From Cradle to Early Grave: Death, Burial and Mourning for Infants and Children in Glossopdale, 1890 - 1911

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From Cradle to Early Grave: Death, Burial and Mourning for Infants and Children in Glossopdale, 1890 – 1911.

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Abstract

This study examines how working-class families in the Glossopdale area of Derbyshire accessed and used funeral rites, bereavement practices and burial rituals for infants and children between 1890 and 1911. It sets out to examine attitudes that were prevalent at the time, and have been repeated by historians, surrounding the behaviour of working-class parents, including widespread accusations about the misuse of burial insurance and an absence of care for their offspring. Local primary sources including statistics and commentary from the area’s Medical Officer for Health demonstrate that burial insurance was not an area of concern locally and that the high infant mortality was due to a wide range of environmental and social factors. Examination of the records of a local undertaker show that the majority of costs involved in burial and funeral rites were unavoidable. Although a large supply of burial insurance providers is identified in the area it is apparent that large numbers of parents did not have it in place for their children and they often relied instead on the flexibility of the undertaker to allow them to spread payments. Diversity is shown in the choices made by parents to decorate and line coffins. In general, the choices made do not suggest that extravagance was in the minds of the parents laying their children to rest. The lack of any extant headstones for children in the sample implies that parents did not to prioritise the purchase of headstones for their offspring due to financial constraints and a preference for more individual and private remembrance. Overall, no evidence was found to confirm the veracity of negative assumptions about greed and apathy among working-class parents. It is suggested that further work to compare child to adult burials and expand the work to other undertakers’ records and other localities would be valuable.
Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

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1: Introduction

This study will examine how working-class families in the Glossopdale area accessed and used funeral rites, bereavement practices and burial rituals for infants and children between 1890 and 1911. Using a range of primary and secondary sources it will assess what attitudes were prevalent about infant and child death in working-class families, both in the families themselves and from local and national commentators and officials. Detailed records from the Funeral Book of a local undertaker will establish costs involved in the purchase of a funeral and provide insight into how these were met. The study will also consider to what extent parents’ needs were accommodated by the undertaker, the Burial Board and others in the community. An assessment will be made of how choices made by bereaved families were influenced by factors such as denomination, fashion and affordability.

The focus upon one locality will allow the details to be placed in context of the individual households and with the practices of local businesses and public bodies. The period 1890 to 1911 has been chosen to take advantage of multiple primary sources at a time of debates about burial and cremation, public health and child rearing practices, the role of life insurance and the funeral trade in general. Some use of undertakers’ accounts has been made in the work of Julie-Marie Strange and Thomas Laqueur among others but they have not located their studies firmly in one location.

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This study will place the undertaker records in a local context and will also make use of other primary sources including Burial Board minutes, census returns, local Medical Officer for Health reports, newspapers and physical surveys of burial grounds.

Pat Jalland contributed a well-rounded interpretation of middle and upper-class death and burial rituals in 1996 but emphasised that the beliefs and behaviour she had uncovered would not automatically filter down to the working-classes. Jalland expressed hope that other historians would examine the experience of working-class families and Julie Marie-Strange was a key academic to take up this challenge, publishing a comprehensive study of the working-class experience of death in 2005. Strange took time to look consider the silences and look the wide range of personal and practical reactions to death that the late Victorian and Edwardian working-classes employed. Other historians have focussed on distinct parts of the working-class experience of death. Thomas Laqueur wrote about the changes imposed by the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, when a decent burial ceased to be a right. The pauper funeral, he said, became the final stamp of failure. Ruth Richardson explored how the stigma surrounding pauper funerals was exacerbated by the Anatomy Act and Lionel Rose chose to amplify accusations of neglect and murder levelled at working-class parents. James Stephen Curl and Julian Litten only touched on the working-class experience in their broader studies but they both chose to reiterate contemporary

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4 Strange, p.1.
5 Laqueur, p.125.
accusations that the working-classes demanded ostentatious display in funeral rites.  

Other recent studies have focussed on a range of more discreet aspects of the history of death. Julie Rugg concentrated on the physical spaces themselves in her study of graveyards and cemeteries in North Yorkshire and a range of authors have contributed to a recently published volume on aspects of funerary archaeology. This study will touch on all these areas, but the strength of both primary and secondary sources means that it could have focussed on any. It is hoped that it has produced a starting-point for local study of working-class burial practices that could be expanded upon both in its existing location and, to enable a broader picture of diversity in practices to be created, in other locations.

The focus of the study is the infants and children up to the age of fourteen whose funeral accounts are recorded in the Funeral Book of Arthur Worsley and Sons Funeral Services Ltd, in Hadfield, Derbyshire between 1890 and 1911. The Worsleys supplied 207 funerals for children and infants during this time and provided a further sixteen coffins for still born infants. Hadfield sits within Glossopdale, in the north-west of Derbyshire. Most of the children lived in Hadfield or its close neighbour Padfield, or resided across the valley in Tintwistle, which lay in Cheshire. Although it sits within Derbyshire, Glossopdale was part of the southern Lancashire cotton-belt and was an

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9 Arthur Worsley Funeral Services Ltd (AWFS), Funeral Book, 1890-1911.
area in which over half of the population worked in the textile industry.\textsuperscript{10} Despite its place in the wider cotton belt, the area at this time has been described as geographically isolated, due to its poor transport links and moorland surrounds.\textsuperscript{11} Within this environment lived the clients of the Worsleys, who can broadly be described as working-class; they would not have had a large disposable income but they did not need to resort to the parish for the burial of their children. As addresses were included against accounts, the probable parents of a large number of the children who were buried during the period were identified using census returns from 1891, 1901 and 1911.\textsuperscript{12} For those whose occupations could be established, the majority of men (61/118) and nearly all of the women (80/82) worked in the local cotton mills. From the 1890s, much of the area’s textile industry began to suffer from increased competition from the Far East.\textsuperscript{13} Mill workers would also have had to deal with fluctuations in income at times such as in 1899, when Bridge Mill, in between Hadfield and Tintwistle was almost gutted.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, mills continued to employ a large proportion of the local population throughout the period. Figures from the time show that the textile industry paid an average wage in the area of 29s 11d for men and 18s 8d for women in 1906.\textsuperscript{15} Most of the remaining men (49/118) were employed as labourers in settings


\textsuperscript{11} Stone, p.18.


\textsuperscript{14} Tom Quayle, \textit{The Cotton Industry in Longdendale and Glossopdale} (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2006), p.103.

\textsuperscript{15} AWFS Funeral Book.; PP. 1909 (4545), \textit{Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into the Earnings and Hours of Labour of Workpeople of the United Kingdom, 1. Textile Trades in 1906}, p.xxix.
such as local quarries, waterworks or builders. A further four worked on the railway and four worked in the retail trade.\textsuperscript{16} The income of the families using the Worsley’s services will have varied but in general, the parents whose children were buried with their assistance would have worked hard for a living and lived week to week.

The Worsleys were one of many funeral suppliers in the area but like many they also carried on other trades and neither Henry Worsley, who founded his business in 1869, or his son Arthur were listed as undertakers in local directories.\textsuperscript{17} Arthur was listed as a joiner and Henry as a shopkeeper and commission agent in 1900. An advert for the Glossop Carriage Company in 1890 showed that there were over twenty funeral suppliers in the area through whom GCC transport could be arranged and five of these were in Hadfield or Tintwistle, so there was local competition in the trade.\textsuperscript{18}

Most of the children were laid to rest in Glossop Cemetery which sat on the hills above the local towns and villages. When it opened in 1859 an editorial in the local newspaper said, ‘The situation, though somewhat bleak, is well chosen. The site affords a beautiful view of the surrounding hills and dales by which it is encircled.’ The cemetery’s location in relation to the Worsley’s premises and the villages in which the children who were laid to rest there can be seen in an 1899 map in Figure 1.1, along with other smaller graveyards where some children were interred, illustrated in yellow. By piecing together information from a range of sources, more can be learnt about how the children came to be buried there and how their parents coped with the aftermath of their deaths.

\textsuperscript{16} NA, RG12.; NA, RG13.; NA RG14.
\textsuperscript{17} Kelly’s, pp.246-252.
\textsuperscript{18} Glossop Advertiser, 3 January 1890, p.1.
Figure 1.1.

IMAGE REDACTED
Chapter 2: Infant and Child Death: Assumptions and Reality

Large numbers of working-class parents living in the Glossopdale area at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries experienced the death of at least one of their child. Information contained in returns for the 1911 census on Platt Street, in the mill village of Padfield, shows that of the sixty-one households for which this information is available, thirty-six had lost at least one child. As these figures only include children born alive to women in their current marriage, the true total will be much higher.

These parents had to deal with the emotional and financial implications of infant and child death within a widespread culture of blame which, despite significant evidence to the contrary, persisted to varying degrees throughout the period. The second half of the nineteenth-century saw working-class parents blamed for the deaths of their children for a range of reasons including greed for insurance pay-outs, mothers working outside the home, drunken negligence or an ignorance of hygienic practices. The most extreme of these assumptions survived into the late twentieth century through the work of historians such as Lionel Rose, whose study of infanticide argued that the value of infant life was determined by supply and demand. This chapter will outline some of these key debates and claims that took place at a national level about parenting and infant and child mortality and assess whether allegations made nationally were

1 RG 14, Registration District 441, Enumeration District 15, Sub District 1, Schedule Numbers 39-122: 2011 Census Returns for Platt Street, Padfield, Glossop <https://www.findmypast.co.uk> [accessed 13 September 2017].
4 Rose, p.5.
identified and considered at a local level. Local records will then be examined for information about the lives and deaths of working-class children in Glossopdale. This will help determine whether claims about parents’ attitudes and aptitudes pertained to working-class Glossopdale. In Chapters Three and Four, evidence from funeral and burial records will be examined to provide an insight into the investment, both financial and emotional, that parents put into their children’s funeral rites and burial rituals.

The most extreme accusation levelled at working-class parents around the turn of the nineteenth-century was, in the words of historian Daniel Grey, that working-class parents were all ‘at risk of killing their children for profit’ because of temptations caused by the availability of burial insurance.\(^5\) By 1890, numerous statutory reforms affecting the supply of burial insurance by friendly societies had been implemented, designed to remove a perceived temptation to infanticide.\(^6\) These had begun with the Friendly Societies Act 1850 restricting the amount of money which could be paid out on the death of a child under the age of ten to three pounds. The Act also made a doctor’s certificate mandatory and stipulated that the money should be paid directly to the undertaker (‘the undertaker’s clause’), although these requirements were removed later in the decade. The debate on what legal restrictions should be imposed to prevent parents from ‘cashing in’ on their children’s deaths continued to be driven through the rest of the century by vociferous political and social campaigners, including the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and by sensationalised national media reports of individual cases.\(^7\) In 1890, as the first burials considered in this study were taking place, the Bishop of Peterborough introduced an

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\(^5\) Grey, p.71.
\(^6\) Grey, p.57.
\(^7\) Grey, pp. 58-59.
unsuccessful Bill into the House of Lords, loosely based on a recent Select Committee report.\(^8\) As well as further lowering the sums that a child’s life could be insured for, the Bill aimed to reintroduce the ‘undertaker’s clause’ and impose severe fines on offending friendly societies. There were several other aborted attempts to introduce similar reforms throughout the 1890s. Evidence presented in Parliament fed a lively debate on burial insurance in national and regional newspapers as well as trade journals.\(^9\) There were further attempts to clamp down on infant insurance in the following twenty years, but the vociferousness of the campaign reduced as others stepped forward to support the practice of insuring against funeral costs.\(^10\) By 1914, Daniel Grey noted, the idea that working-class parents were all at risk of killing their children for fleeting profit was not part of the cultural landscape.\(^11\) Nevertheless, the parents of children in the sample lived through a time when they were effectively being accused of wishing their children dead for a small profit. To understand to what extent these attitudes filtered down to a local level it is necessary to look at the reports and commentary produced or digested in Glossopdale in that period.

An examination of local newspapers does not suggest that burial insurance was a major talking point in the community. In editorials and correspondence pages of the main Glossop newspapers there was no mention of either the Select Committee Report of 1889 or the Bishop of Peterborough’s Bill between 1888 and 1890.\(^12\) There also appear to have been no significant local cases in which burial insurance was cited as a

\(^8\) Grey, pp. 59-60.
\(^9\) Grey, p.58.
\(^10\) Strange, pp. 237-238.
\(^11\) Grey, p.71.
\(^12\) Glossop-dale Chronicle, January 1888 – December 1891.; Glossop Advertiser, January 1888 – December 1891.
factor in child murder apart from one case of multiple poisonings from 1850 in nearby Mottram. Nonetheless, residents of the area may have been aware of the debate through involvement in friendly societies or similar organisations. The Amalgamated Union of Family Friendly Burial Societies of Manchester and Surrounding Districts was formed in March 1889 and met in May 1890 to discuss the potential legislation being discussed in Parliament. Delegates from Derbyshire were involved in the meeting where, unsurprisingly, a strong consensus was against any move to restrict working-class opportunities for burial insurance, especially as there had been no cases of infanticide amongst the 58 societies in membership. Subscribers to the Oddfellows’ Magazine in 1890 would also have read of fears for the survival of juvenile branches, of which there was one in Glossop, and seen that a meeting in London of various societies had adopted a resolution protesting against ‘sweeping, untrue and slanderous statements made in the House of Lords and elsewhere’. It is likely that these issues would have also been raised at local branch meetings. It would of course not be expected that organisations in the business of supplying the insurance would have been in favour of restrictions. If, however, evidence did exist at a local level of the risks of burial insurance to young lives then it is likely that this would have been raised by the Medical Officers for Health. Their reports allow a more objective view to be formed of what caused the high level of infant and child mortality in Glossopdale and allow other assumptions about working-class mothers to be considered.

14 ‘Burial Societies Conference in Manchester’, Manchester Times, 24 May 1890.
Edwin Chadwick first called for the appointment of Medical Officers of Health (MOH) in the 1840s, but it was not until 1872 that the Public Health Act made it a requirement for all local sanitary authorities in England and Wales.\textsuperscript{16} The 1875 Public Health Act required all MHOs to be registered doctors but they had a wide range of responsibilities and some MHO’s expertise across sanitary science and preventative medicine may have been limited.\textsuperscript{17} Detailed analysis in many of the Glossop reports however, for instance on the effect of rainfall and temperature on diarrhoea outbreaks suggests that the Glossop Urban Sanitary Authority was served by skilled staff.\textsuperscript{18} Local surgeon James Rhodes was employed as MHO until his death in 1898, to be replaced by Duncan John Mackenzie who remained in position beyond 1911 on a salary of £100, shared equally with the Glossop-dale Rural Sanitary Authority.\textsuperscript{19} Both MHOs were supported by at least one sanitary inspector whose reports were included with those of the MOH from 1903.\textsuperscript{20} Glossop MHOs and Sanitary Inspectors used their annual reports to make a variety of recommendations, suggesting their relationships with the authorities were strong enough for them to ignore advice in textbooks of the time to not

\textsuperscript{17} Wohl, pp. 182-185.
\textsuperscript{20} WIL/.b29257967, p.38.; Wohl, pp. 194-195.
concern themselves too much with social questions of the day.\textsuperscript{21} Where MHOs were silent in their commentary, the detailed statistics contained in the reports can assist in the evaluation of contemporary claims and accusations levelled against working-class parents.

The MHO reports show that between 1903 and 1911, there were 992 deaths of residents in the Glossop Borough below the age of fifteen, 627 of whom were under the age of one.\textsuperscript{22} During these years, there were only fourteen deaths attributed to accidents, and, although over a quarter (273) were defined as ‘other causes’ which were not explained, there was no mention of suspicious deaths, violent or otherwise. Burial insurance was not mentioned once in any commentary on the reports by the MHOs. The majority of all the deaths given a cause were put down to gastric or respiratory diseases but the main specific cause of death for those under the age of one was premature birth; at ninety-three deaths this was slightly ahead of diarrhoea, which caused the death of eighty-seven infants. For older children, the causes that were identified were mainly respiratory or infectious diseases. The top seven causes for each age group are set out below.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{21} Wohl, pp. 198-199.
### Table 2.1: Main recorded causes of death 1903 – 1911

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recorded Cause of Death - Up to One (Total = 625)</th>
<th>Recorded Cause of Death - One and below Five (Total = 271)</th>
<th>Recorded Cause of Death - Five and below Fifteen (Total = 96)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Other Causes</td>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
<td>All Other Causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premature Birth</td>
<td>All Other Causes</td>
<td>Other Tubercular Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea</td>
<td>Measles</td>
<td>Scarlet Fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronchitis</td>
<td>Scarlet Fever</td>
<td>Measles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
<td>Other Tubercular Diseases</td>
<td>Phthisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enteritis</td>
<td>Diarrhoea</td>
<td>Heart Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Tubercular Diseases</td>
<td>Bronchitis</td>
<td>Accidents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A more detailed breakdown of the causes of infant death that was provided in reports from 1905 to 1911 further demonstrates further that the sort of violence or negligence attributed to bereaved parents by some contemporary commentators and later historians was not evident in Glossopdale. Out of 413 infant deaths in the period, only two were attributed to overlying or suffocation. This does not mirror the picture painted by Rose of ‘parents smothering their children in a drunken stupor following a Saturday night spree. Once again the picture on the ground suggests that the working-class parents of Glossopdale did not live up the stereotypes that fed the cultural anxiety later described by Daniel Grey. Indeed, as Wohl pointed out, many of the deaths may have

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25 Rose, pp. 177-178., Wohl, p.34.

26 Grey, p.54.
been attributed to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome at a later period in time. But violence or drunken negligence was not the only way working-class mothers were blamed for infant deaths by campaigners including medical authorities; women who bottle-fed their babies could be ‘held guilty of virtual infanticide’. Between 1905 and 1911 nine cases of infant death within the Glossop Urban Sanitary Authority were attributed to ‘want of breast milk or starvation’ but the MHO did not attribute blame to the parents in any of these cases. Lionel Rose may have seized upon this silence as support for his theory that homicide figures were a ‘gross understatement’; ‘For a mother so inclined,’ he suggested, ‘it would not have been difficult to will death upon her infant by neglecting it and inducting one or other of the symptoms described’. Wohl rightly points out that the broad range of statistics and studies available from both MHOs and other sources at the time should not be taken literally, but the Glossopdale MHO reports certainly do not give credence to Rose’s narrative of working-class parents engineering the deaths of their infants. Indeed, as Julie-Marie Strange identified, the notion that poverty is synonymous with the neglect of children is a complicated issue that Rose did not choose to fully explore. What the MHOs did do in their reports to the Glossop Urban Sanitary Authority was provide suggestions for how deaths could be reduced. These tell us more about the environment that working-class children were born into and how their mothers were viewed.

27 Wohl, p.34.
28 Wohl, p.23.
30 Rose, pp.7-8.,
Comparative figures published in the 1904 MOH report and set out in Figure 2.1 show that infant mortality had been higher than the national or county average for much of the previous nine years. In presenting the breakdown, Dr. Mackenzie submitted that the higher rate in urban areas was due to many causes, including a greater risk of infection and reduced ‘pure air’ but pointed out that ‘…no doubt a great part is due to artificial nursing of infants and the ignorance of mothers whose time and attention is taken up with their work in the factory.’

**Figure 2.1: Infant Mortality 1895-1903. Deaths per Thousand Births.**

In a 1907 special report requested by the local council to explain why Glossop had the highest overall death rate in the county, Dr. Mackenzie was able to explain that the infantile death rate was in fact only eighth highest in the county and state, ‘we might be able to do better if female youth as well as grown women were more fully instructed in

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32 WIL./b29257979, p.5.  
33 WIL./b29257979, p.5.
hygienic methods of infant rearing. This call for education echoed a key theme in his report of 1906 when the MHO had stressed the crucial influence of schools in the ‘education of female youth in domestic hygiene and the rearing of infants’ and welcomed funding for a convalescent home and base for district nurses who could provide education and support to mothers, ‘…after the accoucheur has left and before the services of the physician are required’. Dr. Mackenzie also noted that the recently held National Conference on Infant Mortality had stressed the importance of education and he must have been aware of the work on visiting and notification which was happening just 19 miles across the Pennines in Huddersfield. This activity was viewed as pioneering at the time but it too issued a moral judgement, echoing assumptions about greed and burial insurance; it assumed that better care would be given to children if parents (or more particularly mothers, as they were judged to be responsible for care) were paid for early registration and promised a sum on their child’s first birthday. In Glossop a different response was taken, as can be seen in the 1906 response to the incidence of deaths from diarrhoea and other gastric illnesses.

1906 had been a particularly bad year for diarrhoea deaths within the Glossop Urban Sanitary Authority, with seventeen deaths of children under one year of age and a further seven of children up to the age of five. Education was seen as key with the

35 WIL/.b29257992., p.8., WIL/.b29257992, p.4.
37 Strange, p.236.
Glossop MHO offering detailed advice to mothers. Summing up his strong message that mothers should be available to breastfeed their babies, he said:

The moral of it all is, in the first place, that the mother should have very good reasons before she deprives her infant of the sustenance natural to it, and, in the second place, that no effort should be spared, either by individual care or public sanitation, to prevent contamination of milk used for hand-fed children.39

The widely held view that mothers should not work had led to a clause in the 1891 Factory Act banning employers from knowingly hiring a woman within a month of childbirth and many wished for this to be taken further.40 Taking a slightly more nuanced position than some of his contemporaries, the Glossop MHO did note that the mothers of children dying from gastric disease were not all in the poorest households, acknowledging that the mothers’ labour was ‘valuable’ and that their families ‘would be likely to be enabled by their earnings to live in a fair class of property.’41 Some consideration was also given to the fact that mothers’ may not be able to produce milk as they themselves were insufficiently or unsuitably fed.42 Reflecting the rural surroundings of the mill towns and villages in which he worked, Dr Mackenzie turned to a farming comparison to stress his point:

Even the sheep farmer understands that when his ewes have had a good winter, are in good condition, and have plenty of milk, the lambs can stand a great deal of hardship in the spring. Can anyone doubt that it is the same with the human mother, and that those who are or who are going to be mothers should be well fed and cared for?43

38 WIL/.b29257992.,pp. 5-7.
39 Wohl, pp.28-32.
40 WIL/.b29258042, p.20.
41 WIL/.b29258042, p.20.
42 WIL/.b29257979, p.17.
43 WIL/.b29257979, p.17.
He stopped short, however, of suggesting that the local authorities should step in and ensure pregnant mothers’ health or that maternity benefits or quality nurseries should be provided. There was also scant mention of the role of midwives in the reports beyond them passing on knowledge and caring for mothers suffering with puerperal fever.\textsuperscript{44} In amongst the MHO’s recommendations, however, there were criticisms which were for the local authorities, not mothers, to take action on and which were repeated in multiple reports.

The improvement of milk supply and sewerage systems were seen as important priorities by the MHOs in Glossop.\textsuperscript{45} St. Helens had established a milk depot in 1899 but in 1907 Dr. Mackenzie was still tentatively raising the issue of how a municipal milk supply system, if properly designed, may reduce contamination.\textsuperscript{46} In 1903 the MHO’s report called for a reservoir scheme to allow more WCs to be installed and ‘make progress on dealing with filth diseases’ and he attributed summer diarrhoea to a variety of factors aside from mothers’ employment, including contamination of food and farms.\textsuperscript{47} In 1911 he was still calling for a range of sanitary improvements including the paving of back yards to ‘prevent soaking of putrescible matter into the soil, and to prevent infectious dust from flying about and getting into milk, etc.’, as well as the improvement of the sewerage system and the supply of W.C.s.\textsuperscript{48} While the ‘ignorance of mothers whose time and attention is taken up with their work in the factory’ was a matter of great concern for the MHO, he clearly recognised that the public authorities had a role to play in improving both infrastructure and education and

\textsuperscript{44} WIL/.b29257992, p.5.; WIL/.b29257992, p.13.  
\textsuperscript{45} Wohl, pp. 32-33.  
\textsuperscript{46} WIL/.b29258005, pp. 16-19.  
\textsuperscript{47} WIL/.b29257967, pp. 2-3.; WIL/.b29257967, pp. 8-9.  
\textsuperscript{48} WIL/.b29258042, p.15.; WIL/.b29258042, p.6.
his most emphatic note to the authorities, written in capitals in 1911 was ‘LET THEM PAVE BACK YARDS’ 49 It is likely that Dr. Mackenzie would have agreed with Wohl’s conclusions that ‘while working wives (and hence bottle feeding) may have been a contributing factor to infant deaths from diarrhoeal diseases, inefficient excrement removal certainly was.’50

The detailed reports of the Glossop MHOs show that, despite widespread condemnation of the attitudes and behaviour of working-class parents from many in national political and civil life, local officials held a more nuanced view. It would be naïve to suggest that there was not criminal intent or a neglectful attitude on the part of any parents in Glossopdale, but local MHO reports provide little evidence of wrongdoing beyond poverty of knowledge, time and resources. A wide range of factors contributed to high mortality rates including a lack of affordable healthcare and maternity benefits, a scarcity in affordable and safe childcare, unsafe milk supplies and a poor sanitary infrastructure. What the reports do not support is Lionel Rose’s theory that ‘forces of supply and demand’ were behind high infant mortality rates.51 In this context the next chapters will look in more detail at costs and choices involved in funeral and burial rites. Having established some of the national context in which children were raised and died, the chapters will examine how bereaved parents coped within it, what choices they made, and assess to what extent they were assisted at a local level.

50 Wohl, p.29.
51 Rose, p.5.
Chapter 3: Paying the Price

Regardless of contemporary political debates surrounding burial insurance, or middle-class assumptions about the adequacy of working-class parenting, the death of a child was a financial and emotional reality faced by a significant proportion of parents in the Glossopdale area. Using the records of the burials of 207 children and sixteen stillborn infants from mainly mill-working or labouring families, local burial records and the minutes of the local Burial Board, this chapter will examine the costs involved in burial practices and funeral rites. It will explore how access to services was affected by undertakers, the local Burial Board, and the wider community. Although no insurance records for the families in question have been located, information about organisations operating locally which could have helped the families in question to manage the cost of funeral rites will also be considered. While limits were imposed on pay-outs of burial insurance for children, perceived extravagance in working-class funerals was often blamed by contemporary commentators on working-class demand and this continued to be supported by historians such as Julian Litten and James Curl.\(^1\) This assumption was refuted by Julie-Marie Strange who identified that efforts to provide a respectable funeral have been wrongly ascribed as evidence of working-class shallowness and snobbery.\(^2\) She also noted that extraordinary expenses were involved in even the most basic burials and pointed out that infectious disease could mean

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multiple deaths striking the same family in a short period of time.\(^3\) Undertakers also came in for criticism; while Charles Dickens’ views of the undertaker as a parasite were still popular at the end of the nineteenth century, Strange points out that the tradesmen’s practices and personalities varied widely.\(^4\) The majority of children in the Funeral Book (160/207) were buried at Glossop Cemetery so the policies of the local Burial Board played a large role.\(^5\) Their policies can be used to reflect on Julie Rugg’s suggestion that Burial Boards could display compassion and flexibility within what was often a rigid framework.\(^6\) By examining what parents paid for funerals, how they accessed the required finances and their dealings with a range of organisations, the veracity of assumptions about working-class parents in Glossopdale will be examined. This will be followed in Chapter Four by a more detailed examination of the choices made by bereaved parents.

Records in the Worsleys’ Funeral Book provide details for many of the purchases necessary for interment and funeral rites, and confirm, as Strange also found, that essential items formed the majority of the costs.\(^7\) The accounts chronicle a range of items supplied to families including the coffin and its furnishings along with refreshments, transport and the undertakers’ attendance at the funeral.\(^8\) Table 3.1 below sets out the lowest, highest and mean costs for funeral services provided for eight age groups. As only a small minority of accounts included burial fees, this aspect will be considered separately.

\(^3\) Strange, p.108.; Strange, p.238.  
\(^4\) Strange, p.110.  
\(^5\) Arthur Worsley Funeral Services Ltd, Funeral Book, 1890 – 1911.  
\(^7\) Strange, p.108.  
\(^8\) AWFS Funeral Book.
Table 3.1 – Costs in Worsley Funeral Book by Age Group 1890 – 1911 (Excluding Cemetery Fees) ⁹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number of Burials</th>
<th>Lowest Cost</th>
<th>Highest Cost</th>
<th>Mean Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stillborn</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>£0 2s 0d</td>
<td>£0 7s 0d</td>
<td>£0 5s 2d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to One Week</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>£0 7s 0d</td>
<td>£1 5s 3d</td>
<td>£0 12s 1d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Week to Three Months</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>£0 5s 0d</td>
<td>£3 13s 0d</td>
<td>£1 3s 9d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to Six Months</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>£0 12s 6d</td>
<td>£3 4s 0d</td>
<td>£1 13s 7d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six to Twelve Months</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>£0 15s 0d</td>
<td>£3 0s 0d</td>
<td>£1 15s 5d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to Two Years</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>£0 18s 0d</td>
<td>£3 13s 0d</td>
<td>£1 15s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to Five Years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>£1 6s 9d</td>
<td>£5 11s 0d</td>
<td>£2 9s 6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five to Ten Years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>£1 15s 9d</td>
<td>£6 2s 3d</td>
<td>£3 8s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten to Fifteen Years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>£2 16s 6d</td>
<td>£4 2s 6d</td>
<td>£3 9s 5d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>223</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>£1 14 6d</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The range of costs can be seen more easily in graph format in Figure 3.1, but to ease manipulation and display of the data, these have been converted into pre-decimal pence.

**Figure 3.1 – Cost of Funeral Services, Expressed in pre-decimal pence (Excluding Cemetery Fees).** ¹⁰

9 AWFS Funeral Book.
10 AWFS Funeral Book.
As Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1 show, the costs charged by the Worsleys (excluding cemetery or church costs) ranged from two shillings to over six pounds. A wide variation in costs was present in all the different age groups. The lowest cost accounts were for the supply of coffins for stillborn children, which ranged from two shillings to over seven shillings. Costs for infants up to the age of one week ranged from seven shillings and averaged over thirteen shillings. As would be expected, the costs rose as the age of the child increased; an average bill of less than two pounds up to the age of two rose above three pounds once a child was over the age of five. The variation in prices demonstrates that savings could be made; within each age group the charges for coffins and the associated furniture, linings and shrouds varied quite widely. With average wages for mill workers in the area sitting around 29s for men and 18s for women, even a relatively modest undertakers’ bill could represent more than a week or two of a household’s income, at a time when medical bills and the loss of the woman’s wage could already have impacted upon the family budget.¹¹

Apart from the coffin, it was the purchase of transport to the cemetery or graveyard which had the most potential to raise the undertaker’s bill. For those families who did purchase some form of transport, over half of the bill could be for the hire of vehicles.¹² Without transport, some families would have faced a steep uphill walk of two to three kilometres to Glossop Cemetery.¹³ Despite this, transport was not purchased for nearly three-quarters of children who died below the age of six months.

¹¹ PP. 1909 (4545), Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into the Earnings and Hours of Labour of Workpeople of the United Kingdom, 1. Textile Trades in 1906, p.xxix. ; Strange, p.39.
¹² AWFS Funeral Book.
In fact, as Table 3.2 shows, transport was not hired in a significant proportion of all age groups.\(^{14}\)

**Table 3.2: Transport Purchased for Funerals by Age Group**\(^ {15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number in Age Group</th>
<th>Number Purchasing Hearse or Hearsette</th>
<th>Number Purchasing Any Transport</th>
<th>Proportion Not Purchasing Any Transport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stillborn</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to One Week</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Week to Three Months</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to Six Months</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six to Twelve Months</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to Two Years</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to Five Years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five to Ten Years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten to Fifteen Years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>223</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>62%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When transport was purchased by a family, the coffin was often carried in a Brougham carriage or a bus rather than a hearse. A hearse could only take the coffin, leaving parents unable to accompany their child, whereas a Brougham carriage or coach would allow the family to travel together. This pattern of hiring minimal or no transport is in line with accounts Strange quotes, of parents carrying their child’s coffin to the cemetery or of coffins carried on the knees of coach passengers.\(^ {16}\) The figures do not give any support to Curl’s allegations of demand for ostentatious funerary displays.\(^ {17}\) Instead, as Strange has pointed out, the modest entrance to the burial ground by the walking funeral party would have created a touching image in its intimacy and simplicity.\(^ {18}\) Across all age groups, the coffin and transport made up at least 89% of

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\(^{14}\) AWFS Funeral Book.  
\(^{15}\) AWFS Funeral Book.  
\(^{16}\) Strange, p.239.  
\(^{17}\) Curl, p.209.  
\(^{18}\) Strange, p.239.
the costs charged by the undertaker, leaving little left for expenditure which could have
attracted the ire of those keen to blame families for extravagant or vulgar practices.19

Other unavoidable costs that parents faced in laying their children to rest,
included the fees and charges made by the cemetery, churchyard or chapel where the
internment took place. The Burial Board which established and controlled the Glossop
Cemetery published its rules, regulations and fees in July 1859.20 The first rule
stipulated that ‘all charges and fees must be paid in advance to the registrar and no
funeral will be permitted to enter the ground until such charges are paid’. This is
contradicted by minutes showing discussion of non-payment in 1893, but within a few
days the Board was discussing the fact that fees were outstanding and taking action.21

The 1859 fees schedule set a fee of 10s 6d for the burial of a child of any age,
comprising four shillings to the Burial Board, 2s 6d to the officiating minister and four
shillings to the sexton. For those to be buried in the Church of England section of the
cemetery, an extra one shilling fee applied, to compensate for the fee not being payable
to the parish for a church burial. An additional fee of 2s 6d could be paid for choice of
ground and five shillings was payable to the minister for a Sunday or morning funeral.22

Minutes of the Burial Board show that new fees were approved by the Secretary of State
at the end of 1892 and 1901 but a search of local papers was unable to locate a published
list of the new charges.23 Cemetery fees are shown, however, in a small number of
accounts in the Funeral Book, from times when it appears that they were paid by the

19 AWFS Funeral Book.
the Country of Derby.’; The Glossop Record, 16 July 1859.
Derbyshire Record Office (DRO), Glossop Borough Council Burial Board, D3700/48/2, Glossop Burial
Board minutes (signed), September 1889-August 1902, 19 January 1893.; ‘Burial Records - High Peak
Borough Council’ <https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/article/704/Burial-records> [accessed 27 December
2017].
21 Glossop Record 2 July 1859.; Glossop Record 16 July 1859.
22 DRO D3700/48/2, 1 December 1892.; DRO D3700/48/2, 12 December 1901.
Worsleys along with other costs. From this information it does not appear that the costs rose steeply in the forty years since the cemetery first opened. The Worsleys added cemetery or church fees to around twenty accounts between 1890 and 1900, often allowing the cost to be spread over time.\textsuperscript{24} Nine of the amounts charged were twelve shillings or below and a further seven were below one pound. The type of fees paid are not specified but cemetery records suggest that the twelve-shilling payments were for internment in a common grave and that the small number of higher payments were for new family graves.\textsuperscript{25} Limited information is available on the fees charged by the local church and chapels where some of the children were buried, but fees recorded in the Funeral Book for burial at the Church of England Church in Tintwistle ranged from ten shillings to 17s 6d in the period.\textsuperscript{26} The fact that these figures are included in the Funeral Book suggests that the undertaker stepped in on occasion to help families who did not have the money available to pay cemetery or church fees in advance. Adding the money to the overall bill meant that the family could pay the sum owing in stages; a flexibility not available from Burial Board or, it appears, from the local church. It was more likely to be the undertaker who took the needs of the working poor into account in providing services.

Glossop Burial Board also demonstrated inflexibility in other ways. Sunday burials were a common way for working-class families to reduce costs and avoid losing wages and Julie Rugg has established that this was recognised as important by many burial boards and cited it as an example of flexibility and compassion within a burial

\textsuperscript{24} AWFS Funeral Book.
\textsuperscript{26} AWFS Funeral Book, Records 30 and 43.
board’s rigid framework. This was not the case at Glossop cemetery where it appears that the five shilling additional charge for Sunday interment was enough to deter parents from choosing to bury their children on a day when wages would not have to be forfeited; no children in the records were buried on the sabbath. Memorials, which will be considered in more detail in Chapter Four, were subject to a further array of charges, including fees for approving the design and wording. Unavoidable costs were also not designed with parents’ financial challenges in mind. Whereas the cost of the coffin, regardless of the extra furnishings purchased with it, increased with age and therefore size of the body, the fees charged by Glossop Burial Board were the same for any child up to the age of twelve, when adult fees became payable. Only those burying stillborn children paid a lower fee of two shillings. The Glossop policy meant that costs for at least six of the children in the Funeral Book who died before the age of one week were at least doubled by the Burial Board fees and it meant these unavoidable fees formed a significant proportion of the costs for many other families burying young infants. This sharp divide in costs between those born alive and those who died before birth was likely to have been a factor in Thomas Woolley ‘causing the body of a deceased child to be buried on the representation that it was still born’ in 1884; the Burial Board asked him to account for his ‘extraordinary behaviour’ but later accepted a letter ‘expressing his deep sorrow and regret’. Julie-Marie Strange identified the cost difference between stillborn and infant burial as a widespread issue.

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27 Rugg, pp. 165-166.
28 AWFS Funeral Book.
29 Glossop Record, 16 July 1859.
30 Glossop Record, 2 July 1859.
31 Glossop Record, 16 July 1859.
32 AWFS Funeral Book.
33 D3700/48/2, 11 September 1884.; D3700/48/2, 20 October 1884.
for working-class parents. She suggests that authorities, by charging the same amount for all children’s burials, gave the same access to all parents, recognising the significance parents may invest in their infants’ funerals, but she also recognised the profit potential of the charging structure, given how many children died in the first few days and weeks of life. The Burial Board in charge of fees at City Road Cemetery in Sheffield went against what appeared to be the norm, charging two shillings not just for stillborn burials but also for any internment up to the age of 28 days. This must have made a significant difference to affordability for parents, as well as reducing the temptation for individuals such as Thomas Woolley to misrepresent the status of an infant. Overall, the policies of the Glossop Burial Board do not appear to have taken the needs of those managing on lower incomes into account. Examples of flexibility and compassion identified by Julie Rugg within the rigid Burial Board system in North Yorkshire were not in place for bereaved working-class parents in Glossopdale.

Given the costs families faced, it is not surprising that parents may have sought to insure the lives of their children. They did this through various types of organisations including friendly societies and trade unions; more frequently, as Paul Johnson noted in his 1985 study of the working-class economy, they paid their pennies to Industrial Assurance Companies and Friendly Collecting Societies, as well as to more informal burial clubs. Friendly Collecting Societies were defined as those societies that received contributions through collectors more than ten miles from the registered office.

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34 Strange, p.240.
35 Wellcome Institute Library (London), b10926975, Council of the City of Sheffield, City Road Cemetery: Rules and Regulations, Tables of Burial Fees; Particulars of Extra and Optional Fees, and Plan of the Cemetery, 1 January 1903, p.21.
36 Rugg, pp.165-166.
and paid out only for burial, whereas ordinary Friendly Societies also insured against sickness or other life events, as did trade unions.\textsuperscript{38} At the end of 1905, nearly six million people in Great Britain and Ireland were members of ordinary Friendly Societies or branches affiliated to larger societies such as the Oddfellows.\textsuperscript{39} A further 7.9 million people were paying into Friendly Collecting Societies such as the two million member strong Royal Liver, which Henry Worsley was described as an agent of in an 1878 trade directory.\textsuperscript{40} In 1906, Sir Edward Brabrook estimated that unregistered societies had around fourteen million members.\textsuperscript{41} This high total figure of 28 million, or two-thirds of the population was, Brabrook suggested, down to multiple memberships as well as the inclusion of infants and children in the figures. He postured that the number of people using some form of burial insurance may be closer to 20 million. Paul Johnson suggested other reasons for exaggerated figures, including the practice of taking out an additional policy without cancelling the first, inaccurate returns, lapses in payments and multiple policies taken out on the same person.\textsuperscript{42} Whatever the true figures, it is clear that burial insurance in its many forms was big business nationally. As Ellen Ross noted in her study of motherhood in London, the prevalence of burial insurance confirmed how necessary it was to imagine that children may die.\textsuperscript{43} With high costs for the essential components of even infant and child interments, it is not surprising that those with insecure jobs and limited disposable

\textsuperscript{38} P.P. 1907 (Cd. 49), Friendly societies, workmen’s compensation societies, industrial and provident societies, and trade unions. Reports of the chief registrar of friendly societies, for the year ending 31st December 1890. Part A, Appendix N, p.xxvii.
\textsuperscript{39} P.P. 1907 (Cd. 49), p.234.
\textsuperscript{40} ‘Morris & Co’s Commercial Directory & Gazetteer of Ashton-Under-Lyne & District 1878’ <http://www.glossopheritage.co.uk/tradedir/dir1878.html> [accessed 12 September 2018].
\textsuperscript{41} P.P 1909 (Cd. 4755), Royal Commission on Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, Appendix Volume III, Minutes of Evidence, pp.455-457.
\textsuperscript{42} Johnson, p.20.
incomes sought to insure against an eventuality they had little control over, so that they could ensure a civilised funeral for their loved ones.

The market for burial insurance in Glossopdale appears to have been a buoyant one. The report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies' for 1906, listed nineteen friendly societies in and around the Glossopdale area, including branches of larger societies.\textsuperscript{44} If figures were similar to the national picture claimed by Brabrook, it is likely that a similar number of local residents would have paid into Friendly Collecting Societies registered further afield and a further 20,000 into unregistered societies.\textsuperscript{45} Between 1901 and 1911, the total population of the Glossop area was below 22,000, suggesting an even higher penetration of burial insurance in the locality than at a national level.\textsuperscript{46} But policies of some local societies suggest that many of the infants whose deaths were handled by the Worsleys would not have been eligible for their benefits. The Gun Inn Friendly Society in Hollingworth for example only admitted members from the age of one year and the Perseverance Funeral Society in nearby Ashton-under-Lyne was only open to ‘all healthy persons from the age of one month to forty-five years..\textsuperscript{47} A significant number of the children in the Worsley’s funeral book would have been excluded from the benefits of one or both of these organisations; nearly a quarter of the children who died were below one month and over half were below one year. There are a number of reasons why these local friendly societies may have limited their services; they may have been mindful of the high infant mortality

\textsuperscript{44} P.P. 1907 (49), pp.59-82.
\textsuperscript{45} P.P. 1907 (49), p.iii.
\textsuperscript{47} P.P. 1907 (49), p. 163.; Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre (TLSAC)/DD82/1, Perseverance Funeral Collecting Society of Ashton under Lyne, Rule Book, c.1900, p. 4.
rate, but it is also worth considering whether they were influenced in some way by the national debate on infant and child burial insurance outlined in Chapter Two. They may have steered away from insuring infants because of real or threatened regulatory restraint or because they were influenced by the accusatory tone of the debate and took the decision to absent themselves from involvement in any perceived wrongdoing. Whatever the reason for friendly societies’ exclusive policies, there were other organisations operating in the area that were very keen to gain the business of parents and families.

In common with millions of others across the country, parents in Glossopdale will have turned to national commercial organisations for burial insurance; at the turn of the century fourteen million ‘industrial’ policies, collected weekly from working families, were in force through the Prudential alone. By 1902 there were 18,000 Prudential agents across the country, sitting at the bottom of a field-staff structure which was headed up by about 500 superintendents and 1,770 assistant superintendents. While details of individual policy holders are not available, the local Kelly’s Directory for 1899 shows that there was an assistant superintendent in Glossop and the 1912 edition shows that one had been added in Hadfield. With each assistant superintendent supervising an average of nearly ten agents, who may themselves have employed

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49 Dennett, p.131.
collectors, it is clear that the locality was well served by the Prudential, which had insured the lives of infants since 1858.\footnote{Sir Arnold Wilson, M.P. and Professor Hermann Levy, \textit{Industrial Assurance} (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.38.}

Burial insurance was undoubtedly a widespread and important source of support for many bereaved parents. In a survey of 170 oral histories from Lancashire all but one interviewee reported their parents paying burial insurance and a similar picture was likely in Glossopdale, but this does not mean that all children will have been insured.\footnote{Strange, p.37.} Infants will have died before insurance was in place, leaving families without even a small pay-out to help cover the costs. Parents may also have forfeited pay-outs because they were in arrears with policies.\footnote{E.W. Brabrook, \textit{Provident Societies and Industrial Welfare} (London: Black and Son, Limited, 1898; repr. South Yarra: Leopold Classic Library, 2018), p.76.} As Paul Johnson notes, families may also have fallen victim to the failure of friendly societies or informal burial clubs.\footnote{Johnson, p.15.} In spite of the ostensibly ubiquitous burial insurance industry in all its forms, it is likely that a significant portion of these Glossopdale families will have had to face the financial burden of their child’s death without any form of insurance pay-out.

The Worsleys’ Funeral Book suggests that where an insurance pay-out was not forthcoming, other sources of support may have been available, not least from the undertaker himself who provided a significant amount of flexibility for many parents.\footnote{AWFS Funeral Book.} In total, forty-nine bills were settled at a later date or were left with an amount outstanding. With a mobile workforce in the area, or parents moving to try and avoid sad memories, it is also possible that some parents left the area before the bills were...
paid. For twenty-five records, the timing of payment can be seen; four were paid up to one month later, eight bills took up to three months to pay, six were not paid six months later and a further four took between six and twelve months to pay. Five bills were only settled in full after over a year had passed since the burial. In addition, for three burials, no total cost is given, and it is possible that these costs were absorbed by the firm. Discounts were also applied to bills for eleven burials and charges for attendance or the ‘lent of pall, gloves and towels’ were not applied in many cases.

This flexibility is exemplified in the twenty cases mentioned earlier where cemetery or church fees were included in the total amount payable to the Worsleys, helping parents with what were non-negotiable costs. For the parents of 15-week-old Mary-Ann in 1898, further assistance was given to ensure that a decent burial could go ahead; as well as cemetery fees the bill included a payment to cover burial club arrears, to ensure the policy would pay out. In considering the flexible payment terms which appeared to be available, it should be noted that Henry Worsley operated parallel businesses as insurance agent and furniture and hardware salesman, selling both door-to-door and from his premises. This would suggest that the collection of debt could be combined with other commercial activity. But whatever combination of compassion, pragmatism or commercial acumen caused the Worsleys to operate in this way, the father and son appear to be far removed from the seedy and avaricious stereotype of nineteenth-century undertakers made familiar by Charles Dickens and numerous contemporary campaigners. As Julie-Marie Strange notes, the undertaking business was as diverse

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56 Strange, p.13.
57 AWFS Funeral Book.
58 AWFS Funeral Book.
59 AWFS Funeral Book, Record 249.
60 ‘About Us’ <http://www.arthurworsley.co.uk/page3.html> [accessed 23 December 2017].
61 Strange p.108.
as its clientele and the personality of the individual funeral director also affected how they operated.\textsuperscript{62} Undertakers, she suggested, who carried on their trade as part of a larger business were more likely to be known as a local personality and less liable to fall victim to negative stereotyping.\textsuperscript{63} The local people of Hadfield, Padfield and Tintwistle could have come across Arthur Worsley as a joiner or his father as a salesman of household goods or insurance agent.\textsuperscript{64} The flexibility with which they treated large numbers of local people in their time of need and their long standing position within the community suggests that transactions were carried out in an environment that was more akin to mutual respect than exploitation.

Aside from the assistance given by the undertaker, the Funeral Book provides clues to other ways in which families were assisted to bury their children. The gaps in between burials and bills being settled may have allowed time for work colleagues and neighbours to raise money to assist with the costs. Nineteenth century working-class communities held a variety of events designed to raise money and remember the deceased, including, as Ruth Richardson noted, funeral raffles or printing and selling a commemorative ballad.\textsuperscript{65} Eleven shillings and sixpence was paid by the local Roman Catholic priest towards the costs of burying three-week-old old Edward, which could have come from the priest himself or from the wider congregation. Given Edward’s age, his parents may not have secured burial insurance for him, even if it was affordable to them.

\textsuperscript{62} Strange, p.108.
\textsuperscript{63} Strange, p.110.
The costs revealed in the Funeral Book and in other local material suggest that it would have been hard to identify even the most expensive of the funerals evidenced in the Worsley’s Funeral Book as the ‘ostentatious display’ Julian Litten declared was still favoured by the working-classes at the time. The costs paid to both undertaker and burial authority were largely unavoidable and support Julie-Marie Strange’s assertion that basic funerals required extraordinary expense regardless of choices the family made. They needed to pay for a coffin, cemetery fees and quite possibly transport. Any extras they may have purchased, to demonstrate a personalisation or expression of love, formed a much smaller proportion of the costs. It is very likely that financial support for many parents will have come from some form of burial insurance and it is not surprising given the outlay and the high chance of losing a child that it was a popular option. It is apparent though that not all deaths were covered by insurance and others did have to rely on the flexibility of the local undertaker or the assistance of others in the community. There were many other choices made by parents regarding their children’s burial and funeral which did not have a large financial impact. They do, however, have the potential to reveal much more about burial rituals and funeral rites in working-class Glossopdale and will be explored in detail in Chapter Four.

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66 Litten, p.171.
67 Strange, p.108.
68 Strange, p.37.
Chapter 4: Handled with Care.

Chapter Three established the essential nature of the majority of the purchases made for infant and child burials. The ledgers also contain a rich source of detail on the materials chosen for burials along with some clues as to the nature of the rituals that took place. In conjunction with Burial Board minutes, local authority records and a survey of local churchyards, a picture has also been built of where the children were buried and how they were commemorated. This chapter will set out the findings from this work, assess what factors may have affected these choices and seek to provide some understanding about how and to what extent parents grieved. As the last chapters established, working-class parents were widely accused by contemporary elites and some historians of having a lack of concern for the health or survival of their children. In addition to accusations about the misuse of burial insurance, historians have postured that that the frequency of infant and child death in working-class families often meant that there was little grief expressed or felt by their parents. David Vincent’s study of oral histories, for example, suggested that lower costs resulting from a smaller household could ‘cushion the blow’ of a child’s death, a theory which is at odds with the costs of the funeral rites themselves.1 Also working from oral histories, Elizabeth Roberts concluded that most women accepted the loss of a child as sad but inevitable, that a few were distraught but some, she postured, welcomed the loss of a baby.2 Julie-Marie Strange’s work on infant and child deaths moved the debate further on, to an understanding that responses to death by working-class parents were diverse; they may

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have needed to be pragmatic but that did not mean they did not care. She noted that even burial rites improvised through financial necessity repudiated claims of a lack of emotion invested by working-class parents. The Funeral Book reveals a wide variety of items purchased from the Worsleys as part of the funeral that demonstrate a diversity that reflects the personal responses to death among working-class families in Glossopdale.

The sources used in this study fill an important gap in the study of materials used in burial and funerals. Archaeological excavations have been a key way in which recent evidence about materials used in burials has been uncovered but limited excavations outside London mean that researchers still have a limited understanding of the geographical spread of different materials and practices. There are also large chronological gaps in evidence. As Anna Kristina Cherryson pointed out in her recent review of archaeological burial evidence there is also an inherent class bias; coffins of the elites and middle classes are more likely to reveal most as triple shell coffins and coffins within vaults are more likely to survive. Catalogues of suppliers to the undertaking trade can provide further information but are limited to certain time periods and do not provide information about the purchasers of the items. The accounts book

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4 Strange, p.239.
7 Harold Mytum, ‘Explaining Stylistic Change in Mortuary Material Culture’ in Mytum and Burgess, (eds), Amazon Kindle e-book, (Chapter 5, Loc.1762).
of a local undertaker therefore provides an ideal opportunity to examine many of the ingredients of a working-class funeral.

As Chapter Three’s analysis of the costs in the Funeral Book found, coffins were the largest purchase for most of the families. Most of the coffins were ‘best oak’ with a few described as polished but there were only a small number of coffins with distinct descriptions. These included one coffin, for a five month old girl, that had painted moulding and one coffin of the fishtail design. The coffins of one eight-year-old boy and one sixteen-month-old boy had glass in their lid and purple was in the lid of one eighteen-month-old boy. There were no examples of white painted coffins which had been an earlier tradition for children’s funerals but which do appear to have been available in the area. Lilian Yates Harlow, born in 1905 and living in nearby Glossop vividly recalls her infant sister in 1913, ‘lying in a little white coffin on the table in front of the window’. Apart from those who were stillborn, only two young infants were buried in cheaper, pitch pine. While there was limited diversity in the coffins themselves, the same cannot be said for the furniture on them. The materials, and to some extent the style of coffin furniture, can be established for 181 out of the 207 burials of children born alive recorded in the Funeral Book, confirming that choices were made and revealing the use use of a wide range of different materials.

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8 AWFS Funeral Book.
9 AWFS Funeral Book, Records 199, 380.
10 AWFS Funeral Book, Records 237, 488, 543.
11 Harold Mytum, ‘United in Death? A Comparative Introduction to Historic Mortuary Culture’, in Mytum and Burgess (eds), (Chapter 1, Loc. 373).
13 AWFS Funeral Book.
Descriptions of the furniture used on the children’s coffins vary in their detail but do demonstrate a wide diversity; handles and ornaments in brass, black, white, gilt and nickel plate were used during the period, along with painted furniture. Some materials came and went; brass stood the test of time, being used in all but two of the years but ‘imitation’ furniture was not cited until 1900. Cost was undoubtedly a factor in the selection of the material, although detailed analysis is not possible as the majority of the furnishings are not priced individually but are included in the overall cost of the coffin. In the small number of cases where they are specified, the costs are between one shilling (for extra painted furniture for an infant’s coffin) to six shillings and sixpence for extra nickel furniture for a two-year-old girl.\(^{14}\) These prices suggest that there was a difference which would have impacted upon tight budgets and limited the choice for many families. There were no significant differences between selections made for different genders and the only denominational variance was in the purchase of a crucifix or cross for four children who were buried in the Roman Catholic section of Glossop Cemetery.\(^{15}\) The spread of materials used over time is more telling, especially as it relates to the age of the child buried.

If age is considered in isolation, it initially appears as if white, or white and gilt furnishings were more likely to be used for younger children up to the age of two years. A closer examination shows, however, that most of these were purchased over a short period of time. In 1893, white furniture was used in ten out of fourteen funerals, in 1894 it accounted for seven out of eleven and in 1895 seven out of nine. In 1895 five out of fourteen coffins were ornamented in white and gilt, all of them for children under

\(^{14}\) AWFS, Record 22.; AWFS Record 24.
\(^{15}\) AWFS Funeral Book, Records 101, 95, 192, 225.
the age of eighteen months. It therefore appears that it was not just the age of the child that encouraged the purchase of white furniture but its availability at a local level. Fashion may have been a factor in the choices made, but there may have been few options for the parents to choose from at any one time. It would have been unusual for a small supplier such as Worsley, supplying an average of ten infant or child coffins a year, to keep a large stock of different furniture. As Mytum has noted, many decisions may have been made by the undertaker as choosing details of a coffin design may have been a low priority in the wake of a recent bereavement. Parents may have been choosing from a small selection with the input of the undertaker. Nevertheless, the fact that nearly all the children in the sample had individualised decorations on their coffin still does suggest that the coffins were chosen with care and thought.

The Funeral Book also shows that diversity was evident in material used within the coffins, in linings, beds and shrouds. The predominant lining until 1892 was swansdown, which reappeared after 1900. Lawn was the preferred option between 1892 and 1900. Wadded lawn or wool beds were purchased in addition by 37 parents. Shrouds made either of swansdown or lawn were chosen by most parents. Most of these are again included in the overall cost of the coffin but some prices were specified and they seem to have ranged from three to six shillings, depending on the age of the child. No shroud was purchased for any of the stillborn infants, or for twenty-six of the children born alive. Archaeological excavations have uncovered low levels of

16 Harold Mytum, ‘Explaining Stylistic Change in Mortuary Material Culture: The Dynamic of Power Relations between the Bereaved and the Undertaker’ in Mytum and Burgess (eds), Amazon Kindle ebook,(Chapter 5, Loc.1722).
17 AWFS Funeral Book.
19 AWFS Funeral Book.
burials in clothes rather than shrouds, but these occurrences have mainly been from triple-shell coffins, vaults or brick-lined graves, so have an inherent middle or upper-class bias.\textsuperscript{20} Cherryson points out some clothed burials may be put down to infectious diseases and a need to avoid washing and redressing the body, but the deceased may also have been dressed in clothes with a personal or family significance.\textsuperscript{21} It is likely that a combination of these factors, and perhaps economic necessity, would be behind the lack of shrouds in this small proportion of burials. Again, it points to a diversity in burial practices and the existence identified by Strange, of a wide range of different expressions of pragmatism and grief.\textsuperscript{22}

Few of the additions to the coffins could be described as extravagant and many of the selections would have been hidden from view. Even visitors who may see a child in a coffin before it was taken for burial would be unlikely to know whether it was lying on a wool bed or what wadding was used in the coffin. Limited transport purchases outlined in Chapter Three suggest that grandiose processions were likewise not the norm for working-class Glossopdale families. But while the embellishments do not demonstrate extravagance, but they do suggest thought and care being put into the arrangements and support Strange’s submission that a prettified coffin can offset the truth of its dreadful contents.\textsuperscript{23} While availability and the undertaker’s influence will have played its part, the individualisation of coffins was also influenced by a combination of care for the departed child and the necessary conventions of a dignified

\textsuperscript{20} Cherryson, Loc.1007.
\textsuperscript{21} Cherryson, Locations 1047-1055.
\textsuperscript{22} Strange, p.262.
\textsuperscript{23} Strange, pp 258-259.
funeral. The findings here do not support the idea of infants as unwanted victims of ‘laws of nature’ that Lionel Rose perpetuated.

Aside from the coffin there were of course many other ingredients which made up a funeral and the Worsleys helped in the supply of a number of these. In common with a number of other undertakers identified by Strange, the Worsleys helped parents with equipment for the funeral tea. Between 1890 and 1905, over a quarter (52/185) of the burials recorded in the Funeral Book included a charge for the hire of a tea urn, at either four or six pence. Mollie Carney told the story in 2002 of Mary Chappelle, wife of one of Glossop Cemetery’s gravediggers who, while living in Hadfield at the beginning of the twentieth-century, had supplemented the family income by making and delivering funeral teas. The clients provided the ingredients and she charged one shilling to prepare it in her home and deliver it to the house of the deceased in a wicker clothes basket. According to the account, it was unacceptable to serve shop bought food but taking more than a day from work for the funeral was not possible to avoid losing too much money. It appears that other refreshments were available for purchase from the Worsleys between 1890 and 1901 and these were bought by over a third of families during that time (55/141). Biscuits and/or wine or port were purchased by mourners for a cost of between ten pence and six shillings. The use of alcohol in working-class funerals was heavily criticised by middle-class commentators but the quantities purchased, just one or two bottles of port or wine, do not suggest scenes of

\[24\] Strange, p.262.


\[26\] Strange, pp. 127-128.

\[27\] AWFS Funeral Book.


\[29\] AWFS Funeral Book.
excess.\textsuperscript{30} Clues about how the alcohol was used can be found in other contemporary sources. Helen Frisby’s exploration of references to burial rituals in the Folklore journal shows that, used carefully, the accounts can provide a valuable historical resource on working-class funerals.\textsuperscript{31} Writing in the journal in 1917, E. Sidney Hartland describes a number of ways in which food and drink were used in funeral rituals.\textsuperscript{32} These include a variety of different traditional cakes and biscuits given to mourners in different parts of England and Wales. He also reported the drinking of port or wine as part of the funeral ritual; first by the bearers before the coffin left the house and for the other guests once they had returned following the burial. Hartland quotes an account from a Derbyshire farmer’s daughter who insisted that the sins of the deceased are taken away with each drop that is drank.\textsuperscript{33} In discussing these accounts, Frisby cautions against inferences that this practice could be associated with an old custom of ‘sin-eating’, a practice of paying someone to ingest the sins of the dead along with the food and drink, She agrees, however, with suggestions made by some folklorists that the practice could have links with Holy Communion.\textsuperscript{34} In 1881 only 54\% of Glossopdale residents had been born in the valley, suggesting that diverse traditions from a wide geographical area could have been acted out in the area.\textsuperscript{35} People from counties surrounding and beyond Derbyshire, as well as Ireland, had travelled to Glossopdale to work in the mills and other industries, as did large numbers from Ireland. Accounts from 19\textsuperscript{th} century Ireland suggest, despite the efforts of priests, that alcohol was among the traditional ingredients

\textsuperscript{30} Strange, p.128.
\textsuperscript{33} Hartland, p.309-310.
\textsuperscript{34} Frisby, pp.118-119.
for working-class funeral rites of both Roman Catholic and protestant families. The small quantities purchased through the Worsleys do not suggest that intoxication was the motivation behind the use of port or wine. Some form of toast or small ceremony, whether religious in origin or not, appears to be a more likely purpose for the alcohol.

Regardless of the thought that went into their furnishings or linings or the arrangements for viewing the body, coffins were buried from sight within a few days and the funeral itself will have been over within a day. Headstones, on the other hand would be long lasting and, as Hymnet has pointed out were chosen later, when more consideration could be given them. It is commonly assumed that much can be told about the past lives of a community through the headstones in local churchyards and cemeteries. In a biography of a 19th century trade union campaigner, written in 1988, a local Glossop author wrote ‘...a glance at the memorials in Glossop Cemetery gives an indication of the misery and distress ordinary families had to face.’ Headstones in the cemetery and in other local churchyards do indeed reflect the high level of infant and child mortality in the local area, with numerous graves, including those in the photographs below, recording the loss of young lives.

37 Mytum, ‘Explaining Stylistic Change’ in Mytum and Burgess (eds), Amazon Kindle e-book,(Chapter 5, Loc.1738).
Yet an investigation into the graves of the children in the Funeral Book shows that the headstones reveal only a small part of the true picture. Just over three-quarters of the children born alive in the sample were laid to rest at Glossop Cemetery (160/207).\textsuperscript{41} By cross-referencing the names and dates in the Funeral Book with cemetery records and maps maintained by High Peak Borough Council, it was possible to identify where their graves were located.\textsuperscript{42} Despite a detailed search, only one name was found, on a modern headstone which included the name as an addition. In local churchyards where a smaller number of the children were buried, there were also no headstones identified, a finding which requires further consideration.

There are a number of reasons why headstones would not have been found in the search. Many of the children in Glossop Cemetery were in common graves, on which

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\textsuperscript{39} Headstone for Jane and Frances Penrose at Glossop Cemetery, Photograph by Author, 2018.

\textsuperscript{40} Tomb for Charles and Alice Wilson at Christ Church, Tintwistle, Photograph by Author, 2018.

\textsuperscript{41} AWFS Funeral Book.

memorials could not be placed. An analysis of the names assigned to different grave numbers in Glossop Cemetery records suggest that around 55% of the burials from the sample were in common graves and Burial Board rules stipulated that stones could only be laid over graves to which an exclusive right of burial had been purchased.43 This still leaves a large number of burials in family graves for which no headstone was located, and while they may have been damaged or removed, other evidence suggests that many were never there. Approvals for the design and wording of each headstone had to be made by the Burial Board and these were recorded in the minutes of their monthly meetings. For the years for which they are available, 1890 up to 1902, no names of children in the Funeral Book are mentioned.44 While this leaves a period of nine years when no information is not available, it is significant that permission was not sought in twelve years to erect headstones for any of the children in the sample. It appears that the purchase of a permanent cemetery memorial on the occasion of a child’s death was not normal practice for the community which used the services of the Worsleys.

Financial considerations appear to have been one reason for the absence of memorials. In addition to the cost of the headstone, Glossop Burial Board charged five shillings before they would consider whether to grant permission to erect one.45 The Board also forbade wood or any other material to be used in place of stone, so families did not have a sanctioned alternative way of marking their children’s resting places.46 Some may have tried, and Strange cites a number of examples of parents attempting to

44 The Glossop Record, 9 July 1859, p.2.
45 The Glossop Record, 16 July 1859.
46 DRO, D3700/48/2, 3 May 1899.; Strange, pp.180-181.
mark graves as a form of remembrance, including a funeral card in a glass jar, flowers and makeshift crosses. But if cost was the only factor and a headstone was seen as part of a dignified burial, it is likely that some families would have managed to find the money, just as they did for the funeral itself. For some, the cemetery may not have been viewed as the locus for remembrance, especially those who did not remain in the area or who could not manage the walk up the hill to its remote location. In discussing burials where no permanent memorial was erected, Strange acknowledges that their absence could support allegations of indifference and an interest solely in the funeral as ostentatious display. She maintains thought that it was primarily financial limitations that prevented memorials from being erected. Cost is likely to have been a significant reason for the lack of permanent memorials in Glossopdale, but it also appears, for children at least, that the erection of a headstone was not an expected action for many working-class families in the area. Aubrey Cannon and Katherine Cook found in rural Cambridgeshire that while economic factors were important in determining whether a memorial would be put in place, their scarcity also pointed to social pressure on working-class mourners to look to the future and focus on existing children. If infant or child death is a common experience within a community, they postured, private expressions of grief may be more likely so as not to intrude on other parents’ emotions. In a similar vein, Strange argued that the transgression of accepted forms of grief caused discomfort in others and could cause conflict. As a result, she says, commemorations

47 Strange, p.180.
48 Strange, p.178.
50 Strange, p.224.
would often take a more personal, perhaps abstract form.\textsuperscript{51} It is likely that this happened in many different ways in Glossopdale.

While headstones do not appear to have been erected in the wake of a child’s death, evidence also exists in Glossop Cemetery of long held remembrance making its way on to a public memorial at a much later date. A number of graves, including those illustrated below, have headstones which include a long list of children to the names of parents who died many decades later. It appears that they were held in the collective family memory and when a headstone was affordable to the family, included on there. While such memorials were not found for any of the children in the sample, this does provide evidence of mourning for children and long held remembrance of their loss.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{subfigure}{0.45\textwidth}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Headstone of Emma Cowdell at Glossop Cemetery with children’s names added.\textsuperscript{52}}
\end{subfigure}
\begin{subfigure}{0.45\textwidth}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image2.png}
\caption{Headstone of George Bamford at Glossop Cemetery with children’s names added.\textsuperscript{53}}
\end{subfigure}
\caption{Headstones with children’s names added.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{51} Strange, p.179.  
\textsuperscript{52} Headstone of Emma Cowden at Glossop Cemetery with children’s names added, Photograph by Author, 2018.  
\textsuperscript{53} Headstone of George Bamford at Glossop Cemetery with children’s names added, Photograph by Author, 2018.
The only way in which the life and death of most of the children would have been recorded in any sort of formal way would have been on cards and ribbons. Bought by over three-quarters of the families of those children who were born alive (162/207) they may also provide an indication of the numbers who had an emotional interest in the child’s life. Most of the cards appear to have been memory cards, produced for distribution at, or after the funeral but on at least two occasions, invitation cards were purchased as well, and delivered by the undertaker. Mollie Carney’s account of Edwardian Hadfield life said that the memory cards were essential to send to distant friends and relatives. On average, more cards were purchased for those children who died at an older age, an average of twenty-two cards were purchased for those aged between five and ten years whereas an average of fifteen cards were purchased for those who died before the age of three months. This does not suggest that there was less grief for the loss of young infants, but older children would have been likely be more widely known in the community and families may have been more established. Cost could also have limited the type and number of cards purchased. A dozen single ‘plain cards’ with envelopes in 1901 would have cost one shilling and ninepence. The same amount of double memory cards would have cost a shilling more. From 1903, a small number of families chose to purchase ribbons instead of, or as well as, cards. These were more expensive, costing over four shillings per dozen. It is likely that, regardless of the existence of a memorial in the local cemetery or churchyard, that these cards would remain an important possession in the family. Photographs of some local examples

54 AWFS Funeral Book, Records 39 and 456.
55 Carney, p.57.
which are likely to be similar in appearance to those purchased through the Worsleys are pictured below.

**Fig. 4.1 – Memory Card for 11-month-old Glossop child.**

![Memory Card for Minnie Bagshawe](image1)

**Fig. 4.2 – Memory Card for Ten-year-old Glossop child.**

![Memory Card for Martha Alice](image2)

A wide range of elements in the burial and funerary process have been considered using the information in the Funeral Book, but it is important to recognise that many other aspects will have contributed to the experiences of families, beyond the key items purchased through the undertaker and the Burial Board or local church or chapel. There is little mention of flowers or other organic decorations in the account book, only five parents purchased wreaths or forget-me-not sprays through the undertaker but it is likely that such personal touches will have been added. In neighbouring Glossop, Lilian Yates Harlow and her sister Jessie remember carrying baskets of flowers to their younger sister’s funeral in 1913. Just as Mary Chappelle supplied the funeral teas, other traders and community members will have played their part in funeral rites in the villages. Julie-Marie Strange points out that there was a strong element of improvisation in mourning wear, but some parents may have taken

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56 Glossop Heritage Trust (GHT), Uncatalogued Memory Card for Minnie Bagshawe, August 1892.
57 Glossop Heritage Trust (GHT), Uncatalogued Memory Card for Martha Bradbury, October 1896.
advantage of the services of a trader such as Hunters in Glossop, which offered mourning outfits at short notice, ‘made on the premises by competent hands…at all prices’.\textsuperscript{59} This is one of the aspects of behaviour which sources used in this study do not provide answers to but did have the potential to add further to costs, and elicit further accusations of fecklessness from contemporary commentators and historians.\textsuperscript{60}

The manuscript evidence considered in this chapter does not tell the whole story about how working-class Glossopdale parents acted out the rites surrounding the deaths of their children. What it does do is show that, as far as was affordable, and sometimes at their time of grief with the assistance of the local undertaker, they put thought and care into the last resting place of their children and the ceremonies that bid them farewell. Questions remain unanswered about how children were memorialised, but as Julie-Marie Strange maintained, parents grieved in personal ways and diverse and less visible forms of commemoration were imbued with no less meaning or thought.\textsuperscript{61} Evidence from other headstones do suggest that many children were mourned for the remainder of their parents’ lives. Overall, the stories the Funeral Book tells do not provide support for either contemporary or academic assertions that children’s deaths were welcomed, made light of or used as an excuse for display or revelry.

\textsuperscript{59} Strange, p.120.; \textit{Glossopdale Chronicle}, 16 May 1902, p.1. \\
\textsuperscript{60} Strange, p.119. \\
\textsuperscript{61} Strange, p.262.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

This study set out to examine how working-class families in the Glossopdale area accessed and used funeral rites, bereavement practices and burial rituals for infants and children between 1890 and 1911. It aimed to assess what attitudes were prevalent about infant and child death both in working-class families themselves and from local and national commentators and officials. Having established this, it sought to develop an understanding of the costs parents faced in laying their children to rest and how they were helped to meet these by the local undertaker, Burial Board and others in the community. Finally, the study set out to investigate the choices that bereaved families made as they prepared to lay their children to rest and commemorate their memory.

An exploration of secondary and primary sources found serious allegations made by national commentators, many of which were sustained by historians, about parents’ attitudes towards their children, particularly regarding the use of burial insurance. These do not appear to have caused concern locally, certainly not at a discernible level. Statistics and commentary from local Medical Officers for Health do not provide any evidence for the misuse of burial insurance or widespread deliberate abuse. Conversely, local evidence suggests that the high levels of child mortality among the working-class community in Glossopdale were due to a range of environmental and social factors.

Examination of the costs paid by parents to lay their children to rest showed that a large majority of the outlay was for unavoidable items such as cemetery fees and coffins. There was little or no evidence of the grandiose display that working-class mourners were accused of. Limited numbers of parents hired transport for what, for
many, would have been a gruelling journey to the cemetery. The amounts needed to pay for even a basic funeral demonstrate why burial insurance was such a popular option. However, scrutiny of the accounts in the Funeral Book, and an exploration of the local market, suggested that burial insurance was either not in place or did not pay out in large numbers of cases, especially for younger infants. In the absence of flexibility by the Burial Board, the local undertaker often stepped in and gave parents time to find the money or spread the cost. This will have been a lifeline for many parents while contributing to a successful business model for the undertaker.

Further consideration of the items chosen by parents to decorate and line their children’s coffins demonstrates that thought and care was put into their last resting places. Limited links between types of furniture or lining and denomination, gender or age suggest that a combination of availability and personal choice were major factors in the choices made. It does not appear that parents in Glossopdale prioritised public memorials on headstones for their children in the time immediately following their deaths, if this choice was available to them. Cost, as well as a practical need to move on appear to have been central to this. Additionally, parents may not have seen the cemetery as the locus for their mourning, or they may have been compelled by cultural sensitivities to not encroach on others’ grief.

This study has allowed a partial picture to be built of how working-class parents in Glossopdale provided burial rites and funeral rituals for their children and has established that contemporary and historical accusations focussing on parents’ greed and lack of concern for their children had little basis in fact. It has shown that most of the costs were unavoidable and found no evidence of demand for wasteful and
flamboyant display. The study has demonstrated the value of a locality-based study to increase the diversity of knowledge about burial practices.

Further work could be carried out to expand upon this knowledge which has focussed upon those records of the burials of those under the age of fourteen. The inclusion of the adults in the Funeral Book would allow useful comparisons to be made about costs, choices and memorials, as would an expansion of the time period. It would also allow further consideration to be made of theories about working-class profligacy and the role of burial insurance within it. The Worsleys appear to have had a largely working-class client base so the addition of funeral records from other local undertakers with a different clientele would allow an insight into class differences as it played out in one locality. In addition, despite valuable recent contributions there is still much more to be ascertained about how the working-classes dealt with death. Further locally based studies in other locations and time periods would help add to the diversity of knowledge and further disprove the slurs against ordinary parents who had to deal with the emotional and financial challenges of losing a child.
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