

Centre for  
Death & Society  
(CDAS)



UNIVERSITY OF  
**BATH**

## Centre for Death & Society Newsletter

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### Director's Note

This essay was first published in the November 2016 issue of Bath Magazine and appeared in the December 2016 CDAS newsletter. I continue to receive e-mail messages about it from both members of the general public and former students so I decided to re-run it this year as a means of acknowledging the hard work the students in Sociology of Death 2017 put in.



My entire life has been spent around death, dying, and dead bodies. And when I say entire, I mean from before I was born to this very second. I grew up in the American funeral industry, where my father, Ron Troyer, was a funeral director for three decades. Indeed, some of my earliest childhood memories are of bodies in caskets coupled with my parents explaining what 'dead' meant.

Through a series of intellectual twists during my postgraduate education, my research focused on the relationship between the dead body and technology. In 2008 I accepted a post in the University of Bath's Centre for Death and Society (CDAS), the world's first and only interdisciplinary research Centre dedicated to exploring the intersections between death, dying, and the dead body.

CDAS was founded in 2005 and in June 2015 celebrated ten years of world-class research, public engagement, and educational work as a death and dying studies hub.

What intrigues me most about the Centre for Death and Society's public engagement work is that right now, in October 2016, death, dying, and dead bodies have never appeared more popular. It's difficult to keep track of all the different Death Cafes, Death Salons, and Death Meet-ups regularly happening across the US, UK, Europe, and Australia. Some groups simply gather in cafes to drink tea, eat cakes, and talk about death, while others create full-blown weekend long events complete with speakers and death-themed fairs.

What's important to keep in mind, however, is that death's current popular interest and fashionability isn't actually new.

On the one hand it's easy to say that humans have 'discussed' death since the dawn of civilization, but what death 'meant' in those earlier times isn't as clearly defined as we technologically sophisticated modern humans might like to think. Definitions of death change and will continue to change in the future. The shift from cardiac to brain death criteria remains a key moment in the broader history of human mortality and demonstrates that supposedly stable concepts can quickly change.

Images of human mortality and death itself have also changed over-time as many westerners now fear representations of cancer or dementia more than the actual Grim Reaper. The medical profession has played a big part in these changes as

'dying' became something that doctors could diagnostically explain, even if life support technology made the moment of death far murkier.

I've been thinking about the current popular interest in death for many reasons, but especially when it comes to my undergraduate students. The University of Bath offers a final year class that I teach on "The Sociology of Death" and Bath is one of the few universities in the UK to do so. The course has run for many years and is extremely popular with the students, e.g., there is always a waiting list for a seat. Students are required to write short, weekly essays about the material we cover in class and 'engage with death' in any way they see fit. In the beginning, many of the students think that the weekly writing will be a real pain and just another silly tick-box exercise that enables them to graduate.

Then everything starts to change.

To a student, the more they think about the Sociology of Death the more they want to write about what death and dying means in our modern age. Indeed, many of the students tell me that they experience sadness at the end of the semester knowing that the final weekly essay is the last one that they will write. One big takeaway for the students that is often noted in the weekly writings is how everyday death is – they just never saw it staring them in the face.

I also always have students in the class who either went through the death of a loved one (usually a parent) before entering University, or watched someone they care about die during the course of their studies. At least one or two grandparents die during the eleven-week semester – verified, in case you are curious, by an obituary. For these students, writing about the experiences of watching someone die becomes both an academic assignment and deeply cathartic.

All of this is to say that, when given the chance by the University of Bath to take a class called the Sociology of Death taught by the Director of the world's only Centre for Death and Society, the students love it. It is the kind of educational opportunity offered by Bath that helps students see the bigger picture of life, the universe, and everything (to quote Douglas Adams).

But, and I think that this is fundamentally important, the students learn to respect death and the power it has to turn everything upside down. For them, death and

dying aren't just fashionable or cool—they're forces of nature that they should discuss with parents and next-of-kin before it is no longer possible. I know this because many parents come up to me at Graduation and thank me for giving their daughter/son the intellectual and emotional tools to discuss what should happen before a family member ends up on life support.

In this way death's current cultural fashionability can play an important role in transforming how individuals think about death and dying long before they suddenly need to. My main advice for the current popular death movements is to quickly establish and make permanent the institutional changes that many groups called for a generation ago and continue to discuss today: greater individual autonomy in end-of-life care decision making, increased discussion about funerals, and an everyday personal embrace of death.

In the event all of these changes don't happen, it's only a matter of time until a new generation discovers death and picks up where the previous groups left off. I, for one, look forward to seeing what's happening with death in another forty years – when I am elderly and preparing to die.

*John Troyer, Director*

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## CDAS News

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### **Welcome to new members and associates**

We are very pleased to welcome back [Dr Hannah Rumble](#) to the CDAS core team. Hannah is joining CDAS as a Research Fellow attached to a new project looking at cremation and grief ([details below](#)). It is great to have Hannah back in the team after her work on Social Fund funeral costs in 2012 and the Dead and Buried project in 2013.

We are also pleased to welcome [John Birrell](#) as a Visiting Research Fellow with CDAS for the next 3 years. John is an independent consultant based in Scotland with considerable experience of working on projects related to funeral

costs and memorialisation practices. He has published in these areas, both independently and with organisations such as Citizens Advice Scotland.

## **CDAS Conference 2018: The Politics of Death**

08-09 June 2018

University of Bath, UK

Over the last fifteen-years, first world popular culture's interest in human mortality significantly expanded and death and dying achieved new levels of media attention.

But what of death's politics? Or the politics of dying and end-of-life? What role does political power play in everyday experiences of human mortality?

The June 2018 Centre for Death and Society Annual Conference will focus on the Politics of Death and what the discovery and re-discovery of death politics means for power, sovereignty, bioethics, the rule of law, and most importantly - death and dying.

For a list of suggested topics, and for further information as it becomes available, please [visit the conference webpage](#).

Please send a 300 Word abstract to [cdas@bath.ac.uk](mailto:cdas@bath.ac.uk) by 28 February 2018.

## **Community of Practice**

15th November marked the launch of our CDAS Community of Practice. Over two sessions attended by more than 30 people from across the dying and bereavement sectors we discussed issues within the South West and opportunities for smarter working practices and innovation. As the Community develops we will keep our wider CDAS network abreast of developments.

Watch this space...

If you want to know more, or to join our Community, please contact [cdas@bath.ac.uk](mailto:cdas@bath.ac.uk)

## New project - **Exploring the relationship between cremation and grief 1-2 years following a death**

We are delighted to announce the commencement of a 2.5 year project funded by one of the largest funeral directing companies in the UK, Dignity. Working with partners from Utrecht University, the University of York and from Scotland, we will be examining the relationship between cremation choices and experiences of grief over the first 1-2 years following a bereavement. [Kate Woodthorpe](#) is leading the project and will be joined in CDAS by Dr Hannah Rumble as a Research Fellow. We will keep the CDAS community informed of the project's progress over the next few years. A project website will be created imminently.



*The project team at the London launch in November.*

## **Managing Death: A Comparative Framework**

05 December 2017, 13.15 - 14.45

Chancellors' Building, 4.1, University of Bath

Speaker: [Prof Tony Walter](#)

Several aspects of modernity – including rationality, commodification, occupational differentiation and the rise of the professions (not least medicine), and longevity - profoundly shape how contemporary societies manage death, dying and loss. At the same time, different modern nations and cultural groups display significant differences in how they manage death. How may these differences be conceptualised? This paper outlines the framework I will be using for a book to be written for Sage that takes national and cultural differences as seriously as it takes modernity itself; risk, economic security and insecurity, and globalisation also get a look in. I will be particularly pleased to receive feedback from colleagues with expertise in cross-national analysis.

This seminar is part of a departmental series in the [Department of Social & Policy Sciences](#) at the University of Bath.

There is no need to book, all welcome, please just let us know you are coming so we can send you a map of the campus: [cdas@bath.ac.uk](mailto:cdas@bath.ac.uk)

## **Continuing Bonds in Bereavement**

### **New Directions for Research and Practice**

The introduction of the continuing bonds model of grief near the end of the 20th century revolutionized the way researchers and practitioners understand bereavement. Continuing Bonds in Bereavement is the most comprehensive, state-of-the-art collection of developments in this field since the inception of the model. As a multi-perspectival, nuanced, and forward-looking anthology, it combines innovations in clinical practice with theoretical and empirical

advancements. The text traces grief in different cultural settings, asking questions about the truth in our interactions with the dead and showing how new cultural developments like social media change the ways we relate to those who have died. Together, the book's four sections encourage practitioners and scholars in both bereavement studies and in other fields to broaden their understanding of the concept of continuing bonds.

CDAS members [Christine Valentine](#) and [Tony Walter](#) have both contributed chapters to this new book from Routledge.

## **Dying Matters Forum**

CDAS Member [Kate Woodthorpe](#) has been invited to join the Dying Matters Forum, which was established in November 2017 following the merger of the National Council for Palliative Care with Hospice UK, and replaces the previous steering and stakeholder groups.

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# **D&D Community News**

## **[Death & Culture Network](#)**

The Death and Culture Network at University of York has now got a mailing list to work alongside its website.

Follow the link to join the mailing list: <http://eepurl.com/dbawnL>

**[National Bereavement Alliance](#)**: updates



### **Supporting carers before and after a death - share your views**

[The National Bereavement Alliance](#) (NBA) is working with NHS England to look for examples of good practice in supporting carers before and after bereavement. NBA wants to share these widely, to inspire local areas to adopt good practice that has worked well elsewhere. They are interested in examples of practical and emotional grief and bereavement support, offered before or after the death, to young or to adult carers. Please think about submitting a practice example: if selected, your case study could feature on the website and at national conferences. The NBA also want to hear your views about how adequate this type of support is in your area. Please [share your views](#).

### **A guide to commissioning bereavement services in England**

The National Bereavement Alliance has published a guide for commissioners and providers of bereavement care. Building on the three-component model of bereavement support, the Guide sets out how providing bereavement support can help meet outcomes across health and social care. The guide is intended to help make the case for services to funders and commissioners. [Download your copy now](#).

### **[Childhood Bereavement Network](#): updates**

#### **Supporting children before a death – how does it help?**

For several years, [Childhood Bereavement Network](#) (CBN) members have been asking for a tool that could help to evaluate pre-bereavement support for children. CBN now has some funding to take this work forward, and is inviting those who work with children before a death to help shape this work through an [online survey](#). The survey asks about current practice and developments in assessing children's needs and evaluating support, and then asks for specific feedback on draft questionnaires. It also has details of how to sign up for a focus group on the topic.

#### **Life Matters Taskforce**

Charities for bereaved children and widowed parents have joined forces in the

Life Matters taskforce to make six policy recommendations to improve support for grieving children and their families. The taskforce has made a [short film](#) summarising the recommendations, and asks people to share this with their MP.

One of the recommendations is a rethink on the new [Bereavement Support Payment](#), which leaves 75% widowed parents worse off than they would have been under previous arrangements. Sir Edward Davey MP has tabled an Early Day Motion 548 calling on the Government to reform the new Bereavement Support Payment, paying it for longer and extending it to unmarried, cohabiting partners with dependent children.

The Childhood Bereavement Network has set up an e-campaign inviting people to ask their MP to watch the taskforce film and [sign the Early Day Motion](#).

## **[Dying Matters Awareness Week 2018 launch event - booking open](#)**

Dying Matters, now part of Hospice UK, is the biggest campaign in the UK that encourages people to talk about dying, death and bereavement. Each year hundreds of volunteer-led events take place during the Dying Matters Awareness Week (14 - 20 May 2018), reaching hundreds of thousands of members of the public.

The Awareness week launch event - *[Dying Matters in Your Community](#)* - takes place on Tuesday 6 February in central London, and will be the place to be for anyone thinking of putting on a Dying Matters event in 2018. A range of speakers will set the scene, provide ideas and inspiration and offer practical advice on how to create and deliver a successful Dying Matters event in your community. There will be a chance to see the range of resources available, talk to others and share ideas, as well as picking up suggestion and materials from the exhibition space.

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# Events

## **Workshops from Red Tent**

The Nurture Centre, Carmarthen, SA17 3AL

### **Griefwork and Ritual**

**09 December 2017**

This one day workshop is an opportunity to sit and be with your own grief. There will be a gentle introduction in the morning into the different ways we can perceive grief; and you will be given opportunity to practice skills for being both with your own grief and also with bereft people. The afternoon will contain a 2.5 hour long grief ritual and ceremony plus an introduction to keening (the art and shamanic act of communal grieving and lamenting). By the end of the day hopefully you will leave with more peace and spaciousness within having released emotion and have some useful tools in your toolbox for being with, working with, people in grief.

### **Song, Sound and Silence: Working with Death and Dying**

**10th December 2017**

This one day workshop is completely experiential; no talent required as we believe everyone can create beauty with their voice (regardless of what you were told at school!). Come willing to sing, to make sounds, to explore your inner landscape of sound and silence. We will have an introduction to Threshold Singing (which is three part harmonies sung as lullabies to the dying). We will also explore lamenting and keening as well as sharing silence and developing or deepening our own relationship both with our voices and with the space between, the silence. This workshop is ideal for anyone who wants to work in communities to raise and share awareness and literacy around positive death; as well as anyone wishing to develop their own voice practice.

Workshop days are £60 per person or £100 for both days

Email [redtenteol@gmail.com](mailto:redtenteol@gmail.com) for a booking form

[www.redtentendoflife.wordpress.com](http://www.redtentendoflife.wordpress.com)

## **New workshops from Cruse**

### **One day Loss and Bereavement Public Workshops**

Our core workshop has been designed for anyone who wants to understand the issues surrounding bereavement and how to communicate with clients and customers after someone has died.

Sessions in Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds and London from 5th December 2017

### **Loss and Bereavement Working with Grief: A Toolkit**

Working with Grief: A Toolkit, is designed for counsellors, therapists, and others working with bereaved people, who want deepen their understanding of grief and improve their skills.

Sessions in Birmingham and London - ongoing dates

### **Cruse Bereavement and Irene Renzenbrink Masterclass**

Taking your understanding of bereavement to a new level! Cruse Masterclasses are delivered in conjunction with some of the biggest names in bereavement and are limited opportunity for people to benefit from this experience.

Sessions in London, Cardiff, Birmingham and Leeds from February 2018.

## **Bereavement Research in Practice: Carers and Bereavement**

25 January 2018

Hospice House, London

Join colleagues from the National Bereavement Alliance for a day of networking for bereavement researchers and practitioners, with a focus on carers and bereavement. The seminar will be a chance for bereavement researchers to share their findings with practitioners, and for practitioners to help shape the future of bereavement research, across sociology, psychology and other disciplines.

Book your place [via Eventbrite](#).

## **Dead Good Guides: Rites of Passage Winter School**

09-12 March 2018

East Woodlands Village Hall near Frome in Somerset

Most of us have a profound need to mark important events in our lives with some kind of ceremony. Often these are occasions that our culture finds easiest to celebrate – for example, births, marriages and deaths - but there are many other significant life experiences that demand attention. Sometimes a personal or private ceremony is the answer; sometimes a more public event where friends and family can bear witness. In a changing social and cultural environment, where confidence in traditional religion has often diminished, the challenge is to create appropriate and authentic new rites of passage. This is our starting point for the Winter School which will examine the Hows and Whys of ceremony and celebration.

This workshop is limited to 12 places only.

Booking: [www.deadgoodguides.co.uk/](http://www.deadgoodguides.co.uk/)

## **Death and Dying Group Conference: End of Life Care: Addressing the issues and meeting the challenges**

21st March 2018

The Open University, Milton Keynes

The theme of the conference is addressing the issues in end of life care and the ways in which the health, social care and academic community can and are mitigating the impact of these challenges. The conference will focus upon inequalities, tackling variations and addressing the practical issues in meeting the needs of individuals towards the end of their life. The conference will update delegates on the challenges of fulfilling a dying person's needs within a care setting and focus on social action and peer mentoring projects within the community. There will be an opportunity for delegates to engage in roundtable

activities with members of the Death and Dying Group about BBC2's 'Time to Live'. This programme followed the journey of twelve individuals through their diagnosis of a terminal illness and living and coping with dying.

## **Remember Me. The Changing Face of Memorialisation**

04 - 07 April 2018

Hull, UK

The Remember Me team is pleased to announce that registration for the Remember Me conference 2018 is now open. Details on how to register can be found on their [website](#). Conference registration is free, and refreshments will be provided each day of the conference. They are preparing an associated social programme including tours, wine receptions and dinners, some of which will be free, others at delegates' own expense.

Hosted in Hull, the UK City of Culture, as a legacy programme event, this interdisciplinary conference brings together British and international researchers from a wide range of disciplines, exploring themes relating to memorialisation, including:

- The influence of role and identity on memorial forms and purposes
- Emotional and behavioural aspects of memorialising practices
- Religious, spiritual and secular meanings in death
- The socio-political construction of death
- Spaces and places: the geography of memorialisation
- Gender, sexuality and age in death and memory
- Socio-economic and cultural variations
- The public/private interface
- Applications to the professional cultures of health and social care practice and funeral and memorial services

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## Calls for Papers

### **'DORS4: The 4th Symposium of the International Death Online Research Network'**

15-17 August 2018

University of Hull

This symposium will consolidate the links between existing and new members of the network and provide opportunities for the discussion of ongoing and new orientations in the interdisciplinary field of death online. The meeting will explore the ways in which online connectivity is changing how, when and where we engage with death and dying and how we invest death-related practices with meaning in the online environment. We warmly welcome new members to the network as well as old friends.

For this 4th Death Online Research Symposium we invite abstracts for oral presentations of new, recently completed, or ongoing research or ideas for future academic research on all kinds of death related online practices. We welcome qualitative and quantitative work which expands our understanding of the current and future trends in death online research from a variety of disciplines, addressing any of the following themes:

- Digitally mediated dying and narrative
- Digitally mediated grieving and memorialising
- Death online and embodied experience
- Digital afterlife, post-mortem identity and digital legacy
- Technological developments in the death care industry
- Digital immortality
- Online vs offline experiences
- Theorising online life and death
- Ethical challenges for studying death online.

The conference will host a special workshop for participating Post Graduate students and early career researchers. We particularly welcome submissions from these groups. All submissions will be peer-reviewed, and we envisage publication of selected full papers in a special issue of an academic journal in the field as well as a collection of writing from the symposium in an open-access online platform.

Important information

Submission format: 300 word abstract

Submission deadline: March 1st, 2018

Submission feedback: April 1st, 2018

Registration open: May 1st, 2018

Registration fee: TBC

All submissions and enquiries should be submitted to Dr Jo Bell:

[j.bell@hull.ac.uk](mailto:j.bell@hull.ac.uk) marked "Death Online Research Symposium Submission" in the subject field. Abstracts should be no longer than 300 words. Please include full contact info (author name, institutional / organisational affiliation and email address) in the submission. Submissions will be anonymised by the organisers before review.

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## Jobs, courses and study opportunities

### Two new Masters (MSc) courses from the University of Bath

The [Institute for Policy Research \(IPR\)](#) and [Department of Social & Policy Sciences](#) at the University of Bath are launching two new part-time MSc courses, [Public Policy \(MPP\)](#) and [Humanitarianism, Conflict and Development](#) (HCDev) in September 2018.

Intellectually challenging, analytically rigorous and practical, the [Bath MPP](#) draws on outstanding international expertise in applied research and policy



studies. It explores creative and innovative approaches for making, shaping and influencing policy, design, and delivery in different contexts. The [Bath MPP](#) can be combined with full-time employment, and throughout the programme, participants critically apply their new knowledge and skills to develop their work-based expertise.

#### [Masterclass: Policy Making in a digital world, 22 February 2018](#)

As part of the launch of our new MSc Public Policy, we are pleased to host a Masterclass in 'Policy Making in a digital world' led by Paul Maltby, Chief Digital Officer at the Department for Communities and Local Government. The event takes place in the University of Bath's London residence on Pall Mall.

The [MSc in Humanitarianism, Conflict and Development](#) addresses the core global challenges of conflict and humanitarian crisis and explores a variety of tools and approaches for responding in these contexts. Rooted in real-world practical and policy challenges, the programme also draws on Bath's outstanding international expertise in international development, humanitarianism and conflict. It provides students with the opportunity to learn from senior policymakers and explore issues relating to human displacement and humanitarianism in real-world contexts, including the opportunity of an optional residential in Amman, Jordan.

#### [Webinar: MSc Humanitarianism, Conflict and Development](#)

We are running a webinar on the 24 January 2018 which will provide you with an introduction to the course and enable you ask any questions you may have.

## **Research Fellow Post – Forms of Care Project**

We are looking for an enthusiastic Research Fellow to join Simon Cohn (LSHTM) and Erica Borgstrom (Open University) on an ESRC funded study that will look at end of life care. The project is committed to applying social theory in order to interrogate how people make sense of the different forms of care involved, and in particular how people and systems distinguish between acts of

doing, not doing and cases of medical neglect.

A core part of the work will be to conduct, largely independently, an ethnographic study within a local London hospital – shadowing palliative care staff, attending meetings, observing routine practice, and talking to patients and their relatives. In addition, the post-holder will assist organising and running a series of workshops, which are intended to draw on preliminary findings in order to revise them further, and instigate practical outputs for non-academic audiences.

The successful candidate will be expected to have submitted their PhD and to have a strong academic record in a relevant social science subject, such as medical anthropology or sociology. Experience of qualitative research in a hospital setting is desirable, as is experience of presenting research findings.

The post is full time and based in London for 30 months.

Salary: £38,533 per annum, inclusive.

Closing Date: **Wednesday 13 December 2017**

Interview Date: To be confirmed

Reference: PHP-HSRP-28

Link to job advert: <https://jobs.lshtm.ac.uk/Vacancy.aspx?ref=PHP-HSRP-28>

Link to the project: <http://blogs.lshtm.ac.uk/formsofcare/>

Enquires to Simon Cohn ([simon.cohn@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:simon.cohn@lshtm.ac.uk)) or Erica Borgstrom ([Erica.borgstrom@open.ac.uk](mailto:Erica.borgstrom@open.ac.uk))

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Visit the [CDAS website](#) to view a full calendar of events

## Contact us

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