

Questions of Dignity: understanding social expectations and ethical process around council funerals in the UK



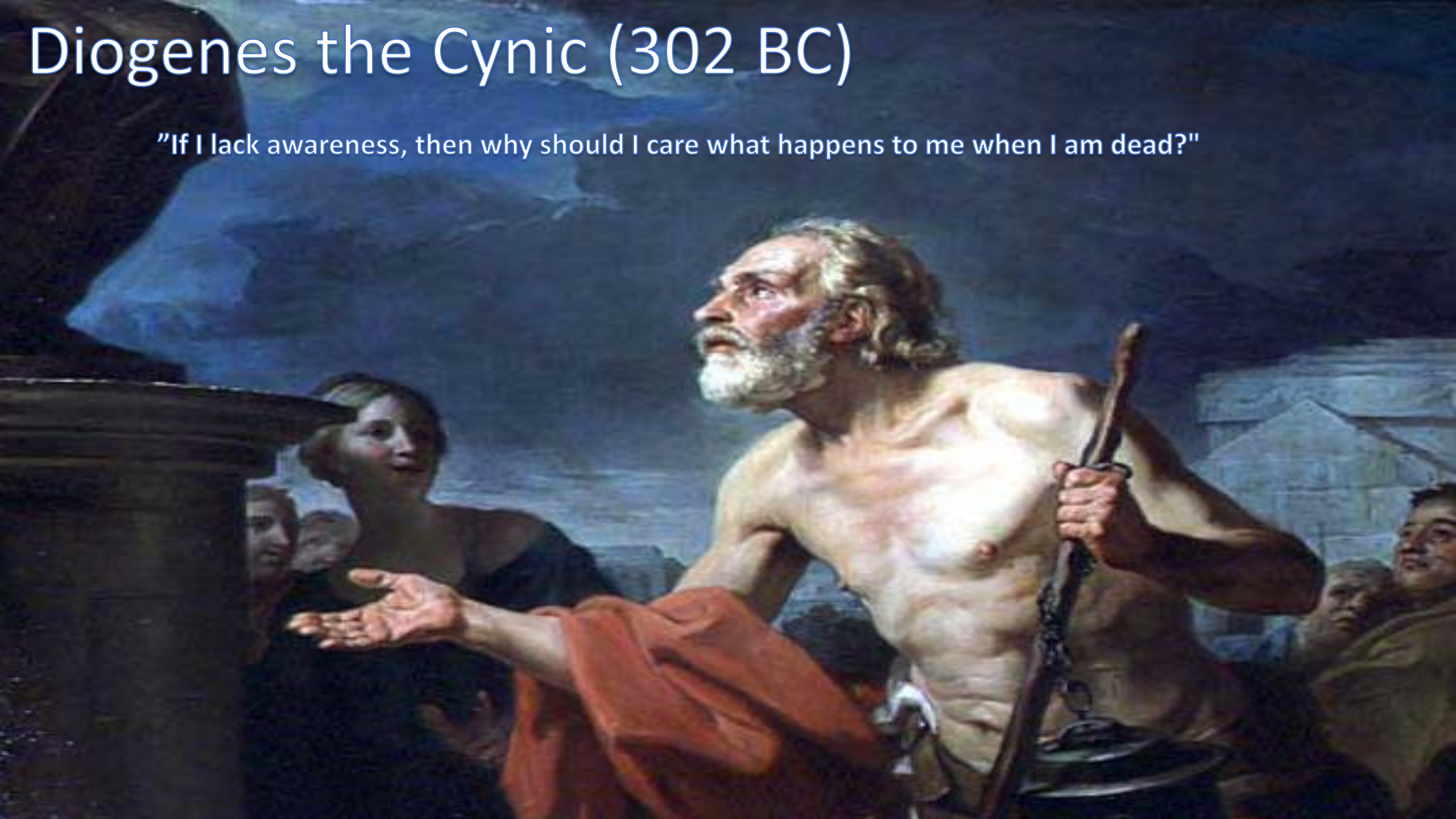
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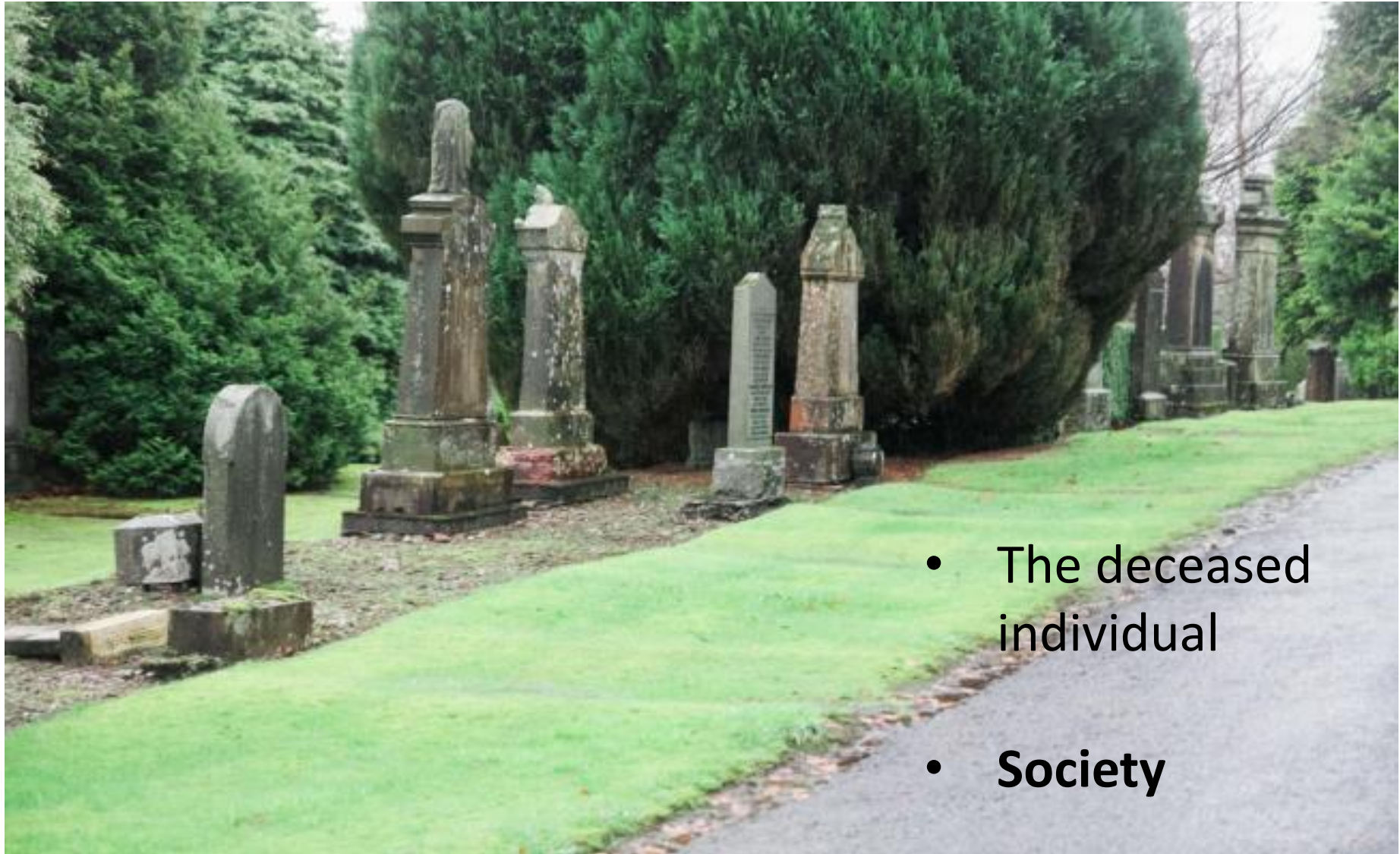
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Diogenes the Cynic (302 BC)

"If I lack awareness, then why should I care what happens to me when I am dead?"



Who is a council funeral for?



- The deceased individual
- **Society**

History of 'Pauper's Funeral'

Pre-Reformation (before 1517)

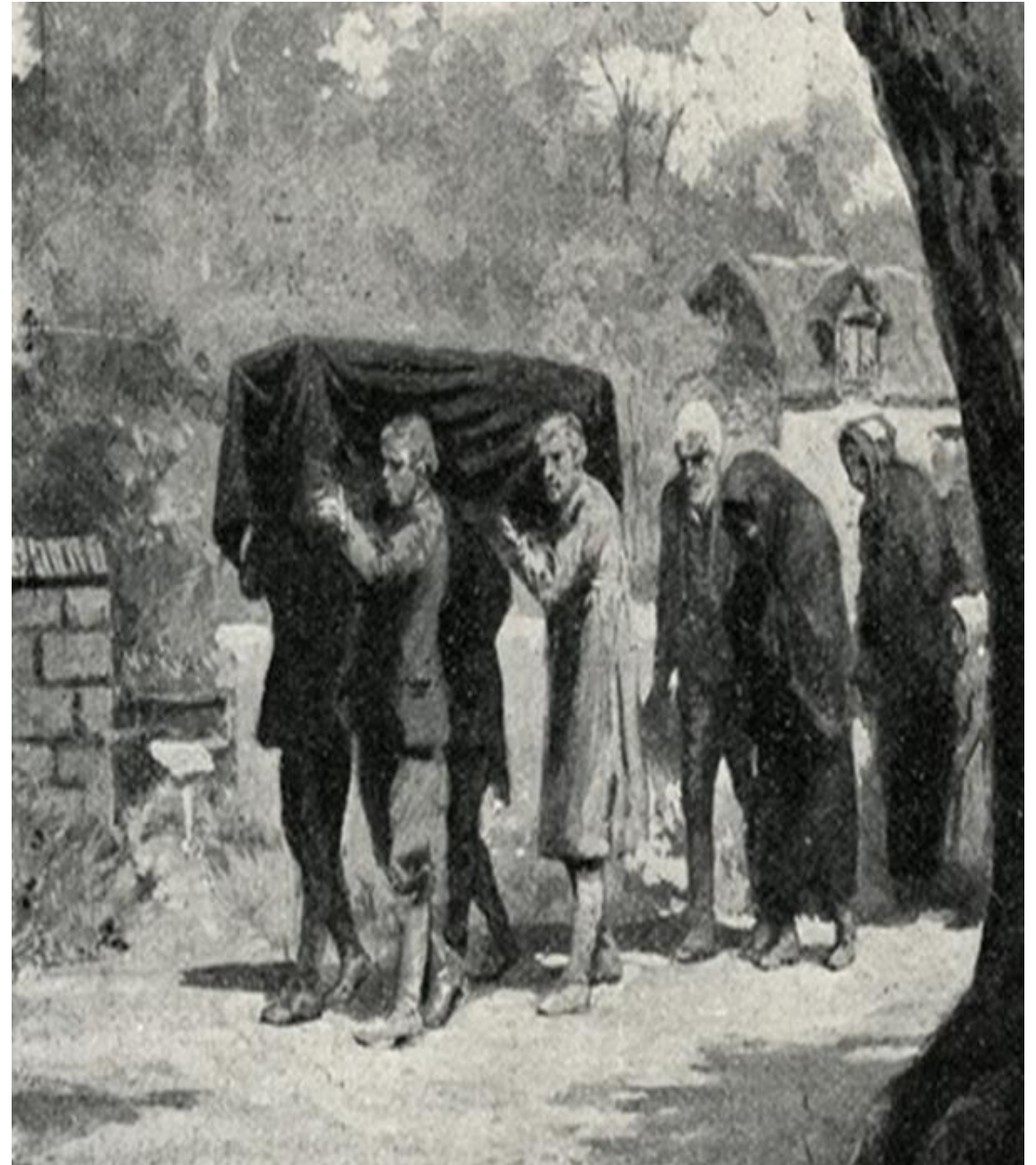
- Monastries buried the poor as a form of religious devotion.
- Burying a poor and/or disconnected person is considered a 'work of mercy'.



History of 'Pauper's Funeral'

16-18th Century

- Elizabethan Poor Laws passed
- Funerals handled by 'Overseers of the Poor' appointed by the parish.
- The money comes from the 'poor tax', set by each overseer and collected from local landowners.



History of 'Pauper's Funeral'

19th Century

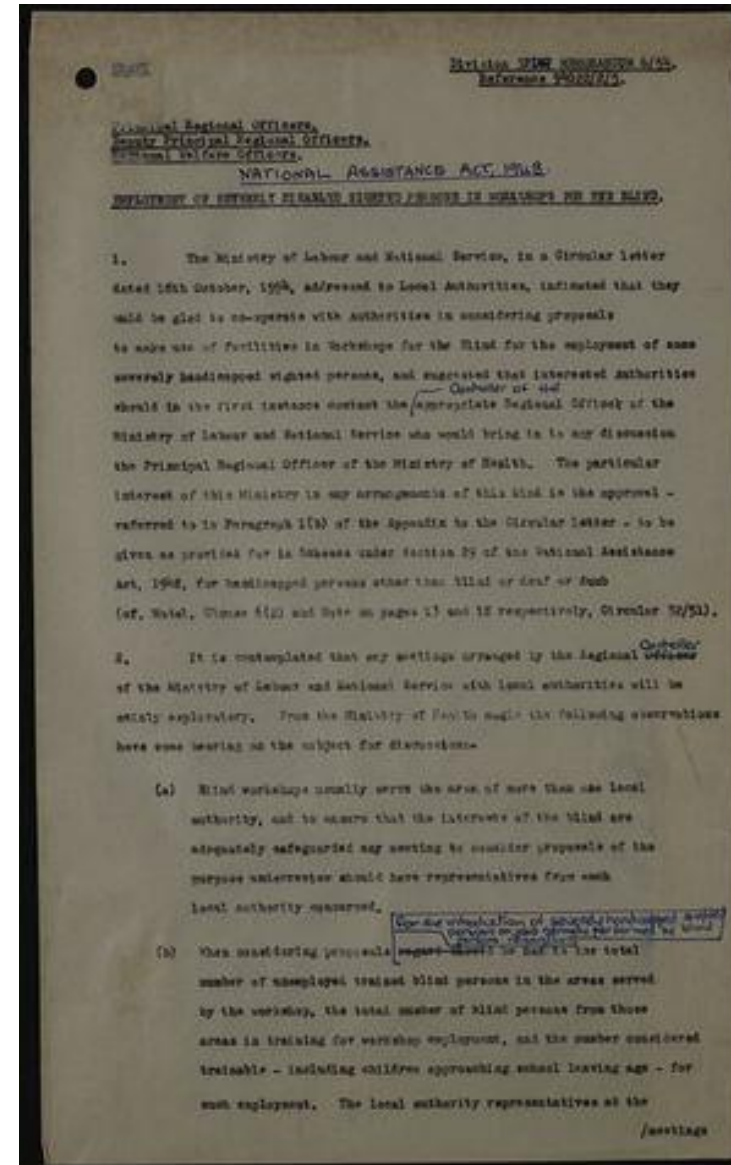
- Poor tax rises
- Poor Laws are reformed
- Anatomy act 1832
- Meaning of the 'pauper's funeral' changes.



History of 'Pauper's Funeral'

1930s & 1940s

- Poor Laws abolished and replaced with a system of public welfare services.
- 1948 National Assistance Act, Article 50





power to order health measures in relation to things

A justice of the peace may make an order under subsection (2) in relation to a thing if the justice is satisfied that—

- (a) the thing is or may be infected or contaminated

(b)

(c)

(d)

The order

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)

A justice c

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

The order

(a)

(b)

to provide

thing has been or about the identity of any related person or the whereabouts of any related thing).

" Related person " means—

- (a) a person who has or may have infected or contaminated the thing mentioned in subsection (3)(a), or

(b) a person whom the thing has or may have infected or contaminated.

" Related thing " means—

- (a) a thing which has or may have infected or contaminated the thing mentioned in subsection (3)(a), or

(b) a thing which the thing mentioned in subsection (3)(a) has or may have infected or contaminated.

(7) The appropriate Minister may by regulations make provision about the evidence that must be available to a justice of the peace



NEWS

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'Paupers' funerals' cost councils £1.7m

By Caroline Wyatt & Alex Strangways-Booth
BBC News

Councils organising 'pauper funerals' are billing families for their loved ones' ashes to claim back some of the costs

- Families are now having to find a
- In cases when they unable to pa
- Some don't automatically return

By SEAN POULTER FOR THE DAILY MAIL
PUBLISHED: 01:55, 8 January 2020 | UP

News | Local News | South Tyneside Council

South Tyneside Council charges grieving 'pauper funeral' families for ashes

The bereaved have to pay following the death of their loved ones

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By James Harrison
14:57, 15 JAN 2020

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Calls to tackle loneliness as pauper's funerals cost NI councils £12,000



 News ▸ Devon News ▸ Brixham

Town fights to prevent pauper's funeral for local 'character' who died alone in fire

Jean Frazer was well-known around Brixham and now the community is rallying to give her the send off she deserves

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COMMENTS

By [Colleen Smith](#) Regional Head of Content
12:56, 2 NOV 2019 | **UPDATED** 02:10, 11 NOV 2019

NEWS

Work of Mercy

Parish Funeral

Pauper funeral

Social Work Funeral

National Assistance Funeral

Public Health Funeral

Section 87 Funeral

State Funeral

DWP Funeral

Indigent Funeral

Common funeral

Environmental Health

Public Protection

Consumer Services

Regulatory Services

Bereavement services

Legal Services

Social Services

“The disparity in departments means that no one group of staff within local authorities has taken ownership of Public Health Act Funerals, and they have operated, and continue to operate, in a policy, training and guidance vacuum.”

Julie Dunk. Deputy Chief Executive of the Institute for Cemetery and Crematorium Management

Who is a council funeral for?



- **The deceased's community:**

Family
Friends
Neighbours
Service Providers

What difference does the answer to this question make?

- Reported increase in number of cases where relatives 'unwilling' to organise the funeral (Public Health Funerals, a survey of authorities in England and Wales, 2010).
- Death is a wound, but also re-opens old wounds.
- Moving away from idea of disposal of a 'thing', towards caring for those left behind.
- Care for those left behind occurs via disposal and ritualization.

Key Questions

- What role does ritual play in the grieving process?
- Is a service provided?
- Are estranged relatives encouraged (or allowed) to have a say in the music and words of the service?
- Are mourners allowed to attend the committal (or service)?
- How are ashes returned to relatives?



News > UK > Home News

Poorest families 'being barred from funerals of relatives' because they can't afford to pay for them

Council tells loved ones they are not allowed to attend or have ashes if they cannot pay for a service

Independent Reporter | Sunday 27 May 2018 17:35 | 11 comments



What sort of ethics guides professional decision-making in this area?

- Collective 'soul-searching' often triggered by scandals and complaints
- Organizational ethics
- 'On the job' ethics

How will the research be conducted?

- Collection and analysis of 200 personal eulogies from council funerals
- Interviews with workers across the sector
- Attending council funerals
- Survey of local authorities across the UK
- Focus groups with the general public
- Archival work
- Holding of 'Knowledge Exchange' workshop at University of Edinburgh to discuss best practice.

Proposed Aims and Outputs

Academic

Articles

‘Eulogies from the edge: crafting funerals for unclaimed persons’

‘Caring by rite: ethical practice and social expectation in council funerals in the UK’

Book

‘Making Ends Meet: social hardship and mortuary ritual in contemporary Britain’

Non-Academic

BBC Scotland Short Film

‘Caring for the Unclaimed’

Observational documentary offering glimpse into the working lives and ethical challenges faced by council workers organizing funerals for unclaimed bodies.

Report for Scottish Government

Public Health Funerals: a relation-centered guide to best practice

Questions?

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