

Victorian Funerals:

In Victorian times death was part of every day life. The subject was talked about freely and the body stayed in the home until the funeral took place. If space allowed the body would be laid out in the coffin and people would visit to see the body and pay their respects. Today the body usually lays at rest in the funeral parlour and the family can visit and even listen to the persons favourite music during the visit, if they wish. The Victorians would have been horrified at the thought of celebrating the life of the person who had died. Today we often hold a formal funeral service and also a Thanksgiving service to celebrate the persons life and all the good things they did. We also want to say thank you to God for that person's life and to express our trust they will be at peace with God in Heaven. When my husband died recently one of the most moving and humbling moments was when, my son received a phone call from a friend and their two year old son piped up saying, "Jesus will look after your Daddy now Gareth".



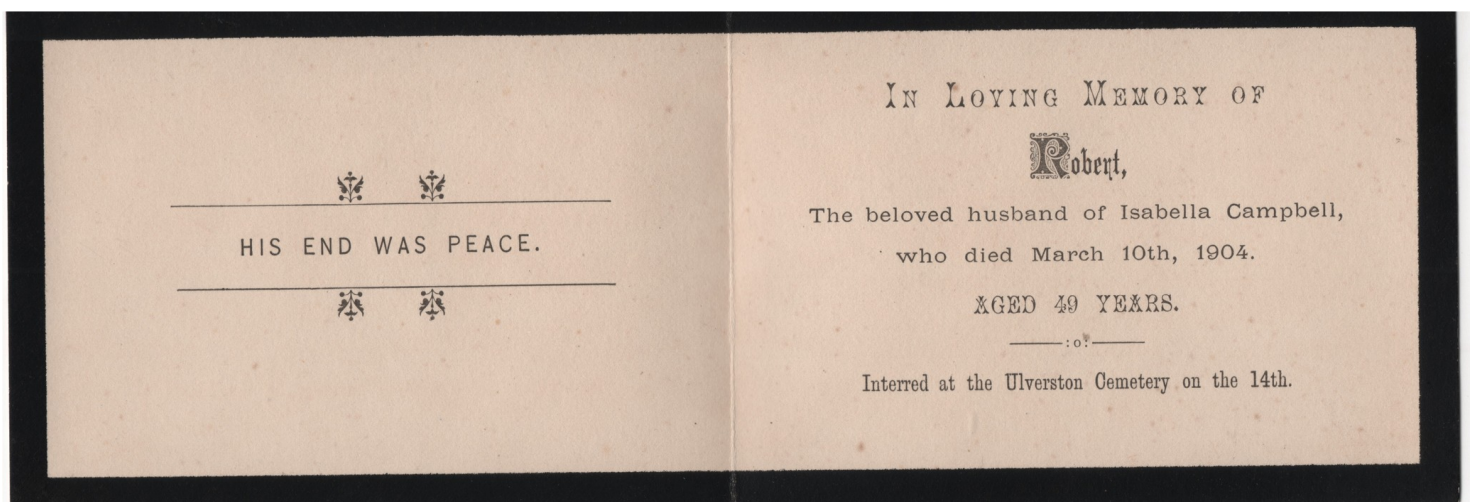
People had to dress appropriately in Victorian times.

Not just the whole family but also the servants of a household had to dress in black and they continued to do so for a long time afterwards. Women often wore funeral veils to cover their faces. For a wife or husband, now being called a widow or widower, and any children they were expected to wear mourning dress for two years and then a further period of half mourning followed. During the half period of mourning a woman was expected to wear grey or purple.

Queen Victoria wore mourning dress for the rest of her life following the death of her husband. On the day of his funeral church bells tolled all day and the shops were closed. In some small towns, even as late as the 1950's, when a funeral procession came down the street, everyone stood still, anyone who had served in the army often saluted and all traffic stopped until it had passed. This was to show their respect.

Apart from wearing the correct clothes certain customs were followed in Victorian times:

Black bordered note paper and Memorial cards were used. As you can see these continued to be used for many years to come. Similar cards were often sent out inviting people to funerals.



Rings, bracelets and lockets, sometimes containing hair, of the deceased person were treasured by the family in memory of the person who had died. **Today**, we would be more likely to go to our photo albums to remember the happy times, we had all shared together but in the times before photography was popular and more common place, personal items were treasured in this way.

Clocks in the house were stopped at the time the person had died. This was thought to prevent any further bad luck.

Mirrors were covered with material or even turned to face the wall. Probably, this was linked to superstition and the thought that the spirit of the dead person may be trapped in the mirrors.

Curtains were closed as a way of showing respect

Social history is interesting concerning these ideas because most poor people did not have clocks and women of the middle and upper classes often went to funerals and looked down on the poor, who did not. They liked to think that the poor did not carry out these customs because they were disrespectful.

The poor often paid into an insurance company or a Burial Club weekly in order to be able to pay for their funerals. There are many people buried at Englesea Brook who could not afford to pay for a proper funeral and there is a special grave with a memorial stone, that was paid for by local people. This was in memory of James Clifton, a farm labourer, who was converted in Sarah Smith's cottage in Englesea Brook and later became a local preacher.

Details of when and where funerals had taken place and the names of those who attended appeared in the local newspapers and **Obituaries** were printed in such books as the Primitive Methodist Minutes of Conference. These can be seen at the Englesea Brook Library and often prove to be of great help and comfort to people researching their family history today.

Hugh Bourne, was the co- founder of the Primitive Methodist Movement with William Clowes and he died on the 17th October 1852 and it is said, that approximately 20,000 people gathered in Tunstall Market place to give thanks for his life. In October 2002 Englesea Brook Museum organised a re-enactment of his funeral.



Sixty children, dressed in Victorian costume, walked behind the horse drawn Victorian hearse to Tunstall Methodist church where prayers were said.



The re-enactment concluded at Englesea Brook Chapel, where Hugh bourne was buried, and a tree was planted in his memory.