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Journey with Absent Friends

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Date

Friday 1 June 2018



During June, the 'Living with Dying' project are going on a [Journey with Absent Friends](#) with artist Ellie Harrison and '[Team Grief](#)'. In an ordinary, domestic caravan, we'll be travelling from Leeds, to Oxford,

Poole, Hamburg, Stockton and the Isle of Arran, to think about where the memories of the dead live. Along the way we will be collecting stories and experiences from visitors to the caravan, who will help us reflect on how people remember, and how this has changed over time.

Over the last year, Laura King has been researching death and remembrance between 1900 and the 1950s. We have curated an exhibition on [Remembrance](#) at Abbey House Museum, and we have been having lots of conversations about ways of remembering lost relatives with [our group of family historians](#).

We have looked at some very elaborate Victorian mourning practices and objects, and we have seen how even the most ordinary or everyday object can take on emotional meaning and significance after someone dies. Places can also be really meaningful to the bereaved, and using places to remember can be of a particular kind of importance to certain groups, such as the poorest families in interwar Britain (who didn't have many things); migrants arriving in the UK, such as around the Second World War; and peripatetic groups, such as Gypsies and Travellers (whose rights to travel have been curtailed in recent years). As well as 'formal' spaces of mourning - gravestones or the site of scattered ashes – more informal sites such as a favourite holiday destination, a pub, or a theatre can act as key sites of remembrance.

Working with Ellie Harrison and the Grief Series team has also helped us to think in different ways about this research – and through collaborating on the caravan project we will be able to take our research to more people, in a really interesting and interactive way.

[Journey with Absent Friends](#) is a sort of pilgrimage for Ellie, visiting sites which were significant for her mother, father and brother, all of whom died when Ellie was relatively young. Inside the caravan the artworks tell stories drawn from Ellie's experiences, Laura's research, and other collaborators. The caravan contains within it a diverse collection of stories and experiences, and we're inviting visitors to add many more along the journey. We hope that interacting with the work will start conversations with our visitors, and will give them a space to think and to talk about their experiences if they wish to. But we also want to show that there is no right or wrong way to remember, and that there are many different ways to grieve. It's okay to be silent too.

You can [listen to Ellie talking more](#) about the Grief Series and the Journey with Absent Friends.

The Value of Collaboration

This collaboration between the Grief Series and the Living with Dying project has been really exciting, and it has made us all think in different ways about our how we work.

By sharing our research we have all become aware of a much greater and more diverse range of stories about death and remembrance. The combination of stories from the present and from the past means that visitors to the caravan will be able to reflect on how remembrance practices change over generations, and will allow older people in particular to reflect back to earlier parts of their life. It lets us reflect on how current attitudes towards death and remembrance have been shaped by the past. We can think about how expectations about grief have changed in positive and negative ways – and we can learn from this in the way we grieve and the way we relate to others.

We've also been thinking about histories of grief and remembrance that have been covered up, whitewashed or straightened out, and this has been an inspiration for the artworks in the caravan. Through Laura's archival research – at the wonderful [Gypsy and Traveller Exchange Archive](#) amongst others – Ellie has been able to think about how to represent more varied and diverse voices, and how to interpret them in nuanced ways. And as historians, we have thought more about ways of reflecting on our own experiences, how to be more honest and open about the ways that they have shaped our work, and how to put ourselves in our research in different ways.



The Journey itself

So where do our memories of the dead live? In sacred spaces like gravestones, or aisle 22 of Tesco's? On someone's Facebook page or Twitter feed? Ellie Harrison is on a month-long journey to find out.

The journey, to sites of personal remembrance, arts venues, and perhaps the occasional service station, will be punctuated with meal events combining beautiful design, great food and immersive performance plus the chance to remember someone you have lost.

Audiences can join us on the journey at the following locations:

- The City of Oxford College: 4th & 5th June - 12:00 - 6:30pm
- Lighthouse Poole: 6th, 7th & 9th June - 6th & 7th: 12:00 - 7:00pm, 9th: 10:00 - 1:00pm. [Book for Lunch with absent friends](#) on Saturday 9th, 1.30pm
- Hamburg, Germany: 12th - 14th June (keep an eye on twitter for our exact roaming locations) - 12:00-6:30pm
- ARC, Stockton Arts Centre: 19th June - 12:00 - 6:30pm
- Isle of Arran, Scotland: 21st & 22nd June (keep an eye on twitter for our exact roaming locations) - 12:00 - 6:30pm

And we'll be back in Leeds for a Picnic with Absent Friends at Kirkstall Abbey on 24th June:

Eat. Celebrate. Remember. Picnic with absent friends is an event to welcome Ellie Harrison home after her month-long journey with a caravan full of hidden treasures. Bring a picnic from home or treat yourself by ordering a bespoke designed hamper with beautifully crafted stories and treats from The Swine That Dines. You can contribute a favourite handed down recipe to our book, hear reflections on the journey and raise a glass to absent friends.

The caravan is free and open to people of all ages. Booking is only required for the meal events - otherwise just turn up! [Visit the Grief Series website](#) for more information.

And remember to follow the journey on Twitter to see what's going on and find updates on times and locations: [@GriefSeries](#) and [#JWAF](#)



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