

## MEDIEVAL FUNERALS

**A medieval funeral could be a very costly, if sombre, affair. Torches and tapers were lit around the body, often held by poor men who were paid to do so, and given black clothes to wear; there would be masses said or sung, sometimes by many different celebrants; the church bells might be rung, money distributed to the poor, and a dinner served. Much of this would be repeated at the 'month's mind', a ceremony one month after the original burial. Some poor men of the parish might earn good money by taking part in a funeral.**

### **Laurence Fyncham, fishmonger of London:**

I wolle have 12 torches of the price of £6 and 4 tapers of waxe of the value of 26s.8d. to be brenne aboute my body ... and I woll that the said 12 torches and 4 tapers by holden by 16 pouere persones durying all the tyme of myn exequies ... every persone of the saide 16 ... to have 20d.

### **Joan Devyn, widow of Henley-upon-Thames:**

I leave 8d. to each chaplain who will take part in my exequies and other divine offices on the day of my burial, 4d. to each holy water clerk in Henley church on that day and 1d. to each boy singing in the said church ... on that day. ... and thirty Gregorian masses [are] to be celebrated ... by all the chaplains then serving in that church ... and on the next day ... they shall have a solemn requiem mass ... and they shall say the *De profundis* round my burial place, all dressed in solemn vestments ... And I will that the great bell be rung for quarter of an hour before my exequies ...

### **Thomas Wyndesore, esquire of Stanwell, Middlesex:**

I will that I have brennyng at my buryng and funerall service 4 tapers and 20 torches of wax, every tapere to conteyn the wight of 10 lb. and every torch weying 16 lb., which which tapers and torches I will that 24 verry pore men and wele disposid shall hold aswele at the tyme of my buryng as at my monethes mynde and that every of the said 24 pore men shalhave for his labour for both tymes 8d. and a gown of frise. ... *Item* I will that there be 3 preestes and 3 clerkes or mo ... for to syng by note in the chirch of Stanwell *placebo* and *dirige* and masse of requiem every day during 30 dayes next ensuyng ... *Item* I will that therbe ordeynid 100 men children ... beyng within the age of 16 yere within my moneth mynd to say for my soule... our lady sawter and I bequeth to ech of them ... 4d. ... *Item* I will that there be ordeyned a convenient dynner at my monethes mynd to the pleasure of God and to the comfort of my lovers and frendes which that shall like them to be there at that tyme with all other of my tenantes of Stanwell. ...

### **Priests, friars, colleagues and the poor might also benefit from a funeral:**

... and for distribution amongst the poor and needy on the day of my burial £5 and on the day of my month's mind £5 ... ☼ Also I woll that the morowmasse preste and the scolemaster of the gramer scole if it please them to be present at my *dirige* and say masse for me the day of my buryng that eyther of them have 6d. for ther labour and eyther of them to have 2s. for seying of David sauter if it please them. ... ☼ Also I will have a *dirige* and masse by the felawis and sojournautes of Trinite hall in Cambrigge ... and that every felawe and sojournaunt beyng [present] have 4d. and every disciple there beyng 2d. and for a pietaunce among them all 2s. and a galon of wyne. ... ☼ Also I leave 6s.8d. to each of the two houses of friars, namely the preachers and the minors, so that all chaplains and ministers of the said two houses of friars may take part in my funeral ceremonies ...

**For some people, the identity of their coffin-bearers was important:**

**Ellen Langwith, widow (of a tailor), silkwoman of London:**

And I wolle also that two of the brothern of cuttelers of the citee of London and two of the brethern of taillours of the same citee bere my body to the church of oure lady a foresaide from my dwelling place ... to every of which 4 brethern so bering my body I biqueth 12d.

**Some people wished to limit the amount spent on their funerals, though some limits set appear lavish compared with others.**

**John Don, senior, mercer of London:**

And I require and pray myn executours that their be no pompous araie doen att my buriyng nor att my monethes mynde nor in lightes, clothyng nor in no grete dyners but in especiall that the cost and charg maye be doen and given among poure peple in mete, drynke, clothyng and in money ...

**Anne [Neville], Duchess of Buckingham:**

... myn executours assone in as secrete wise as thei godely and conveniently may do cary and ley my said body in the saide college church setting all pompe and pride of the world apart and that the costes and charges to be made and borne ... excede nott the somme of an £100 ...

**Margaret Leynham, widow, of Finchley:**

And in eschuing the pompe of the world I utterly forbede myne executours that ... thei holde anny feest for me butt oonely make a mannerly recreation to chier withall theim silf, my kynnesfolk and my servautes and in especiall poor people ... they give for me no manner lyverey of blak gownes except oonely to theim silf and 24 gowne clothes besideth of easy price to serve for 24 persones, menne and wommen, that att that tyme beth and here afore have been my servautes. ...