' needs, exemplified by the director himself.
'Gradually you realise you've built yourself up quite a high standard, subconsciously perhaps (...), in this part of the world (my work) is held in high regard, (...) the (present) fall away from religious belief leaves the individual exposed to despair at death, (...) (my) job is to give support during grief; along with doctors and clergy (...) we are trusted implicitly. Most of my clients are professional people (...) and only about 8% of the area I serve go to a competitor. It is becoming a profession (because funeral directors) have not merely a business (orientation), but integrity and sincerity'.

Without religious belief, he says death is seen as a fearsome adversary, and funeral directors can only sustain the bereaved if they possess a personal conviction about the value of their work'. Modern techniques are double-edged in consequence. They enable the funeral director to meet the complex needs of an industrial society, but influence him to regard his work as a business and not as a vocation. He uses the word 'professional' to emphasise an orientation that distinguishes him from other service workers, but this may be because the skills he commands are of a relatively low order. His local standing appears to be equal to that of a small shopkeeper or branch manager but not the equal of the doctor, solicitor or barrister whom he claims as his occupational peers. He does not recognise the market power and collegiate control which sets them apart from such as himself. His 'Chapel of Rest' is just a small, asbestos-roofed shed. There is nothing visible to suggest training, technical skill, efficiency or expertise. His manner would undoubtedly give consolation to a bereaved client but it was manifestly clear that the technical services he offered were extremely circumscribed and in no way resembled the descriptions he gave of them. There is no reason to doubt that he could give the same comforting reassurances to a bereaved client as his model of 60 years ago had done to his mother. But that man, he claims, was an unskilled undertaker! With fewer funerals to conduct each successive year, he did not experience a great call on his expertise. His claim to provide approximately one funeral each week appeared to be optimistic from the evidence gained at his home and his work place. The moral career he claimed for himself did not appear to have been rewarded by a 'fitting' occupational status.
His situation could be understood sympathetically. He was about to retire completely from active business and was not in good health. His wife who had supported him in his work by acting as an unpaid secretary and receptionist, had been seriously ill in the last two years. During the two years I was in contact with him I was witnessing the end of an active life of both man and business. The run-down was apparent, and his son, also a funeral director, intended to remain as Superintendent of a large crematorium and not to continue his father's business. His interpretations and definitions were shaped by his commitment to 'professionalism', an investment in those qualities of honour, dignity and altruism which were essential before 'skill' was developed. His past aspirations had been buttressed by expectations which had not survived the impact of commercial competition. Nevertheless, this was the man who had been the central figure in a television programme, documenting the life of the contemporary funeral director ten years ago. Certainly the relatively high status he gave to the small private business director had been echoed within the NAFD for more than 50 years, but the sentiment does not accord with the practical realities. With a changing and growing urban population, small firms such as his must actively seek new clients or be lost from public awareness. He can no longer rely on being known and respected locally since the geographic social mobility common to post-war years had removed his base of potential clients. His size, location and style of business is being swamped by the multi-outlet firm in which business profitability outweighs vocational commitment.

He has identified himself with what I shall call the presentational aspects of the 'English' way of death. By this I mean that the manner in which the director presents himself to his client comes to be regarded by him as the crucial determinant of the outcome of the exchange between them. Particular needs are presumed to motivate a client, who starts an exchange between himself and the director to ensure that his needs will be met or reduced. His needs can be seen to encompass physical, psychological and spiritual components, and the task of the director, therefore, is to present himself in such a way that his credentials are seen to be 'appropriate'. He must be seen to be 'the
most suitable type of person' to be given access to the private areas of family life.

The director, therefore, must convince himself as well as his audience, that he has the necessary strengths to meet these demands.

The presentation of a moral commitment is of greater significance to the eventual outcome of the exchange, than the possession of technical skill. This presentational view of the social exchange thereby lays heavy emphasis on the type of management controls exercised by the funeral director in such a focussed gather as a funeral.

Goffman catches the flavour of such social manoeuverings when he examines the manner in which we categorise people, in those special settings where a stranger does enter our immediate presence. He suggests that all along we have been making certain assumptions as to what the individuals ought to be; we 'impute' a characterisation and thereby construct a 'virtual' social identify, against which the individual concerned will produce his own construction (Goffman 1968 pl2). In doing so he will demonstrate an 'actual' social identity which may or may not conform to the 'virtual' identity we had consigned to him. As a consequence we may come to regard his as bad or ineffectual, thereby in a sense, to discredit him because he fails to substantiate our expectations. 'We lean of these expectations (...) transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands' (ibid pl2). In this way, says Goffman, we provide a complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each category we make. We are not aware that we have made demands on the performance of others until an active question arises as to whether or not they will be fulfilled. Of course, whilst still unknown to us, each stranger may have been collaborating with similar others to build a 'typification', one to which we will refer when constructing our own model, for example, of 'funeral director'. Not surprisingly, each director will then find it easier to match his performance to our expectations, thereby confirming the astute nature of our expectations.
When playing out his occupational identity, the individual director need not reveal, or comment on, his personal biography—he need not offer for consideration the fact that he is divorced, a vegetarian or even that he is newly-fledged. His social personality is a role repertoire. Therefore, as this respondent implies, directors carry with them into each exchange, a repertoire of performances designed to convince their audience that they are what they out to be. They offer not merely an 'undertaking' to give value for money, but also a personal identification with the client. In doing so, they believe that they are providing the correct social personality for the social setting in which they are to practice their craft. When each member of the interaction occupies an acceptable position, and fleshes it out with a convincing portrayal, then the social setting is given an acceptable order and coherence.

Those who are 'committed' to a bereaved role (i.e. forced into it), can gain comfort from being marshalled by those who embrace the directorial role (i.e. seek to perform it) so long as their moral leadership is discreetly exercised. The director must convince the bereaved that his sympathy is unforced and spontaneous, even though he has regularly exhibited it to others. The quality of his concern transmutes his routines into (apparently) spontaneous reflections of the client's needs.

For this director, social and personal identities appear to have combined without disharmony, and he resolutely believes that such integrated commitment to 'service' will receive its due reward in the form of an accredited, superior, social status. From his viewpoint the logical consequence of such a public regard for his work should be financial prosperity. No matter that his premises are undistinguished by comfort or style, that the calls on his service are diminishing, that he is in the backwater of commercial activity. He counts these of little importance when weighed against his dedication to the 'English' way of death, dependent as it is on understatement and self-reserve. He claims to possess a sense of 'vocation', and he gives to his own
performance a status and a dignity which might be missing, if he relied solely on a public affirmation of his occupational service.

He appears to experience no form of identity clash since in the hidden back-regions of his home and adjoining work place he presents himself as he does when facing the public. His wife supports his embracement of his work role, and together they appear to live out an inner commitment. 'Appear' to live out, because all probing questions directed at him or his wife, were interpreted as requests for factual evidence coming from an inexperienced but informed researcher. His most revealing statement was '(my work) is as much a 'calling' as a business - it has to be a 'calling' when you are a small firm like we are'. Small businesses, he implied, offered a moral integrity which could not be undermined by any technical deficiency in their service. If their virtue was not rewarded by expanding public recognition, their self-confidence remained unshaken. Inner security was developed by reliance on personal integrity, not by commercial success. Nevertheless, this respondent was aware that the common yardstick by which businesses including his own are measured, is commercial success. He was financially secure in his retirement age, but no longer commercially successful in an increasingly aggressive market. He therefore drew on his one unassailable reserve - the integrity of a professional. His 'English way of death' required dignity, compassion, tact, sincerity and reliability. If he possessed these 'gifts' or 'talents', then he could not be undermined by any material shortcomings.

THE BUSINESS ORIENTATION - 'PUTTING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD' (R30)

As a representative of a dwindling group of funeral directors who feel themselves to be guardians of a moral code increasingly under attack, the previous respondent is a minority case. In contrast, representatives of the big businesses who deal with thousands of funerals each year operate in a context of different dimensions and contrasting values. Business efficiency is their orientation, and career contingency their motivation.
By allocating their physical resources to six strategically placed depots, and by creating a highly specialised division of labour, a business as large as (...) Co-operative Society seeks to reduce its operating costs. Local branch-managers receive new clients and offer suitable services. When decision have been made, clients' wishes are 'phoned to the nearest depot. The dead body is collected in an unmarked van and removed to the nearest depot where it is refrigerated.

At each depot the reserves of human talent and physical resource are mobilised to meet consumer demand. A coffin is put together from pre-cut chipboard, or withdrawn from the warehouse shelves. Coffin fillings are created from bales of redeemed Co-operative stamps and linings are stapled into position concealing such utilitarian infilling. Handles are nailed into position and name plates are engraved. The embalmer is called in and the body is preserved, if it is not to be shelved in a refrigerator. Hearse and limousines are allocated for the precise time of day required, and an 'A' team is selected to physically present the combined resources. At the centre of this network is the depot manager who 'constructs' each funeral by allocating resources to constantly fluctuating requirements. Each separate task is undertaken by a separate man, or pair of men, so that low-skill specialisms combine to produce the required output. A large blackboard shows the strategic planning and the tactical deployment of men and materials. Funeral directors are nowhere to be seen since this is a funeral workshop not a funeral 'home'.

Behind and above this corporate endeavour is the General Manager, who controls not only the six depots, but the administration and finance of the total organisation. His responsibility is to produce a continuing cortege of funerals - to ensure that the presentational aspects of the entire work community are suitably effective. As he puts it, he is concerned ultimately with 'putting the show on the road'.

This respondent holds the executive position, responsible for the entire (...) Co-op funeral service operating through a wide area of London. This includes 27 'outlets' i.e. those branch offices from which the
manager will telephone requests for vehicles and staff to one of six
Depots. Each depot, therefore, will be decisive in arranging the exact
time of the disposal, and work out staff-time tabling, availability of
cars, journey times, wages, overtime payments and logistics concerning
economic deployment of all their services. The branch manager will, in
most cases, act a 'conductor' of the funeral and control the actual
ceremonial from house or hospital to place of disposal and back again.
He will also take note of client requests, deal with all official
matters concerning doctors, registrars, clergy and interment fees and
will be seen by clients as the person involved with and responsible for
servicing their needs.

In reality, the responsibility for ensuring the efficiency of the
service provided, rests with the higher level administrators at each
Depot, and ultimately with this General Manager. He has overall, day to
day, responsibility for the approximately 10,500 funerals which this
Co-operative Society carried out each year. Now 62, he has had 48 years
in funeral practice and has risen from being an untrained youth in the
Co-operative movement, through various grades of responsibility,
including Branch Manager, to reach his present position. He has a wide
knowledge of the Co-operative movement and of the relationships that
exist between it and the private trade.

Since he rarely has face to fact contact with the clients, need never
view a dead body and has long ago ceased to 'conduct' a funeral, he
represents the organisational approach to the occupation, which is
concerned primarily with economic viability. The 'merchandise' which
has to be sold on the open market, in competition with others in the
same line of business, could easily be any other commodity, since
similar conditions of trading apply. Petrol prices, vehicle costs,
wages, conditions of work, Trades Union negotiations, upkeep of
premises, costs of raw materials; these are the matters which weigh
most constantly on his office. Personal service and body handling
skills do not feature in the daily tasks requiring his individual
attention.
This division of labour is duplicated at each of the depots. Whilst Deputy Managers check figures and assess staff needs, operatives trim chipboards on work-tables, complete a coffin from separate sections, tack into place nylon linings, operate engraving machines or balance ledgers to show units of work completed. There is not a body or a client in sight to influence their work and many of them do not come into contact with either in the normal pattern they experience.

It is the size and organisational procedure of the Co-operatives which generates much of the criticism levelled against them by the private trade. Most critics, however, are not aware of how the Co-operative funeral service developed or how it operates. In 1925 most Co-operative Societies began a Death Benefit Scheme, whereby a small proportion of the money spent by a customer in purchasing Co-operative goods was returned to him in the form of a Death Grant. This lead to the (...) Co-op providing, in 1931, one or two shops to deal with the funeral needs of their members and this provision marked its entry into the funeral business. In 1933 the (...) Co-op introduced a free life-insurance scheme for their members, once again linked to the purchases they made at the (...) Co-op shops. This enabled many customers to receive about £40 in the event of a death occurring after they had been regular customers for many years. Both these schemes have been discontinued by the great majority of Co-operative Societies, particularly since the Health Service Act of 1948 introduced a Death Grant of £30. Since there is a high degree of autonomy within the separate regional Societies, some may still provide a form of assistance to their customers without the others knowing of the scheme. The overall picture, however, is of a market situation in which customers have no special financial inducement to use Co-operative funeral services rather than competitors.

Until 1936, the funeral departments of each Society were subsidised by the more economically secure departments, but since that year they have all operated as independent financial units, and, in many areas, have become the most financially sound of all the departments, showing a
regular annual profit, reflecting the overall profitability of funeral directing throughout Britain.

(Note: 1982 the entire (...) Co-op was taken over by the Co-operative Retail Service because it was making a trading loss. The funeral service section however remained profitable.

In the first years of operation the (...) Co-op had to obtain funeral directors from the private trade, but now they train their own and regularly use the NAFD Diploma scheme to gain the nationally acceptable certification.

The criticisms levelled at Co-operatives stems from the irritation of established funeral directors at what they regard as interference in their occupation - 'The grocers have lowered the status of the profession to that of a trade' is how one critic summed up his antagonism. Furthermore, say the critics, the Co-operative movement is one large competitor, with marketing techniques suitable for chain-store competition but reprehensible when operated within a funeral service. It is claimed by private business members that the Co-operatives have a captive audience, and they usher their customers from groceries, footwear and clothing, into funeral provisions, offering them coupons or rebates if they make a purchase. The ultimate criticism levelled at the Co-operatives, is that the service they provide is poor, shoddy, or soulless and that their funeral provision is of the same low standard as their regular grocery provision. The political ideology of the Co-operative movement does not seem to be the central target for criticism, even though its manifest aims were to provide a service in which customers would be influenced in deciding policy, as well as in creating the profits in which they would subsequently share. This omission may be partly explained by the toning down of political ideology by the Co-operative Societies themselves. The movement has diverse elements such as Wholesale, Retail, Educational, and Youth Movement, but the main public image which they have developed nationally is that of a widespread commercial undertaking represented in a chain of
retail stores, and not of a trading organisation based on socialist principles.

Much of the criticism is unfounded. The funeral custom has to be captured or won, it can no longer be guaranteed as a consequence of shared political principles or working class image. Furthermore, each Society follows its own course of action and is not supported by central finance if it commits errors of judgement, nor is the funeral department subsidised by other departments if it fails to be economically successful. In addition, the centralisation of resources developed by the (...) Co-op can ensure swift, certain and efficient service which is in many respects, superior in quality and choice than the comparable service offered by small private businesses. The most basic point of contention, however, relates not to physical facilities but to orientation. The claim made by many small businesses is that it is impossible, by virtue of size and impersonality, for a large organisation to provide the caring solicitude and the personal responsiveness which private firms regularly provide. The detailed information given by the previous respondent (R89) indicates that private businesses may well be dingy and ill-equipped, or be unscrupulous and manipulative (R100). The (...) Co-op respondent knew from first hand experience the hostility and reproach directed at the Co-operative movement and claimed that much of it was disdirected or unfair. Nevertheless, he sought to present a respectable face to the public by claiming a virtue in his style of operation. The criticisms by both sides were usually indirect, oblique and suggestive. That given by the private trade against the Co-operatives was most frequently implicit rather than overt i.e. 'we do it in this way to help our clients, whereas there are others who cannot give the same degree of attention to detail because they are too large (...) they lack soul'. (R103). The criticism of the private trade by the Co-operatives tended to be overt and centred on their hypocrisy (R30).

There are some funeral directors who do not regard themselves as being in direct competition with Co-operatives, since their potential clients are not in the social group that would consider using such a
working-class oriented movement. Perhaps the Co-operative movement as a whole still retains a public image of its working-class origins in Rochdale and East London but its funeral establishments on the High Street are virtually indistinguishable from its rivals. In England at the moment, there are businesses which cater for the wealthy and others which cater for the poor. Most, however, present a public presence which differs little, district from district. Therefore all smaller businesses regard the Co-operatives as competitors for the vast middle range of clients who will all be spending a minimum of £500 (1985) on a funeral.

This respondent claims 'business competence' as the basis of the (...) Co-op's professional attitude. His criterion of 'professionalism' is 'skilled training' and he claimed that all branch managers had passed the NAFD Diploma after having been prepared for it by the (...) Co-op training scheme ('better than the six month, part-time course provided by the NAFD themselves'). The training received by the operatives is efficient, he claims, and is in accord with the recommendations agreed between employers and Union. His claim that the (...) Co-op workers are well trained is borne out by the regular recruitment of retired Co-operative workers and by private businesses, on a part-time basis. The engagement is frequently denied by the private directors, but confirmed by their employees.

Since a new hearse will cost £30,000 (1985) and large limousines £29,500, the (...) Co-op is now supplementing its fleet of Daimlers with Ford 'Granadas' which cost £22,000 and are equally effective, thereby reducing costs, not only in capital expenditure, but in servicing. The private trade are likely to continue with Daimlers because they believe that they present a more dignified presence.

There is a clear chain of command, including an industrial relations officer, and the relationship between this respondent and his operatives was observably informal and easy. One essential difference between the (...) Co-op and the many private firms is the Trade Union connection. The (...), as with all Co-operative Societies, is totally unionised, a
'closed shop' at operative level, with well organised branches led by informed and involved Shop Stewards. The 'grey areas of friction' (as he called them) concerned hair length and style of clothing and were not disruptive situations. The (...) Co-op intention is to train young entrants in all aspects of funeral work and to encourage them to stay with them. They seek applicants with 'common sense' and claim to have found, from experience, that 'A' level students do not seem to possess this quality! They take on 8 to 10 entrants, of whom 6 usually stay in the work. As a consequence the (...) Co-op has a very much lower age profile among their staff than the private businesses - for example, limousine drivers of 18 years of age, and conductors of 22 years of age. Moreover, he claims, there are many 'square pegs' to be found within private family businesses, since children follow their fathers without real choice, a view reinforced by respondents in the private trade. In the (...) Co-op he claims, achievement outweighs ascription. (There are also many older men who enter the occupation - private or Co-operative - either due to similarities between both work situations, e.g. bus, heavy goods, van or coach drivers, or postmen, porters, doormen and night security guards, who are used to uniform, shift work or clean manual work.

All operatives are given about £500 (1985) of clothing and footwear, which has to be returned if they leave the employment within the first year, and which has to be supplemented or replaced by the operative himself as it becomes shabby. To ensure that operatives remain formally smart, new clothing and footwear, except socks and underclothing, can be bought at cost price from the Co-operative shops.

Headwear, suits, shoes and gloves are traditionally formal in style, and either black or grey in colour. Furthermore, there are no women in the (...) Co-op who actually conduct a funeral (and very few in the occupation nationwide). There are two women managers of branch offices who do all the arrangement but never publicly control the ceremony. Even those two women were appointed, by the respondent, against strong male opposition. The one (...) Co-op woman manager who was interviewed,
This respondent's account of the closed shop emphasised its consequences for the operatives' strike in July-October 1979. He claims that the strike was a total failure. NUFSO, he argues, failed to convince most of its members that a strike was necessary or appropriate, and many shared the management view that their occupation should resist such 'harmful' social action. Since the (...) Co-op is the biggest employer of Union labour in the London funeral service, this led the private trade to assume that the (...) Co-op would have to cease trading when the strike occurred. According to the respondent, about 83% of union members defied the official pickets and continued to work, and since there was a facility for storing many of the embalmed bodies in refrigerators, there was no immediate health hazard if they could not be buried or cremated. Therefore, he said, the (...) Co-op broke the strike because its strength as a union shop was turned against its own officials. (As reported in Chapter 3 the detailed information provided by the Union Secretary offers a convincing rebuttal of this interpretation). Since very few members even bothered to attend its normal union meetings (about 10 out of the 85 Head Office members, for example), the (...) Co-op actually operated as though it were a non-union firm. Most members, claims the respondent, would have torn up their Union cards in indignation at the strike call, if a closed shop agreement had not been in operation. Even though many private firms pay their operatives above Union agreed rates and employ non-union labour, the (...) Co-op retain its labour force because so much overtime can be offered, operatives thereby gain a higher income than is obtainable from the minimum hours frequently worked in the private businesses. Since the (...) Co-op carries out more funerals per year than any other single firm in England, it has far reaching effects on all other businesses. According to the respondent, it gets problems about six months earlier than smaller firms, and the manner in which it solves them has repercussions for all funeral establishments - for example, rates of pay for overtime, replacement of Daimlers by Fords, acceptance of Union re-grading schemes, etc.
He believes that the major changes in funerals that have occurred since 1945 can be attributed to social mobility and car ownership. Whereas the traditional working class always had large showy funerals, (and are still likely to do so today), among the middle-class clients the common demand is for a less flamboyant, more restrained and smaller ceremony. Fewer flowers, restrained bereavement, short service, cremation, and particularly, fewer limousines are now common. It is common practice now for a majority of mourners to attend the funeral in their own vehicles and thereby noticeably reduce the size of the cortege. This change in consumer habits has lead the virtual extinction of 'carriage masters' who hire out large limousine to small firms. Apart from a minority among the working class, other significant groups who insist on funerals of pomp and circumstance are Gypsies and West Indians.

He noted that in Sweden, measures have been taken to reduce the funeral cost of death by encouraging employers to pay a small, but regular, sum of money for each employee, graduated in accordance with his or her status. At death, any funeral director can be employed, and if the funeral costs are less than the money available, the surplus is returned to the employer. If, however the funeral costs are greater than the amount available, the bereaved will contribute the money required. This scheme can be linked to a cost of living index to ensure that the rising costs of labour, materials and fuel, can be covered. This approach was also outlined by the National Secretary of the FTAT (R107) who supported its introduction to Britain. Because most people do not acknowledge the consequence of death in advance, and are not prepared for it economically, this respondent thought that such forethought was sensible. He believes that the funeral director's main work is to provide an efficient technical service - without getting involved personally - and that business efficiency is the key to service. Profits will grow as a consequence of careful planning and rational use of resources. 'Clients don't know us before a death and they don't want to know us afterwards'. The (...) Co-op make about 40% of their own coffins, the majority in chipboard with paper-thin veneers, and the minority from oak. Of this 40% about 40% are in the cheapest price range, but most bereaved do not choose the cheapest possible funeral -
in which the coffin is usually the dearest single purchase - preferring
to pay more than the bottom price. The Price Commission of 1977 had
recommended that all funeral directors display prominently their
charges, showing details and specifications. Many funeral premises do
not do this, but the (...) Co-op produces coloured brochures, in
addition to detailed price lists. Since clients do not regularly choose
the lowest prices available (a tendency noted and used by USA directors
in planning their sales stratagems), most funeral directors base their
market assessments on lower inter-quartile range. The (...) Co-op was
seen to be so knowledgeable by the Price Commission members, when
investigating the occupation in 1977, that they were asked to comment on
the details which the Commission had received from some private
businesses. The respondent argues that 'no-one in the funeral business
makes large profits', but certainly the (...) Co-op make 30% profit on
the masonry headstones which they make themselves and the Price
Commission Report says they had 'appreciably higher profit margins than
public companies'. They claim that they do not press clients into
buying extras for the disposal, but they do offer to provide clothing,
accessories, flowers, wreaths, tombstones, stationery, transport,
reminiscences and scattering of ashes, each of which contributes to a
satisfactory profit margin.

Each successful (...) Co-op funeral depended upon a hidden substructure
of inter-related sections. 'When the show is on the road it is only the
tip of the iceberg. Our business reliability is the key attraction for
our clients'. The respondent claims that by centralising their
resources into these six Depots they can provide a more efficient
service to their clients than is possible by private businesses. In
addition, he claims that the personal needs of each client is
satisfactorily met by sympathetic branch managers.

The numerous funeral directors who criticise the (...) Co-op funeral
service, maintain that its large size and ready market combine to
produce a poor service and an insensitive performance, and that it lacks
the proper client relationship that is the essence of professionalism.
In contrast the (...) Co-op respondent regards business organisation as the essential pre-requisite of professional performance.

The success of this Co-operative Society appears to result from:-

(i) economies of scale, achieved by mass production techniques and bulk purchasing
(ii) a centralisation technique, whereby a few large depots serve many branch offices
(iii) a division of labour, whereby personal service is carried out by branch managers and technical skills by the central depots
(iv) a household name, which ensures that its presence is widely known

This respondent presents the managerial stance, in which practical trading sense ensure business profitability, without damaging the 'image' of personal service cultivated at branch office level.

He regards selling funerals as he does selling groceries. In a competitive market he must provide goods which are comparable to that offered by competitors, and must produce them more economically. This will be achieved by organisational techniques which combine an effective division of labour with a centralisation of resources.

The outlet at which the customer is induced to purchase such goods (in this case a service as well as commodities), must present the proper image or the customer will buy elsewhere. It is at this level of marketing that he employs branch managers who, as funeral directors, will provide the necessary skill and integrity.

Private businesses he maintains, have to meet the same economic pressures as the Co-operatives, but they have a tendency to conceal their concern for commercial viability whilst emphasising their caring involvement with customer needs. They claim a commitment to altruistic service which, they infer, the Co-operatives lack.
He argues that the same market forces influence both groups of practitioners, and his competitors claim to superior service is not supported by the evidence. The larger size of the Co-operatives necessitates a greater division of labour than that practised in smaller concerns, but the end product is no less consumer-oriented as a consequence.

He regards himself as a marketing director putting on a public show which meets the needs of the free buyer on the open market. That, he believes, is the true aim of all in the occupation, large or small. The criticisms levelled at the Co-operatives are, he claims, based on insufficient information, lack of commercial business sense, snobbery and competitive weakness. Business profitability is central to all in the occupation he argues, and the claim to great client involvement made by the small private firm derisory.

In his view it is precisely because many small businesses run on shoe-string economies that they fail to produce the consistently high standards to be found in the (...) Co-op. The criticisms mounted against it frequently stem from business jealousy masquerading as concern for standards - an inversion of the 'reality of the situation', as seen from his standpoint. Perhaps it is precisely because he is so far removed from the need to sell a service by selling one's self, that he can afford to be so dismissive of the personal activities that dominate the perceptions of the small director, as epitomised by the respondent who idealised the 'English' way of death (R89). It may be, therefore, that it is at the branch level that the sense of vocation, calling and personal integrity will always be most strongly presented, since it is here that interpersonal relationships are believed to ensure status and profit.

FAMILY POWER

Among the well-established and successful firms there is no misrepresentation of market importance. Confident of their ability to survive economic threats to their dominant trading position and secure
in client demand for their 'superior' service, they exhibit a sureness of touch denied their less successful colleagues. Foremost among them are a small number of successful family businesses, in which relatives keep directorial control and economic profits firmly among themselves. They are buttressed against challenge from competitors by their undoubted commercial success and are frequently referred to as leaders of the occupation by those who occupy the lower rungs of the career ladder.

THE FIRST FAMILY - BUSINESS CONSULTANTS (R95)

At the recognised top of the social and commercial structure is one long-established London family, whose senior partner spoke about his family's position (R95). With 169 years of successful trading his firm now operates 16 branch offices from its headquarters in a fashionable part of London's West End. It is not so much the volume of work which sets it apart from its competitors (about 1,400 each year), but the social class of its clients. They come from the professions, the wealthy and the aristocracy residing in the fashionable centre of London, and give a 'tone' to the firm not equalled buy its competitors. The question of Royal funerals was handled with such discretion by the respondent that one felt vulgar for raising it. The answer was oblique, and centred on the need of 'the Royals' for privacy and on the ability of the firm to be discreet. The unstated implication was that the social credentials of the family were such as to ensure its suitability to carry out such exacting work, were it ever to be asked to do so! Its human ancestry demonstrated 'public service' and 'public honour'. The respondent's grandfather was knighted after becoming Mayor of two separate London Boroughs; his uncle was knighted and his father, a Colonel, became Deputy Lieutenant of the County. When asked if his firm carried out Royal funerals he replied:-

'The Royal family have a very hard row to hoe publicly and it would be pretty disgusting if any company was to use them as a form of advertising. I never discuss Royalty (...) a very delicate area (...) you can assume from what I have said'.

289
I chose not to point out that from marmalade to shoes, goods were advertised to the public on the basis of Royal preference, and that 'by command' could, without bad taste, be assigned to dignified dispositions. Nevertheless, the question had been answered in its own manner, one in which the social status of his family business was firmly established. He was at pains to emphasise the social range of his clients by explaining that, 'by maintaining branches at Harrow Road serving the lower social classes, in addition to those in Eaton Square, Vincent Square and Ashley Gardens serving members of Parliament and the Upper Middle Class, we keep our significant position in the business'. Our style of performance is influenced by the social class of the clientele. The people in Wandworth and Clapham (...) want to have USA Ford 'Galaxy' vehicles, but clients from Ashley Gardens, Vincent Square and Smith Square want Daimlers and would not want me to walk in front, nor to wear a top hat'. 'The Upper Middle Class tend to have simple cut-flowers which go later to a nursing home - they innovate more than the Working Class who want more ostentatious funerals - more hired cars and more symbolic flower constructions - chairs, darts, broken columns and so on. Cremation cuts across all social classes, about 75% to 80% of all our funerals are by cremation, but the Aristocracy and the Working Class tend to have more traditional burials'. '(We will) always help another company if needed (...) many people come to sell to us rather than any other business'. The size of a business is of great importance to most proprietors and this respondent emphasised his own preference by saying: '(...) I don't wish the firm to grow very big (and to) lose continuity (...) I know virtually every one of the 200 or so staff by first name, and don't want a network throughout the country (...) lose personal touch (...) bad man-management'.

Administratively, he explained: '(...) we use the terms 'Executive' and 'work staff' and it is company policy to encourage the work-staff to be involved with their Union. However, the work tends to cut across Union involvement and, since we provide a twenty-four hours service that many firms do not, many clients come to us. We don't pay more than Trade Union agreed rates but we do provide a lot of overtime, and many workers were, therefore, against the strike. We said to them: '(...) go along
with the Trade Union call for a strike or a work to rule, we will co-operate'. But we kept our head low and waited for it to blow over'.

This relaxed view was most probably due to his firm's secure trading position and wide resources. Many smaller firms took a much more positive anti-Union approach, believing that an industrial dispute would harm them in their two most vulnerable places; profits and publicity. For example (R100), examined earlier, when discussing his view of 'making a fair profit', in 1983, offered his workers more pay than Union negotiated wages, scrapped overtime pay for night call-out duty and introduced a rota system for unsocial hours work. He hoped, thereby, to avoid outside 'interference' (as he calls Trade Union activism) in his work routines. In contrast, this respondent, with his much larger work-force and Central London location accepts the importance of his relationship with the Unions and takes a far more relaxed stance in which negotiation is accepted as a regulatory necessity.

The firm's strength is greater than indicated so far because his family has extended the range and commitment of their work. They have established an air freight company which carries about 50% of all bodies which are transported between the UK and countries abroad each year. They handle about 1,400 bodies each year and have gained specialist knowledge concerning crating and protecting bodies in transit. Moreover, the administrative details involved in moving bodies across international boundaries can be quite involved and the informant is a leading member of 'The International Federation of Thanatopractological Associations' which aims to standardise body documentation and to help firms negotiate national regulations. Furthermore, by gaining a certificate in medical jurisprudence he has become widely accepted as a specialist in the treatment of bodies following a disaster and is therefore called to give advice to Governments, airlines, rail companies and shipping agencies. By a combination of historical survival, social status, economic strength and specialist knowledge, this family firm is a leader in the occupation. To maintain its economic strength it has created its own manufacturing company to ensure that it can produce and assemble its own necessary goods. By such
diversity it ensure adequate deferences against change from within or without the occupation.

In his view '(...) the occupation is not a profession but a Trade Association with professionalism in it (...) its a bit pompous to call it a profession until we have a professional exam licensed by the Government. We act as consultants and (even though) arranging a funeral is something that any businessman can do - counselling calls for professional responses - personal relationships during emotional trauma. We are not grief therapists, that's appalling, but we are technically skilled emotionally'.

He appears to mean that he and him family are specialists in human behaviour and can deal as effectively with grief and distress as they can with the physical complexities associated with the actual funeral ceremony. These skills have been learned through long experience with diverse human needs and not through training schemes devised by the NAFD. He suggests that if the NAFD Diploma is made harder to achieve and made compulsory for all funeral directors, then the newly trained practitioners might get the seal of Government approval. The belief that a higher standard of educational achievement would lift the occupation toward 'professional' status is the most contentious issue among proprietors and even though it is their proclaimed policy, the NAFD has not made headway toward its achievement.

This respondent is the only director to regard himself and his family as consultants, used by Government bodies, and competitors alike. He is criticised by some of his more individualistic competitors for claiming knowledge and skills for himself which are easily obtainable by studying the Manual of Directing published by the NAFD. Nevertheless, the firm's name is nationally recognised throughout the occupation and his air of calm certainty emphasised a sureness of touch which may derive from such an established pre-eminence. To attempt expansion throughout a wider geographic area might involve high capital outlay and problems of supply, administration and training. The consequence could well be to weaken their present trading position of strength within the specific
and highly profitable central London 'manor'. Funeral directors occasionally refer to the area within which they have dominant market control as their 'manor', in the way that policemen claim jurisdiction over areas relevant to their authority.

As in so many family firms this respondent had hoped to train for a different occupation and only reluctantly entered the family business. In his case, he sought the Army or Medicine but ill health prevented him from doing so. He claims to have achieved some of the characteristic consequences attached to those careers for example, rational appraisal of resources, leadership and man-management. Medical jurisprudence and disaster management give him a pseudo-medical knowledge and thereby further enhance his decision-making ability. To judge from the formal photographs and paintings of elder family members bedecked with civil honours, so prominently displayed in his office, privilege and leadership appear to be well established in the firm. The present position attained by the family seemed to be based on a judicious manipulation of family status, business expertise and funeral skills in that order. Throughout the funeral directing occupation name, permanence and status are regarded as hallmarks of quality. This firm demonstrates the economic rewards available to successful claimants.

THE INNOVATING FAMILY - COMMERCIAL SUCCESS (R94)

A different, but almost equally successful way of achieving commercial success was outlined by an informant in Wolverhampton (R94). He also had originally intended to seek other work but overcame his reservations and reluctantly joined his family's funeral firm. 'I still have double standards that I can't explain. I would never have thought of (funeral directing) if I hadn't been brought up in it (...) when people join us from outside I think they must be made (...) why do they do it? (...) it seems strange for an outsider to want to do it, but natural for me'.

In spite of the original uncertainty about his work-role, he is now very positive about the manner in which it should be accomplished. 'We give a professional, personal service because of our relationship to our
clients (...) we like to present a professional image. Even though we (the family members) do not take all the funerals personally, we like to think that our client will not know that (our man) is not (one of ourselves) because he will give equally personal service'. Their concern to convince audiences of their worth and skill can be found throughout the funeral occupation. It is possible however to regard their self-presentations as common to all salesmen, rather than a specific death-oriented pattern of behaviour.

In this particular case, the family firm had become successful by radically changing their public image and seeking to present themselves as progressive 'trend-setters'. The informant appeared relaxed and confident in his role as senior partner and whatever inner doubts he felt about his role were not manifest in his performance. In 1965 his uncle had returned from a visit to the USA convinced that the methods he had observed in practice there could be satisfactorily introduced into England. Therefore 'we built 14 Chapels of Rest, 3 interview rooms, a large Garden of Remembrance, well-furnished offices and, in addition, a coffin showroom with American-style caskets. In fact we introduced a real funeral-home'. This was a commercial gamble, since many directors believed that such a foreign style of presentation was unacceptable in England, and very few firms have followed their lead. 'We don't shoulder the coffin' (as is almost universal in Britain) 'but either carry it at arms length with proper carry handles, or we push it on a specially built trolley'. This is contentious, since it is widely held within the occupation to be 'undignified' to carry the body in any other way than in a coffin balanced on the shoulders of bearers. 'We do very little cosmeticising (of the bodies) but we preserve them whether they are to be viewed or not'. This practice is now as common in Britain as it is in North America. They decided to modernise their communication system and 'have installed a Pye telephone system to link all our cars, but may be changing soon to a Post Office paging system. We also advertise boldly in Yellow Pages, but the benefit is minimal, so we may reduce to merely a bold-type entry. One satisfied customer produces three to four more, and we are now very well known'. He is aware of the need to gain new clients, not merely to retain existing supporters, so
'we will have to keep our name before people - getting known is the most important thing, therefore we will buy up a firm but keep its name going. There are always approaches being made, through solicitors, to sell businesses'. His appraisal of competition within the occupation was that 'the Co-ops have an advantage since people assume that all Co-ops are the same - they are nationally known and expected to provide a similar service wherever they are and we accept that they provide a good service'. Even though caskets are not widely accepted (commonly preferred by West Indian clients) they were successful in increasing their business by 500 funerals per year soon after introducing their new style of service in the late 1960s. By 'upgrading' their premises in the American style they gained new clients, kept their established local dominance and have retained the improved market position. This family approach to marketing is bold and innovative; attributes noticeably absent throughout the occupation as a whole. Their success contradicts the widely held view, passed to me by many informants, that such cultural imports would be regarded with distaste or hostility by the indigenous clientele. In light of their achievement, against advice from within the occupation, it would appear that funeral directors in Britain are uncertain judges of public taste and inefficient assessors of market flexibility. This firm is 140 years old and five generations had lifted it from a small joiners to a business carrying out 2,500 funerals each year. They have only three competitors to serve the quarter-million population of Wolverhampton. 'Workers do the body work and the conducting (since they don't want greater responsibilities) and the family does the client work'.

Nevertheless, this respondent is one of the few large businesses to recognise, or to admit, that '(...) the little man can score over us by giving a much better personal service (than we can with our extended resources) by doing everything himself. I'm trying to think how we can score over him - with efficiency and flexibility perhaps. No I don't see myself as a counsellor, that's the work of the preacher, but this is a personal service occupation (and our relationship with our clients is vital)'.
The successful establishment of a 'name' is again emphasised by this firm and the assumption of a long established family is a powerful motivation for clients to choose them rather than competitors. The 'Co-ops' achieve a similar response by establishing a local prominence with a suggestion of durability clinging to them. As with Boots, Woolworth's Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer, a very large trading organisation has become widely accepted as a 'common resource' wherein certain goods and services may be confidently sought and immediately provided. The successful 'family' businesses also lay claim to a public face but on a modest scale which ensures popular recognition and paying clients. The fact that take-overs have obliterated particular families is a fact to be kept well away from public awareness. The firm demonstrates the degree of profitability to accrue to innovative business practices, rather than, as the respondent claimed, from professional status. The evidence he provided suggested commercial ingenuity rather than professionalism as the determining factor in achieving a greater profitability. This is an example of a respondent failing to recognise the basis of his own success or his unwillingness to acknowledge it openly.

FAMILY PATERNALISM AND BUSINESS STRENGTH (R83)

A second claim to professionalism was given by the head of a very well known London firm, who also undermined his claim by demonstrating a business orientation. He supported, (unknowingly) the functionalist theory of stratification outlined by Davis and Moore in 1945. He extolled the elevation of the talented few to leadership roles through the exercise of dedicated training and regarded the rise of his own family as an example. The decisive action in his family history was made by his great-grandfather who, whilst a builder and joiner, 'undertook' to make coffins and to provide funerals. (The latter part of the 19th Century marked the development of many such firms). He then became a wheelwright and began to make his own funeral carriages. The consequences of such industry was eventually to lead to the present business becoming one of the largest factors to the occupation. '(...) we provide coffins, coffin sets, handles, beading, veneers and
chipboards. We are stone-masons, carriage and limousine builders, automobile engineers and vehicle repairers as well as funeral directors. We've got factories, works and shops in Brighton, Bedford, Medway, Suffolk and Norfolk as well as in London. All trade in their original names. We are possibly unique in being in both wholesale and retail businesses on such a scale at the same time, and in acting as 'carriage masters' to many small firms and then repairing and designing vehicles. The term 'carriage-master' is still in use, referring originally to the large, multi-owner who hired his horse-drawn carriages to smaller operators. There are still many firms who cannot afford to buy and keep the large and expensive limousine still considered essential for a 'suitable' funeral ceremony (or a wedding). They have to contact the large firms, who are very willing to hire out vehicles if they can do so during slack periods. 'Carrying out more than 5,750 funerals each year we are undoubtedly well established as funeral directors and widely used as factors to the occupation generally, as our widespread advertising in 'The Funeral Director' testifies. We are nationally known'. The range of activities encompassed by the firm gave a stable economic base from which to resist the economic pressures developing within the occupation. (He did not mention that his firm supplied drivers and hearses to the largest Jewish Movement in London, nor was this acknowledged by its General Secretary during my rather stormy interview with him - R22. See below.)

He accounted for their success by outlining the human qualities which sustained their special service. When his uncle retired he was asked to join the Board of Directors as Chairman which he did, unwillingly, and subsequently because its Managing Director. His qualifications for fulfilling these duties was, he claims, the training he received both as an aeronautical engineer and as a Group Captain with a permanent commission in the RAF. Such disciplined control of activity and behaviour as he encountered in those occupations '(...)' produced the essential attitudes for business success'. Discipline and skilled techniques trained his character he claimed, so that he developed a degree of 'professionalism' suited to his new work role. 'A funeral director should see himself as a professional (...) after all he has to
be a mind reader - an understanding sort of person - not a psycho-analyst - must have a sympathetic attitude, demonstrate that he is the one man for the job - trained to do it - a form of vocation - must know the rules and regulations, advise my client on the best and most appropriate way of doing it, and show respect for the dead member of the family - to show how it can be best achieved - we should have a professional charter (it will come). We must not disturb the family - the central part of the professionalism is a combination of caring solicitude and background training - but it depends on the personality make-up'.

His constant emphasis on character and training as the two basic qualities essential for funeral directing was unmistakable and extended to his concern to mould the future of the firm. 'No family member wants to continue the business and it will pass into the hands of the Directors I have trained myself - training is the essential component for business success (...) and we train people for our own future use'. Once again a family member, reluctant to join the established business, had been drawn into its collective persona and had developed a paternalistic attitude. It is fair to deduce from his own self-assessments that he regards his commercial success as a reflection of his inner, unassailable 'character'. Furthermore, such personal qualities require a period of disciplined training to temper and hone the innate qualities that (one presumes) not everyone is fortunate enough to possess from birth. The similarities between this belief and the public schools' ethos of educating for a 'way of life', and directly to Davis and Moore's (1945), analysis of stratification through a ladder of structured inequalities are obvious. Leadership is dependent on the maturation of leadership 'qualities'; occupational success requires application to work in a rule-governed manner; professional status is achieved by dedication to moral prerequisites; skill and tact emerge from practical experience; administration requires man-management techniques learnt by reliance on one's own capabilities; and status is won by self-denying altruism.
The informant could well argue that the continuing success of his firm, with its diverse resources, vindicated these theoretical assumptions. Certainly, in the vehicle work shops and the body-handling rooms, the work staff acted as though in accord with such beliefs. A hierarchy of roles was recognisable, with authority securely in the hands of the respondent, and, by his patronage, to the Board members. How this family-dominated structure will survive his demise is unknown at the present, but immediate hospital treatment was necessary and the respondent expected to relinquish his control very soon. Whether family orientations would survive the transition to a purely business pragmatism, will be interesting to examine.

This form of family control prevails in a large number of firms throughout the country and creates an 'avuncular' or 'paternalistic' approach to both workers and clients. The strong and persuasive supposition that proprietors 'look after' their responsive but basically placid workers, extends by implication to embrace the unwitting public. Clients may be frequently treated, or accommodated more as 'patient' than responsible buyer. Bereavement is quite widely regarded as incapacitating, a form of 'sickness' which calls forth concerned support and a directing initiative from funeral proprietors. In the sense that mourners experience a break in their normative patterns and their behaviour changes as a response to stress, they can easily be regarded as 'deviant' characterisations who require leadership. By contrast large, successful businesses are manifestly 'normal', having encountered and survived unscathed, numerous mourning involvements. Not surprisingly, senior members of the family regard themselves as patriarchal in a multiple sense, guiding, controlling, yet sympathetically sharing the experiences of mourners, workers and clients. They regard their controlling activities as supportive, unselfish and appropriate; it is therefore difficult for clients to avoid or reject their embrace.

This firm is a notable example of the manner in which a small trader can exploit a particular market and, by diversification, develop a prosperous and expanding business. As outlined in Chapters Two and
Three, many tradesmen sought to provide funerals as supplements to their more regular trade as carpenters, builders, upholsterers etc., and a few were successful in handing on a small business capable of expansion. In approximately 125 years this particular family business has changed from sole trader to factors supplying not only funerals, but essential goods to the occupation as a whole. This success could be seen as a justification for his claim that personal quality, training and leadership, are decisive in building a responsible commercial undertaking. It is impossible, however, to know if exploitation or malpractice were influential in assisting the fortunes of this firm rather than its competitors, since he did not acknowledge that such circumstances could operate. Family history was rarely blemished by such undesirable characteristics when participants recounted it.

This account emphasises the link between family control and business success, as it does the fact that involvement may be forced on particular members rather than willingly claimed by them. In this highly successful business (as in the most prestigious family, R95, already recounted) the present Managing Director had been reluctant to enter the firm merely to continue a tradition. Once incorporated, however, he had striven to ensure that the family name became respected for its commercial success. This respondent feels that specialism, profitability and honesty are insufficient and seeks to add personal leadership qualities. Not only does he claim a specialism when dealing with human frailty, but regards it as a manifestation of desirable personal characteristics.

FAMILY CITADEL - BUSINESS AS MORAL COMMITMENT (R101/102)

Some family firms have members who are positively embittered by the role conflicts they experience at work. The splenetic asides given by one lady in South London (R101) may not be representative of the occupation as a whole, but were echoed by many informants who also felt trapped by family ascription. She had passed the NAFD Diploma course and, with her 21 year old son, controlled one branch of the family business. Both acted as funeral directors and had a small work force of two men.
She claimed that because both she and her son worked hard '(...) we are both employers and employees (...)' and therefore she had no need to speak to 'the men' since '(...) they can't add anything to what I can tell you. I'm on the go all the time (...) yet workers tell you that they finish work at 5 o'clock'. They take home over £50 per week (1977) plus socks, suits, coats, clean towels (...) ten minutes from work so no fares to pay (...) in my father's day, none of the workers had cars, and he never had a holiday abroad (...) but now the workers go abroad!'

At first she claimed that her workers shared the family's views on funeral work and she had no objection to her request to talk with them. Gradually her answers and asides revealed a distrust of their opinions and a general dislike of all workers in the occupation, whom she regarded as overprotected and underworked. She also indicated that they might give answers which contradicted her own and this would raise the anger of the senior family members. At no time did she attempt to examine her own role and that of her family with any degree of serious intent. Their moral virtue and business honesty were given bases of reference.

'There is always jealousy (...) of my son because he has a new Triumph 2000 and he's only 21 years old (...) now I've got a car, free telephone, rent, electricity (...) because I live over 'the shop' (...) I only have my food and clothing to buy out of my salary (...) I was resentful of all my brother had so why shouldn't the men be resentful of us (...) why not resentful? (...) its only human nature (...) only the old ones wouldn't be. One said to me the other day '(...) after all, our bosses owe us nothing (...) we're lucky because they give us a job (...) they don't have to'. This is the old fashioned way when the majority of people thought it lucky to have a job (...) we were much better before the Unions came. I think (my son) or I ought to be in there when you talk to the men, otherwise jealousy will creep in (...) and, my God, don't the Trade Union officials feather their own nests (...) the money they earn (...) I know they've got damn good cars and don't work very hard (...) in fact at the NAFD the laughter was amazing when this was raised'.
It appeared, from her remarks, that 'the men' were easily led by unscrupulous leaders and that the old-time deferential attitude, so commendable in manual workers, was being eroded. Leadership qualities among the family proprietors were being undervalued or even challenged. The lady felt that all around her '(...) standards are dropping (...) we are now controlled by Unions (...) men can get more money than my son (...) my father is jealous of his business and anyone who says a word against it - out! (firm) used to be a family firm, then they were taken over by a pop-star, Englebert Humperdink!' (This was true, but later reversed when the 'Music and Plastics Industry' owned by Humperdink, sold the funeral outlets back to (...) after a brief ownership).

'My son doesn't realise what a good life he actually has (...) the money is there and he just uses it. The men would say he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and he get all the perks. The standard of treatment of the dead is dropping (...) the Co-op either copy, or employ adults from other firms (...) they have a merely business point of view'.

Extreme though this total viewpoint may seem, it echoes many more carefully phrased opinions given by informants. 'Blame' is regularly attached to Trade Unions, officialdom, lazy workers, sub-standard Co-operatives, irresponsible colleagues and the uncaring public. 'Professionalism' is seen to be under attack by blatant 'commercialism' and traditional standards are threatened. When these criticisms are juxtaposed with the comfortable standard of living common to the great majority of funeral directors, the detached observer is led to question the reasons underlying their defensive posture. If 'enemies' combine to fetter their genuine altruism and to minimise their technical competence, how do they maintain an occupational pre-eminence in which (...) 'net profit margins made by funeral directors are in general high and in most sectors have maintained or even improved their position over the last few years' (Price Commission Report 1977).

This informant is, perhaps, unrepresentative in the catholicity of her dislike and regret. She finds much to reject throughout the world not
merely that contained in the realm of her daily work experience. She claims to work hard in an occupation that '(..) is not a woman's job. (Clients) appreciate me as a woman dealing with them at a final viewing, but men are more dignified (...) stiff upper lip (...) dignity is how we show our service. Bus conductors used to take their caps off (...) men stood still but now they even cut into the cortege (...) cars overtake with impatience. Life is no longer important (...) see Ireland! People want to share, its the last way of showing that you care and funeral directors are helping to maintain standards (...) funeral directors all over the country are nice (...) except the Co-op (...) people go to the Co-op expecting their dividend, but in fact it's slapped on the bill. I have tried to commit suicide four times and have just come from six months in a hospital (...) I wouldn't mind if I died in bed tonight. But the dead can't hurt me'.

The strength of her distaste for what she regards as low standards may be explained by a 'psychological disturbance', but the criticism she voices is very common among funeral directors. Her son (R102) was more prosaic and practical in response to questions about his work role. He stressed the difficulties involved in preparing a funeral and his own responses to a dead body. He claimed to be able to deal effectively with an unknown body, but not able to tackle it if known personally to him. This reinforced, yet again, the fact that bodies can only be effectively processed if they have no living links with the funeral director. His instrumental approach to work did not find favour with his mother, who claimed that a client orientation was more appropriate for their work. She was protective of his interests, even though disapproving of the manner in which he performed his service. Behind them both loomed the 'family interest' made manifest by his grandfather, the undisputed patriarch. He controlled the family and the commercial interests of the firm. He refused to see me, or to talk with me about the business and also refused me permission to talk with 'the men' (as all the family referred to the work force) whilst they were at work. I attempted to speak with them out of work hours, but eventually decided not to press the issue. This was partially due to the fact that I would have had to stop their cars as they drove away if I was to get into
conversation with them and, in this particular situation, I was more interested in listening to the family justifications than in checking the accuracy of their details. As McHugh noted, in another context: 'It is the sociologist's special advantage not to have to observe the act or person that members deal with, only the way members do their dealing' (McHugh in Dreitzel 1970 p175).

I had two long talks with the mother, one with the son and a telephone conversation with the grandfather. Through them, the strength of 'family' as a unifying and defining agency was made particularly clear. The mother had reverted to the use of her family name when separated from her husband, and her son had taken her family name by deed-poll. They both stressed family honour, the importance of continuity from one generation to another and the 'style' of people they were:-

'We're supposed to be a Christian country but the only time people get involved is a birth, christening and death. This firm is lucky, we have Roman Catholic, high and low church (clients). My great-grandfather started the firm and I was born into it. All our seven shops have family members in charge (...) most unusual. My father was the first to introduce grey livery. My son and I are the only family members to go through the FDA course (...) its not of much value (...) its best to learn by experience. We are a happy business (...) you get to be nice to do any type of funeral work (...) can't be done by just anybody. One of the men said he ceased to be an undertaker at five o'clock. I think that's all wrong. (We have to pay them) during non-office hours for a call-out (...) we just ring around until we find one (...) this is where your costs mount up, whereas if we (family) did it, there would be no cost at all. Our good name is the most important aspect of our business (...) in funeral directing their is no need for Unionism. Frankly, if I had my way, Trade Unionists wouldn't enter into our business'.

Her son's interpretation of the work was different from his mother's but also his information was frequently self-contradictory. He had been
working in the firm for five years, since leaving school and had learned
the administrative and transport aspects of the work in particular.
However, he admitted that '(...) I would never have gone into it just
for the job but (because) I'll always be looked after (...) financial
security you know. I (...) term myself a funeral director whilst I am
at work, but when work's finished, its finished for me ( ...) I don't
want to know about it ( ...) I don't like people saying 'cor! he's an
undertaker' or 'I don't know how he can do that sort of work' ( ...)'. A
moment later he was saying that he felt that he should be recognised as
a funeral director and treated with respect by those who might know he
was a director. His general conversation was marred by a lack of
coherence and internal logic which made it extremely difficult to
understand, for example, '( ...) well, I think I'm different to my
Grandfather, he's a Minister in any case, he's a Minister as well as
doing it (unusual isn't it, being Minister of the Church etc . . .), it is
and it isn't, it obviously has great advantage ( ...) he's a Baptist,
very funny family, half of its Baptist and the other part Church of
England, another part of its Catholic which no one can understand, don't
ask me. Any my uncle, again, is a Baptist and he again would never
( ...) he's always got to be neat and tidy. It's hard to say ( ...) people
think I'm not normal for some reason'. It was the stress he
placed on particular words, or the topics he chose to emphasise, which
gave continuity to his account. He noted the routine characteristics of
his work and said '( ...) people think that funeral directors merely deal
with the dead, but nurses of eighteen touch more dead bodies than
funeral directors ( ...) our actual part is three or four minutes ( ...) we
take it for granted ( ...) if I thought about it I couldn't do the job
( ...) it's a very satisfying job, but you may move ten bodies in a day
so they eventually become merely 'objects' ( ...) and I can't stand the
sight of blood. We're not in the business to make a loss (so) you've
got to be in complete control ( ...) what you say has got to be accepted
( ...) (and) the client must respect you because they've got confidence
in you'. As with so many informants he was constantly noting the
presentational aspects involved in his work and that '( ...) the funeral
director wants everything to go off smoothly ( ...) mustn't make mistakes
( ...) always in the public eye ( ...) we must be aware of people up the
road peering from behind curtains (...) basically nothing should go wrong (...) (sometimes) they all try to jump in the cars and they are trying to get twelve in and are quite happy sitting on top of each other (...) unless you pull them out. You mustn't get involved emotionally (...) I think women get more involved emotionally tied than men do (...) women can't obviously conduct a funeral (...) you become so involved with the performance that you are arranging and not with the dead person (...) it's a business (...) and it has to be done exactly (...) this is the big thing. If things go wrong you can usually bluff your way round it (...) since it might be once in twenty years (that people attend a funeral)'. A few moments later he was saying that when a car breakdown occurs '(...) you don't go running around panicking (...) you just tell them the truth, whatever happens I tell them exactly what is happening'. It would appear that faults in the proceedings that originated from sources outside his control were acknowledgeable; those for which he might be considered personally culpable were concealed.

A few salient points emerge from the interpretations given by these two respondents which, disjointed through they were, reaffirmed the importance of family commitment in competitive business affairs.

Firstly, the power of family ties which bind disparate personalities together is clearly emphasised. Kinship bonds serve to hold members the better to face the 'unjust' assault of outsiders. Such outsiders can be identified:

- Corporately (Trade Unions or Co-operatives)
- Operationally (disgruntled and affluent workers)
- Collectively (bad drivers, disregarding public, disorganised clients)

All make the 'self-denying service', claimed to be provided by the family, more difficult to produce.

Secondly, the possibility for individual members to hold different interpretations concerning personal commitment is shown. Altruistic
service by one member can be matched by resignation to instrumental routine in another, both operating within the same family business.

Thirdly, the development of dual attitudes is seen to be a distinct possibility - a form of 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger 1962). Good standards of living are openly acknowledged and expanding business is claimed, yet simultaneously the financial basis of the family firm is presented as precarious and constantly threatened by unfair competition or organised labour.

Therefore, the family is manifestly successful but 'profits are unobtainable' due to unfair competition, whilst also being 'lower than critics suggest' and further 'depleted by unfair Trade Union activities', yet morally 'deserved' as a reward for conscientious service to clients. The dissonance produced by such self-contradictory assumptions produced 'explanations' in which recrimination against hostile 'outsiders' reinforced the importance of family allegiances, but did little to establish a less myopic picture of the business.

In this particular case, occupational prestige and personal worth were inextricably linked to provide a moral citadel capable of withstanding all actual, or imagined assaults. Economic control and moral leadership are retained through self-propogation and the family ensures its own survival.

MARRYING INTO A FUNERAL BUSINESS – ROLE SEPARATION (R113, 84(a), R79)

Not all family members share a sense of belonging to a joint enterprise as demonstrated above, nor do they all develop a feeling of involvement with funeral work. Marrying into a funeral family may not make a significant difference to the degree of commitment felt by a member who shares affinity but not kinship ties. Many respondents indicated that they were extremely reluctant to accept the funeral role offered to them whether it was by their parents and grandparents or spouse.
One young woman, who had married into the occupation six years earlier (R113), felt that '(...) when you're with it all day it doesn't mean anything (...) its just another one that's happened (...) I'm glad to seem them (family) go out (...) but I'm stuck here (...) I don't feel rewarded for it (...) do you follow me? I've no regrets on the six years I've been here, don't get me wrong (...) When I first got married (friends) said 'Oh, God forbid, you haven't married an undertaker - not you'. I was mixing with people in different professions, you know, the print and the chemist and their lives were very different and, of course, they said 'Oh, you're not going to live with the dead (...) you'll see all corpses (...) how on earth are you going to take it!' Then when I was married they said 'What's it like being married to an undertaker?' as though it was something, you know, entirely strange (...) like a 'Dr. Who', I suppose, really. Sometimes if I don't feel very well and I do happen to see some corpses down there, um, it can make me feel a little bit, un, a-w, you know, really low. The way I feel having seem them (...) I think, oh, God, get me away from it all, not to see any more'

This respondent lived in a small building in Bermondsey, which contained the living rooms above the office, coffin workshop and dead bodies downstairs. Therefore she had to brush past the occupied coffins to reach the stairs to her rooms and on one unforgettable occasion had felt her clothes caught in the fingers of a corpse which had been encoffined without a lid properly fixed and with its hand over the side. It felt to her as though the dead had moved and it had horrified her. Nevertheless, she had known the undertaker and his first wife for several years and was a regular visitor before she became second wife. When she was married her daily encounter with death disturbed her and prevented her from developing a full involvement with the business. Comforting clients and accepting their requests was as far as she would go towards participation and she shrank for involvement with the body-work. She spoke at length and with enthusiasm about shopping excursions and afternoon teas, seeing them as an escape and a reward. Her husband's partner (R79), the proprietor and a descendant of the founder, gave her support, and she felt closely tied to him. This
loving and close-knit association in no way lessened her dislike of the work, nor her fear of the dead bodies.

Her husband (R84(A)) had worked for 32 years in this family firm and lived as one of the family. His 23 year old son was about to join the business and a cousin already worked at a branch office, 'a happy crew', was how he referred to them jointly, including his wife. 'We are in social work' he claimed 'and people come to us for help (...) they may even need to be restrained if they become over anguished'. He showed great involvement with his work and concern that modern conditions were harmful, for example; '(...) Cremation is a hurry-up process (...) you don't throw your dog on the fire when it dies, so why burn up your loved ones. Surely you want to treasure their memory?' This approach was reinforced by the proprietor (R79) who regarded the human species as 'the lowest of all species - we foul our nests - notice how many people read 'The News of the World' (...) everywhere there's a misunderstanding of the funeral director - in print its belittling - if its visual its usually cruel and silly jokes. The way we treat our dead is an indication of the way we treat our living - its a show of respect - otherwise we can have the garbage can picking up the cadavers. I was born into the business, but my feelings carry over to the others in the firm'.

It was obvious that the young woman had not accepted funeral work even whilst accepting her inclusion in the family setting. She supported their caring solicitude for mourners grief, but could not bring herself to become an integral part of the occupation. Her age, sex and emotional response set her apart and caused her to seek fulfilment in the relatively trivial social encounters of her time away from the family's central concern. Most respondents who had been pressed into the occupation accommodated to it. This woman's unease, and dislike of the setting, imposed a severe strain on her marriage.
Legal ownership of small family firms is sometimes difficult to ascertain, since names remain unchanged even when take-over occurs and, in other cases, the particular names which appear are of people long since dead. In some cases close and distant relatives are part of the directorial board; sometimes affines are closely involved but in others they are supportive spouses only. Only by involvement in their closed world can an observer be sure of each family net work and the subtleties of interaction are not easily understood. The sense of 'belonging' is a defining influence in their daily work, even though it can be expressed with distaste or revulsion and acted out with commitment or obligation.

One respondent, (R114), who immediately accepted the claims made on her when marrying a funeral director, stated her case quite clearly. 'People forget we are meat, and we all know what happens to meat in hot weather. The average person could not carry this knowledge and should not be asked to do so. I never believed that I would become as involved in the way that I have, (especially) as my husband was too embarrassed to tell me what his job actually was until we were engaged to be married - but I believe that one should know all the jobs if one is to support the leader'. She took the lead in conversation and justified her husbands attitudes and actions. 'The occupation has a great social value' she claimed. This is a lady with strong convictions who expressed forcibly that combination of personal commitment and commercial enterprise widely demonstrated in family firms. Whereas (R113) felt forced into an unacceptable role through her marriage, this respondent consciously grasped it, with a directness unusual even among directors.

From the evidence provided by family members it would appear that many of them 'invest' themselves in the family business and fight to protect their personal capital from erosion. It is primarily a moral battle, in which constant skirmishes with insensitive outsiders lead to defensive attitudes.
'The firm' comes to represent not only specialised competence but the moral integrity of its members. History is often of central importance, as current holders of the family name refer back to ancestors, whose virtues laid the foundations for the present resource. In a manner perhaps not too dissimilar from aristocratic families remembering service to monarchs, they look back with pride to wheelwrights, carpenters, joiners, furniture makers and stonemasons who received recognition for individual service from those they served. They have a history of service to others to maintain and consequently are as emotively bound to past traditions as they are practically tied to present performances. To put it another way, criticism of their occupational competence may well be regarded by them as an indictment of moral culpability as well as a denigration of their technical efficiency.

Family members when they leave the premises do not usually discard their responsibility - they carry into their social world not merely the role of funeral director but a personal identification with a way of life. Even the youngest member of the family (noted above R102), who tried to shrug off his occupational role when off-duty, felt the need to be identified as a 'responsible director' by those who already possessed some knowledge of his work.

Some funeral workers (consensualists) acted as though they had become 'honorary' family members as a consequence of 'loyal' and long service - not to the clients, but to the family employing them. Many 'pragmatists' however, left the responsibility of upholding the firm's moral virtue behind, with their uniforms, when their day finished. For them it was merely work which had but little claim on their non-work selves. If friends or strangers made reference to the distinctive nature of their work, it could be justified on purely instrumental considerations as providing a steady and reliable income. Whatever degree of personal commitment they gave to the firm, their sense of personal worth was rarely inextricably tied to the firm's moral standing.
For most family members and many 'consensualists' however, public and private, work and non-work presentations were synonymous. It has been suggested that in traditional, pre-industrial societies, members owned the stage on which they acted out their rituals but in contemporary society they are forced to hire both stage and performers to represent their interests (K. Macdonald 1982). To present oneself as a suitable surrogate, as directors and workers do regularly, requires identification with the needs and problems associated with death and grief. Family business-men believe that this can only be offered with conviction if public and private 'selves' coalesce to provide assurance to servicer and serviced alike that moral integrity commands technical skill.

COMMERCIAL OR PROFESSIONAL ALIGNMENT

Throughout this study I have argued that there are no activities regularly performed by funeral directors that could not be effectively carried out by well-intentioned laymen. Even embalming ('Temporary Preservation'), which requires careful control of dangerous chemicals and a knowledge of anatomy does not necessitate (in the daily practice of funeral preparation), more than a rudimentary technical skill. Funeral directors, in this reading, do not owe their occupational significance to special knowledge, delicate skill or caring solicitude, but primarily, to their commercial exploitation of the special social circumstances produced by death.

For example, the widespread public ignorance of what to do when a death occurs, allows the funeral director to take responsibility by removing the dead from the proximity of the living (see Chapter 8). This helps to sustain the common feeling of inadequacy, particularly since he cloaks his practical activities with secrecy. As one informant commented; 'Relatives will spend years looking after a diseased body, but as soon as its dead, they want to get rid of it immediately, even though its then harmless' (R108). Some even suppose that it is actually illegal to bury your own dead (Chapter 8). One worker argues that it was also illegal to bury without first 'embalming' the body, even though
his own firm regularly did so (R56). Furthermore, there is a strong disinclination by the public to rectify their ignorance, before having to deal with a funeral. Self-help and do-it-yourself provisions have stopped short of funeral servicing. Funeral directors capitalise on this reluctance, by declaring a constant readiness to act as caretakers of the dead. Death work, they suggest, is a burden to be borne by strangers, not by those incapacitated by grief. A disapproval of any bereaved who might wish to do it themselves is widespread throughout the occupation, notable even among three workers who felt that funeral directors were 'just in it for the money' (R56, R57, R71). They became angry when asked why individuals should not bury their own dead, if they wished. 'Not tasteful', 'Give a bad impression', 'cheap', 'nasty' and 'illegal' were included in their responses. These same operatives, however, also spoke of the impossibility of funeral workers treating dead bodies 'respectfully' or 'reverently' when so many passed through their hands. They were divided over a question of whether private or municipal funeral directors were 'best' for the public, but not over client control of the funeral!

Also, it is widely believed that bereavement produces social dislocation for those who grieve and a specialisation of tasks is considered essential to reduce their distress. Therefore, the one occupation which offers to perform all the necessary tasks it seen to be the appropriate service to employ, irrespective of its actual technical capabilities, or its value-for-money.

Finally, because some prestigious occupations, such as are to be found in Law, Medicine and Engineering, have obtained both commercial success and 'professional' status, many funeral directors seek to emulate them. They are divided over which public position will prove to be the most suitable, and many are uncertain about how to resolve latent difficulties in becoming both commercial successful and 'professionally' respected. When the bereaved present themselves for help, should they be regarded as 'customer' or 'client'? Should they be called 'client' but treated as 'customer'? Are directors in 'trade', 'business' or 'profession'? The comparatively meagre reserves of knowledge and skill
at their command, require that they strongly emphasise the quality of
the personal service they offer - thereby unobtrusively suggesting
'professional', one-to-one confidentiality. Their present occupational
stance of discreet availability precludes openly exploitive stratagems,
such as competent advertising and public relations campaigns. They play
a waiting game, careful not to arouse consumer rejection.
Circumspection cannot be rudely transformed without cost in credibility.
Openly competitive advertising is regarded as a step toward the brash
materialism of the American market, yet truly 'professional' status
requires a corporate closing of ranks and a willingness to raise
standards of practice and behaviour. It will be realised that any
attempt to place directors unequivocally in either 'professional' or
'business' orientations must acknowledge the influence of their own
self-definitions. Because individual directors give different weight to
the subjective aspects of behaviour, it is open to them to define
'professional' conduct in a variety of ways. If they define it as
solicitude for a client's need, matched with uncommon skills and then
prove to provide such attributes, it will be difficult to deny their
claim by referring them to more analytic definitions. They act in
accord with their beliefs (whatever strictures social scientists lay on
this behaviouristic approach). When, however, they seek to translate
their concept of client service into improved social status and to seek
official recognition for their occupational specialisms, they fail to
substantiate their presumption. The acknowledged professions have
gained their privileged status by translating one order of scarce
resources - special knowledge and skills - into another - social and
economic rewards (Larson 1977). Maintaining scarcity implies a tendency
to monopoly of market expertise and of special status. Viewed in this
way, funeral directors totally fail to substantiate any claim to
professional location in the occupational structure of Britain. I am
not concerned here to show the total inadequacy of their self-placement,
but to indicate the influence that such personal appraisal has on their
occupational performance, and on their proclaimed identity. If they
claim an altruistic motivation, then it is their own justification for
that attitude that should be assessed - by observation from within their
occupational community.
No funeral director I met failed to acknowledge some commercial motivation, but many preferred that it remained concealed, or relegated to pure necessity. Those who acknowledged that commercial interests motivated them, claimed a 'professionalism' to soften any exploitive tendencies attached to purely market interests. Only the representatives of large public companies and prestigious family firms appeared to be free from embarrassment when examining a profit motive. The greater the claim to a moral commitment the larger the claimed dedication to professionalism, and the lower the acknowledgement of financial motivation - an almost inverse relationship between a subjective commitment to professionalism and an acknowledged profit-motive.

The uncertainty felt among proprietors concerning their 'real' location was reflected by one lady who said 'I would call someone who hadn't his own hearse 'an undertaker', but 'funeral director' sounds better. Funeral director really only applies to the men (...) I only married into it (the occupation) and I hadn't thought whether it is a profession or not (...) I was a professional when I was conducting (...) you know, its a skilled performance'. She moved from status (hearse-owner) to sex-role (mens work) and then to skill in performance (conducting) without clarification. She further claimed that her firm had changed from 'undertakers' to 'funeral directors when the building was updated, yet also said that 'undertaker' and 'funeral director' were interchangeable terms! (R93).

Uncertainty, compounded with false knowledge, was also expressed by a branch manager of a prosperous East Anglian firm, who said: 'there's a two-year training period, as you know (...) large firms operate a two-year apprenticeship, but usually for the sons of the owners'. Neither of these suppositions is generally true and he should have been aware of the generally low level of training since he had always been involved with funeral directors, literally growing up '(...) with a cemetery at the bottom of the garden' (R19). Because he had been carefully trained by monthly spells at driving, coffin making, 'embalming', directing and office accounts, be believed that this was
general practice throughout the occupation. Because every other trainee he encountered had been sons of proprietors he assumed that carefully planned training was the common experience and that the occupation was engaged in producing 'professionally' competent performers by self-recruitment.

The most positive claim to total involvement with his professional performance was given by the owner of a small Leeds firms carrying out fewer than 100 funerals each year (R84). For him 'a professional' was a person possessed of special gifts. 'A specialist with personal integrity and trust (...) similar to a doctor or accountant (...) where clients came to a name, to an individual, not to a business concern.
The personal touch is essential and, because the funeral director is a custodian of the body, he needs to be honest, ethical, compassionate, understanding, straightforward (...) similar to a priest'. He saw his work as a full-time specialism and was supported in his work by one worker and by his wife, who acted as receptionist, accountant and co-director. He was also an embalmer and had very firm convictions regarding the 'proper' way to treat the dead and the bereaved.

Embalming gave him a 'tremendous job-satisfaction, since the body will keep nice for a week or more, and can be constantly 'topped-up' for a longer period'. To allow a dead body to be seen naked was indecent in his view, and he took care to cover the body from the waist down with a plastic sheet as I watched him work. He was piercing the body with sharp metal and draining its blood down the sink, yet he found it necessary to screen its genitals from my sight. 'The funeral director must take responsibility from the clients, even though in doing so he may deprive them of the grief thereapy of laying out, buying flowers and sending out notices. The more I know the clients in advance the better thereapy I can give'. He felt it necessary to go to some trouble to protect his clients from what he felt to be 'unpleasant scenes'. 'I never allow clients to view the dead body without preparing them (...) I'm always present to begin with (...) in case of fainting, hysterics of nosying'. He did not feel it necessary to describe a 'nosey' activity, but his proprietorial concern to keep his body work from too close an inspection seemed clear. His sensitivity to nakedness and propriety
influenced him to keep what is in fact a scarcely covered dead body from 'prying' eyes even though it was the bereaved who were seeking to observe what was surely 'their' body if it was anyones.

He has a cassette tape of organ music to 'soften the shock of viewing' and he has a routine to protect his clients from too rude an awareness of death when they come to view his embalming skill. 'I put the feet away from the entrance, therefore the bereaved have to walk around the coffin to view the face, which will be covered with a cloth. I remove the cloth, walk round the coffin slowly, replace the cloth and walk out leaving the clients alone, leaving the door slightly open in case of need'. He does not actually trust his clients to act 'appropriately' when faced with the trauma of death. He exhibits a paternalism which requires him to exercise leadership and control, albeit diplomatically. Having worked hard to please his father, (foregoing his own personal desire, in this case to become a fashion photographer), he emphasises that whatever he does, he does properly and well. His 'professionalism' is expressed through attention to detail and therefore he wants to lead others into the same disciplined behaviour that he regards as fitting the occasion.

It is this type of occupational control that I contrasted with Goffman's claim that professional service involved 'equals in collaboration'. This respondent seeks to be considered 'professional' in both attitude and activity, but to demonstrate his control he 'unbalances' his client in such a way that he alone defines the reality of the encounter. As a previous informant in South London noted (R79): 'some people could do this job without too much personal involvement, but they wouldn't be a real professional - we are professionals'.

Funeral directors who operate with such an interpretation tend to help create the client dependence which they then respond to as a call upon their 'professionalism'. 'A funeral director sees himself (and should do so) as a professional - after all he has to be a mind-reader; to be understanding, but not a psychoanalyst; have a sympathetic attitude to demonstrate that he is the one man who can do that job for them. He's
trained for it (...) a form of vocation. We should have a professional charter - it will come - he must show (the client) how it must be done' (R83 - director of a South London family firm). 'We give a professional service (and) we like to give a professional image'.

The director who sought to present a ceremony in keeping with 'the English way of Death' said: 'we are leaving behind our down-town, seedy-stained image, and coming to be a profession. We direct public taste and (create) a sense of what is customary. For example, the contours of the body should be seen through the robe, giving the impression of someone sleeping in a bed, but nevertheless dead - the softening of reality'. But, in contrast, to the Leeds embalmer, quoted previously, he said: 'I don't leave the face cloth on when clients view, because lay people get a terrible shock when its removed. I leave it at the foot, inferring that I will place it in position before screwing the lid down. 'Undertakers' don't have the finish or the expertise, they're not in any sense professional. They may have integrity, but they lack our standard of perfection' (R89).

Throughout these definitions runs the common thread of exercising control over clients definitions and behaviour. This is achieved by elevating relatively mundane and routine activities to significant occupational specialisms. It should not be assumed that the Directors who emphasise their 'professional' status necessarily try to hide their commercial involvement. Frequently they acknowledge it, but with non-focussing asides such as that given by a South London proprietor: '(...) most of us have cash-flow problems and are overdrawn at the bank. That's why we need to keep in with the Churches - they give us business' (R91). The most common theme was that of moderate rewards for hard work - 'we don't want to be millionaires (...) we get bread and a little bit of jam' said the wife of a funeral director in Surrey (R93). 'I was exploited during my training, but I had aimed to get £1,000 a year by the time I was 21 (1970)' said a Suffolk director (R19). 'It would be easy to take more money off people and become more profitable, but we would then become salesmen to maximise profits. We combine making a profit and supplying a family need' claimed a leading member of the NAFD
(R99). 'We could make a fortune if we exploited the 'open' bereaved'. The difficulty many of them exhibited when discussing income was best summarised in the pithy sentence: 'I don't wish anyone to die, but it is my bread and butter' (R89).

Successive public relations officers in the NAFD have failed to prevent the mass-media from presenting funeral directors as avaricious or incompetent, possibly because of their internal dissension.

Most proprietors fear media attention, regarding it as trivialising and negatively biased. This is primarily due to their own secretive and unforthcoming attitude toward public knowledge, which ensures that Press coverage of their work is usually critical, rarely analytic. 'There's certainly money to be made in the death industry (...) undertakers expect up to 25% commission from florists for recommending them (...) coffins are sold back to undertakers for half the price and he uses them again (...) the chances of getting back the ashes of a loved one are remote' (Titbits 21.4.77). 'The funeral directors become very coy indeed when it comes to charges of cartelisation (...) a silence deeper than that of a funeral parlour followed my taunt that the field was narrowing down to three major combinations in London. The most hardened socialist, when he dies, must pay tribute to private enterprise' (New Statesman 22.12.72). During the strike of operatives in the autumn of 1977, the tabloid newspapers really exploited the potential for disturbing disclosures, for example: 'now we have come to this (...) the nadir of corporate insensitivity (...) human grief held to ransom' (Daily Mail 4.10.77). Even the Directors themselves add to their own personification as odd, as for example, evidenced in a 'quality' Sunday newspaper. Below a cartoon, showing a woman discussing a balding, middle-aged man in black with her friend and saying, 'when he told me he was a funeral director I nearly died!' a real director wrote: 'your local director won't bite (...) you may even discover that he is a normal human being' (Sunday Times 14.12.80). More recently published articles merely continue the common theme - either to ridicule or to expose an occupation which has never attempted to present itself clearly and accurately.

319
More positive self-identification is provided by those who do emphasise business success as their goal, although none would be as blunt as to admit: '(...) there is very little that funeral directors can actually study in any depth (...) they have no subject matter to discuss and no intellectual core (...) they are just businessmen' (R2). This was an American informant who revealed that, in the United States for example, funeral directors had five-day seminars, preferably in a 'good' resort, such as Miami, New Orleans or Las Vagas, where they convinced themselves that they were improving their professional status. In his view their social placement was entirely due to the significance of the ceremony at which they officiate and the social circumstances in which it was embedded, as I have argued earlier. In the USA, they sell costly merchandise, which the public does not inspect or compare and the 'service' they provide is largely superficial. For example, costly 'real embalming' is offered which, it is implied, will last for many years but which is really 'temporary preservation'. In England the commercial pressure is less intense, but the basic aim is the same - to sell merchandise and a particular ability to use it effectively. 'We are businessmen who operate our business in a professional manner. Our trade association can't be compared with professional associations' (R88). He had been in the business for forty years but had drifted into it, as have so many others. Now, even though he is the NAFD Board of Examiners, he still operates as a business man trying to be better than the next man - '(...) not like the Co-op mark you - don't quote me on this - but they're more concerned with a shiny coffin, whereas I try to help them forget what it even looks like (...) frankly, I would rather you don't talk with my workers - they could only tell you details and that's not sociology is it?'

If, however, a director's aim is to gain market dominance he must identify the needs of the consumer. Frequently directors expressed conflicting assumptions concerning whose needs were actually being met: '(...) we do exactly what the public wants (...) simpler coffin and ceremony (...) but who wants to know about funerals? (...) if we had open days we would be criticised (...) no one wants to know (...) butchers' shops don't have open days do they?' A few moments later,
however, the same respondent let slip how directors do succeed in manipulating consumer demand - 'when Chapels of Rest started in 1930 about 2% asked for them, now about 98% want them. The demand followed the provision by the Directors' (R99). Listening to what directors say in asides, anecdotes and confidences can provide insight into their actual behaviour.

The public did not demand veneered chipboard for coffins; small viewing rooms misnamed 'Chapels'; 'temporary preservation' presented as embalming; Daimler limousines rather than Fords; lawn cemeteries or top hats and black gloves - but they accept them as 'appropriate' when sold as part of a funeral package.

Social class differences in attitude and performance were presented by a village 'undertaker' in Cheshire:- 'I gambled and took over the firm when the son died, three years ago. Then it was a joiner's, carpenter's plumber's, wheelwright's and builder's as well as a funeral directors, doing 52 per year. I set myself the target of 40, and now I've done 52 also. If I can get to 100 I can give up the joinery. I'm a working class man but as a funeral director I will be seen as middle-class.

They won't have me in the NAFD because I haven't got a proper Chapel - to be realist, it won't make any real difference - just the name. They're very snobbish really - funeral directing is a business - it helps if you are a craftsman in a small village like this (...) village people want different things than town folk (...) they know what they want for a funeral, for example, publishing names of mourners in order of precedence, and I will increase business by doing a good job' (R87).

At the other end of the social and economic scale is the very large public company covering the south of England, which has expanded from owning six profitable Crematoria to the retail trade of funeral directing. It started this process in 1972 by purchasing one of the two largest firms in South London. This firm was available because it had been bought from its original family ownership by a music and plastics firm, which then decided not to continue with it. Since it is extremely difficult to open new businesses successfully (client resistance to new
names) the trading company retained the original family name and 'never trades under its proper name'. The informant (25 years with the group) is its Accountant Director and he emphasised the importance of continuing a familiar name for clients to remember. 'Never open a business 'cold', because clients mainly come through family or recommendation. The goodwill of the name is very important to trade' (R104). Speaking as a pragmatic businessman he outlined the manner in which the trading group has expanded, buying private firms whenever they appeared to contribute to the overall pattern of development. 'All private Crems' are profitable because they have commercial motivation whereas new municipal crematoriums can cost £1 million and never be profitable - three of the six we own were built by invitation and in co-operation with local authority before inflation rose. We buy coffins in bulk. The public don't see us as a corporate business group and we cherish that (...) we want to keep the good name of the local firms. A salaried manager can concentrate on funeral directing and not face the pressures of the small businessman'. He was clear-sighted about the role of funeral work and ensured that the company kept closely to it. 'It is basically a business, there's nothing mystical about what a funeral director does (...) even embalming wouldn't hurt anyone if not done properly. Its 'professional' only in the sense that it seeks to provide what the client needs and is supportive, but the skills are open to any kindly, sensitive person. Its nonsense to copy the Americans with five years at mortuary school'. However, the greatest difference between his interpretation and most others who sought to define their work is to be seen in his evaluation of both self-imposed codes of conduct and constant search for higher profits. He argues that it is a profitable occupation especially when economies of scale are exercised carefully. He did not regard Trade Unions as a threat to employers' profitability since, if negotiated with sensibly they could bring stability to the occupation. 'I'm surprised that funeral directors acknowledge an anti-union bias, and I'm opposed to the proposed Registration which is, in reality, a closed shop of funeral directors. I agree with better educational and training facilities but 'professionalism' is an over used word - there's no need for registration which is only suitable to drum someone out of the
Brownies'. His strongest analysis was reserved for the consequences of protected membership. It would lead, he claimed, to counter-attacks from public pressure groups, as it has in the USA where small businesses, such as are found in funeral work, used their 'professional' codes of conduct to over-exploit their market. 'We would then get a State bureaucracy established to limit the power of our occupational bureaucracy, and I would spend my time looking over my shoulder at the State, which would seek to limit us, or take us over. Free market forces will keep out undesirable practitioners without support by registration, which is anti-consumer'. This is the polar extreme to the altruistic professionalism which was claimed so frequently by the small proprietors. It emphasises the choices available to directors but also indicates that only the really large businesses, or those of eminent status, feel sufficiently secure to reject completely the ideology of 'profession'.

Weighing the accounts provided by many participants, and observing their practical accomplishments leads unequivocally to the conclusion that they are businessmen with commercial interests as the paramount concern. Many seek to obscure their profit seeking activity with unsubstantiated claims to professional attributes. Consequently ambiguity over the appropriate role to perform, and dissatisfaction with their publicly perceived status, is widespread.

The strength with which a commercial role may be denied was convincingly demonstrated by a respondent operating in a particularly sensitive funeral situation. (See below). Whilst he is not representative of the majority he reflects the widespread unease that permeates the occupation when matters of 'profit' are raised. He interpreted questions about economic practicalities as an attack on his personal probity and considered that a discussion of workers pay and conditions was inappropriate in a review of funeral provision.
The Jewish faith invokes a reverence for every dead body and presents the funeral Mitvah (Blessing) as both a duty and an honour. Historically, members of each community, especially the bereaved took personal responsibility for ensuring that the ceremonies commanded by God were properly performed. A special group was formed to treat the body correctly and reverently. Men treated men and women treated women. They were the 'Chevra Kadisha' or the 'Holy Brotherhood'.

Gradually this degree of personal responsibility lessened partly due to different interpretations of Judaic law and partly as a concession to the pressures imposed by mobile, urban populations. The manner in which Jewish dead are actually treated varies, according to which Judaic Movement is involved. Strictly orthodox procedures exist alongside innovative activities.

The doctrinally 'pure' groups are generally referred to as 'Orthodox' and include Hassadim, Adath Yisroel and the Federation of Synagogues. They forbid cremation and (claim that) members themselves perform the Mitvah according to tradition. They retain a 'closed' attitude to their faith refusing to discuss their funeral ceremony even with other Judaic Movements. They claim to produce a genuine Chevra Kadisha.

Closest to them, and probably the largest Judaic Movement in Britain is the United Synagogue which also opposes cremation and employs its own special workers to prepare the body in the proper ritual manner calling them the Chevra Kadisha. It also hires a hearse and driver from a Jewish funeral director, (see R83 above) who performs a double function; to carry out a correct Mitvah for the Synagogue and to secure a profit for his business.

The Reform Movement does allow cremation and contracts-out its funerals to a Jewish funeral director who will service several Reform Synagogues.
The Liberal-Progressive Movement is far removed from the Orthodox Movement and allows freedom to its members to choose the form of ceremony they think fitting and thereby to select whichever form of disposal and whichever director meets their needs.

The evidence gained from the last three of these movements shows that the great majority of British Jews subscribe annually to their own particular synagogue and from that contribution some money is made available to meet the burial costs incurred by members when death occurs. Therefore burial in the appropriate cemetery, or cremation, is paid for in advance of need.

However, to cover the funeral costs there is a funeral scheme whereby each synagogue budgets a particular sum of money each year for anticipated funeral costs. No payment is necessary by members unless they are over 50 years of age when they join the synagogue. Therefore the term Burial Society which is widely used, may refer merely to the burial scheme or to both the burial and funeral scheme.

To find out how a Burial Society operates and how members of a 'Chevra Kadisha' regard their own special contribution to the funeral ceremony, I interviewed the most senior official of the largest Movement (R22). He began by emphasising the moral commitment given by his Chevra Kadisha to its religious task and the high status accorded to all its members as they carried out, on behalf of others, God's wishes for the dead. Theoretically the workers are honoured for the hallowed service they provide, but in practice, it would appear to be a hidden and relatively low grade occupational task, with low wages. When pressed for precise information concerning their income, gratuities, conditions of work and Trade Union membership, he gave contradictory answers. Abruptly he refused to answer any more questions relating to what he called 'commerce'. He claimed that his workers were 'volunteers, recruited by advertisements in the Jewish press; that they were paid 'adequately' and each had a very high status. He said they received the national average wage (not saying what that was at the time) and furthermore, that there was no point in letting me talk to them as he knew everything
there was to know about their work. When I asked to meet them he grew angry saying (...) 'I'm not going to permit you to meet them nor to discuss terms of employment and things like that, because this is a commercial thing and I thought that you wanted to know how we carried out our funerals'. When I agreed that was my intention, but why could we discuss their work as a moral issue but not as wage labour, he said. 'But we are not a commercial undertaking here at all - not in any sense of the word - nowhere have I said it - we are truly 'Chevra Kadisha'. Every member of the Synagogue who pays his membership contribution is entitled to our services and burial in our cemetery - if we were a commercial undertaking we could make fortunes, but we don't. Quite frankly had I considered this interview to consider such matters, I would not have agreed to it'. Once more I pressed him, asking if paying the workers to do such a venerated task reduced their status. 'No', he replied 'obviously people will tell you they are underpaid - they're telling me so every day - you show me one case where workers say they are adequately paid, If I were asked I'd say that I was underpaid'. Once again I asked to speak to them and in response he told me that they were not on the premises, then rang for their leader to come to see me from downstairs where they had their headquarters! No one was available (he claimed), then having asked me to switch the tape-recorder off said: 'Off the record - I would like you to see the one who trains the others - obviously they are in a constant fight with me for money as are the rest of my Department - but they would never tell you the truth. Work is a situation of bargaining and they are never satisfied, also they are not allowed to ask for, or to accept, money from the bereaved, but they do! They go up and say: 'I hope everything was all right' and thereby take home £20 - £30 extra each week. They would get fired if this was admitted, but we all know it goes on. They get far more than their apparent salary, but to talk with them would do you no good because they would not tell you the truth'.

He presented the remarkable picture of an (apparently) avaricious work force, carrying out the most venerated responsibility laid up on Jews, led by a man who does not trust them to speak the truth. He, in turn, denies the existence of a commercial transaction, before delivering
himself of confirmation that workers share a national concern with low wages and cannot be trusted not to ask the mourners for money. His crucial remark was in reply to my question: 'you are saying that there is a commercial relationship between paid attendants and the Burial Society?' - 'No - I am the 'Chevra Kadisha'.'

The respondent (R22) felt that the religious commitment of the entire Burial Society was impugned by the suggestion that its services were bought rather than given. However, the Burial Society is financed by members' subscriptions, as is the Funeral Scheme and he is paid to administer its operations. In turn he hires, and pays the wage-earners who carry out the actual body work. That the Burial Society does not intend to make a profit from the money it receives, does not alter the relationship of subscriber to the Society, and hence to the funeral workers, which is that of buying a service in advance of need. A further commercial transaction is provided when the Society hires the services of a private funeral company to complete the funeral and disposal ceremony.

His unease was possibly due to the position he occupied between the extremes of Orthodoxy and Liberalism. The former claimed to respect the importance of the 'Mitvah' by providing a 'Chevra Kadisha' composed entirely of unpaid volunteers, whilst the latter regarded an openly commercial undertaking as quite suitable. In operating a Burial Society which claimed a moral voluntarism yet operated as a commercial business, he could be repudiated by the Orthodox Jew and considered hypocritical by the Reform Movement. His anger may have resulted from the fact that his vulnerability was exposed by an outsider, who was asking questions never posed before.

Representatives of the more radical wing of Judaism confirmed this interpretation, noting that as far as they were concerned, their own membership was free to choose whatever form of commercial contract they felt appropriate to their belief. The Orthodox Movement refused to answer questions put to them over the telephone and would not guarantee to reply to a letter. Any letter must have:- headed notepaper, my
professional status and confirmation of my official position from a referee of academic standing. The tone of voice used by their official representative was curt and dismissive; a response also received by the liberal wing of Judaism. Legitimate interest in their funeral procedures could, apparently, only come from those with the highest academic scholarship. Theirs was the most extreme form of defensive hostility encountered, but a similar though greatly modified reaction met my first formal enquiries to the NAFD. Such a 'siege-like' response was not found in the Muhammadan interview.

THE MUHAMMADAN MOSQUE AND THE COMMERCIAL FUNERAL (R44)

At a regionally important Mosque commercial activities were conducted in open view. Business, I was told, is undertaken for the good of Allah and the souls of the devout. The respondent (R44) was the Welsh-born wife of the Superintendent who was a member of the high caste Anafi sect. She had been converted to Islam 25 years ago when questioning the inadequacies of the Bible, had been to Mecca five times, and effectively ran the funeral business with her two sons. Her husband, though not an Imam, took prayers and was, in her words, 'a very learned man'. He led with worship and prayer; she controlled the detailed ritual of cleansing and burial. They were, respectively, the religious and the funeral business leaders of the largest East London Mosque.

They were the 'best known Muslim funeral business in the entire country' she claimed and will 'pick up bodies from anywhere so that they may be properly prepared and flown abroad where necessary'. They had been in the wholesale curry business but gave it up, due she said, to her husband's fanatical beliefs. 'Women occupy a high position in Muslim Society', she told me, 'even though they are not encouraged to attend funerals because they are emotionally weak and should not pray near a man 'since it will distract him from his prayers'. (Similarly, Jewish women are required not to attend funerals in many branches of Judaic faith). This lady dominated the men around her, and directed the funeral affairs with determination and verve. She had a lung removed for cancer but smoked heavily, since, as she said 'Allah will call me
when the time comes, and at present I am doing good work for other people'. Since there are about 10,000 Muslims in East London (of the 1.5 million in the UK) they were kept busy with the ritual cleansing of the dead before burial. 'The dead body can feel, so it must be handled reverently - washed twice with fragrant soap and water, once with special clean water and then rubbed with pure essence of perfume, without alcohol. Prayers are said while the body is prepared in the Mosque with the mourners, and finally at the graveside. Women have 22 yards of wrapping cloth and men 15 yards, and are, if possible, buried in private graves, specially fashioned so that the body can sit up when the two angels come for it'. With burial grounds at Tottenham, Watford, Ealing, Brookwood and Wandsworth, there were high travelling costs, but most mourners now went in their own cars. She did not mind being called 'funeral director' but claimed that they did not make a lot of money from it because 'the central reward is the praise of Allah, and because Muslims should give 2.5 per cent of their savings to the poor, we are not rich'. The working office was dirty and disordered, the Mosque entrance unpretentious and not very clean, and their behaviour was unconcerned and haphazard. The office was small, little more than a wooden shack attached to the Mosque, with the robed figure of her husband, the Superintendent, passing to and fro mostly in silence but occasionally offering information to correct the others. From the general conversation I gather that the family lived well, but not pretentiously, and lacked none of the contemporary aids to comfortable living. The overall impression, gathered through direct and indirect evidence, was of a small, but profitable family business in which funeral work was the central focus of attention. The 'office' resembled a small car-hire firm with garage and office combined, constantly involved in the practicalities of commercial existence. In this case, religion dominated the definition of the situation, but business strategems manifestly influenced their daily activity. Telephone bookings were made to despatch bodies; money was counted; timetables arranged. The authority of the husband gave them religious status, whilst their pivotal position in the funeral ritual gave them commercial respectability and a business monopoly. Their body-workers were not available to me, and religious proprieties prevented me from observing
them at work. The fact that they relied on the munificence of Allah for final reward did not prevent them from seeking a more immediate reward from earthly clients, even though they presented themselves as indifferent to material rewards. The experience gained in the wholesale food trade enabled them to run a business that dealt with a different form of merchandise, but which required similar control over packaging, storing, loading and transporting.

SOLE TRADER - THE CRAFTSMAN'S BUSINESS STYLE (R97)

Possibly the most complete advocate of the sole-trader funeral director was the very gentle man who spoke to me in a small Cheshire village (R97). His polite and slightly deferential attitude reflected his assessment of our respective social statuses. I had come to him through his local vicar; I was 'doing research' and was questioning him almost 'on behalf of' all his clients. Therefore I was 'respectable' and deserved his full consideration. In a small house he recounted his occupational life in great detail and anecdotal style. The picture he presented is of complete absorption in his work and total integration into the village life. His business orientation produced a career in which self-esteem was gained from client approval.

He followed his father's sympathetic and caring model and took over his joinery, building and funeral firm when he died five years ago, doing fewer than one funeral a week. His eldest brother's wife 'deprived' him of £14,000 but he has enough income to survive, even though frequently he has to wait for payment. 'I couldn't afford to pay a staff - in the end it would have to go on the funeral bill wouldn't it?'. The public don't understand the work and the tension and everything that a funeral director has to do. There's far more to it than putting people in boxes, but some are in it just to make a pile - for the big firms its just a job. Its different in the country - thousands know me - we're a country community where a funeral director can become a friend. Everyone in the village knows me and many people still have the body back home. They look good when I've finished. 'How beautiful you've laid him our, Mr. L.' I don't do TP unless asked for but when I close
the coffin I put two air fresheners in it - there's no smells in church after I've finished, Mr. Smale!

Pride in his work coloured everything he recounted and he identified completely with the service he provided. 'You hear of cowboys who overcharge anybody, but when I send an account I'm happy about it. I've never slipped up once, nothing has ever gone wrong, because I've gone into it properly. I always have elm or oak coffins, except chipboard for cremation. I don't like putting a body in the ground where I feel a chipboard coffin will ease out and blow with the damp. I couldn't get to sleep if I did that. When I present my bill with a solid oak coffin - it will last 50-60 years in a dry graveyard - I feel I've done my duty and everyone's happy. Locally there are some very wet graveyards. I use a collapsible wheeled bier, four men to wheel but six men to lower into the grave - it goes down lovely!'

He feels strongly that etiquette should be observed at all times and that it is the small director who provides it most regularly. 'I've been brought up since a little boy seeing my father make the coffins - never let me help him 'til I was 17 and then he wouldn't let me remove a lady - I never removed a lady 'til I was married (...) a man was alright. (Is your tape going alright?) Mr. Smale, for all the hundreds of funerals I've done, I've not slipped up once. I'm there, with the family right behind me, not rushed. Most people know what we do, but one bad newspaper story can ruin a man's life. I'm going up and up each year, so I'm pleasing people aren't I?' He knows who to trust and who to suspect. 'I often have to wait five months for solicitors to pay - humble cottagers will pay on the spot, but solicitors - rogues! - they sit on the money!' His self-assessment as an integral part of his rural community, accepted as an honest provider of a necessary service was supported by informants in the village.

Not once did he use the term 'professional', nor refer to it as a 'business'. For him it was a trade and a service which gave him a treasured self-esteem. The degree of commitment he exhibited is that claimed by official NAFD spokesmen for the occupation as a whole. It
would appear that it exists in specific locations only, where the funeral director is firmly rooted in the village community. This is the 'ideal' personification of caring client service, but, as in most other idealised constructs, notable by its rarity.

Increasing geographic mobility and the consequent change in the composition of village populations; the introduction of mass-production techniques for coffins; and the concentration of resources at a few strategically sited centres have put the sole-trader under increasing pressure to withdraw from funeral provision. Even though funeral firms carrying out fewer than five funerals each week made up about 80% of all funeral firms in 1980, they only provided about one third of all funerals produced each year. The sole-trader, epitomised by this respondent, will find it increasingly difficult to survive the predatory advance of the town-based family firm, seeking to develop a chain of offices serviced from one or more centrally located depots. The survivors are likely to be craftsmen who are well known in villages that are too small or too awkwardly located for town firms to pursue. This respondent is seen to be illustrative of such a tradesman and one who is committed to 'honourable' business practice.

Before leaving this sample of proprietors and managers who reflect the major influences in the occupation, it is worth a second look at those who stand at the opposite pole to this respondent in terms of size and influence. The Co-operatives because of their ubiquitous presence and large share of the market for funerals influence the entire occupation. They are viewed by the private companies with a mixture of criticism, hostility, apprehension and jealousy. The evidence gained from a wide variety of sources in the funeral occupation does not support the more extreme, ignorant and partisan criticisms. It does indicate that the business orientation so noticeable in the various Co-operative Societies may be the biggest single cause of the gradual disappearance of the many small private firms which have relied too heavily on a personal commitment to 'professionalism'. Furthermore, the market for funerals would appear to support a chain of local offices managed by 'directors' but serviced from central depots controlled by administrators, rather
than a proliferation of small, autonomous units competing among themselves in fluctuating 'manors'. If the proprietors who say that most clients wish for a basic, simple, common style of funeral are right, then it can be provided more cheaply by big companies than by small private businesses.

The loss of the sole-trader, especially when he is a craftsman involved in the materials he works as much as in the purpose to which they are to be put, must be regretted. As this respondent showed the qualities of different woods, their grain, weight, water resistance and characteristic look are known to craftsmen and the link between the living trees, artisans, the bereaved, the dead and their burial, is a sensitive one that is lost when mass-production techniques come to dominate death. This respondent knew the distinctive properties of the wood he moulded; in total contrast the Co-operative worker only saw 'chipboard' for most of his occupational life and the natural wood coffins rested, for the most part unwanted, in the warehouse.

FUNERALS AS BIG BUSINESS - THE CO-OPS 23% (R30, 29, 28)

It is widely accepted that between them the various 'Co-ops' provide almost a quarter of the 650,000 funerals that take place each year and of those, roughly 17,500 are carried out in Greater London. Whatever the London-based 'Co-ops' do will obviously have an influence throughout the country and their 'closed-shop' agreement with the Unions greatly affects the pay and conditions of operatives throughout the occupation.

The (...) Society, (10,500) was dominant (...) of the Thames but, as explained in Chapter Three, it was taken over by the Co-operative Wholesale Society in November 1982. (...) of the Thames it is the (...) Society which dominates (7,000) although in the suburbs, as on the South Coast, the (...) has spread its net to swallow the smaller Co-ops. Both these London Societies are distinctly different from all other funeral businesses - partly because they are so consistently denigrated by directors in the private sector, but also because their retail businesses are operated on a formal, hierarchical ladder of command, up
which all employees can, theoretically move. Respondents from all levels provided information about the Co-operative system and their own part in it. Each of three General Managers (R30, 29, 28) told me that they had moved up through the various grades during more than 40 years working for the Co-op. They each claimed that this gave a stability and continuity to their funeral service which was missing from their competitors. In the private businesses, they argued, there were many 'square pegs in round holes', since children followed father without real choice. This has been widely confirmed in the evidence given to me by many such people and noted in this work. Nevertheless, once incorporated into the business, many of these reluctant entrants felt compelled to do well and to fulfil their parents' hopes. In contrast, the Co-ops encouraged late starters to prosper in their employ; bus and lorry drivers, ex-servicemen, prison officers, policemen and security guards all were to be found and a wider range of previous occupations was represented in the Co-ops than in the private firms.

The central claim made by all three respondents was for 'business reliability', achieved by a competent, centralised organisational efficiency which was generally lacking among their competitors. 'There is no criticism which is not based essentially on resources', claimed one respondent (R28). 'Most people don't want to know us before a death - nor after the funeral's over. They come for efficient service and get it because we organise all funerals from a central depot. The branch managerss give the personal involvement that the clients require, and the organisation backs him up. The private trade criticises us frequently, but basically it's because they can't match our service, not because we mass-produce funerals. We don't. There is also a different age structure apparent in the Co-ops, since there are usually a larger number of younger men, with drivers of 18 years of age and conductors of 21 years, than to be found in the private sector. 'Even though most clients may be Co-op members or sympathisers and predominantly come from the working-class, the funeral section of Co-ops has been, for years, one of the most profitable sectors of the Co-operative Movement. There's no chance of us getting into some towns, suburbs or districts due to our working-class image, and the name puts many people off. Also
the working-class are very conservative and stick to known funeral directors, so 'X' is bomb-proof, even though his customers will come to us for tombstones.' ('X' is the family proprietor (R79) whose South London 'manor' ensured his continued success).

The Co-operative General Managers were far more willing to talk about their procedures that most funeral directors in the private sector, but were as jealous of their reputation as those to be found anywhere in the occupation. They also regarded Press reporting as flippant or hostile, possibly because funerals are somehow seen to be inappropriate for profit making. Furthermore, they were prepared to acknowledge that State control of funerals, or municipalisation, would reduce the costs so long as bureaucratic centralism did not replace local offices. Such a possibility was considered heresy by the vast majority of private funeral directors since it would destroy the need for a competitive service which nurtured their profitability.

The Co-ops also seek to buy suitable family businesses and to retain the original name, in the manner widespread throughout the private trade.

They claimed to provide funerals for most sections of the community except Jews, who usually seek Jewish directors, and they regard gypsies as having the closest resemblance to Victorian style working-class funerals: 'masses of flowers, hosts of mourners, dozens of cars, yet smoking and unconcerned at the funeral. Flowers tortured into many shapes - horses, traps, dogs, caps, hats, houses and names; singing 'Amazing Grace' and not know the words of the hymns and prayers they had chosen; some smoking in the church if not stopped and other sitting outside in their cars'.

They think of funerals as a watershed - a different life needs a ceremony - even if you hate someone you still lose something. 'Funeral directors lead because people expect to be told what to do. There's conformity to fashion on the part of the funeral director who leads the client, but the director in turn conforms to the needs of the Crematorium' (R28). They felt that people did not openly acknowledge
death, therefore their job was to provide an efficient service without getting involved with the client's personal life - exactly opposite to the many small-business directors who wished to feel wanted by their clients. (R97).

Therefore, these three senior representatives of Co-operative funerals felt their work to be part of the total Co-operative Movement, but specially distinct within it. They expressed pride in the service they offered and, whilst recognising their social class location, rebutted the criticisms made by their competitors in the private sector (but not made by their most effective challenger, the large public company examined previously (R104).

The Co-operatives trading efficiency had declined during the years 1972-76 but their net profit percentage margin was still 17.9% in 1976 compared to that of public companies, in the same year, of 14.3%. Also, unlike most funeral firms, Co-operative Societies receive refunds of VAT that is incurred in relation to their funeral business, increasing net margins by about one percentage point. (Only about half the public companies had refunds of VAT). It is difficult to compare private companies and their profit margins with either Co-operatives or public companies because it is open to the proprietor to decide how much he will leave in the business as 'profit' and how much he will take as 'remuneration', and practice varies greatly from one firm to another. Nevertheless, large or small, private companies improved their profit margins; the large from 20.7% to 25.1%; the small from 18.0% to 24.6% all over four years, 1972-76. (Figures are taken from the 1977 Price Commission Report which comments that all businesses conducting over 1,000 funerals per year, show what by any standard must be regarded as a generous level of profit).

The Co-operatives vary, one from another, in the quality of their funeral provision. This is usually due to the manner in which branch managers operate the premises under their control but this fact is frequently overlooked by their critics. If there is such a thing as a small-business mentality, it may be observed in the manner that
successful and profitable private firms castigate and denigrate their Co-operatives.

The foregoing accounts have revealed the personal belief, motives and attitudes of directors. They indicate the wide range of work-orientation, career prospect, and market position available to them. The self-placement and occupational role developed by the sole trader, the family director, the Co-operative Manager and the public company director can be compared from these accounts. From the sole-trader craftsman whose total role-repertoire is known to all his potential customers, to the owner of a large family business whose family name is the only local knowledge available to customers, extends a common thread of business practicality. The most interesting aspect of their presentation is the degree to which 'professionalism' is used by them as a resource, to be drawn on as a 'justification'.

These accounts show the diversity behind the public conformity, and the motivation which commits people to a work-role that most in the population shun. These are the spokesmen, the leaders, the creators of the occupation; we have yet to hear from those who do the 'dirty' work, who are infrequently seen; whose tasks are rarely considered; and who are relatively powerless. It is in their hands, however, that the dead are relocated, and it is on their conscientious involvement that the profitable businesses depend. What they do and how they regard themselves is the content of the next section.

THE RESPONDENTS' ACCOUNT PART (B) THE WORKERS
A CONSENSUALIST MAJORITY

Publicly and formally it is the proprietor and his occupational association which claim the right to define what funeral work really is. The manual workers ('the Operatives' or 'the men'), have only a limited opportunity to modify or to challenge the public image created by their employers, and in practice they rarely seek to do so. Nevertheless, they are responsible for the great bulk of body-handling tasks and it is
on them that the main burden of the funeral presentation rests. The mass-media brings them to public view when a work-to-rule or strike is presented as irresponsible worker behaviour, or when owner-employee conflict is emphasised, but these are rare occasions. As already noted the Trade Union (once NUFSO, now amalgamated into the larger FTAF), has a membership of about 3,000 in a total work-force in the occupation of approximately 14,000. It's greatest strength is in the Co-operative Societies which are all 'closed-shop'; fully unionised through all grades from unskilled to managerial positions. The workers' activities are mostly hidden from public view, and, whilst the proprietor assures his clients of technical skill and reverent treatment of the body, it is the workers who actually translate theory into practice. Many workers share their employers' definition of the situation and have been involved in demonstrating their loyalty to him for many years, there is, therefore, little possibility of discord. Nevertheless, there is a considerable range of opinion among those workers who are sceptical of the proprietors' public stance and who have decidedly critical opinions about the quality of the work they provide. Even workers who support proprietors invariably invest the funeral work with more prosaic, irreverent and humorous interpretations than is common among their 'guv'ners'. They have the potential to reveal 'truths', to undermine superficial assumptions and to ridicule pomposity. Even though many of them do not choose to be critical of their employers, it is in their undercover world that counter-realities may be observed.

Many respondents expressed suspicion or distrust of their fellow workers in general and even the few who spoke in favour of municipalisation in principle, argue against it in practice, because 'workers would abuse their power, as British Leyland workers do' (R110). Even a 'protectionist' Trade Union member of many years experience, who as a Branch Secretary was next in line for a senior union position, echoed many other workers when he said that the 1977 strike had been morally wrong, and that a work-to-rule would have been correct procedure for 'their sort of work'. He felt that the public face of the entire occupation had been damaged by action which harmed clients, even though the cause was just. 'Workers should fight for better conditions but the
needs of the mourners must come first' (R110). He argued that (...) 'it's necessary to limit the excessive profits made by directors who don't give clients value for money. My boss saves money by not renewing uniforms as promised, providing no TP or refrigeration unless specially asked for (...) there's no hot water in the body-room and the body fluids get carried through the staff rest room to the lavatory (...) the viewing rooms are poor, there's no real competition and Branch Managers can get 2.5% commission on each burial or cremation and 5% on monumental mason work and (...) 100% profit on tombstone lettering'. This was not the limit of his criticism since he claimed that clients were charged for 3 days use of the Chapel of Rest even though most of them only had use of it for the day of viewing only; plastic flowers were regularly substituted for live ones and six bodies were sometimes picked up at one time from hospital mortuaries, yet each client was individually charged for the service. Coffins are cheap to produce, perhaps £15 each, but are charged at well over £100 (directors claim that the coffin price covers overheads such as fuel, power, vehicle servicing, depreciation, accessories, etc., and that the three-day charge for viewing room is to cover the costs involved when clients change their mind and want to use it after initially refusing the opportunity).

Nevertheless, in spite of these criticisms and of his long Trade Union experience, he not only opposed the introduction of municipalisation because it would give 'poor customer service', but he supported what he referred to as 'controlled private enterprise'. This meant that the worst excesses of the private businesses could be eradicated. It would appear that he sought pragmatic resolution of imperfections rather than ideological transformation, yet all the bad practices he detailed happened regularly within the unseen work regions so closely controlled by private owners. How the proprietors definitions of 'fair service' were to be changed, or externally monitored he did not explain.

A relevant insight on workers' attitudes was manifest during the 1982 London Branch meeting of FTAT in which pay claims and working conditions were discussed by Branch Representatives. One member claimed that one of the largest funeral directing firms in London 'reckoned to make £400
per year for every person working for them' and therefore a pay rise was justified as well as necessary. 'I'm in it for the money', he said, 'we should not accept owners' discretion because they use it unfairly. We need a rise in basic pay – we're just seen as glorified dustmen at the moment'. During the ensuing argument the Branch Secretary, a Union official for many years, said: 'how do we know what profits are made? Now I'm not a governor's man but (...)' and then gave reasons for not pressing for increased pay, including: '(...) but managers have to do a lot of work in their free time and they will always promote people who the employers think deserve it'. It should be noted that this Secretary was also a Branch Manager of a 'respectable' (his own term), Central London firm and was one of the very few Licentiate members of the NAFD (i.e. a non-owner who had passed the NAFD Diploma). He represented himself to me, in three long interviews as a 'moderate', a strong Unionist who had the best interests of 'the business' (i.e. the occupation) at heart (R20). He ran his branch office virtually single handed, premises which were unusually austere, formal and comfortless. The walls carried pictures of deceased proprietors, Victorian funerals and testaments of Certification. It would not seem unjustified to regard him as a man of twin-loyalties; one to Trade Union activism, the second to those who provided work opportunity that is, proprietors. Both proprietors and workers, he claimed shared common goals. He was unusual in that he had been a Christian Missionary in India for many years and supported an enlightened colonialism. Leadership, he seemed to imply, carried with it responsibilities as well as rights and good owners bore that in mind when setting the boundaries for 'suitable' performance and attitude. Workers, it followed, had duties to serve the higher cause whilst having the right to be treated with appropriate respect. He represented an instrumental, utilitarian approach to Trade Union activities, which many other workers supported. The ideal of 'public service', presented by the proprietors, has been widely accepted by workers, who thereby critically weaken their own bargaining position. Most workers have either been in funeral work for many years, or have moved from driving, caretaking, portering, security, police, armed forces or similar semi-skilled work, thereby working in an organisational setting which encouraged rule-keeping. For example, one
knowledgeable operative in a South-Coast resort had left school at 14 years old, entered the Army, left to become a school caretaker and had now been a chauffeur-bearer for 14 years, leaving for a time due to travel difficulties, but returning again. His wife's father was a Manager in a Co-operative who drifted into funeral work after leaving the Army and working as a hospital porter. His son also works with him in a Co-operative firm. When he started his wages were so low that he only survived by overtime pay. He doesn't seek to gain the Diploma and thence possible promotion, but does conduct occasional funerals. He is a Shop Steward but not militant in activity; he 'seeks a fair wage for a job which provides security and a few perks' (R72). This attitude is common and accounts for the lack of Union involvement throughout the occupation. There is widespread evidence from respondents to support the view that workers who survived the first few weeks as funeral workers tended to stay for many years, frequently in one firm. Most workers in that situation, whether Trade Unionists or not, tended to want better work conditions, to regard directors as comfortably off and to prefer private ownership to municipalisation. 'Gripes' and dissatisfaction were explained as reactions to a particular director's shortcomings and not regarded as a consequence of market conditions. Most Trade Unionists appeared 'consensualist' in attitude, only supporting Union activity when manifestly necessary.

A further case of identification with the supposed values of the firm was presented by a worker who had more responsibility in a Co-operative firm that most of his peers (R14). Aged 56, he had been 21 years in the funeral business, following work in a furniture removal firm after his release from the Army. He had moved through various jobs, such as driving a hearse and eight years ago moved into the office. He is now a Grade 'A' Operative working as 'Office Manager', (a post which does not officially exist), and is paid extra to do it. Above him is an Assistant Manager and Branch Manager, and his responsibility is to arrange and administrate all funerals, but not to conduct them. Every fourth week he is 'on call' for 24 hours when he may be required to drive, put headstones up or do whatever else needs his attention. He was the Shop Steward until six years ago when: '(...) I decided that
others should have a go, but no one else does it. I'm 'ex officio' but members still come to me with problems. Most workers see the Union as a necessary evil, but when the chips are down they see that its not so evil. We've never had any problems here to warrant a Trade Union really. The Union has improved the pay and working conditions for all workers, but our relationship between staff and management has been extremely good. Even though its a small Union, we achieved a lot by patient talking with the LAFD (The London Association of Funeral Directors), with whom the London Branch of FTAT negotiate) and with CFSMA' (The Co-operative Funeral Service Managers' Association, which is regarded as the Managers' Union within the Co-operative Movement). He is strongly opposed to municipalisation believing that if Local Government took responsibility for funeral service it would not operate a 24 hour service, nor, in his view would it give the careful service provided by the private trade - 'a body without a heart, concerned with profit and loss and facts and figures'. All workers, he believed, shared his view!

There is no way in which the public can get a better picture of funeral work, he claimed, because the television image is a travesty of the truth. 'There's no possibility of presenting our image well, because people do not want to know - if we try to ram it down their throats it would backfire on us. We, here, are professional and social workers but some Directors are more business oriented'. He did not continue to work for a Diploma, 'I have experience - don't need the Diploma. The younger people need it because they lack experience'.

Gradually, however, he spoke in more detail about the practicalities of the work and revealed a less complimentary aspect of the daily work. His branch made a charge for using a 'Chapel of Rest' even if the bereaved did not use it to view a body. This was justified, he claimed, because the charge helped to cover other costs such a refrigeration and also many clients did end up by using the facility even though they had said they did not intend to do so.
There was also a consecrated Chapel on the premises, now a coffin storage room and from its untidy appearance obviously unused for a considerable time, yet he asked me to believe that storage was merely temporary and that the room was regularly available for clients private use. He claimed that it was no use breaking down costs into separate items because clients don't understand! All bodies were refrigerated and only temporarily preserved if specifically asked but '(...) we don't refuse them permission to view if they haven't been preserved', seemingly totally ignorant of the legal rights of the bereaved, or perhaps more relevantly, choosing to emphasise the firm's responsibility for deciding what was 'appropriate' for each body. He considered that they were better than all their competitors and criticised small businesses who employ part-time workers who don't have the bearing for the job. 'We choose carefully because you can't learn to live with this work - you either can stick it or not. Our staff are satisfied - there's no them or us. We treat our clients well, they can stay as long as they wish in the Chapels of Rest, but most stay about ten minutes'.

From my direct observation, however, the so-called 'Chapels of Rest' were small, dingy, poorly lit, sparsely furnished rooms, holding two trestles, a coffin and a single chair. Roman Catholic mourners had the benefit of two large candles and a crucifix. There was, manifestly, no attempt to provide comfort for eye or body and no effort had been made to encourage more than a temporary stay.

This particular respondent closely involved with his branch office work-role illustrates the manner in which consensualists support and confirm the attitudes expressed by their employers, even when physical evidence refutes their justifications. The evidence available in this Co-operative office demonstrates vividly the reluctance, widespread throughout the occupation, to face bereavement in the funeral home. Attitude and manipulation of space exert an unmistakable pressure to mourn unobtrusively and privately. (This may be the origin of the pressure to silent and hidden grief that Aries and Gorer claim is widespread). The funeral home is provided for clients to view the directors handiwork; the domestic home is more appropriate for grieving or for 'waking'.

343
This respondent indicates that a managerial role may further strengthen a 'consensualist' attitude, since to be a 'responsible' member of the firm may not be compatible with acting as a Trade Union official. His career may be advanced by identifying with the necessities of the work, rather than with the needs of the employees.

Not all workers who seek personal advantage see the need to adopt the values, attitudes or performances presented by their employers. Relatively few in number, some workers present a more independent orientation, even though they are more likely to support their own particular employer rather than identify themselves with collectively-orientated Trade Unionism. These are the 'pragmatists' - seeking personal satisfaction through practical application of a work-role.

THE PRAGMATISTS

The utilitarian or instrumental approach to work exists among workers but relatively few maintain it in the face of indirect pressure to support the 'firm'. This approach was in evidence among eight Operatives employed by the (...) Co-op, talking informally in their cramped rest room during a dinner break over tea and cards: 'It's a good number - funerals themselves are boring, repetitive and monotonous, but there's no supervision, there's variety and freedom. The bearer's best off, no worries, no driving, no car-cleaning, no responsibility for expensive cars. BUT there's no place to hide'. (R55). This relative absence of easing situations was mentioned by many informants, because in the body or coffin shop they are constantly visible and once in the public view 'skiving' is limited due to their open visibility.

'It's just a job (...) like a bus service transporting bodies around (...) but there's a dirty end to the work (...) picking up nasty bodies in all sorts of conditions (...) also we're understaffed, but that suits them and us, they don't have so many salaries to pay and we get more overtime' (R108). One reason why many workers prefer the Co-op to private owners is that there is more work security and more possibility
of overtime, to match against the slightly higher basic rates of pay offered by private employers (which is paid to ensure easy call on their workers for stand-by duties at night or weekend).

'Most of us don't see it as a career - you can join at any age even retirement age. I cam from being a bus-driver because a friend said it was a good skive and no travel time involved - its easy work, but less pay than before' (R57).

'I've been on post, papers, railway and shops (...) came through a friend who gave me the details (...) I live locally so I don't have any travel time and its a good number' (R58).

They were fully aware of the 'fiddles' their bosses used to make profits. They said that owners could make £90 (1980) profit on each funeral and to prove it actually priced the separate items, such as petrol, coffin, wages, repairs etc., and added 25% as overheads 'just to be fair'. They made a good case, since they had precise knowledge of the actual prices paid and charged by the directors, something totally unavailable to outsiders. The fact that good profits are made has been substantiated by the Price Commission working on the basis of figures provided by the directors themselves. Common sense would suggest that such figures would err on the side of conservativism, since they were provided by the directors themselves.

Subtle aspects of trading emerged in their conversation; for example that Co-operative vehicles on loan to private firms had their identifying name plates removed to avoid 'lowering the tone' and that even in strongly working-class areas, such as Bermondsey, South London, the Co-op could not get a foothold when a local Catholic population resolutely clung to a Catholic director, such as (R59) detailed above.

Many workers are elderly and have been in the occupation for many years. They are knowledgeable about the business, efficient through long practice and earthy in the comments and are either tolerant or supportive of their bosses: '(...)governors are the most important
'Funeral directors look after you, but undertakers are just like us' (R74). 'In small firms you get good relationships - secure job - free uniform - and it's useful. I left once but came back (..) we don't need a Union' (R52). Even the young found the working life suitable: 'I'm nineteen, had no job after leaving school (..) it's a respectful job (..) but I don't tell strangers what I do'. It was not uncommon to meet men with long employment with the same firm. For example (R74) has been 44 years with his North London firm and his father had been 47 years with the same firm. In the same business, a second worker had been there 19 years, having left Ireland, where his mother and grandfather '(...) conducted wakes for three to four days at a time. They are now only overnight, or one day (..) what are they for? (..) why, time to dig the grave, to praise the dead, to have a booze-up the dead would have enjoyed. That's where ghost-stories come from (..) and many jokes'. A third worker had been employed there for 29 years. It is not surprising, therefore, that in these long-standing, non-unionised, family firms, a strongly bonded corporate feeling dominates the work situation and the work is frequently defined as a joint enterprise between worker and owner, even though the self-seeking aspirations of both sides are seen as 'legitimate'.

Many workers who voiced the opinion that directors were in it for the money did not regard that as in any way reprehensible. They expected the proprietors to share their own view that one worked for personal profit. The concept of service to others gave a justification for doing this work rather than any other, and the individual characteristics of each director set the tone of the working environment. 'Our directors are all wealthy (..) got big cars, stables, private nurses, big houses etc.,' said another worker, yet he staunchly defended them by claiming that 'they give good value for money (..) better than most competitors and its private enterprise that get it done' (R60). Good profits ensured reliable wages and plenty of overtime.

Criticism of employers, therefore, was part of the game, a regular ingredient in a worker's perception of his work situation in which the
was employed to carry out instructions in a team situation. The performance required leaders and led; an end product with which workers identified; and most vital of all, a bunch of mates with whom they felt at ease.

The nature of their daily work gave them a measure of control over time, effort, location and status, in addition to providing a work region where they could relax, joke, grumble and feel at ease. These are powerful considerations in the choice of job, and if their work is compared with their several previous occupations (such as bus, coach and van drivers, dock police and security guards, the Armed Services, warehousemen, dustmen, and school caretakers) it has many obvious advantages. They enjoy the white-collar status which the work provides, and which has not had to be obtained through an educational competition. The work is generally neither hard nor persistently dirty. It provides a service to the community at large, yet is tangibly linked to specific individuals who are generally appreciative. They form a unique group - no one else does the same work. Essentially it is clean manual semi-skilled work which provides opportunity for promotion, overtime, and the opportunity for having a laugh with mates. (For the importance of fun in work see Willis 1977). As part of a collaborative team the routine of daily tasks can be made enjoyable by the exploitation of 'easing situations', therefore it comes to be regarded as a 'cushy number'.

TEAM 'EASING' SITUATIONS

As with all team performances, humour provides the universal easing situation, but in this case it could be only rarely expressed in public. Privately workers could express the sense of the absurd which is always available to be exploited in public spectacles and sombre occasions. Here they could explode with anger or collapse with enjoyment over the misfortunes, contrived or accidental, that befell one or another. As a funeral worker of eight years experience put it: 'most directors don't know the reality of the job done by the workers (...) all of us have learned what to do by experience, and its friendship that keeps us sane.
Everyone who does this job is slightly odd (...) its the jokes that release the tension'.

As expected, much humour comes from normally uneventful experiences viewed from an unusual perspective, as for example at a black man's funeral one worker whispered to another: 'whatever you do, don't ask for a spade to fill in the grave'. Carrying the coffin is difficult for the uninitiated and requires close co-operation between the four bearers, especially if the body is heavy or the coffin is weighty oak or elm. One bearer can therefore disrupt the symmetry of the carry and sometimes will do so deliberately to put pressure on his mates. By walking out of step he will cause the rhythm of the walk to be disturbed and the other bearers will find it difficult to maintain poise whilst trying not to alert the audience to anything unusual. Another solo 'ploy' is initiated when the coffin is to be removed from the hearse. Since the level of the coffin is slightly below shoulder level (when standing) one bearer bends his knees to get his shoulder under the coffin as it slides out of the hearse rack. As he does so, the accompanying bearer presses down unobtrusively on the coffin top making it virtually impossible for the first man to stand up. Caught bending there is little he can do without creating visible discord and has to curse inwardly until the pressure is lifted.

Variations of such simple, but effective 'stopers' involve two bearers, when for example, the rear two press steadily ahead when the first two need to slow down. They strive to keep balance without appearing to do so, yet have to hold up a weighty coffin and prevent themselves from dropping it whilst being constantly pushed onward by the two rear bearers. Since coffins are usually supported on wooden trestles during the church service, bearers 3 and 4 have to move round them to get the foot of the coffin firmly set on them. Bearers 1 and 2 at the head keep gently moving, creating problems of overshoot, dislodging the trestles or continuing to go round in a circle. The appearance of the carry is essential to the formality of the ceremony, therefore the consequences of these carrying ploys must be concealed from the audience at all costs. To the uninitiated this may not contain humour, merely

348
provocation or irreverence. It is precisely here that humour can be generated, since it is in the juxtaposition of public decorum and concealed deviance that incongruity can reside. It is one method of challenging the serious unhappiness that pervades their regular public duties.

The humour is more direct and earthy when they are in the body-preparation rooms where the opinions on 'how well hung' the man is, or 'how big are the boobs' of the woman, merely reflect the sexual comments that regularly pass as humour in similar work situations. Funeral directors tend to be furious when they hear such comments and embalmers are moved to anger when 'their' bodies are treated as casual sexual objects. Also 'touch this one up Bill, to see if she's still alive', is but a variation on a common sexual theme.

Raw terms for bodies are not funny, merely caustically accurate when they refer to drowned bodies as 'bloaters', a burned body as 'a burner' and a long decayed body as 'a stinker'. Play on the word 'dead' is too obvious for many workers but is frequently used by them when one of their mates fails to get his round of drinks - 'this ones dead, its had its hand in its pocket so long'.

Wherever possible workers seek to supplement their wages, often through 'box money', that is, tips from clients for carrying the coffin. It is usually given to the directors who then puts it into a joint savings to be shared out equally later. Some workers average about £15 per month in this way (1982), but there is cause for concern when 'we all know full well he's coppered, but he says he hasn't' or 'he says he copped one or a deuce, when we know full well on a job like this he'd have got a tenner'. This even led one bearer to say that he wouldn't want to be a director 'because there's too many temptations to fiddle'. (One simple way of upsetting the public dignity of the director is to catch him in front of the hearse, leaning backward to rest against the bonnet. The driver gently eases the car back about a foot so that he has a horrible moment of falling backward and clutches at air, as surreptiously as possible.) 'The biggest tips come from the working-class and even
though 'we don't expect tips if they have the money, clients should be prepared to tip for the hard and dirty work we do' (R61).

Part of the hard and dirty work he referred to takes place at the graveside, when the coffin has to be lowered, often in wet, muddy conditions. To ease the coffin downward, webbing straps are laid across the grave, beneath the coffin. A further touch of sardonic humour is produced when bearers on one side ensure that they have excessive lengths of strap, thereby causing the other bearers to fumble with the short ends, trying to prevent the coffin from making too sudden a descent. If such stratagems were constantly employed, funerals would tend to become a battleground of wits, until the ceremony collapsed in disarray. These are the occasional excesses, commonly known about but infrequently utilised. When next observing a coffin carried shoulder high it might be worth observing carefully the interlocked arms of the bearers on opposite sides of the coffin, since by pressing down rather than bearing up, either side can make the weight almost unbearable for the opposite pair. The spontaneous accidents are sometimes incredible to behold without dissolving into tears of laughter, as, for example when a clergyman, for reasons never discovered, walked backwards into the open grave and abruptly, but silently, disappeared from view. His muffled cries for help led to assistance, and resulted in the scrambled reappearance of the muddy man of the cloth, who then attempted to resume the service as if nothing unusual had happened. To recount the story gave the teller renewed pleasure.

Most workers acknowledge that they have a 'safe' job, that is, one for which there is a regular demand and from which they will not be sacked if they continue to 'keep their nose clean'. The 'perks' are few but appreciated. Driving a £20,000 limousine slowly past solicitous audiences and then taking it at ninety miles an hour along a motorway without police harassment is a pleasure to be savoured. It is possible that they can accept the occasional horrific sights and exposure to the sight and smell of dead bodies, if a routine world of commonplace activities regulates their daily work. Many have suggested to me that washing and servicing cars, shouldering coffins and 'dressing up'
reinforces a stable world of events to counter the distress of relatives and the need to handle dead bodies from mortuary to funeral home. Actually handling the dead bodies occupies a small fraction of their work time, but its impact is immense in certain situations. As funeral service workers they have to present a formal, dignified composure; as individual social beings they are as rude, dissembling, uncouth, disruptive or mischievous as any other group of workers may be. They and their directors are paid to act as caretakers of the dead, and in demeanour and presentation to act as paid mourners; 'passing' as a mourner may require 'distracting' behaviour, because too close an identification with death and tribulation would be unsupportable. The reality of being alive produces a reaction against terror and sombre rectitude and both are distanced by irreverent counter definitions. Their occupational task is to ensure that a public ceremony runs smoothly without incident - their personal goal is to ensure that their social identity survives the pressures associated with death. Most informants appeared to have solved their problems with skill and humour. As one informant explained, they are disregarded if they perform well, yet are called callous and indifferent if they surreptitiously smoke or lounge. During the 1939-45 War according to one respondent, (R60), soldiers were told to tell their Japanese captors that they were either dustmen or funeral workers - in either case the Japanese would cease interrogating them because, to the Japanese, no-one doing such lowly work could possibly be entrusted with anything of importance. 'Perks' therefore were hard to gain, but criticism and disdain were constant possibilities.

Among the work force, however, there were some who could not accept the 'laissez-faire' attitudes of the 'pragmatists' nor the willing co-operation with employers demonstrated by 'consensualists'. Whilst all workers enjoyed the easing situations some felt the weakness of the work force needed a more positive response than 'having a laugh to ease things along'.

351
Very few workers provided a clear analysis of their place in the funeral occupation - those that did so tended to be active Trade Unionists. A clear example was provided by a leading official in FTAT (R107). His assessment was outlined in Chapter Three but his further comments are relevant now, since so few workers attempted more than generalisations or specific case histories. For example, he claimed that the large public company in Southern England, (whose Accounting Director (R104) had been so forthright in his appraisal of funeral directors), is strongly hostile to Trade Union activities. Moreover, he claims it is affiliated to the 'Economic League', a semi-secret organisation with links to the Conservative Party. It supplies information to employers concerning workers who are considered to be 'militant', either politically or economically. Employers can ring a special code number to get a complete dossier on the man, in order to combat any activities he might attempt which they consider 'harmful'. 'The Guardian' newspaper, with permission from the TUC General Secretary, rang the Economic League, providing six actual names of workers, and received personal information on the men, some of it factually incorrect. Subsequently, the newspaper printed an article linking the public company with the Economic League (28.6.78). The Union Leader believes that the company seeks to exercise a controlling paternalism over their workers to prevent a unionised and organised work force developing.

Throughout the NAFD there has been a consistent rejection of national negotiation with the Union. The crucial negotiations take place in London between the LAFD and the London Trade Union representatives and the resulting agreements are then pivotal for all other regions in Britain. He argues that this method is deliberately chosen to avoid the NAFD having to 'recognise' the Union as a national negotiating body, with all the implications this would have to conditions of service, promotion, overtime rates and union representation in presently non-union firms. It would specifically influence the position of those Grade 'A' Operatives who were asked to be Managers, because they frequently work unsocial hours, their wives are often poorly paid
'secretaries' to their husbands and they have access to the 'secret' financial details of trading in their particular firm, which proprietors would not wish Trade Unionists to hear about.

Another contentious issue is the future development of funeral provision. The private trade in general, and the Co-operative Societies, do not wish to see municipal authorities take over funeral provision, or any part of it. This Union official suggests that the high cost of funerals is primarily accounted for by wages and limousines and that both aspects of trading could be reduced through municipalisation. By providing a Registrar's Office inside crematoria and cemeteries, a small staff could deal with legal documents and arrange body removals. Body treatment could be carried out at this same office, by workers employed by local authorities. In his view, the 'client relationship' claimed by directors as special to their endeavours, is a necessary fiction, to enable them to gain good economic returns on heavy capital outlay and ostentatious display. Many clients require efficiency and cheapness, he claims, and do not wish for a ceremony which is frequently ill-tuned to their particular needs. The trend towards simple ceremonies, with little ostentation and with most mourners travelling to and from the funeral in their own cars, is already well established. The exploitive element would disappear, in his view, once the profit-seeking private director was removed. He acknowledges that local authorities could deal as autocratically and insensitively with death-related problems as they have shown themselves capable in other areas of social need, but this is an argument for reform of municipal malfunctions, not of municipalisation itself. Competition between private firms has not led to reductions in prices charged to consumers, but it does prevent basic prices developing nationwide and prevents most people understanding what services can or should be expected, and what exactly is provided for the large amounts of money paid, especially for tombstones and engraving.

From his reading of the early Minutes of his Union's origin, he interprets them to show that '(...) the most powerful funeral families wanted a new Union to emerge. This would prevent the workers joining
the Transport and General Workers' Union which would be too large for them to influence. A new and weak Union, however, could be more easily manipulated and, at the same time, staff associations could be started to make sure that workers came to regard proprietors as caring employers. Furthermore the NAFD said that any workers who passed their Diploma could become a Licentiate Member of their Association, but must not be a member of a Trade Union. They had no voting rights in the NAFD and were, in reality, merely social members. In 1971, it was declared illegal to hold them to non-Trade Union membership. Since then Licentiate Membership has been removed from the NAFD'.

This respondent suggests that most workers find it difficult to survive the first month of funeral work but, '(...) once that period has been passed, the routine of the work encourages them to stay, frequently for a long time. Simultaneously, the nature of the work they perform ensures that the public know little of their actual working conditions, hours of work or rates of pay. This means that proprietors have greater opportunity to manipulate the working conditions without either public knowledge or concern, or spirited Trade Union intervention from outside the occupation. 'They maintain a nice, comfortable living, with comfortable profits, without too many organisations or Government Departments prying into them. Some of them think they've got some divine right to do the job, but that's not the way I see it (...) they tend to be in it because their families have got the business (...) I think that they're in a business and their claim to be professionals is merely window-dressing. My men admit that it's merely a job, but one that has some good working conditions. For the best part of the day these chaps just sit in luxury limousines, driving around in smart uniforms and many of them like that. In fact, we always say that our branch meetings are held in the hearse, you know, when they are going along the roads they can do all their Union talking. The bad public image that directors have got is largely their own fault - they have always fought shy of anything appearing in the Press or on Television'.

One method of relaxing from the underlying strains accompanying death work appears to be widespread. It is to become involved in the
entertainment world, according to this informant (R107). 'Actors part-time, you know, local repertory company (...) playing in a band (...) there's an awful lot of them doing it. Literally scores of them are members of the local dramatic society, or maybe a drummer, and one or two managers have actually got their own brass band. One used to be a drummer for Joe Loss (...) two of three have gone through 'Opportunity Knocks' (a television programme). I used to play in a band myself'.

Basically, therefore, he regards funeral work as a utilitarian service, with both employers and employed working for financial rewards and regular work. The funeral directors claim an unselfish motivation - a client oriented public service performed with proper adherence to traditional ceremony. Manual workers count the 'perks' of the job and make their free time provide a rewarding contrast.

'REAL' DEATH WORK - THE EMBALMERS PERSPECTIVE (R37)

Since neither employers nor employed are constantly handling dead bodies, it is only the embalmers who face the potential problems of coping with death on a daily basis. Respondents told me that they could only continue to handle the bodies if they depersonalised the dead. 'I can't risk feeling personal to the bodies (...) I give them respectful handling but they are just carcasses to me, that have to be treated' (R37). He worked for a firm of embalmers and was sent, either to service one particular firm for several consecutive days, or 'on the road' to service a number of separate firms. Starting as a coffin-maker he had been embalming for fourteen years and was now 34 years old. His brother was also an embalmer.

He does about 70-75 bodies each week for the Co-op (his regular client) and about 30-35 when on the road. 'Shifting X number of bodies' was the way he referred to his daily work load, but didn't like 'production' work, when many bodies had to be completed in a brief period of time. Each body should take about one and a half hours, but by increasing the pressure at which fluid enters the body, from 51bs per square inch to 351bs per square inch, he could get each done in twenty minutes. He
couldn't do a friend or a relative and had to force himself to do young children, otherwise he would not be able to continue. 'I finished up shaking when I did a two-month old child (...) some even have to give it up after those cases. I'm not religious, but I take a pride in doing good work. Bodies look different from each other, even when the same amount of fluid is used. There's plenty of 'cowboys' in the business, some of them throw bodies around like sacks of potatoes'.

As he worked, both male and female naked bodies were open to view by passing workers, but he became angry when some stopped to 'gawp' at a young woman on the table because they offended his definition of the scene. The atmosphere was casual, with people smoking, drinking coffee, ordering sandwiches, coming and going through unpulled curtains, washing dirty crockery and leaving the door to the street open to cool the room down. His belief that '(...) its a good job that the public can't see what's going on (...) they'd be horrified' was certainly justified when the post-mortem body he was restoring to some semblance of human characteristics, proved to be stuffed with newspapers and to possess two sternums - the post-mortem attendants mistakenly leaving another body without one. 'Easing situations' were possibly even more important for him than for the funeral workers, since he was actually handling dead bodies constantly. He had no opportunity to present himself to the public in a bearing or conducting role, no uniform or big car to parade in public and no alternative activity such as was regularly available to other workers. His comfort came from doing a good job; from being treated as a 'specialist' by the others, who merely brought bodies to him; and by exercising control over the embalming room, unimpressive though it may have been. Furthermore, he had the British Institute of Embalmers Diploma and was 'called in' to sanitise bodies that most people would wish to avoid. His 'specialist' role, in which a certain skill and application to a nasty job of work was clearly in evidence, provided a framework of support, an occupational reference mark, which could be used to regularise and sanction an otherwise 'disgusting' job.

As suggested earlier, once mastered, his work was routinely simple and required no advanced techniques or exceptional skills. It does, however, carry possibilities of exposure to disease such as septicaemia
from cuts, bronchitis from formalin gas, burning from bleach disinfectants and death from Hepatitis 'B'. Indirectly, these dangers may have strengthened the separateness of his work-role, and created the slightly higher status he is accorded by those who observe his handiwork. Furthermore, since he comes according to the demand for his services he does not appear to be assimilated fully into the daily work experience of the firm. Co-operation, rather than incorporation, is the accepted relationship between the funeral workers and the embalmer. Where the embalmer is a full-time employee of the firm, he tends to be included in the other daily routines connected with funeral preparation and thereby loses the valuable assets of independence and autonomy. He does, however, have the possibility of distancing himself from his stressful work-role by humorous asides, lewd observations and crude body-handling, and a few 'cowboys' may choose this style of adjustment.

This respondent 'ran' an informal embalming room but the casualness he permitted was to ease his working conditions and not allowed to be exploited by funeral workers in any way they chose. He regarded himself as a separate contributor to the total work operation and did not give himself fully to either worker or management orientation.

ATTENDANT ROLES

'Am an attendant lord, one that will do to swell a progress, start a scene or two, advise the prince; no doubt an easy tool, deferential, glad to be of use' (The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock - T.S. Eliot).

From workers' definitions of their work situation, reinforced by observation of their regular working procedures, they may be seen as supporting players in the drama they present. Acting as chorus, crowd, attendant or audience, plausibility and involvement were vital to 'authentic' staging. For an attendant to be without appropriate costume, to be lacking the necessary props or to be late on cue, is to court disaster for the entire scene. To show disattention or indifference can direct audience attention away from what has so far been regarded as the central focus of the action and toward what should
be accepted, by players and onlookers alike, as peripheral; marginal to
the accepted emotional content. In the back-stage preparations funeral
workers greatly influence the tone and progress of the task in hand;
they assemble, dress and fill the coffin, move the body, polish the car
or inscribe the name plate. But once the public activity begins, they
slip into supportive roles, contributing to the ritualised performance
by non-assertive reliability. Constant repetition brings casual ease to
each successive performance, but the measure of their success is to be
gauged by the extent to which they are overlooked. As recounted above,
their individual defining prowess is clearly demarcated among their
work-set, where surreptitious reworking of normal practices is always
possible. Such challenges to the formal gravity of the situation are
attended with serious consequences, hence their irregular use and
careful concealment. The director 'conducts' the performance,
manifestly distinct in position, demeanour and activity. The supporting
cast of workers may be inclined to subvert the manifest purpose of the
gathering, by investing it with irreverent humour, whilst ensuring that
they do no thereby provide an open and catastrophic re-definition of the
entire ceremony. They do not, however, seek to supplant their
'conductor' (who is sometimes not averse to overshadowing the chief
mourners), nor to create diversions or scenes of counter-interest. In
many funeral locations it is difficult for them to escape offstage, so
smoking and casual talk must be accomplished, as best it may, whilst
remaining open to be observed.

Cigarettes are concealed in cupped hands, smoke is allowed to dribble
out rather than to spread in revealing clouds, flasks may be discreetly
sipped under cover of a need to search within a limousine. Returning in
a coffinless hearse, creates a highly visual passenger role for the
bearers, one in which 'uncharacteristic' frivolity is again curbed. It
is also easy for workers to lose attentiveness and to feel marginal to
the key figures, when they spend much of the public time standing,
waiting, marking time and awaiting the cue of the director. Only when
actually bearing the coffin may they, briefly, become the centre of
attention. Not surprisingly, at that moment when their physical
comportment and facial control are the subject of audience attention,
provocation amongst themselves is both mischievously compelling and dangerously possible. Their adaptability and resourcefulness is indicated by the fact that such potentially 'open' actions usually pass unnoticed by the audiences through which they pass. Mourners 'complicity' extends to their corporate disattention to action which indicates that the conventional posture is being flouted. They tend to talk in hushed voices, gather in isolated groups, avoid bold eye contact with the silent bearers and wait patiently for their appropriate cue to be activated. Bearers, like waiters or servants at their appropriate stations, draw little attention to themselves unless they flout the conventions of place. At funerals, waiting mourners stand ready to be ushered into groups according to preference of kin or authority. They are unlikely to make prolonged eye-contact with the bearers since there is an absence of familiarity with them and no easy way of breaking the social distance that separates their distinctive roles. It is indelicate to scrutinise death workers too closely, since it may indicate too critical a stance regarding the machinery in action. The eyes of mourners may find few places to linger without discomfiture, since only between friends will there be an absence of impropriety when eye-contact develops. Mourners become enmeshed within the drama; they are not free to clearly observe the asides of the supporting cast.

Each worker provided an interpretation of what it felt like to be part of a funeral construction team. Each moved between the back-regions of preparation and informality and the performance areas of maximum public openness. Their differing accounts presented certain configurations - attitudes overlapped and allowed classification of 'consensualist', 'pragmatist' and 'protectionist'.

The great majority were supportive of private enterprise, hostile to municipalisation, indifferent to Trade Union collectivism and co-operative with employers. They were, therefore consensualist in value orientation; instrumental in Trade Union involvement; sceptical of individual employers; pragmatic about proprietors profits and workers pay and subversive below a point of disruption. The smaller the division of labour, the higher the possibility of corporate loyalty;
the closer the contact between employer and employee, the greater the likelihood of 'consensualist' attitudes prevailing among them.

A minority of committed idealists presented a contrasting pattern of behaviour - concentrated in Co-operative Societies and well-unionised firms, they tended to be active Trade Unionists usually Shop Stewards of Branch Secretaries. However, Union membership did not necessarily imply commitment to the protectionist attitudes expressed by the critics of funeral directors. No indication of marxist, communist, syndicalist or anachist commitments were acknowledged by the minority who are classified as 'protectionists'. Most expressed support for socialist principles and/or mixed-economy society, in which funerals would be provided as an aspect of social service. The Union National Secretary was an exception, since not only did he provide a closely-reasoned critique of the entire occupation but also acknowledged the possible consequences arising from any future municipalisation of funeral service. He foresaw a reduction in the total work force and the decline of competitive, profit-seeking private firms to historical anomalies.

Employers' refusal to enter into national negotiations with the Trade Union gave them sufficient leverage to manipulate wage levels to their own advantage and their paternalistic attitudes encouraged dependency and support among many workers. The case noted above (R20) where the roles of autonomous manager, Licentiate member of the NAFD, Union Secretary, Christian, colonialist and supporter of workers rights, were combined by one man, suggests that the greater the degree of managerial responsibility and client contact available to the worker the lower the likelihood of him developing a protectionist attitude. His support for 'moderation' in Trade Union negotiations allowed his membership of the NAFD to remain emotionally unchallenged since he regarded himself as a bridge between supportive piers not as a participant in each of two opposing camps. The 'protectionists' were an influential minority, who improved workers conditions but failed to create a partisan work-force.

The truly 'pragmatic' were also thinly spread through the workforce, seeking purely personal rewards was not compatible with team-work. Such
workers eschewed committed Trade Union involvement since it implied working for common goals which might adversely affect unfettered response to chance.

They did not identify fully with the many 'consensualists' around them, since those workers frequently indicated that the firm had first claim on their loyalties.

Most 'pragmastists' were content with a work situation which made few physical or emotional demands on them and which gave them a comfortable living. They responded to the needs of the present without attaching themselves to either 'consensualists' or 'protectionists', seemingly unwilling to seek certification or further responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The sample of those who make up the funeral occupation is not complete. Scotland and Northern Ireland directors have not been examined and differences in style and attitude may exist in those countries. Wales has only been studied in an area close to the English border and that cannot be considered representative. Many Scots, Irish and Welsh workers have been interviewed without any suggesting that a truly 'national' characteristic existed in their homelands. Nevertheless, the national and regional distinctions remain to be closely examined at a future date and their present exclusion is due entirely to the limitations of time and money. The influence of Methodism and Prestbyterianism many exert a particular pressure to produce funerals in a manner not yet observed; remote rural communities may provide examples of local specialism; historial traditions may restrict funeral performances to a style uncommon to the more experimental areas of Southern England.

Nevertheless, the respondents cited above present a cross-section of all the important themes identified earlier in this study. Size, orientation, market, ideology, sex, age, and owner and worker categories
have all been examined to note the diversity which underlie the apparent uniformity of the funeral occupation. From 130 respondents selection has been made to reflect the differences which they have chosen to present and a categorisation has been developed from their identification of priorities.

They are all actors, seeking to influence the perception that others have of their presentation. Whilst they are circumscribed by the structured society in which they perform, they have the ability to choose which roles to perform. Challenging the limitations imposed on them may entail social and occupational costs beyond their expectations or willingness to absorb, but choice is available.

The official spokespeople of the occupation reflect the interests and attitudes of one dominant aspiration, namely the achievement of higher status through a professional orientation. The accounts given by respondents indicate the contrasting even conflicting goals that have not been fully expressed through elected officials, but which exert considerable influence on individual members.

The potential for disunity has not been realised, because the nature of their work imposes restraint. Funerals are not regarded by the public as suitable vehicles to carry occupational, social, political or personality disagreements nor to be characterised as purely economic ventures. Members therefore practice restraint, aware that to publicise their individual beliefs would be damaging to the collective 'image' of the occupation which sustains their present success.

In private, however, they can present their alternative face, and in the manner in which they 'account for' their own beliefs they demonstrate a previously unrecorded repertoire of roles. The value of listening to people, in addition to observing them, is shown in this study. Respondents felt free to present occupational and social 'selves' previously restricted to colleagues, when assured of a supportive and trustworthy observer who came to be accepted as an 'insider'.
The final respondent is dealt with more comprehensively through participatory observation, whereby more role performances were observed. His techniques of performance were more extravagant than any so far experienced and his single-minded application to 'selling' his public-performances more extreme that encountered before. He is to be regarded as an exceptional case, but one in which the tendencies noted elsewhere are merely pushed to extreme realisation. He is presented as an illustration of the difficulties to be overcome by anyone wishing to become a funeral director and of the consequences attached to the management of human resources. He illustrates, unambiguously, the stratagems that can be used to present a particular occupational role in which individual characteristics are oversold. Most directors prefer circumspection to flamboyance, but a wide range of presentational techniques are available to them, as already demonstrated by previous respondents.

He was not chosen because he exhibited unusual characteristics - his choice was fortuitous. His script, stage and performance may have been suitable for the occupation but he failed to perceive the need to temper a star-role with a competent and supportive cast. A solo performance, no matter how intriguing to watch, cannot also provide ensemble repertoire.

The public can be served and exploited simultaneously. Directors have been careful to acknowledge the former and conceal the latter possibility. This director demonstrates how both can be successfully achieved without damage to self-idealisation but with the ever present danger of commercial instability as a consequence of over-extension of personality.
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CHAPTER SIX

BECOMING A FUNERAL DIRECTOR

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION IN A NEW BUSINESS (R81)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>367</td>
<td>Becoming a Funeral Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>367</td>
<td>Participant Observation in a New Business (R81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>369</td>
<td>Mr Upman's commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>370</td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>371</td>
<td>Gestation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>373</td>
<td>Emergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>374</td>
<td>Projection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>379</td>
<td>The Professional veneer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>382</td>
<td>Backstage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>388</td>
<td>Public Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>391</td>
<td>Professionalism as a Marketable Commodity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>394</td>
<td>'Consequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>396</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>402</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

366
'There will be time to prepare a face
to meet the faces that you meet'

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' T.S. Eliot)

The value of participant observation is derived from the intimacy of interaction it provides, not from the length of times it spans. The usefulness of participation extending for weeks, months or years is undeniable but the possibility of obtaining close and intimate participation with a funeral director for that length of time was virtually impossible. Furthermore, the value of an offer to spend two weeks living with a director and his family was unlikely to be surpassed by a longer period spent entirely in the funeral office. The 'native culture' could be invaded, or penetrated, more effectively by sharing the total life situation for a few weeks, than by participating in the work situation alone for many months. 'Native culture' here refers to that way of living and that skill in ordering events which is the taken-for-granted resource of the individual, or group, under observation, and of which the observer is not an integral part.

The work done by Ditton, in his observation of bakers' roundsmen, is a good example of the manner in which an occupational culture can be breached by an outsider, (Ditton 1979). He noted the manner in which bakers roundsmen systematically manipulated their customers for company profit, and later for private gain, yet did not come to define themselves as either criminal or deviant. They regarded their actions as normal, coping strategies, necessary to survive in an occupational situation of face-to-face exchange. As a participant he was able to experience the learning procedures whereby a naive newcomer to the trade developed into a skilled 'con-man' without losing self-esteem.

A similar degree of understanding was achieved by Bensman and Gerver (1963) when they studied airframe assembly in the U.S.A. Workers regularly used a forbidden tool to realign aileron rivets and in doing so risked instant dismissal, since such procedures were likely to weaken the wing. Nevertheless, to be a successful fitter it was necessary for the uninitiated apprentice to learn when and how to use the tool. He
learned the appropriate skills slowly and intermittently from his supervisors, who should themselves have been sacked for resorting to the use of the forbidden tool. Without such 'deviant' performances, 'plane production would have fallen behind schedule. Contracts could only be met by deliberately flouting safely regulations. Workers acting 'deviantly' would, therefore, define their acts as 'normal', since such acts were an integral part of their daily work, even though covertly exercised.

Only by participating in the everyday work situations of the study group were these researchers able to see the patterns of interaction which the participants actively constructed. The workers were not passive recipients of rules, norms, values and attitudes, but agents, performers, directors and audiences of a social world unknown by those who did not participate in the work experience. Similarly, becoming a participant in a funeral directing business exposed the behaviour which a funeral director considered necessary if he was to become commercially successful.

My opportunity to participate fully in practical funeral work came with the offer to spend two weeks in a funeral director's home and to work as his assistant. I was able, thereby, to penetrate the total culture of the funeral director since I shared his back-regions of domestic life and informal friendships as well as the front-regions where work skills were publicly presented. I accompanied him to friends' houses, pubs, restaurants and relatives, and shared in his home-life with his wife and children. I was introduced, variously, as a friend, visitor, helper, researcher and funeral worker and thereby invited to perform, spontaneously, roles supportive of the director. As his assistant I carried out all funeral activities, which included collecting the newly dead, removing bodies from the mortuary, preparing bodies for viewing and for commital, 'dressing' coffins, acting as coffin bearer and interviewing the bereaved clients. I was centrally placed to observe him under almost every work and home circumstance and for a length of time sufficient to ensure that each of his many role performances were visible. Had he attempted to conceal performances he considered harmful
to his self-image he would have made them significant since only a few hours of sleep were excluded from my observation. Activities liable to expose him as deviant, were they to be publicly presented, were readily available to me as a co-participant.

**MR UPMAN'S COMMITMENT**

Mr Upman regulates his performances to satisfy two significant reference groups which influence his self-perceptions. The first is composed of occupational groups consisting of those with whom he has regular and formal work contact, such as doctors, policemen, coroners, clergymen and senior hospital, cemetery and crematoria officials. To these he exhibited a mixture of deference, respectability and service competence, presenting a person suitable to be accepted as a work-peer. From them he hoped to gain confirmation of his proprietorial role.

The second group comprised all people who could be classified as 'clients' either past, present or potential. For these he provided leadership, expertise, humour and confidence to whatever degree he believed the circumstance would permit. From them he gained reinforcement of his technical capability and his personal credibility.

Two occupational models directed his performance:–

(i) **The businessman** – wherein he was practical, astute, efficient, knowledgeable and above all, successful.

(ii) **The professional** – wherein he exercised his skills in the 'proper manner' presenting an image of a caring, considerate 'interpreter' of human needs under adversity.

It is in the interplay of these two ideal models that he produces his unique version of the funeral director. He is totally committed to the belief that he can operate successfully within both frameworks. By negotiation, compromise, intuition, sensitivity and astuteness, he
prompts other actors to accept his leadership. He did not seek the backing of any organisation, whether of Masonic Lodge, Chamber of Commerce, Rotarian Branch or the National Association of Funeral Directors. He intended to sell himself, unaided, to a public waiting to be won over. He operated, therefore, without an organisational safety net. He had to be individually competent to carry a scene, construct an interaction, negotiate a settlement and interpret ambiguities. Unschooled in the subtleties of his business, he nevertheless acted confidently. As entrepreneur, impresario, solo artist or confidante, he performed his role with an unmatched enthusiasm and dedication. He claimed to be a salesman, therefore I observed the manner in which he manipulated both his physical and social environment in order to achieve his aim. He ensured that each separate audience came to accept his performance as authentic, that is, appropriate for the task to be performed or the social exchange to be concluded. I believe that Mr Upman survives my analysis and is recognisable as a decision making individual, not merely a characterisation of my own design. I became an integral part of his act but retained sufficient role-distance to record what was going on as a disinterested observer. I was part of his culture for this period, but not 'of it' since I did not invest myself totally in its daily creation, as did Mr Upman.

BIOGRAPHY

My Upman is thirty-four years old, married to a woman of thirty-two with whom he has two children of eight and six years. They live in a seven-roomed bungalow close to a small Berkshire town and fifteen miles from a large city.

His wife's family are extremely prosperous, deriving their wealth from agricultural land, property development and a company producing agricultural products. They sold part of their holding in this company and distributed the money they gained to their children and grandchildren to reduce taxation. Mr Upman and his wife have substantial resources although I do not know the extent of their
personal wealth. The house is comfortably furnished without evidence of luxury or ostentation.

His own family origins were set in South London with a father who, as a lay preacher, had aspired to become ordained but without success and, in a chance visit to Berkshire, introduced Mr Upman to his future in-laws. From originally working as a salesman in a gents' outfitters, he moved to the sale of yoghurt-making machinery and then on to a public relations work. Selling, therefore, is his chief expertise and an activity that he likes. He came to work for the agricultural company as a sales representative and, subsequently, married the owner's daughter. He was promoted for developing new outlets for the products and then moved into their public relations department, charged with satisfying customer complaints. He developed his new responsibilities in an unusual manner, by travelling widely to meet complainants and giving them hospitality and soothing talk. Before his promotion he had been treated with scant interest by his employers, but he appeared to regard his public relations commission as an opportunity to use personal charm and initiative to convince them of his true ability.

A history of thyroid trouble had apparently been successfully treated, but during his time in public relations he had to undergo two operations for recurrent stomach pains. He claims to have had a flair for producing an easy relationship with people from a wide diversity of backgrounds and enjoyed the opportunity to solve problems personally without recourse to his head office. Nevertheless, the work was tiring for him and his illnesses caused him to worry a great deal. He was in a situation of ambivalence and stress.

GESTATION

His departure from the company was abrupt and is explained by Mr Upman in a markedly different way than it is by a very close, and sympathetic, relative. He stressed his bad health and genuine concern for survival
if he did not relieve the mental and physical strain he was experiencing. Moreover, he emphasised the deep desire he felt to help people in difficulty or adversity, and the fact that he was seeking some way to put his talents to work in a socially useful relationship.

In contrast, his relative says that he was dismissed suddenly, due to conflict between a new management and himself, over his idiosyncratic methods of dealing with customers. He was so angry that he intended to sue for wrongful dismissal, but was given a large cash settlement and an offer of help from his father-in-law to set up his own business. Whatever the 'true' origin of change, it was during this transitional period that he became a debt-collector and he has retained at least one friend from this period, who is still working in this way and who was present at Mr Upman's inauguration as a funeral director.

It is at this point that a fortuitous experience gave direction and impetus to his work-life, whatever the reason for his abrupt exit from employee status in the family business.

He received an urgent call for help from a friend who was a local funeral manager. He needed assistance in moving a dead body from a house to a mortuary. With great reluctance he agreed to lift and carry a corpse for the first time. The experience disturbed him but in a way he had not foreseen, since it was not the dead body that raised his distaste, but the brusque, uncaring and undignified manner in which his friend handled the body. As he pulled the trousers off the recumbent body lying on the floor, he allowed each leg to fall with a thump. The carpet did not disguise the sounds and they carried through to the distraught widow in the next room. (Mr Upman never satisfactorily explained why the trousers were removed - a most unusual thing to do!) 'Suddenly, I realised that not only could I deal with the sight and touch of a dead body, but that I could do it more stylishly than the performance I had just witnessed'. Yet, 'as a child I so feared contact with death that I walked around a block of houses to enter the house by the back door, rather than pass the front room in which a body was laid. Furthermore, I felt the need to give emotional support and practical
help to the widow, who was helpless in the next room whilst my friend manhandled her dead husband. He has strong Low Church involvement and regards it as a Christian duty to give succour to those in need of help. As a consequence of this experience he decided to become an efficient and caring funeral director, laying aside his stressful employee role to become a public figure with a specialised skill.

He believed that the local competition could be overcome by using the resolute marketing techniques had already mastered and he felt assured of a successful outcome, since the main competitor rested, too easily, on his virtual monopoly of local funerals. The big companies were fifteen miles away in the city and the scene was set, he believed, for his effective entry onto the public stage. He saw the situation as one in which need, opportunity and ambition had coalesced to provide him with a business career. He regards the provision of funerals as a suitable opportunity for developing his socialising skills and bereavement offers him the opportunities to exhibit his tact, solicitude and intuition. Above all, he enjoys constructing and controlling a dignified social occasion which will clearly lead to profit, prestige and a successful business career. Self-projection, he believed, would produce commercial profitability.

EMERGENCE

A search of the district revealed an empty, small, double-fronted shop which admirably suited his purpose. One of a parade on the main road leading from the town, it was flanked by small-business concerns such as wool-shop, hardware, grocer's, turf accountants and, most usefully, a small printer's. The railway station was five minutes away by car and a small hospital almost opposite. Parking space was available on a wide fore-court, there was a back garden with sufficient space to build a shed to house a body refrigerator, a side access ensured privacy and there was no need to apply for planning permission since it had previously been registered as a business property. The downstairs rooms became a reception office, two interview rooms, the 'chapel or rest' and the mortuary, whilst upstairs a comfortable flat materialised, with
office, store room, lounge, bathroom and kitchen. In total, this provided a very suitable headquarters in which business could be transacted, leisure could be enjoyed, equipment stored and bodies handled.

He regarded these premises as ideal, although they appeared non-descript from outside and only adequate for a relatively sparse flow of clients. It was essential for Mr Upman to launch these premises in such style that they were given due recognition by the occupational-others upon whom he would depend for his future status.

The original estimate for transforming the premises, and obtaining the special commodities his business would require, was £ 50,000. The eventual (1980) cost was £ 125,000 which included such essentials as a second hand hearse, an estate car, car radio service, telephone answering machine, central heating, formal clothing and a four-body refrigerator.

PROJECTION

He launched his business career with an astute combination of commercial acumen and 'professional' decorum by providing two 'open-days' in June 1980. Two hundred various personages were invited, all in their separate way vital to his future success. The clergy he contrived to separate so that High Church officials came on the first day, along with coroners, doctors and senior hospital officials; and Low Church and Roman Catholics attended on the second, amongst the other representative of local interests.

On both days a steady trickle of visitors came to be conducted through each small room in turn, to end upstairs for refreshment, cloistered together in the lounge-reception room. Thereupon developed a succession of scenes reminiscent of film funeral-breakfasts, where people who have little in common, and even less acquaintance with each other, are forced to rub shoulders whilst balancing drink and food in uncomfortable positions, and maintaining a suitable flow of conversation.
In addition to these officials, there were reporters, old friends, funeral directors, florists, stonemasons, grave diggers, gents' outfitters, coffin manufacturers, trade salesmen, printers, caterers and a debt collector from his earlier days in that occupation, each in polite conversational postures. Since the whole operation was designed to elicit approval from the guests, as much as to publicise his debut, it was difficult for them not to be forthcoming with some form of appreciative response. However, it appeared that most of them felt it was indelicate to enthuse volubly about laying-out facilities, or the merits of refrigeration over embalming. The theme of death, though fundamental to the occasion, was left dormant. No jokes, quips, puns nor anecdotes on death were offered and no informed appraisal of technical detail was aired among those whose daily work concerned such matters. It appeared that, whatever their special knowledge, when presented with a cold, tiled room containing stainless steel equipment and a bare metal stretcher, easy conversational gambits were hard to muster. Similarly, when ushered into a small, dimly-lit room with strangers, in which the sole focus of attention was a coffin with its satin-lined interior open to inspection even the most perceptive visitor found himself hard pressed to utter more than commonplace responses. Certainly, this viewing room was not furnished in the formalised wood-veneer, favoured by so many funeral establishments, which creates such a drear oppression among those not collapsed with grief. It had pastel shades and an absence of 'low-church decrepit' which is frequently the stock-in-trade of viewing rooms in both large and small businesses in England. Nevertheless, comments such as 'tasteful', 'very nice' and 'most appropriate' did not form the basis of a conversation to be continued over refreshments upstairs.

In spite of these limitations, Mr Upman considered these informal associations to be successful, since the objective of publicising his newly emerged facility was achieved. From this general presentation of his resources, he intended to establish a wider public recognition. He combined a wide diversity of traits which might well disturb his more conservative colleagues, were they to become aware of his versatility. He did not 'become' whatever type of person he judged his audience would
favour because he always preferred to maintain the persona of a well-intentioned, alert, humorous constructor of conversation whoever he was talking to. He possessed an easy facility to present himself as either the ubiquitous man of public affairs, the polite, reserved 'confidante' or the purveyor of sexual innuendo, whichever he intuited his audience favoured, switching from one performance to another without pause and frequently within one social exchange. This was accomplished sometimes with what, as an observer, I considered to be a failure of judgement or an insensitivity to the response of his audience. For example, in one such dialogue, he spoke from his car to a woman taking her child to school to say, without preamble, 'your husband was right!' and in reply to the puzzled look on her face, continued 'you are looking more attractive than ever'. The nonplussed reaction of the woman led him to add; 'you have more clothes on today than last time I saw you(...)(pause at non comprehension by the woman)(...) you were sunbathing then'(unanswerable due to the diverse cues he strewed in her conversational path).

When driving the hearse on a later occasion he drew up alongside a girl at a roundabout and offered her a lift, with sexual innuendo added, and when talking with barmaids managed to include comments on their sexuality, with asides about putting funeral business his way when opportunity emerged. He discriminated between audiences, and only employed sexually loaded conversation with those he considered to be open to such a gambit. As a solicitous, cheerful conversationalist with crossing ladies, shop assistants, bus drivers, meter attendants and elderly people, he exuded genuinely warm interest in their daily activities. He buttressed his role of punctilious and understanding listener with a flow of personal reminiscences concerning unforeseen death and inconsolable loss. Though to an observer these might appear to be unsolicited and intrusive, they were received by some of the bereaved as evidence of a shared predicament and, consequently, produced favourable responses from them.

Mr. Upman is a short man with fair hair, always cleanly and formally dressed, with an engaging and open welcome for strangers. He runs his
business with personal control over every detail and has invested not only money, but his total personality in creating a successful and competitive business. His daily life is a flowing movement from place to place and from role to role, a facility which is not readily discernible to a passing observer.

A constant companion, however, becomes aware of his adroit manipulation of every possibility. No role was weakly presented but fully supported with appropriate behavioural cues. By observing his competence in selecting a suitable performance I became aware of his self-reliance, as, in every encounter he exuded an impression of single-handed achievement. This was most noticeable in his 'conducting' role which is arguably the central performance of his chosen occupation. Dressed in black top-hat, full length black cape with heavy brass buckle overlying a tail-coat and pin-stripe trousers, and carrying his black gloves, he would walk in front of the cortege, ignoring the gaze or comments of bystanders, totally inured within his self-appraisal that this is how a funeral ceremony should be staged (reminiscent of Preedy on the beach in William Sansoms's 'A Pride of Ladies' in Goffman 1969 p5). His commitment to dignity did not, however, prevent him on one occasion from suddenly opening the nearside door of the hearse to try and hit one of a pack of rude-mannered school boys who cheekily overtook the cortege on bicycles. Children were possibly the only audience to challenge his self-perceptions, and on a subsequent occasion a string of them emerged from school gates and were totally unimpressed by his public performance. They did not need, or fear, his services, nor were they persuaded that his performance was necessary. They regarded him as odd, perhaps even ridiculous, and they told him so. At no other time was his performance, public or private, so effectively challenged. His defining power was totally rejected by an audience of children whose code of conduct was devised and monitored by their peers, not his. The 'serious' quality of adult existence and the traumatic experience of death which provided him with his central role, were now missing, and he became an angry grown-up facing his young challengers. However, his irritation quickly passed and he once more directed his attention to his adult audience.
Since this was the Christmas period, he found it appropriate to carry several bottles of wine, purchased cheaply in bulk, within the hearse, as he proceeded with two bodies to the crematorium. After the first funeral service had finished he was driven quickly to a nearby house, and dismounted from the hearse with the two bottles concealed beneath his cloak (but minus his top hat to indicate that this was an informal visit), to give them as gifts. Whilst he was cementing a friendship, the hearse was driven behind nearby shops into a service road, to gain a certain minimum degree of privacy, and the second coffin was drawn out from its place of concealment within the lower section of the hearse and hastily pushed onto the top surface, to be in full view ready for the next funeral service. Whilst one attendant ran to replenish his cigarettes from the nearby shop, the second produced a crumpled wreath from a recess, hurriedly restored it to shape and placed it on top of the coffin. The hearse then moved back to pick up Mr. Upman, ready for his next performance. At speed the vehicle returned to the crematorium gates, where it slowed to a walking pace as Mr. Upman, with hat restored to its appropriate position, placed himself in front of it and walked very slowly the full length of the drive. No-one appeared to be looking at him but, as mourners had arrived earlier in their own cars, hopefully they would observe the dignified entrance of the hearse preceded by a solitary figure of respectability.

Within the routine of a funeral ceremony there is a potential for honest, fair and legal service which offers a good business investment. This is matched by the possibility for deception, self-projection and greed. The entire range of 'normal' social interaction available to people in daily contact with each other is a potential to be exploited for commercial profit or self-esteem. At moments when commercial success was his chief concern Mr. Upman could produce a moral justification which was hardly more than a convenient patina to allay any doubts that may have arisen among his observers of 'sharp practice'. He believed that a 'professional' performance could be identified by the smoothly competent control of events exercised by a dedicated individual. This, Mr. Upman was determined to record, was an apt description of himself. So long as the public ceremony was effective and his clients' needs
satisfied, the hidden mechanisms of mounting the performance were no concern of anybody, he claimed. Work and leisure roles were intermingled and when he carried frozen poultry in the hearse to be distributed as Christmas gifts whilst collecting a body from the mortuary, this was as integral a part of his overlapping social activities as carrying a body to an internment with gift bottles of wine hidden under the driver's seat. He was careful, however, to make sure that the public was not aware of either the poultry or the wine.

THE PROFESSIONAL VENEER

Mr. Upman claims that, despite his fear of a dead body, he had a great admiration for 'the man in black' who controlled such a death ceremony. He had observed, as a child, performances of style wherein pomp was discreetly exhibited and dignity was gravely presented and he wished to be cast in the same mould. Skillful, efficient, dignified, comprehensive and dedicated, are the actions of a professional, he claimed, and he used every aspect of his marketing technique to gain a professional status. He aims to sell himself and his services in such a way that he will be respected. He monitors his success in achieving this goal by reference to both a private and a public response. Predominantly he seeks to reassure himself that he approximates to his own assessment of proper conduct. He appears to regard formal and traditional performances as imperative - the content of his work is to be judged by its public dignity. His personal behaviour is similarly assessed by himself. Does he appear to himself to be in accord with his ideal model? Of this he has little or no doubt - he is what he appears to be. Inner rehearsal and outward presentation combine to present a credible occupational role and social identity that has been cast and reworked with diligence and skill. Secondly, he seeks public approval through the formal responses of clients and co-participants such as clergy or hospital officials. He is reinforced in his belief that he performs well, by his critical appraisal of competitors, most of whom he denigrates for lack of formality or shoddy attention to detail. He insists on the suitability of a Daimler hearse since not only is it the traditional vehicle but the
coffin can be clearly seen within it. His role must be seen at every possible stage. He walks in front of the cortege for as long as it is possible to do so. On one occasion he walked several hundred yards towards the market place and would have gone completely around the square had not the traffic been too heavy to infiltrate. It was market day - an opportune time for public display. Everyone present would have been aware of a genuine 'spectacle'.

Police calls are responded to at seventy miles an hour, with a green flashing light they allow him to use. This is not to achieve the body removal effectively since it will await his arrival, but to ensure that he is seen to be doing so and that the police and coroners will respond to his speedy efficiency with approval. He has succeeded remarkably, since the local coroner has chosen to drop his competitors from call-out service to accidents and emergencies, and to use Mr. Upman whenever possible.

He has a trade agreement with the local florist so that he makes a small profit on any order he channels to them and similarly with a local firm of caterers. To 'avoid inconvenience' he suggests to the bereaved that floral tributes are sent to his business address and that a notice is placed in the press to inform the mourners. This is frequently accepted and the newspaper entry gives him free publicity. He suggests that private cars may seem undignified whereas hiring his limousines will allow efficient and 'appropriate' conveyance. His press advertisements are larger than his competitors, and his black-suited appearance is regularly observed in shops, offices, police and railway stations and public buildings. He presents his occupational image at every possible occasion to ensure public recognition.

He has contempt for the occupational organisation, the NAFD, although he may join it in the future. He was originally proposed for membership, but when a satisfied client placed an advertisement in the local paper praising his work, his sponsors withdrew. He wrote them a critical letter, complaining of their narrow-minded suspicion that he had solicited the advertisement. He has obtained the organisation's
'directory of firms', surreptitiously from the present writer. This compendium of business addresses he regards as the only benefit to accrue from the NAFD. He hopes to take the British Institute of Embalmers diploma to reduce his reliance on trained operatives. Essentially, therefore, he is a small businessman who is seeking to become established by offering as many facilities as possible and by selling himself assiduously. He differs from many others in similar situations by not wishing to join organisational power blocks such as the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotarians, Masons or his trade association. He observes his commercial environment and seeks success in it by exploiting those marketing techniques which have proved successful in other selling situations. Success, he believes, will generate 'professional' status for him, since commercial respectability and competence is, in his view, the power base on which all claims to professional status depend.

His accountant assessed that an average of two funerals per week would entail a loss of £4,000 in the first full year of trading. If he could obtain an average of three per week he could make a profit of £6,000 in that year. He had succeeded in averaging two per week in his first six months of operation, but many accounts had not been settled, a common experience for funeral directors. He intended, therefore, to borrow £11,000 and to obtain a three month bank credit to ensure not only this survival, but open up the possibility of buying a small competitor. He anticipated on the basis of the public response he had received, to make a first year profit of £7,000.

He is confident that his public image is that of a reliable and 'professional' director, who is what he claimed to be, a self-made success. When examined closely it can be seen that he has very little skill to offer clients and no theoretical background of research and conceptualising to draw upon no collegiate support and daily limited market control. He equates personal attentiveness and concern to provide good service with collegiate based knowledge and, in practical consequences, he is right to do so. The market position of funeral directors is based on public ignorance and occupational secretiveness.
By exploiting the ignorance and offering a suitable skill with personal charm, he can gain a local monopoly. This is likely to be a short-lived accomplishment since he has few technical or economical reserves to support his future development.

BACKSTAGE

What activities does Mr. Upman perform? What skills do his employees utilise behind closed doors and what equipment do they use? Are their joint occupational performances developed by trial and error or learned from training manuals?

Even though there are differences of style and presentation between various establishments, all of them perform basic routines in a remarkably similar manner. The hallmark which unites them all is 'concealment', whereby a variety of stratagems ensure that the lay public does not observe the actual body handling. They mask the 'dirty' work from the public gaze and are assisted in doing so by a willingness to avert their eyes exhibited by most people.

Mr. Upman, for example, seems to regard the corpse as unimportant in itself, since, once it is in his keeping, it is often left lying on a stretcher without being accorded any intrinsic respectability or importance, a great contrast to Jewish or Hindu treatment of the corpse. It is only when it is to become a symbol that it is given detailed attention, to ensure that it calls forth the responses he seeks to produce. His daily activities all led toward the two final presentations of the body - firstly the body on private view to the mourners and, secondly, the ultimate public ceremony. The body frequently lies unattended for several days in whatever position it had been deposited on arrival, draped merely with a white plastic sheet. His attention during these first days is concentrated on preparing the stage on which it is eventually to occupy the central position, (but not the 'starring' role which he reserves for himself).
About 60% of deaths occur in hospital or other similar non-private accommodation, so frequently the body is picked up from a mortuary. Here, many bodies lie on separate stretchers which slide in and out of large refrigerators like shelves from an oven, to display their contents. To the mortuary is taken a 'shell', a hard, plastic coffin, which can be easily disinfected and re-used constantly for the 'pick-up'. A plastic sheet usually enwraps the body and an identification label is tied to the big toe. The body, stiff, cold and white, is lifted, with difficulty, still enclosed in the sheet, and placed into the shell. In some mortuaries the body lies in a specially hinged plastic coffin, whose sides and ends can be dropped, to ease the change over. The correct forms must be delivered by the funeral business otherwise the mortuary attendant will not let the body go. When collecting one body I had to remain for an hour in the estate car with the corpse, because the correct form was mislaid. Only when we decided to move the body back to the mortuary and thereby give the attendant responsibility for it once again, did he let the body go without the form. Personal inconvenience outweighed rule-keeping in this instance.

It requires more skill and attention to detail to get a body from a private home, since stairwells, bedrooms, doorways and halls are not built to accommodate a stretcher-carried body. The progress of one particular body can be reviewed to show the manner in which a caretaker of the dead constructs a transformatory sequence. When I assisted Mr. Upman to remove an eighteen stone dead woman from her bed on a wheeled stretcher, we had to stand the stretcher vertically, with her strapped to it. With her immense weight balanced on end and our faces pressed into her body to keep it upright, we 'walked' the stretcher out of the room, until we could lower it to the ground and wheel it to the waiting estate car. In the privacy of the room, the body was handled unceremoniously, because it was a physical burden. With public scrutiny on it, it was moved slowly and considerately since it still had connotations of 'life' accorded it by the bereaved. In such circumstances the directors 'back stage' is a moveable location, accompanying him to wherever he can perform unseen.
From both types of pick-up the estate car, with side and end windows covered by curtains, took the body to the business premises. At the mortuary, only officials had seen us at work. Most mortuaries are sited well away from other public facilities and the arrival and departure of cars is rarely seen by the public or discreetly overlooked. Even in private homes the bereaved could only see what the funeral workers allowed them to see, since by judicious shutting of doors to 'spare' the bereaved, they worked, unobserved, on the body. As noted above, a dead woman can be 'walked' from her death bed to the door of her room. Removing her from her bed necessitated standing astride her on the bed and handling her in a way likely to distress her relatives.

The body was wheeled into the small, bare, cold room (called 'the mortuary') in the business premises, where it was unceremoniously dumped onto a high stretcher and left, covered with a sheet, until it could be encoffined several days later. Since no temporary preservation is offered by Mr. Upman, the body remained where it was placed, unless put into the four-berthed refrigerator in the specially constructed garden shed.

The coffin preparation was simple indeed. A ready built coffin of the correct size was chosen from the stock and a furnishing laid inside it. This required us to staple a thin covering of quilting to the base, the sides and the underside of the lid and then to cover this with a pink, blue or white satin 'set'. The whole operation took about an hour to complete and was followed by nailing thin plastic 'handles' on either side. Even for burial the handles are not strong enough to bear the weight of the coffin, so it was always shoulder-borne. The handles looked, and are, cheap and weak.

A name plate was prepared by scoring details onto a thin piece of brass-looking plastic with a small engraving machine; it was then nailed to the top lid surface with thin nails and the coffin was ready. When the body was placed into it, a great deal of manoeuvring was necessary to get a stiff body into a position resembling repose. Since much of the body became discoloured by blood coagulation (such as fingers, arms,
ears, face and especially back and buttocks), it was necessary to force
the resisting limbs into the most 'natural' position to conceal its poor
appearance. Lipstick and powder was used to repair some of the ravages
and nails were cut and hair combed. Finally, the 'set' was arranged to
frame the face and to soften the outlines of the body and the 'skillful
techniques' of the funeral director were complete. A body treated as a
recumbent and resistant 'object', suddenly became an object of
reverence. This was not due to any intrinsic metamorphosis, but to its
imminent presentation to the bereaved.

When a viewing had been requested, the open coffin was wheeled into the
viewing room - called the 'Chapel of Rest', where the lighting was
reduced and softened. The scene was set for a judgement to be made. When
the relatives saw the body, therefore, they could only see what Mr.
Upman ensured they could observe and then only under subdued lighting.
The body certainly looked dead; no attempt had been made to ensure a
resemblance to healthy tissue. This was the first important public
response to his work and was an essential experience of farewell for the
close relatives. Therefore it was the setting that was exploited by Mr.
Upman. He wanted the bereaved to feel reassured that 'their' body had
been well handled, but of this they would never be sure. The appearance
of the body was vital. He believed that it must look comfortable,
composed, softened, but certainly dead. No attempt was made to suggest
life-like textures. 'Rest' was the key image he sought to produce and
because only the hands and face were visible, the body posture was an
essential factor. Mr. Upman sought to achieve a satisfactory response to
his work by controlling as many factors of the encounter as possible. He
was kind, tactful and considerate. He encouraged the bereaved to sit and
talk over a drink upstairs after they had viewed, to reassure, comfort
and listen.

His administrative skills occupied his time between the death and
disposal. Registrar's forms, doctor's certificates, cemetery or
crematorium bookings were required. Hearse, limousines and bearers were
allocated, travelling times estimated, flowers and press notices
arranged, assembly times for mourners decided. Simultaneously, he was
inviting the relevant clergy to conduct the ceremony, and organists to prepare suitable hymns. A record of all the expenditure was kept, which found its way eventually onto the account as 'Disbursements' which was scrupulously fair.

The public ceremony required organising ability, self-confidence and a suitable measure of unction on the part of the director. It also required a willingness to be marshalled, closeted, transported and organised on the part of the mourners. The confidence exuded by the director was gained from his organising activities and, since he knew the putative role of everyone in the ceremony, he could relate one part of the activity to all other parts, a factor denied to other participants, who knew only their own contribution. If any of the mourners had produced an untoward or unexpected performance it could, theoretically, change the entire sentiment of the ceremony, but since most of those present tacitly agreed to conform to the presentation produced by the director, there was very little likelihood of disruption. This is significant evidence of the occupational power exercised by funeral directors; rarely, if ever, is their handling of the body or their publicly performed ceremony challenged by their clients.

The reporting agencies such as newspapers and television occasionally resurrect the charge that coffins are used more than once at cremation committals, or that directors are 'seedy', but these merely rework old suggestions of one or two rotten apples in an otherwise sound barrel. Comedy shows stereotyped cameos, but there is very little non-sensational investigation by the mass media. One well-known reporter for a nationally prestigious newspaper wrote a full page article on funeral directing in 1981, but when I asked her for further information she replied that she had none. She had given one full day's study to one director and then written the article - this exhausted her store of knowledge and her interest.

The skills and aptitudes that Mr. Upman required are those commonly associated with tour-operating, transport time-tabling and car-hire
service; in short, logistics. Time and goods must be sold, assessed and budgeted by the controlling skills of salesman ship and accountancy. Unusual cases may be solved by recourse to the NAFD Handbook, or by asking advice from other directors, Mr. Upman, by carefully gaining knowledge of the legal requirements (for example, shipping a body abroad) would do it himself. There is no esoteric knowledge to gain, nor arduous training to survive. By observing him in daily practice, the pretentious claims made by many of his colleagues are exposed. The type and extent of such skills are quite commonplace. Also, only a modest level of personal integrity is necessary to survive the small degree of public scrutiny such work receives.

Since the bereaved, or their agents, rarely 'shop around' for good service (how can it be assessed in advance of its performance?) or for value for money (the 'phone call to request prices does not reveal more than basic charges, most of which are similar, business to business), they choose a funeral director on the basis of reputation and proximity. It is sensible for directors, therefore, to provide a public ceremony that is in accord with current public taste. However, Mr. Upman and his colleagues are instrumental in building and sustaining that image of suitability to which the public subscribe. Large, luxurious and formal limousines with neutral-faced attendants tend to reassure onlookers that a suitably dignified farewell is to be enacted. Since, as a general rule, the bereaved and audiences have had few, if any, involvements with funerals and have had no experience of alternatives, they have little reason to demand alternative services. They accept the director's model as suitable. His controlling status is based on their willing acquiescence, his skills are sought because of their reluctance to provide self-help. 'Do it yourself' activity has spread rapidly in practical technology. It has not extended to reach matters of emotional ritual, although funeral associations would like to provide a greater degree of autonomy for the bereaved.
In common with many small-business, owner-managers, Mr. Upman places great reliance on 'personal face'. He believes that a business succeeds or fails in direct relationship to the personal qualities of the owner. All his energies are therefore concentrated on achieving a satisfactory public image. The distinguishing factors of diligence and dignity are not, he believes, scattered indiscriminately among the population - they develop as a consequence of high personal motivation. Therefore, any private gain which accrues may be seen as a consequence of his personal commitment to a client. Furthermore, since he believes that people will not purchase 'bad' service, any business success he achieves reflects favourably on his occupational skill. A combination of personal qualities and skilled operation produces a public service, which in his view, deserves to succeed.

Friendliness is his most useful social attribute. At no time does he appear remote or unapproachable. Jokes and flippant asides appeared as genuine manifestations of his feelings. He did not become sour or biting when in private, and the music-hall stereotype of 'undertaker' was a far remove from his jaunty and neat appearance. He used informal speech patterns when ever possible and had genuine skill at making people at ease during the first moments of a meeting. He managed to involve clients in talk which was conversational and not totally confined to the business on hand, and thereby to convince them that he would give personal attention to their needs.

To be effective he must be known, or known about, within his locality. To this end he spoke incessantly to all who were in contact with him even temporarily, such as coach or ambulance drivers who he passed en-route. He seemed oblivious to the possibility that those he addressed so confidently, might not welcome his unasked 'bonhomie', but most of those he grabbed, metaphorically, by the collar, appeared to like him and accept his friendly advances. His car was an extension of himself and offered without request to carry food, luggage, shopping, people and
messages. This generosity was a reflection of his genuine friendliness, as well as part of his strategy of conquest.

He bought suits, shirts, food, flowers, printing, ornaments etc., locally, and was assiduously creating a reservoir of tradespeople who regarded him as a customer worth respecting. He spread his purchases over a wide variety of shops and used his bargaining skills to get favourable discounts, each contact apparently being led into thinking that his business was the one most likely to be used in the future.

Every business transaction was settled at the moment of purchase if possible. Clergymen, doctors, crematorium staff were paid for goods or services from a large bundle of notes, probably £200 in total, that he carried with him every day. He greatly annoyed one Roman Catholic priest by paying him with notes in his own residence, whereupon he was told that a 'formal' business transaction was the usual and acceptable method of payment. Mr. Upman was not to be dissuaded from his conviction however, that most clergy welcomed cash, which could then be passed in to their personal account, without the need to acknowledge it officially! This contrasted incongruously with Mr. Upman's other beliefs concerning the virtuous conduct of the 'professionals' he sought to emulate.

The complexity surrounding the funeral requires many groups, shops and organisations to contribute their own specialism. Whoever controls the productions of the ceremony influences each of them directly or indirectly. He knows who to tip, who to thank and who to placate. If he offers to dispose of the wreaths and they are given into his care, he then takes them, personally, to the local old people's home and receives grateful thanks from the residents for doing so.

He is, thereby, ensuring that he is known in the home, one of the most important centre for potential customers. To be favourably regarded there is to be assured a steady stream of future custom. This was borne out by the comments of one matron of a residential community where a death had just occurred. She said to the next of kin '(...) we always
ask Mr. Upman to help(...) he has six or seven good men to help him.'
Neither of these points were true since this was his first funeral from this particular home and he only has two assistants. However, from that impromptu remark she was quite possibly ensuring that both would come to be true. She wanted to be seen, by the bereaved, as both knowledgeable and caring and to show her concern to do whatever she could for those in her charge, even at their death, by selecting a suitable funeral director. She had not actually selected him on this occasion, but having committed herself to praising his services, she would be likely to use her spontaneous remark as a basis for future calls.

Once he has established his name he can feel assured that his catchment area is developing satisfactorily. He has done this by ensuring that his business card is prominently displayed in nursing homes and police stations, and by giving the local nurses' home an artificial flower arrangement for their Christmas party which was left over from a previous funeral.

As the most recent DHSS publication: 'Families, Funerals and Finances', 1980, makes clear, it is upon his reputation that a funeral director primarily depends for custom. One successful ceremony will produce a train of events leading to future business. The bereaved are comforted and return for future disposals in the family; the florists sell more wreaths and flowers and give him favourable discounts. The cemetery and crematorium officials like the way he removes the flowers and keeps their columbarium tidy and therefore deal with his future bookings promptly. The police have his telephone number to ring at any time for an efficient emergency service and may seek to call him rather than a lesser known, but equally competent, director.

Mr. Upman seeks to develop a public face, an occupational role which he can consolidate. By selling himself he hopes to achieve these goals within two years. He suffers no problem of self-identity as he did when he was employed to sell other people's products.
Mr. Upman does not claim to belong to a profession, nor to be a professional. What he does lay claim to is a 'professionalism' - commitment to a proper code of conduct which elevates him above a merely skillful performer. If everything is carried out to the highest standards, with a dedication to personal service that produces a trust relationship between clients and himself, then this, he claims, is the essence of the professionalism that the well established occupations of medicine and law possess. He believes that this situation is generated and sustained principally by individual performance. His work is rewarded financially and, later, will receive esteem and status. As more people come to use his services his self-assessment will be reinforced. This is how the well established occupations such as clergy, barristers, solicitors, doctors, engineers and accountants, actually operate, even though their progress toward market security and dominance is different to his. They claim that their authoritative performances are derived from a long, arduous and detailed course of study, in which high academic standards are essential. Moreover, since their collegiate study is fraught with the possibilities of failure, internal competitiveness is an integral part of their collective education. The body of knowledge they pursue is not only extensive, but specialisms abound within it. Therefore, while working their way through a rigorously designed course of study they are encouraged to develop inner convictions which buttress the search for specialisation. This period of socialisation is an essential ingredient in the making of the accepted professional, since it is during this long acculturisation that the rules concerning language, dress, deportment, composure and operation are gradually absorbed. The initial ignorance of the trainee is transformed into the knowing involvement of the graduate. The skilled performance and personal commitment which Mr. Upman regards as the essence of professionalism are merely the outward manifestations of this collegiate experience. The weight of tradition is transmitted by the senior members to new entrants through their control over curriculum, teaching methods and ethics. Colleague control eventually operates to produce the
appropriate degree of role separation between expert and client which the trust relationship is supposed to bridge.

Evidence to show the unintended consequence of collegiate control was provided by Howard Becker in his study of medical students (Becker, 1961). He emphasised that new entrants are motivated by a desire to save life, combat disease and cure patients. Within a few months, they modify such exalted goals and concentrate their energies on learning specialist language, absorbing technical details and above all, passing exams by answering prescribed questions with rote-learned answers. In short, their goal became survival within a tightly organised system and to be successful they needed to absorb the correct input and present the appropriate responses. This period of social transformation moulds a diverse entry of uninformed enthusiasts into a coherent body of practitioners. Jonathan Miller, in several BBC Open University radio programmes, showed how such corporate training is put into effective operation to the detriment of patients. When a group of doctors converge on a hospital patient and, in the course of diagnosis, ask him for his own, lay, opinion, they may frequently say to each other, across him: 'Super-tonsorial I think, don't you?', meaning: 'Ignore him, he's talking out of the top of his head.' Their professional skill - manifest, it appears to the patient, through their caring, sensitive approach to his needs - is, in reality, used to separate him from them by using occupational jargon to emphasise his ignorance.

The social skills and the technical knowledge developed by doctors, lawyers and, for example, legal draughtsmen, are buttressed by the use of specialised language and public performances which place laymen at a disadvantage. Moreover, each individual member supports, directly or indirectly, the total occupational group, by sustaining a similar style of performances based on a shared value system. The veneer of reciprocal trust between specialist and client conceals a superior-inferior relationship which has developed as a consequence of the disparate nurture experienced by each participant to the relationship.
In total contrast, Mr. Upman believes that he does not need the support of an organisation, nor the collective wisdom developed by his peers and his public acceptability appears to support his belief. He strives for a social performance, which the organisational professional takes for granted and he appears to be achieving it. His immediate and individually achieved accomplishment can be compared to the collegiate-controlled success of the established professions and found to be vastly inferior. However, such 'folk' definitions of what 'professionalism' means, have diluted the professional's own trait model, based on knowledge, skill and an altruistic service. If Mr. Upman succeeds in his quest for status it will be achieved on the basis of his claim to possess the requisite qualities, not on the objective confirmation of his actual market position. He can be seen to be 'doing the proper thing' in such a manner that public, peer and self-definition coalesce. The main reason for client ignorance about his work is not the intrinsic complexity of the subject; it is the distasteful nature of the operations and the emotional intensity of the ritual. Nevertheless the manner in which he presents his work, the virtual impossibility of checking his caretaking procedures and the willingness of clients to give him both the body and the responsibility for its deployment, ensure that he receives a semblance of professional ranking. He claims a commitment to personal service and identifies it, to himself and all others, as 'professionalism'. Clients expect identification of their emotional needs as well as technical servicing of the body and he claims to provide it. Teachers, social workers, nurses, psychotherapists etc. have long claimed to provide similar caring specialisms, and now driving schools and estate agents lay claim to be similarly motivated. Manifestly, it is a claim to a high status and is a direct reflection of the effectiveness with which the long established professions have 'flooded' the market place with 'public service' ethics. 'Objective' validation of his claim is not offered by him, nor necessarily sought by his clients. To this extent, therefore, a layman's category of 'professionalism' has widespread currency and is independent of specialist interpretations. So long as Mr. Upman is content with his present social location, he will probably perceive an acceptable degree of congruence between his own self-location and that
accorded him by his clients. His limited horizons of analysis will protect him from self-denigration and from occupational frustration. If, however, he seeks to impress the elite occupations with which he brushes occupational shoulders, that he is one of them, he is likely to be firmly put down. Their exclusivity is closely protected by organisational muscle and his solo exhibitionism will merely serve to identify his weakness.

The fact that Mr. Upman is only challenged openly by school children and by no organised social group, is an indication of his occupation's success in manipulating public opinion, not merely a reflection of his personal public image. Personality has a limited range of effectiveness if it is not supported by effective occupational organisation. Mr. Upman tries to sell his products through a successful presentation of his self-image, and he has achieved some local acceptability and limited short-term rewards. However, a capitalist market will be unlikely to preserve such personal talents unscathed for very long, unless they are to be protected by reliable business efficiency.

**CONSEQUENCE**

Mr. Upman has neglected to construct a sound organisational base and misused the human resources from which one could have been constructed. His wife, a legal partner in the firm, took no active part in funeral preparation or production but exercised a restraining influence on his more speculative ideas. She did not, however, foresee his mistake. He employed two young men, previously inexperienced in funeral work, as full-time assistants, with whom he had a close and friendly relationship. They were responsible for all the backstage preparation of the body, for fetching and carrying dead bodies, and for driving and bearing at the funeral ceremony. However, interviewing the clients and conducting each funeral were kept in Mr. Upman's control and he offered them no specific training to develop a more important role in funeral presentation. In fact, he quite unexpectedly employed an older man, well practised in funeral work, but bankrupted when trying to start and run
his own funeral business. He was offered the job of assistant to Mr. Upman, thereby conducting and arranging funerals, with the possibility of becoming a partner in the firm.

Mr. Upman left for a week's holiday, leaving his new assistant in charge of affairs, with blank cheques for use if required. This prospective partner, however, placed his short-term interests before the needs of the firm, (or of his own long-term prospects) and spent undue amounts of money - unwisely. On his return, Mr. Upman sacked him, and continued as before to take all major decisions himself.

His situation worsened abruptly when the police came to examine his accounts - for reasons never fully explained - and he was unfavourably featured in the local press. The possibility of legal action hung over him for several months, but was lifted when the police informed him that they did not intend to pursue the matter further.

In place of the expansion he so confidently expected, has come a retraction in business. He has failed to create the secure business base from which to expand and now oscillates between foreseeing a 'profitable future' and fearing the need to 'sell up and get out'.

The major reason for his inability to develop appears to be an unwise dependence on 'personal face' as a significant trading facility. Efficient, dependable, and constant service is a basic pre-requisite if a funeral firm is to survive and expand. He neglected to produce a stable work-force and emphasised the more ephemeral resource of personal front. Office, flat, limousines, refrigerator and advertising are necessary purchases, but without consistency of service, fail to convince respective customers of reliability. He has insufficient resources to produce several funerals simultaneously and presents too few funerals to provide a public advertisement of his business achievements.

In place of welding his two cooperative workers into a reliable unit, he allowed them to remain dissatisfied with the mundane future he offered
them. They were 'consensualist' in attitude, but he did not train them in the skills which he was only then developing in himself. If workers can produce an acceptable 'middle-class' appearance and a suitable language code to support it, they can present funerals without undue trouble. The Newfoundland model shows how upward occupational mobility can be introduced and controlled. The personality of the director can provide a public focus of attention, but cannot alone, provide a satisfactory business efficiency. Mr. Upman's claim to 'professionalism' was not substantiated by the basic, and fundamentally by more important demonstration of dependable business efficiency. To identify the projection of self-image as the substance of the occupation is a mistake which may yet prove to be an irreversible error of judgement for Mr. Upman.

Mr. Upman's career has been followed for three years. He is still precariously balanced between survival and defeat. Profits have been insufficient for him to contemplate opening a second business, though that was his original intention. The market for funerals is theoretically open to the input of new talent and capital; success should await those who supply a suitable customer service at a competitive price. It has been shown by respondents that to claim a share of the market on the basis of personal attributes alone is insufficient. Long-term family influence, a supportive work-force and shrewd commercial investment are more likely to produce success than the aggressive marketing of a 'professional self'.

CONCLUSION

How are we to assess Mr. Upman's occupational performance; how are we to interpret his presentation of self?

He has been observed creating and presenting an occupational role of unusual flamboyance, one in which idiosyncracies appear to have been taken to an extreme of perverse individuality. However, moral strictures are inappropriate for two distinctly separate reasons: firstly, and more importantly, because we need to assess, amorally, the
consequences of his performance for his occupational career and his personal self-perceptions, rather than to express criticism of an apparently over-indulgent self projection; secondly, because few critics would emerge unscathed were they also to be subjected to the same close and unremitting observation focussed on Mr. Upman. Few people have all their role-performances scrutinised in a concentrated span of time, and most would probably prefer to keep work and non-work, intimate and public performances from receiving equal analytic exposure. Because Mr. Upman invested so much of his physical, economic and moral capital in his presentation of self he is open to be declared the fool; because he appears to have 'oversold' himself to so many publics he is vulnerable to rejection by those he seeks to impress. He is not unique in failing to produce an unflawed social self.

Mr. Upman's performances included two analytically distinct components; one was the need to define each social situation in such a manner that other participants accepted it as appropriate, suitable or necessary; the second was to present a 'self' which accorded not only with the situational properties he assiduously manipulated but with the occupational role ascription carried by his audiences. Through linguistic messages he eased his way into his listeners confidence and by expressive messages he exuded information for observers to glean. (See Goffman 1963 p13). He sought tacit co-operation from those who joined with him in social encounters of every kind, concerned primarily to ensure that his reading of the scene, his definition of the situation, became acceptable to those on whom his occupational career would depend. Each encounter provided an opportunity for him to defend his presentation and for others to protect it by practical and symbolic ratification. He was engaged in creating a public self; in constructing a formal 'face' in which the expressive line he devised carried a positive social value. To a considerable degree he was successful in this strategem, apparently convincing audiences that he was what he claimed to be, namely a caring, observant, resourceful specialist. The situation in which his role was given meaning was defined by him as 'protective' - help for the living and
care for the dead. 'Situations' allow a mutual monitoring of performance and expression, and 'social occasions' present a structured social context in which patterns of conduct can be established. It was in social occasions that Mr. Upman was most persuasive, seeking to ensure that an internally consistent image of himself was presented and that participants publicly sustained his chosen identity. Familiarity with possibilities and pitfalls enabled him to guide the course of the interaction more easily than his unpractised audience, and since the social occasion is the natural home of talk he used conversation to frame the moment to his advantage.

Mr. Upman's private self did not show significant dissimilarity to his public, formal official 'face' and in this respect contradicts the view expressed by Goffman concerning the uneven 'fit' between the official self and the individual performing self. Ditton (1980 p43) examines the claimed disparity between official and personal 'self' and notes Goffman's particular emphasis on role-distance and organisational underlives as two forms of straining at the limitations imposed by official selves. It can be seen from the linguistic and expressive cues given off by Mr. Upman when unobserved by potential clients that he did not experience role-strain nor seek to distance his private self from his publicly performed occupational role. His intention was to gain authentication from all who encountered him, but since this could not be totally assured, he minimised potential discord by acting consistently - always in 'situational tone'. As Goffman notes:-

'The organisation of an encounter and the definition of the situation it provides turn on the conceptions the participants have concerning the identity of the participants and the identity of the social occasion of which the encounter is a part. These identities are the organisational hub of the encounter. Events which cause trouble do not merely add disruptive noise but often convey information that threatens to discredit or supplant the organising identities of the interaction' (Goffman 1972 p50 : emphasis added).
Mr. Upman's constructional ability appeared adequate to the task, since he gave no indication of uncertainty or distress and rarely received disruptive redefinitions from his co-performers. Private and public identities coalesced - personal and social identities were mutually supportive.

Whilst he appeared to negotiate social occasions with considerable success and to have his presentation of an occupational role ratified by those who observed it, he manifestly failed to translate this 'performance capital' into financial profit. The reason for such an inadequate return was his inability to utilise resources other than personal 'face'. His employees were not allowed to develop occupational skills or presentational subtleties, but confined to supportive roles. Business stability was not ensured or protected because 'appearance' was considered to be sufficient to attract the necessary flow of customers. Funeral directing is a business activity, and is ultimately more responsive to commercial considerations, such as cash reserves, necessary stock, ready availability, adequate labour and anticipation of market demand than the consolidation of a personal identity. Mr. Upman invested too heavily in the overt production of a moral career and undervalued the potential residing in practical accomplishments.

He demonstrates how every social encounter can be 'tapped' for ratification of a claimed social identity. Negotiation between participants is a characteristic of all social interaction, other than occasions in which coercion resolves contending definitions, but Mr. Upman presented himself so tenaciously that very little bargaining developed. He marketed himself as a successful funeral director, but failed to 'sell' funerals.

It might be argued that he was taken in by his own act, sincerely believing in the impression of reality that he was concerned to stage. To suggest that this was the case would be to posit an aspect of 'self' that was capable of being duped by another, somehow separate and distinctive, component of self. This could be a reference to the 'public' and 'private' aspects of self noted above, (which were not
dissimilar or in opposition in his case); or to his willingness to be cynical, that is to knowingly and willingly accept a false front. Goffman comments on such possibilities in the following manner:—

'(...) an individual may be taken in by his own act or be cynical about it. These extremes are something a little more than just the ends of a continuum. Each provides the individual with a position which has its own particular securities and defences (...)'
(Goffman 1969 p17)

It is aposite in Mr. Upman's case to interpret him through the words of Park, who Goffman quotes immediately following his own reflections on role performance:—

'It is no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role (...). It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.

(...) This mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves - the role we are striving to live up to - this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our nature'. (Park 1950 pp249-50).

We cannot deny that Mr. Upman, as with everyone else, has the potential for sincerity or for deception and cynicism and can utilise each resource to facilitate his role-performance. What is noted here, however, is that without knowing the inner recesses of his mind but judging him on the basis of his performances, (including linguistic subtleties, expressive gestures, postural messages as well as claimed intentions), his occupational role-performance is so well established that it is, as Park reflects, an integral part of his personality. It is not performed cynically nor 'with tongue in cheek', nor disparaged by recourse to role-distance.
The thread of 'proper' occupational behaviour ran through Mr. Upman's self-appraisal, as it did through so many of the accounts presented by funeral directors. It is fitting, therefore, to examine closely the concept of 'profession', as utilised by service workers to justify their occupational performance, and by those who would accord it a more precise and specialised definition. Mr. Upman, and others who feel the need to claim a particular style of moral commitment to their work, are rarely challenged to justify their claim. The following chapter examines the basis of their attachment to an ideology of 'professionalism' and contrasts the 'lay' approach to that proposed by academic analysts.
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402
CHAPTER SEVEN

FUNERAL DIRECTING AND PROFESSIONAL IDEOLOGY

PAGE CONTENTS

404 Introduction
407 The Impact of Work Roles on Social Identity
411 Funeral Directors and Work Roles
416 Functionalist and Conflict Models of 'Profession'
419 (A) The Functionalist Model
425 (B) A Conflict Model
434 Conclusion
436 Bibliography
FUNERAL DIRECTING AND PROFESSIONAL IDEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Funeral directors have been examined as social actors seeking status and profit from staging a funeral. Many have spoken of the difficulty they experience in reconciling what they regard as the competing claims of professionalism and commercialism. To present a professional-counselling approach to clients whilst seeking to profit from selling goods has proved discomforting. All occupations seek a suitable ideological framework in which their work will be given credibility, and 'profession' is the most prestigious and powerful of occupational ideologies. As this chapter will show, if professional 'status' is to be conclusively achieved an occupation must have sufficient economic power to enforce its entitlement.

Problems of definition surround the term 'profession' and in common usage it is notoriously imprecise. It is most frequently used as a claim to status whether or not there is a consensus regarding the prestige of the occupation. Larkin catches the problem attached to definition when he writes:

'If a 'profession' simply becomes what its members claim for it, the term loses any analytic force or prediction. On the other hand, a sociological definition which takes no account of lay perceptions can be equally invalid' (Larkin 1983 p 180)

Funeral directors use a lay definition but employ it as though it could be objectively validated. They fail to appreciate that any work autonomy they possess is not derived from a power to demarcate a legitimate sphere of influence, but from public support for the service they perform. (See Larkin below). They monopolise individual funeral skills but fail to control the overall context of development (Ibid p 182). They have cornered a section of the market for death-work and sought to disguise the relatively low level of skill required to perform it effectively. The division of labour in death work is unequally divided with the clergy, acting on behalf of an entrenched religious belief maintaining control over the defining or symbolic aspect, and
leaving the 'dirty' work to funeral directors. Funeral directors thereby occupy a position which no other group seeks to challenge or to occupy yet fulfil a task that carries a high degree of meaning for clients. They appear to be an exception to Freidson's analysis which claims that

'(...) it is possible to reserve the term profession for that form of occupational organisation which has at once gained for its members a labour monopoly and a place in the division of labour that is free of authority of others over their work'. (Freidson 1977 p 22)

Funeral directors have almost total control over their own work sphere, yet many manifestly do not have the prestige, status or power possessed by accredited professions, of which medicine is the defining case. They have not subordinated other occupations, gained state licensure, received public approbation or demonstrated a skill crucial to matters of great survival value.

However, as Larkin notes, Freidson's analysis contains an essentialism carried over from the trait theories whereby he over-emphasises the distinctive nature of professionalism, rather than analysing degrees of occupational control (Larkin 1983 p 90). It is for this reason that support is given in this study to Johnson's analysis which defines professionalism as but one example of occupational control produced in different social contexts. (Johnson 1972). He also places his behavioural explanation in an historical perspective, emphasising thereby a stage in the development of an occupation in which it comes to determine not only the control of the client relationship but the manner in which its services are to be made available.

Furthermore in British society, as in most industrialised societies, a wide distinction is made between hand and brain work which creates a structured specialisation of labour (Braverman 1974). Funeral work does not require a store of unusual knowledge nor analytic skills of any magnitude, whilst it does necessitate body-handling techniques of a
basically manual character. Funeral directors seek to conceal the large proportion of 'hand' work involved by emphasising the counselling and directing component of their work, and to exclude other occupations by 'taking on' all the official requirements attending a death. They seek thereby to control the consumers of their service rather than rival producers since there are none to challenge them (Ibid p 6).

For an occupation to gain wide recognition it must have been accorded value outside its purely narrow expertise (by state, public, specialist peers, etc), and thereby gained the right to legitimise its work area by 'closure', that is the power to exclude other occupations (Weber 1978). The most effective method of gaining 'legitimate' closure is to receive state registration through Parliament, although as Larkin notes, two other routes to public recognition are possible, namely, popular accord and royal charter (Ibid p 9 : emphasis added). Funeral directors have in fact received a wide measure of public accord and are the only occupation constantly entrusted with the care of the dead, an act of great significance. However the public willingness to support them rather than to seek alternatives is, on its own, insufficient to give them power to exclude competitors; and thereby forces them to be more concerned with every day commercial possibilities than with extending the range of their influence.

As Larson (1977) argues, an occupation must form 'organic' ties with a ruling class and become recognised as expert in defining a particular segment of social reality which corresponds with its social class culture if it is to achieve professional status (Larkin pl2). Funeral directors have not been able, legally, to exclude contenders for their work, but have usurped as far as possible the associated work of embalmers, wood polishers, coffin-makers, furnishers, carriage-masters, stone masons and, in certain administrative and organising capacities, even the clergy. The biggest and most successful funeral companies control every process from wood and chip-board manufacture to cemeteries and crematoria, leaving only plastic goods and limousines outside their immediate control.
They exchange a service for income but, unlike medicine or religion, they have no role in the overall management of particularly significant symbols. They have 'poached' from other occupations, e.g. stonemasonry, embalming and limousine-hire and have strengthened their influence by gaining entrepreneurial control over the entire funeral ceremony. Nevertheless, they cannot substantiate a claim to professional status except in the loosely defined, non-specific behavioural sense, namely to possess a client relationship of trust and service. This chapter discusses the power attached to 'professional' status and the occupational status of the funeral director's service role.

THE IMPACT OF WORK ROLES ON SOCIAL IDENTITY

Specially sensitive areas of life such as family and work exert a powerful influence on the construction of roles and the impact of family has been examined by Bott (1957); Parsons (1971); Leon (1969); Brown (1970); Esterson (1970); Bettelheim (1971); and McVicar (1979). It is, however, the consequence of work experience that is examined here and in particular the successful development of an occupational role. For example, the constant performance of a 'professional man' may lead to self-persuasion, whereby a funeral director becomes inwardly what he claims to be. His public performance is an outward reflection of the person he sees himself to be. This process is caught by Elms and Janis who write:

'(...) gradual change (occurs) whereby a person comes to accept, privately, the beliefs and value judgements that he has expressed publicly while playing the expected social role' (Quoted in Halmos 1970 p154).

As already noted, the social and occupational role played by directors is not merely 'expected' and thereby imposed on them; it is significantly their own creation and something to which they feel attached. Many respondents have described the importance of 'being' rather than 'acting as if' a director.
'Work' is obligated time - time regularly allocated to objectively rewarded tasks regarded as necessary for individual and group survival. The routine imposed by work helps to produce the time-structured aspect of Western social existence, and thereby shapes the consciousness of individuals from a very early age. This may be clearly seen when individuals are forced to withdraw from work-roles. Redundancy, unemployment, retirement or sickness, compel an individual to stand removed from the regular compulsion exercised by work. The central pre-occupations of society are no longer his to share. Concepts such as 'leisure' need to be reinterpreted, since the idea of 'choice' so central to leisure, only has real significance when contrasted to 'obligation'. The importance attached to work is well documented, and the obligations and expectations which influence the self-perceptions of people in work has been traced in many studies, notably by Wedderburn (1972); Goldthorpe (1968); Hollowell (1968); Sudnow (1967); Humphreys (1970); Tunstall (1969) and Ditton (1977). This study reinforces their findings concerning the influence that work exercises on a person's self-perceptions and social placement. Official agencies, such as the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, treat members of occupations as anonymous ciphers, whereas peers and kin place a member intimately by the type and style of work he performs. Because work is task-oriented, gradations of success or failure are closely tied to its accomplishment, and 'service' to others can be a highly motivating and financially rewarding orientation. Men in particular are work-oriented, since they are likely to spend twice the number of years at work as they do either growing old enough to perform it, or being relegated from it for being too old to accomplish it satisfactorily. The self-regard which the work identity creates can scarcely be over-rated, especially if the occupational role is difficult to sustain.

Writers such as Lewis and Maude (1952) and Halmos (1970) claim that there is a substantial and growing number of workers who value work 'per se', and regard it as a resource to be developed for the communal good; they feel that they can fulfil inner needs, rise to respected positions within the hierarchy of occupations, and contribute something of value to their society. The dominant attitude which such writers claim to
identify is that of 'service', which has spread from the 'established' professions to the caring occupations (such as social work, probation, community health-care and consumer protection agencies), and is moderating the potentially selfish orientations of all occupations which have personal relationships as their central concern. Established professionals are presented as models to be followed, as they are said to demonstrate the moral and social value of dedication to service. Nevertheless, expertise in a specific area of human knowledge is embodied in the stratified and hierarchical structure of contemporary society and reinforces the view that competitive specialisation is of a great social value to the development of the society. There is, therefore, the possibility of tension arising when service to the others has to be provided whilst simultaneously seeking individual profit. Nevertheless, many workers in 'professional' occupations are said to be motivated primarily by 'altruism', whereby a sense of 'calling' leads them to 'profess' their commitment to fair and impartial conduct. Their occupational behaviour, it is claimed, is an outward indication of their inner convictions.

The historical origins of the belief that there is an intrinsic value attached to work, irrespective of the gains to be made from performing it are difficult to identify. It may seem obvious to assert that man must work upon the natural environment if he is to survive and multiply. However, if survival is a necessary cause for sustained physical activity, it is not a sufficient cause to explain the ordered, rational and ideological developments which have come to control its performance. Certainly it can be argued that a belief in monotheistic design, whereby a personal God decides the fate of each individual member of the human race has influenced Judeo-Christian appraisal of work and its intrinsic value. Specific evaluation of work and its 'dignity' was not an idea unique to Christianity, but the development of a Protestant asceticism produced a constant reinforcement of 'laudatory work'. Disinclination to work was regarded as a fall from the state of grace ('Works of the Puritan Divines' 1845-8, p319 and 'Christian Directory' I, p380).

Weber makes a claim that,
'(...) the rational conduct of life on the basis of the idea of the calling, thus has its origins(...) in the spirit of Christian asceticism(...) which stripped work of all its charms in this world, (...) Work in a calling as such is the will of God'.
(Runciman 1978, p169, p168)

He argues that the present impersonality of labour, its joylessness and pointlessness for many individuals, has been hallowed by religion. Now capitalism is in the saddle and can compel labour without offering reward in the next world.

The religious idea of a 'calling' has had profound consequences for contemporary occupational behaviour. Occupations claiming 'professionalism' as a distinguished characteristic of their work, frequently lay claim (or apologists do so on their behalf) to a moral virtue which distinguishes them from other occupations. They no longer relate their performance to divine revelation or direction, but they present their work in a framework of ethical service and conscientious performance which contains echoes of the Christian ethic (as seen by Weber). The word 'profession' has become part of everyday language with overtones of elite superiority and moral commitment to specialist service. Remarkable claims have been made for the social value of such occupations, and according to Durkheim, they provide the most suitable model for aspiring the service occupations to copy. He believes they will provide the necessary combinations of moral commitment and technical expertise which modern industrial societies require (Durkheim in Mauss, 1900: Halmos 1970). They reflect, in clear and unambiguous terms, the ideology of work as a necessary virtue. By linking dedication, specialism and altruism to the manner in which they perform their work, they stand as direct descendants of the religious asceticism which Weber claims imbued work with decisive moral overtones. Aspiring funeral directors, therefore, have powerful role models to emulate.
'Gentlemanly conduct' has come to be seen by many directors, as the outward manifestation of an inner dedication to conscientious work, and a suitable method of resolving any client uncertainty that may exist concerning the role of the director. As noted earlier (Chapter 1), Habenstein's study in the United States of America led him to similar conclusions (Habenstein 1954), that is, that service occupations seek to resolve occupational ambiguity by claiming to possess a gentlemanly involvement with their clients, which allows them the status of 'professional'. Courtesy, tact, deference to need and anticipation of wants are relevant attributes to display if client uncertainty is to be reduced. Such behaviour has particular relevance in Britain where funeral directors have tried for over 70 years to achieve a professional status.

In the United States of America, studies also show an uncertainty in the occupation over their dual role as commercial businessmen and professional counsellor (Bowman 1954; Crouch 1971; Pine 1975; Wood 1977). Furthermore, the clergy have criticised directors for usurping the Church's command of funeral ceremony, and have rejected directors' claims to possess an equal status. (These conclusions were drawn from responses to a questionnaire on conflict between clergymen and funeral directors produced by Robert Fulton in 1960. There was a 35% return from the clergymen who were questioned. No funeral directors were included!)

Role-conflict is mentioned in all the American studies mentioned above and has been identified as a common characteristic among British directors in this study. Role-conflict in directors may be derived from their attempt to seek commercial profit from arranging a funeral - a ceremony which is widely regarded as 'unsuitable' for inclusion in profit-seeking commercialism. Furthermore, whilst other occupations have bodies as their focus of attention, only funeral directors seek to obtain dead bodies in order to process them, exhibit them and to gain profit from their handiwork. In addition, through the presentation of appropriate clothing, deportment, speech and action, they resemble
mourners but are paid to appear so. Actual mourners are accorded a special status - they can break conventional rules of behaviour due to grief and social dislocation. To be paid to act as a mourner does not fit easily with the contemporary regard for spontaneous and natural response to death.

From conversations with many funeral workers, bereaved and mourners, it would appear that funeral directors are objects of curiosity and discomfort because they handle that which others consciously avoid. In reality, most directors do not regularly handle the dead. That task is given to their employees and involves not only little skill, but forms only a small part of their work. Nevertheless, it is of sufficient importance to 'colour' the occupation as a whole.

Widespread and regular observation of funerals and funeral premises shows that sombre premises display only certain symbolic items for example urns for flowers but not coffins for bodies. Decorous service, formal clothing and restrained salesmanship signals to prospective customers that a 'gentlemanly' service is being offered. Front-office talk gives a presumption that what is being accomplished out of sight includes specialisms of an unusual and sophisticated kind, but whether they are connected with business-like efficiency or profession-like ethics is left vague by the funeral directors. The occupation thereby presents a dual image to clients, that of business-professional, and constructs for itself a problem of self-identity. It is not surprising that the most widely known books on the occupation have been of a highly critical nature, since secrecy or hypocrisy appear to be the characteristics of many funeral directors (Waugh 1948, Mitford 1963). There have been very few attempts to penetrate the occupation, and the sociologists who have done so have been confined to the United States of America, for example:- R. Habenstein (1954); V. Pine (1975); R. Fulton (1960); L. Bowman (1954); J. Wood (1971); B. Crouch (1971), R. Turner and C. Edgley (1976).

An analysis of the public image of the funeral director based on case material drawn from the respondents cited in this study, from detailed
conversation with funeral participants, and from content analysis of current literature indicates, in the writer's judgement, a profound ambivalence between director and client and this view is supported by Habenstein's study (1954). He found that ambivalence was weakly developed in the relation of a specific client to his funeral director, but strongly in evidence on the public image of the funeral director as an occupational category (Habenstein, ibid; p 244). Since there is no inherent or essential reason why funeral directors should be regarded negatively, or ambivalently at best, the reason must be sought in social terms, not psychological. Habenstein believes that the ambivalence between potential client and the occupation can be explained by the opposition between the traditional prescriptions enforced by the Christian religion, and the currently popular aesthetic of death. The Christian prescription was for reverent, personal involvement in the care of the dead body but Americans delegate the task to a secular functionary. The funeral director responds to the current aesthetic by hiding the dead from the living, and then presenting the dead body within a setting of beauty, to mask the corruption by death. Directors respond to this situation, he claims, by refusing to accept that there is a significant, culturally-based, negative attitude toward them as a group, but only an understandable criticism directed to a 'few rotten apples in the barrel'. To reduce even this level of dislike, directors concentrate their efforts on developing the personal service aspect of their 'calling'. The social basis for ambivalence, noted by Habenstein, lies in the fact that traditionally the dead should be treated reverently and personally yet 'the current popular aesthetic of death makes for the alienation of the dead' (Habenstein Ibid p244).

From the analysis of directors and clients studied in the present work, ambivalence is seen to be generated as a consequence of:-

(i) directors uncertainty over their 'correct' role - business man or professional counsellor;

(ii) directors secular location within a manifestly Christian ceremony;

(iii) personal responsibility for the dead body being replaced with hired impersonal servicing;
(iv) directors accepting responsibility for the dead body yet distancing themselves from actual body-handling tasks;
(v) the distaste, disgust, fear or loathing relating to a cadaver becoming attached to the director who handles it but who seeks to maintain a normal business relationship with clients.

Any of these circumstances, alone or in combination one with another, create polarising attitudes and uncertainty over what response is circumstantially 'proper'.

'AMBIVALENCE' refers to the existence of parallel qualities or meanings and in the case of death work, would relate to the conflicting meanings inherent to funeral directing. This may be likened to an expression of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962) whereby attitudinal distancing from death whilst behaviourally associating with the caretaker of the dead, requires that the client places the funeral director positively, to allow a manageable social interaction. The cost of resolving the tension is unease. Funeral directors seeks to bridge the sacred-secular, symbolic-utilitarian, businessman-counsellor meanings available to define their occupational role. The case studies available in this research show that very many fail to do so.

From other studies, notably Mitford, (1963), it would appear that American directors have interpreted their 'service' potential primarily in terms of 'goods' which are now widely regarded as both unnecessary and overpriced (large elaborate caskets with interior sprung mattresses, soft lighting, hidden tape records producing 'appropriate' music, underclothing, coiffeurs and 'cosmeticising'). The consequence has been to further distance the public and to move many clients from ambivalence to hostility. Many States have therefore introduced controlling legislation. As Mitford quotes:-

'The focus of the buyer's interest must be the casket, vault, clothing, furnishing, funeral cars, etc. - the only tangible evidence of how much has been invested in the funeral - the only real status symbol associated with a funeral service.' (From the 'National Funeral Service Journal' in Mitford, 1963, p.22)
Consequently, she suggests, 'if the undertaker fails to move in and strike while the iron is hot, the opportunity is literally lost and gone for ever'. They have invested heavily in the consumer market but have failed to gain the respectable status they seek. In contrast to their over-commercialism, Mitford finds the English scene to be far more prosaic, traditional, and for the most part, safe from innovation. She did not, however, devote sufficient time to the pattern of development in England, to be aware of the similar uncertainties which beset the occupation here. The evidence provided in this study supports her view that innovative techniques have not been widely introduced by English directors but where they have been positively presented they have produced increased profits.

Support for Habenstein's findings of ambivalence between director and client has been given by a large number of respondents in the present research. Habenstein identifies it as a consequence of opposition between traditional practices and current aesthetics, in which the personal involvement of the bereaved is replaced with the impersonal control of the director. In this view the Christian tradition is opposed by a current secularity.

This study argues that the open secularity of funerals has been in evidence since the early 19th century, when undertakers first assumed responsibility for the funeral ceremonies, and that it is the present director's own uncertainty over his appropriate role that has been instrumental in creating the ambivalence that both actors and observer have noted. In Britain, directors have produced an uneasy combination of gentlemanly conduct, business commercialism and professional counselling because they have failed to reconcile the competing claims of each position. Each location may be said to be a manifestation of a 'secular' orientation, and thereby to give support to Habenstein's explanation. In Britain, directors also seek to blame the frequently expressed negative public attitude on the performance of a few 'rotten apples' who tarnish the reputation of the majority, (as noted by Habenstein in America).
Nevertheless, the conclusion reached in this study is that it is not secular control of the ceremony which is the crucial issue, but the failure of funeral directors to reconcile the competing claims of commercialism and professionalism. Furthermore, the uncertainty is confounded by their inability, or refusal, to acknowledge that the professional status they seek is unobtainable as a consequence of their inherent occupational weakness. Their position is further weakened by their willingness to confuse gentlemanly conduct (one aspect of the 'culture' created by a 'profession') with occupational power.

Funeral directors have convinced the public that they are essential for the production of a funeral (a totally false claim) and that as a consequence, they have a right to claim a substantially higher status than they receive at present. Nevertheless, their premises are shop-like and their charges inflate the cost of a funeral. Their uniform suggests that a formal authority rests with them and their attitudes express paternalistic control. They work publicly in places sanctified by religion whilst remaining secular in orientation. It is to overcome such tensions that many resort to an uncritical acceptance of a professional model without sufficient appreciation of its consequences. Directors have the right to compose a funeral, but collectively, they have been unable to create a role which convinces them of their authenticity. A 'professional' status, many believe, would allay their self-doubts.

FUNCTIONALIST AND CONFLICT MODELS OF 'PROFESSION'

The literature on this topic is immense, and to select the most relevant is a difficult task. Among those writers who have influenced this study are:

Abel's writing is to be highly commended, and is critical of those models which employ functionalist or trait models. I am indebted to him for opening up a line of investigation which has been followed throughout this chapter.

**Firstly**, he claims that they consistently employ a functionalist model which fails to locate or explain professions in any other way than that constructed by the professions themselves, ('professional ideology cloaked in value-neutral garb').

**Secondly**, they persist in stressing the unique character of the professions, thereby disregarding the extent to which they share similar characteristics with all occupations.

**Thirdly**, they lack an historical perspective and thereby fail to analyse the competitive economic system which fostered their growth, and within which they obtained significance.

His criticisms are valid, because within the majority of studies professions are regarded and presented as being exceptional occupations. Their work is said to be vital to the welfare of society because it provides answers to complex questions. Consequently, it is claimed that they possess a special kind of knowledge which cannot be obtained elsewhere. The dedication with which they serve their society is rewarded by high status and economic security. Their work-role emphasises the value to society of elite leadership, of work autonomy, and of occupational specialism. A combination of public support and State recognition ensures that they retain the freedom to decide what is in the best interests of the public, and then to provide it.

These are large claims to make on behalf of a few select occupations, but within the functionalist literature they are developed further, to include the superior qualities said to be possessed by the practitioners within them. Many studies have constructed a table of qualities or 'traits' by which 'professional' people may be recognised, and which collectively serve to identify the occupation. (Millerson 1964) Foremost
among them are intellectual excellence, commitment or dedication to altruistic public service and moral integrity. In such studies, social function and individual excellence are combined to 'predict' the value of personal groups.

However, Abel's condemnation of such uncritical assumptions, reflects the growing unwillingness of sociologists to accept them. In the following pages the weakness of the functionalist model is exposed and a conflict model of occupational stratification is proposed. Those funeral directors who aspire to 'professional' status are motivated by an implicit acceptance of a functionalist model.

The challenge to the functionalists starts from a presumption that 'power' should be the focus of attention not 'social function'. 'Power' is an abstract concept, a label to account for the observable differences in people's social behaviour. It has two dimensions: the first is the freedom to act as one wishes independently of others' wishes, whilst the second is the ability to control the actions of others irrespective of their opposition. Essentially, it is 'the ability of the holder to exact the compliance or obedience of other individuals to his will on whatever basis' (Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, p490). Since few are strong enough to maintain power constantly, there arises a need to legitimise the power that has been gained, and to convert it to 'authority' and it is precisely this transformation that the privileged occupations have achieved. The functionalist model stresses harmony of interests and consensual goals, and thereby minimises the struggle between contending groups. In contrast, a conflict model challenges the prior assumptions about 'social need', 'altruism' and 'consensus' and seeks, instead, to examine the historical development of occupational power. Both models agree on the dominant position achieved by 'professional' groups - each seeks to provide an explanation of their success from a different starting point.
The 'essential' quality of occupational groups is outlined by Durkheim who wrote:

A nation can be maintained only if between State and the Individual there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups(...) occupational groups are suited to fill this role, and that is their destiny. (Durkheim, 1935, p28).

He was arguing from the family as the paradigmatic case, in which both organic solidarity and the division of labour were harmoniously fused, and suggesting that occupational groups should develop a family-like form, but on a larger scale, and thereby develop cohesion between individual and the State. They were to be the modern counterparts of Roman Collegia and Medieval Guilds, providing a moral community, with specialised service and altruistic endeavour. Their social 'function' was to counter anomic induced by industrial fragmentation - 'to provide a code of moral conduct and practice in place of unrestrained economic interest' (Elliot, ibid, p7).

In this manner the 'needs' of the social system are satisfactorily met. (However, these supposed needs may not be met; may not be genuine needs at all because they do not act on the actual, rather than the supposed, social situation; or they may be met by different mechanisms). The degree of 'fit' between professional service and the needs of society has been examined by Goode (1961) who claims that industrial life is characterised by professional skills, which are provided by a 'community within a community'. The inner (professional) community shares common status, values, identity and language even though it has no physical location. By careful selection and socialisation of intake and by constructing a powerful organisation to control its affairs, it succeeds in exercising complete internal social control, and ensures that the occupation's values are in tune with the wider community values. He further argues that client choice is a basic form of social control, and therefore the profession knows that if it fails to keep within the
consensual values of society, others will force it to do so. Therefore
the public gives the professional community the right to socially
reproduce the next generation of specialists, and the professionals
feed-back to the public their own ('professional') method of judging
expert performances. Consequently, if the public have confidence in the
skill of the professionals, they will also have faith in their ability
to assess quality and to keep their own house in good order.

What Goode is actually illustrating is the legitimate power (i.e.
authority) that professions have gained, whereby they control their own
collective performance and that of the public they supposedly 'serve'.
This belief (in the moral leadership of certain groups) is not new, and
was clearly expressed by Beverley Thompson who, in 1875, wrote:

The importance of the professions can hardly be overrated, they
form the head of the great English middle-class(...) keep up to the
mark its standards of morality and direct its intelligence. (Quoted
in Reader, 1966).

As a consequence of their example there has been a rapid increase in the
number of occupations claiming professional status, according to Reader,
who tries to show this by examining the Census returns from 1851 to 1911
and abstracting from them seventeen occupations which he labels as
'professions'. He shows as much as a five-fold increase in some of them,
and claims this to be a consequence of the spread of professional ethics
throughout society. He chose to include teachers, actors, musicians,
midwives and authors within his list, thereby unwittingly reinforcing
the fears of Lewis and Maude who, whilst emphasising the functional
importance of professions, believe that any increase in numbers '(...)
may impair the status of the 'senior' profession by dilution', leading
to their economic disadvantage and the erosion of their long-standing
record of public service (Lewis and Maude, 1952).

It is, however, to Halmos (1970, p27) that we must turn for the
strongest support for the professions in recent years. He argues that
the moral virtues of professionalism are beneficial for the entire
society, and claims that 'the process of professionalisation performs a function not only for the intellectual and the professional individual, but also for society'. He accepts William Goode's definition of the professions, which identifies prolonged specialised training in abstract knowledge and a collective orientation, as the two significant factors (Goode, 1961). Halmos then claims that:

'To be a professional is to have one's moral conflicts about one's duties and ambitions eased, even solved, by a code of conduct which clothes the all-too-human self-seeking in robes of self-denying dignity and mobility. For society professionalisation does the job of socialising the privateering, and potentially anarchic intellectuals(...) the intellectual is made to cultivate his personal integrity in serving his fellow men.' (Halmos, 1970, p27)

Therefore, by professionalising elites, a new form of qualified leadership is formed.

His central suggestion is that we should distinguish between the impersonal and the personal service professions, because only the latter seek to bring about changes in the body or the personality of the client, e.g. health, education and welfare services. From them is spreading the counselling ideology which will eventually permeate the total society via the elites who make it manifest. He is claiming that a moral reformation of leadership will develop, emanating from the moral change that will sweep through all professions who practice personal service - there will emerge 'a major change in the moral climate of society as a whole' (Halmos, 1970, p25).

It is to be doubted if those without power in society are quite so sanguine about the type of moral leadership and counselling they receive. The elites within law, medicine and social services have been frequently criticised for exploiting many of those they are supposed to serve by Royal Commissions, Committees of Enquiry and House of Commons Select Committees.
The mystique surrounding 'professional' behaviour is difficult to penetrate without the critic appearing to be churlish or jealous, because the ideology of selfless service is so widely accepted. Goffman, for example, appears to underestimate the inequalities of power that exist between client and specialist when he writes:

'(...) ideally, there is a double voluntarism to the relationship, as with persons living in sin, and a limit to the reasonable complaint that either party can make about the relationship while remaining in it. Expert servicing expresses mutual respect between client and server, and is designed to be a gentlemanly process'.

(Goffman, 1968, p6, p293 : Emphasis added).

It is unrealistic to suppose that professional and client have equal power to determine the outcome of a business transaction. Deliberately, or due to their familiarity with the processes involved, both established and aspiring professionals can manipulate the interaction to their advantage. The uninformed client must, of necessity, trust that the expert has skill and integrity, and can find redress for incompetence difficult or impossible. Moreover, he is not in a position to make a detailed assessment of the service he is receiving, and consequently the 'designing' potential that Goffman refers to is not equally distributed. Inequality of power is the basis of the relationship, and is constantly underplayed in functionalist models.

Halmos argues that the very notion of personality may be defined as a system of roles learnt by an individual (ibid, pl49) and he stresses that learning the roles and entering into the social relationships within which they have meaning, is a simultaneous process. Some role performances come to dominate others, and foremost among such primary roles are those associated with work. This is especially true for professionals, he claims:

'The work life invades the after-work life and the sharp demarcation between the work hours and the leisure hours disappears. To the professional person his work becomes his life.'
Hence the act of embarking on a professional career is similar in some respects to entering a religious order.' (Halmos, 1970, p152).

This is a reinforcement of the idea of a 'calling' which tends to surface regularly in all discussions of professions - a tacit assumption that some people have the particular qualities necessary for a life of service to others, even though such traits may need to be trained before they can be used effectively.

Since many members of the public regard death-work with repugnance, funeral directing is a role which must be played with a care and circumspection that gradually becomes a fixed component of the role. It is appropriate for funeral directors to adopt a functionalist model of a 'profession' albeit unknowingly, since it positively reinforces a desirable work identity. By developing the techniques which lead to specialisation, and by practising them in a gentlemanly way, why should they not claim a degree of professionalism which unites them in attitude, if not in status, to the existing elite occupations? All occupations seek a 'frame' within which to locate their work and a functionalist model provides a comprehensive work ideology within which funeral directors can feel safe. The occupations on which they model themselves, however, have had a long historical development and this time has been used to construct associations, e.g. collective power. By developing 'collegiate control' (Johnson, 1972) they can produce a uniform marketable commodity, a situation which funeral directors try to achieve through open competition.

The privileged occupations have achieved their status because they have always operated in areas of potential social tension where decisions taken have considerable impact on those involved. In pre-industrial Britain, negotiation of such problems was primarily achieved by gentlemen servicing gentlemen, and specialists derived their high status not necessarily from the training they may have received in pupilage, but from having a close contact with a clientele drawn from the court and the nobility. The image of the 'specialist' has developed from the historical centrality of the Church, and its emphasis on 'calling' as
noted earlier. The dedication to public service so essential for the ecclesiastic experience, required that a common code of conduct be developed to bind individual members into a close community of shared values - in effect an 'association'.

Geoffrey Millerson (1964), identified four different types of organisational control exercised by work groups who claimed professional status:

i) Prestige Associations - such as the Royal Society;

ii) Study Association - such as the Medical Association of London;

iii) Occupational Associations - such as the British Medical Association;

iv) Qualifying Associations - such as the Royal College of Physicians.

He confines his book to a close study of the Qualifying Associations and emphasises that during the last one hundred and fifty years they have developed new forms of occupational government in order to exert control over the rapid growth in technical service. He concludes by claiming 'Our society benefits by their presence' (ibid, p220). More usefully, as far as this assessment of a functionalist model is concerned, he details twenty-one major works which focus attention on professional characteristics or 'traits' in which he identifies fourteen recurring common elements. No fewer than eight of these elements contain references to moral characteristics, such as loyalty, impartiality, public service, code of conduct and altruism.

Almost without exception, the specialist models using a 'social function' perspective, provide an inventory of desirable traits said to be possessed by members of the professions. Such 'traits' closely resemble the self-evaluations provided by the professionals themselves, and such self-commendation is a common resource of those funeral
directors who are professionally oriented, and who seek a more privileged social position than they at present occupy.

(B) A CONFLICT MODEL

Privilege is one aspect of social inequality and professions are an integral part of the dominant elites of society. I am indebted to the work of Portwood and Fielding who, in recent work, have clearly outlined a persuasive argument on this subject, focusing upon lawyers, clergy, doctors, accountants and university teachers (Portwood and Fielding, 1981). Their work is valuable because it identifies an historical process which connects pre-industrial societies with industrially developed societies. They explain:

an unresolved dialectic, i.e. where a succeeding phase of social development retains characteristics and value of a previous phase as central, rather than residual features of the new one, e.g. the feudal notion of gentleman within British capitalist society.

Therefore, professionals emphasise the gentlemanly nature of their specialist skills and cannot be expected to make criticisms of a social formation of which they form such an integral part. Moreover, it will be seen that they do not gain their privileged position purely as a logical outcome of the administrative role they play in capitalist society, 'Specifically, professions in England today are expected to be both experts and gentlemen - they are products of the past as they are of the present' (ibid). Age, tradition and closure (barring the unqualified) have ensured that patterns of privilege have developed for a few specific occupations, who not only serve predominantly a middle-class and upper-class clientele, but support the ideology of capitalism whilst doing so. Privilege, they claim, is multi-faceted, and to attain it a long and complicated process must be negotiated, whereby wealth, status and power are gained from patrons, other elites, Government agencies and the State.
In essence, therefore, professionals are not simply 'servants of power' but also powerholders themselves. In this way 'professional organisations and ideology are a cornerstone of general social inequality' (ibid).

There is, however, a reverse side to this particular coin of privilege. All contenders for power will be criticised by some of those they dominate, and will be misunderstood by those who only view them from afar. Unfavourable stereotypes develop as a consequence, and are difficult to unseat. The secure professions, therefore are those who can contain any critical casting within an overall production of respectability. Aspiring occupations are those whose credibility cannot yet sustain a hold in the face of doubt. Funeral directors carry with them the negative stereotypes constructed during their artisan origins, and lack an essential specialisation - anyone could do their work without complex training. Professional people are expected to bring their own creative abilities into their work situation, using the existing work norms as a point of departure. Funeral work in Britain does not encompass cosmeticising nor 'waking', and funeral directors have a very limited area within which to demonstrate 'creativity'. 'Gentlemanly' attitudes however can impress clients and does not require a particularly creative skill.

'Professions', therefore, are those occupations which can successfully delineate the boundary between themselves and their clients, and can manipulate the exchange between both sides to the encounter, even when common stereotypes could hinder their performance. But how do professionals with presumed autonomy resist lay encroachment on their privilege? Braude offers an explanation which starts from the special position occupied by professions in the division of labour whereby they are rated highly due to their technical, social and moral standing. (Braude, 1961, 39, pp297-301). He suggests that the moral division of labour deals with who can do what to whom, at what time, and how severely. Therefore, each speciality has a licence to perform specific tasks which others are denied. While legitimating a person's rights to perform specific tasks, a licence also gives a person permission to
deviate - he can legally do what a layman could not. (Braude, 1961). A specialist, therefore, may deviate from social expectation of normal behaviour, so that what was improper before licencing is quite proper now.

Braude develops this further, when he says that once a licence has been gained by a specialist, he may then tell others how to perform. He now has a mandate which implies:

the right of the profession to structure its role performance and, inferentially, the reciprocal performance of the layman. Therefore, by effectively defining the nature of the interaction in the work situation, the specialist insures its own autonomy, and, to the degree that it is effective, legitimates its mandate in the process. (Braude, 1961).

In his view, the term 'profession' should be defined in dynamic terms, as a consequence of the degree to which the occupation can hold its relationship with its clients. Funeral directors have some attributes of a profession, as defined by Braude, but lack the elite occupational status and licence which he claims are essential prerequisites. They aspire to privileged status but lack the technical, social and moral standing Braude regards as essential before a claim can be substantiated.

To regard the professional as a deviant case is a valuable contribution to the conflict model of 'profession'. Professions are deviant because they possess occupational power denied to others, and this power has been given to them by the State, on behalf of the clients on whom it will be practised. There is no logical basis for drawing a qualitative distinction between professions and other occupations, they are to be distinguished by the degree to which they develop occupational autonomy (see Abel, above).

Once a privileged position has been gained, professional occupations seek to extend their mandate, as a buttress against future challenges.
McKinley (1973) supports this contention when he neatly juxtaposes Parsons' claim that:

(...)

professional authority is characterised by specificity of function(...) and is always limited to a particular 'field' of knowledge and skill. (Parsons, 1954, p38)

with Hughes' comment:

Professions(...) perhaps more than any other kind of occupations, claim a legal, moral and intellectual mandate (and) (...) they collectively presume to tell society what is good or right for the individual and the society at large(...) indeed they set the very terms in which people think about specific topics. (Hughes, 1955, p79 : emphasis added)

The extension of an occupation's authority can be judged by the degree to which its collective pronouncement on a wide variety of issues are regarded as authoritative and

by becoming a gatekeeper to what is valued, the professional gains the additional sanction of being able to make taking his advice a prerequisite for obtaining a good or a service valued independently of his service. (Friedson, 1970, p117).

One method of achieving dominance is to use 'mystification' techniques, whereby client uncertainty is manipulated and the wisdom of the specialist reinforced. For example, by use of formalities, argot, specialist division of labour, bureaucratic procedures, claims to esoteric knowledge, use of archaic uniform, titles or rank, and distinctive places of work, the client is manoeuvred into a position of deference based on ignorance.

The central position that funeral directing occupies within the social activities surrounding death, provides its members with such manipulative possibilities, but they are strictly limited, in effect.
They do not hold the entrance to new experiences, nor can they define future behaviour for clients. The mystification potential available to them is limited in time, location and range, both by the style of the ritual they present, and by the boundaries set to their influence by the well-established service occupations of Law, Medicine and Religion. Their secluded work-places provide the one resource for exploiting clients' credulity.

It is now appropriate to finally dispose of the functional myth that professions perform a unique function, by considering precisely how they have arrived at their present eminence. To this end the analysis provided by Johnson and Larson will be used: Johnson because he believes that professionalism is a form of collegiate control which is but one way of exercising occupational influence; Larson because she stands functionalism upside-down and claims that professionals create the demand for their services and then determine the manner in which those demands shall be met (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977).

Midway through his book, Johnson deals with the fact that dependence upon the skill of others has the effect of reducing the common area of shared experience and knowledge, and of increasing social distance, which creates a structure of uncertainty. This is the basis of the tension which exists in the relationship between producer and consumer, and the power relationship between them will determine whether uncertainty will be reduced at the expense of producer or consumer. Because some occupations are associated with particularly acute problems of uncertainty, where client judgement is particularly ineffective, they involve social relationships of great potential tension. This is not so for all groups in society, nor is it the case that where services are required, all such services will be equally valued. Therefore, those occupations which are associated with peculiarly acute tensions, such as Law, Medicine, Religion, Accountancy and Social Work, have given rise to a number of institutionalised forms of control which, he claims, are historically identifiable. They are:
In which the producer defines the needs of the consumer and the manner in which these needs are catered for. This type of control he terms Collegiate and was exemplified by Guilds in medieval Europe, and by Professionalism in contemporary Britain.

In which the consumer defines his own needs and the manner in which they are to be met. This type of control he terms oligarchic or corporate Patronage.

In which a third party mediates in the relationship between producer and consumer, defining both the needs and the manner in which the needs are to be met. This Mediative type can be seen in operation in Capitalism or State control of the interaction.

It will be seen, therefore, that Johnson regards professionalism as a peculiar type of occupational control, not as an expression of the inherent nature of particular occupations. This leads to the analysis of 'a profession' not as an occupation but a means of controlling an occupation, and to recognising 'professionalisation' as an historically specific process which some occupations have undergone at a particular time, rather than a process which certain occupations may always be expected to undergo because of their 'essential' qualities (Johnson, 1972, p45). Each form of control is an attempt to regulate the producer-consumer relationship.

The evidence presented in earlier chapters of this study shows that those funeral directors who seek higher occupational status believe they can obtain it through a form of 'collegiate control', without realising that they do not possess sufficient power over the producer-consumer relationship to be able to achieve it. As Johnson writes:

(...)professionalism developed in Britain(...) in association with the rise in power of an urban middle-class which provided an expanding market for various services based largely on individual needs - and also provided recruits for the growing ranks of professionals. Under professionalism, the producer-consumer
relationship is initiated by the client and terminated by the
professional. Consumer choice is weakened under such conditions,
and made ineffective by virtue of the consumer's heterogeneity and
individualisation. Professionalism is associated with a homogenous
occupational community (and this) is associated with a relatively
low degree of specialisation within the occupation, and by
recruitment from similar backgrounds. (ibid, p53)

It is a superficial understanding of these conditions that misleads
funeral directors to believe that if they act collectively they will
create an occupational government capable of reflecting the
'professional' way of life they believe they already exhibit. As Johnson
makes clear, the pervasiveness of the ideology is not indicative of the
extent of professionalism.

Finally it is the Marxist perspective developed by Larson that provides
the most sustained critique of privileged occupations (Larson, 1977).
Starting from Polanyi's examination of the great economic and social
transformation of the nineteenth century, she traces the rise of
occupations seeking to erect 'monopolies of competence' within the
competitive market. (Polanyi, 1957).

She identifies, as Bowen notes (Bowen, 14.7.78) two historical
processes:

1 Certain occupations organise to regulate competition for services
during periods of active extension of markets;

2 Organised middle-class occupations subsequently embark upon a
collective conquest for status.

The outcome of these two processes is the establishment of the link
between occupational elitism and the class structure. In this way, she
claims, 'professionalism' becomes an instrument of social stratification
in market societies. The ideologies used by privileged occupations to
gain high collective mobility are firstly: to convince the public and

431
State agencies that its members possess the knowledge and skills necessary to provide a standard commodity that it needs and is unavailable elsewhere; and secondly: to standardise the production of the producers. She is arguing, therefore, that creating professional markets requires establishing social credit within the broader social structure which shapes the social need for a given service.

Obviously the educative and socialising techniques available to specialist occupations are vital ingredients in transforming neophytes into practised performers. It is in this vital area of inducing new recruits to accept the economic and social sacrifices of training that the funeral occupation signally fails; it cannot produce a standardised funeral director. Larson develops her central theme in the following words:

'Professionalisation is thus an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources - special knowledge and skills - into another - social and economic rewards. To maintain scarcity implies a tendency to monopoly: monopoly of expertise in the market, monopoly of status in a system of stratification'. (ibid, p17)

She emphasises the Marxist theory of value by arguing that professionals must be adequately socialised so as to provide recognisably distinct services for exchange on the professional market. The 'free' professions e.g. Law and Medicine, were freed from status restraints by the capitalist market system, and were not exploited because they were not subjected to the capitalist relations of production through which surplus value is extracted. They were 'unproductive', she claims, because their services were available to workers and capitalists alike and did not produce surplus value. (When employed by large organisations they do become exploited and do generate a surplus value).

In concluding this brief selection from Larson, I wish to focus on the most direct rebuttal of the functionalist analysis. She shows, through historical example drawn from England and the U.S.A., how professions actively foster the needs that only they can fulfill, in pursuit of
narrowly defined self-interest. They have moved from fulfilling a predominantly economic function - that of organising a linkage between education and the market place - to a predominantly ideological one - justifying inequality of status and restriction of access in the occupational order (Larson, ibid, p18).

She has done what Abel claimed was necessary, challenged the whole basis on which most studies of professions were formulated. She shows how they have developed historically, in competition with other occupations of similar capabilities, utilising the concept of public service as a justification for seeking a privileged position.

A measure of their success in this venture can be seen in the widespread belief that professionals should enjoy certain 'goods' (money, status, autonomy, privilege) not enjoyed by most other workers. The ideology which sustains the professionals in their favoured position is widespread throughout contemporary society. 'The key elements can be identified as individualism, elitism and a psychology of entitlement' which combine to produce a self-image which motivates individuals and groups (Clark, 1981, p92-106). Consequently, virtuosity of performance is delighted in by able specialists, and technique and style are highly appreciated by the cognoscenti.

Service to mankind can become morally uplifting and can easily develop a feeling of philanthropy. Furthermore, the self-discipline and lengthy education can come to be regarded as elements of credentialising which deserve special rewards. Therefore, for privilege to be maximally impressive and effective, it must be accompanied by symbols of status (which) the successful professional has the right to expect and enjoy, not as something pleasant, but as an essential part of respectable professional stature. (ibid, p99).
CONCLUSION

The evidence provided by directors (presented in chapters 3, 5 & 6), indicates the degree of role-conflict that many directors experience. It is the writer's opinion that sufficient evidence is available in contemporary literature, mass-media reporting and client recounting to argue that the occupation collectively is perceived by the public to be both necessary but distasteful; obligatory but unwanted. Directors who themselves did not experience client ambiguity nevertheless acknowledged its widespread existence and sought to explain or justify it. Habenstein's study in America (1962) produced similar findings and explained the client-director ambiguity as a consequence of the conflict between traditional Christian expectations and current secular practice. This study identifies the ambiguity as a consequence of two separate but interconnected situations. The first is the public's unwillingness to regard a funeral ceremony as merely a vehicle for commercial profit. The second is the attempt by directors to resolve the difficulties associated with the commercialisation of the funeral by a claim to professional service. The tension they experience in attempting to reconcile contradictory practices (as they perceive them to be), creates uncertainty for them and for their audience.

They use the word 'profession' to refer to the particular personal qualities possessed by those, including themselves, who provide a special occupational service. In claiming a 'professionalism' for the funeral service, they develop a style of performance and a self-idealisation that goes some way to resolving the contradictions they perceive between service and profit. Superficially this appears to be a harmless practice since it can unite director and client in a pattern of assured occupational behaviour. The consequence, however, of using the term to refer merely to commendable behaviour is to conceal the true extent of the power possessed by a few privileged occupations. Their continued authority depends as much on consumer ignorance of their market dominance as it does on consumer dependence on their hidden power. It has been argued in this chapter that the term 'profession' should be used to identify the market power
of an occupation and to clarify the basis of this power and the manner in which it regulates producer-consumer relationships. It should not therefore be used to refer to any occupation merely on the basis of a claim by its members to possess particular personal qualities.

Funeral directors in Britain have totally failed to achieve their own self-proclaimed goal of privileged status but have gained a protected, assured and lucrative commercial location. They have failed to exploit their favourable market position for the benefit of the occupation's corporate prestige, due to the individually competitive nature of their working situation. Commercial success has been sought and widely attained but without any appreciable development of collegiate control. Professions succeed in dominating their market by a collegiate control of members; by justifying inequalities of status and restricting access to privilege; by organising a link between education and the market place; by obtaining State recognition and thereby claiming a mandate to provide leadership on matters outside their specialism; and on elevating particular skills to the status of mythologies. In seeking to emulate them, or to be accepted as aspirants to such elevated company, funeral directors are frequently prepared to use their own self-evaluations as the basis for advancement. They thereby fail to reflect on those characteristics, noted above, without which aspiration to higher occupational status must remain illusory.

Finally, in chapter eight a dramaturgical analysis of a funeral is presented. It shows in detail the manner in which a director can use his skill to control and order the ceremony so that it accords with his 'reading'. Professionally oriented or not, he fashions the disposal ceremony through clever stagecraft and astute directives. The term 'director' more closely reflects his true relationship to the drama than does 'thanatologist', 'funeral manager', 'mortician', 'undertaker' or 'grief therapist' since each fails to emphasise his ability to control successive scenes and from them to construct a convincing performance.
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442
CHAPTER EIGHT

A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF FUNERAL WORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>444</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>445</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>450</td>
<td>The Mobile Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>451</td>
<td>The Interviewing Technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td>The Hidden Backstage Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td>The Cast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>460</td>
<td>Timing, Co-ordination, Presentation and Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>468</td>
<td>Public Stagecraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>472</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
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A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF FUNERAL WORK

PROLOGUE

From the viewpoint of the sociology of occupations, funeral directing must be regarded as unique. It is the only occupation which seeks to present the dead to the living and to profit from doing so consistently. This is accomplished symbolically when the coffin 'represents' the concealed body, and with realism when the body is undeniably visible at a private viewing. In either case, a dramatic occasion is created requiring both tact and panache for its successful accomplishment. No other occupation is so closely involved in publicising death.

Furthermore, it is a fixed-input business. The death-rate determines the availability of bodies and the number of deaths cannot be increased to provide better profit margins. Therefore income can only be increased by either:-

a) raising the price of funerals
or
b) obtaining a larger share of the market for funerals.

Price rises may produce adverse consumer reaction and lead to reduced business, therefore directors concentrate their efforts on producing 'successful' funerals which will gain favourable audience response and lead to a greater volume of trade. To achieve this they must sell themselves, their services and their wares through the manipulation of a ceremony which by its very nature emphasises distress and avoidance, and precludes aggressive or flamboyant publicity. Central to the directors performance are control, dignity and probity, each expressed with conviction. The audience must be won over by presenting such a smoothly competent performance that the machinery of production is imperceptible.

A degree of role-distance from certain aspects of his work is essential if the funeral director is to avoid being tarnished by too close a contact with the dead body. Since the cadaver frequently carries
connotations of fear and disgust which overcome the honour and respect accorded it at the moment of death, the director will employ others to handle the body. In this way he distances himself from the unclean, profane, disgusting or frightening aspects of his trade and directs attention toward the more dignified and client-oriented aspects of his occupational role.

PREPARATION

Barriers are erected to prevent unwanted audience perception or interference. Boundaries are created to ensure that outsiders do not gain access to action and behaviour which will shock or dismay them.

This is achieved physically by creating territorial boundaries beyond which hidden body-handling tasks can be performed. Closed rooms and doors marked 'private', 'no admittance' and 'staff only' deny the uninitiated access. Simultaneously attitudinal cues are presented through formal clothing, language and posture, which warn observers that specific codes of conduct are in operation. Questions relating to unmentionable practices are consequently inadmissible and client separation from the body is enforced. ("The funeral director needs (...) to have his wits about him indeed to perceive the needs of the situation" NAFD Manual of Funeral Directing).

The defensive resources available to the funeral directors are adequate to repulse any potential incursion mounted by a critical, or merely unattended visitor. Naked bodies, casually dressed workers, dirty workrooms, uncouth language and shoddy work may regularly precede a decently presented ceremony but such back-stage processes are hidden from audience observation. Client willingness to accept the public part of the funeral without undue criticism is matched, or exceeded, by their unwillingness to part the curtain behind which the back-stage practicality of funeral work is regularly enacted.

Within the funeral home preparations are made to meet the expected demands. A call to action is constantly anticipated, and answering
machines replace telephonists at evenings and weekends to ensure that no call goes unanswered. Nevertheless, so sure of custom have some directors become that they will not respond immediately to a call for assistance if it is received late at night or during the weekend. They will allow the body to remain distressingly close to the bereaved until the following day or the following Monday morning, when they may pick up more than one body in the same vehicle to save expense.

Sensitive answers are prepared for callers. Much as 'commission salesmen' carefully prepare introductory openings and reassuring phrases to ease access to new customers, so funeral directors lay in a store of calm and practical responses to client calls. Scripts, thereby, are prepared in advance of need and presented with that degree of authoritative compassion suitable for development into a dialogue concerning active body handling. Talk is of fundamental importance in structuring the interplay between client and servicer - care and restraint in speech leads the client to place significant activities in his sole charge. 'If you are pleased to leave these affairs in my hands I will make sure that (...)' or 'perhaps if you will allow me to advise (...)' and 'I will attend to the formalities if you wish (...)’ create the impression of coupled knowledge and helpfulness.

However alongside the attitudinal advances into his clients personal affairs reside the practical resources awaiting deployment. The 'props' do not have to be hurriedly assembled but are prepared in advance of need. In a small firm, for example, where the funeral director may well need to perform body-handling tasks as well as to attend personally to client's intimate affairs, a dark, well-pressed suit hangs ready for immediate use. A clean white shirt, black tie, overcoat and gloves are placed close by. These will be used if a formal client interview is necessary, otherwise more practical working clothes will be worn to lift and carry the body, showing signs of wear but formal and dark nevertheless. In public the import of death will never be underplayed by casual or frivolous appearance, and even in the concealed work room the director does not allow himself to be caught unprepared and to be observed 'out of character'. His diary will be close at hand, allowing
him to give immediate replies to clients who 'phone to arrange a funeral
date. The NAFD 'Manual' will not be far from reach, to indicate how to
deal with the 'unusual' case. The firms' funeral-booking forms will lie
alongside, waiting to become the formal account of the next performance
to be enacted. Everything is ready to convince the next customer that
he is the sole subject of attention.

In large firms all body 'pick-ups' are carried out by ancillary workers
allowing the director to keep the desired distance from the body whilst
maintaining overall control. If, however, the director himself is
directly involved in the pick-up, he can employ 'staging methods',
described below, to maintain his dignity and controlling status.

The smoothness with which the removal is accomplished is the hallmark of
the good director. It sets the mood of the opening exchanges and
generates confidence among the bereaved that the more significant acts
yet to come will be satisfactorily produced. ('All work should be done
with the minimum of noise and the maximum of efficiency' NAFD Manual of
Funeral Directing).

If the director is likely to be called out to attend emergencies and
accidents then a suitably equipped low-loading estate car is ready with
window curtains to conceal its contents. It carries a specially
constructed folding stretcher complete with plastic overwraps and canvas
belts; a folding wheel-chair, large plastic bags, rubber gloves, stout
knife, good flashlight, ropes, hazard warning lights and traffic cones -
everything required to ensure that a death can be efficiently managed
without further disruption to the physical and social environment in
which it occurs. Should the body need to be picked up from a mortuary
less effort at concealment and fewer accessories are necessary. A plain
van transports a large plastic coffin, known throughout the trade as 'a
shell', into which the body is unceremoniously placed for quick removal.
Disinfected, it is used repetitively for one body after another, and is
one of the least pleasant receptacles available to directors even though
the official version of its use says ('The highest standards of hygeine
should be observed in the design and use of these 'removal shells'' NAFD

447
Manual of Funeral Directing). In such a manner a mundane, utilitarian, tough, plastic box is figuratively transformed into a sanitary receptacle. Sometimes several bodies will be picked up at one visit to a mortuary, each client being charged separately for the 'service'. Such conservation of director's time and money is not publicly known; it provides a small but useful addition to the director's overall profit.

If the funeral home is well-staffed, an aura of bored readiness pervades the atmosphere, perhaps matched in fire or ambulance stations where 'stand-by' is normal procedure. However in the latter services many activities are pursued which are not duplicated in funeral firms. Firemen, for example, have a games room and television rest room; weight training equipment is now standard and volley ball is played in the adjoining yard. They have frequent fire-drills and equipment checks, and in many stations decorating, especially with shrubs and flowers, is commonly practised. Funeral workers, in contrast, must not be seen practising body-removals or hearse loading, nor be observed checking coffin-sets, re-stacking coffins or carrying weighted coffins to rehearse actual funeral procedures. They do not wash and clean the hearse in public view, nor brighten up the windows with flowers and shrubs. They are not to be seen in braces and shirt-sleeves. They are confined to the back-stage rest-room, the garage or the embalming room. The space for casualness is circumscribed and in many firms the place for humour, comment and 'easing' situations becomes the embalming room itself. It becomes the 'gossip shop', rivalling the rest-room for tea, sandwiches, cakes and confidences when the embalmer is at work. For them a dead body is common place, and they treat it with scant respect when unobserved by the paying client. Since 'the show' has not begun, personal pleasures and requirements are given expression. Dignity, decorum and formality will be 'created' and presented when appropriate; retrieval and refurbishing of appropriate demeanours being an occupational resource.

The 'set' is silent for much of the waiting time. A processed body lies on a high stretcher, plastic sheet concealing its contours but with
protruding hand or foot signalling its state of readiness. The embalming table is clean and bare, the draining sink dry, the preserving fluids colour the jars they fill, tubes and containers are stacked within reach. Surgical instruments gleam ominously in glass fronted cabinets and the bright lights are dimmed until they spotlight the next body. In the adjoining rest-room the staff wait for the next cast-call to be made. Playing cards, studying racing-form, reading tabloid newspapers, drinking tea, arguing and discussing recent work events, they pass the time in the cramped back-regions. The talk is rarely about death itself, though frequently about death-work. Shifts, team activities or changes, competitor mistakes, 'cock-ups', 'foul ups', narrow squeaks, stupid mourners, pathetic child-funerals, wage increases, overtime pay and ribald and mocking humour characterises much of the conversation. Heated argument over politics and sport surface regularly; seriousness is little in evidence. The driver may tinker with the hearse engine, (always in a perfect condition), whilst another member checks the work-rota. He may be the only one in formal dress, ready to visit the florist, registrar, organist, stonemason or crematorium to check final details. He may be required to usher the bereaved from the relatively 'open' office area to the restricted viewing-room area. In a large firm many more will be uniformed, carrying wreaths and preparing for the next performance but in all firms the absence of people working and the aura of unhurried calm is a consequence of the structured decorum organised by the director, it is not purely fortuitous. ('The golden rule is to be unhurried' NAFD Manual of Funeral Directing). Work-roles have been learned and internalised, and are rarely exposed for critical analysis - until an observer is introduced. Only then is the value or the utility of their particular branch of death-work laid bare for discussion. Suggestion of municipally staged funerals produces solidarity; occupational self-interest produces volubility and justificatory argument.
THE MOBILE STAGE

On receiving a call for his services the director moves into the public arena, and changes face to do so. He becomes the caring, solicitous and above all efficient director of events. He has a measure of control over audience perception similar to that possessed by doctors called out to patients. This is his 'stage-creating' potential whereby, on entering a house to pick up a newly dead body, he can take command of a room and temporarily transform it into his own secluded work-region. Ushering the bereaved elsewhere and closing the door and curtains, he and his assistant create a protected space in which to work on the body. It is pushed, pulled, lifted, rolled, bent, bundled or dragged unceremoniously until it can be fitted onto the waiting stretcher. This physical manipulation can be strenuous and difficult in a confined space and must be accomplished without the noise or expletives being overheard. Considerations of decorum, decency or respect for the body play little part in their considerations (duplating the task-oriented behaviour common to the fixed back-stage of the funeral home). For the bereaved the body still has the identity and dignity it possessed at the moment of death, and few could observe the directors indifference to its human characteristics with calm acceptance. Directors, therefore, do not allow their physical 'abuse' of the body to be seen or to be suspected. Quietness is essential, requests for help must be avoided; the body must simply disappear. Since rigor mortis is dependent on temperature, illness and elapsed time, the director cannot be squeamish when moving a flexible body which may quickly become intractable. He uses his stagecraft to exit without fuss, removing the central character and leaving the temporary stage empty. ('(Staff) need to tactfully ask the relatives to retire whilst the body is removed (...). Extreme care should be taken not to mark walls or furniture' NAFD Manual of Funeral Directing).

He now becomes the caretaker of the dead, a responsibility of great significance since he must guard it in safety. To actually lose a body would result in the most serious moral and legal repercussions and possibly cause irreparable harm to his reputation. The theft of a body
is not unknown - one was stolen in a hearse left unattended at a motorway service area and later found untouched - but few directors regard theft as a likelihood to prepare against. They do realise however that the body may have to be shown to relatives for a private viewing and are careful to ask the bereaved if they will wish to see the it again. If they do not, the body may well receive scant attention, either stored untouched in a refrigerator or left lying unattended on a storage shelf awaiting its final act of 'boxing', i.e. encoffining. Not all directors will preserve every body as a matter of course.

THE INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUE

The client who comes to the funeral home to arrange the details of the funeral may not be the most closely bereaved. Nevertheless, the director will treat the interaction very seriously since he is now about to sell his goods and services - a delicate task requiring tact and compassion if it is to be successfully accomplished. He avoids extremes of behaviour and attempts to conduct what is in fact an interview so that practicalities are given priority over emotional out pourings. Whatever is decided becomes the 'blueprint' for the ensuing construction, therefore client's wishes must be carefully recorded. Each funeral firm will have prepared its own style of form on which to note every possibility from religious peculiarity to newspaper notification; from coroner's withholding of the body, to immediate burial. Not only will his personal attention result in a firm order for his services, it will also set the tone for his future client-relationship.

By gentle questioning, delicate probing and re-assuring comments, the director will gradually extract the requirements of the client, assisting him with selective proposals which may eventually result in a payment well in excess of the client's anticipation. It would be foolish to 'push' his services or to 'over-sell' his goods, since though he would most probably induce the client to afford his proposals, he would consequently lose other potential customers through adverse client comments. He will be content, therefore, to accept his client's
directives as a basic requirement but in reminding the client of items he may have overlooked (extra cars for distant relatives, newspaper notices, a suitable choir and, of course, the provision of the 'normal' temporary preservation), the items considered desirable, if not necessary, will grow in number. He must be sensitive to his client's mood because to 'put a foot wrong' at this stage will effectively harm his long term aim, which is to present a public performance for an audience other than the immediately bereaved.

He seeks to present himself as though a 'professional advisor', on the side of the client, helping him to make wise decisions in circumstances of unfamiliarity and uncertainty. It may be appropriate to convey an attitude of neutrality over some of the choices to be made (cost of coffin and fittings for example), implying that his task is essentially that of serving the client by outlining alternatives to be considered. He would not wish his client to enquire what his 'mark-up' on the coffin price was to be, nor exactly what he was paying for by having the body 'preserved'. Creating the appearance of a professional advisor subverts any critical attention that may arise in the mind of the client and allows a 'contract' between director and client to be mutually agreed, not imposed.

The director must decide how to offer himself in such a way as to match the client's presentation. He must intuit what degree of familiarity is desirable or acceptable, and what degree of emotion should be demonstrated. The body, therefore, may be referred to in familiar terms when he perceives the client to be of working-class origins and of a caring disposition - 'would you care to see mother in our private Chapel of Rest before the church service (...)?' Alternatively, when the client is regarded as more suited to a degree of social distance, a more formal approach may be more acceptable - 'should you wish to view Mrs. Morgan before the service, privately in our reserved and quiet side chapel, this can be easily arranged'.

A book of plastic-covered photographs will show the range of coffins available to those whose emotion is difficult to control, keeping the
immediacy of the actual objects removed from contemplation. For those clients whose composure (and attention to detail) is more controlled, a selection of coffins are available on display in another room. Resting on trestles, lids standing nearby with polished name-plates still bare, the open coffins display pleated nylon interior-sets and small pillows. The client is not 'equal' to the director during these exchanges. The setting is arranged by the director and he is familiar with everything that needs to be done. The client is ignorant about specific costs of goods and of charges made by other services such as doctors, clergymen, organists, gravediggers and, especially, the charges made by crematoriums and cemeteries. He is uncertain about time-schedules, cost of graves, disposal regulations and methods of disposal such as sprinkling ashes. Finally, he is not necessarily acquainted with matters of funeral protocol.

The director, therefore, can 'manage' this particular scene with confidence in his ability to lead his client. He can enable him to leave feeling that he has taken proper care of the deceased's funeral. The client possesses one important item – the money. Once he has agreed to the proposals made by the director, he offers to honour his word at a future time when the director's account is presented. The director ensures that no money actually passes hands and that usually no further discussion of money matters need arise at any subsequent stage of the proceedings. The client is thereby 'bound' to a considerable outlay of money without immediate need to produce it or to prove his creditworthiness. The economic consequence of his decision is to be delayed for, perhaps, several months, but its impact is not therefore lessened.

It is, of course, possible for this entire transaction to take place in the home of the client, or even on 'neutral' ground such as a retirement home. In such cases, the director loses the 'edge' he gains so effortlessly when on home territory. To balance against this is the possibility that the client feels doubly unsure of his ability to make sensible decisions because the 'home' has now become a temporary 'office' to transact a business for which he is singularly unprepared.
To terminate his unease, he may be likely to make hurried decisions which do not reflect his 'true' inclinations. Such conjectures cannot be substantiated for, whatever the stage for the interaction, the well-practised director can manage the scene with greater confidence than a first time performer.

THE HIDDEN BACK-STAGE PROCEDURES

In the privacy of the funeral home, the preparation or 'embalming' room may resemble a medical laboratory and is spatially segregated from the front office, the viewing rooms, the chapel and any other rooms the public frequents. Here the corpse is washed, shaved, and considerately treated - or so the director would have his clients believe. In reality it is plugged, cut, pierced, drained, covered and left unattended, regarded merely as 'another one' to be encoffined and removed. A pseudo-medical environment is created by the embalmers use of a white-coat, surgical instruments and a heavy smell of disinfectant and embalming fluid. The blood is drained from the main veins in the neck, armpit or groin, and is simultaneously replaced with a preservative fluid through the arteries. This enters the body by gravity feed pipes from plastic bottles suspended above the embalming table and allows the flesh to be softened and coloured to whatever tone the embalmer desires. He will rub extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes and nostrils to ensure the correct degree of flexibility, and seek to produce a flesh-coloured tint within the skin. To reduce the time spent on each body, he will frequently use a machine pump to force the embalming fluid rapidly through the body, resulting sometimes in too great a concentration of formaldehyde, creating a roseate appearance unpleasant to observe - too little fluid and the skin will be blotched and unpleasant to view. To drain the blood and other fluids more rapidly from internal organs such as the heart, lungs, liver and bladder, a large sharply-pointed metal tube, attached to a drainage tube, is inserted through the abdomen and thrust into each organ in turn. The penetration of the sharp metal into the soft abdomen is one of the more aggressive actions employed by the embalmer. The naked body is handled in a manner that would shock the bereaved were they permitted to see it
and should the body have been through a coroner's post-mortem, the piecing together of the remains is not a sight for the weak. A 'body' is 'reconstituted' as flesh and organs are replaced to provide a semblance of normality to the cadaver.

The unceremonious handling of the body directly contradicts the impression fostered frontstage. A physical attack on the body whilst it is in the preparation room is common-place activity to the staff; it would be shocking in the extreme for the bereaved. ("Viewing of the remains by the family should not be permitted in the Preparation Room' NAFD Manual of Funeral Directing). The casual and off-hand treatment of the corpse would, if observed by them, destroy the funeral director's carefully constructed frontstage assurances. This is the technical 'skill' for which the client pays. 'Preserving' the body involves mutilating it and there is more 'skill' involved in concealing the ravages by astute stage-management of its presentation than there is in seeking to preserve it. Treating a corpse 'inhumanely' may seem to be an impossibility since, at death, the 'human' qualities disappear, to be supplanted by an inanimate and non-sentient passivity. Nevertheless, if the violent acts performed by the funeral director, or by his employee, were to be seen by the bereaved, they would be regarded as insensitive and repulsive violations of an inherent dignity attached to the body. This would strain and possibly rupture the tacit assumptions (fostered by the director and accepted by the bereaved) concerning 'appropriate' treatment of the body. The belief that the corpse is treated reverently, carefully, protectively and with a dignity due to its human status could not be sustained if clients reflected on the funeral director's turnover of bodies, his funeral rate per week or on the reality underlying the words 'temporary preservation'.

No such analysis appears to be entertained by the bereaved and the funeral director ensures that no hint of moral violation distracts his client from the 'official' reading of the scene he presents. Backstage regions are not only protected by the 'knowing' staff and their strategic shielding activity, but also by 'compliant' visitors. They exercise tact and discretion, not wishing to violate the staff
interpretation of proper behaviour, nor to confront physical realities
which they could not face. Active and passive participation by visitors
allows an interpersonal strategy to develop whereby staff and audience
collude to present a common definition of the situation.

To push at the territorial boundaries, physically, attitudinally or
linguistically, would be to trespass; to suggest that the bereaved had
equal rights to cross the threshold separating the backstage and
frontstage regions would be to violate the unwritten contract concerning
staff and client statuses. Inspecting preparation and dressing rooms
and 'props' is not usually included in the entrance price to any staged
ceremony.

Viewing the body is probably the most traumatic experience for the
bereaved and, as indicated by respondents already cited, presents the
director with a challenge to his interpretive skill. Should the face be
visible? If so, should it be in line of sight when entering the room?
If covered, how and when should it be revealed? Should the director
remain to offer a consoling (or manipulating) presence?

('The head resting on pillows of just the right height, possibly
inclined a little to one side. There is no need for the nose to be
meticulously centred and pointing to the ceiling' NAFD Manual of
Funeral Directing).

As noted in the Newfoundland study, such behavioural problems are
created by the director, not by the bereaved, who unwittingly are cast
as inadequate and untrustworthy - inadequate to reinforce the director's
restraint, not trusted to maintain composure.

('Wait to ensure they are not over-distressed, (...) leave them for
a few minutes, (...) after a short period (...) return (...) set
them at ease (until) they recover their poise' NAFD Manual of
Funeral Directing).

The body lies in an open coffin, hands placed together in an appropriate
position of prayer or restfulness. The face is visible nestling in an
artfully arranged supportive pillow. The viewing room is small,
sombrely lit and bare of all but a candle, plastic 'stained glass
window' and, if Roman Catholic, an obligatory crucifix. The room is
deliberately kept sparsely furnished and suggestive of a transitory and constantly changing occupancy. ('There should be one or two suitable chairs and an occasional table' NAFD Manual of Funeral Directing: emphasis added).

The director's language interprets the moment; quiet, grave, decorous, restrained, controlled and supportive. His demeanour offers a model for visitors to copy. The rhetoric of death is nowhere more positively voiced than here, where the natural response of the bereaved is constrained by the contrived artificiality imposed by funeral directors. The bereaved cannot behave 'naturally' on a staged setting over which they have no control, therefore they monitor the director's cues as a way of behaving appropriately rather than spontaneously. Excessive displays of grief are courteously but firmly muted by the director into farewells and apologies - the situation, he implies, called for an emotional restraint which had not been demonstrated. Mourners feel they have 'given way', 'broken down' or 'lost control' in front of someone tactful enough to overlook the transgression. This is the most significant of stages since it is here that the director exerts the most powerful influence, the bereaved are most vulnerable, and the deceased is finally presented as manifestly 'dead' (a fact not fully accepted until then by many of the bereaved). Henceforth, the director's authority is assured, since the display of emotion leaves the mourners vulnerable and the director emotionally 'cool'. 'Deviance' and 'order' are themes available for presentation in many situations and disruption of viewing composure can be regarded as deviant when contrasted unfavourably with self-control.

If the composure and self-restraint of the client is too strongly breached, the director's entire staging is put at risk. His controlling and defining potential requires that a cool, measured appraisal of his work-task results in audience approval. Emotional outbursts, other than in private, place his interpretation at risk. Any refusal to accept his given line will shift the defining potential toward the client end of a servicer-serviced polarity. Creating images is the 'stock-in-trade'
common to all service occupations and any weakening of the fostered impression can have severe consequences for the entire masquerade.

Funerals are dramas, yet many audiences seem unaware of their similarity to other more common-place dramatic performances such as weddings, plays and operas. Staged impressions must not be undermined, as those who work in the back regions of restaurants, operating theatres, circuses and slaughter-houses can testify. Actors, prostitutes, magicians, 'con-men', spies and clergymen share with funeral directors the need to protect their audiences from disillusion and to manage their behaviour in such a way as to prevent disenchantment. Mourners have come to grieve the loss of a beloved person, not to be horrified at molestation, aggrieved at directors' indifference to their comfort or prepared to provide original readings of a traditional script. They are unlikely to regard the ceremony as a staged performance with connotation of pretence and managed emotion.

THE CAST

The working cast rarely assemble together to practice a scene or to rehearse cues, exits, entrances or maintaining face. Individually, they learn appropriate role-performances by a combination of backstage conversation and frontstage practice. Novices are given simple straightforward funerals in which to practice and they assist veterans on their first funerals. Facial control and postural stance are key factors in contriving a suitable performance, and team support ensures that beginners are shielded from the more exposed activities, such as bending the knee to be first man beneath the coffin as it slides out from the hearse-floor or placing the most important wreath on the coffin itself. 'Easing ploys' are inserted when the director's attention is distracted elsewhere and workers thereby tread a fine line between demonstrating an acceptable degree of role-distance and disrupting the ceremony.

Whatever the supporting cast may feel privately, their public demeanour shows total accord with the director's interpretation. Their role is
supportive since the funeral director will rarely relinquish the starring role of conductor, regarding it, correctly, as the pivotal performance. He demonstrates his distinctive position in the ceremony by presenting physical, presentational and attitudinal cues to the discerning observer. Physically he separates himself a few paces from the actual coffin-handling tasks to ensure that he can be seen to be controlling but not 'carrying'. He directs his team, leads his men but does not become one of them. He attends the mourners as well as supervising the movement of the coffin, thereby demonstrating his overall command of the total assembly. He signals, discreetly, the appropriate moment for change in direction, speed and emphasis. Gestures are slight, demeanour is protective, posture is restrained.

Presentationally he shows a subtle variation of the basic uniform: top hat rather than peaked-cap; tail coat not jacket-coat; cloak or overcoat not rain coat. His most significant 'prop' however is frequently a pair of gloves, carried but not worn. Even on the rare occasions when the director is small of stature, in the same uniform attire as his men and retiring in attitude, the unworn gloves will signify his difference and reflect his true rank. He is showing to his audience that he bridges the gap between the formal and practical presentation of a funeral ceremony (glove wearing) and the informal and social requirements of client service (personal hand shaking). Furthermore, that he has white-collared, 'professional' status but is sufficiently adaptable and practised to perform all necessary physical activities should he be required to do so. He is operationally separated from his men who wear gloves throughout their coffin handling tasks and are not required to remove them to shake hands with clients and other members of the audience. Carried gloves symbolise role-distance from basic body-handling tasks, and attachment to directorial status.

Attitudinally he is composed but alert to new developments, formal yet approachable, knowing but not forward, sympathetic but not emotional, leading yet decorous. The funeral director leads by delicate suggestion and determines through apparent subservience. As official (and paid)
mourner, he indicates that composure and restraint can hold in check disruptive and disquieting behaviour.

His staff assist the mourners into gleaming limousines. The opulence of these vehicles is in marked contrast to the relatively non-descript character of mourners' cars, and conveys the impression that no expense is too great to ensure that the dead receive due respect. A certain controlled arrogance thereby tinges the workers performance as they glide soundlessly before the subdued audience, who are but paying guests in temporary occupation of such vehicles. 'He who pays the piper, calls the tune' is not true of funeral ceremonies where paying clients and their invited quests are prone to walk in step with the directors threnody.

The full cast includes the bereaved, the mourners, the clergy, organist and disposal workers; each fulfilling one necessary part of a collective performance. Whilst the clergyman is formally responsible for the most potent act, - that of defining the significance of the total ceremony and activating the physical disposal of the body - he is frequently 'booked' for the occasion, either as 'duty' chaplin or directly by the funeral director on his client's behalf. Increasingly his is a minor functionary having no close relationship with either the deceased or the bereaved, appearing on cue from the director to lead the interpretive scene and disappearing at its conclusion. The director may be unobtrusive in the performance of his tasks, but his control of the rhetoric, presentation and logistic of death is complete.

TIMING, COORDINATION, PRESENTATION AND WITHDRAWAL

'The first and most important principle to be established is:-

'One person shall be finally responsible for all arrangements in respect of each funeral'

and (members should) act as they would if the deceased were a member of their own family (...). On arrival at the place of service, the chief mourners should be kept in their cars if possible until everything is checked (...). It will generally be found that the higher the
educational level of the client, the more restrained and composed he will tend to remain. Consequently, he will require a more matter-of-fact-approach, while the lower educational levels will display more emotional distress' (NAFD Manual of Funeral Directing : emphasis added).

It will be seen from the extract quoted above, that funeral directors take their responsibilities seriously! Throughout their manual, advice is offered on the best method of performing their numerous tasks, indicating the attitudes they should hold toward those on whom they will practice their skills.

'If we assume the funeral director accepts a professional standard of dress and manner, surely it will affect his idea of his own status (...) and just as much affect (his client's) manner to him and their whole thought of him. It is (then) easy for him to carry out his full functions, as primarily a professional adviser and only secondarily a salesman.' (Ibid p3 : emphasis added)

This rather gentle directive (and overt claim to 'professional' status) is to be contrasted to the more forthright exposition given to American funeral directors:-

'The funeral director should not strut, nor should he appear to be mousey. His demeanour should show dignity, concern and confidence. (...) he) should not talk loud, nor should he whisper secretly. He should not speak in a subdued voice (...) should not walk around unnecessarily (...) should not snap his fingers or hiss to get attention'. (Raether 1971 pl21)

The British director, apparently, must be sufficiently astute to assess the educational level of his clients and to respond to their distinctive emotional predilections; he must adroitly restrain mourners from walking when and where they choose thereby inserting personal idiosyncrasy into formalised procedure; and must present himself so neutrally as to preclude untoward audience awareness.
He can be observed acting on these injunctions when the cortege arrives at a disposal ground. His procedure will be largely determined by the particular physical structure of the church, cemetery or crematorium he is attending since each will have access routes of special significance to him. For example, a church may have a long, irregular and uneven path winding between graves which must be negotiated carefully if the coffin is not to be dropped or bearers stumble. The director will have inspected it beforehand to note difficulties and will lead his men effectively to the aisle where the waiting trestles stand to receive the coffin. Scarcely a word will be needed; a nod of the head will be sufficient for the men to slide the coffin from the hearse to their shoulders and prepare to follow his directives. But, should mourners be inside the church, seated and quietly accepting their passivity, or outside waiting to follow the coffin when the director indicates the appropriate moment? If inside, who should sit where? If outside, who will presume to take the initiative and to move inside? A variety of moves are open to the director to ensure that mourners are shepherded to appropriate places in significant order of precedence. A murmured indication of procedure 'If you are ready Mrs. Brown (...)’ or 'Would you care to go inside now?' will start the movement into the church. By leading the chief mourners to the front pew he establishes both a hierarchy of precedence and a suitability of location among the assembled audience. A lift of the eyebrows and a gently indicating open palm will signify when to move and where to sit; a supportive touch to the elbow will provide both reassurance and guidance.

Once the coffin is placed in full view of the congregation the director must decide how to move his men to their next established position. Should they leave the church by the side transept or aisle, or should they remain sitting unobtrusively out of the line of sight of the central body of mourners? If they go from the church should the director accompany them, or remain as a dignified but non-participating observer, ready to escort the bereaved from the church as soon as the service ends? With the ceremony finished, many of the audience will remain uneasily and unhappily seated until the director indicates that an exit is appropriate. In specific cases when the audience appears to
be too sparse to dignify the occasion, he and his men may remain present at the rear of the church, to contribute 'good' voice, frequently demonstrating a better acquaintance with hymns and responses than the majority of mourners. It must be recalled that he is not merely assisting his client, and the mourners in general, to surmount the intricacies of the proceedings with dignity - he is also ensuring that the proceedings terminate at the pre-determined time, allowing a further ceremony to follow without overlap. This 'time-scheduling' is most important at those crematoriums which allocate a mere twenty minutes for a service since the 'fit' of one funeral with the next allows no time for hesitancy. The smooth succession of exit and entry is a function of his guidance and even with a thirty minute schedule he must be alert to prevent a tardy procession. It is, therefore, to the cues of the director that an observer must attend if he would understand the deployment and movement of the assembled cast of performers. Discreetly suggestive rather than overtly controlling they are, nevertheless, the organising directives without which the performances would be embarrassingly uncertain, or the bereaved would be inconveniently occupying the place reserved for the next group of mourners.

There are significantly different signals to communicate at separate crematoriums, each of which solves the same problems of logistics in significantly different ways. Basically the hearse must be able to approach closely to the access doors, be unloaded and move away without causing or encountering congestion. Some crematoriums therefore create a central roundabout whereby vehicles circulate past the main entrance; others provide two entrances one on either side of the chapel(s) so that funerals alternate, first at one side, then the other. In the more modern variants a red-green traffic-light system indicates to the incoming hearse which side to use and when it is appropriate to approach the door. Exits are separated from entrances to ensure that a 'stream' of users flow through in a smooth sequence. The overall intention is to produce a 'controlled-flow' so that time-schedules are maintained, successive audiences are kept apart and mourners can be controlled by specialists. Crematoriums are not intended for casual, unsupervised, impromptu or unorganised performances. Directors are the lynch-pin of
efficient servicing and their effectiveness is essential for a constant succession of funerals to be marshalled without dislocation.

Crematorium supervisors allocate time to funeral directors, rarely to private individuals, because they can be trusted to observe time schedules. It is instructive to observe a director who produces his cortège at the crematorium gates ten minutes before the scheduled time of service in order to be ready for the service at the exact time. He halts the hearse just inside the gates, if there is room to do so, and stands calmly and patiently at a suitable distance in front of it, thereby showing control of, but not relationship to, the coffin. Mourners sit disconsolately in their vehicle passing the time in desultory conversation lacking both knowledge of the next activity or control over its timing. Other mourners congregate by their parked cars or stand in small knots, waiting for their summons to participate in a ceremony of which they are, as yet, not a formal part. At his signal the hearse moves slowly forward to the appropriate entrance and the coffin is removed to be placed at the front of the chapel. The director imperceptibly beckons the chief mourners' limousine which glides to the same door and deposits its occupants. The director leads them into the chapel and indicates their position on the front row nearest to the pulpit. Meanwhile the separate knots of attending mourners 'drift' through the door to be marshalled into pews or, since some directors consider them to be of marginal importance at this moment, left to find their own position.

A unified audience is now created from the disparate groupings, all of whom have, directly or indirectly, been waiting for the director's indications. By leaving them to participate in the service he will have time to supervise his men as they lay out the wreaths and flowers in neat rows close to the chapel, the chief mourners' contributions taking prominence. He opens the doors at the exactly propitious moment and is there to suggest that 'you might like to see the floral offerings which are laid out for you in the rose-garden'? An informal procession moves to the appointed place, chief mourners ahead of the director, stragglers at the rear. Nothing is left to chance - the director ensures that what
should be done, will be done. For him the successful cremation is one that goes according to plan - it is an exercise in logistics with moral overtones; a successful integration of separate operations; a succession of physical moves following a logical pattern. He is unlikely to regard it as 'a biographical ritual in which social identities are transformed'. He attends to its subtleties as operational difficulties to be successfully surmounted; as practicalities demanding a practised skill.

Should the funeral culminate in a cemetery, the director has significant problems of a different type. Earthy mounds can be covered with green cloth but still become slippery in wet weather; lowering a coffin requires co-ordination and care, no matter how many times the action is repeated; the inconveniences of wind, rain and cold can cause fingers to fumble and dignity to be destroyed. Older cemeteries have few access paths and large areas of grave-filled space to be negotiated. To marshall coffin bearers, minister and mourners into a circumscribed space, close to the grave yet not impeding the necessary activities, requires the willing compliance of all involved. Too many too close will impair the efficient performance of tasks; stragglers arriving late will suggest indifference to the gravity of the occasion; clumsy handling of the coffin will indicate insufficient skill. Each successive audience poses uncertainties even for an experienced director; his assured performance rests heavily on the routine acquiescence of each new group of mourners. Their willingness to be led stems from a mixture of ignorance, customary practice and unwillingness to be identified as deviant. 'Everyone knows' how to behave properly even without prior experience of an actual funeral because the stereotypical performance created by innumerable directors has been incorporated into folk-lore. Photograph, film and fiction have 'caught the flavour of the final act' and provide a behavioural prototype for all to observe. So long as the director accords to the image he and his colleagues have so assiduously created over many years, so long will he find that the 'logic' of the ceremony will not need to be taught afresh at each funeral.
Finally, it must be remembered that the director has no final curtain to complete his act; no footlights bow to present and no audience acclaim to reward his endeavour. He cannot mop his brow, congratulate his co-actors or express his thanks to a warmly appreciative audience. He cannot step outside his chosen role-performance and presume that he should be invited to join the mourners on a social basis. Attentive to his clients needs to the last he must disengage the chief mourners from the disposal scene and ensure that they leave the stage on which they have been central, if reluctant, performers. Whilst a cemetery burial allows a freedom of movement to mourners denied then by the formal restrictions of a crematorium, each setting has the potential for allowing 'drift', whereby the ceremony possesses no obvious finale or end point. The director, therefore, concentrates his attention on the chief mourners, since they will set the tone, the pace and the mood for others to respect and to follow. Enclosing them in the limousine and moving them away to another setting not only allows him to terminate the disposal scene, but gives attending mourners a cue to use the physical space to relax, and to drop their previously guarded presentation. Posture, eye contact, verbal exchange and physical movement brighten and quicken among the now freely moving members. For the director, however, no lessening of 'face' is permissible. Neither he nor his staff can relax into back-slapping congratulations at the close of a well-turned performance, nor loosen uniform, make jokes, travel fast or 'give someone a lift back home'. Only when the cars are garaged and the security of the back-region is again reached, can the bearers' occupational roles can be relaxed or discarded temporarily - laid aside until required again. Perhaps even here the director may not wish to be observed as frivolous, even by his 'knowing' staff. 'Appearance' indicates authority, responsibility and control; might not his future authority be in jeopardy if the directorial role is abruptly shed as though merely a mask of convenience?

As noted throughout this research 'acting is becoming' and the director may so heavily invest his personal sense of identity in the work-role performance as to be caught up in its authenticity. To lay it aside as though it were a mere appendage and not a reflection of his 'true' self...
may endanger his future style of presentation. Humour, irreverence, criticism or sarcasm on his part may weaken his own self-conception. Reputation - his chief marketable quality - may thereby suffer internal, and inerradicable tarnish.

It might however come as a severe jolt to his self-esteem if he were to realise that many mourners who act as unwitting audience to his public performance are uncomfortably aware of his ever present self-protection during the funeral, and respond to his constantly supportive and directive activity with discomfort.

Being marshalled, however discreetly, can provoke reactions of resentment and irritation even when circumstances appear to dictate its necessity. All controllers of audience participation may well share a similar low opinion of collective audience behaviour, whether that behaviour is due to ignorance, disattention, laziness or contrariness. Court ushers, cathedral guides, church wardens, school teachers, holiday couriers and queue marshalls share with funeral directors a supervisory role which, though considered by authorities to be necessary for a controlled movement of people, is irksome to recipients. A funeral director cannot be assured that his supervisory role is willingly received by those mourners not overcome with grief and disoriented by change. Should a director himself become a member of the audience, and receive the usual, somewhat condescending, attention reserved for untutored audiences, he might perceive the mannered performance given by the funeral director to be more unctuous than he would wish. Nevertheless, the director will probably feel re-assured when he reflects on his achievements. He has ensured (he believes) that each scene was a fitting 'cameo' wherein a particular activity stood out in relief against a background of supportive assistance. Each contained a symbolic picture of what the commercialisation of death will entail. By linking them together he has provided a succession of pictures, a chain of events, leading from a particular death to a formally presented disposal. In giving emphasis to each particular scene, and by ensuring that they are staged efficiently, he has fulfilled a necessary physical task (disposal); has enabled the bereaved to move from one

467
self-identity to another (biographical change); has reinforced the community values concerning death, dignity and departure (ritualism); and has comforted the emotionally disturbed mourners (leadership).

Viewed dramaturgically he has been able to present a coherent occupational role by gaining control over the successive stages on which it is presented. Whether the stage is 'movable' (as hearse, equipped limousine or place of death); or 'fixed' (funeral home, crematorium or cemetery), by adroit presentation of a knowing self he has lead a largely unwitting audience to provide him with personal profit and public status. Few occupations allow the self to be so publicly presented with so few economic or physical constraints.

PUBLIC STAGECRAFT

No other ritual is so dominated by one person and one occupation and, in the public ceremony, all the director's planning and preparation is resolved into one staged showpiece. As in every constructed performance actors can demonstrate distancing procedures as well as commitment, and the final public act of a funeral allows for either possibility to be fully developed.

It is the director's concern to present a unified finale, and from the moment his vehicles leave the garage, all strategems including language, style, dress, deportment and control of space and time are selected to achieve that goal. Whilst a funeral ritual may be considered primarily as an exercise in logistics, or as a resolution of psychological adjustment, from the sociological standpoint it is a dramatic ritual which demonstrates individuals in the process of giving meaning to significant events through social action. The dramaturgical perspective focuses on the theatrical stagecraft and directorial flair presented by the funeral staff and seeks to understand social behaviour through theories of action rather than theories of knowledge. The funeral ritual is social drama of an intensely emotional kind; a form of morality play in which conformity and deviance are potentially available to all performers. The funeral director treads the stage as a practised
performer, indicating by quiet words of suggestion to the bereaved, soft but direct commands to his staff, business-like dialogue with officials and quiet asides to the clergy that the performance is entering its final phase. The work-team, the bereaved, the mourners, the clergy, must all be orchestrated to produce the climactic disposal scene, whilst backstage activities are kept hidden to prevent the fostered illusion being shattered. Grave-fillers must not be observed leaning on their shovels; mourners for the following funeral must not be met face to face; the recorded tape-music must not play at the wrong speed; the clergyman must not address words of comfort to wrongly identified mourners or praise the wrong corpse. Black smoke must not belch from crematorium chimney, nor grave be dug too deep for lowering ropes to plumb. Pitfalls bestrew the route from funeral home to final disposal and the successfully accomplished ceremony receives muted thanks, not triumphant acclaim. The most feared dislocations rarely occur but, once experienced, enter the collective occupational folk-lore of cautionary tales. Rarely is the wrong body delivered or are corpse and mourners located at different ceremonies; infrequently does the coffin spill its contents or descend prematurely into the open grave. The director is more concerned to prevent excessive displays of grief, uncontrolled physical exhibitionism, or critical detachment on the part of the mourners since this would reflect unfavourably on his defining potential. Actions create mood and the 'overproduction' of emotion, or its opposite mode, indifference, would nullify the funeral director's carefully nurtured funeral credo.

The sudden, unexpected and disastrous accident cannot be foreseen and can seriously weaken the director's public image. Nevertheless, should an accident occur he can apportion blame among his staff and set in action plans to avoid repetition. Should the mood be wrong, and consequent actions out of harmony with the established pattern of events, then the funeral director is morally culpable - he has failed to develop the correct 'tone' and effectively 'lost' his audience. Therefore, the mood of the final ceremony is the most significant reflection of the director's occupational skill and moral worth. From his first interview with the bereaved, he has planned the dramatic
finale, however limited or extravagant its presentation may be.

Advising the client on expenditure when he or she is emotionally most susceptible to exploitation; minimising the unusualness, unfamiliarity and unhappiness created by death; protecting the bereaved by hiding the preparation room; presenting the body as 'naturally' as possible to limit psychological shock; emphasising the dignity of the ceremony; controlling audience, staff, ancillaries and officials; all these activities were creative precursors leading to the final act - the public culmination of effort and dedication. No appeal is possible for a director who mismanages his entrepreneurial responsibility or who misreads his starring role. Most audiences sense the unpleasant consequences awaiting themselves and the director for flouting his expectations, and therefore allow his stagecraft to reach a successful conclusion.

No matter how standard each funeral becomes for the funeral director, he must approach it as a drama in its own right, with attendant possibilities of failure. Each must be 'brought off' and validated, not only by the audience for whom it was staged and who are co-participants in a very real sense, but by informed members of the 'trade' who stand as critics in the wings. The tension which develops as a consequence of balancing between success and failure is heightened by the nature of the presentation - moving the dead through the living on the way to a final disposal is inherently problematic. It is precisely this problematic tension which makes ritualised drama so interesting to observe and so precarious to stage.

Funeral directors may appear to be peculiar because they devote their working lives to doing those things which most people consciously avoid. Nevertheless they are merely expressing a common human experience, although in a particular and specialised setting. The presentation of a social self and the performance of an occupational role are fundamental aspects of social relationships, and the manner of their staging in a funeral ceremony is not structurally different from that to be encountered elsewhere, although considerably more interesting because previously unrecorded. Analysis of a funeral as a heightened example of
daily social interaction is rare, yet in such a biographically significant ritual all the declamatory, purposeful and interpretive potential of everyday stagecraft is open to observation.

The funeral claims our attention as a public drama because it shows in stylised form and in acute tension the problems and rewards associated with seeking to define a 'problematic' situation with assurance and credibility. Directorial finesse can ensure that all participants come to accept a single definition of the performance to be enacted, and willingly confirm its validity by acting out their given roles with sincerity. Social existence is made bearable by the routinisation of daily interaction; the constant and unremitting need to totally re-create or re-negotiate everyday social encounters would rapidly deplete individual reserves of tolerance.

Funerals demonstrate the manner in which significant moments can be routinised and given a temporary stability and coherence not inherently present. By a single-minded concern to combine self-concept and role-performance a funeral director can create a successful funeral. It can become a model for future use, thereby justifying his occupational presence to the public and his self-identity to himself.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>NAFD</td>
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# CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>475</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Normative Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>475</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Funeral Directors as Agents of Social Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>The Stock Funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>477</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>The Professionalism of Funeral Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Presentation and Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Classifying Firms and Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>482</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>The Absence of a Fully Authenticated Funeral Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>483</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Labelling the Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>484</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Historical Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>484</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Sanitary Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>485</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Exploiting a Secular Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>487</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Creating a Directorial Role and Engineering a Funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>487</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Interpretive Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>490</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Engineering Sincerity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the funeral directing occupation and the role of the director in constructing and presenting a funeral.

The research design was framed to include not only the practical activities which created a funeral but the manner in which funeral roles were perceived, created and sustained by directors, employees, clients and audiences.

The theoretical, normative, practical and interpretive components of funeral work were examined and a dramaturgical analysis of funeral performances was presented. Occupational competence was assessed and the training, certification and skill required to operate as a directors was examined. The division of labour sustaining the occupation and the status accorded specific positions was investigated. The size, type and orientation of firms was analysed and the relative importance of peers, clients, and audiences in Britain compared to that existing in Newfoundland by comparative study.

The manner in which directors sustained their role-performance and their recourse to tradition, family, profession, commerce or personal traits as motivating concepts was presented through primary and secondary data.

Participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interviewing, historical and archival research were utilised to place the micro-social world of the funeral director in a wider social context which exerted constraints on his occupational performance.

The findings presented in the preceding chapters can be summarised in the following manner:-
1. NORMATIVE CONTROLS
2. PRESENTATION AND STRUCTURE
3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT
4. CREATING A DIRECTORIAL ROLE AND ENGINEERING A FUNERAL

Each offers insight into particular aspects of their occupational experience; in combination they provide an interpretation of funeral directing in contemporary Britain.

1. NORMATIVE CONTROL

1.1 FUNERAL DIRECTORS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Funeral directors have been shown to be (unconscious) agents of social control in that they reinforce particular beliefs integral to capitalist ideology. They encourage the public to regard bereavement as an incapacitating affliction which requires the employment of skilful services. The importance of trained 'specialists' operating in a hierarchical division of labour is emphasised whereby funeral directors, embalmers, doctors and clergymen service 'victims' of human fate with honesty and dignity. They reinforce a belief in competition between business units but claim to temper it with voluntary codes of conduct which protect the vulnerable client. Funeral directors emphasise the inability of clients to satisfy their own needs and compete between themselves for a dominant share of a profitable, consistent and predictable market for funerals. Their behaviour implies that caretaking of the dead body and its subsequent treatment and presentation should be separated from the bereaved and placed in the hands of specialists, denying the possibility that a non profit-making municipal service could be equally effective or that family and kin should retain responsibility. The body is removed from the bereaved not as a consequence of their uncaring or incompetent behaviour but to ensure that a separation of tasks is reinforced and that directors can gain income and prestige from relieving them of this particular 'burden'.
1.2 THE STOCK FUNERAL

Funeral directors have been shown to prepare what can be regarded as a 'stock' funeral. It awaits a purchaser and required little modification to suit particular circumstances. The component parts are prepared in advance of need and the notification of a death is the signal to activate them. Each funeral is sold as an original and distinctive creation but the research has shown it to be little more than a variation on a common theme owing little to spontaneity or individuality but much to patterned and standardised conformity. Prefabricated coffins, either in sections or 'boxed-up', wait in store rooms and only unusual sizes or requests for genuine oak or elm-wood necessitate a telephone call to the wholesale coffin-producer. Customer choice is significantly limited to the selection made available to them by the director who has been responsible for the widespread use of coffins during the last two-hundred years and who ensures that he gains a satisfactory profit from their sale.

The naive assumption that a demand for specific types of funerals and for the controlling authority of the funeral director exists independent of the directors themselves has been shown to be untenable. They profit from death and are therefore as concerned to generate a need for their services as they are to supply the material goods they claim to be necessary. They have produced 'mystification' techniques, utilising language, uniform, deportment, space and social distance to ensure that the skills they claim to possess are not open to inspection and that their fostered impressions of probity cannot be easily challenged. In this manner consumer expectation is aroused and consequent 'demand' is readily satisfied. The hegemony of 'market forces' is thereby restated and commercial individualism is extolled at the expense of family, kin, locality or municipality.
1.3 THE PROFESSIONALISM OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

The present status of funeral directors, considered as a collective occupational group, has been shown to rest on widespread public acquiescence with their own claimed importance. Chapter two showed in detail their unavailing search for formal state recognition and their failure to become an autonomous and self-credentialising occupation. In matters of collegiate control, internal certification and normative sanctions they have been shown to be strategically weak. Compared with their own declared aspirations and with the successful accomplishments of funeral directors elsewhere, such as to be seen in Newfoundland, they have a lower occupational status than they believe to be appropriate.

Therefore, the ideology of 'profession' is used by many directors to legitimate their occupational role and to provide a moral status sufficient to compensate for their occupational 'marginality'. The research indicates a close relationship between that size and stability of a particular business and its director's attachment to a professional role. Two factors significantly influence his choice of role-performance, each reinforcing the other. Firstly, profitability; the stronger the economic viability of the firm the lower the likelihood of claiming a professional status. Commercially successful directors tend to criticise professional aspirations, regarding them as pretentious and unrealistic. However, directors of small private businesses concerned with economic survival in an occupation which increasingly favours large economic units, commonly seek reassurance for their occupational role by emphasising attitudinal resources, such as professionalism is believed to supply.

Secondly, social distance; the more infrequent the face to face contact between director and client the less likely the director is to buttress his performance with a claim to professional status. A business orientation emphasises the rational, planned and logical allocation of resources to maximise profits. Indulgence in over-personalised salesmanship, based on unsupported claims to occupational prestige is regarded as a sign of weakness. Therefore in large and commercially successful firms the commitment to a business orientation tends to be higher than elsewhere in
the occupation. Proprietors of such firms may regard themselves less as funeral directors (though still retaining the title) and more appropriately as managers, thereby emphasising control rather than performance.

The research, however, indicates that the great majority of firms are small in size and provide only about five funerals each week. It is throughout this 'moral majority' as so many regard themselves, that the thrust toward professional identity is most pronounced. The degree to which a perceived social self and an occupational role are permeated with a professional ideology varies inversely with economic stability and profitability. Reliance on professionalism may be a sensitive indicator of financial insecurity.

This guideline to directorial attitude and behaviour requires modification by the inclusion of a further variable - that of family membership. Concepts of family honour, obedience and responsibility influence both the orientation and the presentation of the directorial role. The research showed a high degree of resentment among directors who had a funeral business imposed on them, but an equally strong demonstration of family loyalty and solidarity in their consequent performance. To be a segment of a family firm exposed the director to pressures not experienced by those free of family obligations. The firm is regarded as a common resource to be guarded for present and future members. Orientations may well be strongly practical and businesslike whilst permeated with a sense of duty to one's kin group. In such circumstances naked commercialism was frequently concealed behind a claim to duty - to 'the men' who worked so loyally; to the memory of ancestors; to the public so reliant on their particular style of service. The 'moral cement' binding together the diverse strains of duty imposed on their loyalties was frequently professionalism - each member could claim a moral virtue from adherence to a principle which protected them from ill-founded criticism.

Thus professionalism is an attitudinal commitment available for use by any director who seeks to convince audiences of his reputable moral status. It is not to be considered merely as an alternative to overt commercialism
since, as the data shows, many directors who acknowledge their dominant business orientation still claim to exercise it in a professional manner. To claim a professional status entails the possibility of being unmasked - to be found unworthy of the honour or to be found wanting in certain crucial components of social identity. The evidence presented in chapter three shows that funeral directors look with particular concern to their occupational peers for confirmation of their occupational technique. They are more responsive to peer group assessment of their professional competence than to customer approval partly due to the informed nature of peer observations and partly to its constancy. Customers, by the nature of their dependency on the director, are not considered a suitably knowledgeable reference group and moreover can only pass judgement on the single occasion of a particular funeral. Thus customers as 'clients' must be fully satisfied and their wishes acknowledged, but the 'significant others' who speak from practical experience have a consistent influence on directors self-assessments. 'Professionalism' therefore becomes a particular attitude to the manner in which the work is accomplished, irrespective of the 'objective' market position of the occupation. This accords closely to lay usage and, as made clear in chapter seven, can strengthen the ego of a director but not significantly assist upward occupational mobility. Therefore, though many funeral directors strive to obscure their basic commercialism, claiming to reject the narrow self-interest associated with profit-seeking, the more astute members of their occupation claim that professionalism is integral to the structural norms of commerce and that competent service deserved and required recognition in the form of renewed profit. Clients value a service for which they paid and directors receive suitable return for their labour. However, as the bedrock of capitalism is the successful manipulation of human as well as non-human resources for personal profit, selling funerals must rely on the willing suspension of suspicion or disbelief by the purchaser. As made abundantly clear by the data provided in chapters five, six and seven, connotations of exploitation or swindling are as closely related to professionalism as to any other form of customer relationship and director's claims to professional conduct did not of itself prove diligence, equity or altruism.
The sincerity and honesty required of a director has no necessary connection with professionalism; this orientation is essentially an aspect of the dramatic rhetoric used by the powerful to maintain dependence in those requiring service. It is used to exploit client weakness and to justify the link developed between specialism and personal profit. The data show the directly or indirectly voiced uncertainty and doubt experienced by directors when seeking to justify their profit. Few of them felt sufficiently secure to operate without some form of obeisance in the direction of professionalism whatever their expressed attitude to selling funerals.

2. PRESENTATION AND STRUCTURE

2.1 CLASSIFYING FIRMS AND INDIVIDUALS

One funeral director's business looks very much like any other when casually observed and since the bereaved rarely 'shop around' to compare goods, services or attitudes the most striking public attribute of the funeral directing occupation is similarity. In the absence of significant difference potential clients seek out the director most likely to be suitable on the basis of family experience, local knowledge or proximity. However, penetration of the previously concealed back-stage regions has revealed the diversity and variation that exists behind the formal presentation of uniformity. Businesses can usefully be categorised in the following manner, under the classification of 'T.O.M.S' wherein:-

(T) TYPE: indicates the variation that exists between sole-trader, private or public business or co-operative society

(O) ORIENTATION: notes whether the firm specialises in funerals; provides funerals in addition to other death-related activities; or provides funerals merely as a supplement to another more significant occupation

(M) MARKET: which emphasises a wholesale or retail output
which reflects the number of funerals constructed each week

Furthermore a typology of funeral directors is presented, not in order to construct an 'ideal-type' against which to measure any real example, but to reflect the motivations, commitments and actions presented by the directors themselves during the investigation. Even though a bi-polarisation of positions is shown, directors cannot be allocated a static position at one polar extreme or the other, except in rare cases.

The 'Business-Professional' orientation emphasises the manner in which directors choose a professional commitment to funeral construction or openly acknowledge a straight-forward commercialism. However, as indicated above, the ideology of professionalism prevades the occupation at proprietorial level and is used as a claim to status by many directors who wish to minimise their business orientation. Moreover a director's concern to achieve an individually successful career may be combined with a wish to advance his family's fortune, therefore the 'Family-Individual' dichotomy is a further guide to directors' behaviour. Finally, the classification emphasising dedication to client service rather then to municipalisation reflects the almost universal commitment given by directors to private enterprise. Virtually none of the directors investigated accepted that municipalisation of funerals would, or could be preferable to individual competition, but it was a polar extreme which focussed their attention most effectively on justifying their own dominant position. The value of constructing such a classification of firms and typology of directors is to frame the individual accounts given by respondents and, by relating one to another, show similarities without thereby obliterating their distinctiveness. The uniformity presented publicly by members of the occupation is a consequence of an occupational 'front' and one that is not substantiated by close investigation.
2.2 THE ABSENCE OF A FULLY AUTHENTICATED DIRECTOR

At the centre of the occupational presentation is the concept of 'director' yet as the findings circumstantially demonstrate the title of 'director' may be claimed, or used, on the basis of either ownership of a firm; membership of the NAFD; qualification; or performance. Consequently it is suggested that only a person possessing all four characteristics could be recognised as an authentic funeral director although no-one in the occupation claimed such a distinctive accolade. Dominating the occupation and assuming the title as of right are the proprietors. Since they gave their name to specific businesses; created their own protective association; claim to represent the collective interests of the occupation; and speak as the moral conscience of all directors, any claim by them to be regarded as 'authentic' will be hard to refute. However, men who 'conduct' funerals may not hold a diploma of qualification; those who are qualified may not be proprietors; proprietors may not handle dead bodies or conduct funerals themselves but act as administrators; some administrators will arrange thousands of funerals without, of necessity, seeing a body, a coffin, a client or a funeral. A client has no way of knowing with certainty whether the man (rarely a woman) who is perceived to be the director and who then conducts their funeral has actually seen the deceased's body, touched it, prepared it, given it his protection (as the act of caretaking implicitly assumes) or even prepared the ceremony. The conductor of the funeral may therefore be no more than a figure-head providing the correct client-oriented accompanyment to the disposal scene. Since the bereaved are largely ignorant of such occupational subtleties they give little attention to the underlying implications of title. The proprietor, as legitimate owner of the firm, may have little to do with the practicalities of funeral work, yet will not willingly relinquish the title of director.

The failure of the NAFD to exercise effective control over its members and to produce 'authentic' funeral directors allows individuals to construct their own definitions. The comparative study conducted with directors in Newfoundland showed clearly how funeral directors can
organise themselves and openly assert a commercial orientation without sacrificing 'face' or status. The evidence gained in Newfoundland reinforces the analysis provided by Magali Larson and Terence Johnson, detailed in chapter seven, that collegiate control and state licensure are essential if occupational dominance and status is to be achieved. The failure of the NAFD to gain state support stems partly from its failure to produce an internally cohesive and controlling association. It has not become a competent, forceful, guiding and regulating body and therefore has no bargaining strength. Its unwillingness to enter into national negotiations with trade unions expresses its insecurity. It seeks to keep the workers fragmented and to ensure that wage negotiations do not become nationally binding. The parochial nature of its attitude is a reflection of its inability to produce a uniform standardisation product - a fully authenticated funeral director.

2.3 LABELLING THE WORKERS

The trade-union with the largest membership (FTAT) can only claim to represent about half the total full-time work force and a minority of the part-time workers. Many unionists acknowledge a purely 'instrumental' attitude to its goals and aspirations even though it has significantly improved their actual conditions of employment. If it expects them to challenge the consensualist approach presented by their employers, they reject it. The few trade-unionists who openly acknowledge a structural imbalance between workers and employers and actively seek to redress the inequality have been labelled 'protectionists' since they regard the union as a defence against work exploitation. They do not thereby consider themselves to be revolutionary activists but as defenders of workers rights and supporters of positive reform. Few among them argue in favour of municipalisation because the consequences of such a decisive change could not be assessed in terms of future employment. They view the 'consensualist' majority as 'guv'ners' men, clearly recognising that most workers were prepared to follow their guv'ner rather than the trade union. The acquiescence of the majority of workers with the stated goals of the proprietors is understandable when the influence of the
'client-service' ethic is fully appreciated by observers. Whilst the occupation lacks the unified and cohesive structure which characterises it to the casual audience, the proprietors have successfully generated a normative consensus among the workers. This is due in part to the strong emphasis placed by them on team-work, requiring individuality to be restricted to a supportive involvement in a group presentation and also to the presentation of 'client-as-victim', which demands from workers an 'other-directed' work orientation. Team-work and client-service provide powerful reasons for conformity. At present a reasonable income can be achieved by funeral directors and many of them expressed a desire to leave things as they are and not to introduce any form of significant change. The increasingly high cost of maintaining expensive vehicles which stand idle for much of the week may be a catalyst which initiates change and forces more openly competitive occupation whereby business mergers and widespread advertising complement a reduction in the number of vehicles maintained, centralisation of resources and a smaller work-force. A change of this magnitude, which could encompass the phasing out of the expensive cortege would not only seriously weaken the quasi-professional stance taken by so many directors noted throughout this study, but rapidly deplete the size of the work-force required to maintain an efficient service. The increasing probability of redundancy would be likely to increase the conformity among those retained, further weakening the influence of committed trade unionists.

3. **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

3.1 **SANITARY INOVATION**

The only innovation of consequence to have been introduced by undertakers and by funeral directors is temporary preservation (mistakenly called 'embalming'). This is the only activity which is not a purely superficial manipulation of the body, even though it is less 'clinical' or scientific than frequently claimed. It is now carried out by the majority of funeral firms as a matter of course, and undoubtedly keeps a body in 'better' condition; that is, one that does not offend the
smell, vision or aesthetic sensibilities of workers or bereaved. It also allows firms of embalmers to prosper; individual embalmers to gain a reasonable income; funeral directors to make a regular extra profit; and funerals to be delayed for a week or more thereby avoiding the payment of workers for week-end or holiday working. There are, therefore, strong financial reasons for its widespread use which are as important as the aesthetic considerations, even though not publicised by the funeral firms.

The occupation is now characterised by sanitary premises, pseudo-clinical practices, gentlemanly procedures and entrepreneurial techniques designed not merely to effectively service clients but to offset the stereotypical images current in past generations. The seedy incompetent undertakers of the Victorian era and the honest but naive artisans of village communities are images which modern directors wish to forget or supplant.

3.2 EXPLOITING A SECULAR MARKET

That a professional stance should be adopted by so many contemporary directors is a measure of the social distance separating them from their late 17th Century origins. The historical evidence shows that the beginnings of a commercial and industrial revolution and the consequent weakening of rigid social barriers that occurred in the 17th and 18th Centuries gave rise to an expanding middle-class and opened the door to a wave of service occupations actively seeking to exploit new markets. Tradesmen-undertakers 'arrived' to provide a secular funeral service, making available first to the wealthier tradesmen, businessmen and officials, then to the less affluent and finally to the poor all the mourning paraphernalia previously associated with only the upper classes. Painters, upholsterers, grave-diggers, wood-workers, cabinet-makers, carpenters, joiners, carriers, livery-stablemen, warehousemen, clothiers, drapers, appraisers, auctioneers and coffin-makers became specialist 'undertakers'. They extended the scope of their work to fully furnish a funeral and gradually succeeded in making a male-dominated, secular oriented 'business' occupation
separated from its artisan origins. (Women were at first involved, extending the nursing and 'laying-out' function they had historically performed, but were soon excluded as the commercial potential of funeral servicing outweighed the 'body-caring' activities previously considered an essentially family concern).

The role of the clergy remained important as the producer of sacred ritual and as comforter to the bereaved, but they became increasingly separated from the overall 'patterning' of the occasion. They have now become but one aspect of a complex service rendered to the living and the dead and with funeral directors offering to conduct the entire ceremony their contemporary role has been significantly circumscribed. The present day self-conscious, quasi-professionally oriented personal service occupation which dominates funeral provision now incorporates body-removal, treatment, encoffining, viewing and public presentation; it builds owns and operates funeral 'homes', 'chapels' of rest and churches. It notifies relatives, purchases flowers, inserts advertisements, fulfills statutory regulations, engages clergymen and will, if required, provide counselling services and financial advice to the bereaved. It is now a prosperous business investment, one that is handed down from father to son and recognised as an important family enterprise. This resembles the passing down of artisan skill that characterised their craftsmen forbears but the contemporary director prides himself on management, administrative and organisational skills tempered with a psychological understanding of 'human nature'. He occupies a firmly middle-class status, confirming it with membership of organisation such as Rotary, Round Table, Chamber of Commerce and Freemasons. The link between a solitary tradesman surviving on the basis of a craft skill such as woodworking, and the present day entrepreneur taking responsibility for psychological as well as physical needs has been traced through social-historical literature, occupational archives and documents and the social history of particular family firms. The fact that coffins have only been in general use for the last two hundred years, coinciding with the period of their development, and that before that were actually banned by law from the poor is one significant indicator of the persuasive selling ability of funeral
directors. Coffins today are not only central to all funerals but are the most expensive single item, with the possible exception of a gravestone.

The 'Metropolitan Internment Act' of 1850 allowed the then Board of Health to provide funerals but no central or municipal authority has ever sought to challenge the effective monopolisation of funerals by this one specialist occupation. What the heralds achieved for themselves on behalf of the Crown and with the support of the Catholic Church, has been surpassed, in purely economic terms, by aspiring businessmen claiming the support of 'tradition', the requirements of formal administration and the justification of necessity as legitimising factors.

4. CREATING A DIRECTORIAL ROLE AND ENGINEERING A FUNERAL

4.1 INTERPRETIVE CONTROL

The central concern of this research has been to conduct a micro-sociological investigation into the occupational experience of the contemporary funeral director. The picture that emerges shows the manner in which he exercises his skill to determine how clients and audiences perceive his occupational role, and how he manipulates his unique position to become controller of funeral ceremony. He is the centre of research interest rather than the macro-social world of economic and historical events to which he feels normatively bound. The evidence indicates the successful manner in which he surmounts whatever difficulties he experiences.

(A) THE REIFICATION OF FUNERAL ACTIVITY

The research has shown that the apparent 'facticity' of a funeral is a consequence of the director's organising and controlling capability which allows him to create a chronological sequence of events in which he exercises behavioural control. Directors react to 'the funeral', which they operationally control, as though it possesses an objective reality with its own internal logic and external constraints. Such an act of 'reification' results in each director acting as if in compliance
with its internal, rule-governed nature. In this way a particular funeral is presented by a director as though it is a reflection of a general principle determining all funerals - a compliance with the 'rules of the game'. The funeral is regarded by all participants as an outcome of the underlying patterning and simultaneously as proof of the existence of such a patterning. It is given status, legitimacy and meaning not by repetitive performance of particular activities but by the validating judgements provided by participants and audiences. This theoretical analysis is derived from empirical observation of the director's defining, classifying, ordering and rule-making activities, and substantiated by respondents whose words and summaries comprise the ethnographic chapters. The central position of the director in the organisation of funerals makes him the interpretive medium through which all information concerning death and disposal is transmitted. He is physically, administratively and organisationally dominant, and a resource to whom others turn for leadership.

(B) AGENDA SETTING

Each individual director studied showed a dramaturgical discipline; an ability to fashion and to control his presentation of an occupational role, and to effect the total integration of all participants into a stylistically elegant performance. To achieve that end each director presents a robust performance of his controlling ability to convince client and audience of his suitability and authenticity. He ensures that events and people are given an order of precedence; that an agenda of specific activities is constructed; that specialists are engaged to fulfil specific tasks; that a coffin and fittings are aesthetically suitable and that an overall time-schedule places people in their correct context. As noted in chapter five, logistical efficiency ensures operational control which in turn regulates attitudinal responses.

As shown in chapter three, individual directors confirmed each other's defining role by extolling a particular hearse, commending the use of preservative techniques, praising a decorous use of language, acknowledging the limits of commercial practice and defining appropriate director-client relationship. Through the pages of the associational
journal they voiced their concern with occupational behaviour and aired criticism of inadequate performances. In this collective manner the individual director was supported in his attempt to define an 'appropriate' performance to a constantly new audience.

Each funeral director was shown to select a particular style of performance and to present it in such a manner as to receive client endorsement, (presented in chapters, five, six and eight). The director is especially vulnerable to a hostile or indifferent response since his immediate profit and future business is a reflection of client evaluation. He therefore ensures a favourable public response by supplying everything required to make a successful funeral from a mental construct of a 'proper' funeral to a particular style of coffin.

(C) ACTIVE DIRECTORS - PASSIVE MOURNERS

Directors, presented in chapter five, demonstrate their ability to maintain interpretive control of funerals. They emphasise a competent team performance; a well established neighbourhood or family firm; a 'professional' skill; care, sobriety, probity and confidentiality. All are used to ensure client compliance with a funeral programme that has been developed for other clients and now awaits a new purchaser. The director's claim to be efficient is complimented by his intimation that the 'burdens' attached to bereavement should not be borne by the client but transferred to the specialist. The director takes physical control of the funeral from the client and thereby creates a passive participant; one who fits into a schedule over which he has no substantial influence.

The absence of physical control over funeral procedures reduces the client's ability to determine meanings because actions generate meanings. Clients are led into performances which emphasise dependency and they are likely to define themselves as followers, not originators. Not one of the bereaved who were questioned as part of this study (nor of those interviewed but not included in the sample), acknowledge being in control of their funeral ceremony. (The funeral ceremony is for the living not the dead therefore it is appropriate, though not usual, to speak of 'their' funeral). The concern of all funeral directors
examined in this study to act as caretakers of the body and to preserve and present it in their own occupational manner physically precludes client responsibility for these emotionally significant activities.

(D) ROUTINISATION OF BEHAVIOUR

Directors therefore gain interpretive control of funerals by determining the practicalities of actual funeral behaviour. Respondents have recounted the manner in which new members learn the 'tricks of the trade' from parents, veterans and astute directors and grow wise in the methods of client manipulation, (referred to as client 'service').

Language, uniform, conduct and astute use of space and design in funeral homes allows a simple routine to be comprehensively developed and routinely presented to a constantly changing and therefore uninitiated audience. From first call on their service to departure from public view the director has ensured control over the interpretations held not only by his immediate client but by all who observe his performance. This has been achieved with the willing acquiescence of those who become dependent on him.

4.2 ENGINEERING SINCERITY (A) CREATING AN 'ACTUAL' SOCIAL ENTITY

Every director must, therefore, construct a suitable public 'face' which will encourage the public to actively seek out his particular service skills. He is open to be hired yet does not widely advertise his wares. Each must produce an actual social identity to mirror the virtual social identity that he has led audiences to expect or, in a more general sense, he is required to reinforce the stereotype generated by members throughout the occupation. He must develop an individual presentation that marks out his particular style of performance whilst contributing to the overall pattern.

The construction and maintenance of a suitable 'public face' is of paramount importance to every funeral director and the respondents cited in chapter five give specific examples of the choices available such as honest artisan, consultant, sound businessman or professional counsellor. The manoeuvres adopted by Mr. Upman to gain public acceptability were excessive (chronicled in chapter six); they
demonstrate the potential for deception, over-dramatisation or affability as well as for sincerity that is possessed by such public performers. The expressive duplicity that is a basic characteristic of all face to face interaction is not held in abeyance because death is the subject matter that brings actors together. Whilst each performer presumes that every other is presenting his 'real' face, and on that basis constructs a contingent social encounter, critical analysis of interaction suggests a different reading of social occasions. Many roles are carried by each interactant and game-playing, cheating, duplicity and face-saving manoeuvres are integral to maintaining personal control over the interaction in order to present a particular performance with conviction. In other words, impression management is an essential prerequisite of role-performance and funeral directors are forced by the public nature of their daily work to be more concerned with creating favourable impressions than many other service occupations. The funeral is believed by participants to be a vehicle for expressing publicly the characteristics of the task that is to be performed, namely the open avowal of a death and the disposal of the body. It is, however, open to the outside analyst to regard it as an expressive extension of the directorial role; that is, as a vehicle for demonstrating the public face of a practising specialist. That it can be observed as carrying both connotations simultaneously is confirmation of the view, expressed throughout this work, that social occasions are bargaining encounters where presentations of self are offered, confirmed or rejected, and where negotiated settlements are achieved. Most funerals are testimony to the success of the director in determining the outcome of potentially precarious social activity. None of the respondents who were interviewed or observed in this study presented a definition of a funeral that was in any way inimical to the funeral director's formal definition of the ceremony as a traditionally sanctioned, client demanded disposal procedure. The significant characteristic attaching to funeral directors is performance, and the research shows directors as actors seeking to convince themselves as well as audiences of the authenticity of their act. Members themselves demonstrated the manner in which they created and marketed a convincingly 'objective' self and erected defensive techniques to
protect it from critical attention. Furthermore, their willing involvement with the Price Commission Report of 1977; their friendship with Members of Parliament prepared to urge the case for State recognition of their occupation; their membership of business organisations such as Chamber of Commerce, Round Table and Freemasonry; the creation of a public relations officer to present their collective opinions; the acceptance of a basic funeral price and their involvement with school's career advice services are practical examples of their attempts to present a collective respectability.

(B) BECOMING A MERCHANT OF MORALITY

A successfully staged funeral requires circumspection from attendant audiences and their compliance with the conductor's reading of events. Individual directors have been shown to be fully involved in maintaining the impression that they also are living up to the standards by which both they and their services are to be judged. But as actors and performers they are less concerned with realising these standards than with engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realised. The activity of funeral directors is directly related to moral matters, (retaining confidences, giving value for money, treating a body respectfully, not abusing client trust, fulfilling obligations etc.,), but they are performers and salesmen who sell morality, that is, offer to behave as moral agents in return for money. They are therefore 'merchants of morality' (Goffman 1969 p222).

Furthermore they are concerned to give 'sincerity' a structural and pivotal position in their occupational activity, convincing audiences that their reputable status is due to probity and care. 'Sincerity' is an important attitudinal resource; part of a repertoire of performance techniques which directors utilise to impress those who are in the process of evaluating their performance. The claim to be sincere is essentially moral; it asserts that what is to be seen is the reality and that imputations of deceit, fraud, duplicity or pretence are inappropriate. Unaffected candour, frankness without artifice and plain speaking are implied, leading the observer to conclude that a social identity is to be purchased in addition to a technical service.
Mistakes, faux pas, embarrassment and disattention must not be allowed to disrupt their smoothly presented performance and their 'accounting' has clearly shown the methods by which they have successfully manufactured a public image which has been accorded a stereotypicality strong enough to survive eighty years of relative public indifference to their actual work-practices.

The directors, mourners and audience monitor not only each others performance but also their own. Too much self-awareness may interfere with giving a convincing performance therefore participants have an investment in being as unselfconscious as possible. The subtle manoeuvres used by members to remain 'in play' without appearing too openly concerned with their own performance are the technical 'ploys' of all social interaction. The actor's own words and actions expressed in this research show, in detail, how directors impose meaning on the corporate activity and in doing so actively create the 'objective reality' called a funeral.

(C) CREATING 'REALITY'

The rules of interaction are not the free product of members in search of meaning. Rules may also result from factors outside members' activities and interests. The apparent reality of funerals has been examined in chapters one and five and shown to be a product of both subjective and '(what is experienced as) objective realities such as cultural requirements or professional necessities existing independently of the actor. The cultural pressures arising from sources outside the occupation are experienced by directors as real and lasting in consequence and this research acknowledges that funeral behaviour reflects the input from two contrasting locations; the individual and the macro-social. Throughout the study the director's attempts to resolve uncertainties arising from the tension between internal and external definitions has been recorded. Interceding in the intensely personal situation of bereavement is explained by recourse to skilled servicing; handling a 'sacred' body is resolved by presenting an empathetic understanding; handling the dead for profit is explained by the premise of 'professional' client-oriented conduct; and the tensions
between sacred and secular (such as providing a secular practice in a religious setting) are handled by adopting an extreme formality.

Funeral directors provide routinised procedures and compile practical agendas in a manner that is rarely challenged. They create a demand for a service which they alone are competent to provide. Observance of 'what goes on' in funeral servicing has, until recently, been confined to casual and intermittent observation of their public appearances. Closer study of the client-director relationship shows that negotiation of contending definitions ends in favour of the director who produces the setting, the demeanour and the talk to validate his controlling influence. The view from inside his occupational world indicates exactly why this should be so and enforces the view that funeral ritualism is less a consequence of cultural norms than the outcome of a commercial transaction created, engineered and sustained by a group of dedicated practitioners. Funeral directors, to a significant degree, determine the 'reality' of funerals and ensure that 'death-work' remains firmly located in their unique occupation.
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<td>1972</td>
<td><em>Mourning</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Penguin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Publication Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PORTWOOD D &amp;</td>
<td>1981 Privilege and the Professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIELDING A</td>
<td>Sociological Review Vol 29 No.4 New Series November 1981 pp749-773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSATHAS G</td>
<td>1980 (ED) in DITTON The View from Goffman - London - Macmillan pp54-63, 72-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUCKLE B</td>
<td>1926 Funeral Customs, their Origin and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUARTERLY REVIEW</td>
<td>1981 Fall pp92-106 - USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAETHER H C</td>
<td>1971 Successful Funeral Service Practice - Englewood Cliffs - Prentice Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READER W</td>
<td>1966 Professional Men - London - Weidenfeld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REEVES M B</td>
<td>(1926 original) 1979 Round About a Pound a Week - London - Virago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHULTZ M</td>
<td>1979 The Mysteries of Life and Death - London - Salamander Books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE FUNERAL.
ALLOWANCES OF MOURNING AT STATE FUNERALS

*Liveryes for Noblemen att Intermentes, every man according to his eustat [rank]*

[Ordinances originally temp. Henry VII, re-issued at different times in the sixteenth century]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garments</th>
<th>Yards required</th>
<th>Price per yard</th>
<th>No. of his servants to be supplied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duke</td>
<td>gown, sloppe,† mantle</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archbishop</td>
<td>gown, sloppe, mantle</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marquis</td>
<td>gown, sloppe, mantle</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl</td>
<td>gown, sloppe, mantle</td>
<td>14–16</td>
<td>8s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viscount</td>
<td>gown and mantle</td>
<td>8–12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baron or Banneret being Knight of the Garter</td>
<td>gown and hood</td>
<td>6–8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knight</td>
<td>[the same?]</td>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>6s. 8d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esquires of royal household</td>
<td>as a knight</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other esquires and gentlemen</td>
<td>gown and tippet</td>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>5s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Four MSS. collated: Bodleian MS. Ashmole 837 (ed. F. Furnivall); Harl. 1354 (ed. J. Strutt); B.M. MSS. Egerton 2642 and Harl. 1440. A few misreadings occur in the two printed versions.
† Sloppe = probably, as for women, “a mourning cassocke not open before” (see p. 210).
‡ Where there is a range of quantities, the lower figures occur in the later MSS.
FUNERAL CAVALCADE OF THE RT HON. THE EARL OF
DERBY, IN 1572 *

Note—Those with mourning hood “over the face” are shown in CAPITALS. Those with hood “over the shoulder” in italics. All who wore hoods also had black gowns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Men</th>
<th>Category and Order of Proceeding</th>
<th>Costume Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Foot 2</td>
<td>Yeomen conductors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Poor men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Choir and singing men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>STANDARD-BEARER (an Esquire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse-</td>
<td>Gentlemen on comely geldings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back 80</td>
<td>Secretaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Esquires and knights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Chaplains of the defunct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preacher (Dean of Chester)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Steward, Treasurer and Comptroller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BANNER-BEARER (an Esquire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HERALD bearing Helm and Crest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HERALD (a King-of-Arms) bearing Shield</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HERALD (a King-of-Arms) bearing Sword</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HERALD (a King-of-Arms) bearing Coat [Tabard]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHARIOT

4 BOYS (PAGES) riding the 4 horses
1 USHER on the fore-seat
4 ESQUIRES†
6 BANNERROLL-BEARERS

Horse- 1
back
1 CHIEF MOURNER, the new Earl
His train-bearer
2 USHERS, one each side of the Earl
GENTLEMAN OF THE HORSE leading
Horse of Estate
8 ASSISTANT MOURNERS (Principal)
1 Yeoman
2 Sons of chief mourner (grandsons of the defunct)

On Foot 2
2 Gentlemen to lead their [the grandsons'] horses
3 Yeomen others
500 Yeomen of the defunct‡
all Servants of gentlemen attending

C H A R I O T

Mourning robes of an earl
Bare-headed
White rods of office

284

* Summary of the account transcribed in J. G. Nichols, Manners and Expenses . . . (1797), pp. 65-71.
† These four probably acted as pall-bearers when the chariot was at rest. Besides these, there were twelve bearers, not listed above, who carried the coffin into the church “8 gentlemen, 4 yeomen in gowns, theire hoods on theire heads” (ibid., p. 69).
‡ There were usually yeomen and gentlemen servants in the fore part of the procession. After the introduction of mourning cloaks some of the yeomen were upgraded to cloaks (from coats) and some of the gentlemen were downgraded to cloaks (from gowns).
40. Funeral effigy of General Monk, Duke of Albemarle, on his coffin, wearing his own ducal robe and coronet, a complete suit of armour, the garter and collar of his Order and a periwig. Bearers of pall, canopy and banners wear the nearly extinct mourning gown and tippetted hood. Pall with escutcheons. 1670.

*Engr. after Francis Barlow in Francis Sandford Order of the ... Interment of George Duke of Albemarle ... 1670.*
Trumpeters in mourning cloaks. An officer-at-arms in black gown and hood; being a pursuivant (junior to a herald) he wears his royal tabard sideways on, so that its short "sleeves" are fore and aft.

Both from B.M. MS. Addl. 35324 (ff. 36 and 27v, details).
At the lower Corner of Fleet-lane at the Signe of the Naked Boy & Coffin, you may be accommodated with all things for a Funeral as well as the meanest as those of greater Ability upon Reasonable Terms, more particularly Coffins, Shroud Palls, Cloaks, Sconces, Stains, Hangings for Rooms, Heraldry, Hearse, & Coaches, Gloves, & all other things not here mentioned by W. Grinly, Coffin Maker.

UNDEFTAKER'S SIGN AND ADVERTISEMENT
(Eighteenth century).

Colour aquatint by Thos. Sutherland after R. B. Davis.
EXTRACT FROM THE ACCOUNT BOOK OF G. RICKWORD, 
UNDERTAKER, COLCHESTER

Funeral of Mrs Jackson, Dedham, 1st May 1863.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 best crape hatbands and scarves</td>
<td>14s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 best silk hatbands and scarves</td>
<td>28/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 best hatbands for Self, plumber, mason and assistant</td>
<td>10/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 silk hatbands for 8 Bearers, 4 Coachmen,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Horseman,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Clerk and Sexton</td>
<td>7s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 crape hatbands for servants</td>
<td>4/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 pair of Kidd gloves for [?]</td>
<td>2/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 pair of dents* best Kidd gloves</td>
<td>4s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 pair of gloves for Bearers, Coachmen, etc.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* I.e. made by Messrs Dent & Co.

THE " DISMAL TRADE " IN COUNCIL.
(from an old print).
Sign of the now extinct " Company of Undertakers."

The Company of Undertakers
ADVERTISEMET OF MOURNING WEAR, 1872

From Walford, E. County Families

MOURNING.

Messrs. Jay have always at command experienced Dressmakers and Milliners, who act as travellers, so that in the event of immediate Mourning being required, or any other sudden emergency for dress, one can be dispatched to any part of the Kingdom on receipt of letter or telegram, without any expense whatever to the purchaser. All articles are marked in plain figures, and charges are the same as if the goods were bought for ready money at the Warehouse in Regent Street.

Messrs. Jay, anxious to remove an impression which they find has gained undue circulation, that none but the richest materials in Made-up Skirts, Mantles, and Millinery are sold at their Establishment, deem it a duty to themselves and the public to assure all Families who have not dealt at Jay's Mourning Warehouse, that they sell an excellent Family Mourning Dress, full length, for the small sum of One Guinea and n-half. Good Wearing Materials are cut from the piece, and at more than an equivalent for the price, which is from 1s. per yard upwards.

JAY'S,
THE LONDON GENERAL MOURNING WAREHOUSE;
217, 219, & 221 REGENT STREET.

MESSRS. JAY,
Having adopted a fixed tariff, publish the following epitome of their charges for

DRESSMAKING.

Making Dress, with Plain Skirt .......................... 10/6
Making Dress, with Tucks of Crapo or Fancy Trimmings ............................................. from 14/0
Making Bodice and Mounting Skirt into Band ........................................................................ 7/6
Making Widow's Bodice, do. do .......................... 8/-
Mounting Skirt into Band, with Alpaca Pocket ................................................................... 1/6
Mounting do. do. with Black Silk Pocket .............................................................................. 2/6
Mounting do. do. without Pocket ......................................................................................... 1/-
Silk Body Lining ...................................................................................................................... 5/6
Silk Sleeves Lining .................................................................................................................. 5/-
Silk Low Body and Sleeve Lining ........................................................................................... 7/-
Lawn Body Lining .................................................................................................................. 1/-
Silk Facing .................................................................................................................................. — 10/-
Petersham Ribbon for Binding ................................................................................................ -40
Petersham Waistband, Covered Crapo and Rosette .................................................................. 2/6
Making Garibaldi ....................................................................................................................... 6/-
Making Low Bodice .................................................................................................................. 6/-
Sandries .................................................................................................................................... 10/-

Tucker, Braid, and Trimmings extra.
Top hat c. 1890. The hat of an undertaker, with black silk 'weeper' ends. *Worthing Library, Museum and Art Gallery*

Half-mourning parasol. White satin heavily edged with black. Summer parasols were often almost covered in crape, with no lace or fringe for the first year, if carried by a widow. Afterwards, mourning fringe could be put on. *Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society*
THE Prototype of the "MOURNING COACH"
(from an old drawing).