**Funerals Study Day  
Friday 15th June 2018**

**The Coffin Works  
13-15 Fleet Street, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham, B3 1JP  
contact: josie@coffinworks.org/ 0121 233 4785  
Tickets: £40 (£30 for students)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **10.00** | **Registration and refreshments** |
| **10.30** | Welcome address  The Coffin Works Story: Newman Brothers and the decline of a company Sarah Hayes |
| **Morning session** | **Death in the 19th Century** |
| **11.00** | Victorian Funeral Customs Helen Frisby |
| **11.30** | Burial disputes in the mid-nineteenth century  Molly Conisbee |
| **12.00** | Staging the Frankfurt Dead House: Wilkie Collins and the reanimated body  Caroline Radcliffe |
| **12.30** | Public Celebration and Private Grief in the Garden Cemetery Josie Wall |
| **13.00** | **Lunch  with 15 minute taster tour of the museum** |
| **Afternoon session** | **Death in the 21st Century** |
| **14.00** | Sensitive Disposal of Foetal Remains – 20 years On Angela Dunn |
| **14.30** | The Gift of Time Kiran Bhogal and Shani Ruscoe |
| **15.00** | Great way to go workshop Su Chard |
| **17.00** | **End of day** |
| **17.30** | **Drinks TBC** |

**Abstracts**

**The Coffin Works Story: Newman Brothers and the decline of a company  
Sarah Hayes**The Newman Brothers factory is a Mercantile Marie Celeste in Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter, where the very finest Coffin Furniture was once made for the great and the good including Winston Churchill and the Royal Family. This talk looks at what made the Newman Brothers so successful and why everything changed, covering at the history of the company from 1882 to 1998 when the doors closed. Luckily that wasn’t the end of the story – hear how the building and collection were saved, enabling the factory to open again as The Coffin Works museum in 2014.

**Victorian Funeral Customs  
Dr Helen Frisby**

We’re all going to die: but how we die is specific to the time and place in which we live. In twenty-first century Britain, three out of four of us can confidently expect to experience what the healthcare professionals call a predictable death trajectory. In other words, we’re likely to live well into old age, and to die in an institutional setting from chronic, degenerative disease. The dead are then kept in a euphemistically named ‘funeral home’ or ‘chapel of rest’, until a twenty-minute crematorium slot (which many of us will find unsatisfying on one level or another) after which the bereaved will be encouraged quickly to return to normal life.

Go back only 150 years however, and things were rather different. While history should of course never be confused with nostalgia, in this talk historian Dr Helen Frisby will suggest that the Victorians have much to teach us about ritual as a powerful way of facing up to the inevitable. Along the way we’ll learn about telling the bees, a penny for St Peter, why it’s good to be ‘put away with ham’ - and that four magpies meant something very different back then…

**Burial disputes in the mid-nineteenth century   
Molly Conisbee**

The unprecedented growth of urban areas during the early to mid-nineteenth century resulted not only in large communities of the living who needed accommodating, but also increasing numbers of the dead. Tensions about the social, economic and health problems associated with overcrowded, disease-ridden and slum-proliferating towns and cities were mirrored by heated public debates about the miasmic health problems of overflowing, stinking graveyards.

The eventual closure of city-centre burial sites in the 1850s is usually attributed to the public health campaigns of Edwin Chadwick, Alfred ‘Graveyard’ Walker and others, but this paper argues that local politics, tensions and resource struggles were just as important in determining the future of graveyards and cemeteries. The debates surrounding cemeteries and their eventual fate is also an example of the ways in which attitudes towards an important aspect of death – cultural attitudes towards the corpse, funerals and disposal – were changing during this period.

**Staging the Frankfurt Dead House: Wilkie Collins and the reanimated body**

**Dr Caroline Radcliffe**

When Wilkie Collins (author of The Woman in White and The Moonstone) staged his play “The Red Vial” in 1858, critics reeled in horror at the appearance of a corpse coming back to life onstage. Collins set the drama in the Frankfurt Dead House, a waiting mortuary for respectable citizens, that allowed corpses to rest for three days before burial, with a bell tied around their fingers in case they should exhibit signs of life. He later adapted the play into the novel ‘Jezebel’s Daughter’. In this talk, Caroline Radcliffe will discuss the historical and fictional accounts of this extraordinary funerary practice and how it lent itself to the sensational nature of the nineteenth century stage.

**Public Celebration and Private Grief in the Garden Cemetery  
Josie Wall**

Garden cemeteries appear in the early 19th century, beginning with Pere Lachaise in Paris, before spreading across Europe and beyond. These cemeteries aimed to create a rural idyll where the dead could sleep forever surrounded by natural beauty. The right to purchase plots and erect monuments encouraged widespread memorialisation of the dead. In a stark contrast to the fetid urban churchyards which preceded them, garden cemeteries were a place people wanted to visit and be remembered. This paper investigates the importance of both the private feelings of the bereaved and the public display surrounding death in the 19th century.

**Sensitive Disposal of Foetal Remains – 20 years On  
Angela Dunn**

In 1998 Angela Dunn carried out research into the burial, cremation and disposal of foetal remains. At that time huge numbers of identifiable foetuses were being sent to waste disposal contractors for incineration or landfill. At the same time most cremation authorities and all national organisations were taking the stance that only individual cremation of foetuses at crematoria must be allowed, an arrangement that was entirely impractical and effectively reinforced the existing practice of dealing with many identifiable foetuses as clinical waste.

Angela outlines some of the problems experienced in establishing a policy for the more sensitive disposal of foetal remains and how this policy has now been implemented throughout the UK over the past 20 years. She also looks at current developments and how policy can be adapted to meet the growing needs of parents.

The presentation will provide the opportunity for attendees to discuss current trends and consider the way forward for the future.

**The Gift of Time  
Kiran Bhogal and Shani Ruscoe**

Central England Co-operative Funeralcare purchased 10 cuddle cots in 2016, devices which offer a cooling pad in a Moses basket to keep a baby’s body cool and give relatives more time to say goodbye.  
The ground-breaking project was the first of its kind in the funeral business and the cuddle cots were made available across the trading area of Central England Co-operative.  
Cuddle cots form part of the Rainbow Service, which offers a complimentary service for children up to and including 17 years of age.  
Helen Lee, from Central England Co-operative Funeralcare, said: “Parents may have had the opportunity to spend time with their baby in the hospital but we wanted to give them the opportunity to further create memories with their baby when we take their little one into our care.”  
“By purchasing cuddle cots, we are able to offer parents more time to sit with their child, to take them home for some time before the funeral if they wish and, most importantly, to be able to cuddle their baby.”  
“We are extremely proud of the Rainbow Service because we can provide complimentary support. Parents are able to focus their mind on their child and creating memories instead of having to worry about finances. The cuddle cot forms part of this choice for families who have suffered the loss of a baby.”  
Simon Rothwell, from the provider, said: “Central England Co-operative is to be commended as the first funeral group to provide this equipment to assist their families.”

**Great way to go workshop  
Su Chard**

It is a time to learn how to plan a funeral, maybe yours may be someone else’s. This is not a skill that many of us have and we never know when it may be asked of us.  
The course is led by Su Chard an Independent celebrant. She has 15 years experience of supporting families during this difficult time. She is also a postgraduate associate of the Centre of Death and Society at The University of Bath.  
Su says, “I spend a lot of time with family members who are trying to do the very best for the person who has died but have little information to go on. Not knowing even simple things like:

• would they have wanted to be cremated or buried,

• what was their favourite hymn or tune,

• where would they have liked the service,

can cause great worry if there is no information to go on. This adds to an already sad and stressful time.”  
By the end of this interesting, empowering and honestly not gloomy time you will have new skills to put into practice for yourself or others.   
“I felt unsure about doing the course, but am so pleased I did. I feel very relieved knowing that I will be helping my family. I can’t quite believe what an enjoyable morning I had and how light hearted I now feel.”   
C.L. Gloucestershire.