



Centre for Death & Society

January 2026 Newsletter

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Director's Note

Hello to 2026 and all our supporters – we hope that this is a productive and happy year for every one of you. We open the year acknowledging the uncertainty in the world right now and we hope that, in the face of this, CDAS can provide you with some community and solidarity. The Centre has always been an inclusive and innovative space for discussion, debate and collaboration, and we will do our best to continue this long tradition in a world that feels increasingly unstable and divisive.

We are also pleased to remind you of the call for papers for our 2026 conference on the pertinent theme of 'Death and Power'. The call is now open and will close on the 2nd February 2026. Get your abstract in before the closing date! We always receive many more abstracts than we can include, so please make sure to explicitly address the theme in what you submit.

Our special congratulations go to two CDAS PhD students this month: to Alastair Comery for successfully defending his thesis and being awarded his PhD, and to recently-awarded George Gumisiriza who was invited to deliver a keynote address at the Hospice UK National Conference in Liverpool. Elsewhere in the Centre, co-director Naomi Pendle travelled to South Sudan as part of her British Academy-funded *Death during Famine* grant. Naomi and Dr. Martin Ochaya (the grant's Co-I) hosted two workshops in Juba (South Sudan) – one with church leaders and one for the South Sudanese and Sudanese research team. Fellow co-director Kate Woodthorpe's ESRC project with Prof Kate Reed at the University of Manchester on death administration started in December – more details about that project will be shared in due course. Meanwhile, Gayle Letherby has commenced her creative writing project with a series of workshops in January and John Troyer has taught another very well received first semester of the undergraduate Sociology of Death unit at the University of Bath. For the first time, this next semester will see another fours months of teaching on this popular course, allowing us to teach more death-related topics. Rebecca Burden joins Jo Owens' on her supervisory team, and in the next few weeks we look forward to the return of PhD student Catriona Bickel from parental leave.

As to the months ahead, we are delighted to announce that we have just secured funding from the GW4 to build connections across the SouthWest of England over the spring. For those local to us, watch this space! In February several members of CDAS will be participating in the Palliative Research Incubator workshop in Bath (details in community events), and in March we have a jointly organised online seminar with the Bereavement Network Europe on the impact of traumatic death on social networks with Dr Georgie Akehurst. If you have suggestions for a seminar or would like to share your work with CDAS, just get in touch. Finally, in advance of two honorary doctorates being awarded via CDAS we want to share with you our new University-wide initiative for very graduation: The Empty Chair. Details about this initiative and a link to an explanatory video can be found in our CDAS news section.

Until next time, Kate and Naomi

CDAS NEWS

Clare Gittings 1954-2025

We start our newsletter this month with the very sad news that just before Christmas, Clare Gittings – known to many of us as a historian of early modern death - died from a severe stroke. Her classic work, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (1984, re-published 2023) charted how modern concern with the individual gradually alienated death from English society; the greater the emphasis on personal uniqueness, the more intense the anguish when an individual dies. Always interested in how the past illuminates the present, she collaborated with scholars from other disciplines such as archaeology, sociology and anthropology, and was instrumental in British death studies emerging in the 1990s as a truly interdisciplinary field.

Clare taught about death through paintings, especially portraits. While always making clear she was not an art historian, much of her working life involved teaching people to ‘read’ paintings and what they tell us about life and death. A passionate, enthusiastic and inspiring teacher, she taught thousands of primary school children on school visits to the National Portrait Gallery where she worked for many years as Education Officer, and dozens of university students (on Masters degrees in Death & Society at the Universities of Reading and Bath) who simply adored her. She was the perfect co-editor (with Peter Jupp) of *Death in England: an illustrated history* (1999).

In her twenties she had worked as a primary school teacher and also worked in teacher training with Voluntary Service Overseas in the Maldives. Latterly in retirement she engaged in local historical research in Hertford where she and Malcolm lived.

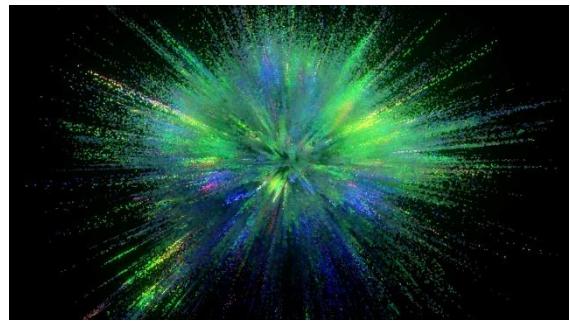
As well as a valued colleague and teacher, Clare was for several of us a dear friend. She was an integral part of the establishment of CDAS and we greatly valued and appreciated her ongoing support for the centre and its members. As Malcolm puts it, ‘Clare touched many hearts across her different fields.’

If you would like details of Clare’s funeral please contact Kate Woodthorpe (k.v.woodthorpe@bath.ac.uk).

CDAS Conference 2026: Death and Power- is now open for contributions

The CDAS conference 2026: death and power will take place from Wednesday 10 - Friday 12 June 2026. It will be wholly online to facilitate international attendance and promote accessibility.

Power, in all its forms, is central to the human condition, peoples' relationships to others, the planet's future, and how endings are experienced. Theorised across many, if not all, disciplines, power is inherent in professions, care, associations with others, policy and politics, perspectives and approaches, rationales and logic. Whether it is something possessed or negotiated, practiced or rejected, power in all its guises is part of life, and of death.



This year's CDAS Conference's theme of power is intended to reflect what is known, and knowable, about dying, death, loss, grief and more, in the past, present and the future. We intentionally leave what we mean by 'power' as open as possible, to encourage as wide a group as possible to engage with the theme.

We welcome abstracts up to 250 words long by 9am GMT on Monday 2 February 2026 from academics, practitioners, policy-makers and others, that address the conference theme.

For more information on topics and the format, please look at [our website](#).

Congratulations to Dr Alastair Comery

Alastair Comery passed his viva in December for his thesis entitled 'A gradual farewell with music: exploring the role of music in bereaved people's everyday lives in facing the death and dying of a loved one'.

Many congratulations to Alastair from all at CDAS, as well as to his supervisors John Troyer and Megan Robb, and many thanks to the examiners Dr Stephen Mason (Liverpool) and Prof Joe Devine (Bath).



The Empty Chair

We were inspired by colleagues at the University of Brussels and their work on create a compassionate university [VUB, a compassionate university | Vrije Universiteit Brussel](#). As part of our 2025 winter graduations, at which we have two honorary doctorates being awarded (more details next month) we have drawn on Brussels to introduce '[The Empty Chair](#)'. This empty chair is to recognise all the students, staff, family members and friends who should be at the graduation ceremony but no longer can be

Dr Gumisiriza gives keynote address in Liverpool

CDAS Ph.D. Alums, Dr. Chao Fang and Dr. George Gumisiriza met up in Liverpool for the Hospice UK National Conference, November 25-27. Dr. Gumisiriza gave a keynote address on faith, culture and spiritual care in hospices. Dr. Fang is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Liverpool.



GW4 funding success

We are pleased to share that we have been successful in securing funding from the GW4 (a consortium of our own University of Bath, plus Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter) to build connections across the SouthWest of England. We have a lot of excellent work on the end of life happening across the region, with multiple large funded studies, fellowships, centres and PhD students. We will use the funding to bring academics and partners together from across the region to see how we can enhance one another's work and support our respective endeavours. If you're based in the SouthWest and are interested in being a part of what we're doing, please get in touch with co-director Kate Woodthorpe (k.v.woodthorpe@bath.ac.uk), who led the bid.

Renske Visser guest edits a special issue in the *Thanatos* journal

The issue is about digital death and was inspired by the 7th International Research Symposium of the Death Online Research Network. You can read the full issue [here](#).

Bethany Simmonds attends BSA DDB Study Group Annual Symposium at the University of Nottingham

Bethany attended the BSA DDB Study Group Annual Symposium at the University of Nottingham on the 16th of December convened by Drs Diana Teggi and Natalie Richardson and presented the following paper: 'Care settings for older people: 'No-man's Land', abandonment and the 'logics of care'. Although an emerging explorative piece, the paper was well received as an innovative application of this theory of carelessness.

In this paper, Bethany critically explored the concept of care in relation to older people at the end of their lives. Care is assumed to be a positive term, abiding connotations of sustenance,

love, and attentiveness. However, this paper explored concepts introduced in Noam Leshem's book (2025) *Edges of Care: Living and Dying in No Man's Land*. Noam's concept of 'the logics of care', the diverse ways various systems of sovereignty define and calculate what forms of life are worth sustaining and which are worth ignoring, will be explored in relation to older people. The logics of care are calculable, like a 'ledger of abandonment' whereby sovereign bodies calculate what is potentially gained or lost by providing (or not) the capacity for certain groups, like older adults, to live. This paper explored the ways that care is suspended and applied for older people at the end of life. In several contemporary examples in health and social care settings in the UK, Bethany applied Leshem's concept of 'No Man's Land', a place outside the realm of normal sovereign logics and duty of care."

Death during Famine workshops hosted by Dr. Martin Ochaya and Naomi Pendle at the Catholic University of South Sudan, Juba (South Sudan)

Dr. Martin Ochaya is Co-Investigator on the *Death during Famine* grant with Naomi Pendle. We gathered on the university campus in Juba to host two workshops. The first workshop was a one-day workshop with senior church leaders from various denominations to discuss the implications of our research for their policies and practices of burial during famine. In our research people impacted by famine often narrated the difficulties with providing a proper burial during famine, as well as the additional indignity this caused. The group of twenty church leaders is now writing recommendations to encourage dignified burials or ways of remembering the famine-dead.

The second workshop was a three-day writing workshop. Participants included South Sudanese and Sudanese researchers, including people from different sides in the South Sudan wars, who are working with us on our British Academy funded grant. We are planning to put together a book from our research and writing.



Fr. Martin Ochaya (Co-I) greeting the camera.



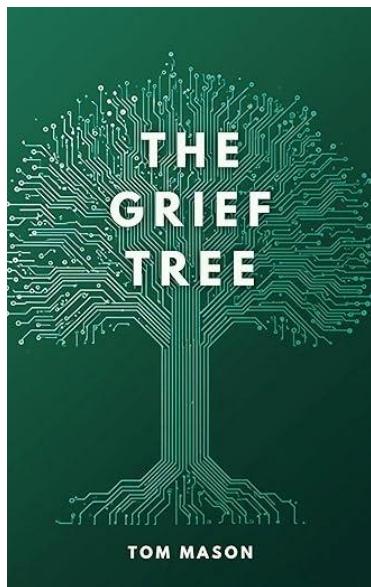
Researchers writing about death during famines in the Sudans in the 1980s, 1990s, 2010s and as recently as 2024 in Sudan.

Santina and Gisma who are our researchers from the Nuba Mountains, Sudan. Gisma is from the Nuba Mountains and Santina has worked as a humanitarian there for over twenty years. While we were in Juba, there was a fatal drone strike by the Sudan government on a school in the town where they live in Nuba Mountains.



The Grief Tree by Tom Mason

Our colleague and Head of Strategic Communications at the University of Bath Tom Mason has just self-published his first novel! Below is the opening paragraph and you can order the book [here](#). Well done Tom!



“It’s safe for Eliza’s memorial to go ahead. The run director shares a screenshot of the weather forecast in the group and promises that the temperature won’t go over 38 degrees. Her update causes the chat to explode with replies, photos and emojis popping up like bubbles, and

Solomon, looking down at his screen, wants to cry. The thought of meeting so many strangers makes his bladder twist. Nerves ping around his stomach with each photo from Eliza’s friends: bright clothes and neon face paint. Someone is bringing their dog. He didn’t think the memorial was going to happen. A red heat warning was supposed to last all weekend and, before he went to bed, the weeds in the garden were wilting. When he woke to grey skies and a breeze, he thought it was a nightmare.”

CDAS EVENTS

Helen Frisby funeral planning workshop at Arnos Vale- 7th February 2026

Learn about traditions of death and burial, and start planning your own send-off.

Whether it's a grand send-off or a simple celebration, one of the kindest things we can do for those we'll leave behind is to let them know what we want. This workshop is a space to help you put your own funeral plans down on paper.

To get started Dr Helen Frisby, author of the Shire book [*Traditions of Death and Burial*](#), will talk about English death and burial customs from the Norman Conquest right through to the present day and the impact of Covid-19. From funeral bells to winding-sheets, angels to the Alexa Ghostbot, we'll discover how funerary ritual helps the dead get where they need to go - and the bereaved where they need to be.

In part two, you'll take inspiration from the talk to begin planning your own 'good send-off.' What might your personal traditions of death and burial look and feel like?

Helen researches and publish on topics relating to death, funerals and bereavement, past and present. She's a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Bath, an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Bristol and Hon. Secretary of [The Folklore Society](#). [Find out more about her work here](#).

More information about the event can be found [here](#).

The impact of traumatic death on social networks: Reflecting on grief and bereavement support in the context of sudden deaths

Bereavement Network Europe/CDAS co-organised seminar

5th March 5pm – 6pm GMT, 6pm – 7pm CET

Online

When someone dies suddenly or unexpectedly, the impact on multiple individuals within a social network can be profound. This webinar makes a case for a more relational understanding of bereavement within this context of loss, arguing that such an approach helps us to recognise the value of one and other's grief being acknowledged, validated and supported, and how loss is mediated *between* people.

Drawing on qualitative evidence generated from a three-year study into the impact of traumatic deaths on social networks, the webinar will explore the extent to which social networks bereaved by a sudden or traumatic death attempt to remedy public disenfranchisement and stigma (Doka, 1989; Guy and Holloway, 2007). Given that the

majority of bereavement support is informal and carried out by close others (Jakoby, 2014; Logan et al, 2018), it will examine the ways in which grief is negotiated from multiple perspectives within a network and how any stigma is, or can be, mitigated.

This is a jointly organised webinar by [Bereavement Network Europe](#) and the [Centre for Death and Society](#) (CDAS) at the University of Bath. It is free to attend.

Speaker biography

Dr Georgie Akehurst is a Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. Her PhD thesis at the University of Sussex focused on grief negotiation among social networks following traumatic bereavement. Her current work in critical suicide studies focuses on how meanings of suicide are culturally embedded and negotiated, and how we can explore what it means to live a ‘liveable’ life.

Links to publications:

[Out of the blue and into it: Autoethnography, emotions and complicated grief - Georgie Akehurst, Susie Scott, 2023](#)

[No-Body Relations and Negative Negotiations: Selfhood after Traumatic Loss \(Chapter 9\) - Interpreting Identities](#)

Sign up [here](#).

CDAS COMMUNITY NEWS

Assisted dying City Campaigners make Bristol Post news

Assisted dying campaigners are urging Bristolians to lobby members of the House of Lords as there are fears that parliamentary process could prevent law change. You can read the article in full [here](#).

New book on the Development of Cremation in England and Wales (1874-2024) has been published

Brian Parsons and Peter C Jupp recently published a book on the history and contemporary practice of cremation as a method of disposal of the dead. It analyses the social, economic and political pressures that facilitated the adoption of cremation. More information about the book can be found [here](#).

Video with Alan Jose from Westerleigh group hit 90,000 views

Perry and Phillips latest video with Alan Jose from Westerleigh Group: [What Really Happens During Cremation? - YouTube](#) hit 90,000 views on YouTube.

CDAS COMMUNITY EVENTS

Dorothy House exhibition to celebrate 50 years

The Light That Lasts / Bruce Munro

A photography exhibition of Bruce Munro's light installations, to celebrate Dorothy House Hospice's 50th anniversary and new partnership with Roseberry Road Studios.

This partnership will see new art-based sessions to support our community in bereavement delivered at the studios and potentially beyond.

The Light That Lasts, curated by internationally acclaimed light-based artist and Dorothy House Ambassador Bruce Munro, is an arresting collection of images of Bruce's immersive installations from around the world.

Each image captures moments in time and spectacles of light that have passed, creating a space to reflect on those whose love remains with us and contemplate light amidst the darkness of winter.

Exhibition Dates / 13th-25th Jan

Mon-Sat / 11am-5pm

Sun / 12pm-4pm

More information can be found [here](#).

For the private view event contact James.Byron@dorothyhouse-hospice.org.uk

Palliative Research Incubator workshop- 4th February 9:30-16:00

BRSLI, Bath

From priorities to projects: turning national research priorities into fundable research

Palliative Research Incubator Workshop

From Priorities to Projects: Turning National Research Priorities into Fundable Research

Who is it for?
Early(including at Masters-level) and mid-career researchers who are either clinical or non-clinical and from any profession/discipline

What you'll gain?

- Support generating individual or collaborative research ideas
- Insight into 2025 Palliative Research Priorities
- Practical tools/techniques for formulating research questions
- Opportunities to connect with peers and mentors
- See the Eventbrite page (below) for more exciting details

Travel Bursary
We are offering a travel bursary to a small group of attendees, see the booking page (below) for more details

Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution
Wednesday 4th February
9:30-16:00

BOOK NOW 

NIHR  National Institute for Health and Care Research 

Palliative Research Incubator Virtual Event

25th February 12:00-12:45

How the Palliative Care Research Society (PCRS) can help you build your research skills

Palliative Research Incubator Virtual Event

How the Palliative Care Research Society (PCRS) can Help you Build your Research Skills

Dr Nicola White, University College London and Dr Emma Chapman University of Leeds

Who is it for?

- Anyonewishing to build their research skills in Palliative and End of Life Care Research

You'll get an insight into:

- How the PCRS can support non-clinical and clinical palliative care research careers nationally
- How the PCRS works with other key organisations
- Exciting opportunities available to PCRS members, including bursary schemes for 2026

FREE
Online
Wednesday 25th February
12:00-12:45



SUPPORTED BY
NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

The Unquiet Dead- the lively burial grounds of the eighteenth century

25th February- 18:30

Death historian Dr Dan O'Brien presents a talk on the unpredictable world of eighteenth-century burial grounds. Before modern cemeteries existed, these long-used community spaces were practical places for dealing with the inevitable problem of death — but they were also far from quiet. Burials, mourners, and everyday life all mixed together, and the dead didn't always rest peacefully.

In this talk, you'll learn about the many people connected to a burial ground and the unexpected activities that took place there — from games and animals to crime. You'll hear stories of undertakers at work, mourners gathered by candlelight, and sextons digging graves in dangerous conditions. Drawing on evidence from many sources, Dr O'Brien reveals how burial grounds were lively public spaces that frequently brought the living close to the dead.

This hybrid talk takes place both onsite in the Spielman Centre and online. The Spielman opens at 6pm, and parking is available from 5pm until the event ends.

More information can be found [here](#).

Registration for the 3rd International Death Literacies Symposium in Breda is now open- 9th and 10th of March

On 9 and 10 March 2026, the End-of-Life Care Research Group (Avans) is hosting an inspiring two-day event on Death Literacy, Grief Literacy in practice and research. As in previous versions of this symposium, Kerrie Noonan from Australia will be attending, and Libby Sallnow from London will also be present, as well as Steven Vanderstichelen from Ghent.

The programme includes:

- keynotes on innovative approaches of death literacy and end-of-life care
- special sessions for Early Career Researchers
- space to explore research and practical developments together

General information: https://lnkd.in/eyy_7_kP

You can register here: <https://lnkd.in/ewriRVBv>

Information about hotels, restaurants, and transport in Breda will be provided in the confirmation email after booking. More specific information about the programme will follow soon.

Palliative Care Research Conference- 4th June 9:30-16:00

Thursday 4th June | Dorothy House Hospice, Winsley | 09:30 – 16:00

We're delighted to invite you to our second collaborative Palliative Care Research Conference, hosted at Dorothy House Hospice in Winsley. This event brings together leading researchers and practitioners to share the latest insights, innovations, and best practices in residential and community settings within palliative care.

Why attend?

- Keynote talks from experts in the field
- Poster presentations and oral abstracts
- Interactive Q&A panels
- Networking opportunities
- Free parking & lunch provided!

Tickets: Early Bird: £70 (limited time)

General Admission: £85

[Reserve Your Spot Now](#)

Call for Abstracts:

Submit your abstract for poster and oral presentation consideration by Friday 27 February 2026.

Email completed forms to research@dorothyhouse-hospice.org.uk

Cremation and Burial Communication and Education Conference and Exhibition- 23rd-25th June

Join us for the Cremation & Burial Communication & Education Conference and Exhibition which is returning to the Hilton Southampton - Utilita Bowl 2026. Be sure to mark your calendars and join us for this important event!

The Cremation Society and the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities are delighted to be working together again to bring you this year's CBCE.

2025 sees another year of challenge for the burial and cremation sector, as the ever increasing complexity and diversity of death care requires innovation from all involved in funerals. CBCE covers the main topics relevant to all professionals within the sector and as the only CPD accredited educational event in the calendar this is a must attend for those wishing to stay ahead in their respective field.

Keynote topics include Law Commission updates, Environmental Permitting changes, technological innovation, and educational updates to help meet your continuing professional development objectives. There is also an opportunity to grow your network and visit the exhibition to discuss the latest products and services with all the leading sector providers.

More information can be found [here](#).

Suicide Bereavement UK's 15th international hybrid conference in Liverpool: 16th September

Suicide Bereavement UK's 15th international hybrid conference is going to be our biggest and boldest yet.

We've upped our game:

- A powerful line-up of international speakers
- Conversations that have never been had before, both nationally and internationally
- A new city (Liverpool) – showcasing the best of the North West
- A 4-star venue at no extra cost to delegates

Every year, delegates tell us how transformative this event is. One attendee summed it up perfectly: "*I think I've found my tribe.*"

This isn't your typical conference — it's professional, but never stuffy. Friendships are made here. We bring together those with lived experience, the bereaved, professionals, researchers, policy makers and carers — all united by a shared commitment to understanding, preventing suicide and providing better support to those bereaved by suicide.

Expect groundbreaking research, genuine connection, and a space where friendships are

formed and hope is renewed.

We know times are tough, but we promise — this experience will be worth every penny. It's a chance to recharge, reconnect, and remember why this work matters.

More details coming soon — but for now, save the date: 16th Sept 2026.

You won't want to miss this.

If you are interested in sponsoring this event, please contact:

Paul Higham
email: paul.higham@suicidebereavementuk.com
Tel: 01706 827 359

CALLS

Call for summaries for Géocarrefour

This issue is called "Power, Death Space". It invites researcher to explore the relation between power (political and non-political), death and space, through three main questions : politics and death, the dead as a leverage to gain power and the power of the dead themselves. Géocarrefour being a geography journal, this issue will focus on the way those relations of power make/unmake space as it exists.

Death and power are no strangers. The former can be considered the basis for the latter, as power often involves anticipating, organising, or even postponing the inevitable arrival of death (Thomas, 1978; Hintermeyer, 1981). Two concepts emerge from this analysis: "necropolitics" (Mbembe, 2003) and "thanatopower" (Taïeb, 2006), understood as the ability of a group to give, prevent, or circulate death. Power can be defined in two ways: first as the ability to structure an exchange of energy, relationships, and information (Raffestin, 1980; Cresswell, 1996; Graeber and Wengrow, 2021), and second as an institution based on the production of behaviour in others (Castoriadis, 1988), whose preferred form is the political structure, whatever its scale may be.

The deadline for proposals is the 15th of February

The deadline for papers is the 15th of May

The complete call can be found here:

<https://journals.openedition.org/geocarrefour/25721>

Call for papers for the 27th Cemeteries Colloquium- 8th May 2026

The 27th Cemeteries Colloquium will be taking place on 8th May 2026 at the University of York, UK. We are now seeking abstract submissions. The Colloquium is an essential forum for the discussion of new and emerging cemetery scholarship and is multi-disciplinary, accepting papers from across the humanities and social sciences. The Colloquium has an emphasis on discussion, and its international and interdisciplinary nature makes the meeting particularly thought-provoking.

Papers will each be given a timeslot of 30 minutes.

The deadline for abstracts is 27th March 2026.

Please send your abstract using [this link](#). If you have any questions, contact Julie Rugg at julierugg36@gmail.com

Call for papers for the Blessed Are Those Who Mourn: Grief from antiquity to the present- 24th-25th June 2026

More than fifty years after the publication of Philippe Ariès' *Western Attitudes Toward Death* (1974), it is past time for a comprehensive reassessment of the history, culture, and experience of grief, loss, and mourning. Recent decades have seen profound developments across fields, including the rise of global and transnational history; the history of emotions and affect theory; the anthropology of death; analyses of the politics of "grievability"; and new interdisciplinary approaches to the relationship between brain, body, and society. Together, these innovations open up fresh ways of understanding how individuals and communities negotiate loss across diverse temporal, cultural, and social contexts.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn seeks to initiate this reassessment by examining grief as a historically situated, socially embedded, and politically resonant phenomenon. Bringing together scholars working across disciplines, periods, and regions, the conference aims to break down siloed approaches and foster new dialogue on the history and culture of grief.

We welcome papers from across the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. We are particularly, but not exclusively, interested in papers on the below themes:

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE What grief is: boundaries, definitions, and phenomenology The politics of grief, including who is permitted to mourn, when, how, and for whom; the intersection between grief, status and power The connection between grief and other emotions Medical approaches to grief, grieving, and consolation The materiality and material culture of grief, including art works, monuments, seals, effigies, tombs, jewellery.
PROPOSALS Call for Papers Funerals, mourning and the "practice" of grief after death Grieving, senses and the body Continuity and change Please send your proposals for twentyminute papers (to be delivered in English), including a title, an abstract of c. 150 words, and short bio, to griefconference.sta2026@gmail.com by Monday 2 February 2026

Call for papers to the international interdisciplinary conference in Ljubljana- 1-3 July 2026

This is a reminder about the upcoming deadline for our Open Call for Papers to the international interdisciplinary conference *The agency of the dead in the lives of individuals: Communication with the dead*, organised by the ERC project DEAGENCY (ERC № 101095729) and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. The conference will take place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, from July 1 - 3, 2026

Contrary to pre-modern European societies, and many contemporary non-Western societies, where the dead were considered members of the community and continued to be significantly involved in people's everyday lives, the dominant Western ontology nowadays does not integrate communication and exchange between the living and the dead. However, as a bulk of quantitative as well as qualitative research testify, for some people in contemporary Western societies, social interactions do not necessarily cease after death but are merely transformed. The dead continue to be involved in our lives, affecting our thoughts, emotions,

values, behaviour, and social relations. While scholars have often treated the accounts of the agency of the dead in people's lives as expressions of "folk belief", and ghosts as symbols and metaphors of larger cultural and social problems and changes, our aim is to take the agency of the dead in the lives of individuals seriously, as people themselves experience it.

The aim of the third DEAGENCY conference is to focus on the different types of interaction between the living and the dead. This will be broadly defined and may include both intentional and unintentional communication with the spirits of the dead, both familiar dead and impersonal ghosts, through both collective and private practices. It can include communication through dreams and other altered states of consciousness, visions, interactions through mediums or with the help of various other practitioners, 'legend trips' and tourism to haunted places, practices of 'summoning the dead', various after-death and memorialisation practices, online communication with spirits, and so on and so forth. Whereas in the past the way of communicating with the dead was largely prescribed by tradition, religion and/or the state, today individuals are free to engage in their practices without having to adhere to prescribed methods; in the fragmented and networked society of privatised death, they may not even have a community to share their practices with.

In this conference we want to explore whether practices of communication between the living and the dead are aimed at maintaining personal relationships with the familiar dead, or whether they are intended as a test of courage or perhaps carried out out of curiosity; do people perform them to honour and commemorate the dead, to ask them for advice, to keep a promise, to obtain or grant forgiveness, to enhance their social status, to improve their social relations, to strengthen their group's identity or a particular ideology, to demonstrate their political stance, or perhaps even as a means in intra-community power struggles and inter-group tensions? Are traditional forms of dealing with the dead (still) used or are they losing their significance for the individual? Have they changed and how, or have they been replaced by new practices? What role do material objects and places play in creating and maintaining interaction with the dead? What consequences does interaction with the dead have for the lives of the living? What role does communication with the dead play?

We invite folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, thanatologists, scholars of bereavement and media studies, as well as scholars from other disciplines concerned with the dead in contemporary society, to submit an abstract and participate in the conference. Papers may draw on a variety of sources – ethnographic, archival, digital, media, etc. The conference language is English; the expected length of papers is 20 minutes. There is no conference fee, but you will need to cover your own travel, accommodation and meals. Please use the following link to submit your application:

- [Application](#)

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Marja Kovanda, Chair of the Organising Committee: Marja.Kovanda@ff.uni-lj.si. The deadline for the submission of applications is 15 December 2025. Acceptance of papers will be confirmed by 31 January 2026.

Call for abstracts for SLSA26 Socio-Legal Studies Association

There is still time to submit your abstract to our SLSA26 Socio-Legal Studies Association annual conference stream 'Death, Dying & the Dead', convened by Richard B. Gibson and Edina Harinja, running for the second year in a row.

The stream explores the many ways law intersects with death, dying, and the dead. Some of the questions we hope to tackle include:

- Are current legal or medical definitions of death (brain death, cardiopulmonary, information-theoretical) still viable?
- How do disability rights, palliative care, and costs shape end-of-life law reform?
- How should law respond to mass death in crises and conflicts?
- What duties exist regarding digital remains and AI's shaping of death?
- How do we regulate 'immortality' services?
- How should law handle contested burials and symbolic uses of the dead?

The stream offers a great opportunity to share research, engage with vibrant scholarly communities, and contribute to discussions shaping the future of socio-legal studies of death.

Deadline for paper proposals: Thursday 18 December 2025

Submit papers and posters [here](#).

Call for papers from all bereavement and global researchers!

The [American Journal of Public Health](#) is soliciting papers on bereavement as a global health concern.

This Call for Papers seeks original research, analytic essays, history essays, notes from the field, and opinion editorials that address the central question:

👉 “Considering current global events, how does bereavement function differently across subgroups, either as a cause or a consequence of population health outcomes?”

👉 Submissions are due March 1, 2026.

If you are not yet aware of the [University of Southern California's Emily Smith-Greenaway](#)'s work, you should do so prior to conceptualizing your papers.

Death Rituals and Death Technologies in Contemporary Ireland and Beyond: Questioning the Old and the New

Symposium at University College Cork, 28-29 May 2026.

Death is the great unifying force for all life — human and non-human. Death shapes our experiences of life as it signals materially and culturally that our existence is finite. In response, human societies have developed complex death, disposal, and mourning rituals over millennia to cope with the temporal reality of death and the corpse it is represented by. However, we are living in a time of flux — environmental degradation, economic precarity, and migrating populations are all upending how we respond to and subsequently ritualise death and the dead body. So-called ‘new’ death technologies such as pyro- and hydro-cremation, body composting, eco burial, and cryopreservation are disrupting traditional concepts of deathly rituals. In the traditional narrative of society’s unilineal development, the role of ritual and history is framed as being antithetical to these new technologies (and vice-versa). This symposium disrupts this notion.

While the majority of death technology studies focus on the ‘newness’ of the proposed and developing technology, this symposium challenges the notion that rituals are archaic and need to be rewritten if not entirely done away with or that death and technology are only newly united and have not been imbricated since the first human died, was mourned, and their body disposed of. Drawing on the vital work done by death studies scholars — and those who seek to ‘queer’ this increasingly established academic field — as well as the practical expertise of industry innovators, this symposium takes the affirmative position that rituals are not always old, and technologies are not always new.

The symposium will explore how traditional death rituals can adapt in the face of new technologies such as water cremation, human composting, eco burial, and cryopreservation. Ireland’s unique death culture, rooted in the nation’s rich history and death culture, is much-lauded. However, this traditional sequence of wake, rosary, removal, funeral mass, and burial is often portrayed as a relic of the past — a quaint antiquity that harks back to a simpler time and is imbricated with Ireland’s longstanding relationship with the Catholic Church. In fact, in several key ways, Ireland is at the forefront of new death technologies. The European Union’s first water cremation facility opened in County Meath in 2023. A publicly-owned ‘eco’ burial ground is currently under development in Cork City, the result of a significant community-led movement. These developments signal a productive tension within Irish death culture, providing the opportunity to rethink deathly ritual and technology, and their intersections, not in opposition, but totally entwined. They also situate Ireland as a unique point of departure to propel transnational collaborations in death and technology studies.

The aim of this symposium is thus to locate the emerging rituals that come with new death technologies, as well as consider the unique value that new death technologies can bring to old rituals. Participants are asked to consider how their unique cultural experiences from their

country of origin or current residence shapes their understanding of death culture, galvanising the international scope of the symposium. Topics can include, but are not limited to, Irish death studies, transnational comparison and contexts, Indigenous rituals and traditions, environmental and ecological impact, the social dimensions of mourning and disposal, and the role of technology in death and disposal.

Proposals should be approximately 300 words with a short bio and bibliography (of 3-5 works cited), and be submitted no later than 31 December, 2025. Responses are anticipated by the end of January. Presenters will be asked to submit draft papers for circulation to symposium participants by 30 April, 2026. Presentations will be 20 minutes long. Whilst online presentation can be facilitated, strong preference will be given to in person presentation. Please indicate your preference for online or in person presentation when submitting your proposal. The event organisers are in a position to offer some financial support to facilitate in person attendance. Final versions of articles (7500 words including bibliography) will be due at the end of July 2026 in anticipation of being part of a special issue at a leading death studies journal.

Please email proposals to Dr. Julia A. Empey (julia.empey@ucc.ie) and Dr. Kate Falconer (kfalconer@ucc.ie).

The European Grief Conference - Call for Abstracts Open for EGC 2026 in Oporto & Bereavement Network Europe 7th webinar

The European Grief Conference 2026 Call For Abstracts Is Now Open.

EGC welcomes a broad range of abstracts on bereavement and grief-related topics with a focus on research, education/policy or practice aligned to levels of the public health model of bereavement. For the 2026 conference we especially welcome abstracts aligned with the conference theme: Bereavement, grief, and loss: Responding collaboratively to local and global challenges.

Full details on the abstract call are available here <https://europeangriefconference.org/call-for-abstracts>

The European Grief Conference will be held in Porto, Portugal, Setember 9thto 11th 2026.

Save the date for the third European Grief Conference 9th-11th September 2026 in O'Porto, Portugal. Read more: <https://europeangriefconference.org/>

Call for speakers at Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust

Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust runs a regular talk series for the public online and sometime in person and we have a wide range of talks that are broadly on the themes of death, dying, interment, bereavement, human remains, and cemeteries (and anything else we think fits). As a charity, it is a way for us to make a small income for the continuing care of the site, spread

the word about Arnos Vale Cemetery and share research and knowledge to a non-academic audience. We welcome the suggestions for presentations of around 45-50 mins from a wide range of speakers and disciplines. We are creating the 2026 programme at the moment and would love to hear from any researchers who'd like to share what they are interested in or working on. A number of previous talks have been delivered by CDAS staff, visiting fellows, and students but we are interested in presentations from all sorts of disciplines, research areas and levels of study.

If you are keen to support us then contact janine.marriott@arnosvale.org.uk

Check out the programme of events at arnosvale.org.uk

Unsung Heroes in Death Care, A Global Analysis

Editors: Drs. Kami Fletcher & Bulelwa Maphele

During the COVID-19 outbreak and its immediate aftermath, we saw death care professionals thrust from the margins to the center. In Ghana, pall bearers went viral for showing how significant ornate last rites are to guiding loved ones to the ancestral plane. In the United States, death doulas made TIME's "Top 100 Photos of 2022" as well as received a featured article. Even still, they were positioned as last responders, appropriately titled since they were last to receive PPE. The social and cultural value of their work to our communities, our nations, our world went unnoticed. These professionals play a critical role in our communities and do not appear in the developmental agenda. They remain as unsung heroes.

There is an urgent need to start appreciating the work done by these unsung heroes in the death care sector - globally. This volume aims to highlight the contributions of death care professionals - the funeral directors, the embalmers, the mortuary workers, the death doulas; and others death care workers - who all play a critical role in supporting bereaved families and communities during the period of losing a loved one. These death care laborers, as individuals and as group, play vital roles in the care and support of the deceased and their families, yet often go unnoticed or underappreciated in broader narratives about death and dying. This international call aims to attract scholars, researchers, and practitioners from around the world to submit abstracts that explore the experiences, challenges, and contributions of death care professionals.

Suggested themes

- The role of death care professionals in supporting bereaved communities.
- The role of government in supporting the death care professionals.
- The impact of death care work on the mental state of the professionals in the death care industries.
- Societal and cultural perceptions of death care professionals across time and space.
- Historical and contemporary perspectives on death care practices.
- Comparative country practices in the death care activities. Innovative and best practices in death care work.
- Challenges affecting sustainability of the death work and within the death care professional circles.

- The role of death care workers in removing trauma in communities and treating the unbereaved.

Editors are asking all interested to please send in a 300-word abstract as well as a working bibliography (primary and secondary sources), no later than August 1, 2026 to kamif2311@gmail.com and bmaphela@uj.ac.za.

For all other queries concerning our volume, please do not hesitate to reach out through the same channels.

The 300-word abstract must include:

- Perspective contributors' name, affiliation, job title
- Essay's (working) title
- Clear argument/thesis statement

Contact Us

Email: cdas@bath.ac.uk

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