# Virtual Colloquium

# Friday 17th November 2023

**PROGRAMME**

Note that the timings here are in GMT (ie UCT+1).

**Session 1: 8:20-10:30**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 08:20-08:30 | Julie Rugg, University of York  *Welcome* |
| 08:30-09:00 | See Mieng Tan & Jan Xiong Tan, Independent scholars  *A controversial birth to cremation: how cremation came about in Singapore* |
| 9:00-10:00 | Vishwambhar Nath Prajapati, UNPG College Padrauna-Kushinagar, Padrauna, India  *Shubh and Ashubh: Shaping the Hindu death culture* |
| 9:30-10:00 | David Ocon & Wei Ping Young, Singapore Management University, Singapore  *Bridging the nature-cultural heritage gap: evaluating sustainable entanglements through cemeteries in urban Asia* |
| 10:00-10:30 | Krystian Puzdrakiewicz, University of Gdańsk, Poland  *Preserve the sacred: attitudes towards recreational use of cemeteries and post-cemetery parks in Poland as a contrast to other Western countries* |

**Session 2: 11:00-13:00**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 11:00-11:30 | Robyn S. Lacy, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada  Sic finis*: 17th-Century burial places and spaces in Northeast North America* |
| 11:30-12:00 | Tristan Portier, UMR Telemme-CNRS, Université d'Aix-Marseille, France  *Cemeteries and the Established Church in Bath (1836-1864)* |
| 12:00-12:30 | Marie-Louise Rouget, University of Galway, Republic of Ireland  *Grave concerns: the state of public cemetery records management in South Africa* |
| 12:30-13:00 | Louis Dall’aglio, Laboratoire EVS (UMR 5600), Lyon, France  *From heterotopias to discipline and punish: on French cemeteries as disciplinary devices* |

**Session 3: 13:30-15:00**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 13:30-14:00 | Oleg Reut, University of Eastern Finland, Finland  *Victory Day during the Continuing War. When the cemetery becomes political* |
| 14:00-14:30 | Ciara Henderson, Trinity College, Dublin, Republic of Ireland  Inse na Leanbh *(Village of Children): the use of cillíní for the burial of the unbaptised in rural Ireland in the 19th and 20th centuries* |
| 14:30-15:00 | Georgina Laragy, Trinity College, Dublin, Republic of Ireland  *Burial of suicide in Ireland in the long 19th century* |

**Session 4: 15:30-17:30**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 15:30-16:15 | **INVITED SPEAKER**  Brenda Mathijssen, University of Groningen, Netherlands  *True nature burial: Unearthing the politics of defining an emerging death practice in The Netherlands* |
| 16:15-16:45 | Georgina Robinson, Durham University, UK  *Alkaline hydrolysis: a whistle-stop tour* |
| 16:45-17:15 | Linda Levitt, Stephen F. Austin State University, Australia  *Cremation niches inspire creative means of commemoration* |
| 17:15-17:30 | Julie Rugg, University of York, UK  *Closing remarks* |

ABSTRACTS

## SESSION 1: 8:20-10:30

8:30-9:00 **A controversial birth to cremation: how cremation came about in Singapore**

*See Mieng Tan and Jan Xiong Tan*, Independent scholars ([strawberryshortcakesg@gmail.com](mailto:strawberryshortcakesg@gmail.com))

Land burials as opposed to cremation were traditionally supported by the Chinese owing to their strong beliefs of the afterlife, filial piety, and geomancy. However, cremation rates in Singapore for the Chinese and non-Muslims have risen significantly from 10% in the early 1960s to 97% in 2017, becoming the country’s default body disposal method. It is thought that the Chinese were discouraged from burying their ancestors in favour of cremation because of the Singapore government’s persistent and intense acquisition of Chinese cemeteries to regain land for national development. However, historical records and literature illuminate three other narratives that led to the embracement of cremation in Singapore – British colonial conceptions of sanitation prompting their misinformed bias against Chinese cemeteries, the autonomy of Chinese clan associations in pushing for cremation, as well as religious modernisation. Non-participant observations at Bukit Brown Chinese Cemetery in central Singapore suggest a fourth narrative – that of family dynamics, which spurs the preference for cremation over land burial in Singapore. Using primary and secondary data, this paper combines historical and social anthropological lenses to argue that cremation has been a controversial endeavour in Singapore since its inception and its significant uptake over the years is at the expense of traditional Chinese graveside rituals.

9:00-9:30 **Shubh and Ashubh : Shaping the Hindu death culture**

*Vishwambhar Nath Prajapati*, UNPG College Padrauna-Kushinagar, Padrauna,India ([vishwa54\_sse@jnu.ac.in](mailto:vishwa54_sse@jnu.ac.in))

Durkheim ([1912]2001) argues that the notion of sacred and profane exist in every religion of the world. Sacred is ideal and transcends everyday existence. The profane or unholy embraces those practices, ideas, persons, and things that are regarded with an everyday attitude of ordinariness, utility and acquaintance. The profane is also believed to contaminate the sacred. All Indic origin religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism) consider the body as mortal (Nashvar). In India death (mrtyu) is not opposite, as is in the West to the idea of life (jivan), it is opposite to birth (jati) (Filippi, 1996:5). This paper will examine how the dynamics of ‘shubh’ and ‘ashubh’ shape the Hindu death culture and evolution of rituals in India. Hetimpur (crematorium) between the Kushinagar and Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh has been the main site for this study.

9:30-10:00 **Bridging the nature-cultural heritage gap: evaluating sustainable entanglements through cemeteries in urban Asia**

*David Ocon & Wei Ping Young*, Singapore Management University([davidocon@smu.edu.sg](mailto:davidocon@smu.edu.sg) [wpyoung@smu.edu.sg](mailto:wpyoung@smu.edu.sg))

The expanding footprint of urban Asian settlements and increasing living standards have put pressure on cemetery sites. Public health narratives and the sanctity associated with death matters in Asian urban landscapes have fed into the rhetoric of cemeteries as undesirable heritage spaces. Often lacking protection, many cemeteries have been exhumed, cleared, and relocated to allow room for new developments and infrastructure, risking the survival of this quiet element of the urban cultural patrimony. Within an Asian context, nature and cultural heritage preservation synergies are not prevalent in major cities like Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. In light of the increasing recognition of urban cemeteries as multi-valued sites with both natural and cultural heritage values, this paper turns to deconstructing the nature-cultural binary and the concept of entanglement to frame an investigation of collaborative interactions. A focused study on Asian urban cemeteries follows, examining existing trends and adapted mix-uses and highlighting the region's unique conservation challenges. The analysis reveals three major typologies encapsulating the region's current nature-cultural heritage entangled preservation approaches: sustainable compromises, memories, and everyday sustainability. To conclude, the paper distils respectful alternative futures for these spaces to be better integrated into the modern textures of the cities, unlocking functional recourses to destruction or oblivion.

10:00-10:30 **Preserve the sacred: Attitudes towards recreational use of cemeteries and post-cemetery parks in Poland as a contrast to other Western countries**

*Krystian Puzdrakiewicz*, University of Gdańsk ([krystian.puzdrakiewicz@ug.edu.pl](mailto:krystian.puzdrakiewicz@ug.edu.pl))

Densely populated cities aim to facilitate the multifunctional use of urban public spaces within the context of the intensive and rational use of limited space resources. Cemeteries are an integral part of any city, but their use is deeply influenced by social factors. The recreational use of cemeteries varies, especially across cultural contexts and even within similar contexts. Based on the experiences of other Western countries, this article examines what recreational potential cemeteries and post-cemetery parks have in Poland. The main objective of the study is to explore people’s use of and thoughts about the appropriate use of these spaces in Gdańsk. To investigate this, face-to-face questionnaire interviews were used. In total, 650 adult respondents living within 500 m walking distance of cemeteries or post-cemetery parks took part in the study. The results reveal a scepticism regarding the recreational use of cemeteries. Instead, these sacred spaces are used primarily for visiting deceased relatives and for reflection. Few differences in opinion were found across demographic variables. A higher level of acceptance, though still limited, was noted for recreation in partially desacralized post-cemetery parks. The paper discusses the possible spread of recreation in cemeteries and post-cemetery parks in Poland. However, changing social attitudes is usually a long-term process. This leads to the conclusion that it is unlikely that cemeteries in Gdańsk will be used for recreational purposes in the near future. Instead, according to the respondents, they should retain their unique character as spaces for burial, reflection and remembrance.

## SESSION 2: 11:00-13:00

11:00-11:30 ***Sic finis*: 17th-Century burial places and spaces in Northeast North America**

*Robyn S. Lacy*, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador ([rsl714@mun.ca](mailto:rsl714@mun.ca))

The burial landscape of the 17th-century in North America is an ever-present feature of historic cities across the northeast seaboard of North America, where many early European settlers landed. These burial spaces, which reflect not only the traditions from the setters’ home country, also show the development of new funeral and burial practices that would evolve and shape how we respond to the same events today. In this paper, based on my PhD research, I will demonstrate how burial grounds developed in the 17th century by British, Dutch, and French settlers reflected aspects of new and old traditions alike, and how these sites compared to one another across the developing burial landscapes of the northeast. Through comparing these early sites, we gain a better understanding of how early settlers were experiencing and dealing with their mortality in an unfamiliar land, and how those sites would eventually influence the modern burial traditions in North America.

11:30-12:00 **Cemeteries and the Established Church in Bath (UK) (1836-1864)**

*Tristan Portier*, UMR Telemme-CNRS, Université d'Aix-Marseille ([atristanportier@gmail.com](mailto:atristanportier@gmail.com))

The cemetery movement (ca. 1825-1850) was partly a reaction to the decay of Anglican churchyards and crypts, particularly in cities. Through private capital, promoters built cemeteries independent of parochial authorities, fuelled by a demand from wealthy urban classes and Nonconformists for alternative burial options. However, the Church’s reaction to these projects proved uneven: at a time when State-sponsored church construction was at its zenith, some viewed cemeteries as undermining the church’s spiritual monopoly over the dead, while others took a pragmatic approach, cutting deals for the managing companies to compensate local rectors, guaranteeing the clergy’s funereal revenue would survive the decay of burial infrastructure. In Bath, first contact with the cemetery movement came in 1836, when the state of churchyards prompted eminent gentlemen to attempt a joint-stock project, which the rectors conspicuously declined to support. Instead, in a rare show of entrepreneurial agency, three rectors created cemetery projects of their own in the following two decades, which entrenched their moral and administrative authority over the parish’s dead. But such manoeuvres, which gained aristocracy and vestry support at the time, ultimately caused vital relationships between rector and parish to fray, cascading into mistrust and even protracted conflicts over ownership of the land and control of its institutions. The unusual funereal feudalism of rectoral cemeteries in Bath thus makes for a fascinating insight into the interplay of moral economy, clergy revenue and Church reform during the cemetery movement and early cemetery reform.

12:00-12:30 **Grave concerns: the state of public cemetery records management in South Africa**

*Marie-Louise Rouget*, University of Galway ([marie-louise.rouget@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:marie-louise.rouget@universityofgalway.ie))

This paper investigates the relationship between public cemetery management and public records management in South Africa. The intersection of South African cemetery management and archives and records management has not previously been explored and represents a rich area for further research. In order to build a common ground for reflection and recommendations, this paper centres on the present regulatory framework for cemetery records management and how records management principles are understood and implemented by cemetery managers. The investigation also draws together beliefs regarding the significance of public cemetery records. While poor records management is known to be an issue in South African public cemeteries, it is treated as less important than burial space shortages, despite representing a useful tool to overcome this primary problem. Cemetery managers have inconsistent beliefs regarding the significance of cemetery records and their role as record keepers. The research points to sufficient cause for intervention by local archivists and records managers.

12:30-13:00 **From heterotopias to discipline and punish: on French cemeteries as disciplinary devices**

*Louis Dall'aglio*, Laboratoire EVS (UMR 5600), Lyon ([louis.dallaglio@ens-lyon.fr](mailto:louis.dallaglio@ens-lyon.fr))

Matthew Gandy’s 2012 proposal of cemeteries as spaces where ‘heterotopic alliances’ can flourish, stemming from his reading of Foucault’s 1964 work on heterotopias, questions the ability of cemeteries to be places where strange forms of life, both human and non-human, can meet and form unexpected networks. The point of this communication is to contradict and complete Gandy’s theorization. We discuss Gandy’s idea of the cemetery’s “queerness” through the analysis of 32 French cemeteries’ rules and regulations. Through this analysis, we discuss the role of the French cemetery as a political device in late 19th century France, and its role in the laicization and republicanizing of the French citizens. This role, however, leaves very little space, figuratively and literally, for citizens in the cemetery management and agency. As it stands, the living and the dead ought to be morally and physically disciplined within the cemetery; recent changes in the French funerary practices, such as the development of garden of remembrance, which were made mandatory in 2008, only seem to reinforce the focus on the collective nature of this device. While national legislation produced during the 20th century tries to emphasize individual freedom when it comes to funerary practices, especially on the aesthetical aspect, local regulations tend to remind every citizen that the French cemetery is less of an aggregate of individual burial space than a collective space ordered by rules good citizens ought to comply to, thus questioning the capacity of French cemeteries to foster ‘heterotopic alliances’.

## SESSION 3: 13:30-15:00

13:30-14:00 **Victory Day during the Continuing War: When the cemetery becomes political**

*Oleg Reut*, University of Eastern Finland ([oleg.reut@uef.fi](mailto:oleg.reut@uef.fi))

The title of the paper refers to the book *When the Cemetery Becomes Political* which raises the question: How can a cemetery – a place for the dead – evolve into a space that cultivates a political dynamic? This question gains increased significance in times of war when new graves emerge daily, the pain of war is often very physical and place-based: the experience of suffering is tied to matter and to place, both as tragedy unfolds and long after. In Russia, this year’s Victory Day (9 May) occurred under quite unique circumstances. Across the country, parades and public gatherings to honour the Soviet contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II were cancelled, with the authorities citing security concerns. The national Immortal Regiment spectacle, in which millions of Russians across the country and abroad join President Vladimir Putin and other officials in marching with photographs of their relatives who gave their lives or otherwise contributed to the Soviet war effort in World War II, was called off. Cemeteries transformed into places of political interaction. Applying the Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (EVL) model (Hirschman) to two case studies, the paper analyses the act of laying flowers on a grave and memorial as a means to shape the ways in which people relate to a difficult past. Cemeteries can be considered as an application of Hirschman’s EVL scheme and as scenes where places of commemoration serve as a safety valve for visitors, allowing them to renounce their discontent and their potential to articulate protest. The paper focuses on two city cemeteries in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia, a North-Western region of the Russian Federation. One of them features a monument devoted to the victims of Finnish concentration camps, while the other serves as a site for the memorial to the victims of political repression.

14:00-14:30 ***Inse na Leanbh* (Village of Children): the use of cillíní for the burial of the unbaptised in rural Ireland in the 19th and 20th centuries**

*Ciara Henderson,* Trinity College, Dublin ([henderci@tcd.ie](mailto:henderci@tcd.ie))

Though Ireland possesses a rich death tradition, such traditions appear absent for infants and more specifically, stillborn infants. This absence is understood in Western culture to be a response to Christian theology and its teaching regarding the liminal status of the unbaptised. Stillborn children were unable to receive the rite of baptism and thus remained unbaptised and consequently were not permitted to be buried within their spiritual community, resulting in separate burial. Burials thus occurred in designated Children’s Burial Grounds (Cillíní) which date ‘overwhelmingly’ to the post-medieval period (Murphy, 2011); and are understood to be a cultural response to dominant Catholic theology evidenced by the time period; their liminal location; a widespread belief in limbo; their status as unconsecrated; and lack of evidence of their use by Protestants (Finlay, 2000; Murphy, 2011). In short, they are commonly believed to be reserved for the exclusive burial of the unbaptised, or perinatal infant. Contrary to the widely held beliefs about the segregated burial of the unbaptised, within cemeteries and children’s burial grounds (Cillíní), this paper provides evidence that Irish burial practices for babies were diverse and where segregation occurs the reasons for doing so are not universal. Using a variety of data sources, this paper examines the evolution of Irish burial practices in the 19th century and the legacy it created for 20th century understanding of parental grief.

14:30-15:00 **The burial of suicide in Ireland in the long 19th century**

*Georgina Laragy*, Trinity College, Dublin ([laragyg@tcd.ie](mailto:laragyg@tcd.ie))

In 1895 Smithsonian ethnographer and second-generation Irish man James Mooney noted that,

The bodies of those lately buried turn over in their coffins when a suicide is deposited among them. So strong is the feeling in regard to self-destruction that in the rare instances where suicide has occrd [sic] the neighbouring cemeteries hav [sic] sometimes been guarded for days by parties determined to prevent the burial of the body near their departed kindred.

The body of the suicide was rejected by both the living and the dead. We have no way of knowing for sure what happened in the ‘cré na cille’ (graveyard clay) when the coffin containing a suicide was lowered into the ground, but it is possible to trace how communities responded to suicide. Mooney was correct: in parts of the country suicides were excluded from burial grounds and cemeteries. But Mooney was writing at the end of a century when burial practices and older rituals around death were changing in general, and at a time of transformation in the legislative and ecclesiastical context in which burial took place This paper is based on a chapter of my forthcoming book looking at histories of suicide in Ireland 1823-1914. The chapter examines deviant burials of suicides and its persistence in folk memory, as well as the role of the state in the transformation of burial in general in 19th century Ireland, public health, and religious belief as evidenced in the Irish Folklore Collection.

## SESSION 4: 15:30-17:30

15:30-16:15

***INVITED SPEAKER: Brenda Mathijssen***

University of Groningen ([brenda.mathijssen@rug.nl](mailto:brenda.mathijssen@rug.nl))

**True nature burial: Unearthing the politics of defining an emerging death practice in The Netherlands**

This paper discusses the emergence of nature burial in the Netherlands by drawing attention to the politics of defining this practice. On the basis of qualitative interviews and the systematic mapping of nature burial sites, it discusses how is nature burial defined, and by whom? What practices are included and excluded by these definitions, and why? By tending to such questions, the paper draws attention to the often-overlooked politics of nature burial. As a ‘green’ or ‘natural’ death practice, nature burial tends to be presented as open, neutral, and inclusive, as being without culture. It often is presented to be available to everyone, regardless people’s religious faith or no faith. Yet, as this paper illustrates, there is little natural about nature burial. Nature burial is a cultural practice with shifting meanings across socio-cultural and national contexts which include and exclude humans and non-humans.

16:15-16:45 **Alkaline hydrolysis: a whistle-stop tour**

*Georgina Robinson*, Durham University ([georgina.m.robinson@durham.ac.uk](mailto:georgina.m.robinson@durham.ac.uk))

This paper seeks to provide a foundational understanding of how the funerary innovation of the alkaline hydrolysis (AH) of human corpses is likely to be adopted in the United Kingdom by covering four key areas of concern:

1. What does history tell us?
2. What do current funerary trends tell us?
3. What influence might the climate crisis have on changing normative funerary practices?
4. What does AH’s popularity in the USA tell us about its potential in the UK?

The paper draws from Georgina Robinson’s recently completed doctoral thesis and fieldwork conducted in the USA – ‘Alkaline hydrolysis: the future of British death-styles’ (2023) – which argues that AH is likely to be adopted in the UK as an environmental and economical form of body disposal, primarily by those who currently choose cremation for non-religious reasons. This ought to be a particularly timely and pertinent paper for the Colloquium, given that the UK’s first centre for AH is on the cusp of becoming operational in the north of England.

16:45-17:15 **Cremation niches inspire creative means of commemoration**

*Linda Levitt*, Stephen F. Austin State University ([levitt.linda@gmail.com](mailto:levitt.linda@gmail.com))

Cremation has been a more frequent choice than burial in the United States since 2015, moving toward a decade of transforming funeral traditions. The growing popularity of cremation niches attests to the change in cultural memory as commemoration moves from official declarations to personal, narrative, and multifaceted memories. The inclusion of objects, photographs, and brief documents in a niche creates a sense of a person’s life in a complex, rich way that is not available on a gravestone. For example, the ashes of actor David White, who portrayed Larry Tate on the television comedy ‘Bewitched’, are placed in a niche at Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles. A list of his film and television credits and a bronze bust share the small niche with photographs of Tate with his son Jonathan, who was killed in the 1998 terrorist attack on Pan Am Flight 103. Through these artifacts, visitors are able to know David White as more than just the roles he played on television and film. This project considers the possibilities for cremation niches to inspire and normalize creative forms of commemoration for anyone seeking to remember a loved one in an unusual manner.

17:15-17:30 *Closing remarks*

*Julie Rugg*, University of York ([julie.rugg@york.ac.uk](mailto:julie.rugg@york.ac.uk))