

How Great Thou Art: 50 Years of African Caribbean Funerals in London

By Charlie Phillips



1. (4) Mr Nodes (the elder) leading pallbearers at a funeral in Notting Hill in the early 1960s. Nodes & Son Funeral Directors are understood and respected for being the first firm of undertakers to offer funeral services that reflected the funerary customs of the African Caribbean community in London.

V – 40x50cm



2. (24) Leroy's funeral featured a horse drawn carriage and the attendance was so great that many mourners including Charlie were left outside the church of St. Matthews in Brixton.

H – 51x61cm



3. (16) Mr Nodes (the younger) and Father John Brownsell at All Saints Church, Notting Hill.

H – 51x61cm



4. (45) Mr Watson was a member of the West Indian Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association. Here his coffin is draped in a Union Jack to reflect his time serving in the British military.

H – 51x61cm



5. (11) Gregory Isaac's London funeral, 2010. The first of two funerals for Isaac. This particular one took place in London and the 2nd when his body was interred in Jamaica.

H – 51x61cm



6. (39) Mr Nodes (the younger) skillfully leading pallbearers out of All Saints Church, Notting Hill.

H - 51x61cm



7. (40) This photograph illustrates how a sympathetic shoulder and the promise that everything will be alright is all that can be said and done.

H - 51x61cm



8. (44) At Frank Critchlow's funeral, mourners were asked to wear scotch bonnet berets. Here we can see Monster sporting it fresh for 2010 with a Cuban cigar.

H - 51x61cm



9. (10) Clive 'Mashup' Phillips, leader of the legendary Mangrove Steel Band at Frank Critchlow's funeral, 2010.

H - 51x61cm



10. (12) Kwaku leads a lively cortege: a brass band, and hundreds of mourners. This is the second time that Miss Cherry has shut Brixton down. The first time was in 1985 when Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce was shot and paralysed by police. Her shooting sparked the Brixton uprisings as many at the time thought she had been murdered and sought to confront the Police.

H - 51x61cm



11. (14) Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce died 26 years after she was shot and paralysed by police. At the time, the police claimed it was an accident but a public enquiry into the shooting 29 years later determined that the shooting was not an accident. The truth is, Cherry Groce was shot as a result of a series of astonishing failures by officers across the ranks to follow procedures designed to protect the public.

H - 51x61cm



12. (37) Two funerals taking place at the same time, both at Kensal Rise Cemetery.

H - 51x61cm



13. (4) The dapper don in the fur coat is the legendary Parachute, purveyor of vintage clothing. His shop in Ladbroke Grove is the haunt of celebrities and fashionistas alike. A long time friend of Charlie, he features in several photographs in the exhibition. Taken at Gallarue's funeral, Nunhead Cemetery.

V - 61x51cm



14. (13) Clinton 'Eastwood' Jones at Cassidy's funeral, Kensal Rise, 1972. Cassidy was a mechanic commonly known as Mile Away, whose adoration for the Land Rover was such that his dying wish was that his body be carried in his Land Rover rather than the traditional hearse.

H - 43x52cm



15. (25) Women in the traditional black and white attire as requested at Baby's funeral, Tooting.

V – 61x51cm



16. (18) Lauraine Ferron holding the cross, Ishmahil Blagrove with digital camera and the Notting Hill Carnival's most celebrated dancer all at Duke Vin's funeral, 2012. Duke Vin created Britain's first Jamaican style sound system in the 50s, the second being Count Suckles. They both immigrated to England as stowaways and the first ever soundclash in Britain where between their respective sounds. The genesis of DJ culture, sound systems, club culture and the Notting Hill Carnival can be traced back to these two stowaways.

H – 51x61cm



17. (21) African and African Caribbean Drummers at the graveside wearing white, based on Ethiopian orthodox traditions.

H – 51x61cm



18. (32) Mourners singing and smoking by the graveside.

H – 51x61cm



19. (47) Professor Augustine John presiding at the graveside of John La Rose.

H – 51x61cm



20. (17) Mourners with orange hymn sheets at John La Rose's funeral, Highgate Cemetery, London. Linton Kwesi Johnson wrote John's obituary in the Guardian, in it he says... 'John was not only my mentor, friend, comrade, he was like a father to me. He was the most remarkable human being I have ever known.'

H – 51x61cm



21. (7) Whilst Red closes the grave at Sammy Cotey's funeral, the mourners sing.

V – 61x51cm



22. (42) At Len Garrison's funeral the ground was frozen so a digger was needed to close the grave. This is unusual as funeral attendees normally close the grave themselves. Wandsworth Cemetery, 2003

H – 51x62cm



23. (2) Taken in 1970 at Sammy's funeral in Kensal Rise Cemetery, this photograph is one of three pictures of Red lamenting the loss of his drinking partner. Of Red's three gestures we chose this image because it mimics the cross, a motif that features heavily in Charlie's compositional style.

V – 61x51cm



24. (41) This is one of Charlie's earlier photographs. The negative has disintegrated a little on the right hand side due to water and poor storage. In many respects this photograph embodies the belief that all photographs are a *momento mori*.

H – 51x61cm



25. (9) An intergenerational group standing by the graveside. This photograph is a fine example of the complexities of hand printing, the negative being underexposed while each face requires its own

exposure time. The shadow detail was enhanced using selenium toner and highlights managed by pre-flashing the paper.

H – 51x61cm



26. (27) Aunt Gloria pouring soil on Uncle Son's grave. Kensal Rise Cemetery, 1970s.

H – 51x61cm



27. (38) A group of mourners.

H – 51x61cm



28. (26) Miss Icey, Miss Tiny and Bounty at Galarue's funeral, Nunhead Cemetery.

H – 51x61cm



29. (3) Baron Baker's funeral, Kensal Rise. Baron Baker is credited with being the chief strategist in leading the defense against a mob of 400 racists in Notting Hill on a 'nigger hunt' in 1958. He is credited with teaching the youth of Notting Hill the tactical and technical knowledge to create petrol bombs and barricades.

V – 61x51cm



30. (6) Madame's great-grandchildren at her funeral in Kensal Rise. Madame appears twice on this wall. She is shown in her youth with a shopping trolley and in later years with silver hair singing at Baron Baker's graveside.

V – 61x51cm



31. (8) Madame, Miss Icey and Bounty are shown among other guests. Madame arrived at this funeral with her shopping trolley, having heard about it whilst out in Shepherds Bush Market.

Square – 52.5x52.5cm – **Wooden frame?**



32. (30) A Singer Sewing Machine is remade as a floral tribute at a dressmaker's funeral. Floral tributes have come to symbolise the deceased's favourite brands with the most popular being Rizla (blue), Guinness (Stout), Technics (SL1200) and betting slips. When we say the most popular, we mean within Charlie's archive.

H – 51x61cm



33. (5) Undertaker with Jamaican flag floral tribute at Mussu's funeral. Mussu was a celebrated ganja wholesaler. His orders of service are illustrated with images of ganja leaves placed around his head. As a prolific importer and producer he supplied the highest grades of the plant for decades, and at his funeral reception, which features in Charlie's video, are scenes that reflect the notoriety of his assembled guests.

V – 61x51cm



34. (35) Miss Icey eulogises her daughter, by the graveside.

H – 51x61cm



35. (19) Charlie says that this picture defines modern funerals and calls it, 'Simply The Best', reflecting how new songs are defining a new generation and their values. Charlie laments how modern day funerals no longer use hymns, and *Simply the Best*, *Songs for my Father* and *My Way*, which are now the theme songs to modern funerals.

H – 51x61cm



36. (23) In the centre of the frame, Parachute greets another gentleman whilst in the distance a man chillaxes on a grave.

H – 51x61cm



37. (22) Reminiscing by the graveside of Uncle Son's funeral with Baron Baker looking on. This comic qualities of this photograph where not lost on us as we chose this image precisely because of it's comedy value.

H – 51x61cm



38. (46) Day release is granted to prisoners so they to can pay their last respects. In this photograph the prisoner is cuffed to his warden whilst he pays his respects to his father.

H – 51x61cm



39. (34) Wailing in grief.

H – 51x61cm



40. (36) A young couple comfort each other at Mr. Briggs's funeral.

H - 51x61cm



41. (48) Brother Love.

H - 51x61cm



42. (15) A group of Cassidy's friends standing around his grave at Kensal Rise Cemetery. In the middle is Clinton and to his right is Ronnie Briggs, whose Nine Night was held at his mechanics workshop in Ladbroke Grove.

H - 51x61cm



43. (43) By contemporary standards this grave is modestly dressed, but it's a testament to another time and the evolution of values and social status.

H - 51x61cm



44. (20) After the burial, old friends and relatives get their first chance to talk to each other.

H - 51x61cm



45. (29) Five Women.

H – 51x61cm -



46. (28) Sister Love. Empressjai writes about Sister love in her essay which is published in the 'How Great Thou Art' book.

H – 51x61cm



47. (33) The second in a run of six shots from Charlie's 35mm Olympus OM10 camera taken at a reception at the Tabernacle in Notting Hill.

H – 51x61cm



48. (31) The Tabernacle in Notting Hill is one of the many community spaces that hosts the funeral receptions. The events are in some cases huge parties where the community socialises, commemorates and celebrates.

H – 51x61cm

49 Framed prints. Frames black metal
17x B&W and 32x Colour
Colour : 7x P: 53x51cm, 27x L: 51x53cm and
B&W : 15x L: 51x53cm

Running metres required approx. 30.

Additional Items:

Catalogue/book: How Great Thou Art: 50 Years of African Caribbean Funerals London – currently out of print

Orders of Service collected by Charlie Phillips

Hi-8 video tape documentary shot 1999-2014

Filming: Charlie Phillips

Editor: Eddie Otchere

Running time 22 minutes