Eating, drinking and the dead in late medieval England

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There is a long pedigree to the consumption of food and drink as part of the commemoration of the dead. Anthropology and archaeology point to feasting at the graveside, in which the dead may even have participated, though this animist approach is not found in the later medieval world.[1] There had been Early Christian opposition to feasting in the presence of the dead: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and other Fathers of the Church had condemned it. But engagement with the dead in terms of food and drink remained important, even if it took a different form to pagan graveside offerings. In Benedictine monasteries, for example, from at least the eleventh century, the food portion of a deceased monk was to be brought to table daily for a month after his death, and in the case of an abbot, for a year: these foods would then be given away as alms.[2] Individuals – and their foods – were thus seen as a continuing part of their community.

In the later Middle Ages, the consumption of food and drink contributed to three important areas related to the dead. Firstly, there was simple community: an engagement with the grieving process, of individuals connected to the deceased coming together – a form of conviviality. Sometimes the dead were present physically or in effigy for parts of this process; at vigils and wakes, we may find people clustered around the body – and some form of consumption of food and/or drink took place at this time. Feasts after burials were an important part of funerary practice across Europe.

The second element was commemoration, that is, beyond the immediate events of the funeral. A very common pattern in late medieval

[1] The one exception is the French royal household, where food was served to the dead – the dead at table and then subsequently in effigy – throughout the sixteenth century, up to and including Henri IV in 1610: E.A.R. Brown, 'Refreshment of the Dead: Post Mortem Meals, Anne de Bretagne, Jean Lemaire de Belges, and the Influence of Antiquity on Royal Ceremonial' in: J. Balsamo ed., *Les funérailles à la Renaissance: XIIe colloque international de la Société Française d'Étude du Seizième Siècle Bar-le-Duc, 2-5 décembre 1999* (Geneva 2002) 113-30.

[2] B.F. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540: the Monastic Experience* (Oxford 1993) 13-14.

England were acts of commemoration known as the week's mind – sometimes referred to as the octave – the month's mind (or 30 days) and a year later, at the anniversary (or obit), and possibly for a term of years beyond that, or even in perpetuity. Some testators made provision for distributions at the feast of All Souls, when all the faithful departed were remembered. These acts of commemoration were widely understood across medieval society and had important links to liturgical practice. At one level, the Eucharist was, and is, a commemorative meal, and some of the elements of the ritual found their way into other practices: the ways in which cups, especially cups with wine or other special drink, were circulated and held, mirrored the way in which chalices were used in the liturgy.

The third element was charity. Giving alms, especially food alms, was often a feature of the arrangements at the funeral, and might form a part of longer term commemoration as well. The inspiration for this might come directly from the testator, or executors might follow customary practice.

This paper examines the foods and drinks involved with funerary practice, their connotations and the contexts in which they were consumed or distributed. Its focus is England between 1200 and 1500. At its centre is the funeral itself, with some reference to commemoration in the first year after death. While the development and maintenance of obits as long-term charity, the use of special plate and drinking vessels, and so on, all connected the dead with food, these elements primarily represented the continuance of commemoration and much has already been written about them.[3] However, less has been said about food and the funeral itself. The evidence for this study comes from wills; the accounts of executors, putting the testator's intentions into practice – but there are now few of these records. We have a limited number of household accounts from elite establishments: it was common for the great household to remain together after the lord or lady's death in some cases for several months, and these records tell us about funerary arrangements. While there are some discursive accounts of funerals from the end of our period, put together probably by heralds or by others with an interest in preserving ceremonial records, these contain almost nothing directly related to the preparation and service of

[3] E.g. the works referred to in C.M. Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England, 1200-1500* (New Haven, CT 2016).

food. Nor do the collections of menus documenting the record of installation feasts, coronations, tournaments and the like extend to funerals.[4]

Funerals

In late medieval England, it was the expectation that most people would be buried the day after they died. The eleventh-century *Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc* set out the practices on the death of a monk, and gave a good deal of detail about timings for the burial, dependent on where the monks were in the round of daily services when the death occurred – but the expectation was that the body would be buried within a day of death. Great stress was laid on the point that the body should never be left unattended.[5] In secular society, there was normally an overnight vigil in the presence of the body, sometimes (and ideally) in a church. This was part of an ecclesiastical effort to ward off diabolical intervention, protecting the body through holy sound, the ringing of bells, the saying of psalms and prayers – in part in the Office for the Dead – and through the beneficence of the light from candles, until the deceased could be laid in consecrated ground.[6] In the Church's eyes, the vigil was intimately linked to the liturgical elements of the Office of the Dead. These elements are three of the canonical hours: Vespers (often referred to by the first word of the liturgy, *Placebo*), Matins and Lauds (said together, traditionally at any point from the middle of the night – the start of day – to sunrise, and known as the *Dirige*, from the opening word of the first antiphon for Matins), followed by the funeral mass and the rite for the burial service itself.[7] Secular approaches to the vigil might involve other elements. Bishop William of Blois in his statutes for the diocese of Worcester of 1229 forbade secular singing and dancing in a house where

[4] G. Kipling ed., *The Receyt of the Ladie Kateryne*, Early English Text Society, Original Series 296 (Oxford 1990) 93, is a rare example that has a reference, albeit a passing one, to a funeral feast after the burial of Prince Arthur in 1502.

[5] D. Knowles and C.N.L. Brooke ed., *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc* (Oxford 2002) 180-193, especially 188-189.

[6] Described in: C.M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, CT 2006) 50-51.

[7] E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT 1992) 210-11; E. Duffy, *Marking the Hours. English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven, CT 2006) 60.

there was a corpse: this may, on the one hand, have been a general admonition to avoid influences that would corrupt the dead body and that might allow the Devil to take advantage of the corpse; but on the other hand, the injunctions may be a reflection of what in fact typically happened at wakes, and that a lively celebration might be envisaged. If there was singing and dancing, one might imagine there was drink and possibly food too.[8] Coroners' rolls for Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, unusual in recording a coroner overseeing the burial, show a timescale that was similar or slightly longer. At Alvington, Lincolnshire, in July 1361, John the son of Richard Souter, died after an accident with livestock on a Friday; the inquest was held the next day and Richard was buried under the view of the coroner.[9] At Wintringham, in North Yorkshire, in 1367, the victim of an incident with a knife while playing football, who died on a Sunday evening, was viewed by the coroner on the Tuesday and was buried on the Wednesday.[10] There was perhaps a longer timescale for funerals of the upper classes, but there was still pressure for them to take place promptly. In his will of May 1361, Michael Northburgh, Bishop of London, asked to be buried as soon as possible after death so that his face could be seen without any sign of decay – an expression of the public dimension of funerals, especially those of the elite.[11]

Food and drink at the wake

It might be thought that the short time between death and burial would militate against extensive provision of food and drink beyond what was available immediately – effectively the ready provision of hospitality – but we must not underestimate local resourcefulness and solidarity in the provision of foodstuffs for these occasions. Late medieval England was a commercial society, and much could be obtained by purchase comparatively

[8] F.M. Powicke and C.R. Cheney ed., *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church. II A.D. 1205-1313*. 2 vols. (Oxford 1964) 1: 169, 174.
[9] The National Archives, Kew, London [hereafter TNA], JUST 2/67, mem. 40d., rot. 4 d.
[10] TNA, JUST 2/71, mem. 3r.
[11] C.M. Woolgar ed., *Testamentary Records of the English and Welsh Episcopate 1200-1413: Wills, Executors' Accounts and Inventories, and the Probate Process*, Canterbury and York Society 102 (Woodbridge 2011) [hereafter *TREWE*] 170.

swiftly. Even in larger establishments, combined with stock already in the household, it was evidently possible to make provision for considerable additional numbers of people. There is some evidence that the custom was that there should be little or no food consumed in the presence of the dead – perhaps treating this as a period of abstinence, like those so common in the routine of diet in medieval society; but there was a degree of ambivalence about this. An *exemplum* from John Bromyard's *Summa predicantium*, completed before the Black Death, illustrated the sin of avarice with the tale of a man who had resources for a whole year except a single day. He conspired with his wife that they should conceal their deficit by pretending that he was dead – for that one day. His body was placed in the hall and covered, with the intention that neither the widow nor the household should eat anything that day out of sorrow and solicitude. The man's provisions would then suffice for the year. But the household returning from the fields viewed things differently. Despite meeting the grieving widow at the door, they sat down to eat – to the consternation of the corpse, which rose up in protest, only to be struck dead by a servant who thought the body was possessed by the Devil.[12] While this speaks to the practice of avoiding food in the presence of the corpse, it was evidently not a universal expectation: it is more than likely that some modest refreshment was available at wakes.

What evidence is there for food at wakes, that is, while watching over the body the night before the burial? With food, like so much else, elite households set the pattern for consumption that was seen by others as desirable, or to be aspired to. At the wake, refreshment took the form, in some instances at least, of spices and wine. This combination was familiar in elite establishments and it was often used at the drinking that took place in great households and other institutions in the afternoon (a bit like afternoon tea) or at the conclusion of a meal, at what was known as the 'voidy', after the meal was cleared away. The spices were brought in on special plates – and by spices we should also understand sweetmeats more generally too. In his will of 1368, the Bishop of Exeter forbade drinking with spices around his body in the choir, but he was quite content that this might happen in the cathedral chapter house or other suitable places.[13] The rider to this statement helps us understand the context for payments elsewhere by

[12] John Bromyard, *Summa predicantium* (Nuremberg 1485) A xxvii Avaricia, Art. x.
[13] F.C. Hingeston-Randolph ed., *The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (A.D. 1327-1369)*. 3 vols. (London 1894-9) 3: 1549.

executors for wine and spices. When William de Kexby, the precentor of York, died in 1410, 12*s.* 4*d.* was allowed for spices for the choir, with a further £1 6*s.* 8*d.* for wine for the choir and on the day of the burial (that is, in a more general consumption of wine).[14] Spices and wine to the value of £1 7*s.* 5*d.* were consumed at the obsequies of Hugh Grantham, a mason of York, in the same year and probably in the same way, as there were further payments for bread and ale given out at the funeral – that is, the accounts imply a sequencing of consumption.[15] At the funeral of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, in 1423, the spice bill came to £2 6*s.* 8*d.* and there were both 12 gallons of sweet wine (which may have gone with the spices) for 16*s.*, a pipe of red wine at £3 19*s.* and £1 8*s.* 6*d.* worth of ale.[16] The purchase of spice plates among the funeral expenses suggests that this was an important part of the ritual of food consumption: they appear in the funeral expenses of Robert Danby, a York vicar, in 1480, and in those of John Collan, a goldsmith from the same city, in 1490.[17] In a few other cases, a payment was made for food for those watching over the corpse.[18]

These elements of conviviality occurred during, in parallel with, or immediately after some of the liturgy connected to the wake or vigil. The presence of the choir in some at least of these examples suggests chanting and/or other music. There is evidence that food was given out at some stages in this process. The executors of Thomas Catton, a York weaver who died in 1413, paid for bread at the *Dirige* on the first day, that is, at that point in the Office of the Dead, as well as for further bread the following day – a total of 9*s.* 6½*d.* worth.[19] These provisions aside, the main investment in food and drink was reserved for after the burial and for the subsequent acts of commemoration – and in this it mirrors, or was mirrored by, what commonly happened with guild and fraternity feasts, which were

[14] P. Stell ed. and trans., *Probate Inventories of the York Diocese, 1350–1500*. The Archaeology of York: Historical Sources for York Archaeology after AD1100, 2/3 (York 2006) 516.
[15] Ibidem, 519.
[16] Ibidem, 535, 544.
[17]Ibidem, 644, 667. The date of the account of Collan's executors is confirmed by: J. Raine ed., *Testamenta Eboracenisa*. vol. 4. Surtees Society 53 (Durham 1869) 56.
[18] William Welwyk, vicar choral of York, 1454: Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 609.
[19] Ibidem, 521.

usually preceded by a mass in which the members of the guild among the faithful departed would be recalled to mind.[20]

Funeral feasts

The arrangements for funeral feasts take us to the heart of medieval religion, in that they open up questions to do with charity and one's relationships with fellow men. What were the intentions of testators? We can detect three typical patterns. Firstly, many testators made no request at all about a funeral feast. In these cases we are reliant on what we know about what the executors did from their accounts – and we must presume that the executors worked to a commonly expected pattern, which they would have believed was in the best interests of the soul of the deceased. In this way, immediately after the death of a bishop, because the temporalities of the see passed into the hands of the Crown, grants were sometimes necessary for executors to draw foodstuffs directly from estates to make suitable provision for the funeral. The executors of Bishop Salmon of Norwich, who died in 1325, were licensed to obtain some of the foodstuffs that were special markers of the elite – venison and freshwater fish – from the bishop's parks, woods, ponds and fisheries.[21] Similarly, the executors of William Zouche, Archbishop of York, who died in 1352, had a licence to fish the stews, ponds and rivers of the temporalities of the see in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, as well as to hunt in parks – to take fish and deer as would reasonably suffice for the funeral.[22]

Secondly, there are specific requests that there should be a feast, or at least that there should be hospitality. These requests very rarely tell us about the scale of the feast, or about some particularity – that it should be modest, or that it should be quite the opposite. In 1369, Lewis Charlton, Bishop of Hereford, enjoined that the costs of his funeral should be moderate and not excessive; however, there was to be a feast on the day of his burial ('quod

[20] E.g. Ordinances for the Guild of St George, Norwich, after 1418, T. Smith and L.T. Smith ed., *English Gilds. The Original Ordinances of more than One Hundred Early English Gilds*. English Text Society, Original Series 40 (London 1870) 446-7.

[21] *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward II, A.D. 1323-1327* (London 1898) 388.

[22] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward III*, vol. 8, *A.D. 1350-1354* (London 1907) 311.

fiat convivium die sepulture mee') – one of the few wills even to mention a feast. He also did not want his servants to wear mourning, but everyone was to dress in their household livery, which tells us more about the style of this occasion.[23]

Thirdly, there were further provisions for food alms, usually beyond those that would have been given as a matter of course as part of a medieval meal (such as the leftovers collected up by an almoner). Here we are looking at gifts of food and drink to the poor – perhaps quite simply the poor in Christ, that is, those attending the funeral, or to specific groups – and in some instances distributions were made to those who were not at the funeral. Philip Repingdon, who had resigned the see of Lincoln in 1419, left a munificent bequest of food for the poor in his will of around 1424. He asked for 100 selected from the poorest in the country roundabout to be very well fed (*copiose ministretur*) with bread and food from the kitchen. Beyond this group, 400 of the poorer people of the diocese were to be fed in the hall of the episcopal palace at Lincoln. Of the 400, the first hundred – the poorer and those from the more remote parts of the diocese – were to have a loaf and a dish with an exceptional helping (*copiosum ferculum*) from the kitchen, besides 20*s.* and a pair of shoes; the second hundred were to have a loaf and a large dish (*largum ferculum*), 12*s.* and a pair of shoes; the third hundred, a loaf and good-sized dish (*unum bonum ferculum*), 8*s.* and a pair of shoes; and the final hundred also a good-sized dish of food, 4*s.* and a pair of shoes.[24]

Any of these requests about food alms might also be framed in ways that covered not only the funeral, but subsequent commemorations as well. One notable type of bequest was of a pittance, that is, special food, or an additional course of special food, for an institutional meal at a hospital or monastery.

Some indication of the scale of late medieval funerals can be seen in the amount that was spent on food. The account of the executors of William de Brembleschote (Bramshott in Hampshire) who died in 1310, a member of the Hampshire gentry, show that his goods were worth some £53 15*s.* 9*d.*. The costs of the funeral feast itself were at least £5 4*s.* 8¼*d*, about 10% of the deceased's goods, with a further charge on the executors

[23] *TREWE*, 109-12.

[24] E.F. Jacob and H.C. Johnson ed., *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443*. Canterbury and York Society 42, 45-47. 4 vols. (London 1937-1947) 2: 285-6.

of the anniversary feast of 8*s.* 5*d.*, just under 1% (Table 1).[25] One guide to the numbers present at the funeral feast is the amount that was spent on bread. Assuming that the equivalent of a penny loaf was available to all attending William de Brembleschote's funeral, the costs indicate that at least 554 loaves were disbursed (beyond bread from the household's own stock). In terms of drink, 17*s.* worth of cider was available – that is, taking 210 gallons to the tun, some 357 gallons – beyond the ale from the household's own stock, and 2*s.* 8*d.* worth of wine, typically reserved for elite guests. The later medieval pattern of butchery of beef carcasses divides each into 320 portions: here one and a half carcasses were consumed, i.e. 480 portions. Given these quantities, it looks as if some 500 people could have attended this funeral and partaken fully of the food on offer, and more may have had a reduced amount. Many of the attendees, those drinking the cider and the ale, were likely to have been from the peasantry.

Distributions to the poor attending funerals were sometimes made in cash rather than as food. The evidence for those of bishops is that these provided for a further and sometimes very substantial group, indeed, for some of the largest gatherings that there can have been in the later Middle Ages. In 1412, Alexander Tottington, Bishop of Norwich, left £20 to be distributed *denariatim* – i.e. a penny to each person – to the poor on the day of his burial, that is, to 4800 people.[26] But this was dwarfed by the number who came to the funeral of Richard Gravesend, Bishop of London, in 1303: the cash distribution made by the executors, £133 4*s.*, implies about a third of the population of London was present – 31,968 individuals at a penny each. In his will Gravesend had left £140 for this purpose.[27] The cash distribution probably took place on 17 February: the funeral feast may have taken place perhaps the day before, but this is not entirely clear. The accounts of Gravesend's executors show that the feast needed swans, hens and rabbits (£13 19*s.* 6*d.*); and there was a separate purchase of spices – saffron, preserved ginger, sugar and other spices (£4 17*s.*). There were further distributions made a week after the burial (£2.), at the thirtieth day (£4); and a pittance for the anniversary for the principal canons of St Paul's and other officers of the church (£6) – the anniversary pittance continued

[25] Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, 4M61/16.
[26] *TREWE*, 251.
[27] W.H. Hale and H.T. Ellacombe ed., *Account of the Executors of Richard, Bishop of London, 1303, and of the Executors of Thomas, Bishop of Exeter, 1310.* Camden Society, new series 10 (London 1874) 112.

for another 10 years, at £2 per annum.[28] Most charges for the week's mind and the month's mind were substantially less than that of the funeral feast, and the anniversary feast was usually on a lesser scale too. Gravesend's feast had more prestigious foodstuffs than William de Brembleschote's, but the latter is to be noted for its hare, and other foods that would have been considered those for the elite: typically, young animals, such as piglets, and birds such as ducks and capons. On the whole, however, de Brembleschote's feast was notable for its solid (and worthy) quantities of beef and mutton – meats that would have formed a minor component in the diet of the peasantry at this date.[29]

If these elite funerals were very substantial gatherings, it is also apparent – again largely from the amounts of bread distributed – that those at a lower social level were well attended. It has recently been demonstrated, from a series of probate accounts for a group of Yorkshire peasants, that their funerals in the fifteenth century commonly must have had 40 to 160 participants. Their goods ranged in total value from 18*s.* 5*d.* to just under £300: most spent under 10% on food at the funeral, but some as little as 2%.[30] A slightly wider range can be seen in a sample of funerals from a cross-section of individuals, including artisans and the clergy, in the York area in the period 1400-1440 (Table 2): here the food costs at the funeral ranged from 1.4% to 16.5% of the total of the deceased's goods and leviable debts.

We can gain some further information about who attended funerals from the fifteenth-century York probate accounts. The costs for clergy attending show them always to have been a significant element. Beyond that, food and drink were provided explicitly for friends and neighbours.[31] The executors of Katherine North in 1461 accounted for 1*s.* 2*d.* worth of bread and ale consumed by her neighbours and given to the poor.[32] William Gale's

[28] Hale and Ellacombe ed., *Account of the Executors*, 100.

[29] See, for example: C.M. Woolgar, 'Meat and Dairy Products in Late Medieval England' and D. Serjeantson, 'Birds: Food and a Mark of Status' in: C.M. Woolgar, D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron ed., *Food in Medieval England. Diet and Nutrition* (Oxford 2006) 88-101 and 131-47.

[30] Professor Chris Dyer, unpublished paper to Diet Group, Oxford, 24 November 2018.

[31] Stell, *Probate Inventories*, friends: 496, 497, 520 (week's mind), 522, 625, 629; neighbours: 522, 550, 624, 625.

[32] Ibidem, 617-18.

executors paid for food for the chaplains and neighbours who attended at both the funeral obsequies and on the eighth day. They paid again for the anniversary, for the feast for the deceased's friends, chaplains and neighbours – an occasion which required a cook, two assistants, and the hire of pewter vessels, and the costs of which ran to an impressive £2 16*s.* 3*d.*[33]

The probate accounts do not distinguish any foodstuff as specially used at funerals – in fact it is notable that they match the patterns of eating more generally at both elite and lower levels – but they do show some particular tastes. On the day of the burial of Thomas Dalby, archdeacon of Richmond, in 1400, there were 8 gallons of mead.[34] Twelve gallons of sweet wine were available at the funeral of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, in 1423, and 9 gallons at that of William Duffield, canon residentiary of York, in 1452.[35] As well as red and white wine, the confection known as theriac ('treacle') was bought for the funeral of William Welwyk, a vicar choral of York, in 1454.[36] The friends and neighbours of William Catton, a weaver of York, in 1413, whose executors spent 15.9% of his wealth on food for the funeral, enjoyed not only bread at the *Dirige*, but also salmon, eels, lampreys and eel pies, as well as frumenty.[37] The presence of fish doubtless depended in part on whether the funeral took place on a day of abstinence from meat (in England, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Lent, and the eves of the feasts of Mary and the apostles).[38] Cheese appears frequently: at the funeral of Robert Conyng, the foodstuffs – bread, ale and cheese – came to 30*s.* 8*d.*, of which the cheese amounted to 6*s.* 8*d.*[39] It appears as well in accounts for high ranking people, although it is not a major foodstuff there. At the funeral of John Kexby, chancellor of York, in 1452, there was 2*d.* worth of cheese among the veal, lamb and piglets, the delicate meats that marked out the prestige of his feast. The executors accounted for 11*s.* worth of bread, so perhaps the cheese was for some of the lesser guests.[40] Occasionally

[33] Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 632-3.
[34] Ibidem, 505.
[35] Ibidem, 544, 602.
[36] Ibidem, 609.
[37] Ibidem, 522.
[38] E.g. Ibidem, 508, 615, 622, 629.
[39] Ibidem, 556; cheese also in 558, 561-2, 563, 564, 588, 636, 640, 643, 659, 667, 670, 671, 677.
[40] Ibidem, 591.

there were other foodstuffs of significance: some, at least, of those at the week's mind of Thomas Crake, a gentleman of Beverley, in 1488 had swan.[41]

The preparation and serving of these meals was often beyond the resources of the households of the deceased. Cooks were hired at the funeral of William Garton, in the 1430s;[42] in 1446, the executors of Thomas Gryssop, a chapman of York, hired two cooks and a turnspit for 2*s*.;[43] and those of William Duffield, a York canon, spent £1 4*s*. 2*d*. on wages of cooks and scullions at his funeral in 1452.[44] At the funeral of Margaret Pigot of Ripon, in 1485, there were expenses for the carriage of tables, trestles and dishes, for two butchers preparing meat and for the hire of a cook for the day.[45]

Why spend so much on the funeral? Conviviality and friendship, certainly, are one explanation. Some elements of expenditure are linked to the standing of the deceased, to notions of good lordship and to leadership in their communities – spending in this way was necessary to maintain connection, to sustain the understandings of magnificence that went with the great household. The notion of community, however, is a nuanced one: the types and quantities of food acquired for feasts for the elite indicate hierarchy, and that a select group only would have had access to distinct foods – such as game and freshwater fish. Charity was a further motivation: how foods were allocated and apportioned reflected wider notions of who might be deserving of support in this way. In 1337, Bishop Stephen Gravesend of London had borne in mind the words of St Augustine that funerary pomp and crowds at funerals were solace for the living, and not of any assistance to the dead. He made an interesting point, too, which echoes a change of emphasis more generally in terms of food alms and charity in the later Middle Ages – his executors were to distribute £100 among his poor tenants rather than poor at the funeral.[46] Charity began at home, or with those with whom one was connected: household, family, tenants and dependents.

[41] Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 663.
[42] Ibidem, 563.
[43] Ibidem, 573.
[44] Ibidem, 602.
[45] Ibidem, 656.
[46] *TREWE*, xxxvi, 120

Conclusion

The later Middle Ages shaped funerary customs to take account of individual and communal wishes. Food and drink were intertwined with the rituals for the disposal of the dead, providing conviviality and commensality for friends, neighbours and clergy. Wills might specify that there should be no feast, or that there should be an elaborate one, usually closely linked to charitable distributions; but food was a ubiquitous way of creating community among the living and with the dead. In absolute terms, the elite invested a great deal of resource in these occasions; and even the executors of individuals of modest means thought it proper to invest between 1 and 15% of a testator's wealth in food for the funeral. This expenditure supported the attendance at funerals of considerable numbers of individuals, from the low 10s to the thousands, depending on the deceased's connections, the scale of charitable giving that was linked to the occasion and to the standing that was necessary for some, at least, to maintain in the eyes of the world. The greatest part of the food and drink was consumed at a feast, after the liturgies for the dead and the burial had been concluded. The pattern of this meal, while reflecting charitable dispositions for the poor, was one that was common to secular feasts, with all that implied in terms of hierarchies of individuals to whom particular foods might be served. These feasts were a reflection of the deceased's community, and like wider notions of philanthropy in this period, there seems to have been a marked change in almsgiving associated with it, from distributions to the poor generally, to those who were more deserving, with a concentration on friends and neighbours. The sense of community with the dead was then maintained through food in other commemoration, at the week's mind, the month's mind and at anniversaries.