Continuing Bonds: Archaeology meets End of Life Care

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BACKGROUND

This research introduces a new project which initiates dialogue between the study of the ancient and the contemporary and engagement between the disciplines of palliative care and archaeology.

April 2016 sees the launch of a 28-month AHRC-funded study exploring the use of the past as an innovative route to opening up conversation about death and dying, and providing tangible focus points for discussion that is, at first, removed from ideas of personal mortality that can often hinder openness.

AIM

To explore how examples from the past may facilitate conversations around death and dying

OBJECTIVES

To develop a number of archaeological case studies that facilitate effective engagement in discussion about death and dying
To evaluate the value and impact of workshops using these materials with healthcare professionals and students
To pilot the use of these materials with the general public and with teachers

WORK SO FAR

What Will Survive of Us?

2013: The discovery of the bones of Richard III was used as a vehicle to explore meaning of remains, relics and spiritual care of body parts with an event open to the public in Leicester.

2014: Roving exhibition created, with Sarah Tarlow, Leicester University, including web presence and discussion events about legacy with public, students and professionals in a range of venues (see banners above).

Disassociated narratives enabled discussion of otherwise difficult topics, often leading to deeper personal reflection.

Facilitated consideration of culturally and socially diverse approaches to death, dying and bereavement.

WHAT NEXT?

• 24 facilitated workshops across 4 themes, in Bradford and Leicester
• Health, allied and social care professionals and students
• Discussions facilitated through examples of themed funerary archaeology
• Media engagement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Continuing Bonds: “when your loved one dies grief isn’t about working through a linear process that ends with ‘acceptance’ or a ‘new life’, where you have moved on or compartmentalized your loved one’s memory. Rather, when a loved one dies you slowly find ways to adjust and redefine your relationship with that person, allowing for a continued bond with that person that will endure, in different ways and to varying degrees, throughout your life.”


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Images: Plastered Skull, Jericho (top right), courtesy of the Kenyon Jericho Archive held at UCL; Plastered Skulls, Tell Aswad (bottom right), courtesy of Danielle Sterdouer CMRS, Paris; and Burial (middle right), Peter Akkermans, Sabi Abu Arei Project.

Discussion: Catherine Walsh, Lancaster University; AHRC Crossing Over Network & ‘Objects as Untold Stories’ team; Sarah Tarlow, Leicester University

Originals ideas shared in PCC2014 poster – thank you for all comments.

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