THE BUSINESS OF DEATH: GRIEF, MOURNERS, AND MAKERS

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This thesis primarily studies the financial role of mourning in the lives of early modern individuals. The thesis examines how both consumers and retailers interacted with mourning goods as well as the emotional value of the objects. The project stemmed from a desire to explore the economic and social histories of the mourners and makers. Ultimately, the objective is to understand the nuances of mourning as a source of both financial profit and loss in the early modern world. Chapter 1 briefly introduces research that has been done on other aspects of death-related businesses such as undertakers, the treatment of funerals, and the separation of fields of history that overlap within the project’s topic. Chapter 2 focuses on the manufacturers of mourning goods and how the market provided entrepreneurial opportunities and difficulties for the working class. Chapter 3 analyzes the financial burden consumers faced when they entered mourning, highlighting how social expectations brought troublesome expenses. Chapter 4 returns to the objects themselves and reaffirms the emotional and psychological role that mourning played during this period and that financial worries and grief often came hand in hand. In short, mourning was an essential cultural practice of the early modern period that allowed for social display and processing of grief. However, mourning simultaneously provided business opportunities with niches of profit and acted as a financial obstacle for the survivors. This thesis contributes to scholarship about economic activities surrounding death and prompts future researchers to investigate similar points of contact.
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Chapter 1: Mourning: Between Culture, Business, and Fashion

Working in the business of death is an old and widespread trade. Death’s universality has created evolving social and cultural expectations, for both the living and the dead. Inevitably, many of these practices cost money but they were also linked to respectability and tradition. The social beliefs around death have provided near-endless market demand for the related goods and services. This steady demand has supplied tradesmen and women with an abundance of opportunities for businesses through which to make a living and benefit from potential pockets of profit. I am focusing on the intersection of mourning as a cultural process, as a business opportunity, and as a fashion experience in early modern England. By and large, historians have neglected this aspect of the experience of death but I will argue that the business of the mourning process was a crucial part of survivors' lives.

Historians have long recognized death as a critical constant in terms of communal transitions and social relationships, but the associated death rituals have been time-specific. Scholarship on early modern death began with historians using demographic approaches in the 1960s. A flurry of research documented changing mortality rates. A high mortality rate is an important context because it established the early modern familiarity with death. Dying young or unexpectedly would have been much more ordinary within a community. Therefore, attending funerals, wearing mourning, and other encounters with death would be frequent experiences for most individuals. High death rates demanded cultural practices which later became a rich field

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1 The work of The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure began in the 1960s.
of historical study. For my project, high mortality (whether infants or children, women in childbirth, adults in epidemics or from ordinary illnesses) was crucial to providing endless opportunities for more business. Ultimately, demographic research provided much-needed information on the statistical contours of death but largely ignored the personal experiences. The next wave of scholarship beginning in the 1970s and 1980s tried to rectify this by examining death in its social and cultural context.3 These scholars looked at issues such as rituals surrounding death, the concept of dying a good death, the varied purpose and functions of funerals, and early modern expressions of grief.

Death and commemorating the dead have always been highly ritualized but in early modern England this took on specific forms. In the early modern period, death was highly visible. Historians focused initially on the cultural and household rituals around death. Unlike today where death is sanitized and usually takes place outside the home, in the early modern period sickness and death were domestic events.4 Historians became interested in the preparation of a sick person’s soul before death. The individuals should already have lived as a good Christian but, when sickness struck them, they should act to ensure their affairs were in order.5 Following the Reformation, a ‘good death’ remained important. Protestant belief in predestination, in other words, that God marks people out before birth, meant that people were ever watchful for signs that they, or their families, might be one of God’s elect.6 A good death might be just the sort of proof they sought.

3 Phillipe Ariès, Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present (PLACE: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 3.
4 Ariès, Western Attitudes Toward Death, 6.
Historians, though, largely focused on preparation for death as an expression of religion rather than on the emotional toll incurred by loss.

Subsequently, scholarship on funerals emerged because scholars began to look at rituals through a new lens as part of the anthropological influence on history. This scholarship particularly focused on funerals as ritualized public performances. Historians recognized that failure to explicate the symbolism and social content of mortuary customs had made it difficult to appreciate the effects of religious controversy on the social experience of death and obscured the essential interaction of ritual, personal identity, and social life. Funerals became occasions for marking social place and a cultural vehicle for contemplating one’s ultimate fate in the public eye. For elites, whose funerals and mourning periods were public events, they were strictly regulated. Despite the concentration of funerals in the upper class, in some ways, the marking of social places did not serve as such an anxiety for elites because their position in society was more assured. The practice remained more opulent among the upper class but did make its way down as a middle-class practice. These middle-class funerals were often more personal by being locally based and smaller in scale.

Funeral rituals also offer insight into the perceived desires of the deceased and view of their place within the community. Early modern subjects demonstrate agency and interior reflection in the ritual preparation of the dying, the treatment of their remains,

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and the testimonies of grief that follow the burial. As the most prominent public ritual surrounding death, funerals feature as crucial subjects of study to understand how communities and individuals processed death in the early modern period. Funerals serve as a performance of how death is integral to life, both for the dead and for those who remain. The study of funerals as ritual helps define the context of death in the early modern household because it often centers on the social networks which death both threaten to disperse and reaffirm.

As part of the research into funerals and burials, scholars began paying attention to the business side of death. Historians investigated topics such as coffins, undertakers, and mourning dress -- mostly out of an interest in death’s accountremonts. Funerals themselves became a symbol of social standing and required considerable financial expenditure. While ordinary funerals were not as standardized compared to those of the elite, scholars noted that a precise relationship began to be established between social standing and the cost of a funeral in the early modern period. By the end of the seventeenth century, the court fashion for mourning at the time of royal death was being mimicked in other sections of society. Following this trend, by the late eighteenth-century mourning garments and accessories gained popularity in the middle class as an essential part of private mourning practice. At this point, mourning goods began gaining some attention from historians. Scholars generally recognized that mourning mementos were large items of expenditure but focused on the objects as part of the cost of a funeral or for

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12 Laqueur, "Bodies, Death," 29.
their emotional commemorative purpose, not on the production of the goods.\textsuperscript{14} This was an important step in recognizing the influence of commercial interests on death, but research was confined to larger more well-known areas such as burial fees, funeral costs, and the undertaker trade.\textsuperscript{15}

Funerals also offered a chance to explore the emotions of the living. Historians have debated the authenticity of ritually performed grief and the role of mourning objects for the living. To get a fair sense of early modern sentiment, a distinction must be made between public rites and private emotions. Mourning goods and funeral garments possess an intense intimacy for the owner.\textsuperscript{16} Objects such as gloves and rings that would be worn regularly not only ensure remembrance of the deceased but keep the memory fresh for the wearer. Further, items such as mourning spoons, which would be seen only in the household and do not play a significant public role, demonstrate genuine private pain over the loss of a friend or family. Even as part of the ritual procedure, the social and affective meanings of jewelry for its early modern wearers, how it was bequeathed, and the role it played in emotional relationships offers access to how attendants at funerals handled intense emotion.\textsuperscript{17} Funerals as a status symbol, an expression of emotion, and a cultural ritual demonstrate how one practice around death can operate on multiple levels. These studies are important for remembering the humanity of historical populations and acknowledging that loss can be commemorated in many ways, even in the context of regulated rituals.

\textsuperscript{16} Smith, "Death at the V & A," 5.
Interest in the feelings of early modern people led historians to explore personal experiences of grief. Scholars disagreed over whether grief existed on the same scale as in modern times, due to the frequency of death, or if it was expressed in a recognizable manner. This debate was especially prevalent concerning the death of children because the infant mortality rate was so high. Some scholars argued that early modern families would be desensitized to the loss of children and therefore would feel less anguish. Eventually, historians discarded this assertion and came to believe that the sting of death maintained its acuity across time for the living. Early modern accounts of death, grief, and survival provide glimpses of moments of extreme emotion before the self is disciplined and regulated by religious practice. By regarding emotions as a source of pleasure and an opportunity to build social relationships we can reach an understanding of early modern subjectivity. Focusing on expressions of grief gave scholars a better idea of an early modern person’s private experience of loss. This personalized many objects and practices surrounding death and de-emphasized the importance of religious rituals. This shift in historical study filled in gaps from earlier research that focused on overall practices rather than individual stories.

Textile historians have also examined death, by studying the production of mourning cloth. Costume history is important because of the special combination of art, design, and social and economic history it offers. Textile research provides context about the makers and sellers of goods, focusing on economic impact. Mourning was an active trade in the London area, requiring patents and knowledge, built upon the skill of

20 Smith, "Death at the V & A," 5.
immigrants for the most part. In the late seventeenth century, fifteen thousand Huguenot refugees settled in and around London, greatly expanding the silk weaving and knitting industry. These craftsmen from the continent brought new technical skills that transformed the London silk and mourning market, reducing demand for French and Italian products. Historians know that mourning had a considerable economic impact because the ‘Black Branch’ of textiles was often in conflict with the mainstream industry, such as silk and lace makers, that resented long mandatory mourning periods. This research established the presence of a mourning market within the textile sector. While historians have mostly overlooked textiles' relevance to death culture, the research demonstrates a niche mourning economy was growing in early modern England.

Recently, studies of women’s roles in the textile industry, independently or through their husbands, have increased. The textile market is ever-shifting and the garments tailors exclusively made in the seventeenth century were being made by a variety of artisans, including women, by the start of the eighteenth century. Expansion of the market aligned with the growing power of capitalism and while it potentially led to higher costs and expectations for mourners, it also created more jobs for new categories of workers. I am interested in expanding upon this exploration of marginalized groups as producers and makers of textiles rather than just wearers. Historians shifting to this topic demonstrates curiosity about ordinary people rather than elites or trends in the industry as

24 Fritz, "The Trade in Death," 308.
a whole. Textile historians have provided much-needed information about the economic status of workers, prices of goods, and workplace structure that, perhaps inadvertently, adds color and depth to the landscape of the business of death.

In early modern England, specific clothing for expressions of grief has been a court fashion since the late Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{27} In a royal funeral, those taking part in the procession wore full-length black mourning cloaks and hoods, as did their attendants. The quality and amount of material in these garments were strictly regulated by the College of Arms, according to the rank of the wearer. As mandated mourning came to include larger swaths of society the makers were increasingly influenced by arbiters of taste, politeness, fashion, and respectability. Funerals and mourning periods were powerful public events during which individuals could project their wealth, position, and power. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the custom of wearing mourning dress slowly trickled down through the lesser aristocracy and into the middle class.\textsuperscript{28} As mourning clothes and accessories came to be viewed as status symbols for sectors of society besides the royal family, they became essential goods for nobles and the ambitious middle class and a market around mourning objects grew.

Even with the attention historians have paid to the use and commercial aspects of mourning goods, much remains to be done. Scholars are starting to explore some aspects of the commercialization of death. However, research must be done to expand the areas of study. The commodification of death reaches into daily life and goes far beyond funerary and burial practices. The fields of textile history and death studies remain largely separate and despite the prevalence of mourning as a practice and trade its

\textsuperscript{27} Taylor, \textit{Mourning Dress}, 91.
\textsuperscript{28} Taylor, \textit{Mourning Dress}, 92.
marginalization in scholarship persists. Scholarship has neglected both the large-scale workings of a mourning market and the lives of mourning makers. Mourning goods usually feature as a side topic within larger works focusing on cultural understandings of death, the textile industry, and funerals. Yet, the mourning business is a vital area of study because mourning practices serve as a point of contact between personal grief, outward display and commemoration, fashion, and the economy. Historians have failed to make these connections.

I propose to investigate how the market around mourning goods functioned in terms of both production and consumption. This includes topics such as who is making the objects, what are the prices of goods, what are the working conditions, and how much of a financial burden mourning imposes on consumers. I will try to bridge the divide between the economics of the textile industry, the ritual use of mourning goods, and the expression of emotions concerning death in the early modern period. I am attempting an economic and social history about the producers and consumers of mourning objects. This topic will also touch on women and immigrants involved in the production of garments and accessories that have been overlooked in earlier periods of historical study. Evaluating their contribution could reshape the way that the mourning market and other businesses around death are understood.

Mourning goods are important because the field needs more investigation into garment-making trades during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to narrow the scholarly gulf between knowledge of the cultural and social meanings of mourning dress and the economic and social histories of their makers. Focusing on mourning goods as both significant financial burdens and emotional symbols will illuminate the balance
between monetary limits and inner sentiment. Historians have overlooked mourning as an intersectional expression of grief, finance, and fashion across gender and class lines. While not all mourning experiences were equivalent, understanding the multi-faceted role of the mourning business can shed light on crevices within the historiography of death and create a more real sense of early modern life.
Chapter 2: “Made with Expedition”

In practice, death entailed a variety of expenses and spawned numerous businesses. To ensure a Christian burial, custom required payment of fees to the church. However, sensing an opportunity for profit, many parishes turned these voluntary payments into a standard scale of charges.\(^{29}\) These fees for performing a variety of tasks and services provided a boost to parish funds and a supplement to meager clerical incomes. Clergymen sometimes overstepped the mark by refusing to bury unless they were paid in advance.\(^{30}\) These costs could then be followed up by the coffin makers who provide the departed’s final resting place. Coffin makers catered to their customers by providing coffins of lead, oak, elm, or pine, decorated with different sorts of nails, lined with various qualities of cloth and furnished with the mattress of one’s choice.\(^{31}\) Perhaps the most infamous of professions trading in death were the undertakers. Profiting from the decline of the heralds, this class of merchants rented out cloaks, hangings, escutcheons, coach coverings, and even coaches to whoever could afford them.\(^{32}\) Undertakers advertised these skills alongside other death services and often pressured their clients who in times of grief and societal pressure could be quite suggestible.

Following all of these arrangements would be the funeral, often dazzlingly expensive and underpinned by numerous businesses. The early modern funeral was marked by the distinct image of a mourning procession dressed in black. If so many businesses sprung up focused on one deceased individual, then the demand to clothe an entire audience of survivors could fuel a market in mourning.


\(^{30}\) Cressey, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, 458.

\(^{31}\) Laqueur, "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals," 114.

\(^{32}\) Laqueur, "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals," 113.
Those in the mourning business competed to monopolize types of cloth because appropriate colors were limited by mandate. On April 20, 1730, John Gastineau and William Mons of Spitalfields submitted a petition addressed to the King for letters patent under the Great Seal for the sole use and benefit from manufacturing mourning crape called Vallee Crape or Bollognia Crape for fourteen years; until then, such crape was manufactured only in Italy. Gastineau and Mons made sure to emphasize in the petition that they had “at great expense and by their indefatigable pains and industry” mastered “manufacturing the said Crape here at home” so that the fabrics were in “every respect as good as those imported” but “considerably cheaper.” Gastineau and Mons also highlight that if granted the patent “the importation of Raw Silk will be increased” and “great numbers of the poor will be employed” due to increased domestic textile work. Ultimately, the patent reader was persuaded by the claims of providing work, enhancing commerce, and making mourning cloth less expensive and recommended that the sovereign grant the petition.

The request for a personal patent demonstrates the competitiveness of textile work within London. The source also acknowledges the transition of textile knowledge from the European continent to England. An influx of Huguenot craftsmen, as well as Dutch immigrants, brought new technical skills responsible for the progress in British textile technology and kickstarted the growth of the silk and textile economy in London. Due to the growing textile market, royal officials were persuaded that silk manufacturing could provide viable employment opportunities for the London poor and simultaneously...

33 The National Archives, SP 36/18/146
34 TNA, SP 36/18/146
35 TNA, SP 36/18/146
drive down domestic costs. While the impact of a single patent was likely negligible beyond the lives of the two makers, Gastineau and Mons, the contribution of the industry to larger society and being supported by officials should be noted.

The mourning sector of the textile industry gained prominence because the most important means of showing both formal respect for the dead and a personal sense of loss was mourning dress. The pomp or grandeur of funeral accouterments demonstrated that the social identity of the deceased had not been entirely extinguished. Mourning clothes and mourning jewelry were more popular in London, Middlesex, and the surrounding areas than in the provinces. Therefore, the industry centers grew in the corresponding cities. Perhaps the principal beneficiaries of mourning mandates were the clothiers, drapers, and dyers who supplied the black fabric. Middle class consumers were increasingly driving and directing the popularity and pervasiveness of mourning goods into the eighteenth century, and makers increasingly responded to this demand. This chapter will focus on the trade in mourning cloth and rings in London during the early modern period. It will focus on the lives of the manufacturers and how they sought to create a livelihood connected to the mourning market.

Advertising

The makers of mourning goods actively advertised their wares, emphasizing their low prices, quick production, and fashionable taste. Mourning rings represented a particularly distinctive facet of mourning and funerary etiquette that provided a more intimate and personal mode for expressions of grief. For much of the studied time period

37 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 449.
38 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 440.
mourning rings were still out of reach for the majority of the English population.\textsuperscript{40} Craftsmen of mourning rings became more numerous starting in the mid seventeenth century.

After the upheavals of the Civil War years, the relative economic and political security and stability established under King Charles II provided a welcome boost to the goldsmiths’ trade. Though the craft was later depressed by plague and fire which affected Cheapside, during the Restoration materials became more readily obtainable, and prices were no longer so stee\textsuperscript{41} By the end of the seventeenth century, mourning rings had become so popular and were in such high demand, that the specialty eventually became a full time occupation for some craftsmen.\textsuperscript{42} Urban goldsmiths catered to both those living within the cities and more rural buyers. Whereas gloves could be obtained locally, executors and relatives of the deceased usually had to apply directly to goldsmiths (often in London), and the making and engraving of rings entailed heightened costs.\textsuperscript{43}

Trade cards were prevalent from the end of the seventeenth century, providing a limited space for sellers to differentiate themselves from competitors. The cards could act as advertising and provide a map to the store. Trade cards not only illustrate goods for sale, but illuminate attitudes towards luxury, ownership, fashion, taste, and personal virtue on the part of both tradesmen and consumers.\textsuperscript{44} The dispersal of trade cards challenges the myth that advertising began in the nineteenth century as a response to an

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Middlemas, “Mourning Jewelry in England,” 10.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Middlemas, “Mourning Jewelry in England,” 235.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Charles Oman, \textit{British Rings, 800-1914} (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Middlemas, “Mourning jewelry in England,” 251.
\end{thebibliography}
industrial revolution. Rather, the cards demonstrate a more gradual consumer evolution in early modern society.\textsuperscript{45}

In contrast to advertisements seeking to persuade an anonymous public to consume particular goods and services, trade cards were freely distributed among a known or anticipated customer base to remind shoppers of a tradesman’s location and merchandise. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the cards ranged in size from a few square inches to large folio sheets, which were folded to assist portability. Trade cards were also visually distinctive, functioning as multimedia prints that combined text and images to convey and reinforce the marketing message.\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{trade_card}
\caption{Trade card for William Sharp dated to the mid to late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{47}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{47} British Museum, 1853,1210.466.
The trade card in figure one features a circular calendar surrounding a plaque with the jeweler's details. The inscription reads “Comber Goldsmith & Watch Maker Sewes Mourning Rings at the shortest Notice / The Utmost Value for Plate, rings, Lace, &c.”

Fig. 2. Trade card for Matthias Otto dated c. 1756.\(^{48}\)

Matthias Otto’s card in figure two includes at the top of the card the relative location of his shop to direct customers, as no formal street address numbering system existed at the time and then lists off his products. Notably, widow's weeds is the first item he lists. The image on the card also features a woman donning dark clothing and veil, likely mourning attire.

\(^{48}\) BM, Heal,86.54.
This elaborate trade card places the name of the seller twice near the top as well as an image of a lamb. The lamb is probably a distinctive sign that could be used as a landmark because the description of the shop's location refers to “the Lamb” twice to orient the reader. The card also contains an enormous amount of information, listing numerous things the establishment can create both in wholesale and retail forms. These items include white & black feathers, black velvet & silk hoods, black silk & velvet bonnets, black lace, black & coloured velvets, and black silk & allamodes, all of which serve mourning purposes. Additionally, in small print at the bottom, outside of the decorative frame, the card asserts that merchants may be supplied with the above ready made goods for exportation, demonstrating these goods were not just for the local market.

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49 BM, Banks, 86.88.
The last trade card comes from James Hill, a wig seller and jeweler active in 1800. The document markets Hill’s goods as “devices in hair” that were “elegantly executed” before providing the shop address. This trade card goes too far in providing information because it includes a surfeit of text at the bottom of the card, demanding a font so small it became ineffective for advertising its goods. However, within this paragraph, the trade card mentions both rings and lockets and also the use of hair in mementos. James Hill stated that “the identical hair is a matter of the first consequence, especially in mementos of deceased friends” and that he possesses the ability to make artificial hair indistinguishable from the real hair of the deceased. Before coming upon this trade card, and several other wig-seller advertisements, I had always assumed that hair included in mourning jewelry was taken directly from the deceased. However, it may

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50 BM, Banks, 94.9.
be that the burial was conducted before hair could be taken or that the deceased’s hair was not in prime condition. The wig seller's choice to market his ability to color and texture match hair demonstrates how makers, ever willing to find their niche, perceived needs and learned new skills.

Advertising was not only a way to potentially expand the maker’s customer base but to try and achieve the ultimate goal of attracting repeat customers. The importance of a maker’s relationship with their client was also touched on by Samuel Pepys in his diary. In March of 1667 Pepys wrote that “being resolved to put [himself] and wife, and Barker and Jane, W. Hewer and Tom, in mourning, and [his] two under-mayds, to give them hoods and scarves and gloves. So to [his] tailor’s” they go.① His tailor was located on Fleet Street and worked as Pepys’ regular tailor from 1665 onwards. To secure such a stable and wealthy client would be the goal of many mourning manufacturers because attracting consistent orders was the key to a stable income.

*Size and Variety of Orders*

The manufacturers advertising methods must have been effective because the evidence available on orders reveals a thriving and consistent demand for mourning goods. Some customers desired simply the dark cloth itself. Orders for the supply of liveries to City Officers billed to Lord Chamberlain between 1727 and 1738 demonstrate the scale.② These records detail a great deal of cloth being ordered over ten years. All the orders are priced at 18s. / yard with the majority calling for 4 ¾ yards of “black cloth” for “Mourning Gown.”③ The accounts include a few exceptions that order 5 ½ yards of black

① Pepys Diary, Wednesday 27 March 1667.
② The Metropolitan Archives, MISC/MSS/216 -- COL/CP/01/057.
③ TMA, MISC/MSS/216 -- COL/CP/01/057.
cloth but largely the orders stay quite consistent throughout the years. It seems that, at least for these individuals, 4 ¾ yards was the standard minimum amount of fabric to be supplied for suit orders. The price of the orders deserves some attention. With all the orders priced at 18s. / yard, the cost is notably stable and expensive. To be appropriately attired at an elite funeral would cost £4.1s. for the fabric alone. This reiterates how expensive mourning dress was, consuming, as will be shown in the next chapter, a large proportion of many individuals’ budgets.

Another example of a large order comes from a list of mourning rings to be given to Samuel Hewitt’s executors in 1725. His last will and testament features a list of eighteen friends and acquaintances to whom he wished to give mourning rings. Items such as rings were just as necessary for mourning attire as the larger garments and let the mourning industry expand beyond textiles into accessories. Though rings were often given by the deceased, clothes were paid for by the mourner, although sometimes wills contained bequests of mourning suits. Not only is eighteen rings a large expenditure for a customer but it demonstrates a significant sale for a goldsmith and the high demand for mourning goods that drove the market. If the rings are from the same maker, eighteen rings is a considerable order to make on short notice so there may have been set designs and styles to be ordered, or perhaps some rings were kept in stock available for small personalizations to condense production time. These orders demonstrate the range of the mourning industry, both in the scale of orders and in the items being commissioned.

Inevitably, orders occasionally went wrong. Interactions with customers were much more personal than in the modern period which could be good or bad for the maker. One letter from 1728 features a man complaining about how “his Taylor had not made

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54 TMA, B/HRS/545.
[his mourning coat] well” so it had to be sent back into the city and “did not arrive till late night at 10 a clock,” causing a considerable delay in commencing mourning arrangements. This exchange could be harmful to the tailor as the makers would rely on maintaining positive relationships with clients and gaining a good reputation to expand their businesses.

Problems Resulting from Orders

Due to sumptuary laws regulating these cloth orders, the “Black Branch” of the textile industry came into frequent conflict with workers involved in silk manufacturing in Spitalfields and Canterbury, colored ribbon manufacturers in Coventry, along with others. While most tailors and manufacturers included mourning in their repertoire rather than specializing, certain makers were much better positioned to pivot to mourning production leaving others to feel the strain of their sales being restricted more sharply. Regular fashion industry makers, unaccustomed to producing mourning material, stood to lose a lot of profit since the market for high-fashion and for new mourning dresses was the same: affluent customers. Especially hard to swallow was the fact that a prolonged mourning period observed by many individuals could impact both the fall and spring cycles of a fashion year. Other branches of the textile industry attempted to decrease the adverse impact on their livelihood by petitioning the crown for relief. These petitions sought to shorten the lengthy mourning periods, complaining that they reduced their trade and led to widespread unemployment. These petitions were the most frequent and

55 TNA, SP 78/196/64.
56 Fritz, "The Trade in Death," 309.
effective means of curbing mourning periods and restoring balance between textile workers.

Numerous petitions from a variety of people involved in the textile trade were presented to the crown in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth centuries. In 1680, one petition signed by eighty lacemen and mercers, explained the devastating impact mourning could have on their business. The manufacturers stressed that their entire livelihood depended on the buying and selling of dyed silk. However, during public mourning there was no demand for silk. This meant that for weeks to months at a time the weavers were “deprived of their whole subsistance for themselves & Families” with no means to pay back debts.57 This document contains 50 signatures at the bottom, showing the number of active silkweavers and widespread support.

The mercers and lacemen complained about a recent rash of mourning mandates. They were constantly providing themselves with great quantities of all sorts of colored silks and gold and silver lace and therefore being caught off guard by a mourning requirement rendered them unable to dispose of these goods. Due to the unpredictable nature of death, and the following mourning period, the makers could not demand more notice but did implore for shorter mandates. For some, mourning mandates took away their income and meant they were unable to pay “taxes [or support] themselves and Numerous families” so they begged the Queen for some relief.58

In 1709 a petition from the silkweavers of London and Canterbury was sent to the court of St. James protesting an order for mourning for the Prince of Denmark. The document highlights the “deplorable condition to which [silkweavers] are reduced by

57 TNA, SP 34/36/78.
58 TNA, SP 34/35/1.
reason of the general mourning” and mentions past petitions they have submitted.\textsuperscript{59} The result of the petition was a decree from the Queen declaring that she did not expect her subjects to continue mourning. This decision demonstrates that the silkweaver petitions were being listened to in some cases and could be effective.

In April 1714, the Company of Silk Weavers from London and Canterbury and the Company of Merchants trading to the Levant composed another petition on the subject of mourning. They noted that mourning for royals in England was usually for the period of 12 months but sometimes longer. However, they could not find any orders of solemn mourning before the death of Charles the Second, arguing that the custom is relatively new. This is important because they sought to delegitimize the practice before requesting that the periods be shortened. The silkweavers and merchants were against long frequent mournings because they caused “great misfortunes” to the “ruin of themselves and their families” for which they needed relief.\textsuperscript{60} The Merchant Taylors guild, including silk weavers, was a big enough part of the economy to receive attention from the Crown.

This document clarifies that non-Black Branch makers had to petition for each distinct mourning period rather than being able to alter the startinting period of the traditional periods. Therefore, an undue burden was regularly placed upon silk and other textile manufacturers, reducing their profits and suddenly decreasing demand. The frequent mention of family, also present in the other petitions, is important because it reminds the reader that these manufacturers were working people whose families depended on their ability to provide consistent income. For some in the industry,

\textsuperscript{59} TNA, PC 1/2/154.
\textsuperscript{60} TNA, PC 1/14/79.
mourning was a source of job instability. However, despite mourning’s disruption of the regular fashion industry the practice also created opportunities for other businesses, providing a spike in income for mourning makers.

Lastly, merchants trading with Turkey and Italy also drafted petitions, directing attention to the effect of the ongoing war with the Ottomans on the textile trade. Losing ships to the enemy and a shortage of material had driven trades depending on silk to gravely straitened conditions. This created not only great losses for the merchants but for all of the connected tradesmen and poor. The situation was exacerbated by “long and frequent publick Mournings” contributing to the current calamity. Mourning mandates were driving up domestic demand for foreign textiles on top of the ongoing shortage. The fifty-four signees request that her Majesty apply a remedy that she sees fit. These three petitions illustrate how mourning mandates upset demand for other textiles and these could interfere with supply and people’s livelihoods. The involved groups were organized and unified, able to find a common goal to work towards. This petition, and the previous one featuring trade to the Levant, emphasize the scale of the mourning market, and how the business grew to reach across Europe and beyond for imported material.

A letter from 1737 highlights how tailors and their apprentices worked long, additional hours under immense pressure to create mourning clothes expeditiously. If they completed the clothes late or delivered garments of sub-par quality it could greatly impact their livelihood. These short order expectations are also clear in the 1842 Report on the Employment of Women which recorded many cases of women’s eyesight being damaged by sewing mourning fabrics for long hours in poor light. Although this source

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61 TNA, SP 34/35/1.
62 Taylor, Mourning Dress, 197.
is from outside the project’s focus period it offers greater context for the conditions endured by these makers and gives a sense of their normal working conditions. Industrialization was much more prominent in 1842 but it could be inferred that conditions would not be significantly better in the early modern period, especially for seamstresses and tailors working with dark fabrics.

Workers Lives

The different branches of the textile industry may have competed but all early modern textile workers were regulated by the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors Guild. The Worshipful Company was founded before 1300, received its first royal charter in 1327, and was one of London’s Great Twelve City Livery Companies. Early records of the company are not always comprehensive but membership and apprenticeship documentation can be found as early as 1398 and became more extensive and complex starting in the later sixteenth century. The Company always had a large membership. For example, the total number of freemen and liverymen, excluding apprentices, in the 1630s has been estimated at 8,000. The Company records display a strict hierarchy, denoting which members are masters, which are wardens, and which are ordinary, while also noting their shop locations. Notably, these records focus on shop-owning and guild registered men while overlooking women and children within the family who would undoubtedly be contributing to the labor.

63 https://www.merchant-taylors.co.uk/about/company-history
65 The Guildhall Library, CLC/L/MD/C/001/MS34024/001.
Manufacturers of mourning products needed high level skills, given the unexpected nature of death, these makers often had to work very quickly with little warning to deliver mourning orders. A letter from 1737 describes how “several mantua makers have more than a hundred women employed, and work night and day, sleeping every three hours by turns” because following the death of the queen, Caroline of Ansbach, “all this world appear in mourning.” The same letter illuminates the different levels of mourning garments being produced because the writer desired a higher quality rather than “the most cheap that could be bought.”

High levels of employment in the textile industry was viewed as a social benefit. The patent concerning sole manufacturing of mourning cloths highlights a contribution to the public good as well as part of its argument. The patent asserted that if the makers, Gastineau and Mons, introduced locally-produced crape into the kingdom, great numbers of the poor would be employed, the importation of raw silk would be increased, and the said goods being in every respect as good as those imported, would be sold considerably cheaper. Therefore, it seems that the government saw textile work and silkweaving as a benefit and a way to occupy the “idle poor” population while lowering domestic costs.

The number of tailors and textile-related workers who were operating during this period is staggering, reflecting the fact that every order had to be meticulously hand cut and sewn. The same labor-intensive method would be required for goldsmiths or silversmiths producing mourning accessories. For garment-makers, the first practical sewing machine would not be invented until 1851. The specialized skills of hand manufacturers were learned in lengthy apprenticeships. Examining several apprenticeship

66 AY 1709, Letter from John Collier, 1737.
67 AY 1709, Letter from John Collier, 1737.
68 TNA, SP 36/18/146.
records revealed that the most common contract length was seven years in the late seventeenth century, with rare exceptions of eight years.\textsuperscript{69} In the later records, there are examples of female apprentices including Sarah Epiuo, Susan Miller, and Susan Mercer. Susan Mercer is especially notable as a tailor active in the 1650s and 1660s. She was called a ‘mourning seller’ and took on a female apprentice, Priscilla Prigg, on 16 March 1663 for 7 years.\textsuperscript{70} By 1670, six female apprentices had been bound to coat-makers, salesmen, and a ‘Mourning seller’, suggesting female involvement in the ready-made clothing industry.\textsuperscript{71}

Tailors and seamstresses' knowledge of fabrics and experience in fittings under harsh deadlines made them valuable skilled workers. This dynamic may be easy to forget in our currently industrialized age but adds depth to our appreciation of interactions between manufacturers and their patrons.

\textit{Conclusion}

The makers of mourning goods were regular working-class people and made up a significant portion of tradesmen within London. They came together in a guild to give themselves more bargaining power with the government and with consumers even as they competed individually for customers. Long work hours and large orders were normal, especially within the Black Branch, requiring intense attention to detail and commitment to the craft in order to deliver suitable garments and maintain reputation. Business owners promoted themselves by distributing trade card advertisements upon which they highlighted their skills, prices, and location. The relatively small space on the cards

\textsuperscript{69} TGL, CLC/L/MD/C/018/MS34038/018.
\textsuperscript{70} TGL, CLC/L/MD/C/018/MS34038/015.
\textsuperscript{71} Birt, “Women, Guilds and the Tailoring Trades,” 158.
makes them especially appealing as objects of study because their limited size required makers to carefully select the information, images, and goods they wanted to highlight for potential customers. Trade cards reveal the identities of numerous tradesmen, retailers, and shopkeepers, opening a window into how the manufacturing and retail trade in mourning goods operated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Mourning goods as a growth sector in the market caused tensions with other sectors of the industry, bringing them into conflict with other powerful groups but also revealing the significance of the mourning trade and its place in the interconnected textile economy. Mourning formed part of an important livelihood for significant parts of the textile manufacturer population in early modern England. During this period, mourning grew into a strong and competitive industry that textile makers could encounter both as an opportunity and an obstacle. The goods that the mourning industry produced were not just required items but goods with considerable emotional meaning for their purchasers. The next chapter focuses on the experience of mourning consumers. While for businesses mourning could be a financial opportunity, for the customers, meeting societal expectations of mourning often became a source of financial stress.
Chapter 3 - “Extraordinary Expense”

The early modern funeral procession marked the end of the transition from life into death. The body’s final trip to a resting place was an important journey. The transportation of the dead was a civil affair, balancing the estate and circumstance of the deceased with the social and cultural concerns of the living. Depending on the deceased’s social status the body could be moved with quiet dignity or lavish expense. Most funeral journeys were short, going no further than the nearest parish church. But people of high social status often required burial in a place of honor some distance from where they died.

Adjusted for economic resources, these obligations of love, status, and service were felt across the social spectrum. Intricate funerals had all the trappings of an elaborate linear theater, a social ballet choreographed with mourners and marchers, biers and hearse, escutcheons, banners, and palls. Mourning garb, mourning gifts, and the proper provision of refreshment added to the expense of the performance, especially because the most important means of showing both formal respect for the dead and a personal sense of loss was mourning-dress. The costs could rise to strain family funds, but the investment was meant to pay off in terms of dignity, honor, and reputation.

Mourning practices demanded a lot from early modern individuals. Beyond privately processing the death of someone in their lives, mourning called for proper public displays of emotion mediated by societal expectations of dress, accessorization, and household presentation. Mourning as a performance created a new financial stressor

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72 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 436.
73 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 436.
74 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 451.
75 Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, 248.
for the mourners in addition to grief. Being able to afford presentable mourning at short notice, due to the unpredictability of death, presented a challenge. The pressure to obtain new fashionable mourning, high quality material, or, for elites, to provide large volumes of mourning cloth for their households could be quite worrisome. Since money and leisure were required for large-scale mourning, it was practiced mostly by the privileged ranks. Families often had to spend substantial amounts to afford the large quantities of black cloth that went into mourning cloaks and gowns, hangings, draperies, and covers, or the gifts of rings and gloves given to funeral guests.76

By the eighteenth century, there were fairly clear and well-established periods of mourning for close relatives: a year for husband and wife, six months for parents or parents-in-law, and three months for sister or brother.77 The periods of mourning for other relatives were less firmly fixed. For example, the mourning period for an uncle or aunt varied between three weeks and three months.78 Beyond familial obligations, the longest periods were mandated when a high-ranking member of the royal family died, which could plunge the public into months of mourning. The longest would be required for British royals but some level could be mandated for foreign sovereigns as well. For the longer periods of mourning, there were two distinct phases: full or first mourning and second or half-mourning. Full mourning demanded only shades of black and that all material must be dull. In half mourning a wider range of colors, such as mauves and greys, was permitted.79 Failure to observe full mourning or wear a mourning token

76 Cressey, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, 438.
77 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, 249.
78 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, 249.
79 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, 249.
appropriate to the closeness of a person’s relationship with the deceased could be perceived as a grievous slight.

Mourning would be required quite often for an early modern person, between obligations to royalty and to their own family or friends. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, orders were given for public mourning for the death of the Duke of Gloucester in 1700; Prince George of Denmark in 1708; Queen Anne in 1714 and King George I. in 1727. Combined with these royal mandates, Barbara Johnson’s textile collection offers special insight into the frequency of familial mourning. Her album includes five instances of mourning for family members over fifty years. For several mourning periods, such as for her mother and father, Johnson recorded multiple outfits or gowns made in different cloth or styles to give her more options in daily wear. This album is exceptional because it gives an actual sense of what the cloth looked like for its quality, range of color, and even some patterns. The most fundamental rule applied to both sexes for mourning cloth was that everything must be matte and dull. Broadcloth and other specially woven dull fabrics, such as Parramatta trimmed with crape, were required. The ubiquity of death in the early modern period ensured that funerals were frequent and mourning was often required.

For example, the death of Samuel Pepys’s mother in 1667 occasioned the first stage of mourning, with the usual intensity of black robes, hoods, scarves, and gloves. Six weeks later the ‘second mourning’ began, in which Pepys’s wife could display her elegant black dress tastefully trimmed with silver lace. Pepys also ‘got a pair of shoes

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80 TNA, SP 36/1/75.
81 Victoria and Albert Museum, Barbara Johnson Album.
83 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 439.
blacked on the soles’ in readiness for his brother’s funeral in 1664, so his mourning ensemble would be perfect, even when kneeling.84

Mourning dress, which was once worn only by the upper class, became widespread among the middle classes by the late seventeenth century as the merchant class acquired more wealth and the consumer revolution began.85 The amount of money spent on mourning attire for funerals by both elites and some middle class households is staggering. From the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century, the wearing of mourning by family members, close relations and friends, and servants was usual. This can be seen from the similar amount of probate accounts recording payments for mourning. The average costs of mourning in the period 1671-1710 were £44 and £23 for mean and median respectively.86 While most of the sources this thesis will examine are from elite sources there are some examples of middle-class expenditure.

84 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 441-442.
Fig. 5. This page of Ms. Johnson’s album features four swatches of mourning cloth, all for her mother, as well as one swatch for a riding garment.\textsuperscript{87}

How Much is Being Spent

The accounts of the White couple provide some insight into the financial priorities of the family. On July 8th, 1710 the couple received a bill for the purchase of 50 funeral rings for a total of £24. 14s. 6d. It can be assumed that these rings were bought for the funeral of Mr. White because another bill for that occasion arrived on July 9th, 1710. The total cost of Mr. White’s funeral, including items such as black feather plumes, fine cloaks, hat bands, forty men in black, and silk cushions, came to £44. 13s. 2d. In October of 1710, Mrs. White received a bill from a textile maker for £15. 2s. ¼d. All of these bills bring the total cost of the funeral and funeral preparation to at least £84. 9s. 8 ¼d.

In comparison, for 122 esquires buried between 1671 and 1800, the funeral expenses ranged from £5 to £419, while those of 50 gentlemen ranged from £0.2 to £154. For London citizens, the funeral spending ranged from £0.8 to £341. Many merchants had funeral costs of more than £100 while there was only one gentleman with a funeral exceeding £100. It was very rare for the funerals of middle income individuals to cost more than £100 even when their wealth was as great as the upper classes. Comparing account books, the average funeral expenses range between £10 and £20 while those of the upper classes cost more than £80. The average income of several occupations gives a sense of where the couple sat on the scale. Temporal Lords had an average annual family income of £6,060, Baronets had £1,500, Knights had £800, 88 TNA, E 219/460.
89 TNA, E 219/460.
90 TNA, E 219/460.
92 Pirohakul The Funeral in England, 75.
93 Pirohakul The Funeral in England, 75.
94 Pirohakul, The Funeral in England, 76.
Gentlemen had £280, Persons in the law had £154, Greater Merchants had £400, Lesser Merchants had £200, manufacturing trades had £38 and building trades had £25.\textsuperscript{95}

While for elite families this funeral would not be a great expense, the accounts of the White family provide information on other expenditures for context. Mrs. White is recorded to have spent £20 for a year of rent and Mr. White, before his death, paid the sum of £18 for full rent of his house.\textsuperscript{96} A few years after her husband's death Mrs. White paid £104 in money and taxes to pay for four years worth of rent.\textsuperscript{97} The comparative cost of rent and the funeral demonstrate that the Whites were likely not a working class couple but also not of the extreme elite class that most sources stem from.

The White family household accounts reveal a significant amount about financial priorities during the early modern period. Compared to rent, usually one of the most expensive costs in someone's life, Mrs. White paid triple her annual rent for her husband’s funeral. Therefore, it is not only high ranking elites who were investing considerably in material items related to mourning and in a respectable funeral. There was communal social pressure to provide a respectable funeral for the deceased, to dress appropriately, and to adorn your house with mourning. The reputation of survivors depended upon their burying the dead properly.\textsuperscript{98} However, even these expenditures would be more than a working class family could afford.

Elites dominate the source material around funerals and mourning because they have the best preserved records of spending. The percentage of probate accounts recording payment for mourning for the wealthier groups is greater than for the poorer

\textsuperscript{95} Pirohakul, \textit{The Funeral in England}, 26.
\textsuperscript{96} TNA, E 219/460.
\textsuperscript{97} TNA, E 219/460.
\textsuperscript{98} Houlbrooke, \textit{Death, Religion and the Family}, 292.
grou\textsuperscript{99} This could be due to the fact that mourning dress in this period was still quite costly. Landed individuals not only had to order mourning goods for themselves but were often responsible for servants within their household and for providing certain mourning items to guests. Providing garments or cloth for the larger household was a major undertaking. Edward Thursby allowed 13s. 4d. to each of his farmers and tenants (he named eighteen) ‘To buy so much black cloth as shall make each a mourning coat, to accompany my corpse’ at his burial in 1602.\textsuperscript{100} The last service they could do for their master was to appear in black to accompany his body's final journey. Consul Castres complained in 1750 of the burden of providing for as few as fourteen people, inquiring whether they could file expenses under a special “bill of extraordinaries” that would allow him to record it in a special category in his records and presumably receive some support.\textsuperscript{101} For some though, to supply fourteen would be a relief; a list of those in her late majesty's household who required mourning came to a total of 143 servants.\textsuperscript{102}

The account book of the Countess of Shaftesbury details not only the number of servants who required mourning dress but also the amount of cloth she was providing and the cost of each order. The most common order size per servant was three yards, although some are much larger going up to ten or even eighteen yards. The price of the cloth also varies greatly, starting at 6 s. / yard and soaring up to 13 or 18s. / yard for others. The orders also feature other items such as black cloth to cover the coach and black baize to hang in the house. The total cost of these mourning orders for the Countess comes to approximately £219.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{99} Pirohakul, \textit{The Funeral in England}, 110-111.
\textsuperscript{100} Cressey, \textit{Birth, Marriage & Death}, 441.
\textsuperscript{101} TNA, SP 89/47/70 - Folio 147.
\textsuperscript{102} TNA, PC 1/2/249.
\textsuperscript{103} TNA, PRO 30/24/43/71.
As an account book, this source does not provide the reason for the order of mourning cloth. Therefore, it is unclear if there has been a royal death causing a general order that demands the family provide mourning quickly or if buying mourning dress for servants is a regular occurrence. Perhaps the servants would receive new mourning items on a semi-standardized cycle. Notably, mourning was treated and recorded as a normal expense alongside other businesses and regular requirements in the Countess's ledger. However, it is unclear how the servants were separated into the different cloth price/quality groups, although a seniority system might have been in place. This source shows not only the scale of household members that elites would be expected to provide for but insight into the specific financial costs they bore.

Problems of Expense

The high cost of these funerals could cause familial tensions, as in the funeral of Joseph Edmond, which was discussed in a legal deposition between his widow and daughter. His widow, Elizabeth, had arranged the funeral and approved expenses such as over £100 of mourning rings to distribute and an additional cost of over £272 to provide several people with mourning apparel. Including charges for upholstery and wine, the event cost approximately £633, a considerable sum. Elizabeth was accused by Joseph’s daughter, Anne, of mishandling the expenses of the event. Anne asserted that she should have had a say in how her father’s funeral was “observed and performed” for the public. However, perhaps more importantly, Anne emphasized that the same amount should have been paid to her out of his personal effects which were given to the widow. The high costs of funerals could be a source of tension, even within prosperous upper-class

104 TNA, E 134/4/Geo1/Hil 8.
families. Mourning-related purchases were necessary because mourning gear helped to
distinguish funeral participants from mere onlookers, and the quality and amount of black
cloth served further to identify those most intimately associated with the deceased. The
fear that money had not been spent responsibly or that their inherited share would suffer
somehow must be balanced with the fear of not displaying an appropriate expression of
grief and stately ritual for the deceased.

The expectation of donning mourning apparel and the correlated cost became a
financial obstacle for many consumers. It was common to request an allowance from an
employer or to borrow mourning from friends and family. Three ambassadors called for
allowances in letters to the Secretary of State in London, listing the details of their
expenses and how they sought to cover the cost. The ambassador to Holland requested
the sum of £150 for hangings in his house and black cloth for himself and his family.
The ambassador in St. Petersburg complained of having received two mourning orders
without receiving any allowance for the “extraordinary charges” when in the past he had
collected money to help pay for family costs. Lastly, the ambassador to Portugal wrote
to the Secretary of State about needing to provide fourteen people with cloaks and
inquired about whether the cost may be charged to his “bill of extraordinaries.”

Funeral expenses underline how many mourning goods were required. Thomas
Guy’s funeral in 1725 cost a total of £308 with a significant portion being spent on
mourning. £10 was spent on “hanging the great hall in deep mourning,” £8 for
“hanging the courtrooms and Lady room,” another £4 for “hanging the Lobby, stair case,

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106 TNA, SP 84/90.
107 TNA, SP 91/13/43.
108 TNA, SP 89/47.
& bordering the Hall yard” showing that decorating the room alone reached £20, a formidable cost for an average Londoner.\textsuperscript{110} It is unclear if makers would decorate or embellish the hangings or simply provide dark cloth. Regardless, mourning expectations begin to add up very quickly as a big sale for the manufacturers. This funeral also spent £18 on “6 hatbands & 6 top’ t black gloves,” £16.5s.6 for “93 best crape hatbands for Mourners Clergy supporters of the pall,” and another three pounds for “6 scarves covered with black crape.”\textsuperscript{111} Hat bands were also possible sales to more middle class customers. At the funeral for a young woman, Thomas Turner, a shopkeeper and schoolmaster, gave away 9 hatbands.\textsuperscript{112}

Even ambassadors complained of the cost and expectation of mourning. Receiving an allowance was a job perk but also a genuinely welcomed financial relief. The discourse shows the variety of mourning materials that were being bought -- not just clothes but also hangings for the house and rooms. As highlighted in the Russian letter, the financial obstacle of acquiring and producing mourning on demand was not a one time event but a lifelong ever repeating hurdle that could not be avoided. Notably, mourning is referred to as an ‘extraordinary’ cost and there is a clear desire for some support or relief from the system to help lighten that. Similarly, in 1751 three navy officers, Mr. James, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Benge, wrote to their board requesting a mourning allowance, stating that they had been given sums of £5 and £4 each previously when Queen Caroline had died.\textsuperscript{113} This option would not be available in most other jobs

\textsuperscript{110} TMA, H9/GY/T1/14.
\textsuperscript{111} TMA, H9/GY/T1/14.
\textsuperscript{112} D. Vaisey, \textit{The Diary of Thomas Turner}, 78.
\textsuperscript{113} TNA, ADM 106/1092/138.
or for the lower class, although, as discussed above, household servants of upper-class families could expect to be provided with mourning cloth.

Numerous extant letters cite the stress of affording mourning. Sir Alexander Cuming wrote to Lord Harrington requesting money for the acquisition of “new” mourning within the next two weeks and inquired about his £300 per annum pension to help pay.\textsuperscript{114} A man named Raby wrote to his friend Boyle complaining about managing the “double expense” of unexpected mourning orders on top of attending a royal wedding.\textsuperscript{115} Therefore, it is implied that mourning garments were comparably expensive and specialized as garments for a wedding. Both events required costly outfits and together presented quite a formidable cost.

Additionally, Camilla Harvie wrote to Sir John Scudamore about sending him mourning for her late husband.\textsuperscript{116} This is an uncommon reference to the exchange of mourning among the upper class. Some families tried to keep costs down by sharing mourning attire. This strategy would be especially effective for shorter mourning periods or a single funeral. The movement of mourning goods among groups of people is an important demonstration of the objects value within society.

\textit{Second-Hand Market}

Mourning items were valuable enough within the early modern world to be part of a prominent second hand pawning market. The resale market could help the lower class afford certain items but it also created a demand for stolen objects which could be resold for profit. Several court cases contain information on the types of items manufactured for

\textsuperscript{114} TNA, SP 36/44/10.  
\textsuperscript{115} TNA, SP 90/4/787.  
\textsuperscript{116} TNA, C 115/100 M.18.7513.
people and deemed valuable enough to steal as well as some of the goods resale prices. These sources demonstrate that there was not only the main mourning market of new goods operating for elites but that the items also figured within a second used or black market economy in which less wealthy consumers could participate.

These court records document the types of goods being stolen and resold and may refer to mourning attire. The items included cloth garments such as black hoods, a woman’s mourning gown, black petticoats, and silk stockings. One of these ordinary accounts is especially interesting because the defendant was charged with stealing nine mourning cloaks from an undertaker. Losing nine cloaks would be a large loss for the undertaker and the large number poses questions of its own. The undertaker could have held those clothes to appropriately dress his workers when required or, perhaps the cloaks were available to the community for rent if purchasing mourning was unrealistic, creating another secondhand market. Beyond textiles, mourning rings were one of the most commonly stolen items. This makes sense as mourning rings would often be found with other jewelry that might be valuable. In the trial accounts mourning rings are often listed as distinct items, separate from other gold or silver rings.

Helpfully, the same trials often contain information about the prices some stolen mourning goods could be resold for and even where they were resold. In one case involving the reselling of mourning rings, William Brown and Joseph Whitlock allegedly broke into the home of James des Romaines and stole a number of items, including some mourning rings. The men passed off one of the rings to their friend Ralph Mitchell who went with his wife to “Bodenham’s” with a stolen mourning ring and were told that it was

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117 The Old Bailey, T17280501-22, OA17170626, T17450530-15.
118 OB, OA17170626.
119 OB, T17331205-52, T17331205-53.
“very light” so the buyer only gave them five shillings for it. Mitchell was involved in another case of selling a stolen mourning ring to “Bodenham.” This sale was of a gold mourning ring with the name of Ann des Romaines engraved on the outside, and Mitchell received a guinea for it. The prices of these mourning ring resales can be compared to the resale of a mourning dress, three black hoods, and an apron for 24s. Interestingly, one second hand seller states that she would “pull the black gown and petticoat to pieces, to make herself mourning for her aunt” rather than resell the goods for profit. The secondhand market was the main avenue in which average people would interact with mourning goods and demonstrate the value of the objects. However, it also shows the amount of financial stress being put upon all levels of society to turn out respectable mourning to the best of their ability.

Conclusion

Mourning was an important part of early modern funerary practices and expressions of grief. As Lady Sussex, who had just lost her husband, expressed when she told Ralph Verney in 1643, “I would not neglect anything for his burial that may express my love and value of him; it will cost a great deal of money, but I must not be failing in my last service to him.” In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ‘mourning’ was a necessary item for funerals for both the upper and middle class. Such expectations created a financial stressor on consumers striving to meet the social standards.

Additionally, the mourning items of house hangings, dresses, and accessories, such as

120 OB, T17331205-52.
121 OB, T17331205-53.
122 OB, T17280501-22.
123 OB, T17450530-15.
124 Cressey, Birth, Marriage & Death, 449.
rings, evolved as new fashions emerged, creating pressure to continuously engage with the market in buying the newest and best goods. On top of changes in fashion, the omnipresence and unpredictability of death meant that early modern individuals would be surprised by frequent funerals and might have to scramble to acquire sufficient materials during times of limited financial security. The frequency is also important because the mourning aspects of funerals and required mourning periods were often one of the most expensive pieces of honorary death practices. This can be seen in the recorded expenditure on the funeral of Lord Brooke, performed at Warwick in 1677, which was nearly £1,191. Blacks accounted for nearly two-thirds of this sum. The logistics of mourning were a thorn in many people’s sides and their complaints, treatment of mourning costs, and efforts to reduce charges illuminate the more practical and financial aspects of the tradition. Beyond expectations of reputation, one reason early modern people may have been so willing to spend on these goods was the real psychological and emotional relief they provided while surrounded by so much death and when facing a future without a loved one.

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Chapter 4: “Memento Mori”

On November 9th, 1717 Francis Hosier, a naval officer, wrote in a letter that “it has pleased God to take away my poor son Will” and a few days later he wrote another letter humbly begging the Navy for permission to wear a mourning ring in remembrance of his deceased son. His two letters remind us that mourning objects were not only valuable and expensive but could also be a genuine expression of personal loss and a source of comfort. The example of Francis Hosier provides insight into the personal experience of death in the early modern world and the ways that objects served as a conduit for these emotions.

To wear mourning items, especially rings or jewelry, was deeply personal and could extend beyond mandated mourning periods. Rings were worn habitually on the survivors' fingers displaying their loss for the rest of the world to see and keeping the former loved one in mind. While objects do not possess meaning on their own, the collective way in which an object is placed into a narrative, associated with something beyond itself, or with past experiences, all endow said object with meaning. The treatment of objects creates a collective meaning and allows them to act as familiar entry points for shared feelings. The feeling of going through the same emotional process as others is reassuring and satisfying, and is a key to the functionality of civilized social life.

Some of these objects are so personal, identifying intimate connections, that analyzing them feels almost like an intrusion on private grief. Recreating the emotions of

\[126\] TNA, ADM 106/711, ADM 106/711/180.
the early modern world is complex due to how emotional expression is intertwined with both social dynamics and inward feelings, so that the emotional experience could be said to be always changing.\textsuperscript{129} Objects can provide windows into the experience of grief because, beyond displaying status, mourning goods were an important part of the emotive regime: the set of normative emotions and the official rituals and practices that express and inculcate them.\textsuperscript{130}

Importantly, mourning accessories, especially rings, were more accessible across classes than full mourning outfits. Scrolled, enameled, or delicately painted items and finely executed hair-work compositions might be costly and labor intensive, with jewelers and goldsmiths often engaging specialist outworkers and craftsmen to complete these more exclusive and bespoke commissions. However, there is evidence as early as the 1730s of cheaper alternatives and more affordable pieces being manufactured and worn.\textsuperscript{131}

Some mourning items, especially clothes, would be passed down in families through wills, serving both to remember past generations and to lower costs. It is sometimes difficult to identify precisely what constitutes a mourning bequest, particularly when that testamentary gift concerns a piece of personal jewelry or where the bequest takes the form of a token monetary sum (perhaps, implicitly understood at the time by the recipient to imply the purchase of a ring).\textsuperscript{132} However, it is important to highlight the handed-down aspect of the goods to emphasize that they did serve both a ritual and

\textsuperscript{129} Bodice, \textit{The History of Emotions}, 62.
\textsuperscript{130} Bodice, \textit{The History of Emotions}, 70.
\textsuperscript{131} Middlemas, “Mourning jewelry in England” 270-271.
\textsuperscript{132} Middlemas, “Mourning jewelry in England,” 10.
psychological purpose -- and it was these cultural and personal emotional purposes that helped fuel the demand.

*Mourning Ring Design*

Rings decorated with funereal imagery were left in wills to family and friends. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the practice of bequeathing rings belonging to the deceased to friends and family was gradually replaced by the custom of leaving a sum of money to buy commemorative and mourning rings.\(^{133}\) In the late seventeenth century, rings were distributed at the funeral service to be worn in memory of the deceased because grief was both a natural and cultural phenomenon, something people felt, but also something they performed.\(^{134}\) A devout individual in seventeenth-century Europe would have been conscious of the fragility of life and the ever present threat of death. Christian faith emphasized the need to prepare their souls for everlasting judgment through prayer and reflection. A ring worn on the finger would be a daily reminder to prepare for life in the world to come. Even those of strong Christian humility or of a non-conformist belief (including ministers themselves) did not deem the mourning ring to be a mark of sinful excess.\(^{135}\) The bulk of evidence indicates that love, pain, and grief were deeply rooted and widely experienced in early modern England.\(^{136}\) An examination of the symbolism surrounding mourning rings yields insight into early modern anxieties around death and how early modern people processed the loss of a loved one as well as

\(^{133}\) V&\textsuperscript{a}, 920-187.

\(^{134}\) Cressey, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, 393.

\(^{135}\) Middlemas, “Mourning jewelry in England” 260.

\(^{136}\) Cressey, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, 393.
their own fear of death. To grieve was to cope, to register one’s loss, and to work through the rift of separation.\textsuperscript{137}

Simple bands enameled with the name and life dates of the deceased were frequently made, sometimes set with a gemstone or a rock crystal covering a symbol such as a coffin or initials in gold wire.\textsuperscript{138} In the late eighteenth century, rings imitated neoclassical designs, their oval bezels often decorated with the same designs as funerary monuments such as urns, broken pillars, and mourning figures. By the end of the nineteenth century, memorial ring designs were becoming more standardized.\textsuperscript{139} The hoops were often inscribed with phrases such as 'In memory' whilst a commemorative inscription could be added to the inside of the hoop.

Numerous religious and cultural symbols served as common decorative tropes. Flowers conjure the blossoming of spring and love enduring beyond the grave. Ferns, often found in graveyards, were commonly carved in jet and ivory. Christian symbolism used in mourning jewelry signifies the wearer’s hope to be reunited with husband, wife, and children after death. Crosses often twined with ivy, vines or lilies, open books, a symbol of judgment, bibles, angels, graves, and anchors all symbolized faith and hope in life after death. Love and eternity motifs were also widely used with clasped hands, knots, serpents swallowing their tails in an eternal circle, padlocks, and setting suns being some of the most popular.

\textsuperscript{137} Cressey, \textit{Birth, Marriage & Death}, 393.
\textsuperscript{139} V&A, M.88-1960.
Fig. 6. Ring featuring a central skull dated to roughly 1600 according to a merchant’s mark on the side of the bezel.\textsuperscript{140}

The ring in figure 6 displays a merchant's mark used by a trader to mark his goods. A merchant’s mark was an emblem or device adopted by a merchant, and placed on goods or products sold by him in order to keep track of them, or as a sign of authentication. The skull on the face of the ring marks someone’s death. The inclusion of a merchant’s mark on the ring exemplifies its dual spiritual function and practical commercial function. Sellers crafted these rings for specific audiences and to elicit certain emotions. To sell these items makers would need to personalize the objects to conjure memories of the buyers' loved ones. If they were unable to achieve this through their craft they would be less likely to complete sales. 'Memento mori' (remember you must die) inscriptions and devices such as hourglasses, skulls, crossbones and skeletons became fashionable on many types of jewelry during this period.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{140} V&A, M.18-1929.
\textsuperscript{141} V&A, 920-1871.
Fig. 7. Enamelled gold mourning ring commemorating the death of Samuel Nicholets of Hertfordshire who died on 7th July 1661, as is recorded in the inscription inside the ring.  

The ring in figure 7 is hollow, and a lock of hair curls around within it, visible through the openwork of the enamelled decoration of skulls, crossed bones, and coats of arms. The most intimate commemoration rings contained strands of the deceased’s hair, or miniature portraits. All bear witness to the desire of those facing death or left bereft by it to sustain the life of memory. Hair from the deceased was incorporated into the designs or set in a compartment at the back of the ring to give each jewel a uniquely personal element. Hair served as a symbol of life in these death objects. Hair could be plaited, woven, sewn, knotted and twisted into a huge variety of shapes and designs of a fine and delicate quality.

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143 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, 252.
Fig. 8. This piece is set with a rock crystal panel over a piece of black silk. The hoop is decorated with a skull and bones. Inscribed outside MEMENTO MORI; and inside S. Spiller ob. 14 May 1719 aet: 39. England, ca.1719.¹⁴⁵

Enameled gold mourning rings came in a variety of styles and symbols. Black and white enamel were favoured but white enamel was often, though not universally, used to commemorate children and unmarried adults.¹⁴⁶ The ring in figure 8 combines the features of earlier 'memento mori' rings, used to remind the mourner of the inevitability of death and the need to prepare the soul, and the memorial ring, focused more on commemorating a specific person. The skull and bones motif is representative of the earlier period but the inclusion of the silk and inscription indicates the changing fashion towards more personalisation. The hoop of the ring is decorated with a skeleton and crossbones, traditional signifiers of mortality, along with the inscription 'Memento mori.' The inscription inside the hoop indicates that the ring was made in memory of S. Spiller, who died in 1719, aged 39.

Fig. 9. Gold mourning ring with an oval bezel with a miniature painted on bone or ivory of a youth standing by an urn and pedestal worked in hair.\textsuperscript{147}

In the late eighteenth century rings began to reflect new mourning sensibilities. In figure 9, an oval plaque on the pedestal is inscribed *WB 1777 EB 1779.* and the back of the bezel is engraved *W. Ballantine Ob.29 Mar.1777 Ae.82. Eliz Ballantine Ob 19 Octr.1779.*\textsuperscript{148} The inscriptions on this ring shows that it was made to commemorate two people: W Ballantine, who died on 29 March, 1777 at the age of 82 and Eliz (Eliza or Elizabeth), who died aged 68 on October 19, 1779.\textsuperscript{149} The people commemorated were likely a married couple or perhaps a pair of siblings. The bezel of the ring is decorated with a finely painted scene of a young man draped in a cloak and leaning on a pedestal which holds a funerary urn. The pedestal is made up of chopped hair, perhaps that of the two deceased Ballantines. Figures found on mourning jewels usually represented idealised mourners, rather than family members. These mourning figures were most frequently women but male figures were sometimes used.

\textsuperscript{147} V&A, 904-1888.  
\textsuperscript{148} V&A, 904-1888.  
\textsuperscript{149} V&A, 904-1888.
Fig. 10. This ring from 1792 is made of gold, enamel and a hair to memorialize Butterfield Harrison.\textsuperscript{150}

The ring in figure 10 is a good example of the later stages of early modern mourning jewelry. This mourning ring was made to commemorate the death of a child, whose brief life is symbolized by the snapped rosebud on the left-hand side of the plant. According to the inscription, the child was named Butterfield Harrison and died on 14 March 1792 aged 2 years 9 months and 14 days.\textsuperscript{151} Although black is the color most usually associated with mourning, white was deemed suitable for children. White’s cultural connection to innocence and purity emphasized the youth of the life lost. For all survivors, the belief that the deceased person completed a comfortable passage out of this world was always important in alleviating grief.\textsuperscript{152} However, it was particularly important for the parents of deceased children to feel that their child would not suffer earthly pains but live in bliss and that they would be reunited in heaven.

Rings were one of the most common and financially accessible mourning goods. They were also some of the most intimate. Habitually wearing the rings means that the person would constantly feel the ring, keeping both the memory of and at times physical

\textsuperscript{150} V&A, M.162-1962.
\textsuperscript{151} V&A, M.162-1962.
\textsuperscript{152} Houlbrooke, \textit{Death, Religion and the Family}, 240.
parts of their loved one close. The privacy of the objects can be seen in the personal features of chosen designs, even though the rings would be on display for the public. Accessories were the most personalizable and inner expressions of grief because they were less regulated and offered a wider canvas to commemorate a loved one.

Other Mourning Accessories

Although rings were one of the most common and some of the best preserved examples of mourning objects, a wide range of mourning accessories were available. These options allowed for and encouraged greater flexibility of emotional expression in different forms. Of course, this meant that the market surrounding mourning accessories could swell and experiment with types of goods that could successfully establish themselves as an acceptable mourning object. The primary purpose of these various objects was still to commemorate the dead and comfort the living but new techniques could be used. These objects also might not be as constant a companion as a ring but could be deployed as the owner saw fit.

![Fig. 11. Necklace made between 1775 and 1800 featuring a gold locket with a frame set with half pearls enclosing a silk ground for the insertion of hair.](V&A, 951-1888)
The simple necklace in figure 11 has an elegant border design formed of tiny seed pearls, which were associated with purity and grief. The necklace is further personalized through the inclusion of hair. Hair had long been important in sentimental jewelry, but during the eighteenth century it seems that hair took on a new prominence. It could now form the centerpiece of a jewel, arranged in complicated motifs or as plain, woven sections. Tiny fragments of hair could even be incorporated into delicate paintings. Some designs were made by professionals, but hair could also be taken from the body of the deceased. Hair jewels were worn to cherish the living as well as to remember the dead. The survival of many pieces celebrating love and friendship indicate the importance of these in early modern society.
Fig. 12. Necklace made between 1650 and 1675 composed of glass, over blue foil, painted with devices in white, on silver backings strung on wax thread.¹⁵⁴

Each of the individual square panels in figure 12 is set with a blue foil which has been painted with a symbol representing love or mortality. These symbols include: a skull and crossbones; initials EJ beneath a coronet; a putto holding leaves; a cornucopia; two cherubs with a flaming heart; a skeleton on a tomb inscribed At Rest; a dolphin; an angel with two crosses; a crowned lion; a winged skull; a bull; the sun, moon and stars; a lyre and butterfly; flowers; clasped hands with a heart; a skull above a crown with inscriptions GLORIA and VANITAS; a putto with a lance; an elephant's head and trident; and a sea animal in a shell. These symbols convey contrasting feelings surrounding death. Some, such as the skeleton and the various skulls, are traditional symbols to remind the wearer of their fate and the purpose of the object. However, alongside those are much more hopeful images. Flowers, angels, the solar system, and clasped hands all contribute to a sense of peacefulness for the dead and soothe the wearer’s anxieties about being parted from their loved one.

Mourning items even went beyond objects that would be worn as part of public display. The exact use of the intriguing embroidery in figure 13 is uncertain. It may have hung on a wall. Alternatively, it could have been used to cover a small table, such as a dressing table, or served as a cupboard cloth. A cupboard cloth was used on a cup-board, which could take various forms but primarily served to display precious vessels, or “cups.”¹⁵⁵

Fig. 13. Embroidery made around 1600 with characteristic Elizabethan blackwork on linen depicting a shepherd-like figure.\textsuperscript{156}

Although the use is ambiguous the technique used is identifiable. Blackwork was worked with black silk on linen, but often had accents in red silk or highlights in silver-gilt thread.\textsuperscript{157} This style of blackwork was used on both furnishings and dress. The subject of the embroidery has never been definitively explained, although each of the emblems, rebuses and mottoes relates directly to the main theme of the shepherd mourning the loss of love or a lover. The description at the Victoria & Albert museum posits that “it is very likely that the embroidery was a very personal piece, since the sorrows of the 'shepherd' are emphasized repeatedly in numerous forms of words, rebuses (images representing words) and emblems.”\textsuperscript{158} Around the border, the words sorrow, misfortune, care, false, and miserable can be seen.

\textsuperscript{156} V&A, M.50-1967.  
\textsuperscript{157} V&A, T.219-1953.  
\textsuperscript{158} V&A, T.219-1953.
The presented objects demonstrate the range that people included in their mourning accessories and the various ways, both public and private, that they conveyed loss. Repeated natural and Christian symbols created a common language for early modern people helping them to process grief and loss. To interact with mourning objects regularly could keep some form of the relationship with the deceased active, the bond worn around on the wearer’s body or displayed within their domestic space. Additionally, the accessories serve the living by reminding them of their own mortality while perhaps soothing their anxieties about the process and reminding the wearers that they too will be commemorated and carried on by friends and family through mourning.

*Politics and Mourning*

A surprising aspect of mourning accessories was their potential for the display of political leanings. The rings were fields upon which one could express feelings of monarchical support, anger, injustice, or of a communal loss rather than a private one. A prime example is that after the execution of Charles I on 30 January 1649 by the Commonwealth, commemorative jewelry was immediately produced. Locks of the King's hair, painted miniatures, and royalist symbols were set into rings, lockets and pendants to be worn as a sign of allegiance to the Royalist cause. As wearing such jewelry could be dangerous during the Civil War, many of these objects may have been hidden until the Restoration or produced after the accession of Charles II. Even though he was a distant figure in their personal lives, people still chose to commission and wear rings commemorating Charles I’s death, either as a symbol of political mourning or to express genuine emotion.

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Charles II was vigilant in ensuring that his father’s memory was preserved. Charles I was celebrated as King Charles the Martyr and the day of his death was maintained as a national day of ‘fasting and humiliation’. Rings set with the King’s portrait were therefore worn as a sign of allegiance to the new regime and a repudiation of Commonwealth sympathies. After the exile of James II in 1688, his political supporters continued to wear these rings to show their support for the restoration of Catholic Stuart rule.

Figure 15 offers another example of commemorating Charles I. On the reverse of the ring is an enameled white skull below a crown between C and R and an inscribed hoo

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Royalists considered Charles's death to be a martyrdom and images of him often show his eyes gazing upwards towards heaven.

Fig. 16. Ring from 1710 that has an oval bezel set with a faceted crystal enclosing the monogram JR in gold wire below a crown supported by two angels in silk. Additionally, the ring’s foliated shoulders are enameled in black.¹⁶³

Charles I was not the only royal to be commemorated on rings. Figure 16 features a memorial ring for James II of England and VII of Scotland whose Catholic faith led him to be removed from the throne in the Glorious Revolution of 1689 and who died in exile in 1701. James ascended to the throne in 1688 on the death of his brother Charles II but his Catholicism and absolutist view of monarchy rapidly led to political upheaval. Parliament invited his son in law William of Orange and daughter Mary to take the throne in the 'Glorious Revolution' and as James's armies deserted, he was forced to flee for France. Under the faceted rock crystal can be found the monogram JR in gold wire below a crown supported by two angels in silk. The two angels supporting the royal crown underline James' claim that he was King by divine right, not merely by law. Wearing the ring constituted an act of mourning but also an expression of continuing support for the Stuart claim to the throne.

Fig. 17. Fan made between 1715 and 1730 depicting royal symbols and flowers.\textsuperscript{164}

A different political accessory is seen in figure 17. It contains symbols relating to support for the Stuarts, similar to the ring above. A fan was an essential accessory in the formal dress of a wealthy woman. The manner in which a lady held and moved her fan conveyed her feelings toward those around her. In the case of this particular fan, it could reveal her political beliefs, if she chose, or display only an innocuous floral design. While the user looked at the side in the photo, others could only see the other side, painted with flowers. The side in the photo features aristocratic figures in the clouds that symbolize support for the exiled Stuart royal family (descendants of James II whose supporters were known as Jacobites) after the death of Queen Anne in 1714.\textsuperscript{165}

While the wearers did not know these royals personally, mourning rings and other accessories allowed them an outlet for communal mourning and an expression of the loss they felt in a personal and political sense. The purpose of these rings were different than

mourning accessories for family and friends, as are the associated emotions, however, the similarity in execution and demonstration of the grief is interesting.

Conclusion

Loss and commemoration could be expressed by a variety of objects which were adaptable to both personal and public purposes. However, it is important to remember that despite the financial burden imposed by the expense of these items and the involvement of businesses dedicated to creating and marketing the goods, their primary purpose was to commemorate the dead and soothe the living. The objects were highly intimate and tailored to apply to every specific case and the correlated anxieties. Remembrance items for children or the unmarried featured different motifs from those further on in life and speak to that unique pain. The living sought to personalize the items with inscriptions, images, and hair demonstrating genuine sorrow that might be less visible in the more public performances such as funerals. Beyond status and societal expectations, these objects are infused with real emotion and offer insight into the personal process of losing a loved one. Even though death, and therefore mourning, was omnipresent it did not make the loss of a loved one easier to bear.
Conclusion: Mourning and Making a Living

In the midst of life we are in death. This Gregorian chant captures some of the timeless qualities of death that early modern people also experienced. But early modern Britons also processed death in ways specific to their time and place. Living during a period of high mortality rates, especially for children and infants, would have made early modern people much more familiar with death and the associated rituals than to those living in the UK today. As the merchant and middle class grew in wealth and influence they began to imitate traditionally elite displays of grief. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mourning practices became more popular outside of the traditional aristocracy, fueling a large side economy around mourning goods and creating opportunities for businesses. Mourning businesses operating within a separate industry have largely been overlooked in scholarship, even as mourning was acknowledged as a high financial cost. This thesis demonstrates that market demand drove a competitive and active mourning industry for a diverse number of goods.

Mourning served as a contact point in early modern life where emotion, fashion, public display, finances, and private grief met. Social pressure to don and sometimes provide respectable mourning attire created financial stress and high expenditure by customers. The social pressures were also crucial in sustaining the demand for dark cloth and memento mori accessories that became an important part of many manufacturers’ sales. The industry was labor intensive and demanded high level skills from the workers to create the complex garments and accessories. Mourning grew so prevalent that it interfered with other sections of the textile industry and impacted merchants trading with the continent. However, beyond cementing profit and enabling public display of status,
these goods held intrinsic emotional value and helped individuals process the death of loved ones and accept their own forthcoming demise.

This thesis has tried to bridge the gap between focusing on the objects and the lives of their makers and consumers to create a better understanding of the business of death. Historians have shown for example what widows wore and what they may have been feeling, but little research exists on the lives of those who dressed widows and other mourners. By revealing how the habits of mourning relied on makers and their businesses, I reframe death and the makers of items that were used to handle grief as part of the consumer revolution.

The business of death was about people making goods, fashion, imitating elite style, respectability, but it was also very much about people’s feelings. People wanted to remember the deceased, connect with them, and release their grief. Emotions played a big part in driving the businesses and joined a synergy in the early modern period between emotion, fashion, and appropriate behavior which made practices like buying, wearing and giving mourning attire popular.

If I was going to work on this project in the future, I would like to explore the contribution of marginalized groups such as women, immigrants, and people of color involved in these businesses. It may be hard to identify sources around these groups because they were likely in the background of any businesses, but examining their roles could create a more realistic representation of the makers and consumers in the marketplace for the business of death. Most of my work centered on London. However, during my research, I encountered references to Norwich as the true heart of the
mourning trade. It would be valuable to seek out more sources there related to women or non-white workers.

At the start of this project I hoped to focus on gender but I found it very difficult to locate much evidence on women, especially as makers. I’ve seen glimpses of suggestive evidence. For example, in the late eighteenth-century the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors membership lists women’s names are included, but written in the margins rather than included on the main list alongside the men. Female apprentices also occasionally appear in some of the Merchant Taylors records of apprenticeship bindings and are not marked any differently than the male apprentices. Additionally, the Old Bailey records contain mentions of women being indicted for stealing mourning items and seeking to resell them. I still think if I had more time I could make an important argument about women’s roles.

I am 22 and I have only been to one funeral, so my experience with death is far different than an early modern person’s. Two weeks after my high school graduation I attended my Grandmother’s funeral which commemorated many aspects of her identity. The service took place in a Cotswold churchyard led by a Church of England minister, military music was played since both her children are in the English army, and my sister recited two American poems to represent her American granddaughters. A man in a black top hat and suit delivered the ashes, I and all the women wore flowered dresses, and my grandfather wore a yellow jacket, as opposed to traditional black because my grandmother loved flowers and did not want us to be sad. Although, of course, we were.

Although this never occurred to me at the time, all of this was paid for. My mother bought us dresses and my father bought a new flowered tie. My mother and aunt

\textsuperscript{166} TGL, CLC/L/MD/C/001/MS34024/001.
paid the crematorium, paid the church for the churchyard service and space, and paid the minister. They bought flowers from a florist’s shop and paid for a reception at the local pub. Friends gave money to a cancer charity instead of sending flowers. People bought sympathy cards, manufactured by workers, and sent them to us. We designed a program with my grandmother’s favorite photograph of herself - in Paris one winter when she went to meet my mother who was on a work trip there. A printer made the program and my uncle paid him. The evening after the service her immediate family bought Indian takeout and shared it along with memories of her at her house.

Although this funeral was vastly different from the regulation and pomp of an early modern one and took place in a different time and place, many of the same sentiments had persisted. The purpose of the service was to express our grief but also commemorate the parts of her memory that she and we found most important, all made possible by participating in the business of death. My family were the consumers, we shaped remembering her as we wanted in part by choosing what to buy and who to pay. In the midst of life we are in death but the living carry on by honoring and remembering those they’ve lost in the best ways they know how.
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