

Institution: University of Bradford		
Unit of Assessment: A4 Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience		
Title of case study: Continuing bonds: the long dead change understanding of death and bereavement in the present.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2020.		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Eleanor Bryant	Associate Professor in Psychology	01/08/2007 - present
Dr Lindsey Büster	Postdoctoral Researcher (PDRA)	07/01/2013–10/08/2018
Dr Lou Comerford Boyes	Associate Professor Psychology	01/03/2002- present
Dr Karina Croucher	Associate Professor in Archaeology	01/08/2013 - present
Dr Jennifer Dayes	Postdoctoral Researcher (PDRA)	12/09/2016-06/03/2020
Dr Laura Green	Lecturer in Nursing	09/01/2012-30/04/2019
Dr Paul Sullivan	Reader in Psychology	02/08/2004 - present
Aoife Sutton	Project Assistant	02/2020 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This unique and ground-breaking collaboration between psychology and archaeology; <i>Continuing Bonds</i> and its follow-on projects, had profound impact on project participants (health and social care professionals, students, and members of the public), and on their social and professional circles. Evidence demonstrates that archaeology was a catalyst for productive conversations about the difficult subjects of death, dying, bereavement and loss. As a meaningful and positive experience the project was transformative, leading to significant personal growth. For some this led to powerful changes in their professional practice. The intervention challenged cultural norms and highlighted diversity of death practices, changing participants' beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The psychology of death, dying and bereavement is a timely topic in the context of elevated levels of mortality associated with Covid-19. According to the British Psychological Society (BPS) we are poor at dealing with bereavement. Death and grieving are difficult topics but according to the BPS, open discussion can help the healing process. End of life professions and sectors are skilled in facilitating such discussion but how can psychological research help improve their practices and the experiences of people coping with death? Based on research with medical students, Sullivan (1) (Reader, UoB, 2004-) discovered that the “professional” and the “personal” mix together in surprising ways when professionals are faced with experiences of death and dead bodies. There is both ‘wonder’ and ‘ordeal’ in confronting the end of life. Generating new meanings (2) for difficult experiences can help alleviate psychological distress.</p> <p>In the project <i>Continuing Bonds: exploring the meaning and legacy of death through past and contemporary practice</i> (CB), we generated new personal understandings of death and bereavement by turning to the ancient past. Archaeological research reveals that ancient cultures had a different attitude that encouraged a better-adapted perspective on death and grieving (3, 4). Our impact case study, underpinned by psychological theory, draws on archaeology to facilitate conversation and openness on death and grief in a way that improves psychological and physical well-being, and builds resilience. This collaboration between</p>		

psychology and archaeology connects shared ideals between these disciplines of respect and compassion to learn psychological lessons from the long dead.

The CB project (PI Croucher, Associate Professor, UoB 2013-, with Co-Investigator Green, at UoB 2012-2019, PDRAs Büster, at UoB 2013-2018, Dayes, UoB 2016-20, and Comerford Boyes, (Associate Professor UoB, since 2002, involved in qualitative analysis) was carried out at UoB and LOROS Hospice, Leicester (2016-18) (3-5). It investigated a new, creative approach to opening dialogue around death, dying, bereavement and loss. Using archaeology, it provided an alternative framework for reflecting on death, through accessible archaeological case studies that illuminated the variety of methods by which past societies have dealt with the dead. Moreover, it focused on one particularly enduring concept: that of “Continuing Bonds” with the dead, which recognises that death is not the end of relationships between the living and the dead, but that the dead continue to have meaning and significance in the lives of the living.

Subsequent research and impact projects involved: *Dying to Talk* (2018) (PI Croucher, with Bryant, Associate Professor, UoB 2007-) with voluntary sector organisations (Child Bereavement UK, Bradford Bereavement Service, MYMUP, Speakers Corner Bradford), with teachers and school children in Bradford (6); and AHRC-funded *Continuing Bonds: Creative Dissemination* (CB:CD) (2019) (PI Croucher, Co-Investigator Dayes). The work used archaeology and original CB experiences to normalise talk of the dead and inspire creative writing, through workshops with members of the public in Bradford, Manchester, and Sheffield, culminating in an anthology and celebration event where participants read their work to friends, families, and stakeholders. In 2020, the research was translated into CB: Continuing Professional Development (CPD) online training for counsellors (PI Croucher, Co-Investigators Bryant, Sullivan and Dayes, Project assistant Sutton 2020-present).

This underpinning research is a unique collaboration between psychologists and archaeologists, offering a union between an understanding of customs from ancient cultures in the context of relevant artefacts (3-5).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Madill, A., & Sullivan, P. (2010). Medical training as adventure-wonder and adventure-ordeal: A dialogical analysis of affect-laden pedagogy. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71(12), 2195-2203. doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.09.048
2. Sullivan, P. (2017). Towards a literary account of mental health from James' Principles of Psychology. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 46, 31-38 [10.1016/j.newideapsych.2016.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2016.02.003)
3. Büster, L., K. Croucher, J. Dayes, C. Faull, L. Green, (2019). From Plastered Skulls to Palliative Care: What the Past Can Teach Us About Dealing with Death, in Williams & Richardson (eds) *Death in the Contemporary World*, AP Online *Journal of Public Archaeology* Special Issue 3 – 2018. DOI: 10.23914/ap.v8i2.147
4. Croucher, K. Büster, L., Dayes, J., Green, L., Raynsford, J., Comerford Boyes, L. and C. Faull (2020). Archaeology and contemporary death: Using the past to provoke, challenge and engage. *PLOS ONE*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244058>
5. Dayes, J., Faull, C., Büster, L., Green, L. and K. Croucher. (2019). Archaeology and Modern Reflections on Death. *BMJ Supportive & Palliative Care*. 9: 229-306. DOI: 10.1136/bmjspcare-2017-001452
6. Booth J, Croucher K, Bryant, E. (2020). Co-producing resources with young people to get them talking about bereavement, death and dying. *Voluntary Sector Review*. doi.org/10.1332/204080520X16014085811284

Grants

AHRC Grant: Croucher (PI). *Continuing Bonds: Exploring the meaning and legacy of death through past and contemporary practice*. 01/05/2016 – 31/08/2018. GBP244,790.00
 AHRC Follow on Funding for engagement and impact. Croucher (PI). *Continuing Bonds: Creative Dissemination* (01/02/2019-31/10/2019) GBP52,697.97

Death, bereavement and loss resources for young people. Higher Education Innovation Fund, UoB. Croucher (PI) (2018) GBP19,500

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impacts attributable to the combined CB projects cluster around three main headlines (Themes 1-3, below), each evidenced in participants' own words in testimonials [E1-3] and in the Internal Reports [E6-10]. Impact is also demonstrated in the video [E4] and the creative writing anthology [E5], and academic output [4].

Participants from diverse professions and walks of life (health and social care, counselling, funerary services, faith leadership, charitable volunteering, teachers, students, creative writers, young film makers and members of the public) were profoundly impacted by the project. Pre- and post- CB workshop data [4, E6] show the workshops were meaningful and impactful in the immediate term: almost all "would recommend the experience to a colleague" (93%, n=174/187 (4, Table 1g)). These altered behaviours and ways of being are additionally impactful when they initiate changes in professional culture/practice that in turn positively impact the experience of a wider group, e.g. patients, service users, clients, faith community, pupils, and lay members of the public.

Theme 1: Archaeology is a catalyst for productive talking about death, dying, bereavement and loss (DDBL).

Almost all CB participants surveyed thought the archaeological materials were effective in facilitating discussion (93%, n=139/150, 4, p.9). Being able to talk differently about DDBL, or even being able to talk about it at all, with developing confidence, articulacy and expression had "ripple out" impacts. Unusual conversations in the workshops, made possible by the archaeology and the safeness of the space, were a catalyst for more productive "difficult" conversations in personal life and the workplace. The data and testimonials provide tangible examples: *"Continuing Bonds allows people opportunity to explore and experience the words and vocabulary and articulation of 'difficult to have conversations' and we were able to put this into practice"* [E3].

Sometimes this newfound ability to talk more productively about death in the workplace comes from a personal change in the first instance [E2d]. Improved confidence in CB participants when talking about DDBL has in some cases led to better experiences for their patients, families, and service users: *"One memorable conversation that was a product of the above [project] was with a patient who was herself facing imminent death. We had very little time...but we were able to talk about planning for her decline and how she and her husband would cope"* [E1a].

Additionally, the young people in Bradford involved in making their 'Dying to Talk' film [E4, shown at the University's 'Festival of the Dead'] showcased a newfound ability to communicate directly about DDBL. When surveyed, these young film makers strongly agreed (Mean 4.63/5, 6) that archaeological case studies encouraged talk about death, moreover that the space to reflect was transformative of their feelings and emotions. Their giving of direct, well-articulated practical advice e.g. use creative methods to remember the dead, make sure people know that "every way" of grieving counts even laughing, good conversation starters around DDBL, are all further illustrations of the project's impact in improving confidence and ability.

Theme 2: Archaeology challenges cultural norms and highlights diversity in death practices, leading to changes in beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviour.

Using archaeological interventions and examples was transformative: the rich diversity of and difference in DDBL practices, rituals and beliefs exemplified in the workshops transformed participants' beliefs, values, attitudes, even behaviours. In challenging cultural norms, workshops exposed participants to different "truths" and therefore changes in participants' personal truth were possible: e.g. the majority of CB participants (84%) reported they now thought differently about DDBL (4, Table 1b). The "threshold", "transition" and "epiphany" themes arising from CB interview analysis [E6], as well as evidential attitude change to death and dying, hence to life and living, are compellingly echoed in the personal testimonies: *"(The artefacts) also helped me to see burial rituals as part of something we share with other cultures and through history"* [E2c].

Theme 3: Through being a meaningful and positive experience, the workshops enabled personal growth. For some, this led to professional development.

Compelling personal growth and development impacts are evident in the evaluation reports [E6-10] and in testimonials: *“Last year and this year have been the first years in decades that I have not lived with profound grief...I attribute that to the workshops giving me the space to talk about my losses”* [E2b]. In the latest longitudinal survey of participants [E8, 2020], the majority (64%) agreed that CB had made a difference to their own responses to death, dying and bereavement when it came up in their professional environment [E8, p12].

Personal impact can lead to professional change: e.g. better understanding the diversity of death practices improved their work with clients [E8, p10-12]. Sometimes these professional development gains are very personally felt and had additional social impact: *“Jane’s confidence in talking about bereavement and death – which she directly attributes to participating in the Continuing Bonds project – has been transformational and has really impacted on my work as chaplain, giving me an ally and driving forward a programme of events.”* [E3]. Even very experienced health and social care professionals working with the terminally ill were able to review and improve their practice: a majority (57%, n=107/187, (4, Table 1e)) of CB participants anticipated that the workshops would influence how they approach death, dying and bereavement in their professional practice. Beyond the original CB project, the majority (80%) of the Continuing Bonds: CPD workshop participants agreed/strongly agreed that the project impacted their work, in particular they would better empathise with their clients (66%) and were more able to validate their clients’ experiences (70%) [E9, p11].

In conclusion, the project clearly demonstrates the value of using archaeology for discussing death, dying, bereavement and loss, and the deep personal affects this has had on project participants, and their families, friends, and colleagues. The project team are humbled by the testimonials that evidence such profound impact. *“Without a shadow of doubt, involvement in the project has been life changing... this has been hugely influential on my life”* [E2b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

All testimonials [E1-3] are in participants’ own words:

E1a-d: Testimonials: Original Continuing Bonds participants: e.g.

“Looking back over the three years since I last attended the project I think it definitely helped me to become more realistic about death for myself and for my patients. This project, I believe, helped to address our society’s ambivalence towards death and often its inability to see it as something that happens to all of us. I think I became more confident in facing death and hence in enjoying life” [E1a] **Community Nurse.**

“My confidence has grown since attending the workshop, I have worked since that time with many more clients. A part of the growth in confidence is that I feel more touched as a human and aware of being a human, and somehow this makes me braver. I have an enriched sense of connection with others” [E1b] **Counsellor.**

“I have used the principles I learned from Continuing Bonds in my own life and with friends who have been bereaved to make sense of the bereavement process. The CB sessions and the research analyses will stay with me always” [E1c] **NHS Educator.**

“To examine relics from graves & other precious objects, to begin to understand how diverse cultures, ancient & modern, understood dying & death... leading me to question the cultures & subcultures I observe day to day in my bereavement work within families & communities in Bradford... I think that my involvement in this project has helped me to help others to articulate these aspects of loss” [E1d] **Bereavement Counsellor.**

E2a-f: Testimonials: Continuing Bonds: Creative Dissemination participants: e.g.

“Attending the project has increased my empathy and understanding in helping bereaved families and also in communicating with the primary school children I work with... I feel more confident sharing my own experiences of bereavement with the families, and there are many situations where this has really helped the family get through a really difficult day” [E2a]

Volunteer – schools and inquests.

“Attending the Continuing Bonds: Creative Dissemination project gave me the encouragement to talk to people about grief, both my own, and to open up conversations with other people, such as work colleagues who mentioned that they had lost people. Listening to their testimonies validated my own experiences and that helped me process my grief... there is no question in my mind that my progress through my grief journey has been made a lot smoother as a direct result of the project” [E2b] Support worker.

“The workshops helped me to share my experience of bereavement and loss (my parents had both recently died) and also to process it” [E2c] Workshop participant.

“In terms of the lasting effects of the workshops, I feel more able to talk about death. It has also deepened my bond with nature, as I increasingly appreciate how we are all part of the same force on this planet (and indeed in the universe). The impact of [this] is that I feel I could support and comfort others in bereavement more effectively” [E2d] Workshop participant.

“I attended some fascinating workshops back in 2019 in Bradford, which really got me thinking and re-evaluating life – before and after death. For me, finding the strength to put pen to paper and write my first bit of poetry could only have happened in such a workshop. To hear others speaking up helped me to think about my own feelings and that it was okay to move towards coming to terms with death itself” [E2e] Workshop participant.

“The project has made a positive influence on me as when writing it I found it a cathartic, fun and engaging experience. Since the poem was created I've enjoyed reading it in public many times and having the support of C.Bonds has meant that since publishing the piece I've been able to feel proud and honoured to be part of something that will have a lasting legacy and influence in the community. It was a great experience and I look forward to the next one!” James Dann, film maker [E2f].

E3: 3rd party testimonial, Lead Chaplain for the University of Wolverhampton

E4: Dying to Talk film (2018): www.bradford.ac.uk/dying-to-talk

E5: Creative Writing Anthology. Croucher, K., Dayes, J., Giles, M., and A. Holland (eds.) (2019). *The Living and the Dead: Creative Conversations between Past and Present*. Continuing Bonds. <https://continuingbonds.live/creative-dissemination/>

E6: Thematic analysis of interview data and open text responses in follow-up and longitudinal surveys

E7: Continuing Bonds Follow-up evaluation data (2016-18)

E8: Longitudinal Survey data, Continuing Bonds / Continuing Bonds: Creative Dissemination (summer 2020)

E9: Continuing Bonds: Continued Professional Development evaluation data (2020)

E10: Continuing Bonds: Creative Dissemination evaluation (2019), including participant statements, e.g.

“I wrote a poem travelling to and from the funeral of my best friend's adult son, which helped me a lot to handle one of the saddest days of my life (I wrote about the funeral)”;

“I am more curious about past traditions around death. I've researched my ancestry more and plan to visit some graves and learn about Jewish rituals around death” [E10];

“Between the 2nd and 3rd workshops a close friend of mine died. I think partly inspired by the workshops I decided to write a poem myself to read at their funeral, rather than select a published one. It was a very powerful and creative process to think about and grieve for my friend”.