

**Short article****TOBACCO AT IRISH FUNERALS: THE FINAL NAIL IN THE COFFIN**

HOUGHTON Frank

*Limerick Institute of Technology, Limerick, Ireland***Abstract**

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*This article highlights the development of the traditional Irish custom to offer tobacco, snuff and beer to callers on the occasion of wakes. A change of habits in recent times as well as the support of the clergy lead to much lesser consumption of tobacco in this context*

**Keywords: Ireland; tobacco; funeral; wake; snuff; denormalisation**

The Irish Government is committed to becoming smoke free (<5% smoking prevalence) by 2025. As part of this process it is committed to a policy of the denormalisation of tobacco [1]. The aim of tobacco denormalization in Ireland may recently have received support from an unexpected quarter that may effectively remove tobacco from Irish funerals. It is interesting to note that up until the mid-1950s, or later in more rural areas, an Irish funeral was accompanied by significant consumption of alcohol, tobacco and snuff [2]. A traditional Irish burial was often preceded by a Wake lasting up to three days (see Figure One) [2,3].

At such Wakes 'customs included the laying of clay pipes, tobacco, and snuff in the room. Every male caller was expected to take at least a puff... Usually, a pipe and tobacco were placed on a table next to the body. On some occasions, a pipe was also laid on the deceased's chest' [4]. The social standing of the deceased and their family was in-part measured through their generosity in the provision of tobacco, snuff, food and alcohol [3]. However, this tradition is fast disappearing and the increasing use of funeral homes has effectively marked the end of this practice. Funeral homes are subject to Ireland's smoke-free legislation, and as such the associated significant consum-

ption of tobacco at such events has ceased.

One final event that may have finally removed tobacco from the Irish funeral scene relates to a recent comments about the inappropriateness of offeratory gifts that went viral [5]. It should be noted in the 2016 Census 78.3% of Ireland's population self-identified as Catholic [6]. From a strict Catholic perspective, offeratory gifts are supposed to relate purely to the bread and wine associated with the funeral Mass [7]. However, in Ireland tradition usually involves family members bringing up a few items that represent the interests or passions of the deceased.

However, controversy emerged recently in Ireland when a priest spoke out against tobacco and alcohol being used as symbolic offeratory gifts:

*Bringing things such as a can of beer, a packet of cigarettes, a remote control, a mobile phone or a football jersey does not tell us anything uplifting about the person who has died... Surely items such as a flower, a family photograph, a prayer-book or rosary reveals far more about the person who has died and the loss he/she is to the family who grieve* [5].

Such objections from the clergy are hardly new. There is a long history of both clerical and civil authority concerns over what was often viewed as an excuse for licentiousness [3]. However, what is perhaps different

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\*Corresponding Author: Frank Houghton; frank.houghton@lit.ie

is that, although objections to this statements were noted in some quarters [8,9], there was significant national and international take-up on this story [5,8,9,10].

Given the attention this incident pro-

voked it seems highly likely that the outcome will be the widespread adoption of an informal policy around the prohibition of tobacco as an offertory gift. Thus, this priest's tirade that went viral seems likely to have helped tobacco denormalization in Ireland.



Figure 1: A Stereotypical Irish Wake (note man & woman with clay pipes)

### Resumo

*Tiu ĉi artikolo prilumas la evoluon de la tradicia irlandia kutimo donaci tabakon, naztabakon kaj bieron al vizitantoj kadre de funebraj vigiloj. Ŝanĝo de kutimoj dum la lastaj jaroj kaj la apogo de klerikoj rezultigis konsiderindan malpliigon de tabakokonsumado kadre de tiu ĉi kunteksto.*

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