



Celebrating lives
Celebrating the Institute

Professor Malcolm Johnson

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

Patron, Institute of Civil Funerals

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Listening to lives that have ended – a worthy enterprise

- I want to take the opportunity, as the Institute approaches its 10th anniversary to celebrate the people and the vision that made our work possible.
- So part of my talk will take you into our collective past. You are all familiar with hearing other people's pasts. That is your chosen work. But here we can take a little time to appreciate what we value about making death meaningful for strangers in distress at the loss of someone who has been important in their lives.
- But we should also look forward; developing our understanding and the developing role we play in a fast changing world.
- So, we will look together at the experiences of the old people in our society – how they live their later lives and encounter death.
- WHY? Because they represent 80% of all deaths
and its my field of research.....

The Institute of Civil Funerals : How did it happen?



The Institute was established in 2004 by Anne Barber, founder and president, as a result of her seeing the need to drive up the quality of funeral ceremonies in the UK. Its aims are to further the provision of Civil Funerals and support the work of Civil Funeral Celebrants.

Management of the Institute lies within the hands of the Council of Management. Council Members are both practicing Civil Funeral Celebrants and Industry representatives who promote the work of the Institute in their own areas of expertise.

Each member of the Council is an expert in their field, and brings invaluable experience to the table. The Council decides the policies of the Institute and works hard to ensure the Institute's objectives are met. The council meet frequently

Marilyn Noon /Watts



Marilyn Noon (also known as Marilyn Watts) died on 25th September 2012.

Marilyn was employed as Systems Manager at Civil Ceremonies Ltd for ten years, helping to establish Civil Funerals and the Institute of Civil Funerals, of which she had been secretary and was Vice President.

She was passionate about the quality of funerals and worked tirelessly to ensure that standards were met and that the quality of training continued to rise.

She helped so many as they started their new profession in this very special area of work.

Professor Tony Walter

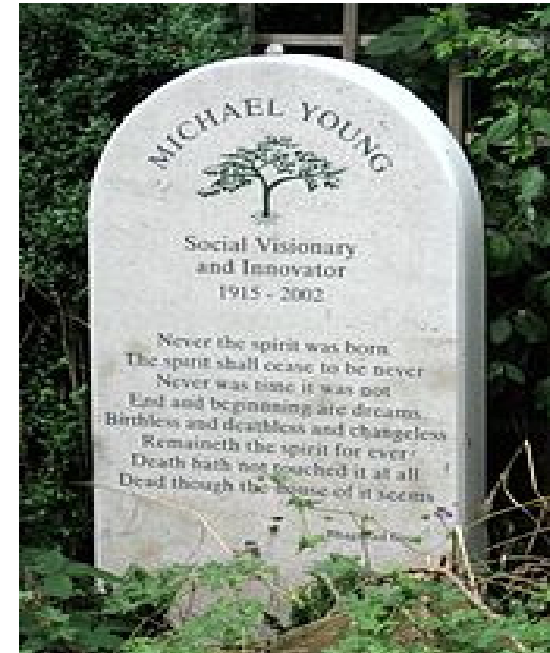
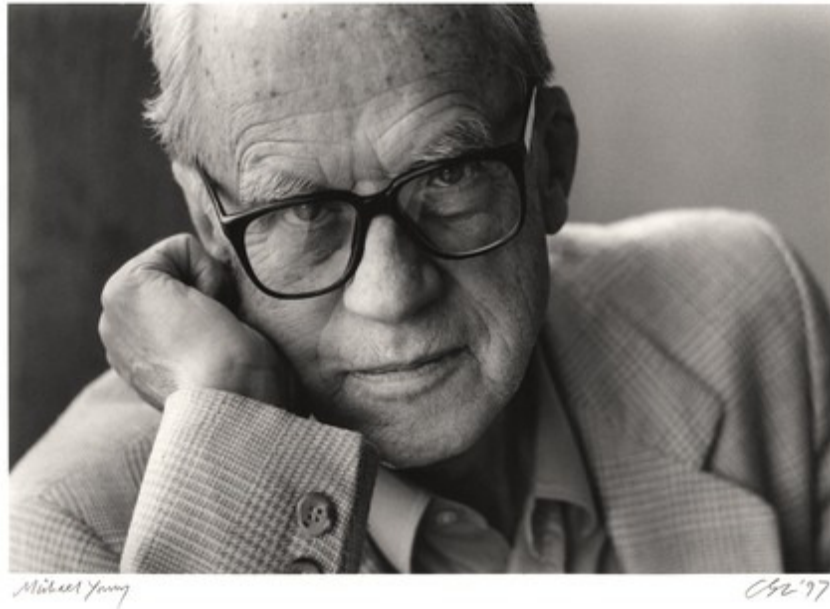


- Tony Walter is the UK's leading sociologist of death. His many books and articles are highly regarded around the world. For a long time his ***Funerals and how to improve them*** (1990) was the benchmark book – sadly, out of print.
- He is now Professor of Death Studies and Director of the Centre for Death & Society at the University of Bath



- Tony (a friend and colleague) was a seminal influence on the founding of the Institute, providing Anne with expert advice and encouragement. He was an original Course Tutor and continues to contribute to the training of Celebrants.
- It was Tony who created the now standard definition of a civil funeral:
'A Civil Funeral is a funeral driven by the wishes, beliefs and values of the deceased and their family, not by the beliefs or ideology of the person conducting the funeral'.

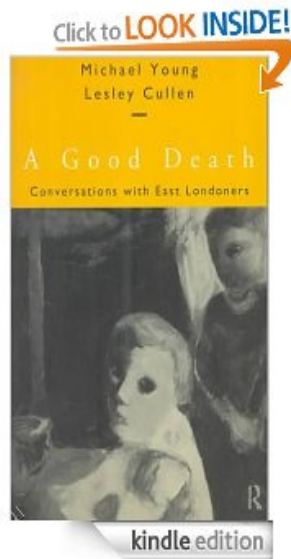
Michael Young researcher and social entrepreneur



Michael Young, Lord Young of Dartington, who died aged 86, in 2002, was a man of many parts: educator, author, academic, consumer advocate, policymaker, political activist - and rebel. Over and above these were two other roles, inventor and entrepreneur, which made him a unique figure in British 20th-century social reform. He was the country's great seedsman of social ideas and institutions. Some of his ideas - like the Open University and the Consumers' Association - have become world famous.

He was also the founder and first Chairman of the National Funerals College

National Funerals College



Michael Young wrote a book with Lesley Cullen, in 1996 *A Good Death*.

His interviews with East Londoners, the days he spent observing depressing crematorium funeral services and watching visitors to graveyards made him angry and determined to provoke change.

• In 1996 he set up **The National Funerals College**. It was not to be a college in a building to which students would go to study courses, but a national presence acting as a pressure group to improve the way we dealt with death in the late 20th century.

• He pressed into service on the Council of the College:

* **Revd Dr Peter Jupp** (Director of the College)

* **Lesley Cullen** Researcher & co-author

* **Gordon Lishman** (subsequently Director General of Age Concern England)

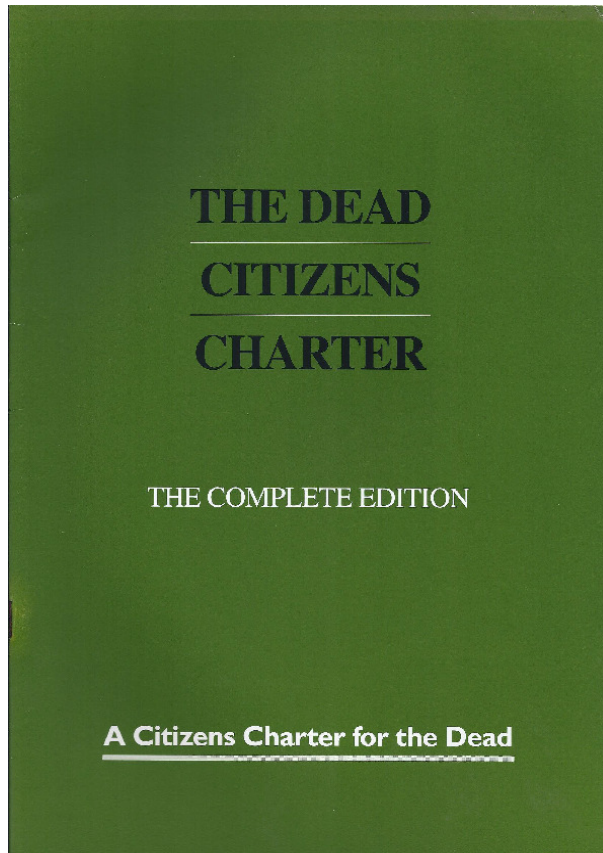
* **Jill Tallon** (Secretary, Compassionate Friends)

* **Sheila Thompson** (Principal Social Worker, St Joseph's Hospice, London),

* **Dr Tony Walter** (Director, MA in Death & Society, University of Reading and author *Funerals and how to improve them*)

* **Professor Malcolm Johnson**, University of Bristol (who became Chairman)

The Dead Citizens Charter



- With Michael at the helm we soon made public impact, taking to task the funeral industry, for their lack of openness, for their unavailable menu of charges and their limited range of services.
- Seminars, conferences and public consultations took place.
- One and two day courses were offered around the country, mobilised by Peter Jupp.
- We made a very public fuss about the purchase by a major American funeral company SCI Funerals Ltd of the Southern Funeral Group and its intentions to introduce American practices and prices. Their move into the UK was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.
- We worked with The Natural Death Centre and the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration.
- And we, together as a Council wrote our major publication: *the Dead Citizens Charter* published in 1997 and the Complete edition in 1998.

Charter recommendations

The Charter made 30 recommendations

Here are a few that might be of interest to funeral celebrants:

- that funeral directors should be required to publish comprehensive information including price lists, with all the options, services and costs clearly itemised*
- that the Government should regulate Pre-paid funeral plans*
- that hospitals , nursing and residential homes should appoint Funeral Advisers*
- that funeral directors should meet mourners in their own home.....*
- That funeral directors and selected cemetery and crematoria staff should have ongoing training in the social and personal importance of the funeral*

- A specialised role of **Funeral Adviser** should be developed to relieve immediate families at a time of great stress.*

Anne's account of what actually happened in 2000

- I was working on a scheme with the Home Office and the registration service to introduce Naming Ceremonies. The Superintendent Registrar for Bristol at the time approached me to say that he had been talking to the local Crematorium Manager who felt that not all those attending funerals were getting the funerals they wanted or needed, could I do something?
- So I came to see you Malcolm, led there because I was working with the Baby Naming Society at the time, another of Lord Young's organisations. You encouraged me, put me in touch with Tony, who has advised and tutored courses with us ever since.
- Tony put me in touch with other people, such as **John Pearce** and the course was designed primarily for registrars. Course 1 was held after 18 months of work and **Janice Thomson and Alistair Butler** – who are celebrants attending the conference - were on that first course.

A decade on

- In 2004 Anne decided that celebrants working on their own needed a professional association to belong to for help, support and networking with each other – it can be a lonely occupation.
- In 2014 that association will be 10 years old. The Institute is now run successfully by practicing members and is administered by Barbara Pearce – who is quite brilliant. The membership is growing and benefits include liability insurance etc.

Celebrant Training

- Only National Qualification
- Level 3 Diploma
- Distance learning + residential course
- Need good experience and skills
- Challenging...but enjoyable!



Where now?

- Developing **new rituals** in an increasingly secular society is a most important task. So being close to contemporary cultural shifts is essential.
- As the Institute's surveys of members show about 60% of civil funerals contain religious elements.
- Today 80% of all deaths are of older people. Celebrants need to be aware of the **unspoken but significant role religion plays** in the thinking of most of those whose lives they celebrate.
- **Spirituality in old age** is an under developed field of study and practise.
- But increasingly intense 'life-review' is a well evidenced activity as we become aware of *finitude*. It may lead to warm remembering, but often gives rise to
- An unknown proportion of older people experience **biographical pain** and those feelings of guilt, anger and depression can equally be present in those they leave behind. A well designed and presented funeral can mitigate continuing pain and depression.
- **Listening**, understanding and responding with imagination is the key.

God, Me and Being Very Old

"Most books focus on positive ageing, and prefer to ignore the challenges of the fourth age, the age of frailty. This book, which tells the stories of the oldest of people, in care homes, through the lenses of chaplains, will be of immense value to all who work with older people. It also challenges the mainline churches to accept the ageing of both society and churches, to address the special needs for spiritual growth and nurture as well as pastoral care of older people."

*Elizabeth MacKinlay, Professor, Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies School of Theology
St Mark's National Theological Centre Charles Sturt University*

"A beautiful and instructive book about the oldest old in Britain today that demonstrates the value of listening and attending to them with empathy. It has important messages not only for Christian churches but for all those interested in improving care standards for the ageing members of our society."

Peter Coleman, Professor of Psychogerontology, University of Southampton

This book is not about old age, but essentially it is about old people, known and loved or lost and bemused. The heart of the book is the hearing and re-telling of the faith stories of fifteen of the oldest old, all of whom are living in residential care settings. The stories outline the lives they have lived and the impact they have made on their listeners.

God, Me and Being Very Old outlines a theoretical basis for exploring the phenomenon of ageing and its effects on society as a whole, with a particular emphasis on the spiritual aspects of ageing, the Church's response to older people and the place of storytelling.

In the final section of the book, five individuals bring their insight and experience into dialogue with the stories of the oldest old, exploring issues around faith development, doubt and dementia, and detailing some vital lessons for the contemporary ageing Church.

Malcolm Johnson, AcSS, FRSA is Visiting Professor of Gerontology and end-of-life care at the University of Bath.

Keith Albans joined MHA in September 2001. He is responsible for spiritual and pastoral welfare of the staff and service users within the organisation and maintaining links with the Methodist Church and the wider church.

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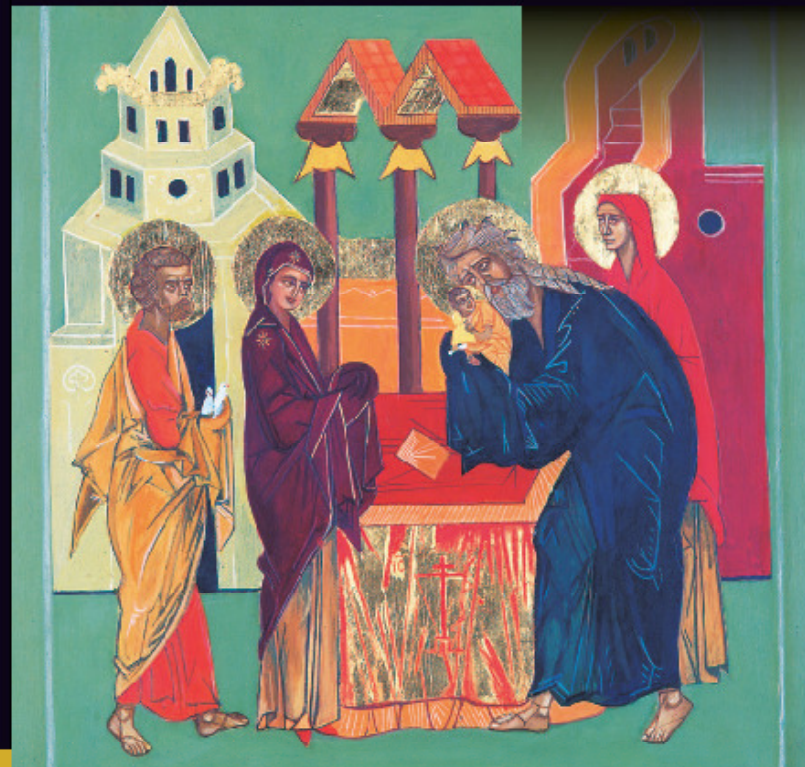
GOD, ME AND BEING VERY OLD

Keith Albans
•
Malcolm Johnson



God, Me and Being Very Old

Spirituality
and Stories
in Later Life



EDITED BY KEITH ALBANS AND MALCOLM JOHNSON

The uncertain future of UK funerals

- Some people have set themselves up as *funeral advisers/consultants/planners*, which radically changes professional relationships from:
- Family contracts with FD, who then subcontracts crematoria, celebrant, newspaper notice, etc. This arrangement is hardware driven (by those who are experts in storing and transporting bodies). to:
- Family contracts with a ceremonial expert (adviser/celebrant), who then subcontracts handling, transport and disposal of body, etc. This arrangement is 'software' driven.
- A funeral is the ritual (or ceremonial) disposal of a body.
- privileges body experts; 2) privileges ceremony experts.
- 1) made sense when pretty much all funerals were clergy-led and simply followed the Prayer Book; now, with bespoke ceremonies, 2) makes much more sense.
- So there is a lot to be said for 2), *but* there are 300 years of entrenched power sustaining 1). So FDs don't like 2)! Funeral advisers struggle to get started, and the more successful ones have succeeded only by eventually becoming FDs (or adding FDing to their role).
- Most funeral innovators, eg Colourful Coffins, natural burial grounds, BHA or civil celebrants, accept their role as subcontractors to the FD, so add to what the FD can offer clients, rather than threatening the FD's business.
- *But,*
- Some FDs are offering the complete package, including ceremony design. Only a few have received any training for this.
- Some coffin manufacturers are now selling direct to the public online, and it is possible the internet may in time undermine the FD's key position – but we are a long way from that yet.

A word of thanks

- My personal contribution to the founding and establishment of the Institute has been modest. Supporting Anne and being a member of Council for a period.
- But I take pride in all that has been achieved in the development of a role and a set of skills which our society profoundly needs. You are a better manifestation of the Funeral Advisers the College proposed.
- What you do for families who have lost someone is a wonderful cultural gift. So much research evidence points to the human value of a good and well conducted funeral. It matters most to close families in the hard weeks and months afterwards when everyone has gone back to their busy lives and all that is left are the memories of a worthy send-off.
- **It is therefore an enormous privilege to be associated, as Patron, with what you are and what you do for individuals and society.**