



BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Educating the Funeral Profession

JOURNAL



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FROM THE DESK OF YOUR NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Jeremy Mead, Dip. FS, LMBIFD



JOINT STATEMENT

As your National President, it gives me great pleasure to announce continued talks with the two Presidents of the NAFD Barry Pritchard & SAIF's Mark Horton regarding the forthcoming implementation of regulation by HM Government for our Funeral Profession.

As has been previously stated, we need to approach the forthcoming talks with the Government with a united voice, proving that we are in a position to self-educate and regulate our own memberships, and therefore to present our standards to the general public, and not those imposed upon us by persons/groups unknown from outside of the profession, who may have very little knowledge of what we do on a daily basis.

We each appreciate that this will not sit comfortably with some of our members but, it is time to forget the past and to establish a future for the newer and possibly younger members of this wonderful profession. What has happened in the past is only remembered by a few and must now be put to one side and forgotten for the good of us all.

The three of us do have some great people from within the funeral world that are advising and helping us to formulate the way forward, and we have the resolute backing of our respective Board of Directors/Governors. Communication between us all is open and honest, in our combined efforts to present the united and unified voice of you all.

Signed by :- Jeremy P Mead BIFD, Barry Pritchard NAFD & Mark Horton SAIF.



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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

Hayley Bell, Dip. FD, LMBIFD - Assistant Chair of Examinations



Dear Readers,

I am excited to share with you the latest updates and news from my roles within the Institute. I have some positive developments to discuss, including a fruitful meeting with Greenwich University regarding the revalidation of the level 4 Diploma in Funeral Service. Additionally, I am delighted to announce that the Certificate in Funeral Service candidates who sat their final examinations in June have successfully passed and are now eagerly waiting for Greenwich to award the credits. It gives me great pleasure to report that this was the first examination I oversaw as the editor. So, without further ado, let's delve into the details of these significant achievements:

Revalidation of the Level 4 Diploma in Funeral Service

As professionals in the funeral service industry, it is crucial to stay updated and maintain the highest standards of knowledge and expertise. That's why the recent positive meeting with Greenwich University regarding the revalidation of the level 4 Diploma in Funeral Service is such a landmark event. This meeting served as an opportunity to discuss the course content, assessments, and overall curriculum to ensure it aligns with the evolving needs of the industry.

I am proud to inform you that the meeting was highly productive, with both parties expressing their commitment to maintaining the integrity and relevance of the diploma. The comprehensive discussions allowed us to explore potential improvements, including incorporating new assessment methods. We are confident that our ongoing relationship with Greenwich University will further enhance the quality of education and training provided by the British Institute of Funeral Directors.

The positive outcome of the meeting not only reinforces the credibility of our level 4 Diploma in Funeral Service but also demonstrates our dedication to fostering professional growth and development within the industry.

Success of Certificate in Funeral Service Candidates

One of the most gratifying aspects of my role in Education is witnessing the success of our candidates. It is with immense pleasure that I share the news of the Certificate in Funeral Service candidates who sat their final examinations in June. I am proud to announce that all the candidates have successfully passed their exams, showcasing their knowledge, skills, and dedication to the funeral service profession. This achievement is particularly significant as it marks the first examination under my helm as Assistant Chair of Examinations. Witnessing the hard work and determination of these candidates has been truly inspiring. Their success not only reflects their commitment to their own professional growth but also contributes to raising the overall standards of the funeral service industry.

While the candidates eagerly await the awarding of credits by Greenwich University, we would like to take a moment to appreciate their efforts and congratulate them on this commendable accomplishment. It is a testament to their diligence and the exceptional education they received through the British Institute of Funeral Directors.

Looking Ahead

As we celebrate the reaccreditation of the level 4 Diploma in Funeral Service and the success of our Certificate in Funeral Service candidates, it is important to acknowledge that these achievements are just the beginning. The funeral service industry is dynamic and constantly evolving, requiring professionals to stay ahead of the curve.

Looking ahead, our focus remains on providing the highest quality education, CPD training, and resources to support the growth and development of funeral service professionals. We will continue to collaborate with esteemed institutions like Greenwich University to ensure our courses reflect the latest industry standards and best practices.

Moreover, we are committed to fostering a community of funeral service professionals who can learn from one another, share their experiences, and collectively elevate the standards of the industry. Through events, conferences, and networking opportunities, we aim to create a platform where professionals can connect, collaborate, and innovate.

In This Issue Of The Journal

In this edition, we have curated a diverse range of articles: Deputy Editor, Lucie Kibbey explores the concept of Water Cremation and its potential benefits for both funeral professionals and the environment, Maxine Edgar, a returning guest article writer, delves into the importance of understanding different funeral trends and cultural practices and Eimer Duffy, our resident social media guru, shares valuable tips for optimizing your Google Business Profile.

I hope you find the articles in this issue insightful and thought-provoking. As always, Lucie and I welcome your contributions and feedback. If you have any news or articles you would like to share with our readers, please get in contact via journal@bifd.org.uk. Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to bringing you more valuable content in future issues.

Until next time, take care

Hayley x

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DEPUTY EDITOR'S DESK

Lucie Kibbey, Cert. FS, MBIFD

Hello one and all,

What a month since I last wrote up an article. Lot's has been going on, my son turned 4 last weekend and I spent most of it crying into a glass of prosecco unwilling to accept that I can no longer call him my "baby".

I also made my biggest wedding cake order to date and attended the wedding – a beautiful Italian themed ceremony and reception, the food was out of this world!!

Besides that, I did get around to finish the book I mentioned last issue and have done a bit of a review for you and would genuinely encourage you all to give it a read. It really is captivating.

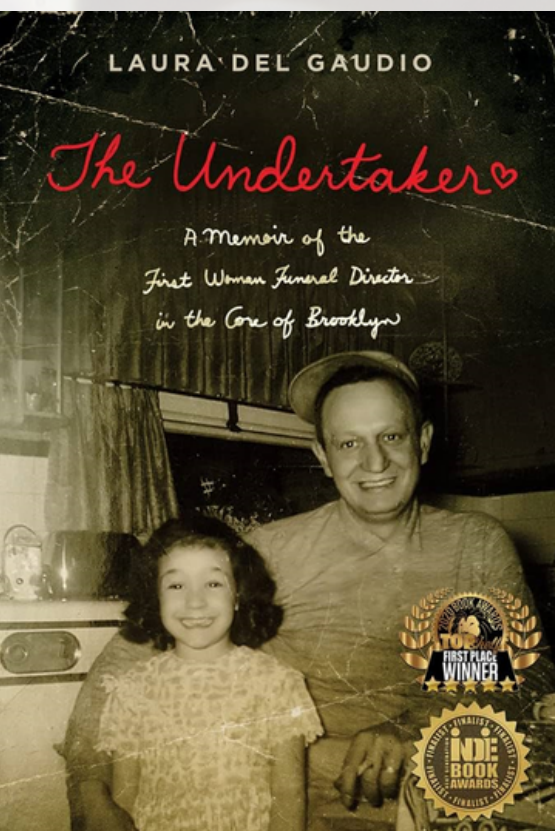
I'll keep it short and sweet and leave you to enjoy a jam-packed Journal. My thanks as always to our lovely Editor Hayley, who puts so much work and effort into this and keeps it modern and relatable. Until next time folks ...

Lucie x



BOOK REVIEW: *The Undertaker*

A Memoir of the first Woman Funeral Director in the core of Brooklyn



"Laura Del Gaudio was raised in Brooklyn. Her formal education was from MacAllister Academy of Funeral Service Inc. and St. John's University. However, her real education was from under the kitchen table as a child where she learned the family business".

The Undertaker is one of those books that you take to your heart and feel like you want to become part of the family. Laura Del Gaudio writes in honest fashion, with the innocence of child talking about a very different Brooklyn to the one that exists today. Sharing family stories, heartbreaks and even recipes it's impossible not to suddenly want to be at least part Italian for a little while.

Laura touches on her father's mental health struggles, how his work suffered because of it, and how it was frowned upon for men to have any kind of battles with their mental well-being.

I found myself in Laura, sharing her humour and frustrations along the way. Suddenly I was feeling her sadness along side her, when she described dressing a deceased infant for the first time, I could have been in the room with her, such is the eloquence that she writes with.



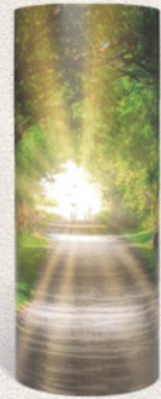
If you find yourself needing a good read for the weekend or a holiday, I can highly recommend it.

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FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT IN SUPPORT OF MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Several months ago Joss, Jane Bennett's son came up with the idea of a football tournament in support of men's mental health, having working in the construction industry for some time he has seen first-hand the issues facing men and felt the pressures of working for himself.

As with any outside event we were watching the weather on virtually an hourly basis; Saturday 15th July, the day of the long-anticipated tournament, the forecast was showing a yellow weather warning with high winds and rain; inflatables and trampolines were cancelled!

The breezy day dawned, the spirits of 35 junior teams and 22 adult teams were high and the games took place. Joss played with Bennetts Funerals' team, they had a fun day and decided it was taking part that was important! They have still got their kit so watch this space.



Joss being interviewed by John Schultz,
Director of Commercial and
Partnerships, Brentwood Town FC

#ITSOKAYTOTALK



The adult winners were Baker's Labels with Merrymead Tea Room's team as runners up, both businesses donated to our cause, along with Brian Hart from SAIF Insure and Bradnam Joinery. Robin Lynn from UK Football Camps helped with the planning, Brentwood Town FC let us use their facilities. Bennetts team were there on the day with games for the kids and Aching Arms were there explaining their work in supporting parents who have lost babies.

We raised an amazing amount of over £8,000 which will be shared between The Craig Tyler Trust a charity local to us and Andy's Man Club, who have groups over much of the UK.

OPEN EVENING AT BENNETTS FUNERAL DIRECTORS

On Tuesday 18th July we opened our premises to allied professionals; ministers and care home staff came along for a tour and explanations about our work, refreshments were provided. Many were touched by the explanation of how we look after families who have lost a baby, our baby chapel displayed various infant coffins. Interestingly two young ladies, hoping to get into the embalming side of our profession came along, it is refreshing to see such enthusiasm.

WHAT'S NEXT...

Bennetts Funeral Directors are working in conjunction with Brentwood Borough Council to run monthly tea dances for the community in general and for those with dementia specifically, the dance teacher is set to go, the hall is booked, we look forward to the first event.



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UNUSUAL FUNERAL TRADITIONS: SKY BURIAL

Hayley Bell, Editor of the Journal

When we think of burial, we often picture a coffin lowered into the ground. However, a burial practice is both ancient and still practised today, known as sky burial. This practice involves leaving the deceased's body exposed to the elements on a mountaintop or other remote location, allowing scavenging birds to consume the remains. While this may seem like a gruesome and unusual practice to some, it is deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs in certain parts of the world. Let's explore the history, cultural significance, and modern-day use of sky burial.

HISTORY OF SKY BURIAL

The practice of sky burial dates back over 3,000 years in Tibet and is still widely practised today. Tibetan Buddhists believe in the concept of a person's consciousness living on after death and that the body is simply a vessel for the spirit. Therefore, they see no use in preserving the body after death. In fact, they believe that by leaving the body exposed to the elements and allowing it to be consumed by animals, the spirit can be released from the physical world and move on to the next stage of existence. Sky burial was also practised in ancient Persia, where it was known as "towers of silence." Zoroastrians believed that burying or burning the body would pollute the earth or fire, respectively, and that leaving the body exposed to the elements was the purest and most natural way to dispose of it. While sky burial is not practised as widely in other parts of the world, it is still used in certain cultures, including parts of Mongolia, Bhutan, and parts of India.



CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SKY BURIAL

Sky burial is more than just a method of disposing of the body; it is deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs. For Tibetan Buddhists, it is a way to honour the deceased and release their spirit from the physical world. It is also seen as a way to generate good karma for the deceased, as the act of giving one's body to the animals is considered a selfless act of generosity. Additionally, sky burial is seen as a way to give back to nature. In a world where human activity has caused significant harm to the environment, allowing animals to consume the body is a way to give back to the ecosystem. It reminds us that we are not separate from nature but a part of it.

Sky burial is also a way to confront death directly. In Western culture, death is often hidden away, and the body is prepared and preserved to look as lifelike as possible. For Tibetan Buddhists, the body is seen as just a vessel, and death is not something to be feared or hidden away.

MODERN-DAY USE OF SKY BURIAL

While sky burial is still widely practised in Tibet, it has faced some challenges in recent years. As Tibet has become more modernized, the government has placed restrictions on where sky burials can take place, and some people have started to view the practice as outdated. Additionally, using vultures in sky burial has led to concerns about disease transmission, leading some to switch to cremation instead. However, sky burial is still an important part of Tibetan Buddhist culture and will likely continue for years. In fact, some people from other parts of the world have even chosen sky burial as their preferred burial method, seeing it as a more natural and environmentally friendly option.

As our world becomes more connected, it is important to remember and respect the cultural practices of other parts of the world. Sky burial may seem unusual or even gruesome to some, but it is a deeply meaningful and important practice for many cultures. Sky burial is a burial practice that has been used for thousands of years and is still practised today in certain cultures. While it may seem strange to those unfamiliar with it, it is deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs. It is a way to honour the deceased, release their spirit from the physical world, and give back to nature.

As we navigate a world that is becoming increasingly globalized, it is important to remember and respect the cultural practices of other parts of the world, even if they differ from ours.

National President Jem Mead and Karen Mead from the National Office, together with representatives from Kindred Associations attended a dedication service at Westerleigh Group's New Forest Crematorium. This dedication ceremony highlighted the collaborative nature of the funeral industry. It showcased a collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of service and ensuring that individuals receive the utmost care and respect during challenging times.

The presence of National President Jem Mead, Karen Mead, and the other attendees at the New Forest Crematorium dedication emphasized the Institute's commitment to unity, respect, and excellence within the funeral industry. It was a momentous occasion that celebrated the collaboration between different organizations and highlighted the invaluable contributions made by the Westerleigh Group.



L/R: Mrs Katharine Barradell, Graeme Horrobin (Manager) Richard Barradell (APCC) Wendy Buchan (Cremation Society) Cll'r Ted Latham (President FBCA) Cll'r David Hawkins (Mayor of New Forest District Council) Heather White (President ICCM) Jem Mead (President BIFD) Karen Mead (BIFD) Paul Bowley (Past President SAIF) Davina Bowley Debbie Smith (Westerleigh CEO) Neil McCausland (Chairman Westerleigh Group) Karen Halliday (FSA) Philip Halliday (President FSA) Cath Tucker (FSA) Alun Tucker (CEO FSA) Julie Dunk (CEO ICCM) Alan Jose (Westerleigh Ambassador) Ed lane (Operations Director Westerleigh)

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FAMILY BUSINESS AT THE HEART OF COUNTY DURHAM COMMUNITY JOINS FUNERAL PARTNERS

A funeral business boasting more than 80 years of rich history has become the latest addition to the Funeral Partners family. The team at Gordon Fletcher and Sons, which operates three funeral homes in County Durham, said that keeping their family name and ensuring job security for their team were among the key reasons for deciding to join Funeral Partners' growing network, which is now the third largest funeral services company in the country. The family-run business was originally set up in 1938 by Thomas Atkinson Fletcher, who combined arranging funerals with joinery work. His son, Gordon Fletcher then took over and renamed the business Gordon Fletcher and Sons, which dealt with construction work as well as funerals. His children, Peter and Colin, were encouraged to study and despite gaining qualifications in the building trade, remained closely tied to the funeral sector.

Colin has been with the business since 1982, while Peter started officially in 2008 when the construction firm closed but both have been involved for as long as they can remember.

Both Colin and Peter are still managing the day-to-day operations in their role as Business Principals.

Commenting on their decision to join Funeral Partners, Peter, said: *"We won't be here forever, and there's nobody in the family who can take over, so we have got to look to the future and safeguard the legacy of the business and the future security of our staff. There are people who have been with us for 15 and 20 years. Working with Funeral Partners has meant we can keep them on, and to enable us to continue with business as usual supporting our community and bereaved families. We've been able to keep our identity, our heritage and feel like we have their respect."*

Their original premises in Spennymoor was recently extended to include a new reception area, while their Ferryhill office, which opened in 1997, is named Lazarus House. This is due to the extensive restoration work that was necessary to restore the former church back to its old glory for it then to be used as an office, rest room and chapel. The third site at Newton Aycliffe opened in 2011.

Speaking about the journey the business has taken, Peter said: *"The last three years have been eye opening for us with the Covid pandemic and the fact that last year we had our busiest ever three-month period for funerals."* Colin added: *"We've been in the funeral business since we were children, either officially or unofficially. It's a vocation and our father always taught us to conduct every funeral like it was for one of our own family members. Funeral Partners haven't tried to change the way we deal with our families, in fact, they've been really supportive and protective of our values, whilst helping us manage issues such as compliance and other important regulations. Plus, there has been investment in new furniture, technology, equipment and marketing support. Working with them will allow us to continue to do what we do best."*

Sam Kershaw, Funeral Partners Chief Executive, said: *"Gordon Fletcher and Sons is exactly the sort of business we want to work with. They have an exemplary reputation and decades of history and experience. It's fantastic they have chosen us, and I look forward to helping write the next chapter in their story. We welcome Colin, Peter and the team to our family of businesses."*

Funeral Partners 



Peter and Colin Fletcher of Gordon Fletcher and Sons
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The team at Quinns Funeral Directors with their new Mercedes hearse and limousine.

Two funeral homes within the Funeral Partners family have recently taken delivery of brand-new hybrid Mercedes vehicles.

Quinns Funeral Directors, which has served families in Greasby, Hoylake and West Kirby Wirral for a combined 70 years and John Clark Funeral Service, which has been serving bereaved families in the Bellshill and North Lanarkshire area since 2001, have taken delivery of the vehicles which combine both petrol and electric capabilities.

The hybrid Mercedes hearses and limousines, which are being rolled out across the Funeral Partners network, can run in full electric mode for up to 30 miles, ensuring a silent funeral procession, while producing zero emissions when driving through built-up areas.

Commenting on the investment it has made in the new fleet, Funeral Partners Chief Executive Sam Kershaw said, *“The new fleet reflects our continued drive towards achieving greater sustainability and enables our branches to continue to offer the very best in terms of choice, service and comfort.”*

Funeral Director John Clark Jr from John Clark Funeral Service, agrees: *“We have always taken great pride in our ability to provide our clients with a comfortable and dignified final journey but now, as well as being respectful to those who have passed, we are able to offer even greater respect for the welfare of those we live alongside in our community by offering a more environmentally friendly choice.”* The hybrid Mercedes hearses and limousines, which are being rolled out across the Funeral Partners network, can run in full electric mode for up to 30 miles, ensuring a silent funeral procession, while producing zero emissions when driving through built-up areas.



The team at John Clark Funeral Service with their new Mercedes hearse and limousine.

Commenting on the investment it has made in the new fleet, Funeral Partners Chief Executive Sam Kershaw said, *“The new fleet reflects our continued drive towards achieving greater sustainability and enables our branches to continue to offer the very best in terms of choice, service and comfort.”*

This is a view echoed by Angela Dallinger, Business Principal at Quinns Funeral Directors, who said: *“The new vehicles, which will be available across all three branches, will help us to continue to ensure that our clients’ loved ones’ final journeys are dignified and serene as we provide the standard of care which has been synonymous with Quinns since the beginning.”*

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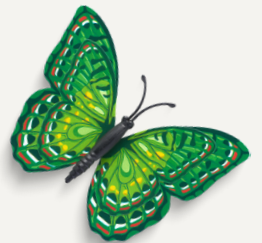


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Sheryl Crouch, head of income at the hospice said:

“We are thrilled to have been nominated by Mead Family Funerals as their chosen charity to support throughout the term that Jem Mead will be President for the British Institute of Funeral Directors. What an honour for us to be the beneficiary of any fundraising while Jem is serving, we are so very proud and humbled to have been chosen.”

IT'S IMPORTANT AS A FUNERAL DIRECTOR TO OBSERVE THE DIFFERING TRENDS IN FUNERALS; BUT ALSO IN A CHANGING WORLD AND DIFFERENT CULTURAL PRACTICES.

By Maxine Edgar

Throughout the funeral for our late Queen Elizabeth II, I read many of the social media comments from UK funeral directors. Many remarked on the audacity of the 'funeral director's logo' on the hearse; once it had been removed, many questioned 'Why'?



It's a question of Etiquette

When we first started our work as funeral directors, we used the services of outside bearers and drivers, many of them having worked in the industry for years. I recall one person advising that they would happily teach our young men 'Funeral etiquette' – clearly we were lacking in that area! Being London based, we have had the privilege of directing funerals from many different ethnicities and cultures. African, Caribbean, Hindu, Bhuddist and a few others. We note the different approaches to the deceased and also how we measure 'respect for the deceased'.

This week we took the funeral for a 81 year old Nigerian matriarch. African funerals demand great preparation and having undertaken many, it's interesting to observe the differences between the Caribbeans of which form 90% of our funerals and that of the Africans.

Irrespective of where the deceased dies; there will always be ceremonies and rituals taking place in their homeland.. Family will travel over land and sea to attend a funeral. This particular lady died some 10 weeks ago. 22 family members flew in from America, Canada and Nigeria. This practice is also common with Caribbeans; maybe 2 to 3 members will travel in for a funeral and the deceased will always be viewed by the family at the chapel of rest in preparation for an open coffin at the church. However few of the African Community view their deceased. I know the British families might have a 'private viewing' in the chapel of rest, generally for the family and close members. The Caribbean community will view at the chapel of rest, the church and if possible also at the graveside.



The African community will be adorned in their particular native dress. The fabric (or cloth as it is known) is purchased in metres galore and each individual pays their share for the fabric and for the dressmaking and tailoring fees. There is a unifying in the native costume. Several groups within the funeral party both male and female will wear the same native cloth.

The immediate family may wear a different design and even within the immediate family the females may wear an outfit that differs from that of the males. The women will wear the "Gele", a strategically tied head wrap made of fabric. The method of tying of the Gele is complicated, unique and individual and deemed to impress.

However I note that whilst both communities tend to be late; the African community have no problem with arriving at the end or even after the funeral ceremony. Their emphasis is focused on meeting together, reuniting with friends and family and fellow mourners. Late arrivals are not seen as a sign of disrespect; however a non-arrival could be.

The Caribbean community will request mourners to wear a particular colour or an emblem. Many have adopted the American 'T Shirt' approach to funerals where the face of the deceased is emblazoned upon the front and the relationship of the wearer is stated on the back. These rituals creating a commonality amongst the mourners but also enhancing the popularity of the deceased, almost giving them 'celebrity status'. If the deceased has been tragically killed or murdered; it dispels any association with 'thug culture' that might have been assigned to their memory.



By Any Means Possible

Last week we directed a Hindu funeral. The wife of the deceased requested that the coffin be brought into the house and opened for prayers on the day of the ceremony. . I agreed to execute a site visit beforehand. It was apparent that this was not going to be an easy feat. The hallway was tiny, the stairs were parallel with the only front room door, there was no angle or leverage. Yet amidst her anguish and pain, she was adamant that by 'any means possible', the coffin would enter the house. She went on to say "even if he had to be stood upright and pushed through the door". Clearly this was a last case scenario and not one that I would have suggested; however it was her call not mine. Fortunately we were able to find an alternative which involved 8 men and a coffin, in a 6ft wide galley kitchen and sliding it in between the counter top and the wall cabinets until we could get it outside the kitchen door and into the garden; bringing the coffin into the house through the patio doors and all without shoes on - as is the custom.

The English neighbours next door were totally gobsmacked. It was bad enough witnessing a coffin going into the house knowing it would be opened and scattered with incense; but taking it into the kitchen and balancing it on the worktop seemed quite disrespectful. Not sure what they would have thought of last week's Nigerian family. The procession went into the chapel 25 minutes late; 10 minutes later I had to go outside of the church and remind the three daughters of the deceased that their mother's funeral was taking place and they might just 'miss their cue'. They were chatting as though they were in the local supermarket car park. The ceremony started at 11.25am, at 12.26pm mourners in native cloth were still turning up, and in great numbers too.

Stop The Traffic

What struck me was the importance that the English neighbours placed upon stopping the traffic for the horses that were on their way and also knocking on the doors of the other neighbours to ensure they moved their cars making way for the limousines that were about to arrive. To them this was of great importance and the correct thing to do. This was not about the family; their respect was for the deceased! It was a beautiful and endearing sight to see an elderly man in shorts, stood in the middle of an A road directing busy traffic!

Just Don't Drop The Coffin

For all communities pomp and ceremony is subjective. There are elements to the ceremony that must take place and by any means necessary. Bearing is not an issue. For these communities There is no 'right or wrong way' to carry a coffin; as long as it is not dropped. The family does not choose who carries, anybody can 'have a go'. In one hand one might hold a beer (or some form of 'flavoured' cigarette). There are no formal steps to be taken and shouldering would only be introduced by a funeral director who wishes to enforce British Standards. Culturally the mourners will backfill the grave and finally arrange the flowers on the top of the grave, this arrangement involves everybody.

Every Man Does His Thing Differently

There used to be many elements to a funeral ceremony that at one time I would have frowned upon. But through observation, research and understanding but a love for my work and people, I have arrived at the understanding that 'every man does his thing differently'.

For some communities it is the turning up and communing together that makes the difference. The African community may be in their desperate hour of grief; the deceased may have on the finest and most expensive of garments; but who would know when few of my African families have a chapel of rest viewing. In fact some I never meet until the day of the funeral. They seem to speedily come to terms with the death; they accept the deceased is far removed and they mourn with friends and family and talk about the goodness and qualities of the deceased. The funeral is simply a ritual, there is little emotional attachment to the coffin or it's contents. The Caribbean community will also go that extra mile for the deceased. However there must be a chapel of rest viewing and that coffin is likely to be opened if the deceased is in an fair condition. There will be weeping and wailing and outward displays of grief often directed at the open casket.

In a changing world of cultural diversity and different groups of people, it is important to acknowledge that the days of the 'Undertaker of old' are on the decline. Whilst demographics play a huge part in how we execute our funerals; the upcoming millennials are making requests that will need to be embraced and adopted if the work of the Funeral Director is to continue.

Maxine Edgar, alongside her equally dedicated husband Brian, is the driving force behind Bronze Ash Funerals. As Founder and Funeral Director, she brings a combination of compassion, commitment, and a unique perspective to the sombre world of funerals.

As she grew older, Maxine found herself naturally gravitating towards eulogy writing, speaking at funerals of family members and friends, and eventually, into the roles of Funeral Celebrant and Funeral Director. It was as if the universe had charted her course, using her early experiences to guide her towards her calling.

Maxine's passion for the funeral industry is not born of morbidity, but from a deep love for people and her community. She feels a certain urgency to demystify the concept of death and transform it from a feared inevitability into an accepted part of life.

Maxine and Brian's ultimate goal is to help people become better informed about death. They desire to create an environment where people can comfortably discuss and embrace the inevitable.

After all, death is not an end, but a transition.



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OPTIMISING YOUR GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE: A VALUABLE TOOL FOR FUNERAL HOMES

Eimer Duffy, FIT Social Media



I'd like to touch on a topic about being online that's often overlooked in the Funeral industry: your Google Business Profile (GBP). This is an amazing free marketing tool for your online presence and is as crucial as your physical one. If you haven't acquired your listing then go to https://www.google.com/intl/en_ie/business/

Let's dive into why optimising your GBP is a great investment for your funeral home:

- **Enhanced Visibility:** Many families turn to Google when they're seeking funeral services. By optimising your GBP, your funeral home will appear more prominently in local searches, meaning you're more likely to be seen by those who need your services most.
- **Builds Trust:** A fully completed GBP provides all the necessary information about your funeral home, including location, opening hours and customer reviews, plus photos, videos, updates and your services etc... By providing clear information and positive customer experiences, you build trust with potential clients.
- **Better Engagement:** With a fully optimised GBP, you can engage directly with families via reviews and questions. Responding promptly and professionally can significantly impact your business, turning potential clients into loyal customers.
- **Showcase Your Services:** GBP allows you to display photos and videos of your services, amenities, and facilities. This gives families a visual understanding of what to expect, which is particularly important in our industry where comfort and aesthetics matter.

So how can you get started with GBP optimisation/fully completing it? Here are a few key tips to get started with:

- **Claim Your Business:** Before you can optimise, you need to claim your GBP. This process is simple and only requires you to verify your business with Google.
- **Provide Comprehensive Information:** Make sure all details are accurate and up-to-date. This includes your address, phone number, email, website, services with descriptions and products etc..., plus your messaging option and opening hours. Remember, incorrect or outdated information can lead to missed opportunities.
- **Encourage & Reply To Reviews:** Reviews play a vital role in GBP optimisation. Encourage families to leave reviews and always respond, whether the review is positive or negative. This shows that you value feedback and are committed to improving your services.
- **Regularly Update Photos & Posts:** A well-maintained GBP is an active GBP. Regularly updating photos and making posts about your services can greatly enhance your online visibility. You can also use this platform to share community involvement or industry-specific advice.



In Conclusion:

Remember, optimising your Google Business Profile is a continuous process. It's not about being perfect from day one, but about making consistent improvements to provide a comprehensive, engaging and reliable profile on Google that truly reflects your funeral home's values and services.

The digital world might feel a bit daunting. However, embracing this free marketing tool can significantly boost your visibility and customer engagement. With a bit of time and effort, your GBP can become an essential tool in connecting with families during their time of need.

Thank you for joining me on this Google Business Profile journey. If you have any further questions, want to really make the most of your GBP or need help in navigating the world of social media, your website or something else, please get in touch, email me on eimer@fitsocialmedia.ie and for more info go to www.fitsocialmedia.co.uk

I am delighted to say I will be at the BIFD conference 20~22 October 2023 so hope to see you there!

Thanks for reading.

Eimer x

Eimer Duffy is a Social Media/Digital Marketing Consultant and Trainer for the Funeral Industry. Assisting Funeral professionals to gain a better online presence and build communities and trust online. Live online interactive sessions for all knowledge levels with the benefit of being held at a time to suit your diary via Zoom.





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Managing Director, Marian Sinclair: Serving families since 2002

WHAT IS WATER CREMATION?

By Deputy Editor Lucie Kibbey

Water cremation, also known as Aquamation, Resomation, Biocremation, Flameless cremation and alkaline hydrolysis, uses water to bring the body back to the skeletal remains. It is the gentle process of returning the body to ashes using water and a small amount of alkali-based solution to speed up the natural process the body goes through at the end of life.

The body is first placed in a coffin or shroud made from biodegradable materials before being carefully placed in the water cremator, which is a steel vessel filled with a mixture of water and potassium hydroxide and heated to a temperature around 160 °C (320 °F), but at an elevated pressure, which prevents boiling. It is this heat which takes the flesh back to its chemical components - amino acids, peptides, sugars, and salts. After about three to four hours, only the bones remain.

They are then ground down to “ashes”, placed in an urn and returned to the family in the same way as a conventional cremation. The liquid is disposed of either through the sanitary sewer system, or through some other method, including use in a garden or green space.



WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE FUNERAL INDUSTRY?

“For decades there have been just two main choices when it comes to [peoples’] end-of-life arrangements: burial and cremation,” says Julian Atkinson, director of Resomation company Kindly Earth.

“[We] will be providing people with another option for how they leave this world because this natural process uses water, not fire, making it gentler on the body and kinder on the environment.”

And there does appear to be an appetite for such a service.

Research by YouGov, commissioned by Co-op Funeralcare, found that 89 per cent of UK adults hadn’t heard of the term Resomation. But once explained, just under a third (29 per cent) said they would choose it for their own funeral if it was available.

“The rise in ecological and sustainability concerns over the past decade combined with a desire to be part of nature or laid to rest in a natural setting, means more people are considering the environmental impact of their body once they die,” says Professor Douglas Davies from the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University.

This alkaline hydrolysis process has been championed by several ecological campaigning groups for using 90 kWh of electricity, one-quarter the energy of flame-based cremation and producing less carbon dioxide and pollutants. It is being presented as an alternative option at some British crematorium sites. As of August 2007, about 1,000 people had chosen this method for the disposal of their remains in the United States.

Alkaline hydrolysis has also been adopted by the pet and animal industry. A handful of companies in North America offer the procedure as an alternative to pet cremation. Alkaline hydrolysis is also used in the agricultural industry to sterilize animal carcasses that may pose a health hazard, because the process inactivates viruses and bacteria.

WHICH COUNTRIES OFFER WATER CREMATION?

The UK is not the only European country to make waves in the Resomation scene. Ireland is set to open its first water cremation facility this year. The service is also available in the US, Canada, and South Africa.

Belgium and the Netherlands are among the other European countries looking to introduce Resomation, but there are regulatory hurdles that must be overcome first.

HISTORY OF WATER CREMATION

The process was patented by Amos Herbert Hobson in 1888 as a method to process animal carcasses into plant food. In 2005, Bio-Response Solutions designed, sold, and installed the first single cadaver alkaline hydrolysis system at the Mayo Clinic, where it was still in use as of 2019. In 2007, a Scottish biochemist, Sandy Sullivan, started a company making the machines, and calling the process (and company) Resomation.

RELIGIOUS VIEWS

In Christian countries and cultures, cremation has historically been discouraged and viewed as a desecration of God's image, and as interference with the resurrection of the dead taught in scripture. It is now acceptable to some denominations.

The Eastern Orthodox Church does not allow cremation.

The Roman Catholic Church allows cremation of bodies if it is not done in denial of the beliefs in the sacredness of the human body or the resurrection of the dead.

However, the Catholic Church in the United States does not approve of alkaline hydrolysis as a method of final disposal of human remains. In 2011, Donald Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington and then chairman of the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), determined it "*unnecessarily disrespectful of the human body.*" The Archdiocese of St. Louis explained that it was considered this way because the Church took concern with the final disposal of the liquid solution, which is typically to the sewer system. This was considered disrespectful of the sanctity of the human body.

Desmond Tutu, former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, was aquamated, per his wishes.

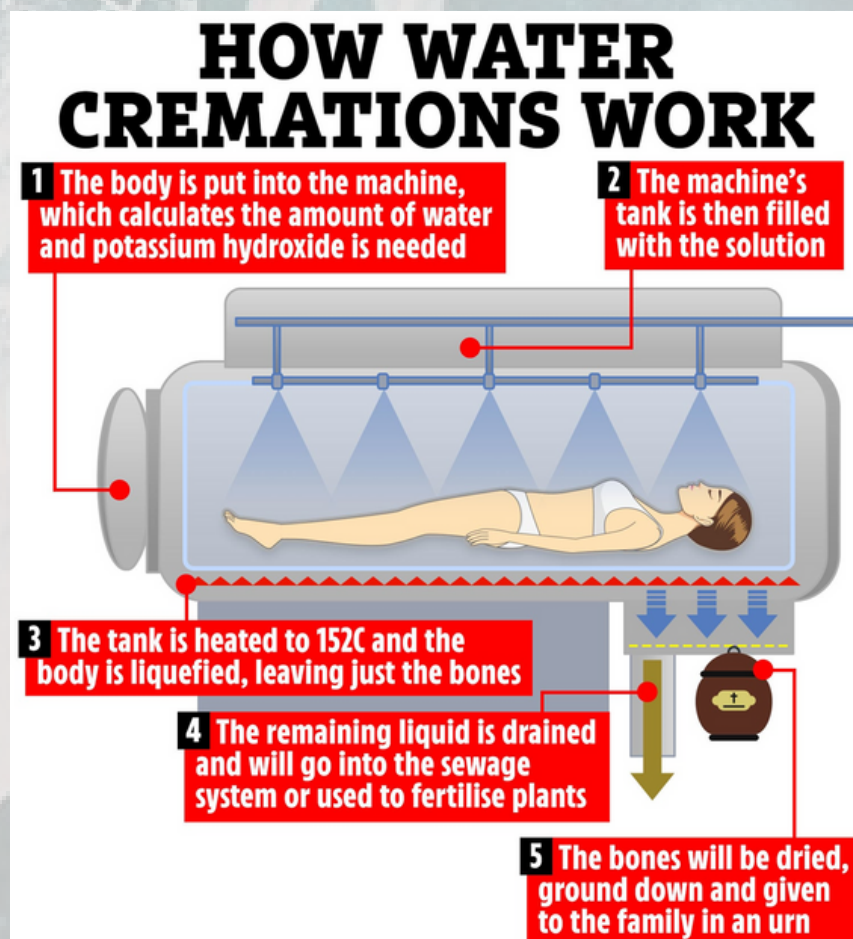
Judaism forbids cremation as it is not in line with the religion's teachings of respect and dignity for humans, who are believed by the religion to be created in God's image. Islam also forbids cremation of the deceased. Both religions are likely to reject alkaline hydrolysis as they believe that the body must be laid to rest through burial to prepare for the afterlife.

Sikhism, Hinduism, and Buddhism each place theological emphasis on the burning of the corpse which may prevent alkaline hydrolysis from replacing cremation.

WHAT WILL THE COST BE?

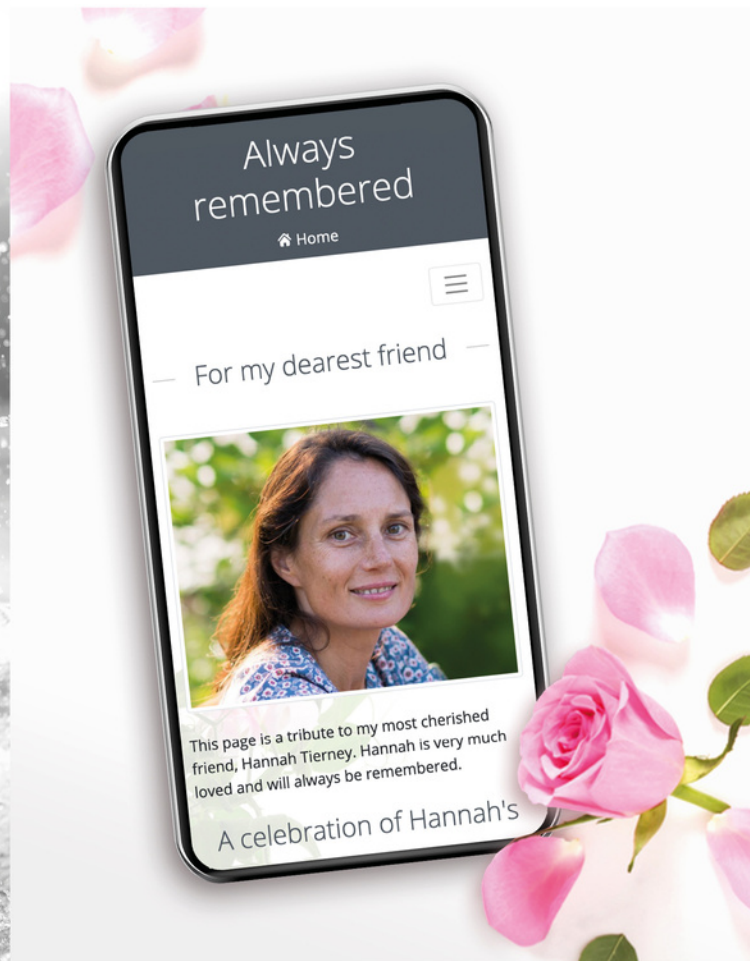
That's a tricky question, as we won't know the prices until crematoria start to install the machines. The machines themselves cost around £330k, but the cost to run them is lower, so hopefully it won't be long until water cremation in the UK is a realistic option.

In the UK, it costs around £1,100 for a direct cremation, and about £4,000 for an attended cremation with a funeral service. Hopefully water cremation services will cost around the same.





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FUNERAL PARTNERS HELPS BEREAVED FAMILIES RAISE £10M FOR CHARITIES THROUGH ONLINE TRIBUTES

Funeral Partners



Bereaved families have raised over £10m through online tribute platform, MuchLoved.

A partnership that began in 2014 between Funeral Partners funeral homes and the online tribute platform, MuchLoved, has enabled more than £10m to be raised for both national and local charities.

The alliance between the two gives bereaved families the opportunity to set up an online tribute page in memory of the person who has passed. Bereaved family and friends can then visit the page to contribute memories or photographs, view funeral notice information and set up a donation to a charity in memory of the deceased.

Over the past nine years, nearly 34,500 tribute pages have been set up, with donations made to over 2,500 individual UK charities. Of those, the top five beneficiaries to date are Cancer Research, which has received £706,583, followed by Alzheimer's Society (£392,938), Woking & Sam Beare Hospices (£391,721), British Heart Foundation (£390,451) and MacMillan Cancer Support (£368,290).

Other charities to have benefited include Mind, the Stroke Association, Guide Dogs, The Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes and Young Epilepsy, as well as a raft of smaller charities local to Funeral Partners businesses across the UK.

Richard Baker, Funeral Partnerships Manager at MuchLoved, said: "We were amazed in 2021 when donations reached the £5m mark but to have reached £10m just two years later is incredible. It is an outstanding achievement that is testament to the generosity of Funeral Partners' clients, as well as the hard work that is put in day after day by the teams within its branches."

Richard continued: "The amount raised is particularly amazing given the ongoing cost of living crisis, which has significantly reduced people's capacity to support charitable endeavours. Despite this, it is clear that the ability to donate to causes close to their hearts gives families something positive to focus on during the most testing of times."

Steph Dunst, Regional Engagement Operations Executive at Alzheimer's Society, which has benefited from the initiative, said: "In-memory fundraising not only raises money that is vital for the continued operation of our services, it also provides a secure and sympathetic place for our supporters to share cherished memories of their loved ones."

Commenting on behalf of Funeral Partners, Marketing Director, Kelly Hailou, said: "We really value our partnership with MuchLoved because the comfort and sense of unity the online service brings families is undeniable. It enables them to share memories about their loved ones and can become a living tribute that can be revisited on anniversaries and other important dates, or just when someone feels the need to be closer to the person they have lost. Of course, another huge benefit is the money they raise for charities, which enables them to continue to provide a range of community support services and fund vital research."

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And the support on offer extends to those working in health and care, schools, prisons, the forces, as well as workplace programmes.

WHY IS THEIR WORK IMPORTANT?

Office for National Statistics published suicide data for England.

- 5219 suicides were registered in 2021. This is 307 more than in 2020.
- The overall suicide rate was 10.5 per 100,000, compared to 10.0 per 100,000 in 2020, and 10.8 per 100,000 in 2019.
- The male suicide rate was 15.8 per 100,000, compared to a female suicide rate of 5.5 per 100,000.
- Males aged 50-54 were found to have the highest suicide rate (22.5 per 100,000).

There is regional variation in the suicide rates. The Northeast of England once again had the highest suicide rate (14.1. per 100,000), with the Northwest of England seeing a significant increase in suicide rate in 2021 (12.9 per 100,000), compared to 2020 (10.1 per 100,000)

WHAT CAN I DO? HOW CAN I HELP?

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• HELP AT A FUNDRAISING EVENT.

We know that on the day support is vital to our team, who have dedicated months of training, all to raise funds and awareness for Samaritans.

You'll be joining a dedicated and friendly team for the day, with full guidance and support for your volunteer role. With flexible opportunities available, you can join us for as long as you like.

• BECOME A SUPPORT VOLUNTEER.

There's a whole range of things that need to be done. You could help one of our branches raise money or promote its services, organise an event, keep our computers working, volunteer to help in one of our shops or generally keep things running smoothly.



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Your host at this popular event this year is Olympic medal swimmer, Cassie Patten, who will share her tips and experience. A team of experienced event organizers will be on hand to ensure that the event runs smoothly and safely. You'll also receive a medal at the end of your challenge as well as a fantastic sense of achievement. So why not take the plunge and join us for this fantastic event? Taking part costs just £25 per person and we ask everyone taking part to raise a minimum of £100 to help support local people at the end of their lives. Our dedicated team of fundraisers are here to support you every step of the way with ideas to help reach your target.

Register now to secure your place and start your fundraising journey. It promises to be a fun day out for all the family, and we hope to see you there.

To find out more, email the team at fundraisingandevents@prospect-hospice.net

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Teal Ripple



THE HEADSTONE

BY HARRY TAYLOR

**DON'T BURY ME UP IN THAT CEMETERY
WHERE I'M JUST A NAME ON A STONE
SOON FORGOT AND LEFT ALONE
WHERE THE ACID RAIN WILL ERASE MY NAME
AND I WILL BE JUST A NUMBER ON A PLOT
SCATTER PART OF ME ON THAT MOUNTAIN TOP
TO BE PART OF THAT MAJESTIC BACKDROP
AND TO MINGLE WITH THE SNOWDROP
AND TAKE ME TO THE WOODS
WHERE I CAN BE PART OF A SAPLING
THEN MY CREMATION CAN BECOME A CREATION
AN OXYGEN EMANATING TREE, BREATH GIVING AND FREE
TAKE ME TO THE MEADOW, I'LL BE NEW GROWN GRASS
I'LL WAVE IN THE BREEZE AS LOVERS PASS
OR FLOAT ME IN THE SEA,
AND LET THE SUN GLISTEN ON ME
OR CAST ME TO THE WINDS
SO I CAN FLY WITH THE BIRDS, GIVE ME WINGS.
DON'T BURY ME UP IN THAT CEMETERY
I DON'T WANT THAT TO BE MY LOT
I DON'T WANT FLOWERS, I KNOW YOU CARE
FOR YOU WERE ALWAYS THERE.
SPREAD ME AROUND, IF THAT'S POSSIBLE TO DO
BUT SAVE SOME OF ME TO BE NEAR YOU.**



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