

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS



THE JOURNAL

ISSUE 1

2026



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**For all Executive,
Administration & General
Enquiries, please contact:**

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**National President's
Chosen Charity**



CONTACT US

**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

I trust this message finds you well as we continue our journey into another promising year. As President of the British Institute of Funeral Directors, it is my privilege to connect with you through this journal, with thanks to Kayleigh for all she does putting it together.



Education and continuous professional development (CPD) are at the heart of our mission. We are dedicated to providing our members with the resources and opportunities necessary to enhance their skills and knowledge in this evolving field.

As we strive to meet the diverse needs of our members, your feedback is invaluable. I invite you to share your thoughts and suggestions on areas where you would like to see additional CPD opportunities. Whether it's specialised training, workshops, or seminars, your insights will guide us in tailoring our offerings to better serve you.

Your active participation is crucial in shaping the future of our profession. I encourage you to engage with the Institute, exchange ideas and contribute to our collective knowledge. Together, we can create a stronger, more informed community.

Clive

Clive Pearson
National President, Region C

SAVE THE DATE!



We're delighted to announce the dates for CBCE 2026 which will see us returning to the Hilton Utilita Bowl - Southampton

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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>	£675
<i>Friday & Saturday Bed & Breakfast</i>	.....<i>Single Room (per person)</i>	£425
<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>	£295
<i>Friday Bed & Breakfast</i>	.....<i>Single Room (per person)</i>	£200
<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea, Coffee & Biscuits</i>		
<i>Saturday Lunch Is Available At £30 PP</i>		

3. Saturday To Sunday Morning - ONLY

<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea, Coffee & Biscuits</i>	.....<i>Double Room (per couple)</i>	£395
<i>Saturday Evening Drinks Reception</i>	.....<i>Single Room (per person)</i>	£235
<i>Saturday Gala Dinner – Includes 3 Course Meal, Cheese & Biscuits & Tea and Coffee</i>		
<i>Saturday Bed & Breakfast</i>		
<i>Saturday Lunch Is Available At £30 PP</i>		

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>	
<i>Saturday Lunch Is Available At £30 PP</i>	

5. AGM ATTENDANCE ONLYFree To All Members & Students

<i>Saturday AGM: On Arrival Tea, Coffee & Biscuits</i>	
<i>Saturday Lunch Is Available On The Day At £30 PP</i>	

TO STAY BEFORE OR AFTER THE CONFERENCE B&B BASIS

Please add extra dates to booking form:

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

The 43rd BIFD CONFERENCE – 23rd – 25th October 2026
The Mercure Tankersley Manor
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Address:

Post Code: Contact Telephone Number:

Email Address: Number of Rooms Required:

Special Dietary Requirements: Yes/No Details of Diet

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Tariff (4) – Gala Dinner Only

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Tariff (5) – AGM Only

£ No Charge

Total Amount Due £.....

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Bacs Payments To:

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Mr. David Gresty
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UNEARTHING THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL MOURNERS

Victoria Wells

Deputy Editor, Region C

In the quiet solemnity of a funeral, tears flow freely – a raw, unscripted outpouring of grief. Or are they? For centuries, and in various cultures around the globe, some of those tears have been shed by individuals for whom crying is not just an emotional response, but a profession. These are the professional mourners, hired to amplify sorrow, uphold social standing, and guide the bereaved through one of life's most profound transitions.



The concept of weeping for hire might seem unusual to modern Western sensibilities, but it's a practice rooted deeply in history and tradition, serving both practical and symbolic functions.

The role of professional mourners, often referred to as moirologists, wailers, or keeners, can be traced back to antiquity. Ancient Egyptian and Roman texts frequently reference women hired to lament loudly at funerals, beating their chests and tearing their hair. This wasn't merely for show; their passionate displays were believed to appease deities, accompany the deceased into the afterlife, and provide a necessary catharsis for the grieving family.

This tradition flourished across diverse cultures:

- **Ancient China:** Professional mourners were, and in some rural areas still are, crucial to funeral rites. Their wailing and lamentations are believed to guide the spirit of the deceased, soothe ancestral spirits, and demonstrate the family's deep filial piety. The louder and more numerous the mourners, the higher the status of the deceased and their family.
- **The Mediterranean & Middle East:** In regions like Greece, Turkey, and parts of the Middle East, the figure of the wailing woman has historically been integral. Their performances, often involving improvised songs and poetic laments, serve to articulate the community's sorrow and celebrate the life of the departed.
- **Ireland:** The Irish keeners were renowned for their melodic, haunting laments, passed down through generations. These women would often lead the procession, their cries providing a powerful emotional anchor for the community.
- **Africa:** In many African cultures, particularly in Ghana, Nigeria, and parts of South Africa, professional mourners continue to play a significant role. Their highly ritualised expressions of grief, sometimes involving specific chants, dances, and body language, are essential to expressing the magnitude of loss and ensuring a proper send-off.

The role of professional mourners extends far beyond simply shedding tears. They serve a multitude of purposes for the deceased's family and the wider community:

1. Amplifying Grief and Status: In many cultures, the intensity of public mourning is directly linked to the social standing and respect commanded by the deceased. A large, demonstrative group of mourners signifies a person of importance, ensuring their memory is honoured fittingly. Hired mourners ensure this visual representation of sorrow is robust, even if the family's immediate circle is small or too overwhelmed to perform.

2. Emotional Release and Catharsis: For the bereaved family, the presence of professional mourners can be incredibly therapeutic. Their loud expressions of grief give permission for others to weep freely, providing an outlet for emotions that might otherwise be suppressed. They effectively "break the ice" of sorrow, making it easier for others to engage in their own mourning process.

3. Ritual and Guidance: Funerals are often complex rituals with specific customs and expectations. Professional mourners are frequently experts in these traditions, knowing precisely when to wail, when to be silent, and how to perform specific gestures. They act as guides, ensuring the proper rites are observed, which can be a great comfort to a family struggling with loss.

4. Maintaining Decorum (Paradoxically): While their role is to express strong emotion, professional mourners can also help maintain a certain decorum. By taking on the most overt and performative aspects of grief, they can sometimes allow family members to grieve more privately without feeling pressured to display a certain level of anguish.

5. A Bridge to the Afterlife: In many belief systems, the cries and prayers of mourners are seen as crucial for the deceased's journey to the afterlife. They are believed to ward off evil spirits, guide the soul, or communicate final messages.

The role of professional mourners, while perhaps foreign to many, offers a profound insight into humanity's universal need to process death. It highlights how different cultures have innovated unique ways to honour the departed, comfort the living, and navigate the delicate boundary between this world and the next. They remind us that grief, in all its forms, is a powerful, communal experience, sometimes requiring a guiding hand – or a professional lament – to truly express its depth.





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The Martins Joins Funeral Partners and Remains True to its Roots



Funeral Director Ian Austin and Funeral Manager Adrian Cartwright.

The Martins Funeral Directors, a trusted name serving the diverse community of Crawley, West Sussex, for more than two decades, has joined Funeral Partners.

The acquisition marks the next chapter in the history of the well-known local funeral home, originally founded by Peter and Jenny Martin in 2001. From its beginnings in Broadfield Barton, The Martins has built an enduring reputation for compassionate service and deep community roots.

Funeral Manager Adrian Cartwright, who leads the team and joined the business 16 years ago, said the move ensures the long-term future of the business while safeguarding the values that have always defined it.

“It’s still the same team, the same faces, and the same care our families have always known,” said Adrian. “Funeral Partners understands that The Martins’ strength lies in its local knowledge and personal service. They’ve reassured us that our independence, identity and community focus will remain at the heart of everything we do.”

Adrian, who began his career in psychiatric care and hospitality before following in his father’s footsteps into the funeral service sector, has been instrumental in maintaining The Martins’ standing in Crawley’s diverse community.

He was trained by the founders, who sold The Martins to Alex Jones Funeral Directors when they decided to retire in 2017. Adrian, together with colleagues Vicky Byrne (Funeral Arranger), Ian Austin (Funeral Director), and Natalie Cantellow (Funeral Administrator), have continued the legacy, supporting families from all faiths and backgrounds with the same care and dedication.

While the change in ownership has been seamless for the community, Adrian says the additional resources, support and investment from Funeral Partners will bring tangible, lasting benefits.

“Behind the scenes, we’re adapting to new systems and processes that will strengthen how we work and improve efficiency. More importantly, the partnership brings the security, investment and support we need to continue delivering the level of service our community expects for many years to come. The Martins’ soul will continue to shine through.”

Planned investment will include refurbishment of the branch premises and updated technology to support families more effectively. However, The Martins’ name, ethos and team will remain unchanged – something both Adrian and Funeral Partners see as vital to maintaining trust in the community.

Funeral Partners’ Chief Executive Officer Sam Kershaw said: “The Martins has a proud reputation for care and professionalism built over decades. We’re delighted to welcome Adrian and his dedicated team into the Funeral Partners family of businesses. Our focus is always on preserving the heritage and individuality of each business we acquire, while providing the investment and support to help them continue to thrive.”

Funeral Partners



Elizabeth Way & Company Funeral Directors Support Millbrook School’s Secret Garden Transformation



The cheque for £1,000 is presented by Elizabeth Way & Company Funeral Directors to Millbrook Infant and Primary School. L-R Ben McCutcheon-Elizabeth Way, teachers Sophie Davis, Leeanne Frost Millbrook Primary School, Wendy Stanley head of PTA.

Children at Millbrook Infant and Primary School in Carbrook, Stalybridge, are set to enjoy an inspiring outdoor learning space thanks to a £1,000 donation from Elizabeth Way & Company Funeral Directors.

The generous contribution comes through the funeral home’s Community Assistance Programme – an initiative that has supported local charities and good causes for the past two years. In total, the programme has now gifted an impressive £6,000 to local projects, making a positive difference in the community.

Advertorial

The funding will be used to renovate the school's much-loved secret garden – a tucked-away green space where pupils can learn through play, explore nature, and develop a deeper appreciation for plants and wildlife. Plans are already underway for a new chicken coop and a 'grow your own' vegetable patch, where children will have the chance to care for animals and see their food flourish from seed to plate.

The garden is already a haven for birds, insects, and other local wildlife, offering a calm and safe environment for young learners. With fresh planting and new features ready for spring, excitement is building among staff, families, and children.

Ben McCutcheon, Funeral Director at Elizabeth Way & Company, presented the cheque to Sophie Davies, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) teacher at Millbrook Infant and Primary School, accompanied by Elizabeth Way's much-loved community mascot, a cuddly toy chicken called Lady Victoria Peckem.



Ben said: "We're passionate about helping our community grow – in every sense. The secret garden is a wonderful resource for the children, and we can't wait to revisit in late spring and summer to see how it blossoms into a lively space full of plants and flowers – and, of course, see how the chickens are doing!"

Sophie added: "Outdoor learning plays such an important role in giving children confidence, curiosity and skills for life. This support from Elizabeth Way & Company means we can bring our plans to life far sooner than expected. We are truly grateful."

Elizabeth Way & Company Funeral Directors will continue backing community-focused initiatives throughout the year – helping ensure projects like this can thrive for generations to come.

For more information about Elizabeth Way & Company Funeral Directors, visit
www.elizabeth-way.co.uk/ or via Facebook at
<https://www.facebook.com/ElizabethWayMossley>

Ensuring a Respectful Viewing Experience

Clive Pearson

National President, Region C

Embalming is a critical practice in the funeral profession, serving not only as a means to preserve the deceased but also as a way to prepare them for a dignified viewing. A well executed embalming process can significantly enhance the experience for grieving families and friends, allowing them to say their final goodbyes in a respectful manner. This article delves into the essential techniques and considerations that contribute to the successful embalming of a deceased individual, emphasising the importance of quality embalming fluids, meticulous techniques, attention to detail and carried out by a qualified Member of the Institute of Embalmers.

The foundation of effective embalming lies in the choice of quality embalming fluids. These fluids are typically composed of formaldehyde, and other products that work together to slow down the decomposition process. Using high-quality embalming fluids is crucial, as they not only prolong the preservation of the body but also minimise the risk of odour and leakage. When selecting embalming fluids, it is vital to consider the specific needs of the deceased, including the cause of death and the duration for which preservation is required. Employing reputable brands known for their efficacy can enhance the overall quality of the embalming process.

One of the key aspects of successful embalming is taking ample time to perform the procedure. Rushing through the process can lead to unsatisfactory results, which could detract from the viewing experience. A meticulous approach involves slowly introducing the embalming fluid into the body at a controlled rate and with appropriate pressure. This method ensures that the fluid circulates thoroughly through the vascular system, reaching all areas of the body and allowing for even preservation.

The embalmer should also pay attention to the body's natural contours and features during this process. By carefully monitoring the distribution of the fluid, the embalmer can achieve a more lifelike appearance, essential for providing comfort to the bereaved.

Before commencing the embalming process, it is imperative to wash the body thoroughly. This step serves two primary purposes: it helps to reduce the presence of pathogens and provides a clean canvas for the embalming fluids to work effectively. Using a good quality antibacterial soap ensures that the skin is free from contaminants.

This washing should be done gently and respectfully, taking care to handle the body with dignity.

Once the embalming process is complete, additional care is required to ensure the deceased looks as natural as possible. The use of quality shower gels and shampoos in the post-embalming wash can significantly enhance the appearance of the skin and hair. A gentle cleanse followed by careful grooming can restore a sense of peace and serenity to the deceased, which is crucial for the viewing experience.

Attention to detail is paramount in this phase. The embalmer should ensure that all facial features, such as the eyes and mouth, are positioned correctly and appear natural and that disinfection has taken place within the nasal and mouth cavities. Cleaning and grooming the fingernails is an often-overlooked aspect of the embalming process that can significantly impact the overall presentation. Well-groomed nails contribute to an impression of care and respect, which is comforting to the family members during their time of grief.

Providing a good embalmed deceased for viewing involves a blend of science, art, and compassion. By focusing on the quality of embalming fluids, taking the necessary time for a thorough process, and ensuring meticulous care in both pre- and post-embalming practices, funeral professionals can create an environment that honours the deceased while providing solace to the grieving. Each step, from preparation to final presentation, plays a vital role in delivering a respectful and dignified farewell, ultimately helping families navigate their loss with grace and peace.



How Digital Tributes Are Transforming Funeral Care

Over the last two decades, digital memorials have transformed how people grieve, remember, and give in memory and have become a vital extension of the care provided by funeral directors. Today, nearly one in four UK deaths is marked with an online tribute, and families increasingly expect secure, meaningful digital spaces as part of their funeral service. This shift reflects wider changes in how people communicate and seek connection, particularly at times of loss.

“At MuchLoved, we’ve seen that when funeral directors help families understand what a tribute page can offer, the value becomes extraordinary,” says Neil Davis, CEO of MuchLoved.

“When talking to families, funeral directors should explain that a tribute is a safe space for friends and families to share stories and photos, and to remember their loved one. It’s also a place they can visit in their own time when they are ready and return to in the months and years ahead.”

This emphasis on choice and timing is critical. Each person’s experience of grief is different, and families appreciate tools that allow them to engage at their own pace. Online tributes provide a gentle, non-intrusive form of support which can remain open for as long as they wish.

For family and friends unable to attend a funeral in person, these digital spaces offer inclusion and connection, helping them feel part of a shared act of remembrance. This is especially true when the tribute includes a livestream link or Order of Service allowing them to join the service virtually.



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Over time, tributes can become living memorials that grow richer as more memories are shared. Anniversaries may prompt reflection, messages from friends near and far can surface new stories, and photographs capture moments that may otherwise have been lost. Many families also use tribute pages to support charitable causes, transforming grief into meaningful action and building legacies that reflect the values of the person who has died.

For funeral directors, integrating tributes into their services is not just about digitalising their funeral notices. It is about extending care beyond the day of the funeral and acknowledging the long-term nature of bereavement. By giving families lasting ownership of their tribute, funeral professionals reinforce their role as trusted carers.

As the funeral profession continues to evolve, the most meaningful innovations will be those that strengthen human connection. Digital tributes, when introduced with care and understanding, allow funeral directors to support families not just through the funeral, but throughout their bereavement journey.





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MuchLoved Grant Funds ‘This Was Them’s’ Innovative Memory-Making Workshops For Bereaved Families



MuchLoved Charitable Trust has awarded funding to This Was Them through its grants scheme, which supports grassroots bereavement projects locally and nationally.

The funding will enable This Was Them to deliver free, practical workshops for parents and guardians supporting a bereaved child or young person. The sessions will help families preserve memories of a loved one in meaningful, tangible ways, particularly where a child may have few or no memories of their own.

This Was Them is known for creating bespoke memory books for bereaved children, developed through memories gathered from family, friends and colleagues and curated alongside photographs into a hard-back keepsake. The new workshops build on this approach, giving parents the time, tools and confidence to gather and record memories themselves.

When a child or young person loses someone they love, there is a real risk that the everyday details such as their voice, their personality, the stories others hold, are lost over time. These workshops make memory collection feel possible, even when grief is heavy, so children can grow up with a meaningful bond to the person who has died.

The pilot workshops will take place in the Godalming and Guildford area. “Through our grants scheme, MuchLoved Charitable Trust supports projects that respond to real needs in bereavement care,” says Catherine Betley, Head of Charity at MuchLoved. “This Was Them’s work stood out for its sensitivity, practicality and long-term impact, and we are proud to support this pilot as it develops.”

For further information, please contact
Catherine Betley, Head of Charity, MuchLoved Charitable Trust
Catherine.betley@muchloved.com

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