

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS



THE JOURNAL

ISSUE 12



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IN THIS ISSUE...

05 A LETTER FROM CLIVE PEARSON

Clive Reflects On This Month As National President

07 CONFERENCE 2026

All the details you need for the 44th Annual Conference in October 2026

12 A PLEA FOR CHOICE

Victoria Wells looks at Ester Rantzen and her role in Assisted Dying

16 THE FISK METALLIC BURIAL CASE

Netflix Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* and its Resonance to the Fisk Metallic Burial Case

20 GRIEF, STRESS AND HYPOTHERMIA

Dr. Phil Gore releases part three of his Grief and Stress comparison to Hypothermia

27 LIFE AND TIMES OF A MEDIEVAL KNIGHT

Ex-Funeral Director Sally Wainwright tells us the background to her writing her new book



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 Enquiries, please contact:*

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The Presidential Team:

National President, Clive Pearson

1st Vice President, Dr Philip Gore

2nd Vice President, Judith Dandy

Immediate Past President, Amanda Pink

admin@bifd.org.uk

Chair of Education, Andrew Floyd:

a.floyd.bifd.edu@gmail.com



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Letter from the National President

Clive Pearson

As we approach the end of another year, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and reflection on the journey we've undertaken together, through the year under the leadership of Past President Amanda. Leanne and I had the privilege of attending our first presidential engagement at the Funeral Supplies Association (FSA) annual dinner. It was a significant occasion, marking the transition of leadership as Jade from Wilcox stepped down after an exceptional year.



We extend our heartfelt congratulations to David Fry from Clarke and Strong, who has taken over the mantle of presidency. We look forward to his leadership and the fresh perspectives he will bring to the association.

Region C held a Christmas Dinner at the Stansfield Arms, Apperley Bridge. It was a truly enjoyable evening, filled with festive cheer among our BIFD members. The warmth and connection shared that night reminded us of the strong community we have built together.

As we enter the festive season, it's essential to acknowledge the tireless dedication of funeral directors across the country. This time of year can be particularly challenging, yet the commitment to providing compassionate care remains unwavering. Your hard work does not go unnoticed, and I am proud to stand alongside each of you in this vital profession.



In the spirit of the season, I want to wish you all a joyful and peaceful Christmas. May this time bring you moments of rest and reflection, surrounded by loved ones. Here's to a new year filled with hope, resilience, and continued support for one another.



Clive Pearson
National President, Region C



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As the festive season approaches, we reflect on a year of growth and shared achievement – from reconnecting with partners at exhibitions across the UK and abroad to expanding our manufacturing facilities to meet growing demand. Every milestone has been made possible through collaboration and commitment.

Thank you for being part of our journey this year. Here's to a peaceful and joyful holiday season and an exciting year ahead!

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44th ANNUAL BIFD CONFERENCE

23rd – 25th October 2026



Mercure Tankersley Manor Hotel

Church Ln, Tankersley, Barnsley S75 3DQ

The BIFD Invites You To Conference 2026.....

BIFD National President, Clive Pearson, and his wife Leanne cordially invite all Members, Fellows, Students, Associates, Presidents of Kindred Associations, and Distinguished Guests to attend the upcoming Conference and Gala Dinner of The British Institute of Funeral Directors. The event will take place from 23rd to 25th October 2025 at The Mercure Tankersley Manor Hotel.



Tankersley Manor centres around a renovated 17th-century residence, conveniently located just a minute from Junction 36 off the M1 and offering free parking. Its 98 refurbished rooms are designed with elegant craftsmanship and bursts of colour to create an inviting atmosphere for guests. You'll find leisure amenities such as a gym, swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna, steam room, and five spa treatment rooms—perfect for enjoying some relaxation during Conference Weekend (advance booking is recommended). The Woodman Restaurant offers a cozy spot by the fire where you can unwind and savour classic Yorkshire dishes.

Nearby attractions include Elsecar Heritage Centre, Cannon Hall, and Chatsworth House.

The President's Charity For 2026.....



Clive and Leanne have selected The Samaritans as the Institute Charity for 2026.

Founded in 1953 by Chad Vara, who recognised through his own life experiences the importance of listening, the organisation empowers individuals by offering a compassionate ear to callers wishing to talk about their emotions, feelings, challenges, and concerns, hoping to help them make positive informed decisions about their lives.

The Samaritans' mission is dedicated to reducing the number of individuals contemplating or attempting to take their own lives. The organisation currently provides comprehensive 24/7 telephone support across England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Its services have expanded to help individuals facing a broad range of issues, including suicide, depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, all forms of abuse, and alcohol or drug use.

Conference Secretary David Gresty actively serves as a listening volunteer and is highly engaged with his local branch. He expresses sincere gratitude to Clive for his support of a charity, that is significant to him, throughout 2026.

The itinerary so far...

Friday 23rd October 2026

The Education Committee is scheduled to convene in the morning, followed by a meeting of the Board of Directors in the afternoon.

Once you've settled into your rooms, Clive welcomes you to join him and Leanne for a three-course dinner in the hotel's function suite.

Saturday 24th October 2026

The Annual General Meeting will be held in the morning, and a buffet lunch will follow afterward.

In the afternoon, Clive has tentative plans for an activity of interest; further details will be provided once arrangements are confirmed.

The evening will commence with a drink's reception, followed by a three-course dinner accompanied by wine, cheese and biscuits, as well as tea and coffee. The programme will include the Diploma Awards Ceremony and the official Handover of Offices, concluding with music and dancing later in the evening.

Earlier than 23rd or later than 25th October 2026

Should you wish to extend your stay, we have arranged favourable rates for dates surrounding the Conference, allowing you to enjoy Yorkshire for a longer visit. Kindly inform us of your specific requirements, and we will endeavour to secure the most advantageous arrangements on your behalf.

The British Institute of Funeral Directors Conference 2026:

23rd – 25th October 2026

The Mercure Tankersley Manor Hotel

Church Ln, Tankersley, Barnsley S75 3DQ

The 44th BIFD Conference 2026 Rates

1. Friday Evening To Sunday Morning – THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

<i>Friday Dinner</i>	<i>.....Double Room (per couple)</i>	<i>£675</i>
<i>Friday & Saturday Bed & Breakfast</i>	<i>.....Single Room (per person)</i>	<i>£425</i>
<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea & Coffee</i>		
<i>Saturday Lunch Included</i>		
<i>Saturday Evening Drinks Reception</i>		
<i>Saturday Gala Dinner – Includes 3 Course Meal, Cheese & Biscuits & Tea and Coffee</i>		

2. Friday Evening To Saturday Morning - ONLY

<i>Friday Dinner</i>	<i>.....Double Room (per couple)</i>	<i>£295</i>
<i>Friday Bed & Breakfast</i>	<i>.....Single Room (per person)</i>	<i>£200</i>
<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea, Coffee & Biscuits</i>		

Saturday Lunch Is Available At £30 PP

3. Saturday To Sunday Morning - ONLY

<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea, Coffee & Biscuits</i>	<i>.....Double Room (per couple)</i>	<i>£395</i>
<i>Saturday Evening Drinks Reception</i>	<i>.....Single Room (per person)</i>	<i>£235</i>
<i>Saturday Gala Dinner – Includes 3 Course Meal, Cheese & Biscuits & Tea and Coffee</i>		
<i>Saturday Bed & Breakfast</i>		

Saturday Lunch Is Available At £30 PP

4. The Gala Banquet Dinner Only

.....£85 Per Person

<i>Saturday Evening Drinks Reception</i>
<i>Saturday Gala Dinner – Includes 3 Course Meal, Cheese & Biscuits & Tea and Coffee</i>

Saturday Lunch Is Available At £30 PP

5. AGM ATTENDANCE ONLY

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<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea, Coffee & Biscuits</i>
--

Saturday Lunch Is Available On The Day At £30 PP

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Please add extra dates to booking form:

<i>.....Double Room (2 People) £POA</i>
<i>.....Single Room (1 Person) £POA</i>

The 43rd BIFD CONFERENCE – 23rd – 25th October 2026

The Mercure Tankersley Manor

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Tariff (3) – Sat to Sun

Double Rate: £.....

Single Rate: £.....

Tariff (4) – Gala Dinner Only

Total Attendees £.....

Tariff (5) – AGM Only

£ No Charge

Please return, or email, your completed booking form to the Conference Co-ordinator and make payment either by Bacs or by Cheque made out to “The BIFD”:

Bacs Payments To:

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Reference: BIFDCONF

Mr. David Gresty

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A Plea for Choice: Esther Rantzen's Galvanising Role in the Assisted Dying Debate

Victoria Wells

Deputy Editor, Region C

The national conversation around assisted dying has seen a dramatic increase in interest, largely galvanised by the courageous and personal campaign of Dame Esther Rantzen.

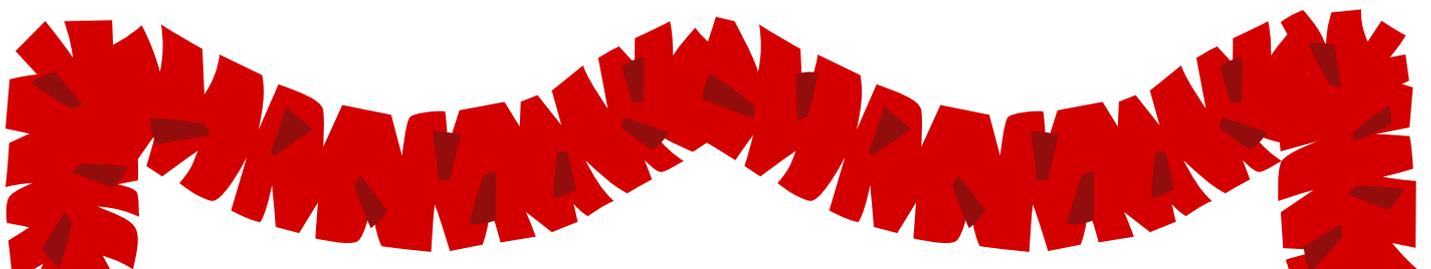
The veteran broadcaster and founder of Childline, who has been diagnosed with stage four lung cancer, made the deeply personal decision to join the Swiss assisted dying clinic, Dignitas. Her decision, which was publicly revealed, ignited a powerful and emotionally charged debate across the UK, putting the issue firmly back on the parliamentary agenda.



Dame Esther's support for a change in the law stems from her desire to have a dignified, pain-free death of her choosing, surrounded by her loved ones. The current law in England and Wales criminalises assisted dying, forcing those who seek this option to travel abroad, often to Switzerland, at significant personal cost and with the distressing reality that family members who assist them could face prosecution.

She has publicly lamented the "cruel mess" of the current law, noting the irony that pets in the UK are afforded a more merciful end-of-life choice than people. Her testimony and fight highlights the fear of a "bad death" and the trauma experienced by families who are forced to watch their loved ones suffer unnecessarily, even with the best palliative care.

Dame Esther's powerful voice has directly translated into political action. A petition she backed, calling for a debate and vote on assisted dying, swiftly surpassed 100,000 signatures, triggering a parliamentary discussion.



A core argument of her campaign is that the law needs to reflect the overwhelming public opinion, with polls consistently showing strong support for legalising assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults. She has tirelessly urged MPs to attend and vote on proposed legislation, stressing that for a vital "life-and-death issue," politicians must listen to their constituents.

A frequent concern raised by opponents of assisted dying is the potential for it to damage the provision or quality of palliative care. However, Dame Esther has strongly refuted this, citing key evidence from a parliamentary inquiry that examined jurisdictions where assisted dying is legal. This evidence suggested that the introduction of assisted dying had not led to a decline in palliative care; indeed, in some areas, it appeared to have been strengthened.

Dame Esther's unwavering advocacy, born out of her own terminal diagnosis, has successfully shone a light on the human cost of the current legislation, propelling the debate on assisted dying to a critical point in the UK.



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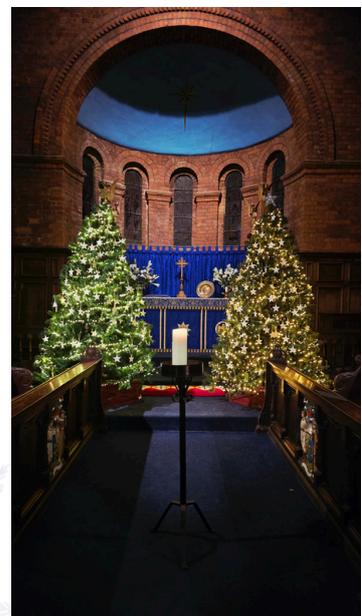
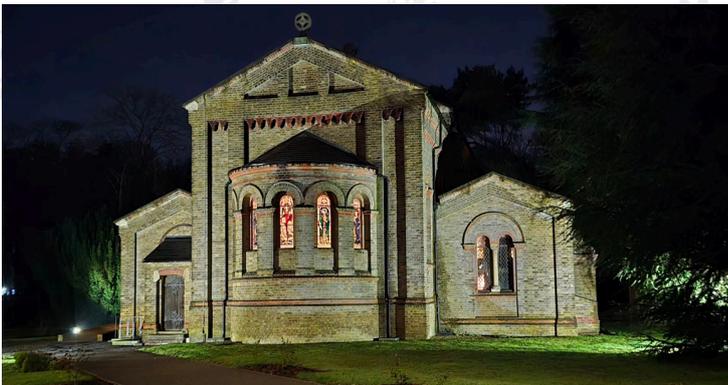
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Annual Memorial Services

For some years Bennetts Funeral Directors in Brentwood and Billerica have been organising memorial services for families they have had the honour of looking after for funeral arrangements. We are fortunate in having a good community relationship with the Army Reserve Centre in Brentwood; the former Essex Regiment Chapel is next door so a perfect non-denominational setting for our service with support from the team at The ARC. This year services were held, firstly in the Regiment Chapel in Brentwood, which was attended by well over two hundred people and secondly in Billerica attended by over 60 people. Family members are invited to light a candle in memory of their loved one and to hang a star with their loved ones' name on our Christmas trees. Following the service, we offered refreshments to enable families to take a little more time to reflect on the evening and chat to our team; this year the message has been very much about light and hope.



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The Fisk Metallic Burial Case: Historical Innovation and Its Resonance in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*



The release of Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* on Netflix has drawn renewed attention to the visual language of 19th-century death care. Among the film's most striking motifs is the appearance of metal, anthropoid-shaped burial containers reminiscent of the real Victorian-era Fisk Metallic Burial Case.

For funeral professionals, this presents a valuable opportunity to explore how historic innovations in body preservation and transport not only shaped modern practice but also continue to influence cultural depictions of death. This article examines the origins and significance of the Fisk case, considers its portrayal in del Toro's adaptation, and reflects on what these themes mean for contemporary funeral service.

The Fisk Metallic Burial Case: A Brief History

Patented in the United States in 1848 by Almond Dunbar Fisk, the Fisk Metallic Burial Case was one of the earliest large-scale attempts to merge mortuary need with industrial manufacturing.

Key characteristics included:

- **Cast or rolled metal construction**, designed to be airtight when sealed.
- **Human-shaped (mummiform) outline**, echoing ancient sarcophagi.
- **A glass viewing plate** over the face, allowing mourners to see the deceased without exposing the body.
- **A focus on preservation**, particularly during long-distance transport; a growing concern in an era of expanding railways and steamship travel.
- **Luxurious pricing**, making the Fisk case a symbol of status and modernity.

While the design saw initial popularity, its distinctive aesthetic, described by some historians as both ingenious and unsettling, meant it ultimately remained a niche product. Yet its influence is clear: it marked a transitional moment between traditional wooden coffins and the more engineered, sealed caskets that would dominate American funerary practice in the 20th century.

The Fisk Case in Frankenstein: Material Culture as Storytelling

Del Toro's Frankenstein does not merely use period props for atmosphere; it draws upon them to communicate themes central to Mary Shelley's original text: preservation, violation, the boundary between science and sanctity, and society's unease with the physical body.

Within the film, the Fisk-like case conveys:

- **A sense of medical intrusion:** Bodies are shown as objects subject to experimentation or transport, echoing 19th-century fears around dissection, anatomy teaching, and body-snatching.
- **Technological ambition:** The case symbolises humanity's desire to control decomposition, an ambition mirrored in Frankenstein's own attempt to control life and death.
- **Moral ambiguity:** The metallic, almost industrial quality of the coffin disrupts the expected warmth of wood, reinforcing the cold, clinical atmosphere of the narrative.



Film and television often take creative liberties with historical artefacts; however, the Fisk case's inclusion in this context is particularly apt. It evokes the exact period anxieties; scientific progress, bodily preservation, and the material conditions of death that shaped both Shelley's novel and the broader development of funeral practice.

Relevance to Modern Funeral Directors

Although the Fisk Metallic Burial Case is a historical curiosity today, its themes remain surprisingly contemporary.

1. Preservation and presentation

Funeral directors continue to navigate family expectations around viewing, preservation, and the physical condition of the deceased. While modern embalming and refrigeration render airtight metal cases unnecessary, the intention to provide dignity, reassurance, and time remains unchanged.

2. Repatriation and long-distance conveyance

The Fisk case reflected a world where the movement of remains over great distances was becoming common. Today, international repatriation is a routine part of funeral service, with its own regulations, container requirements, and emotional weight for families.

3. Symbolism of the coffin

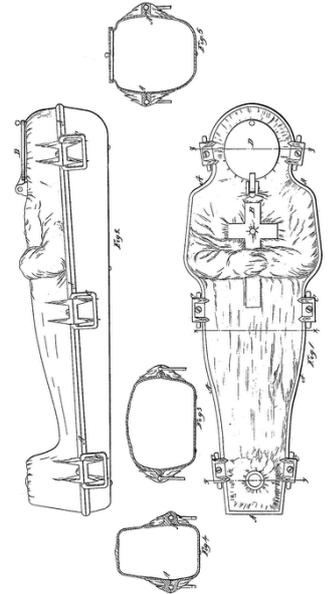
Coffin and casket design still communicates meaning. Whether a family chooses simplicity, environmental sustainability, traditional craftsmanship, or grandeur, the container remains a deeply expressive aspect of ritual and identity.

4. Cultural representation of the profession

As the public increasingly encounters funerary imagery through television and film, the profession can benefit from understanding, and where appropriate, engaging with how death is depicted. These portrayals shape expectations and assumptions about the work funeral directors do.

In conclusion, the Fisk Metallic Burial Case, though a relatively short-lived product, represents a pivotal moment in the history of mortuary care; a moment when industrial innovation, public health concerns, and evolving attitudes to death converged. Its appearance in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* highlights the enduring power of such artefacts to illuminate the anxieties and aspirations of their time.

For members of the British Institute of Funeral Directors, reflecting on these historical intersections enriches our understanding of contemporary practice. The materials, methods, and symbolism of caring for the dead have always evolved alongside society itself, and continue to do so today.



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 More details coming soon — but for now, save the date: **16th Sept 2026.**

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Grief, Stress and Hypothermia: some details

Dr Phil Gore MBTFD, Ph. D.

1st Vice President

As this is quite a deep subject, I have decided to split a rather large concluding article into two more manageable parts. So the final pages will appear in the following edition of our journal.



So for those of younger years, before the possibly over-used concept of 'mental health' is well known, but it was common in my younger years for individuals to spend their entire working life without the slightest public acknowledgement of the rigors that might build up over the years. Of course it is highly likely that people took in their stride the challenges of the day and were none the wiser. But this does not mean they did not suffer. My father, Thomas J. Gore (1915 – 2015) fought through the second world war in the north African desert and Italy, with the eighth army. I learnt from some of his contemporaries decades ago about some of the truly terrible experiences that he observed and lived through, experiences that he never mentioned and the details of which he took to his grave. Plenty of folk experienced similar disturbing events and the largest majority appeared to have coped with their experiences, but this does not mean that they didn't suffer. Today there seems a far greater emphasis on combat stress.

Perhaps we ought to consider the issues of funeral stress.

I don't want to suggest that contemporary folk are somehow not as robust as older generations; its just that I am of the opinion in our own particular specialist world that we can become exposed and inured to more than our fair share of grief and stress. One of my occupational 'hats' is that of an embalming tutor and I have to manage the introduction of young students to the concept and reality of major trauma, inevitably after autopsy. I recall with a young woman student some years ago managing to disguise from her naïve introduction to sudden and brutal death, the broken neck suffered by the victim we were embalming. I told her afterwards and had a long and useful chat with her. I hope it helped.

Because I fall into that age group, as a much younger man in the 'eighties and 'nineties, I often spoke with increasingly aged veterans of the second world war. I recall an elderly man chatting with me. He told me that he couldn't understand why he was so upset about his wife dying, when as a young man himself, he had lived through the disastrous raid carried out by the allies on the port of Dieppe in 1942. For those whose grasp of history is a little tenuous, the raid on Dieppe was a costly, bloody exercise in chaos and death and must have a been a frightening and disquieting experience for the participants.



I thought him really brave to raise this with me and I pointed out that having survived that catastrophic experience didn't mean that he was invulnerable to grief. I also pointed out that as 'he had quite liked his wife of forty years' he had every right to be a bit upset as she had died. I often use this sort of phrase and it produces a moment of comic relief on occasions. One of our local celebrants encapsulates this issue as 'there is grief because first there was love'. A bit trite, but true. Just because an individual may have survived a terrifying ordeal doesn't mean that they are somehow protected from other emotional issues.

So to refer back to my initial premise concerning hypothermia, as an illustration of the effects of grief, any lifeguard will tell you that you need to calm down when in cold water, where hypothermia is a risk. I am told, to continue my analogy, that hypothermia can induce in its victims in its final phases, that illusion of well-being, so that those who are dying in that state may well feel warm and discard layers of clothing that they should still be wearing. You have to appreciate that you are stressed (or suffering from hypothermia) in the first place. Of course it may well be that you have accrued a mental burden for so long that you don't even know you're carrying it. You have to appreciate that you are stressed (or suffering from hypothermia) in the first place. So coming back to stress, ignoring the background issues and powering through your day isn't really a solution, it might lead to some sort of burn out later.

You need to marshal your strength.

I need to introduce a 'Radio 4' moment here. It was decades ago that, to my surprise (and dismay) I found that an interesting programme I happened to be listening to was actually on Radio 4. I found this disconcerting since I thought that only old people found Radio 4 interesting. Recently I came across a useful snippet, about what is known as interoceptive awareness. Well, what, I hear you thinking, is that? Well it's the ability to sense, interpret and respond to internal bodily signals like hunger, thirst, emotions (and stress), providing an up to date understanding of your internal state. I came across a sign a few weeks ago at a health centre where the strapline was to 'Be body aware', urging any reads to be on the lookout for physical symptoms. I didn't realise at the time, but I had a quick focus on this sort of issue decades ago, regarding stress levels.

So casting my mind back more than forty years, I remember during my first degree in psychology a module with the intriguing title of 'biological bases of behaviour' which traced how various systems within the living body react to situations that can cause stress. To know more accurately what the lecturer was talking about, we were all wired up to an electroencephalograph [EEG], which measures electrical activity in the brain. I was relieved to find that I had some. A state of alertness produces beta waves which are sharp, jagged and small. A state of relaxation produces alpha waves, which are far more rounded and larger wave length. You could learn to produce alpha waves, whilst attached to the EEG, so that you could feel more relaxed. This was very helpful and I found that this simple technique reduced my blood pressure. Now I'm no young left-leaning-radical, but I found this 'deliberate relaxing' very useful and can now induce in myself a calmer frame of mind when things get a bit dynamic.

This is for me a useful aid, but unless you have an EEG tucked away, that is a bit academic. Perhaps before we go too far along this route, it might be worth asking the question 'how do you know if you are stressed'? I am sure that plenty of experienced members will recall elderly folk (usually widows) who recount their recently demised husband's dying moments. Perhaps it's just me, but I find these episodes happen quite regularly. What is overwhelmingly obvious to me in these circumstances is that plenty of people don't know how to listen to their inner self, so they don't recognise the signs.

Somewhere in the background I am sure that there are folk thinking 'what's the matter with people today, are they a bit soft'? Well I don't really have an answer to that but I have an observation that may well explain what the possible issue might be with contemporary funeral service. When I decided, more than thirty years ago, to do a bit of background work in conjunction with my Masters by research, at the university of Kent at Canterbury, I interviewed a number of retired funeral directors within the east Kent area, who were all known by my father, so that I could have some background to what I intended to research. Armed with my trusty cassette recorder, what became very obvious, as the interviews progressed, was that the 'funeral world' from the nineteen twenties to the nineteen seventies had radically changed, compared to today.



So in my concluding article we'll examine how the funeral world has changed, the implications of this and briefly explore some techniques that may help with combatting stress.



CT Hull Funeral Service Joins Funeral Partners To Secure 70-Year Family Legacy



CT Hull Funeral Service, a family-run business operating in Poulton-le-Fylde for more than 70 years, has become the latest funeral company to join Funeral Partners.

The business was founded in 1950 by carpenter and joiner Tommy Hull, who specialised in making coffins. His son Chris formally established CT Hull in 1990, continuing the family tradition. Today, the business is led by Funeral Director Claire Hull Naylor, supported by her brother Chris, their mother Catherine Hull, and Funeral Director Rebecca Turner.

The family made the decision to join Funeral Partners in order to secure the business's long-term future while reducing the pressures of running a small funeral home amid increasing industry regulation. Having long enjoyed a collaborative relationship with local funeral provider Box Bros., who also recently joined Funeral Partners, the move was a natural fit.

Claire said: "Running a small funeral business involves balancing paperwork, estimates, donations, and day-to-day operations alongside providing care for families. Joining Funeral Partners gives us peace of mind that our name and reputation are in safe hands, while freeing us to focus on families and our own loved ones."

The family described the acquisition process as "quick, smooth and straightforward" with support from Acquisition Manager David McCarthy and Divisional Operations Manager Ruth Meadows. For the local community, the transition has been seamless, with no disruption to the high standard of service CT Hull is known for.

Chris added: "Being part of Funeral Partners gives us access to a network of operational expertise, compliance support, training and digital resources. It complements our family business perfectly, and the timing couldn't be better."

The acquisition has already brought immediate investment, upgraded premises and additional resources, allowing CT Hull to focus more time on families while streamlining administrative responsibilities.

Chris concluded: “Funeral Partners has the ability to meet the wider challenges facing the funeral industry in the months and years ahead. That allows us, as a business rooted in our community, to focus on what matters most – supporting families with compassion when they need us most.

“It’s great to know that the legacy that our grandad first started 70 years ago, that our dad dedicated his life to, and that Claire and all the team are committed to building on, has been secured for generations to come.”

Sam Kershaw, Funeral Partners CEO, said: “I am delighted to be welcoming CT Hull to our Funeral Partners family and working with them to build on their legacy. We know they have a brilliant reputation locally, and the wealth of both funeral experience and support for families they bring with them is invaluable to our business.”



Houston & Williamson Marks 125 Years Of Service To Belfast Families



One of Belfast’s most respected funeral directors, Houston & Williamson, has celebrated an incredible 125 years of service to the local community with a special thanksgiving event held at the company’s premises.

The event brought together current and former team members, along with representatives from local schools, community organisations, and church clergy, to honour the firm’s proud heritage and enduring commitment to compassionate service.

The service was led by the Rev. Jack Lambe, with music from the Malvern School Choir, adding a heartfelt touch to the occasion. Guests enjoyed the opportunity to share memories, reconnect and celebrate the funeral directors’ remarkable journey spanning more than a century.

Advertorial

Paul Williamson, great-grandson of founder David Williamson and special guest at the ceremony, said: “It’s an incredible honour to represent my family at such a remarkable milestone. Houston & Williamson has been part of our community for 125 years, serving families through generations with care, dignity and respect. My great-grandfather, David Williamson, alongside the Houston brothers, founded this business on values of compassion and service. Seeing those same principles still at the heart of Houston & Williamson today is deeply moving. The company’s legacy isn’t just in the years it has traded, but in the trust and relationships built across generations. It’s wonderful to see that tradition continuing.”

Funeral Arranger June McCandless, a team member with 35 years’ service, added: “It is a privilege to be part of a business with such deep roots in the local community. Every family we serve becomes part of the Houston & Williamson story. Over the years, we have seen many changes – new facilities, new faces, and new ways of working – but our commitment to compassion and professionalism has never changed. Marking 125 years is a proud moment for everyone here. We are honouring the past while looking forward to serving future generations with the same care and respect.”

The current team at Houston & Williamson also includes Funeral Arranger Gemma Wilkie and Funeral Director Stephen Love.

Founded around 1900 as Houston Brothers and Williamson, the company’s roots stretch back to when David Williamson and the Houston brothers – Archie, Samuel and James – first established a hackney car service. David also ran a small milk delivery business before expanding into funeral services, which soon became the company’s main focus.

Over the decades, four generations of the Williamson family have guided the firm through times of change and growth. After the end of the Second World War, ownership passed to David Jnr. Williamson and John Williamson, who steered the firm through some challenging years. Under the leadership of the founder’s grandson, Davey Williamson, and his son Archie (both now deceased), Houston & Williamson became one of Northern Ireland’s most respected funeral directors.

The business, which settled at its current premises on Crumlin Road in 1975, is now part of Funeral Partners Northern Ireland, continuing to uphold its founding principles while serving the Belfast community with professionalism and compassion.





Season's Greetings from Funeral Partners Celebrating Together This Christmas



As the year draws to a close, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our incredible teams, suppliers and fellow funeral professionals for their dedication, care and compassion. To all the new businesses that have joined us this year, welcome to the Funeral Partners family. We are proud to support you and honoured by your trust.

From everyone at Funeral Partners, we wish you joy for the festive season and a peaceful New Year.

Looking to join our growing team?

Explore career opportunities at funeralpartners.co.uk

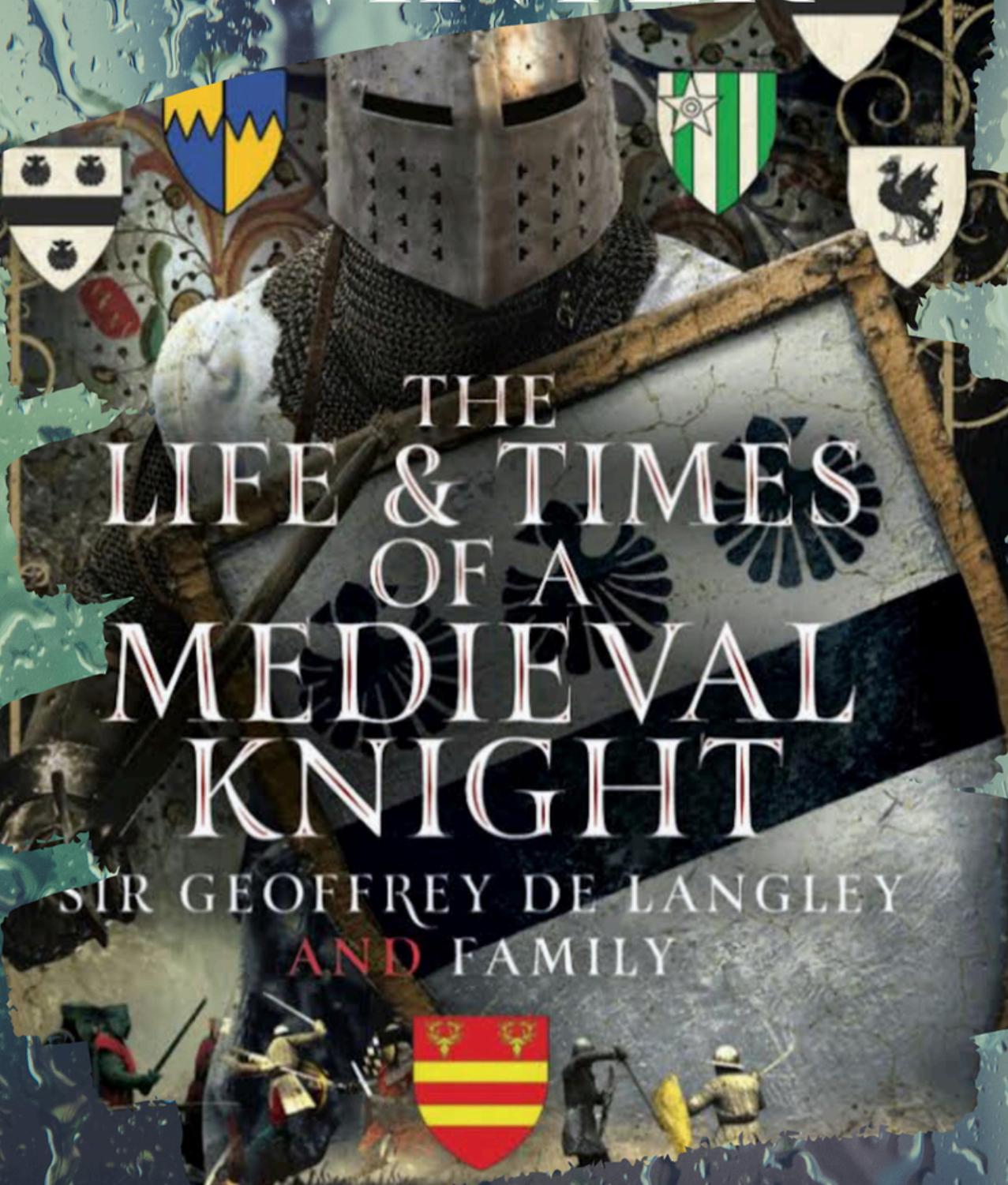
Hear from some of our partners about their acquisition journey and becoming part of Funeral Partners.

funeralpartners.co.uk/story

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COMING THIS WINTER

A central image of a medieval knight in full plate armor, including a helmet with a visor and chainmail. The knight is holding a large banner with a sunburst pattern. The background is a collage of various heraldic shields and a scene of a battle.

THE LIFE & TIMES OF A MEDIEVEAL KNIGHT

SIR GEOFFREY DE LANGLEY
AND FAMILY

CONTACT EMAIL: SANDYWAINWRIGHT1@GMAIL.COM

FOLLOW ME



About the Author

Sandy Wainwright (BSc, DipFD) is a former funeral director, BIFD Diploma Tutor and was a tutor on the CDAS Foundation Degree in Funeral Service, Bath University. Her articles appeared in trade press during this time.

Now a medievalist, historian and writer specialising in 13th/14th century social history, fabric and clothing construction, and medical/death practices. She also makes reproduction historical clothing, for TV, stage and museums. She is married to a medieval longbow archer, and together their family bring the 13th-15th centuries to life at re-enactments throughout the year.



SANDY WAINWRIGHT

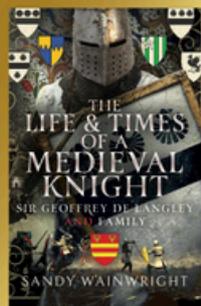
AUTHOR & SPEAKER



sandywainwright1@gmail.com

Text or WhatsApp me: 07841 967830

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COMING
SOON



Hidden History

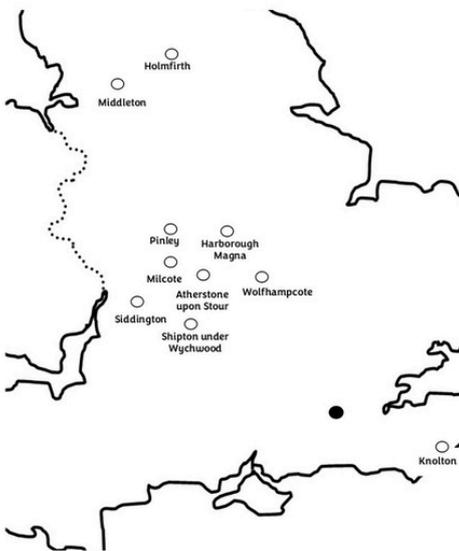
How connecting with the history around you can be life changing

Over 25 years ago now, I began working as a very proud Funeral Director in Coventry and Warwickshire. On the grand scale of things, my ten-year service was a comparatively short time, but I loved it. Poor health and disability prevents me ever returning to it, which at times really hurts and frustrates me. Now, my love of history, research and writing, fills my days and fires my imagination.

It was early one morning in Spring 2021, that I finally realised fate was helping me make sense of my life. I discovered something interesting on the 'Ancestry' website. I found 'Sir Geoffrey de Langley of Pinley' (c. 1200 – 1274) in my paternal 'Langley' family line.

Over the next few years my ADHD hyperfocus really came into its own, as I went on the hunt for further information. History typically focuses on the lives of the nobility, the noteworthy and the scandalous; but I have a particular love for life stories of the 'normal person'. If there is no one to tell their story, however, the 'normal person' only enters history if there is a primary source, recorded at the time.

Major Langley settlements c.1150–



Locations are estimated. Map not to scale. For illustration only, as a companion to information given in the text of this book.

I was very lucky that the Langley family contained a lot of lawyers, jurors, witnesses, or were listed on muster rolls- as well as there being a few murderers. I was determined that I would tell the stories of this 'normal' family, and my upcoming book was born.

What actually struck me however was that the settlement of 'Pinley', now known as Stoke Aldermoor, is where the funeral home I worked in, 'Henry Ison & Sons', still stands (though I have had no involvement with them since leaving). When I worked there, I had researched the history of the Ison family and the start of the business, but never the land it was built on, or anything pre-Victorian.

At the bottom of the hill, known as 'The Moorfield', that sweeps down through Stoke Aldermoor, one can still see the remnants of what was once Pinley Woods. During the development of the nearby industrial estate, retail park, and leisure centre, archaeological teams uncovered the remains of a sandstone wall, a pebble yard surface, and ditches containing roof and floor tiles. This evidence suggests that the medieval building on the site was the manor of Pinley. It also means that my ancestral seat is now a Matalan.

Their chapel location, however, is marked on old OS maps as being where one of the major nursing homes I would visit often, is situated. The driveway to the car park for the funeral home is a couple of metres away. I literally walked on their land every day, and when I looked out of my attic office window, I looked out over what was once a thriving medieval community.

Opposite the oldest cemetery in Coventry, on London Road, stands Charterhouse Priory and is now a National Trust property. It has a medieval wall painting, that I believe to be of John Langley, who died at the start of the Wars of the Roses, as this land too belonged to the family.

My book explores the ebb and flow of family life across England, up to the 15th Century. In many ways, their experiences are not so different from ours. They went to work, fulfilling jobs out of duty rather than passion. They networked, had families, loved, lost, and found themselves in arguments. They were often misunderstood and displayed signs of mental illness, neurodivergence, or both. However, I have not yet had to chase my enemy to Glossop, though strange things can happen.

Instead of feeling that the time I spent working in the funeral sector was ‘wasted,’ I now feel that it was an essential part of my life. It put me in a world where I saw everything that I needed to, whilst I could, in terms of physical locations, but also of human experience. The time sat solemnly in a church service, or cemetery, connected me to human history in more ways than I appreciated at the time. It also made me realise how much history is literally under our feet that we are not aware of. Not just every headstone we walk past, but the heraldry you might see on a font. The road names, the place names, the ruined stone walls and the stained glass windows, all give us clues to the lives behind them. Turns out that of the Warwickshire and Gloucestershire lands formally in the family, I had been in nearly all of the churches at some point over the years. Their coat of arms is still displayed in the medieval stained glass in St Mary’s Walsgrave, Coventry – but I didn’t know it at the time.

Since the day I sat holding the hand of a recipient of the Burma Star, who told me how he met his deceased wife, an army nurse, one of my first funeral arrangements, I realised how important it was to share social history. We keep people alive by telling their stories and the funeral is an enormous part of this oral history. Sometimes, their stories can also become part of yours. As Doctor Who once said ‘We are all stories, in the end. Just make it a good one...’

THE PEYTO WINDOW, WALSGRAVE



‘The Life and Times of a Medieval Knight: Sir Geoffrey de Langley & Family’ is published by Pen & Sword Books, available to pre-order now.



If anyone would like to do a review of this book please contact Sally on the details provided.

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Supporting Grief and Remembrance in the Digital Age

Practical steps to help your families

As online spaces increasingly shape how we connect, digital tributes become ever more popular as a place to remember a loved one. Today, online tributes are created for around one in four UK deaths, and many more are shared informally on social media. There is a growing expectation that funeral directors will offer accessible, secure digital memorial spaces.

Since MuchLoved was established, 18 years ago, we have noticed a consistent pattern: when families understand what an online tribute can offer, they derive deeper comfort, connection, and long-term value. Our ICARE model provides a simple guide for funeral directors to recognise the different needs families may have and to support them at each stage.

This article introduces the **ICARE** framework and offers practical steps that any funeral director can implement to help families get the most from their online tribute.

I – INFORM

Share the news clearly, respectfully, and securely

For many families, their tribute begins as an online funeral notice, providing funeral details, timings, a livestream link and dress code. Unlike social media posts that are vulnerable to scams, a dedicated tribute page keeps everything accurate and in one place. This first stage often forms the foundation for what becomes a lasting digital memorial.

Practical steps for funeral directors:

- 1. Include all funeral details** - service times, locations, maps, transport notes, livestreams, orders of service, and any specific requests
- 2. Add a photo and theme** - simple personalisation helps mourners instantly recognise they're in the right place and encourages engagement
- 3. Help the family share it safely** - encourage posting the link on social media from the official page, ensuring a scam-free sharing



C – COLLECT

Gather messages, condolences, and donations

Online tributes offer a shared space for condolence, as well as charitable giving. The donation total is typically higher because more people donate (not only funeral guests), donors are not limited by what's in their pocket, and Gift Aid is easy to add. For those unable to attend, posting a message or lighting a candle gives them a way to participate.

Practical steps for funeral directors

- 1. Create a tribute for every funeral**, regardless of whether donations are being collected, the messages provide real comfort
- 2. Explain the significance of the chosen charity** as context encourages generosity and connection
- 3. Make access easy** by including QR codes on orders of service or display them at the venue so mourners can easily find the tribute

A – APPRECIATE

Celebrate the life lived through stories, photos, and shared memories

This is the stage funeral directors sometimes underestimate and where families often find the greatest value. Online tributes become evolving spaces where friends and relatives contribute photographs, stories, music and videos. Families may even discover new stories about their loved ones.

One widow who initially resisted having a tribute changed her mind when she saw a photo of her husband she'd never encountered before. Moments like these transform tributes from funeral notices into personal memorials.

Practical steps for funeral directors

- 1. Tell families what's possible** – tributes can be used for as long as they want and can contain an unlimited number of messages, photos and stories
- 2. Reassure them there is no time pressure** - the tribute is available whenever they're ready; some will explore the tribute immediately, others may wait weeks or months
- 3. Involve the celebrant or officiant** who can invite attendees to share memories on the tribute, giving friends a practical way to contribute



R – REMEMBER

Provide a space for ongoing connection, wherever people are

Unlike physical memorials, digital tributes can be visited anywhere, anytime - on birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, or whenever memories all called on to provide comfort. MuchLoved data shows that:

- While most activity happens near the funeral,
- 20% of all page activity occurs more than a year later, and
- Around half of those who return after the first year continue returning even 10 years on.

Practical steps for funeral directors

- 1. Assign the family as tribute owners early** - giving them control and ownership of the page
- 2. Make clear that the tribute is theirs to keep permanently** as families often don't realise this
- 3. Set expectations** letting them know they can revisit whenever they feel ready

E – EMPOWER

Support families seeking to build a legacy

Some families choose to use their tribute pages to turn grief into purposeful action by raising awareness, running events or organising fundraisers.

Tribute event pages allow all sorts of activities, large or small, from bake sales to marathons, to be shared through one place. Families can see the full impact created in their loved one's name.

Practical steps for funeral directors

- 1. Share local stories** - inspire families who may not have considered legacy-building before
- 2. Engage with hospices and local charities** - many lack large fundraising teams so pointing families toward in-memory pages can make a real difference
- 3. Recognise your contribution** - the families who build lasting legacies often remember the funeral director who first introduced them to the tribute page

Online tributes offer comfort long after the funeral

Each stage of the ICARE model offers simple opportunities to support your families. The more consistently funeral directors support families across these five areas, the more meaningful and enduring their online tributes become.

Online tributes aren't just digital funeral notices, they are evolving memorial spaces that grow richer over time. When families are supported, these pages become places of comfort, storytelling, remembrance, and legacy for years to come.

much  loved



The British Institute of Funeral Directors wishes all our members and friends a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Key Qualities to Consider When Selecting a Funeral Director: Commitment, Professionalism, and Empathy

Written by Sharon Meader MBIE - M&M Embalming Ltd (UK)

The Cost of Saying Goodbye

It's undeniable that the cost of arranging a funeral can be significant, and the experience of losing a loved one is emotionally overwhelming. When faced with planning a funeral, many questions arise: Can we afford the expenses? Which funeral director should we trust? Who will care for our loved one with the same respect and dignity as we did in life? The choices and decisions can be daunting, and the process often feels like an insurmountable challenge.

Direct Cremations: Caution and Consideration

Nowadays, television adverts and leaflets frequently promote 'direct cremations'—companies that promise to handle every detail, claiming there are no hidden charges. The offer is simple: pay the fee, and your loved one will be 'collected', with the 'ashes' returned to your door in due course. However, it is worth being wary of certain terms. If a company refers to 'collecting' your loved one or simply speaks of 'ashes', it may be cause for concern. Our loved ones are not packages to be picked up; they should be brought into care and treated with the utmost respect. Even after cremation, referring to their remains by name or as 'cremated remains' preserves their dignity. Death does not strip a person of their identity, and it is essential to ensure they are treated as individuals, not objects.

Choosing a Funeral Director: Where to Start?

The abundance of funeral directors can make it difficult to decide whom to trust. Recommendations, internet searches, and television adverts all play a role, but qualifications and dedication stand out. While many excellent funeral directors may not hold formal qualifications, seeking professionals who are reputable and recognised often starts with looking for those who have invested in continuous learning, gained industry qualifications, and become members or associates of national associations. This pursuit of knowledge and a willingness to learn from others sets a high standard of care.

Continuous learning is not a sign of weakness, but rather a commitment to improvement. The funeral profession is constantly evolving, with new regulations, laws, products, and methods emerging. Professionals who are dedicated to lifelong learning ensure they are always providing the best possible service to clients and the deceased alike. If you encounter someone who claims to know everything, be cautious—no one can be an expert in all areas, and ongoing development is vital in maintaining high standards.

Understanding Qualifications in the Funeral Industry

Within the funeral industry, you may notice individuals who use letters after their names, indicating specific qualifications. For example, MBIE stands for Member of the British Institute of Embalming—a title that signifies a rigorous 2–3-year course covering anatomy, biology, chemistry also health and safety, culminating in written and practical examinations. This level of dedication, often accompanied by challenges and perseverance, reflects a true commitment to the profession.

Another example is DipFD, the Diploma in Funeral Directing. This qualification, granted by bodies such as the British Institute of Funeral Directors (BIFD) or the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD), also requires up to two years of study. It encompasses areas such as legal and regulatory standards, cultural and religious understanding, and the ability to identify signs of financial or mental abuse. A minimum of a grade C in English and Maths is required, or completion of functional skills courses alongside

the main programme. The qualification process concludes with written, arrangement, and observational examinations, after which the funeral director is entitled to display the relevant letters after their name.

Importantly, even after obtaining qualifications, learning does not stop. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is crucial, as industry standards, regulations, and practices are always evolving. This ensures that funeral directors and their companies are equipped to provide the highest level of care.

The Role of Funeral Team Members and Apprenticeships

Not all qualifications result in post-nominal letters, but that does not diminish their value. For example, funeral service operatives and funeral service crew (FSO/FSC) can gain certification through apprenticeship schemes. Achieving this qualification also requires at least a grade C in English and Maths or completion of functional skills courses. Personal progression and CPD are essential, ensuring staff remain up to date and capable of providing the best possible service.

The Importance of Ongoing Learning

Learning is a journey filled with challenges and rewards. Some may stop learning once qualified, but others continue to seek progress and improvement. The funeral profession, like all fields, are subject to constant change. Advances in Laws, embalming chemicals, regulatory updates, technological innovations, and evolving practices all require professionals to stay informed. Ongoing learning is the cornerstone of maintaining high standards and delivering the best possible care.

All reputable funeral homes are enthusiastic and ready for regulations to be implemented.

The need for regulation in the funeral industry is clear and very much overdue. Without proper knowledge, experience, and qualifications, some operators may exploit grieving families or fail to provide dignified care.

Expressing pride in your profession or to openly discuss the care provided in all aspects should be a pleasure to share with others. Every funeral home has sacred spaces where the deceased are looked after, but guided tours of these facilities can also be arranged if needed. Any visit must be scheduled at a suitable time to respect the privacy of those who have passed away. This is a reflection of the qualities expected from a trustworthy service provider.

Confidence and Trust in a Funeral Directors

Confidence in your chosen funeral home is crucial. The care provided to your loved one should be no less than what staff would offer their own family members. Continuous upskilling among staff will be evident in their approach and the conversations you have with them. If doubts arise at any stage, it is always acceptable to seek advice or even change your funeral provider, although this may incur additional charges.

Identifying Reputable Funeral Directors

When choosing a funeral director, look for evidence of professional membership—logos from the NAFD, BIFD, or MBIE—displayed on windows, doors, or walls alongside certificates. These indicators suggest adherence to national standards and regular checks on premises and members. If you have concerns about any company or individual associated with these organisations, you can contact them for advice or to raise a complaint, which will be taken seriously and investigated.

While qualifications alone do not guarantee continued high standards, selecting a company with dedicated, qualified staff is a positive starting point. Membership in respected organisations also ensures there are avenues for your concerns to be heard.

The Value of Compassionate Care

You truly cannot put a price on the best care. The saying 'buy cheap, buy twice' does not apply to funerals—there is only one opportunity to do things right. Opting for the cheapest option does not always equate to the best care, and it is vital to remain vigilant and not be swayed by low prices alone. If something seems too good to be true, it likely is, and may leave little room for personalisation or final goodbyes.

Ask important questions: Where is your loved one resting? Where will the cremation take place? Has proper care, such as embalming, been offered and explained? Are your loved ones treated with respect and dignity, or are they simply 'collected' and stored without consideration? Experienced professionals should be able to answer these questions confidently. If not, ask yourself what might be hidden from view and whether you are comfortable with the care being provided.

Moisturising features and caring for the deceased should be second nature to experienced staff, maintaining dignity even in death. Special requests for arrangements should be met wherever possible. Remember, you only get one chance to organise a funeral as you wish, and if anything feels amiss, you have the right to change your choice of funeral home.

Dedication to the Profession

The depth of qualifications and continuous professional development required in the funeral profession reflects a genuine dedication to providing the best care. Those who view this line of work not simply as a job, but as a calling, are the ones who will extend the utmost care and compassion to you, your family, and your loved one during the most difficult times.

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Conclusion:

Your Right to a Service That Meets Your Needs

You should always feel at ease with the funeral director you have chosen. It is important that no request you make is considered too much trouble or treated as a problem. After all, the funeral director is providing you with a service for which you are paying, and your wishes deserve respect and attention.

If your reasonable requests cannot be fulfilled, you have every right to reconsider your choice and change funeral directors. Your comfort and peace of mind throughout this process are paramount, and you are entitled to seek a provider who meets your expectations and needs.



Merry Christmas From The Wilcox Family

From our family to yours, thank you for your continued trust and friendship. May this Christmas bring peace to your home and the New Year open with kindness and connection.



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