**Baggage for the Beyond? Contemporary UK grave goods practices and their meanings**

Ethics application ID - 4658221

**Principal investigator (PI):** Dr Jennifer Riley**Mentor:** Professor Vikki Entwistle

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

Grave goods – clothing and objects deposited alongside dead human bodies, when buried or cremated – have long been a subject of archaeological interest, but are also important and widespread in the UK today. Many and diverse people put significance by, and attribute complex meaning to, depositing such objects: yet, these practices have not been thoroughly studied.

The drawings in the ‘grave goods’ display at The Vagina Museum are an exciting resource for this project.

They can provide valuable insights concerning: the kinds of objects people imagine leaving with the deceased in the contemporary UK context; the items they would hypothetically like in their own grave; and the tone and manner in which such objects are discussed and presented.

It is sincerely hoped that this study will have positive long-term social impacts, for example, through improved understanding of the needs and preferences of bereaved people, challenging the idea that discussing or planning for death is ‘taboo,’ or service improvements in the UK funeral industry. Your participation will directly contribute to the study’s capacity to meaningfully inform future practice and policy.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No. If you do not wish for your drawing to be included in this research project, you can either retain it yourself, or write “do not use for research purposes’ on the back of your drawing.

Because these drawings are on public display, in a free-to-access museum, they are being treated as secondary data already in the public realm. However, several safeguards are in place to ensure that the members of the public who produced them are protected. First, all identifying data (such as names, contact details) will be redacted; second, the drawings will not be reproduced in outputs from the project. Rather, their contents will be described or parts of drawings replicated in Dr Riley’s handwriting/drawing, so that the original artist cannot be identified by these means.

### **How will the drawings be used?**

Dr Riley will first use the drawings for analysis, exploring questions such as:

* Which items feature most frequently?
* What – if any – explanations are given for choosing these items?
* What sort of tone (e.g. light-hearted; sad; serious) do people use when writing on these drawings?

The results of these analyses will be included in a range of project outputs, which will be free to access as far as possible. These will likely include: Academic journal articles; presentations; radio and TV coverage; blog and magazine articles; a book; an online exhibition; and social media content. However, as noted above, the drawings will not directly be replicated in any research outputs: rather, their contents will be described or parts of drawings replicated in Dr Riley’s handwriting/drawing, to safeguard the identities of the original artists.

### **What will happen to my drawings?**

Dr Riley will be given temporary custody of the hard copy drawings. They will be stored securely at her home for the duration of her research, after which they will be returned to The Vagina Museum. Dr Riley will also digitize the drawings. These digital versions will be stored in research-specific drives on secure University of Aberdeen servers and only accessed or transported by encrypted and password-protected devices. It will be retained in accordance with the University of Aberdeen Research Data Management Policy for 5 years after the project end date and thereafter permanently deleted in accordance with University IT data security procedures. University requirements and the provisions of the UK Data Protection Act 2018 will apply at all times. A backup copy will be stored on an external hard drive owned by Dr Riley and stored securely at her home.

For further information, you can consult the University’s Privacy Notice for Research Participants for further information on how we manage your data - <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/privacy/research-participants-938.php>. You can also contact the University’s Data Protection Officer [dpa@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:dpa@abdn.ac.uk) or 01224 272596.

**How will I find out about the results of the study?**

The project is currently due for completion at the end of 2026. It is anticipated that study findings will be shared via the University of Aberdeen website and social media channels in due course. Dr Riley runs an Instagram account for the project - @baggageforthebeyond.

### **Who is funding and/or sponsoring the study?**

This study is being funded by the Leverhulme Trust under their Early Career Fellowship scheme. You can find out more information at <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/early-career-fellowships>

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

The research project has been approved by the Committee for Research Ethics and Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business, University of Aberdeen on the 12th December 2024.

### **Contact Details**

If you have any general queries or would like further information about the study, please contact the PI**:** [jennifer.riley@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.riley@abdn.ac.uk)c/oDivinity and Religious Studies, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, 50-52 College Bounds, University of Aberdeen, AB24 3DS

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you can contact the Chair of the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business, Dr Elizabeth Curtis([elizabeth.curtis@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:elizabeth.curtis@abdn.ac.uk)).