

New Director

The Journal caught up with Region C Director Christopher Sykes at the last meeting of the Board. He was kind enough to spend some time with your editor and provide an insight into his working philosophies.

How long have you been a member of the BIFD, and which other roles you have served at a regional level?

I began my journey in 2003, by joining as a Student Member of the Institute and from there have completed my embalming qualifications, Diploma in Funeral Directing and now find myself seven years later as a Director of the Institute. I feel effective governance is vital in the success of any venture; and given the reputation enjoyed by the board, I was delighted and honoured to be selected by my region to be on the Board of Directors and represent their views at national level. I pride myself on being incredibly enthusiastic and this being my first major role within the Institute, grasp it with both hands and will do the best I can to support, help and guide my regional members.

What do you consider to be the single biggest benefit of membership?

In my view, the biggest benefit of being a member of the British Institute of Funeral Directors can simply be categorised in one word...Support. To be within such an Institute where we are all individual members who can support each other through own experiences, certain events or just general knowledge of our industry I think are vital. This is why I feel our members attending regional meetings is a must, it is a must to meet new colleagues, meet new friends and share new ideas to help support each other and continue to be proud members of a great Institute. I do also feel that our Institute being responsible for the tutors and training of anyone wishing to enter into this field are also a major benefit to be proud of.

How many members does your region have, and what is the most memorable education session that your region has delivered to members?

My region has a total of 99 members which break down to 23 Licensed Full Members, 35 Full Members, 39 Students, 1 Fellow and 1 Honorary Member. Region C is not the largest or smallest region but having nearly 100 members is a still a big responsibility. I cannot pinpoint one example of a most memorable educational

session because each and every event is different with different speakers and different levels of education.

How did you arrive at the job you are doing today?

My story within the funeral industry started at an early age of 14 when I was a pupil at Heckmondwike Grammar School. Every pupil had to attend a work experience placement and mine through help of my father was to be at George Brooke Ltd Funeral Directors in Dewsbury. This placement was to be very enjoyable and open my eyes to the whole behind the scenes insight within funeral directing and embalming. I was asked to return to work during school holidays and then when I gained my college qualifications, I started a full time position within the company.

My future was discussed and I become a student member of the British Institute of Funeral Directors in 2003. Having completed the Foundation Certificate in Funeral Service I was well on track and at this point, the embalmer at George Brooke Ltd left and created an open opportunity for me with the skills I had already learnt and so I went on to join the British Institute of Embalmers, completed their course and was one of the youngest qualified embalmers within the UK at that time. Naturally I then continued my funeral directing studies and soon after obtained the Diploma in Funeral Directing. In 2007 I was welcomed into the American Society of Embalmers and have attended many of their conferences and seminars across the United States and I am honored to say I have become very good friends with many key funeral professionals from around the world. I have recently returned from Springfield, Missouri at which Vernie Fountain, Founder of the Fountain National Academy hosted his International Embalming and Reconstructive Surgery Conference for Professional Embalmers.

I am proud to say that as for many other fellow colleagues and professionals, my education is constant as you can never stop learning within this industry sector. I have George Brooke Ltd, the BIFD, NAFD, BIE and ASE to thank for every opportunity given to me and I am certainly proud to be on the Board of Directors.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever heard?

The best advice I ever heard was from the founder of the company, Mr. George Brooke and was simply this:

“There are never problems, only solutions”

