



The Victorian Celebration of Death

James Stevens Curl

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In this beautifully illustrated and well-researched book Professor Curl has rescued much fascinating material from undeserved oblivion, and his work fills a genuine gap. From humble working-class exequies to the massive outpouring of grief at the State funerals of Wellington and Queen Victoria herself, The Victorian Celebration of Death covers an immense canvas. It describes the change in sensibility that led to a new tenderness towards the dead; the history of the urban cemeteries with their architecture and landscapes; the ephemera of death and dying; State funerals as national spectacles; and the utilitarian reactions towards the end of the 19th century. Combining wit with compassion, Curl wears his learning lightly, and his taste for the eerie is delicately balanced by this literary personality. He has resurrected many valuable and extremely interesting aspects of 19th century attitudes to death and the disposal of the dead.

The Victorian Celebration of Death Details

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From Reader Review The Victorian Celebration of Death for online ebook

Don says

Extremely well-written and lavishly illustrated.

Sarah says

I can see why James Curl is The Cemetery Guy: he seems to know the ins and outs of every law, reform crusade, and aesthetic movement that contributed to the establishment of modern cemeteries. Unfortunately, this leads his book to be drier than the occupants of said cemeteries. Also Curl, disappointingly, barely covers other aspects of Victorian mourning, cramming information about waking, clothing, mourning customs, hair jewelry, the crepe trade, etc. into a few chapters on the end which mainly discuss royal funerals. While I will definitely keep this on my shelf as a great reference book, I was expecting a wider breadth of inquiry about Victorian attitudes toward death (Curl discuss nicely, and at length, attitudes toward burial, but less about death itself) and the constellations of goods and behaviors that made up the Celebration of death.

My favorite thing about the book, though? Curl's grumpy demeanor. He's pretty cheesed off about contemporary funeral practices and isn't afraid to say so.

Nurture Waratah says

This could have been a very interesting topic, but the writing is boring and repetitive. I gave up after page sixteen.

Matt Bashore says

The author obviously spent a lifetime researching the move from churchyard burials to suburban cemeteries. But most of it does not make interesting reading, especially in his highly-detailed, disjointed, repetitive style. However, I enjoyed the slightly more cohesive first chapter on Victorian funerary processions, fashions, jewelry, etc., and there were some interesting (and often grotesque) facts scattered throughout. It does contain one of the best dedications I've read, obviously to his long-suffering wife: "for Eileen, who could never enthuse about cemeteries, but who understood"

P.H.G. Haslam says

Curl's style is delightfully over the top. But it is true... the way society treats its dead is reflective of it. Despite getting a little bogged-down in the details of legislation, this is a romantic and passionate approach

to the topic.

Jillian says

I end up reading strange things while killing time at the library (pardon the pun). The information about funereal traditions and Victorian culture was quite interesting, though I ended up skimming the drier sections on land sales, business, and architecture. Curl is very passionate about his subject though, and I have no doubt the "lavishly illustrated" second edition is even better than the one I read.
