

2013

# Winter issue:

The Early Years

Foreman's Diary 1913

Two Decades and the ICCM

John Robertson: the Founding Father

Presidential Address 2013

Fasten Your Seatbelts for the Next 100!

Awards, Diplomas & Presentations 2013

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2013

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## editorial

Anniversaries are a time for reflection – centenaries the more so – hence this issue devotes much of its space to looking back over our first 100 years.

It starts on the front cover with a random depiction, through the decades, of the single most significant change for our members – the proliferation of crematoria to take account of the extraordinary increase in a preference for cremation over burial. Figures, courtesy of the Cremation Society of Great Britain's web site, show that in 1913 of 578,044 deaths in the United Kingdom 1,188 resulted in cremation. Contrast this with their most recent listing for last year – a provisional figure for the number of deaths only some 5,000 less but, of these, 425,784 cremations.

That we have arrived at this point in our history is down to many dedicated individuals – most of their names can be found on page 5. The first of them is profiled in detail on subsequent pages. For this we are grateful to Institute member and prolific contributor to *The Journal*, Brian Parsons. His meticulously researched articles on both our 'founding father' and our 'association' amount to the most comprehensive chronicling of our formative years so far published.

But we nearly didn't make it to our 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1927 we found ourselves bankrupt but largely due to the efforts of C L Hilton, whose name appears twice in that illustrious listing of presidents, who served as general secretary from that year until 1933, we survived and flourished. After his death on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1974 at Horsebridge, Sussex at the age of 87 he was described in these columns under the heading 'Tribute to a really great man' as 'a gentleman and a professional of the highest ability and every member should be grateful that he applied so much of his talents and life to the Institute'. Fulsome approbation of Charles is to be found in both our 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklets as can the names of other men and women who have served with distinction and shaped our development.

More of our history can be found in Natasha Bradshaw's excellent presidential address, beginning on page 6. But it was either side of the millennium that a profound transformation of the Institute was to take place.

In 1997 Kirsty Cole, the then deputy director of administration at Newark & Sherwood District Council, succeeded Russell Cann as our honorary solicitor. Russell, who had served us brilliantly since 1985, after taking over from Pat Rust, recommended her appointment to the then executive council. A shrewd choice. Interestingly, she was articled to Russell when they were both with South Kesteven District Council.

By March of the following year Kirsty, in the vanguard of a major review, had 'company secretary' added to her role with the Institute and began setting about masterminding an overhaul of our articles of association to include an elected board of directors.

By the end of the year 2000 she had overseen our affiliation with the Stratford Business School and the outsourcing of diploma modules to meet BTEC and HNC standards and then, most significantly of all, announced that we would be appointing our first ever full-time employee the following year.

When Tim Morris was appointed to this position in April 2001 the inspirational board chairman at the time, Chris Johns, wrote, 'The Institute is very fortunate to have a man of his calibre at the top of its organisation. The remarkable success of the cemetery operatives training scheme is down to him and I know he will bring the same fervour to bear on all his work'.

A year later we moved into our own headquarters; the Institute's 'founding father' would have thoroughly approved – it being a building he walked past most days between 1913 and 1936.

V. Charles Ward succeeded Kirsty Cole, but not before, in 2005, the now highly successful 'Corporate' category of membership had been introduced.

Thus, 100 years on, whilst service to our members remains a top priority, it is our innate ability to respond to the changing needs of the bereaved that gives us reason to face our 2<sup>nd</sup> century with confidence and enthusiasm.

**Bob Coates**







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# 100 years of presidents



tabulation showing office holder, employer, place of induction ( ) and ICCM name changes

## UNITED KINGDOM ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY SUPERINTENDENTS 1913-18

1913-1916 J D Robertson, City of London (London)  
1916-1917 T Bevan, St. Marylebone (London)  
1917-1918 F J P Loud, Ealing (Guildford)

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY SUPERINTENDENTS 1918-32

1918-1919 F J P Loud, Ealing (Sheffield)  
1919-1920 C Cook, Sheffield (Hampstead)  
1920-1921 G Eickhoff, Crystal Palace (Leeds)  
1921-1922 F C Tate, Birmingham (Birmingham)  
1922-1923 F Ivermee, Willesden (Liverpool)  
1923-1924 A T Townsend JP, Accrington (London)  
1924-1925 J D Robertson, City of London (Scarborough)  
1925-1926 L G Godseff, Liverpool (Manchester)  
1926-1927 H Robertson, York Public Cem. Co. (Plymouth)  
1927-1928 A J Blackell, Plymouth (Darlington)  
1928-1929 G Eickhoff, Crystal Palace (Bradford)  
1929-1930 W Sheldon, Leeds (Nottingham)  
1930-1931 G H Cowie, Birkenhead (Cardiff)  
1931-1932 P Benson, Tottenham (Brighton)

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY & CREMATORIUM SUPERINTENDENTS 1932-47

1932-1933 P Benson, Tottenham (London)  
1933-1934 F Atherton, Wigan (Birmingham)  
1934-1935 F C Tate, Birmingham (Folkestone)  
1935-1936 C Cook, Sheffield (Blackpool)  
1936-1937 R J Brown, Hammersmith (Torquay)  
1937-1938 B A Caulkin, Birmingham (Edinburgh)  
1938-1939 J R Ramsden, Hyde (Portsmouth)  
1939-1940 C L Hilton, Deptford (Portsmouth)  
1940-1941 L G Godseff, Liverpool (WWII - no conference)  
1941-1942 W A E Tongue, Birmingham (no conference)  
1942-1943 A Mason, Warrington (no conference)  
1943-1944 C L Hilton, Deptford (no conference)  
1944-1945 H W Beechey MBE, Bristol (London)  
1945-1946 H G Garrett MBE, Brighton (Brighton)  
1946-1947 J Owen, Manchester (Scarborough)

## THE INSTITUTE OF BURIAL AND CREMATION ADMINISTRATION 1947-1958

1947-1948 J A Fox, Cardiff (Cheltenham)  
1948-1949 T Dalglish, Clydebank (Glasgow)  
1949-1950 E F Coward, Fulham (Bournemouth)  
1950-1951 W R Pearson, Leeds (Harrogate)  
1951-1952 F G Herbert, City of London (Torquay)  
1952-1953 F Wilkes, Salford (Blackpool)  
1953-1954 H T Hopper, Wimbledon (Eastbourne)  
1954-1955 E F Marsh, Leicester (Scarborough)  
1955-1956 J Gowridge, Denton (Southport)  
1956-1957 A Willis, Stoke-on-Trent (Hastings)  
1957-1958 H W Welsh, Hampstead (Aberdeen)

## THE INSTITUTE OF BURIAL AND CREMATION ADMINISTRATION 1958-2003 (INC)

1958-1959 L J Evans, Croydon (Llandudno)

1959-1960 J H Porthouse, Carlisle (Margate)  
1960-1961 T H Burt, Pontypridd (Harrogate)  
1961-1962 T L Ashton, Keighley (Portsmouth)  
1962-1963 H W Welsh, Hampstead (Morecambe)  
1963-1964 L J Shears, Tunbridge Wells (Folkestone)  
1964-1965 A T Harrison MBE, Edinburgh (Edinburgh)  
1965-1966 C H England, Nottingham (Plymouth)  
1966-1967 J W Roberts, Middlesbrough (Douglas, IoM)  
1967-1968 C Wilkins, Battersea (Brighton)  
1968-1969 R Stew, Wolverhampton (Harrogate)  
1969-1970 A J Gaynor, Southend-on-Sea (Portsmouth)  
1970-1971 R Rawcliffe, Liverpool (Liverpool)  
1971-1972 R J W Greenslade, Bristol (Plymouth)  
1972-1973 F S Pratt, Wolverhampton (Aberdeen)  
1973-1974 E S Turner JP, City of London (London)  
1974-1975 H F Vant, Mansfield (Scarborough)  
1975-1976 J S Smith, Medway (Folkestone)  
1976-1977 J M Ramsden Mrs, Leeds (Bath)  
1977-1978 L L Wild, Sheffield (Sheffield)  
1978-1979 P G Rust MBE, Wychavon (Liverpool)  
1979-1980 J Sutton, Southampton (Weston Super Mare)  
1980-1981 A L Wallace, Chesterfield (Glasgow)  
1981-1982 D A Smale, Brighton (Brighton)  
1982-1983 P A Plews, Harrogate (Bristol)  
1983-1984 R G Girton, Worthing (Harrogate)  
1984-1985 E J Leadbetter, Grantham (Llandudno)  
1985-1986 C Skelton, Bristol (Felixstowe)  
1986-1987 J Butterfield, Thurrock (Plymouth)  
1987-1988 G Wright, Tyne & Wear (Scarborough)  
1988-1989 R G Gill, Brent (Malvern)  
1989-1990 J W Maher, Peterborough (Glasgow)  
1990-1991 B P McHale, Solihull (Southport)  
1991-1992 B Swift, Bedford (Portsmouth)  
1992-1993 D Crawshaw, Glasgow (Great Yarmouth)  
1993-1994 K West MBE, Carlisle (Carlisle)  
1994-1995 J Rodacan Mrs, Ipswich (Swansea)  
1995-1996 P Gitsham, Middlesbrough (Brighton)  
1996-1997 M Stride, Croydon (Blackpool)  
1997-1998 B Lowe, Sandwell (Eastbourne)  
1998-1999 C Howlett, Chilterns (Aberdeen)  
1999-2000 A Copeland, Dunbartonshire (Torquay)  
2000-2001 I E Hussein Dr, City of London (Buxton)  
2001-2002 A Dunn Mrs, Warrington (Scarborough)  
2002-2003 J E Dunk Ms, Bournemouth (Southport)

## INSTITUTE OF CEMETERY & CREMATORIUM MANAGEMENT (INC) 2003-

2003-2004 C F Johns, Classic Crem. Partnerships (Harrogate)  
2004-2005 D MacColl, North Ayrshire (Harrogate)  
2005-2006 P Ewing, South Ayrshire (Harrogate)  
2006-2007 A Till Cllr, Lewisham (Harrogate)  
2007-2008 D McCarthy, City of London (Kenilworth)  
2008-2009 M Birch, Cardiff (Kenilworth)  
2009-2010 K Dry, Lambeth (Kenilworth)  
2010-2011 I Quance, Exeter (Kenilworth)  
2011-2012 A Devonport, Barnsley (Kenilworth)  
2012-2013 N Bradshaw Mrs, Mortlake (Broughton)  
2013-2014 R McGinley, Southern-Cooperative (Broughton)



## presidential address to the ICCM learning convention and exhibition 30 September 2013

On behalf of the ICCM, I would like to welcome you all to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Learning Convention, in this, our centenary year. Dr Brian Parsons, our first speaker today, will give us the history of Mr Robertson, the founder of our organisation, originally known as the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents. That first meeting took place in 1913. It was also the year that the post office began parcel post deliveries, the House of Commons rejected the right for women to vote and the Royal Horticultural Society held its first Chelsea Flower Show.



What would these first congress meetings have been like? I can imagine well dressed men, possibly smoking pipes and cigarettes as they listened to well spoken and passionate Cemetery Superintendents.

There may have been heated discussions on topics such as abolishing weekend funerals, or prohibiting burials in shrouds and speculation as to whether cremation will become accepted by the general public.

But of course 1913 was the last year of the 'Edwardian Summer'. The year before the start of the most terrible war in the history of mankind. At this inaugural meeting Mr Robertson and his fellow superintendents would have been unaware that they and their colleagues across the UK, would spend their next five years dealing with the nation's grief as its youth were slaughtered and laid to rest in our cemeteries and those that were being created in Flanders and France.

It must have been very helpful to the War Government to find that there that was now an organisation in place that could advise on all aspects of burial and cremation practices.

Over the rest of the century there were many occasions when our colleagues had to respond to major crises, including the 1919 Spanish Flu epidemic, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, which brought massive numbers of civilian deaths, as well as those of soldiers. During the Cold War were members of our Institute called in to provide advice on the handling of the huge number of expected fatalities that would occur *if* a nuclear attack took place?

Locally, our superintendents and staff would have been involved in managing the burial or cremation of tragedies such as Aberfan in 1967, when 116 children and 8 adults died. Others had to deal with the massacres in Hungerford, 1987, Dunblane, 1987, Lockerbie, 1988 and the London Bombings, 2005. There is so much to learn from how our colleagues handled these very sad traumatic situations.

What's in a name?

In 1913 there were only 13 crematoria in the country. By 1918 only one more had been added. In that year our name was changed to the National Association of Cemetery Superintendents.

In 1932 in the organisation's name was changed to the National Association of Cemetery and Crematorium Superintendents, in response to the growing number of crematoria – 24.

In 1947 the organisation became The Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration and there were 58 crematoria in the country.

In 1958 it became the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration (Inc). and the number of crematoria had risen to 120.

Now to more recent times, those which many of us here will remember. We became, in 2003, The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (Inc). By then there were 244 crematoria in the country.

To date there are in excess of 270 operating, others approaching completion shortly (including that of our incoming President Roddy McGinley – The Oaks in Havant) and several more at various stages of the planning process or with approval. This in addition to an ever-increasing number of Natural Burial Grounds, coupled with the search for land, new or re-used, to provide 'traditional' grave plots. The London Borough of Southwark has just completed raising ground, as churchyards used to do, on their common graves for future burials hence my reference to 're-used' ground.

Although this is our centenary year, it is actually the 94<sup>th</sup> time that we have met at an annual gathering. On the first 12 occasions it was called 'Congress', for the next eighty years a 'Conference' and, since 2012, the 'Learning Convention'.

Venues have included Aberdeen, Cardiff, Brighton, Bristol, Hastings, Harrogate, London and Swansea. Harrogate has been our most frequent host, with 7 conferences being held there.

On the 4 June 1913, Emily Wilding Davison, a militant activist who fought for women's suffrage in Britain, stepped in front of King George V's horse, Anmer, at the Epsom Derby, sustaining injuries that resulted in her death four days later. Her funeral was on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1913, thousands of suffragettes accompanied the coffin and tens of thousands of people lined the streets of London. After a service in Bloomsbury her coffin was taken by train to the family grave in Morpeth, Northumberland.

By the time I entered the job market, most of the rights fought for by women had been obtained. However, as I get older I find myself reflecting on the past and now feel it is appropriate to pay tribute to those who fought for so long for these basic rights. It was the determination and spirit of Emily and other women such as those in our factories – like the girls at Gillette and Firestones on the golden mile in Brentford – which paved the way for the equality of women in the work place. If it were not for them, I and many others would not be in the positions we are in today.

Many of you will know Charles Howlett. He remembers his first conference which was at Felixstowe, in 1986. It was held in an old cinema, which he says was pretty grotty.

Up to the 1990's, Members and those attending Conference and Branch Meetings were mostly men. Wives would accompany their husbands to the venue. They would go shopping or sightseeing while the men got down to work. At the end of the day, all would meet up for tea.

He remembers that in those days there was a strict hierarchy; with those at the 'top' (ICCM officers, past presidents, life members, speakers and important guests) having little 'private' drinks receptions before meals and eating separately from the hoi polloi. As a relatively new young member you didn't dare speak to those at the 'top' unless they spoke to you, and even then, you always addressed them as Mr or Mrs.

Charles' boss, Bert Britton, (Mr Britton to Charles) never really made it into this top clique. Mr Britton had been around for a long time and was a very loyal Branch Member, holding various Branch officer posts over the years. Occasionally he would be asked to join a drinks party – and because Charles was with Mr Britton, and his wife Lillian (who always went everywhere with him) – Charles was invited too. He remembers feeling so very honoured to be asked.

Today there is no hierarchy. Everyone is welcome. All of us who work in cemeteries and crematoria have an important individual role to play. And that goes for manufacturers and suppliers too.

Tomorrow evening we will be celebrating our centenary and all of you are invited to a drinks reception, kindly provided by the Q Hotel Group.

It is a great honour to be President of the ICCM. I am particularly proud to be your President in this our centenary year. The President of the ICCM spends 3 years on the Board as a Director; as Deputy President, President and Immediate Past President.

All Directors of the Board give their time voluntarily and take their responsibilities very seriously. The ICCM's mission statement is to promote the development, advancement and welfare of our members, and to facilitate the better provision, operation, administration and management of cemeteries, crematoria and bereavement related services.

The ICCM has drawn up several primary purposes. One of which is to provide education and training, including lectures and conferences.

The ICCM's promotion of the training and development of staff has had a major impact on the quality of service that is provided by cemeteries and crematoria. Access to an accredited qualification is now available to staff at all levels, a main objective of the Board. The Institute is the sole provider of accredited qualifications in our field of work.

Corporate membership rose by 25% in the previous 12 months due in part to the Association of Burial Authorities (ABA) deciding to dissolve and merge with the Institute. You will recall a similar action taken by the Confederation of Burial Authorities (CBA). A founder member of the CBA serves on today's Board which amplifies the intentions of like-minded organisations.

The Institute continues to support BRAMM as a representative of burial authorities alongside the SLCC and FBCA. Remember, BRAMM is the only memorial registration scheme where you have a say through a national organisation representing you the burial authority.

In 1996, Ken West MBE was instrumental in the creation of the Charter for the Bereaved. The Charter provides the bereaved with information and assistance regarding decisions, that they may need to make, when arranging a funeral. Adoption of the Charter is a commitment by burial and cremation authorities, and companies that adopt it, to improving the service to bereaved families. The Charter is a written statement of what can be expected and enables people to judge the quality of the service received.

In 2012 a Natural Burial Ground committee was established by the Board. Tomorrow morning Nicky Whichelow and Ian Quance will be launching a specific natural burial and assessment Charter. There will also be a new Diploma unit – so those responsible for natural burial grounds will also have

access to an accredited qualification. This new 'Charter for the Bereaved Choosing Natural Burial' helps promote the natural option as an equal choice alongside traditional burial and cremation. The Charter is all about provision of choice in all parts of our service.

Another primary objective is to distribute a journal and papers produced by the Institute. An attempt to produce a quarterly Journal for members was first made by Mr H. Robertson of York in 1930. It was not until February 1935 though that the production of the forerunner of today's publication began. For this we have the then Midland Branch and more particularly, Mr W.A.E. Tongue, to thank.

An early editorial read:

*"The need for a publication dealing with the practical problems of cemetery and crematorium superintendents is unquestioned. It has been apparent for some years that the Annual Conference can only permit a limited time for discussion of the many interesting and instructive questions that arise, and there is definitely a need for some continuity of outlook between each Conference. The Journal should therefore be a vital force in the life of the Association".*

So, when the first issue for 2014 rolls off the presses it will be for the 80<sup>th</sup> consecutive year and the current editorial staff, Bob and Sheri Coates, will be commencing their 20<sup>th</sup> year at the helm. We thank you Bob & Sheri.

When there are new ideas and policies and guidance there tends to be a pattern of response – the immediate adopters and those that criticise; those that watch and wait to see what happens and who will only adopt the policy once it seems safe to do so. Lastly, there are those, who for some reason, will never adopt the policy and guidance. (Possibly because they remain unconvinced?)

We do need people to be cautious and critical, because this can help prevent mistakes being made and ensure the changes proposed are justified and are not just change for change sake, but for a good reason.

The metals recycling policy is an initiative that many people were worried about. I would now say, to anyone who is not doing it, – why not?

The recycling of metals scheme was initiated in 2006 with the help of the Royal Dutch Cremation Society and Orthometals, a Dutch metals recycling company. The first collection yielded a return of £14,993. This was presented in early 2007 to 5 different national bereavement charities after 10 nominations were received from scheme members.

In 2011, having listened to feedback from scheme members, the criteria for nominations changed from a national bereavement charity to a national or local bereavement charity.

This was well received by all. Since the scheme began, a total of 200 individual cheques have been issued and these have been awarded to 102 different charities. The biggest recipient has been CRUSE, who received 23 nominations and over £100,000 from the scheme. Macmillan is second with 16 nominations and over £81,000, the next Cancer Research and SANDS with 8 nominations for £38,000 and £30,000 respectively. These Charities have really benefited from the donations and thus been able to help bereaved families.

Over 50% of crematoria have adopted the recycling scheme. There are, now and again, some sensational press comments on the recycling scheme, saying, for example, *'that you end up as road sign'*. What is so very very important and should be shouted from the crematoria roof tops, is that instead of burying waste metals in the ground, they are collected and recycled and, as a result, a million pounds can be distributed to bereavement charities.

I thank and congratulate the crematoria staff who have written the reports to Council or Board meetings to implement the scheme. And most importantly I thank the bereaved families that have given their consent for the metals to be recycled. Without the support of the bereaved there would be no scheme. Please, please if you have not already done so, do sign up to the scheme and let your local bereavement charities benefit. I am sure any Member that has implemented the scheme will happily share reports and forms with you.

It is said that you can judge how civilised a nation is by the empathy its people shows to others.

Looking back over the last 25 years there is much evidence that, as a nation, we are becoming more empathetic. Each generation becomes more liberal and more tolerant. Single mothers are no longer shunned and disowned by their families. People with disabilities are not hidden away; witness last year's Olympics. Civil partnerships are given legal status and women, unable to conceive without intervention, can have babies through IVF or egg, or sperm donation.

We, as a nation have learnt to listen to what people have to say, and to value what is important to them. People may say this is all 'Political Correctness' nonsense. However I personally believe that PC is just another term for good manners, understanding the needs of others and, by doing so, avoiding unnecessary hurt or upset.

Before I wrote this welcome, I read the 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> conference welcome papers of past presidents. In not one of the papers were death or bereaved people mentioned. I now believe that the policies, guidance and training developed by the ICCM, and those drawn up within our cemeteries and crematoria, have ensured that the needs of bereaved families are at the heart of everything we do.



The world we now inhabit is all about information and choice. It may be that we need this to feel more in control. It may be that we are all fighting in some way to be individual and we want this reflected. In this digital age we are all under continuous scrutiny. Woe betide those of us who fail to live up to our quality of service promise.

In recent years there has been an increasing number of public enquiries. Two major disasters come to mind; the Marchioness and Hillsborough. A friend I went to school with, Joe McCarthy, died at Hillsborough. He was only 19. As a result of many years of tireless effort from the families, changes came about. Their decisions were made on what is right for bereaved families and the deceased.

The Marchioness review revealed that it used to be the practise for the hands of the deceased to be removed and sent to the Coroner's office for identification purposes. We are shocked now by this, but it was usual practise then. The priority used to be 'what ever is most convenient' for the Coroner, whereas now, it is the needs of the bereaved family and respect for the deceased.

Our Baby and Infant Policy was initiated in the early 80s. There is no law to say that we must cremate or bury babies under 24 weeks, but I do honestly believe it is the right thing to do and can see no reason why it should not be so. I am hoping, that within the next 25 years, or preferably much sooner, the incineration of those babies, who die in hospital, will have ceased completely. Whatever the length of gestation, or reason for death, they will all be cremated or buried in a humane, caring, sensitive and dignified way by people who believe in these values.

Tomorrow we will hear a paper given by Anne Barber, "Funeral Celebrancy - 12 years on!". As a society we have become more secular. Is this because religious organisations have not changed to reflect the changes in society, or will we be looking at religions getting stronger and stronger as we do not have one theme linking us together, such as the Big Society? Civil funerals have established a shift away from the service being about God to the service being about the deceased.

Funeral services changed a lot in '80s and '90s. I remember a discussion with Angie McLachlan, who will deliver a paper tomorrow, about why these changes occurred. She suggested the change may, in some way, have been a result of so many young men dying of AIDS in the '80s. These men had time to plan a funeral; they had time to be individual, and sometimes flamboyant. They had memorable and "good" funerals.

In the past 25 years we have seen the increase of recorded music at services. The first specialist crematoria music system was introduced by Wesley Music in 1997 at the new private crematorium in Stevenage, Harwood Park. Now, over 70% of crematoria have a computerised music system.

Throughout civilisation we mark the death of a person with a funeral. It could be argued that the fundamentals of the service have not changed. There still has to be a beginning, a middle and an end. Bible readings may be replaced with poems, and sombre organ music 'to leave to' with Frank Sinatra's 'My Way' but, in essence, the funeral as a ceremony remains. I wonder what Mr Robertson would make of it all.

In conclusion I would like to state that the ICCM is an organisation that values its Members and works extremely hard to respond to Members needs. You all are the people who, on a daily basis, are providing services to bereaved.

For all the changes that have taken place over the years, there is still the physical work that has to be undertaken by a human being, and as yet cannot be done by a computer or robot.

In cemeteries this means that staff continue to work in all weather conditions to ensure graves are prepared in readiness for a burial. They check and re-check 100 year old grave plans and registers, that may or may not have been digitised, to ensure they have the right grave. They do all they can to present the grave as best they can, removing water, laying matting, levelling ground to make the area safe. They arrange flower tributes on graves. They lay petals in baby graves.

In both cemeteries and crematoria staff clear snow from paths, with shovels. In the summer, staff work in hot conditions wearing their funeral regalia. In all weather conditions gardeners strim and cut grass, weed beds, pick up litter. In crematoria staff work hard to check all procedures are in place to ensure the right ashes are given to the right person. They check and double-check paperwork for spelling, they check funeral and music requests. Cemetery and crematoria staff talk to bereaved families, they answer questions, they show them around the grounds and premises, and they listen to peoples stories.

Day in and day out cemetery and crematoria staff try and do their utmost to ensure funerals take place in the manner the family have asked for. They go on training courses, they learn, they adopt and implement policies. They all do all of this because they care. They do it because they are good and compassionate people.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank every one of them.

I would also like to thank all of you who are here today, because I know you will take away the information and knowledge you have obtained and share experiences that will help improve services for everyone in the future. Thank you.

**Natasha Bradshaw**

## introducing president 2013/14 Roddy McGinley...



I am honoured and privileged to be the new President of the ICCM. My theme for this forthcoming year is 'compassion and pride'. All of us have been left scarred and wounded by the loss of someone dear to us. This is how bereavement affects us all, both within and without the profession.

To date my time on the Institute Board has been a fantastic experience. To sit amongst people who are not only extremely professional and committed, but who also share a deep sense of compassion for the welfare of the bereaved and the cemetery and crematorium managers that they represent, has been an exceptionally humbling experience. I believe that we are all very fortunate to have such a dedicated, hardworking and caring band of true professionals to guide and encourage us throughout our careers, and the real beauty of this arrangement is that, as Institute members, all of this invaluable experience and sound advice is only a telephone call or an email away.

I started my employment as a crematorium technician in Scotland. I wanted to fast-track my career but there wasn't an easy way; hard work, study and sheer determination has got me to where I am today. Subsequently, I moved south of the border to Dacorum Borough Council where I managed the bereavement service; the job also required me to be both the Public Health and War Memorials Officer.



I am now crematorium and cemeteries manager for The Oaks Crematorium in Havant, Portsmouth; a brand new state-of-the-art facility, and the first crematorium for the Southern Co-operative. I also have the pleasure of managing the absolutely stunning Clayton Wood Natural Burial Ground just north of Brighton. It's so beautiful that if it were not for my Scottish roots I would reserve a space there myself!

The Institute gives unwavering support to its members and during my year of office I hope to spread the message that the ICCM 'does what it says on tin'.....promotes and develops best practice in cemeteries and crematoria.

## ....and deputy president Ken Dry

My career in the sphere of Bereavement began with the Co-Operative Funeral Services back in 1992, five years after which I then took up post as Registrar at Eastbourne Crematorium. This jump involved a very steep 'learning curve', though thankfully my staff quickly alerted me to the ICCM Diploma course, Tim Morris and the South Eastern Branch; all excellent sources of knowledge and expertise.

My time at Eastbourne was happy and fulfilling, however the need for additional challenge took hold, and in 2001 I began work for the LB of Lambeth managing its then 'forgotten' bereavement services. The task at hand was significant (if not impossible), and after 11 years I left for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council knowing I had developed Lambeth Bereavement Service as far as the organisation had 'willed it'.

In 2008 I passed my Diploma, and in 2009 gained subsequent Diploma 'Honours'. Shortly thereafter I became a Director on the ICCM Board and served as Chairman, culminating in my initial Presidency in 2009/10 and the award of ICCM Fellowship.

In closing, it is interesting to note that the last 'Institute' member to serve two Presidential terms was Charles L. Hilton, who undertook both tenures during the Second World War, and simultaneous to his involvement in emergency mortuary provision for the east end of London. Additionally, as a member of an Emergency Committee, he travelled the UK extensively with many journeys made on unheated trains in 'black out' conditions, occasionally arriving in towns under active Luftwaffe attack.

Like many of us today, I remain eternally grateful to Charles and his era for the determination and courage shown during those terrible years, and whilst I'm sure my second term will not mirror Charles' experiences, it will I'm sure bring its own challenges and intricacies, though hopefully without the aerial bombardment!

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## learning convention and exhibition 2013



Four delegates kindly agreed to report on each of the sessions at the ICCM Learning Convention and Exhibition held at the Forest Pines Hotel, Broughton, North Lincolnshire from 30<sup>th</sup> September - 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013; Christine Walker-Kelley from Worthing Borough Council, Nikki Hewitt from Hull City Council, Robert Savill from the South West Middlesex Crematorium Board and Jason King from the Westerleigh Group.

### Session 1

Christine Walker-Kelley



This was the first convention I have ever attended and I really wasn't sure what to expect. Although I am relatively new to the post of Assistant Registrar at Worthing Crematorium I have been a Technician for 13 years. This led me to anticipate some friendly rivalry and in-house jokes between the various crematoria and cemetery staff that attended the event. I couldn't have been more wrong!

I arrived at the Forest Pines Hotel in North Lincolnshire on Monday morning; a bit early as I had spent the weekend with my parents who live just north of the Lincolnshire border. The receptionist kindly stored my bag for me whilst I treated Mum and Dad to a cup of coffee in the bar overlooking the golf course.

We could see the final touches being made to the exhibition reception – there were centenary balloons and glittery bits all over the table and my anticipation was replaced by curiosity and just a touch of excitement. Having waved goodbye to my parents I made my way to the entrance of the conference centre to be greeted by another smiling, helpful member of hotel staff who directed me to the ICCM's Julie Callender, pictured below with ICCM officers, Trevor Robson and David McCarthy. Although I had spoken to Julie I'd never met her and it was nice to finally put a face to a name. She was registering everyone and handing out the delegate badges and goody bags, and suggested I take a look at the exhibition as there was a little while longer before the Convention officially opened.



The goody bag came in very handy as I was given lots of information leaflets and brochures as I chatted with exhibitors. Although they all made me feel welcome I must say a special thank you to Karon and Peter of The Columbaria Company and Bill and Oliver of Granart who all took the time to really introduce themselves. By the time I left to make my way to the main Convention room I felt I had already made new friends.

I arrived in plenty of time for President Natasha Bradshaw's address. My initial anticipation returned as I stood in the doorway trying to see if seats were allocated. Natasha spotted me and kindly took me under her wing. She introduced me to some ladies – Linda Barker, Anita Allen, Linda Francis, and Heather White – and gentlemen, Nick Barton and Steve Goold. They are all lovely and were very easy going – especially when you consider I was a complete stranger at the time. We were chatting away until Natasha stood to begin her address. [Reproduced on pp 6-9.]



She did an excellent job and before we knew it the first paper was being presented by Dr Brian Parsons, above, who enlightened us about the founding of the Institute and those who drove our profession forward in the early years. [Reproduced on pp 23-34 and 35-46.]

ICCM Chief Executive, Tim Morris, then gave us industry updates covering death certification, metals recycling, the Scottish Commission into baby cremations and the localism agenda.



After a break for refreshments Kate Dimmock from Dunstable Town Council presented 'Dunstable

War Graves'. One wet Sunday Kate decided to have a look at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission recently launched web site and was intrigued to find family members in the WW1 records. So began her journey....[To be published in Spring 2014 issue.]



The final two papers of the day were 'Living for the Dead: Who are they really?' written by Catherine Brew and presented by Angie McLachlan, and 'Death and the "Spirit of Place": assessing cemeteries as a heritage asset' by Dr Julie Rugg, pictured.

Catherine's paper explored how death has been represented on headstones and the ways in which cemeteries have come to 'hold the trauma' – thus enforcing the fear of death. Julie discussed the USP (unique selling point) of burial space compared with other heritage sites.



I sat through every paper and, although mostly directed at cemeteries, I found them all interesting. Each of the speakers did an excellent job and I could see that they had put a lot of thought and effort into making their presentations relevant and meaningful. There was so much information my head felt a bit like a sponge and I was glad we had a couple of hours to relax before dinner and the evening entertainment.

Dinner was nice but the quiz was nothing like I'd imagined. There were 10 rounds of 10 questions and some of those were really obscure. We weren't allowed to enlist the help of Google (or similar helpful resources) and had to use our already stretched brains – cruel but very funny! Our team, The Not So Magnificent Seven, came 3rd from last which was a pleasant surprise. We were very pleased to accept two lovely bottles of wine that had been donated as prizes by the exhibitors. We decided to enjoy them at the gala dinner the following evening and said goodnight.

I really enjoyed the Convention; all the papers were interesting (some were downright hilarious), the people were kind and I came away with new contacts but my favourite part of the entire event was meeting new friends within my chosen field.

#### Session 2 Nikki Hewitt



Well, I think I am the luckiest temporary journalist for the session that I was asked to cover to report back on at this year's Convention. The last time I had the opportunity to attend conference was way back in 2008. Since then I have had another child, carried out over 70 full exhumations, had about 20 hairstyles, worked with 3 different managers, 4 chief executives *and* over 14,000 funerals have passed through my

service – I know, I am still a novice in our industry. This year, I was not disappointed, there were many new faces and some established ones – and I enjoyed meeting you all.

The morning of Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> October started out with the launch of the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved Choosing Natural Burial. Since Ken West started the modern take on natural funerals in 1993, there has been many private and public green burial facilities introduced in the UK. Ian Quance, a former President of the ICCM, has taken things further. Working with Nicky Whichelow of Greenacres Woodland Burials (both pictured right), they have created this new charter which will sit alongside the current Charter for the Bereaved. The natural burial charter is complimented by a BTEC accredited certificate in natural burial ground management, practical City and Guilds training sessions and a series of one day training events. The charter is now available on the ICCM website.



Ken West...well all I can say is I cannot wait to read my copy of his new novel 'RIP OFF! - or the British way of death'; a 'fictitious but based on fact' novel based on Ken's vast professional working career, using black humour – rather apt – Ken's novel, lifts the lid on our industry and may prove to be the perfect springboard to expose it for what it has become.

Ken's aim is to champion good funerals, to encourage people to invoke their right of consumer choice, to change the way that dying, bereavement and funerals are dealt with. Not to plagiarise but to share Ken's own selling pitch – they usually say that books change your life – well this one may change your death; a new genre of reading has been created.

In 'Shortage of Burial Space', Alex Strangeways-Booth explained that her team have found that 44% percent of England's cemeteries will run out of space within the next 20 years and a quarter will run out within 10 years. These figures show a creeping problem which experts say will soon be a major one, the Church of England is also facing a crisis.



Legislation does not allow us to easily re-use cemetery space. Leading on from this the ICCM have taken a resolution from Convention this year and will lobby the relevant government departments to permit legislative changes to allow all authorities to carry out grave re-use, similar to those in London.

Judith Abela, pictured, is the Groups Manager for Sands. By 'working to improve services' for bereaved parents the charity want to be able to continue and improve the work they do and the guidance they provide to professionals.



To become involved you can contact Judith or your local group to look at how as professionals we can support families not just at the time of their loss, but the ongoing support to allow them to grieve and remember their babies.

The exhibitors are a very integral and important part of the Convention. This year I met some new suppliers to the industry that I have not had the opportunity to meet before with new ideas on how to use modern technology, new materials, new competitors – keeping things moving and fresh. I am not going to mention particular companies as you are all good and supportive in your own way to us lowly cemetery and crematorium managers. We all have our own unique communities with their own idiosyncrasies and levels of acceptance and you come through to help us help the bereaved in their most desperate time of need – thank you.

### Session 3 Robert Savill



The afternoon's session consisted of five papers/presentations, chaired by David McCarthy, the ICCM Technical Services and Guidance Manager.

The first, entitled 'Controlling the Cost of Funerals', was presented by Martin Birch, Operational Manager for Bereavement & Registration Services for the City & County of Cardiff, pictured below.

He outlined the scheme that has been implemented in Cardiff to provide a low cost, fixed price complete funeral service, from a funeral director, available for any resident of Cardiff at a price agreed by the local authority. Not to be confused with a Public Health Funeral. The audience listened to Martin with interest and, at the end, there were a few questions from the floor and further discussions later following the presentation.



The second presentation titled 'Funeral Celebrancy – 12 years on!' was delivered by Anne Barber, Managing Director of Civil Ceremonies Ltd., who informed the Convention about Celebrant Training now being offered as a Level 3 Diploma, which is the only national qualification of its type.

In 2008 Anne spoke at the ICCM Conference sharing feedback from a survey of Funeral Celebrants. Following a recent 15 page questionnaire, Anne presented further feedback, which gave positive indicators of a greater working relationship between Celebrants and bereavement services, who are supporting each other further in order to deliver the type of service that families required. Surprisingly, whilst people had requested a Civil Funeral some 60% of these funerals had included some religious content, a 10% increase over the figures last obtained in 2008.



The third presentation was titled 'The Birth and Death of Ichabod Smith.' Angie McLachlan of Red Plait Interpretation

gave us some insight on how she had developed a new training aid to assist in the handling of a body, trying to make it as lifelike as possible. His name is Ichabod, an interactive manikin unlike others already available. He is plumbed so the majority of problems that are associated with dealing with a body can be experienced.



After a brief refreshment break in the exhibition the fourth presentation, 'Respect Shrouds for Burial and Cremation' by Gordon Tulley of Respect GB, discussed and showed the audience a coffin-less shroud that could not only be buried, but also cremated for a 'greener' cremation and accommodating the growing number of families and individuals who wanted to make as little impact on the environment as possible whilst having a service to suit their wishes.



Richard Barradell, assisting the Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers Association, then presented his paper; 'A Coffin Standard for Cremation'. Richard updated the audience on the protocol, testing and procedures being undertaken to ensure that coffins presented for cremation are fit for purpose. [A summary of which can be found on page 74.]

Everyone assembled for a reception prior to the Awards Ceremony and Gala Dinner. The proceedings were opened by incoming President Roddy McGinley who highlighted the ten recipients of the Diploma, the 2013 Photographic Competition [as reported in the Autumn TJ], this year's Wesley Music Award, the Blue AV Award for the best stand, the Life Membership and the Fellowship Awards [more on pages 17 & 19] before the evening concluded with a Gala Dinner followed by a disco. Convention 2013 was all that I'd hoped for.....and more. ►



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**Commercial Director**

alison.close@co-operative.coop 07753 929 450

- **Colin Rickman**  
**UK Business Development Manager**

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Poole & Wimborne Woodland Burial Ground, Dorset



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[www.co-operativecrematorium.co.uk](http://www.co-operativecrematorium.co.uk)

[www.woodlandburialground.co.uk](http://www.woodlandburialground.co.uk)

#### Session 4 Jason King



In the first paper on the final day, 'Avoiding (Unintended) Fires in Your Crematorium', Kim Stopher, below, of Stopher Associates Ltd provided very clear information about assessing the risks within our workplaces.

Kim's knowledge on the subject imparted some interesting information. He did not dwell too much on recent past headlines about fires at crematoriums but

focused on the current legislation in place in respect of health and safety, fire risk assessments and gas safety.

I found the issues around re-visiting fire risk assessments due to increased working temperatures interesting. I know from my own experience crematoriums have become warmer places to work in as a result of abatement plant and Kim's information about lighting cables only being heat resistant to 70 degrees before potentially becoming electrical fire risks will need to be investigated. I could always feed our crematorium operators carrots and ask them to work in the dark!



The next presentation, 'Without Intervention Funeral Poverty is Set to Soar; and it's already at record levels', was statistic heavy but very interesting as it has also been a hot topic with the media. Simon Cox, pictured below, from Sun Life Direct informed us that a 10 year survey had been carried out looking at rising funeral costs and, as a result, robust information was provided for us all to consider.



I was amazed that since the first survey was conducted in 2004 there has been on average an 80% increase for a basic funeral. We were given pricing information from the report, shared exclusively with the ICCM Convention delegates in advance of publication of the full report, which showed the variances in fees across

the country. There were some vast differences. Another surprising fact was that 18% of families arranging a funeral are struggling to cover the cost. This was a presentation that will certainly create further debate.

Throughout the Convention there had been plenty of opportunity to visit the exhibition. During Wednesday morning's refreshment break I took my last walk around the stands. The exhibition was a great opportunity to meet some of the people who already supply your cemetery and crematorium

but also see new ideas and products being displayed that may be a consideration in the future.

The penultimate paper 'Funeral Photography – Helping the Bereaved', was a more relaxing presentation. Rachel Wallace of Farewell Photography is a professional photographer who has specialized in providing photographic records of a funeral, or as Rachel regularly referred to them 'An End of Life Service', for almost ten years.

We were given a brief history of photography at funerals and the desire of families to photograph deceased family members, particularly children at a time when infant mortality was much higher. Today, from selected photographs of the funeral, Rachel produces 'Memory Books' which her clients find a great comfort and helps with the mourning process.

The final 'keynote' paper [see pages 79-82] was presented by Charles Cowling of the Good Funeral Guide. 'Fasten Your Seatbelts for the Next 100!' was entertaining but also thought-provoking. What will funerals and our industry be like in 100 years' time? Charles, pictured with previous speaker Rachel Wallace, provided several theories for the future and also reminded us of many areas of our profession that have changed, or been considered for change, in recent years; areas such as bespoke funerals, Resomation, natural burial, transferring heat from crematoria, grave re-use, and direct cremations. If anyone lives to 2113 I am sure Charles will be interested to hear from you!



The papers this year were a good mix; the early years of the 100-year-old ICCM, industry updates, war graves, history on the headstone, cemeteries as heritage, natural burial, seeing death through humour, shortage of burial space, services for bereaved parents, controlling funeral costs, the celebrant's view, training people to care for the dead, safe shrouds, standardising coffins for cremation, preventing fires at crematoriums, funeral poverty, funeral photography and predicting the next 100 years of bereavement services.

At the conclusion of this comprehensive Convention experience all the speakers, the event organisers – Julie Dunk and Blue are pictured here – the



'backroom' boys and girls and exhibitors got a well-deserved round of applause for their efforts in ensuring that delegates benefited personally and, more importantly for their employers, professionally, from the Convention & Exhibition 2013.



## iccm awards and presentations 2013

Celebrating the achievements of our members and those that work in and support our industry; presented at the Learning Convention and Exhibition Gala Dinner on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> October.



**Fellowship: Natasha Bradshaw**  
for dedication and commitment to the ICCM,  
and in particular the South East Branch.



**Life Membership: Geoff Scrutton**  
for services to the Institute and the  
South East Branch.



**Life Membership: David McCarthy**  
ICCM Technical Services and Guidance Manager  
for services to the members and the profession.



**Blue AV Best Stand Award: presented by Blue Donnebaer to Alan Clough, designer for The Columbaria Company** whose stand showcased the village of Little Wiggle and its inhabitants and is based on a book Alan has written to help bereaved children. Alan read his 'Dear Mum' story on the stand and introduced delegates to the characters from the village.



**Wesley Award: Garry Wise**  
(pictured above right) for his professional and personal approach in raising the quality of the City of Westminster cemeteries. Garry has introduced initiatives that have led to all three sites achieving and retaining Green Flag accreditation, as well as winning Gold standard in the London in Bloom competition. He has also encouraged external organisations to make use of the cemeteries for training purposes and as examples of best practice. His award was presented by Alan Jeffrey from Wesley Media.

### Presentation to the local branch of CRUSE

who received a donation from the proceeds of the Recycling of Metals Scheme.  
Chris Lisle and Lois Hindmarsh accepted a cheque for £3472.00 from President Roddy McGinley.

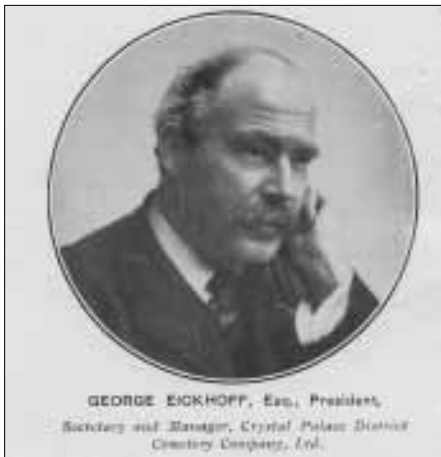




## iccm in touch

Some twelve months ago I received a telephone call from a lady who informed me that she had discovered that one of her ancestors was connected to the Institute and wanted to find out more about him. On telling me his instantly recognisable name I was able to provide some immediate information and later search the archives for detail. The name was George Eickhoff.

Many members, most likely us older ones, will know this name from the Eickhoff medal awarded to high performing diploma students (perhaps the board should consider re-striking the medal and reintroducing this award).



It didn't take long to find more information on the man in the archive at the national office as George was President in 1921, and hence had a platform during that year from which he could spread the word on his theme for his term of office which was the power of knowledge.

In the 1921 yearbook he wrote:

*"It is a habit with the lazy-minded to rest upon the laurels of the past. We want to avoid this, and in the New Year to resolve that the work shall be carried on with renewed vigour. Let us face the future with courage and resolution, determination that our Association shall be yet more successful, and that we personally will not rest contented until every Cemetery Superintendent is a member."*

*"We may have knowledge of a subject, or we may know where we can find information upon it; our Association helps us in the second condition. Believing that every man is a debtor to his profession, then every Superintendent is in duty bound to be a helper, and our members can best help by getting every eligible candidate to become an actual member."*

*"How can we help? By attendance at our meetings, by electing the best men to office, by being so thorough that membership shall be synonymous with efficiency; thus we shall add value to our membership, and so give increased power to our influence. How can we help? 'Be there a will, and wisdom finds a way'."*

*"With the rapidly changing conditions of service, it is imperative that we should help to fulfil those conditions, the interpretation of which will be largely in our hands."*

*"Let our slogan for the New Year be " Opportunity always awaits the eager"."*

*Ever in your service, GEORGE EICKHOFF, President  
BECKENHAM January 1921.*

What would George's views be of today's accredited qualifications available to all levels of cemetery and crematorium staff?

Favourable I hope as it was he that started the ball rolling in 1921. It should be remembered that the 'Association' was born in 1913. There then followed the 1914 – 1918 war therefore 1921 was very early days in the development of the 'Institute'.

Despite the above words now being over 90 years old, the final part of George's message regarding rapidly changing conditions is as appropriate today as it was then.

On another matter there have been a couple of items in the press recently regarding authorities looking to attract additional income to their service via the Localism Act.

One plans to sell masonry directly to the public initially for no profit, however, if there is sufficient demand perhaps a trading company will be established. Another is looking at all aspects of its service for delivery by an authority owned company. Watch that space very closely.

**Tim Morris, ICCM Chief Executive**

## iccm diploma recipients 2013

All this year's Diploma recipients were announced at the Learning Convention & Exhibition Gala Dinner on the 1<sup>st</sup> October. Linda Barker, Heather White and Frank McCool were in attendance to receive their certificate from President Roddy McGinley and Sue Gull and Marc Gisbourne of Stratford Business School. They, and the other ICCM (Dip)s, are pictured here.



**Linda Barker**  
Bournemouth Borough Council



**Heather White**  
Southampton City Council



**Frank McCool**  
North Lanarkshire Council



**Sofia Allana**  
London Borough  
of Islington



**Bev Mitchell**  
Borough Council  
of King's Lynn  
& West Norfolk



**Lyndon Elsey**, Registrar of Cemeteries & Crematorium in Swansea is pictured being presented with his certificate by Mrs Gaynor Richards, High Sheriff of West Glamorgan. Also pictured are Dr Edward Roberts, Vice Lord Lieutenant of West Glamorgan and Noel Evans FICCM, left, Bereavement and Registration Services Manager, City and Council of Swansea.



**Jamie Reece & Aileen Stirling**  
City of Edinburgh Council



**Clair Cooper**  
Hyndburn  
Borough Council



**Fiona Porter**  
North Ayrshire Council

Achieving an ICCM Diploma demonstrates not only the possession of a recognised academic qualification accredited to a BTEC HNC standard but also recognises an individual's character and commitment to developing his or her own management competencies in a specialised and sensitive field of work.

## retirement of David McCarthy, FICCM(Dip)(Hons)

By the time you read this issue of The Journal David McCarthy will have retired from his post as Technical Services & Guidance Manager. This was formally announced to his many friends and colleagues at the 2013 Learning Convention & Exhibition Gala Dinner.

Dave came to us as a full-time officer in 2008 after twenty years in his previous post of Systems and Quality Manager at the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium where, during this time, he served on the ICCM Board of Directors and as our President.

Dave's thesis for his Diploma covered the legal process of granting and transferring rights of burial which he transformed into the highly successful training course that has been running for many years. As the mainstay for our training partnership with the Society of Local Council Clerks, Dave has met literally hundreds of parish clerks on his journeys around the country and has become a well known person in the wider cemetery management scenario. His likeable, quiet nature and willingness to impart his knowledge has made him popular amongst course candidates.



At this year's AGM the best kept secret was announced that Dave would receive Life Membership of the Institute [recorded on page 17] for his services over the years. He was certainly not expecting this, which was evident by his startled look of surprise.

At the later awards ceremony Dave collected his Life Membership certificate from the President and as he made his way back to his seat was recalled to collect a gift to mark his retirement. The startled look was again apparent.

I am sure that all who know Dave will wish him a long and happy retirement however don't be surprised if he tutors a course that you might attend in the future. He's not getting away that easily.



The Board of Directors, Officers and the numerous members that know him would like to thank Dave as a friend and supporter of the Institute. As Dave often says at his burial rights courses – 'don't take your eye off of the person(s) entitled'....

....this time it is Dave that's entitled to a rest, in between times when we need him that is.

**Tim Morris, ICCM Chief Executive**



## iccm convention thanks

Looking through the lens is Patricia McGinley, official photographer and President's lady. Thanks to Patricia, Julie Dunk and Blue for images of the event – there's more on pages 75-78.

Also thanks to all the speakers for sharing their knowledge with us, the session chairs; Natasha Bradshaw, Tim Morris, David McCarthy, Martin Birch and Roddy McGinley, the exhibitors for showcasing their products and services and the delegates whose attendance at the 2013 Learning Convention & Exhibition made all the hard work by event organiser Julie Dunk worthwhile.

Last, but not least, thanks to Blue AV who sponsored the Convention, the Best Exhibition Stand Award and produced the Mega Quiz, Clear Skies Software who kindly sponsored the Tuesday morning session, Townsweb Archiving Ltd who provided the lanyards for the delegates badges and all the exhibitors who donated prizes for the Mega Quiz.





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## John Robertson: portrait of the 'founding father'

When what was described as a 'well-attended meeting of cemetery superintendents' gathered together in October 1913 to form what is now the ICCM, John Robertson was elected as their leader. Today his name is forgotten, although it is the first to appear on the presidential chain of office. But who was John Robertson? This article looks at the life and contribution to cemetery and crematorium management by the 'founding father.'

Born at Invermoriston in the Highlands of Scotland in 1868/69, John Duncan Robertson completed a six-year apprenticeship in forestry and gardening at Edinburgh School of Forestry.<sup>1</sup> Commencing his career in Ramsgate he then moved to London as a foreman at the Royal Park in Greenwich where he worked for four years under Angus Duncan Webster, a noted writer on horticulture and historian of the park.<sup>2</sup> During this time Robertson was engaged as an instructor in horticulture at a school in Eltham. His change of direction towards cemeteries was made around 1901 when he became foreman at Plumstead Cemetery and then Greenwich Cemetery.<sup>3</sup>

*Greenwich Park, where Robertson was first employed when he moved to London.*



This was followed by eight years as superintendent of the 17-acre Hammersmith Cemetery in 1905 before he was appointed to the City of London in April 1913 at the age of 43.<sup>4</sup> Robertson remained there until he retired on 30 June 1936.<sup>5</sup> During his twenty-three year stint he became a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society.<sup>6</sup>

*Margravine Cemetery in Hammersmith where Robertson was superintendent for eight years.*



He was the founder, first member and first president of United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents. He returned to the presidential chair in 1924 and at the conference the following year was described as the 'Father' of the Association. Robertson also served on East Ham Borough Council.<sup>7</sup> After retirement, and the death of his wife Isabel, Robertson toured around Africa, New Zealand and the Far East.<sup>8</sup> He died aged 73 on 8 March 1942 and following cremation at the City of London his ashes were buried with his wife in the Cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

### Robertson: His Years at the City

Robertson succeeded Alfred Bell who had retired due to ill health in July 1912 and had been superintendent for sixteen years. There were 185 applications for the position, all from males and mostly aged between the late 30's to late 40s. Six applications were rejected on account of being over the upper age limit of 45 years. Of the twelve initially shortlisted, most had between three and sixteen years' experience of cemetery management, with many having progressed from gardener to superintendent level.

*The entrance to the City of London Cemetery where Robertson was superintendent and registrar, 1913 to 1936.*



The appointment was clearly viewed as the key post for superintendents as applicants included those managing significant cemeteries in the major cities and towns around the UK, including Birmingham, York, Bath, Bristol, South Shields and Blackpool, in addition to those from the London area such as Acton, Islington, Morden and Westminster. Many had considerably more experience, but Robertson was appointed from a shortlist of three and offered the position at £200 per annum (including a house, fuel and light), rising to £300.<sup>10</sup> The terms of his employment required him to become a Freeman of the City.



*A view of Chapel Avenue in the City of London Cemetery. On the left is Col William Hayward's mausoleum, which he designed and contains his ashes. Haywood was engineer and surveyor to the Commissioners for Sewers for the City of London and responsible for laying out the cemetery. This view was taken around the time Robertson started work at the cemetery.*



At the time he was appointed the City of London Cemetery had carried out 327,000 burials and received around 3,300 each year.<sup>11</sup> Although now comprising 200 acres, when Robertson commenced work only 121 were in use, with the remaining part used for sports facilities including a playing field for the East Ham Presbyterian Football Club. The 50 members of staff were employed as carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, groundsmen and gravediggers along with a very small administrative staff. Up to thirty extra casual staff were also engaged during the winter months.<sup>12</sup> Cemetery income just about equated with expenditure.<sup>13</sup>

Robertson wasted no time in identifying areas where improvements could be made and compiled a 16-point plan including resurfacing the main entrance, attending to the trees, replanting flower beds and shrubberies, provision of seating in the crematorium chapel, preparing additional burial ground and reorganising the staff. The Sanitary Committee formed a sub-committee to work with him on these changes.

The provision of new burial space was necessary as the majority of burials in the cemetery were in common graves; just under 64 per cent in 1916. (By the time he retired it had decreased to 47 per cent, a development he welcomed.) He identified that old ground in the south east part of the cemetery should be used and reported the following to the Sanitary Committee:

Referring to my report of the 27 May [1913] last re the extension of second class common ground, I beg to state that I have carefully considered the suggestion of again burying over part of the common ground buried in some years ago, and consider it would not be practical. Most of the old common ground has been planted thickly with trees and shrubs necessitating their removal. Every grave would have to be "boxed" and using up a large quantity of timber and much extra labour. In digging, many human remains would be

disturbed and however careful we might be in dealing with the same, the public would sooner or later get information of what we were doing and create so much ill feeling against the cemetery as to drive much of its trade away and make our work appear a public scandal.<sup>14</sup>

The term 'boxed' refers to the shoring of a grave. Later that year he decided not to pursue this project and explained his reason to the sub-committee:

Referring to the suggestion of again burying over a portion of the older common ground, I have six test holes dug in various parts with the result that in each case human remains were found at depths varying from 3ft 9" to 5ft, and in one test hole the last coffin was in excellent state of preservation after being in the earth since 1869, consequently, I do not consider it advisable to bury over this ground yet.<sup>15</sup>

After this initial burst of activity, Robertson settled into the routine and occasional tasks occupying a cemetery superintendent including the annual inspection, reburials from City churches, replacement of cremators due to lack of use, the provision of surpluses for the chaplains and acquiring a dog for the 63 year old deaf night watchman. Others included extinguishing fires due to drought, finding the body of a dead child in the cemetery, gradually replacing horses with motor vehicles, dealing with a forged one pound note in the office, the fifteen year attempt to get an organ in one of the chapels, and supervising around twenty exhumations a year. Robertson remained friendly with Angus Webster at Greenwich who included a photograph of an unusual specimen that happened to be in the City of London Cemetery in his book *London Trees*.<sup>16</sup>

*A Pterocarya tree in the City of London Cemetery illustrated in Angus Webster's book London Trees published in 1920.*



Thirteen months after Robertson's appointment to the City, the Great War commenced. Some staff were called up to serve at the front and although this put pressure on gravedigging and maintenance, it would be the exceptional number of deaths caused by Spanish flu in October and November 1918 that tested the operational efficiency of the cemetery in an unprecedented manner. During November there were 807 burials (242 in the same month during 1917) and the busiest day was 11 November when 67 interments were recorded.

In Robertson's report to the Sanitary Committee he outlined how he coped:

About the third week of October the pressure of work became so severe that...I telephoned...asking for assistance to help with gravedigging, and advised you to communicate with the military authorities...the Eastern Command immediately sent a working party of twenty men, most of them used on land work, and consequently of great assistance.

During the five weeks ending 21<sup>st</sup> instant, a total of 836 interments took place, as against the 284 in the corresponding part of last year, showing an increase of 552 interments in the five weeks.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> instant, 65 interments took place, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> instant, I had orders in hand for 139 interments....

During most of the time I have had to keep the office staff at work each evening to cope with increased registrations and other clerical work, and paid them overtime....I have had to keep the best gravediggers at work every Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

I would like to point out to you that during this time nearly all other work in the cemetery has been at a standstill.<sup>17</sup>

### Robertson and Cremation

Robertson was an advocate of cremation, and although he had no experience of running a crematorium – few cemetery superintendents did – he welcomed the challenge of increasing the usage of the facility that had opened in 1904. Robertson's interest in cremation can be traced back to his time at south east London where he became acquainted with the Vicar of Greenwich, the Revd Brooke Lambert (1834-1901), the social reformer and early member of the Cremation Society of England.<sup>18</sup> During his first year at the City there were only 22 cremations; in the year of his retirement twenty-three years later, 295 took place.<sup>19</sup>

*The City of London Crematorium*



During the Great War, he wrote to *The Undertakers' Journal* about the pressure cemeteries were under caused by the high death-rates and shortage of staff and lamented that despite the promotion of cremation in some national newspapers, there was no change in preference.<sup>20</sup>

He was the first cemetery superintendent to speak at a British Undertakers' Association (BUA) conference, and in his 1917 paper Robertson identified the need for a close working relationship with undertakers. He noted:

Let us come back to hard facts, and realize that the undertaker and superintendent are today in the same class from the standpoint of public service, and is it not therefore to our interest, as well as to that of the public, that we should co-operate and work more in harmony with each other in order to give to the public the best possible service at our disposal?

He continued:

It is trifling to mention, but I have known undertakers take a pleasure in flouting the superintendent's authority whenever they entered a cemetery with funerals, forgetting the fact that under such conditions they were subject to the superintendent's control. Surely we must now, more than ever before, bear in mind the fact that the foundation and groundwork of all our business relations and successes will depend greatly upon mutual organization and harmony. Am I not right in saying that today we meet on common ground, and if it be so, are we to permit our interests to run in opposite directions? If we are, not only shall our own interests and welfare suffer, but worse still, our service to the public will not be what it otherwise would, and that at a time when our services are most needed, and not only services but sympathy and encouragement.<sup>21</sup>

As a pragmatist, he recognised the importance of funeral directors in the promotion of cremation. However, he acknowledged that cremation was likely to lead to a financial loss for funeral directors as a lower grade coffin would be used. In a letter published in 1920 he also revealed his change of attitude towards cremation:

Years ago I myself was a strong opponent of cremation; and why? The answer is very simple - ignorance, coupled with sentiment and also religious convictions. A close examination and study, and a comparison of both earth burial and cremation, have made me a most convinced believer in the latter method. Here, then, we have the root-cause for so much slow progress, and the remedy for removing it is in the hands of the public themselves. They must first of all give the matter more careful thought than ever before. Think more of the health of the living by disposing of the dead by the only method than ensures against many of the evils so very apparent by our present method of earth burial.<sup>22</sup>

Speaking on 'Cremation and Economics' at the Federation of Cremation Authorities conference in 1924 Robertson recognised that burial in a common grave was likely to continue as it was considerably less expensive than

cremation.<sup>23</sup> It was a subject that provoked much lively debate, particularly as the hon secretary of the BUA disputed some of the evidence.

In a conference paper given two years later, Robertson claimed that municipal authorities were anxious to dispose of the dead by cremation, but did little to promote it. Disappointed at the low figures at his own crematorium, he even described it as 'more or less a white elephant.'<sup>24</sup>

In 1934 he arranged for the crematorium to be photographed so funeral directors could display these in their premises, while his authority also published leaflets entitled 'Garden of Rest'.<sup>25</sup> He also supported advertising in *The Undertakers' Journal* over many years and in the local press. His belief in cremation was never faltering and in 1931 he declared:

...let me say that no modern cemetery is fully equipped unless it has a crematorium...The modern cemetery, like the great departmental store which is fully equipped in all departments, should be able to offer to the public all the known legal forms of disposal, which of course includes cremation.<sup>26</sup>

To further encourage cremation Robertson was mindful of the need to provide facilities for depositing ashes and in 1928 proposed the creation of a garden of remembrance with concrete chambers in which urns could be placed.<sup>27</sup> A similar scheme had already been created at Hull, and again in the 1930s when Stoke Poges was created.<sup>28</sup> In the event, three bays of the catacomb range were converted into a columbarium.

In a talk given to the West Ham Rotary Club entitled 'Crematoria: bright and cheerful' he believed that a well-planted garden of remembrance would help encourage cremation.<sup>29</sup> He must have been delighted when NACS became the National Association of Cemetery and Crematorium Superintendents (NACCS) in 1933.<sup>30</sup>

### The Founding of the National Association of Cemetery Superintendents

Shortly after Robertson was appointed to the City he was instrumental in the founding of what would become the National Association of Cemetery Superintendents (NACS). He was elected president at the first meeting held on 17 October 1913 and served in this capacity until 1917.<sup>31</sup>

John Duncan Robertson



Forming a representative association was the first stage in professionalizing the occupation; it was a strategy already utilised by embalmers and funeral directors through the British Embalmers' Society and the British Undertakers' Association respectively. The progress that these two organisations had made would have enthused Robertson; one of the founders and national secretary of the BUA, James Hurry, was a funeral director in nearby Stratford and regularly visited the City of London Cemetery.

Initially called the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents, by 1918 it had morphed into National Association of Cemetery Superintendents (NACS). Embracing superintendents in both local government-owned cemeteries and the private sector its title had to reflect this. Indeed, a number of members were employed by the cemetery companies in London, for example, George Eickhoff from Crystal Palace District Cemetery.<sup>32</sup> At the time many organisations representing local government officials were in existence, such as the Association of Rate Collectors and Assistant Overseers, Institute of Civil Engineers, Institute of Municipal and County Engineers, Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants, and the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO). NACS's title was not exclusively municipal. The early membership was largely London-centric and between founding and 1917, all meetings were held in London.

With education being an essential part of the professionalization process, it was Robertson who took the initiative, probably mindful of his comprehensive training and modest teaching experience. In the early years visits to cemeteries were viewed as an important way of enhancing knowledge and the annual congress always involved a tour. The giving of short papers started at the second congress with Robertson delivering one about the history of his cemetery.<sup>33</sup> It was at the 1921 congress that he spoke of the need for the educating those supervising the burial of the dead and that NACS should run classes, conduct an examination and award a diploma. A syllabus should include botany, book-keeping and plan making.<sup>34</sup> A year later this was explored in conjunction with NALGO, then through a sub-committee. But progress was frustratingly slow. It was finally decided to follow NALGO's example by having a preliminary and intermediate examinations.<sup>35</sup> However, it was only as Robertson was retiring in 1936 that the syllabus was finalised.

### Robertson as a Writer on Cemetery Management

Robertson was the first twentieth century writer on cemetery layout, horticulture and management. Indeed, as far as can be traced, not since his fellow-countryman John Claudius Loudon's book of 1843 had any literature on the subject been published. The only writings were by US authors such as the modest output by Samuel Parsons, the superintendent of New York Parks, Howard Evart Weed's



*Modern Park Cemeteries* of 1912 (see below) and also contributions to the periodical *Park and Cemetery*.<sup>36</sup>

Robertson's writings appeared in *The Undertakers' Journal*, the only funeral periodical published at the time (it would be 1934 before NACCS launched their journal). His series entitled 'The Modern or Ideal Cemetery' commenced in December 1916 and a total of nineteen articles appeared with the last in January 1920.<sup>37</sup> He made further contributions on the subject in 1929, 1931 and 1938 along with five articles on cremation. A few had their origins as conference papers.<sup>38</sup> As far as can be ascertained, Robertson's series remains the largest collection of articles to have ever been published on the subject by one person. Robertson intended to put these into a book, but this was never achieved.<sup>39</sup>

The articles are sequential. Starting with 'selecting a site,' and 'preparing the plans,' he moved to 'construction, enclosing and drainage, 'roads', 'lawns', 'planting', 'staff', 'monuments' before finally reaching 'law, rules and regulations'. Some were in two parts, while 'planting' was in three, reflecting not only the importance of this subject, but also his area of expertise. It's clear that some directly reflect his experience at the City; that on 'road construction' came only a few years after the resurfacing of some of the main avenues.

Robertson's writing's were not just the presentation of utopian ideas, but practical advice. However, rather than defining the modern or ideal cemetery, these were more about best practice and guidance reflecting his own experiences and his knowledge based on visiting cemeteries and discussions with colleagues.

They were not academic in the sense of being referenced or illustrated and many had an anecdotal dimension. Some had historical references, such as a note about the first person to have drained land in Britain. There are also quotes from religious texts, poetry and even the Greek historian, Plutarch.

From surveying these writings a number of features about Robertson's ideal cemetery can be ascertained. First, the ideal or modern cemetery was to be based on the park model. Identifying that cemeteries had parallels with public parks, he always guarded against saying there were similarities. He noted:

...although park-like schemes should be introduced, sight should not be lost of the fact that many features suitable to park planning may not always be in accord with cemetery requirements, but a combination of both would bring into being the most suitable for the cemetery; always bearing in mind the area of land to be treated, and its topographical features.<sup>40</sup>

Again, he noted the differences:

In the preparation of the plans, the designer should visualise a park for, in the words of an authority of this subject, cemeteries in this country are becoming more attractive from an aesthetic point of view, while many of our parks are gradually given over more and more to sports of various forms which generally curtails space for floral display.<sup>41</sup>

The hallmark of an ideal cemetery was good planting and in one article he commented that, 'The seasonal floral displays in many cases comparing favourably with many of our public parks and gardens.'<sup>42</sup> This leads into the second point that planting should be coherent. Showy or what he termed 'gay displays' were to be avoided and should be replaced with

...tasteful attractions...to lure the visitor to a continual round of fresh discoveries that would in no way exhaust interest or appear improperly placed, and would reveal a combination of efforts in harmony with our best landscape traditions.<sup>43</sup>

In his article on 'Preparing the Plans' Robertson believed that cemeteries should become places of 'knowledge and information.'<sup>44</sup> He returned to this in his penultimate article on 'colour' where he reiterated that the 'blaze' of colour seen in public parks should be avoided. He believed that white and differing shades of green, particularly where trees were concerned, should predominate.

*A view in the City of London taken around the time of Robertson's appointment.*



Thirdly, cemeteries were to avoid the 'chess-board plan' of straight lines and roads, such as the main avenue heading directly to the chapel. The roads should curve, just like the schemes proposed by Loudon but also adopted by Col Hayward who devised the layout at the City of London Cemetery. Fourthly, planning should be in the hands of qualified landscape architects, whilst other external specialists should be engaged, such as ecclesiastical architects for designing cemetery buildings. Fifthly, in respect of trees, he opined that the '...monotonous repetitions of ordinary trees, such as Lime, Oak and Elm, along with common shrubs such as Privet and Laurel' have no place in the modern cemetery. Yews were similarly regarded.

'Sharp foliage contrasts' should be replaced with groupings and the last of three instalments on 'plantings' contained many suggestions. Rhododendrons were particularly recommended.

*Greenbank Cemetery in Bristol. It would have been interesting to know Robertson's views on the elaborate planting.*



*A view in the City of London Cemetery looking down a thickly-planted avenue towards the catacombs.*



*The view as it is today.*



Lastly, Robertson provided a job description and person specification for the superintendent. He should be

...fully acquainted with the rules and regulations of the cemetery under his charge, a disciplinarian and good manager of men, expert in horticulture and park cemetery arboriculture, landscape, general surveying and plans, building materials and construction, finance, general office routine, and the burial laws.<sup>45</sup>

*An image of a modern American lawn cemetery from Howard Weed's book Modern Park Cemeteries.*



It is not known if Robertson was acquainted with Howard Weed's book *Modern Park Cemeteries*, but there are distinct parallels between this text and his series. The titles of at least eleven chapters are either the same or very similar as are the length of the contributions.

### Robertson on the Design of Cemeteries

The last area is Robertson's ideas on the design of cemeteries and there are two aspects to this, planting and colour mentioned above, and secondly, memorialization and the future direction of cemetery schemes. In his two-part article on 'Monuments', Robertson identified a number of issues stemming from the legacy of the previous century including memorial stability. He then went on to suggest considerations when planning new cemeteries: that memorials of a defined size and value should be placed together according to the landscape; that ugly structures should be prohibited; that earth mounds marking out graves should be removed and that granite should replace the use of white marble. He also recommended the establishment of a fund contributed to by private graves owners for the purpose of maintaining monuments.<sup>46</sup>

Five years before Robertson wrote this, *The Undertakers' Journal* reprinted an article from *The Field* that indicated the emerging style of American cemeteries, as already written about by Weed, where stone memorials and iron fencing around graves were being removed and the grounds should be extensively planted with shrubs and grass.<sup>47</sup> It's likely that Robertson would agree with these principles, but only to a point as the definition of a 'modern' cemetery found in his writings was one carefully planned by a landscape designer with memorials grouped according to type and spaced to prevent monotony. He stopped short of saying that cemeteries should be restricted to one style of memorial.

It was the idea of the regulated grouping of memorials that effectively was the start of what would become the lawn cemetery. This in an area thoroughly explored by Julie Rugg who attributes its introduction to the deterioration of the Victorian cemetery, a rejection of the old and embracing the new, pragmatism and the professionalization of cemetery



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management.<sup>48</sup> Robertson's writing would only just pre-date the adoption of the Imperial War Graves Commission uniform headstone design set in rows surrounded by lawn, and it would be not until 1935 when a municipal authority first opened a lawn cemetery, Saffron Hill in Leicester.<sup>49</sup> At the following year's conference, the last attended by Robertson, the chief superintendent of Liverpool's cemeteries and NACCS president 1940-41, Leo Godseff, outlined the use of new style of memorial.

During past years protests have been made against the unsightliness of the majority of cemeteries, principally because the arrangement of memorials and other grave embellishments destroys all semblance of repose. Assuming that the main object when making a cemetery is to be one of restfulness, the natural question appears to be, why not a lawn cemetery, where something really good and impressive could be achieved?

He continued:

In the first place, the name might with advantage be changed from cemetery to Garden of Rest.

Godseff then went on to outline his thoughts:

It will be necessary to break with tradition and revise our ideas with regard to layout, the everlasting draught board design, with the graves packed closely side by side in order to utilise every inch of ground for burial, will have to go, the allocation of ground for beautifying purposes will need to be on a more generous scale, and most important of all the present type of memorial would have to be excluded. The layout design will need to be on landscape principles, as distinct from the more formal engineering design.<sup>50</sup>

Robertson would have wholeheartedly agreed with these ideas.

Although responsible for preparing additional land for common graves at the City, Robertson never designed a cemetery. Twice he suggested displaying a model cemetery at an exhibition, an idea inspired by those included at continental events. For the 1917 Industries of the Empire Exhibition to be held at Willesden, he suggested that,

The grounds to be laid out on the park cemetery principle (you know how much one sees of the chess-board cemetery in this country). The artistic relations between memorials and landscape; drainage and sanitation; models of modern and up-to-date chapels, crematoria, columbarium, and urn courts and model office administration.<sup>51</sup>

The second model would have been shown at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. Neither was progressed beyond the discussion stage.<sup>52</sup>

Other than through his writings, the closest Robertson came to presenting his ideas about cemetery design was in 1933 when he sought permission from his authority to give expert evidence on behalf of the Borough of Wimbledon for their new cemetery at Leatherhead in Surrey.<sup>53</sup> He gave members of the Council a tour of the City of London Cemetery and on three occasions visited their proposed site.<sup>54</sup> Cross-examined during a House of Lords Select Committee in March that year Robertson displayed his knowledge of the layout of cemeteries around London and further afield. He said that the cemetery should be laid out in a 'modern style' but regrettably did not elaborate on this term as the focus of the questioning centred around an expenditure of £15,000 on drainage.<sup>55</sup> However, when finally opened in 1961, Randalls Park was a lawn cemetery.

*John Robertson's grave in the City of London Cemetery. Part of the inscription reads 'Supt' Registrar of this Cemetery'.*



Over his forty years of municipal service John Robertson worked tirelessly to elevate the status of the cemetery and crematorium superintendent through the founding and sustained participation in the activities of the National Association and also in his writings. In the centenary year of this organisation it is appropriate to look back to the beginning and pay tribute to a man rightly dubbed as the 'founding father.'

### **Acknowledgements**

Staff the local studies/archives of the following London authorities: Hammersmith & Fulham, Merton and Greenwich; London Metropolitan Archive; RHS Lindley Library; Gary Burks and staff at the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium; the Parliamentary Archive; the library at the Royal Botanical Gardens; Edinburgh City Archive.

**Dr Brian Parsons, BA PhD DipFD MBIE AICCM**

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32 Niche Granite Sanctum Panorama



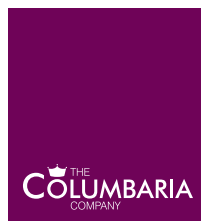
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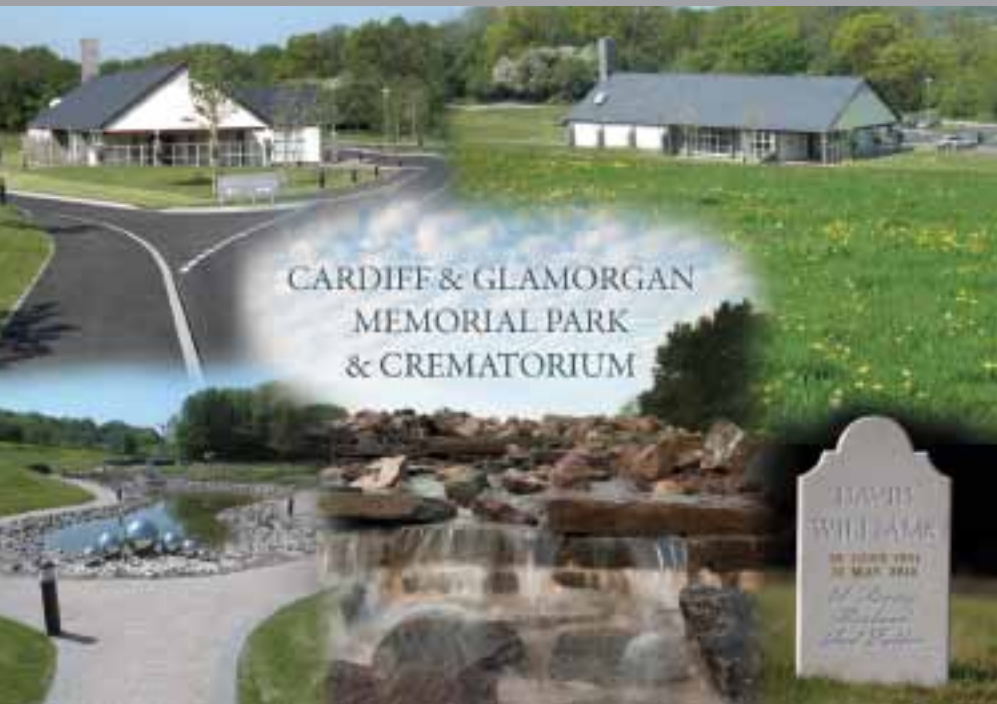
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\*The crematoria mentioned in this advertisement were sold in 2009



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- <sup>2</sup> Author of *Greenwich Park* (1902) and books on trees, timber, orchids, etc
- <sup>3</sup> Apart from a mention in his application for the post at the City of London Cemetery, this cannot be verified as the Burial Committee minutes for Plumstead Cemetery are missing.
- <sup>4</sup> Robertson resigned on 27 February 1913. Hammersmith Borough Council Minutes 3 March 1913. His head gardener, RJ Brow, was then appointed acting superintendent. He was among the founding members of NACS and present at the first conference.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Presentation' (1936) *Journal of the National Association of Cemetery and Crematorium Superintendents* Vol 2 No 4 November p19
- <sup>6</sup> Robertson was elected a Fellow around 1919 or 1920. I am grateful to staff at the Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library for this information.
- <sup>7</sup> See 'London News Items' (1920) *TUJ* November p344
- <sup>8</sup> 'Death of Mrs JD Robertson' (1933) *TUJ* February p60. He married Isabel in 1895 and she died on 30 January 1933. As was usual practice for employees of the Corporation, the grave was provided gratis. For overseas tours see Robertson JD (1938) 'From the Cape to the Zambezi' *The Undertakers' and Funeral Directors' Journal* (Hereafter *TUFDJ*) August pp299-300 & Robertson JD (1940) 'A Tour of New Zealand' *TUFDJ* January pp9-10 & Robertson JD (1940) 'A Tour of the Far East and Back' *TUFDJ* December pp327-328
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- <sup>23</sup> See 'Third Annual Conference of Cremation Authorities' (1924) *BUA Monthly* September pp87-91
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- <sup>48</sup> Rugg J (2006) 'Lawn Cemeteries: the emergence of a new landscape of death' *Urban History* Vol 33 No 2 pp213-233
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## anecdotal evidence

As a young lad fresh out of college I was delighted to have been appointed to the post of Crematorium and Cemetery Clerk (office junior) to the Crystal Palace & District Cemetery Company Ltd. incorporating Beckenham Crematorium. On 5th January 1972 I began my career.



Image courtesy of Dr Brian Parsons

First a tour of the offices located in the downstairs rooms of the Elmers End Road Cemetery Lodge, next the location of the grave of WG Grace and then the chapel and crematory. Entering the crematory, via steep downward steps, I was met by the operators Tom and Ted. They were keen to show me the latest Downs Diamond Cremator with automatic tipping hearth and 'The "Lightning" Pulveriser' (right), an early cremulator made by The Patent Lightning Crusher Co Ltd, London EC1.



Ted offered me a cup of tea and on my acceptance, much to my surprise, climbed up a stepladder that was leaning against a cremator. At the top he reached out and unhooked a rather grubby cream enamel mug with a green rim from a meat hook which hung from the side of a galvanised bucket. Ted dipped the cup into the bucket and produced probably what was the strongest cup of tea that I have ever had! The "brew" was made up each morning with a pack of PG Tips and then kept warm on top of the cremator for the rest of that day. Were those the days?!

Alan José

## the early years of the National Association

From 1913 until its own publication was launched twenty-one years later, proceedings of the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents were recorded in *The Undertakers' Journal* (*TUJ*). First published in 1886, it was the only periodical dealing with funeral service and coverage afforded to the fledgling Association was generous. From these accounts it is possible to chart activities in the early years.

It was a testing time as less than a year after the first meeting the Great War commenced. Nevertheless, the resilience of the membership proved that the Association was here to stay. But what did the Association do in the early years, what was the format of meetings and what were the issues of the day? Drawing from these reports, this article attempts to answer these questions by focusing on those formative years: 1913-1918.<sup>1</sup>

Although there was an attempt around 1906 to establish an organisation to represent cemetery superintendents, few details can be ascertained. First mention of a new organisation was made in *TUJ* in November 1913 with a report about a meeting held the previous month:

Association of Cemetery Superintendents'  
A well-attended meeting of cemetery superintendents was held at the Kensington Town Hall on Friday evening, Oct. 17th, at which Mr CF Tate was asked to take the chair. After a full discussion had taken place with regard to the objects of the meeting, it was unanimously agreed to form an Association to be known as "The United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents." Mr JD Robertson, City of London, was elected president; Mr A King, Islington, vice-president, with Mr CF Tate, Kensington Cemetery, Hanwell, W., hon. secretary and treasurer. A strong organizing committee was elected to draft rules, &c., and it was decided that the annual subscriptions should be 5s. Full information can be obtained from the hon. secretary, who will be pleased to receive the names of intending members.<sup>2</sup>

John Duncan Robertson.  
First President of the  
Association.



The next meeting was held in January 1914:

A meeting of this Association was held on the 13th Jan. at the Hammersmith Town Hall, the president Mr JD Robertson in the chair. The secretary submitted the names of twenty-five applicants for membership, and on the motion of Mr Cochran, seconded by Mr Loud, they were duly elected. "The Deaths Registration and Burials Bill," and how it would affect cemetery

Superintendents, was discussed, and it was decided to bring the matter before the special meeting to be held in February for further consideration. The annual convention was arranged to be held in July at a place to be decided later.<sup>3</sup>

In the event the Death Registration and Burial Bill did not proceed beyond the first reading. Twenty-five gathered for the second meeting in January 1914 at Hammersmith Town Hall (Robertson's former authority), whilst the Association's first congress in July was attended by sixty-two members.<sup>4</sup>

In March 1914, *TUJ* reproduced an article from the periodical *The Field* in which the American lawn cemetery was described.

One of the best known cemetery superintendents in the United States is a Scotsman, and he has lately published his views upon the subject. He says that he was first acquainted with the graveyard around the auld kirk at Forres. It was chokeful [sic] of graves and headstones, erect, leaning, or flat, and the gravedigger's sheep were the only caretakers. In those days, to those people, a modern cemetery would have been a desecration, but now opinion has changed. America has led the way, and there are no cemeteries in Europe to compare with Lakewood in Minneapolis, Spring Grove in Cincinnati, and others. What is required, we are told, is that the superintendent should be a talented landscape gardener, not a "stone man," have the love, eye, and 'heart of an artist, and he must also be a despot. The modern cemetery is not exactly a place of mourning; it is a garden of beauty, a place of landscape loveliness, and a peaceful attraction to visitors as well as to lot owners.

One of the larger American cemeteries covers 273 acres, and in it are 56,300 interments. A few years ago it was comparatively uncared for. Since then, to improve it, over half a mile of hedges have been removed from around graves, and more than eight and a half mile of stone or iron fencing; thousands of trees and shrubs have been planted and grass has largely superseded gravel paths; thousands of dollars are annually expended on plants, bulbs, seeds, &c. In most cemeteries all new lots are sold under a "perpetual care" agreement, which possesses obvious advantages; and the old ones are kept in good order whether paid for or not.



Similar improvement in English cemeteries is highly desirable, the ideal being that they should much more resemble beautiful gardens. Public gardening has advanced so much of late years that surely it is not unreasonable to look for a corresponding improvement in cemeteries.

Publication of this article clearly enthused Charles Tate, the superintendent of Kensington Cemetery and the Association's hon secretary & treasurer, who responded by issuing a rallying call to prospective members:

Twenty-seven years ago the Association of American Cemetery Superintendents was organized, and the improvements in American cemeteries commenced with the formation of this Association. The object of this Association is the advancement of the interests and the elevation of the character of cemeteries in America. And in the intervening time this Association has, effected:-

- (a) The adoption of the lawn plan system
- (b) Efficient drainage
- (c) The perpetual care of graves
- (d) The endowment of both graves and mausoleums
- (e) The abolition of Sunday funerals

In October of last year a similar association was formed in England (the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents), with objects similar to the above.

This Association now numbers some fifty members, including the superintendents of some of the largest cemeteries in the kingdom. It is, of course, useless to advocate the adoption of the lawn plan system for the older cemeteries in this country, but it is obvious that great improvements can be made on the present system, new sections of old cemeteries could be made to conform to the requirements of the ideal, but the old cemeteries, no matter how modernised, must ever remain amiss in something, because the change necessary in their reconstruction would be impracticable. Again, some of the graves and plots may be cared for, but many are sure to be absolutely neglected and unprovided for payment or no payment, the cemetery should step in and give, the whole a plain, general care, and as far as possible eliminate all objectionable features.

Co-operation of interests is to-day acknowledged by all discriminating men to be the surest method of obtaining success, and looking to the good results which have attended the American association, the organizers of the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents feel confident that it will prove to be of great assistance and benefit to all those interested in our sphere of service.

I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to extend a most cordial welcome to any prospective member, and

can assure them we will, one and all, be pleased to receive their suggestions and be informed of their methods concerning subjects that are continually before our meetings. The annual subscription to the Association is 5s, and I shall be pleased to supply any of your readers who are interested with any further particulars they desire, together with a copy of the rules and form of application for membership, on receipt of a postcard.<sup>5</sup>

In May, details of the first congress were announced and a report of the proceedings published later in the year:

The first Annual Congress of the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents was held in London on the 15th and 16th of July, and proved a huge success. The members met at Anderton's Hotel, Fleet Street, EC, at 11 am on the morning of July 15th, among others there being present: Messrs. B Ashling, Peterborough; T Bevan, St. Marylebone; AJ Blackell, Plymouth; RJ Brown, Hammersmith; D Bliss, Swansea; ST Burgoyne, Battersea; T Buckerfield, St. Pancras; WA Cochrane, Hampstead; J Davies, Newcastle-under-Lyne; JK Everitt, Norwich; F Fairbourn, Halifax; AH Fletcher, Enfield; WC Hards, Greenwich; W Hand, Cambridge; WG Hill, Sheen; AE Joyce, Southborough; A King, Islington; J King, Erith; FJP Loud, Acton; FW Perrin, Bath; FW Parkinson, Armley; JD Robertson, City of London; GW Snow, Wandsworth; JN Sharman, Shooters Hill; Geo Sabey, Rushden; WC Stokes, Great Northern; AT Townsend, Accrington; C Willis, Shrewsbury; W Yarwood, Knutsford; CF Tate, Kensington.

The President, Mr JD Robertson, in a few words welcomed the members to London, and hoped by what they saw and heard, they would go back home well repaid for their visit.

At 12 noon a move was made to a motor that was in readiness en route for Hampstead Cemetery, where the Chairman of the Hampstead Cemetery Committee, and Mr WA Cochrane, the Superintendent, met them at the entrance, and it was soon evident that the members were interested in all they saw.

*Hampstead Cemetery*



This fine cemetery is 25 acres in extent, and great credit is due to Mr Cochrane for the manner in which the grounds are kept, and the arrangements of the graves and flower beds.

The next visit was to the St. Marylebone Cemetery, an ideal cemetery, under the supervision of Mr T Bevan, who is known far and wide as an expert horticulturist, and from the condition of the grounds it is quite evident that what Mr. Bevan preaches he puts into practice. Mr Bevan explained at some length the drainage arrangements of the cemetery, which were considered by the members of the Association to be perfect.

*The entrance gates on Brunswick Park Road in Southgate to the Great Northern Cemetery.*



*The chapel in the Great Northern Cemetery*



The members then rejoined the motor and were conveyed to the Great Northern Cemetery. This is a beautiful place, well wooded, and an ideal site for a cemetery. The members then proceeded to Islington and St Pancras Cemeteries, which adjoin, and at the kind invitation of Mr Buckerfield and Mr King tea was partaken of in the joint Board Room.

At 7.20 p.m. the members and others assembled at Anderton's Hotel, when a well-earned dinner awaited them, presided over by Mr JD Robertson. There was not much time to spend over this function, as the hour for business was at hand.

The meeting was opened by a pithy speech from the President, which was as follows:

*A view in Islington Cemetery, the third cemetery to be visited during the first congress.*



Ladies and Gentlemen, In the first place let me welcome you to this our first Congress of the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents. The profession of superintendents is a very old one, and it is passing strange that until last year there was no form of union or society in our midst whereby we could meet as on the present occasion. To-day, almost every form of profession and trade has its association, and it is well that it should be so. The old adage, "United we stand, divided we fall," comes home to us very forcibly to-day in almost every walk of life. It is well, therefore, that we cemetery superintendents have at last bestirred ourselves, and from efforts put forth by a few last year we to-day are on the fair road in becoming an association of which we expect great things as time goes by. I may mention in passing that our Association is the outcome of a conversation which took place between a few superintendents in February 1913, at the Guildhall.

Although some years ago an attempt was then made without success to form an association, from the conversation referred to, one of our members sent a circular letter round the London cemeteries, with the result that our good friend Mr Tate was able to secure a room at the Kensington Town Hall, and called a meeting. At this meeting the question of the wisdom, or otherwise, of forming an association was fully discussed, with the result that there and then a committee was appointed to draw up a report and rules. Subsequent meetings were held at various centres in London, until at last we were able to say we are an organized body, not, let me say, to grind any individual's axe, but for the good and welfare of the communities which we serve. There is no doubt that if we had such an organization, say fifty or sixty years ago, we would not have to lament the fact to-day that many of our cemeteries are mere stoneyards.

Planned as many cemeteries were, by men with little or no taste or knowledge of landscape gardening, and indeed many of our cemeteries afterwards managed by men trained behind the counter, little wonder if visitors feel chilled and have a horror to enter many cemeteries.

I am sure there is a great future before our Association, and with a good committee, an able secretary, such as we have in Mr Tate, we should impress as much as possible the wisdom and, indeed, the necessity, of consulting us on many important questions, such as planning and laying-out new grounds, filling positions with fully qualified men, and other matter of equal importance to the public. I may mention in passing that we are already taking active steps to have some of the clauses in the Deaths Registration and Burials Bill, now before Parliament, amended; in this and in other directions we purpose making our power felt.

May I take this opportunity to impress upon the members who are here from the provinces the wisdom of pressing any superintendents they may know in their district to become members without delay? We look to the time when we shall have several branches in the provinces, with London as the centre. I sincerely trust that our country members will go home satisfied with what they saw to-day, and what they will see tomorrow of our London cemeteries, and further convinced with the fact that we in London are out not for self-advertisement, but for the good of the whole. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have much business on hand, and I shall not detain you any longer, but express your own and my own good wishes for the welfare and further success of our Association.

The next item on the programme was a paper entitled "The Laying Out, Draining, and Planting of a Cemetery," by Mr T Bevan, superintendent of St Marylebone Cemetery, and any member who had the pleasure of seeing the cemetery that Mr T Bevan had laid out, drained, and planted, would know that this paper was given by a man who knew his business. This paper we hope to be able to give next month.

### Secretary's Report

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have pleasure to submit my first annual report. The Association was first formed in October of last year, since when some sixty-two members have been enrolled. Six meetings have been held in various parts of London. The meetings have been well attended, and various subjects in connection with cemetery matters brought forward and discussed. The Association is in a sound financial position, and I am looking forward to the time when every cemetery superintendent will become a member of this Association.

Mr A Cochrane read a very interesting paper on "The Evolutions of the London Burial Ground," which was full of interest to the members, and showed that Mr Cochrane was a master in the history of the old London burial grounds, and which we intend to print in a subsequent issue.

### Election of Officers for 1915

Mr JD Robertson, City of London, was unanimously elected president; and Mr A King, Islington, vice-president. Committee: Messrs WA Cochrane, Hampstead; A Casselton, Fulham; J Blackkell, Plymouth; C Hards, Greenwich; WG Hill, Sheen; FJP Loud, Acton; JN Sharman, Shooters Hill; GW Snow, Wandsworth. Secretary: Mr CF Tate, Kensington.

*A photograph of the entrance to the City of London Cemetery taken around the time of the first visit by members in 1914. [Since 2002 the ICCM head office has been located in the building to the right of this image.]*



### Congress for 1915

The Annual Congress for 1915 was decided to be held in Liverpool and Manchester.

On the second day the members and their wives, to the number of fifty, met at Anderton's Hotel, and proceeded by motor through London to the beautiful cemetery of the City of London. They were met at the entrance by Mr JD Robertson, the worthy president of the Association, in whose charge this cemetery lies, and were conducted round the extensive grounds, Mr Robertson explaining many of the memorials, etc. which had been moved from the City. The two large chapels were much admired, and the crematorium there was also inspected, and they were afterwards hospitably entertained by the President in the grounds of his house. Tea was partaken of, followed by a musical entertainment, this bringing the day's proceedings to a happy close.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1914 the editor of *TUJ* interviewed John Robertson who revealed the three-fold objectives of NACS:

- a. To further the interests of cemetery superintendents and promote the efficiency of cemeteries in the United Kingdom
- b. To promote the knowledge of work appertaining to the management of cemeteries
- c. To provide facilities and foster social intercourse amongst members.<sup>7</sup>

In the article Robertson referred to the Death Registration Bill that had been discussed the previous year in Parliament. Designed to amend the law relating to the registration of



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death and burials it did not proceed beyond the first reading. However, Robertson noted that

One clause of the Bill...makes it a criminal offence to bury without a certificate or a coroner's warrant to do so, and anyone acting in contravention of the law thus established 'shall for each offence be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds, or on conviction on indictment to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds, or to imprisonment with or without hard labour, etc.'. That...is what we cemetery superintendents shall be liable to if this Bill passes, and yet we cannot refuse to bury if a body is brought to us for burial.'<sup>8</sup>

Despite the declaration of War, the Association still managed to meet in July and August 1915, but at the former meeting it was decided against holding a conference. The July meeting touched for the first time on the issue of closing cemeteries one half-day per week, a proposal supported by members of the British Undertakers' Association. At the first joint meeting between the two associations held on 4<sup>th</sup> August there was much discussion about the hardship this would cause the '...working and poorer classes' although it was noted that Saturday afternoon funerals were declining in favour of Thursday afternoons, the general closing day for London.' Eventually a resolution was passed:

That this meeting is of an opinion that all cemeteries situated in London and greater London and the immediate vicinity should be closed for interments on Saturday afternoons not later than one o'clock, and that the last reading for funerals should be not later than 12.30pm on that day.<sup>9</sup>

It was also resolved that this recommendation take effect from 1 January 1916. The secretary of the Association then wrote to nearly fifty burial authorities about this matter. But progress was slow and in December 1915 an unidentified correspondent wrote to *TUJ* to say that only a handful of replies had been received. It was further believed that:

If only one of our large and foremost cemeteries would be strong enough to lead the way, to strike out with this innovation, the result would be assured, there is not the slightest shadow of doubt that in the course of a very short time Saturday afternoon funerals would be a thing of the past, only to be found in history.<sup>10</sup>

Enthused by the first visit to cemeteries, a return to this popular activity was made on 29<sup>th</sup> September when members visited three locations in south-east London: Nunhead, Brockley and Ladywell.

The first meeting of 1916 was held in February at which an update was given about the Saturday half-holiday. Among other information in the summary it was revealed that

*Lewisham Cemetery. The account of the meeting states: 'In proceeding down the fine main avenue Mr Day [the superintendent] pointed out the splendid centre bed, 30 yards in diameter, planted with a variety of plants, now beautiful with those colours and tints which are only seen at this period of the year.'*<sup>11</sup>



eleven authorities were unable to adopt the proposal, along with five who considered the time inopportune on account of the war. Only two had adopted the ACS/BUA recommendation. Optimistically, the honorary secretary did identify that at least sixteen burial authorities recognised the principle that '...every man is entitled to rest and recreation.'<sup>12</sup>

It was at this meeting that Mr Eickhoff raised the issue of the increasing shortage of labour to work in cemeteries. This was taken up by the honorary secretary who wrote to Local Government Association about the exemption of cemetery employees from military service only to report at the meeting in May 1916 that the Committee (Reserved Occupations) do not propose to include them among the certified (or 'Starred') occupations.

The second annual congress was held in July and reported on the year's activities and noted that nineteen new members had joined bringing the total to 71. Thomas Bevan replaced John Robertson as the President. A fellow horticulturalist, he was superintendent of St Marylebone Cemetery.

It would appear that no further meetings were held until the executive committee gathered in February 1917 when the honorary secretary circulated the draft of a letter about the salaries of superintendents to the National Association of Local Government Board Officers. It concluded with a recommendation that the minimum should be no less than £110 per annum (about £4,125 today).

Guildford was the first occasion when the annual congress was held away from London. Taking place on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1917, the third congress comprised an afternoon's trip around the London Necropolis Company's Brookwood Cemetery at Woking followed by an evening meeting when the AGM was also held.



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*Cemeteries in north-west London were visited during the second conference. Starting with Paddington Cemetery in Kilburn, the brake (a horse drawn vehicle as petrol rationing prevented the hire of a motor coach) then made its way to St Mary's RC Cemetery at Kensal Green, followed by the neighbouring All Souls' Cemetery. On the return into central London members also visited Paddington Old church and churchyard containing the grave of the actress, Sarah Siddons. At St Mary's Cemetery members were shown the catacombs containing the coffins of deceased Belgian refugees waiting burial in their own country. At All Souls' Cemetery, Mr Burgess the superintendent, led a tour of the catacombs before showing members the extensive nursery and glass houses where '...the income from which reaches probably the highest figure for any cemetery in the Kingdom.'<sup>13</sup>*



The fulsome account of the journey from the Company's private station in Westminster Bridge Road to the cemetery is reproduced here:

At the kind invitation of the Directors of the Necropolis Company the members were invited to journey to Brookwood by the company's private train, a free return ticket being handed to each member.

*The London Necropolis Station at 121 Westminster Bridge Road.*



Previous to the party taking their places in the two reserved saloons, an inspection of the London offices and station of the Company was made, and Mr FE Smith, the Chief Superintendent, explained the whole details and arrangements made for the reception of funerals taking place at Brookwood. The handsome mortuary chapel was opened for inspection, together

with the several waiting rooms provided for the use of mourners. One was struck with the perfect arrangements made by the Company.

Punctually at 11.58 am the train steamed out of the private station and the prospect of an interesting journey and visit was looked forward to. During the early part of the morning the rain had fallen, and it looked possible, as London was left behind, that the visit to Brookwood Cemetery would be favoured by fine weather.

During the journey Mr FE Smith gave some interesting particulars as to the foundation of the London Necropolis Company and the establishment of their cemetery. He informed the party that the Company was incorporated by special Act of Parliament in July 1851, the Company purchasing something like 2,000 acres at Brookwood, near Woking; 600 acres were enclosed and the Cemetery was opened for interments in 1855.

On passing the Brookwood station the train moderated its speed in readiness to be switched off the main line to that of the private line of the Necropolis Company which runs right through the Cemetery, crossing the Pirbright Road, to the consecrated portion of the Cemetery.

Arriving at the first private station within the Cemetery, which is situated in the general or unconsecrated portion, the members alighted and were received by Mr Barrett, the Cemetery Superintendent.

*A funeral train arriving at South Station in Brookwood Cemetery. Members of the Association would have arrived in similar style for their tour.*



The station buildings, forming three sides of a square, consist of a number of waiting rooms for the use of mourners; they are well fitted up with all modern requirements for the convenience and comfort of visitors, and from the station platform a very fine view of the Cemetery is obtainable. The fine specimen trees and shrubs comprising the graceful silver birch, the beautiful copper beech's, weeping hollies, and stately wellingtonias, intermingled with the rugged pines and gorgeous heather, give a striking effect seldom met with in the general run of cemeteries.

At the invitation of Mr FE Smith, on behalf of the London Necropolis Company, the members were handsomely entertained to lunch, the fruit grown at the Company's farm, adjoining the Cemetery, being voted a great success.



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*'Midst Surrey Pines.' Members of the Association would have walked down a number of the avenues, such as this one called St Andrew's, in Brookwood Cemetery.*



Having replenished the inner man, the members, under the guidance of Mr G Barrett, commenced a tour of inspection, the weather at this point showing very unpromising signs of rain.

Mr Barrett pointed out that various plots of ground were set aside for the burial of congregations; there are reserved enclosures for many parishes, notably Kensington; St Saviour's Southwark, St Margaret's Westminster; Christ Church and many City Churches. There are also the grounds for the burial of actors, Swedes, and Mohammedans, the latter being marked with a description stone on which is engraved the dial of a compass with an arrow pointing in the direction of Mecca. The inscription engraved upon the stone is as follows: "Reserved by the Oriental Institute of Woking." The graves of Mohammedans are so dug to allow the body to lie with the face towards Mecca. The graves are dug to a depth of six feet and then excavated under one side, two feet in. The body after being placed in the grave is then pushed into this cavity and then walled up with unburnt bricks. The six-foot deep excavation is then filled in.

The next ground to be visited was that set aside for the burial of Parsees or Guebres, the followers of Zerdnsht, who dwelt in Persia till 638. When the monarchy was annihilated by the Arabs in 611 they fled to India, and their descendants still reside in Bombay. In the centre of this ground is a large temple used for the funeral services. The symbols, the solid silver implements used in the course of the service were exhibited for the inspection of the party. At the entrance to this piece of ground is a reproduction of the Gate of Dalal.

While this inspection was taking place, the rain, which had been threatening, commenced and developed into a steady downpour, rendering further inspection of the cemetery impossible, the party returning in haste to the shelter of the station buildings.

After tea spent in mutual admiration, and towards the late afternoon, a hurried visit was paid to the nursery

ground, glasshouses, stables, joiners' shops and the statuary and monumental departments. Mr Barrett pointed out the mechanical arrangements for cutting, rubbing, polishing, and the party had an opportunity of inspecting the pneumatic tools for working stone and marble.

At the conclusion of the visit, the president expressed to Mr Smith and Mr Barrett the association's sincere thanks for opportunity to visit Brookwood Cemetery, and desired Mr Smith to convey to his directors their thanks for the handsome way in which they had been entertained.<sup>14</sup>

At the evening's meeting the issue of military service and the reduction of cemetery staff was discussed along with that of superintendents' salaries. The founding president's salary was indicative of the disparity between cemetery superintendents and other colleagues in local government. Employed on £200 per annum (plus house and fuel), he received the smallest salary of colleague officers within his own authority:

Gas Meter inspector £250  
Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures £400  
Inspector of Sewers £250  
Chief of Cleansing and Watering £400<sup>15</sup>

The issue led the NACS secretary to assess superintendent's remuneration using a survey. NALGO was contacted for assistance in setting a minimum salary, suggested by the Association was £110 per annum, but at £210 by NALGO. The extent to which these were recognised by authorities is unclear. It was discussed again at the executive meeting in June 1918, but the overriding issue continued to be cemetery staff being called-up for military service. It was resolved that

...this Association of Cemetery Superintendents call the attention of the Minister of National Service to the seriousness of the further calling up of the staffs of cemeteries for military service; already funerals are delayed owing to the depleted staff, and a further reduction will mean a danger to the public health, due to the prolonged delay in the burial of deceased persons.<sup>16</sup>

*The Dalal Gateway, Brookwood Cemetery. This gateway was constructed on the edge of the Parsee (or Zoroastrian) section and formed an unusual entrance to the Fire Temple which also stands in the grounds. This view shows the gateway looking towards an area of the cemetery which later became the Canadian Military Cemetery. Unfortunately the gateway no longer stands, except its concrete foundations.*



President Bevan also retired from his post at St Marylebone Cemetery and John Robertson thanked him for his contribution to the work of the Association and wished him a well-deserved rest.

November 1918 not only marked the end of the war, but also the outbreak of Spanish flu. Around the time of the Armistice, undertakers and cemeteries were struggling to cope with three to four times the average number of burials.<sup>17</sup> It was a subject referred to during the first post-war conference, which took place in July 1919. Held over two days at the Grand Hotel in Sheffield, members were welcomed by the Lord Mayor. By this stage there were 93 members of the Association. Charles Cook was elected president and in his address he looked back at the trials presented during these formative years.

May I...be retrospective, and go back to the date of the Association's formation, in 1913. Little did the founders dream of the events to take place between that date and the present. The association had scarcely found its feet before the nation was plunged into the greatest war history has to record. Naturally, the conditions that have prevailed since have had an effect on the progress of this and kindred associations. The Secretary and other members joined HM Forces to help fight the country's battles, leaving behind others with additional responsibilities to carry on the work they had commenced.

*Although outside the scope of this article, this photograph shows delegates (and wives) outside the chapel in Witton Cemetery during the 1922 conference held in Birmingham. It is probably the first image ever to have been taken at a conference.*



Mr Cook then commented on the effects of the Spanish flu:

History provides us with no records to equal the difficulties we were faced with during a portion of last year, when the influenza epidemic was rampant....From the nine weeks ending November 30th 1918, we had in our local cemeteries 2,528 interments, as against an average of 700 for the same period. I only mention this as an illustration of what I know happened throughout the country, and as proof of the valuable services rendered.<sup>18</sup>

These accounts reveal one distinct characteristic of the early members: that they appreciated visiting cemeteries. Today this activity continues to be a popular feature of branch meetings and visits to both cemeteries and crematoria are seen as an important educational opportunity.

Despite the difficulties presented by the Great War, the Association continued to meet and discuss issues facing the cemetery superintendent. These pioneers laid the foundations on which the Association/Institute has flourished

and a century on it is only right that their commitment and efforts are recognised.

With thanks to John Clarke in the preparation of this article.

**Dr Brian Parsons BA PhD  
DipFD MBIE AICCM**

*All images from the author's collection.*

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## the plantsman: foreman's diary Friday December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1913



I am enjoying a quiet afternoon with most of my daily tasks completed so I've decided to hide in the potting shed, have a nice cup of tea, and browse the latest seed catalogues to get some ideas for the new flower beds at the entrance of our recently purchased and prepared cemetery by the Grand Union Canal at Alperton, Middlesex. The Council haven't decided on the name of the new cemetery yet. The rumour going about is that it will be called Wembley New Cemetery or Sudbury but I have a feeling it will be named after the village close by, Alperton. There's still some time for the Council to make their minds up as the opening is not until early summer next year.

Calendula has to be on my list, commonly known as Marigold, sometimes English Marigold, the bright orange and yellow daisy-like flowers adorn most of our gardens these days and really brighten up the most overcast summer day. Initially Calendula was grown as a culinary herb. What shall I chose? Should I plant 'Lemon Queen' with 'Orange King' or perhaps a combination of 'Meteor', 'Prince of Orange' and 'Sulphur Queen'.

Calendula  
'Orange King'



Everyone is raving about the bright colours of the Californian poppy (*Eschscholzia*). Many new varieties are now available, from 'Alba' a cream rather than white, 'Diana' a pale yellow and rose colour, 'Golden West' a flamboyant gold and orange, 'Frieded Pink' pink and cream, 'Mandarin' a flashing orange, scarlet and gold, 'Orange Queen' a very deep orange and yellow and lastly 'Ruby King' a deep crimson.



Californian Poppy



Alyssum



Perfumed flowers have been greatly admired throughout the reigns of Victoria and Edward VII and now under the reign of our new monarch, George V, they continue their popularity and Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*) is no exception with its sweet honey perfumed scent. Used as a dwarf edging plant, all varieties grow no more than 4" tall and are white with 'Little Dorit' being the most popular.

The perennial Delphiniums are quite costly to buy, so to keep within my allocated budget I'm having to choose the annual type known commonly as Larkspur, these can be sown in spring where they are to flower, flowering from late June through to end of August. I'm choosing 'Giant Imperial' with colours ranging from pink shades through to lavender, purple and blues and the occasional white bloom.



Larkspur



Pansy and viola must be included. [These plants were developed from the wild flower 'Heartsease' at the beginning of the last century with Lady Mary Elizabeth Bennet, daughter of the Lord of Tankerville and James, Lord Gambier leading the propagation of the pansy we know so well today.] 'Fire King' bears flowers that are distinct and striking. The lower petals are magenta margined with yellow while the upper petals are a reddish brown also 'Peacock Blue' where upper and lower petals are white margined with a sumptuous blue and a dark face.



Pansy



### 1913 seed catalogue

**Fire King Pansy.**  
This novelty comes almost absolutely true, scarcely a plant bearing flowers of variance from the type, which is very distinct and striking. The lower petals each have a large blotch of deep brown-red or magenta, interlined with yellow, while the upper petals are of a bright reddish-brown, of a real fiery shade, warranting the name of Fire King. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**Snow Queen Pansy.**  
Pure sunny white, with yellow dot in center of flower, sometimes marked near center with faint blue or purple lines, altogether the loveliest variety of any of the different classes of Pansies. It is highly prized by a great many Pansy lovers for just that reason. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**Peacock Pansy.**  
A beautiful variety of ultramarine blue in the upper petals of the flower, edged with a thin white line, within which is a space of purplish crimson, passing into a rich central blotch of deep blue, shading to black. Named "Peacock" because the blending colors resemble those of peacock feathers. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**Sweet-Scented Pansies.**  
*The Perfume of the Violet.*  
*The Beauty of the Pansy.*  
This new class is the result of crossing the Pansy (tricolor) with the sweetest Violet (double). The resulting hybrid, in addition to retaining the delightful Violet perfume, produces the most beautiful Pansy-like blossoms. It is the richest union, of great substance and of an endless variety of colors. They are not equally fragrant, though the majority are as highly scented as the purest Violet. Mixed colors. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**Emperor Frederick Pansy.**  
The first color is deep, velvety brown, shaded into a narrow band of deep, molten yellow, which borders each petal. The perfect flowers show a distinct face, marking a rich gold and dark brown. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**Pansy, Emperor William.**  
Ultramarine blue with a violet eye. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**New Imperial German Pansy.**  
This mixture embraces seed of over fifty colors and markings, and is guaranteed to equal any strain offered as Imperial German. Pk., 150 seeds, 5 ct.

**Pansy, Good Mixed.**  
Fine for bedding; many rich colors. Pk., 100 seeds, 5 ct.

**NOTICE**—One packet of each of the seventeen varieties of Pansies for 75 cents.

Miss C. H. Lipman: Dear Mother—The Boston Ferns arrived yesterday. They were in splendid condition. Shall take pleasure in recommending your Fern to my friends. Mrs. Chas. A. South.

Rich. Burman, Wm., Aug 25, 1906.

I attended the very first Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show this year and was honoured to be in attendance on the day Queen Mary visited. It was an excellent show and one that I hope continues for many a year. Such a golden opportunity to see so many new varieties of our favourite plants being grown. This picture was in the newspaper - can you spot me in the background?!

Queen Mary visits first Chelsea Flower Show in 1913 (image: Lindley Library)



### 2013 footnote:

In its 100 year history the RHS Chelsea Flower Show has been cancelled only once. During World War II the War Office required the land for an anti-aircraft site and, when the show resumed in 1947, there was still some doubt as to whether it should take place at all. Exhibitors wanted a postponement as stocks of plants were low, staff much depleted and fuel for greenhouses was obtainable only with special permits. However, Lord Aberconway (then RHS President) and the RHS Council felt strongly that the show should resume as soon as possible. It was a great success.

My research to date has found that the only *Calendula* variety now available is 'Orange King'. I found Larkspur 'Imperial Mixed'; perhaps the Giant has been dropped! I couldn't find any mention in today's seed suppliers catalogues for *Calendula* 'Lemon Queen', 'Meteor', 'Prince of Orange' and 'Sulphur Queen'. Nor could I find any of the Californian poppy varieties 'Alba', 'Diana', 'Golden West', 'Fruited Pink', 'Mandarin', 'Orange Queen' and 'Ruby King'. Also unavailable today are Pansy 'Peacock Blue' or 'Fire King' and sadly 'Little Dorit' has vanished as well.





## pulpit; one hundred, not out!

It is astonishing to think that the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management – and its antecedents which reflect the changing remit of bereavement services over the years – has been continuously informing, entertaining, educating, upholding and supporting the British and Commonwealth funeral community since before the outbreak of the disastrous Great War in 1914.

This is a great achievement and something about which the successive leadership should be really proud. Also, congratulations to everyone involved in *The Journal* which is a unique and special publication. The editor, contributors and publishers do a brilliant job.

My first knowledge of the ICCM came in 2006 when, whilst attending the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party of Neil Sherry – a well-known local funeral director, I was seated with my wife Marion on the same table as two total strangers. After conversation we discovered that they were in fact Bob and Sheri Coates. Bob, at the time manager of Mortlake Crematorium was, I discovered, also the editor of *The Journal* and during conversation they asked me where I was going on holiday that year. I replied that we were off to the Ukraine. They asked if we were planning to visit any cemeteries and if so, would I photograph them and write something? Seven years later, here I am still writing.

The year 2013 is also an important year in my life because I am leaving work for retirement. My work, if you can call it that, has been as a clergyman. It is a diverse world with many privileges and joys and of course, the conducting of funerals has been a major part of my life and one that I have always taken very seriously and with great care and attention to the needs and wishes of the bereaved.



I have always desired to help mourners express themselves at the time of their bereavement, and then help them to experience exactly the funeral that they wanted. Now in my 40<sup>th</sup> year as a clergyman, I still feel the same and still try my best.

Above you see me in Holy Cross Churchyard in Greenford holding 40 'Parson's Pocket Books', representing my life in Holy Orders since 1974, and on which I will draw for the content of this article. The Parson's Pocket Book is essentially a diary with bits and bobs relevant to the life of working clergy and I have always found them very useful.

On the first page the preface states "Memory has been defined as the faculty by which we forget things." The purpose of the Pocket Book is to help the clergyman "not to lose sight of things"! And on the very back page there is an "Income or wages table" showing how much an annual income is calculated in monthly, weekly and daily proportions. As a sign of the times, the table starts at £1 a year and ends at a formidable £1,000 a year, which is £83.33 a month, £19.33 a week and £ 2.74 a day. £1,000 a year! Gosh. How times have changed!

Obviously, I can't go back to 1913 and write about my experiences of funerals or other aspects of life, but my 40 years are a significant portion of that century.

I went back to the 1974 diary and found it rather a ghostly experience. It is totally blank until Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> May when I have written the terse single word "exams". I remember walking round the Close in Salisbury Cathedral where my exams were sat, and wondering if disaster was about to strike! Well, the terrors of exams were navigated successfully and 40 years later I look back at myself with a mixture of pride and disdain. Off I went to the pre-ordination retreat at Manchester Diocese's special place known as Crawshawbooth House and, donning my clerical collar for the very first time, walked in the open street, feeling conspicuous. The diary doesn't even have an entry for Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> June, the date of my ordination to the Diaconate, so unsure I was of actually making it! But soon afterwards, the pages fill with names, addresses and information, most of which is now totally forgotten, by me at any rate. I had become the junior assistant curate of the Gothic revival style Oldham Parish Church, pictured below c1960).





My first funeral was on Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1974 at 12.30pm in the Parish Church of Oldham. The vicar of the parish, my boss, was away in Italy on holiday, and the funeral director informed me that it would have to be a double funeral. A double? "Yes, a father and daughter have died last week in Oldham General hospital but from unrelated causes, and could I do them both together please?" With my vicar away, I had to play it by ear and it was a good start to a 40 year period of funerals of such a wide variety and diversity of situations and intensity that my head sometimes reels at what I have been doing. The clergy fee for that first funeral in 1974 was £1.

The best look at my early funeral work comes in my Parson's Pocket Book of 1976 where I have recorded details of 89 funerals I had conducted. I was just one of three members of staff, so the parish total was much higher. I conducted 22 of that 89 in cemeteries, and the others in local crematoria. The clergy fee had doubled! It was now £2.

At one of our local crematoria Jim and Bill were the attendants and I quickly found myself on good terms with them. They mercilessly pulled my leg as a new recruit to the job, but I enjoyed it too. One day, as I led the coffin into the chapel reading out the Funeral Sentences, I could see Jim and Bill's heads poking round the corner from the back room, scrutinising me. I was puzzled as to why, until I stepped into the pulpit. There, on the lectern, they had placed a girly magazine with a rather busty young woman prominently displaying her figure. Jim and Bill were in stitches as they saw me looking at the magazine and trying to keep a straight face and maintain an appropriate funeral expression. Ribald laughter could be heard from the back room as the funeral proceeded!

They were always telling me how slow I was at funerals, especially compared to another local clergyman, The Revd. Alfred Mullett, whom they nick-named "Mullett the Bullet" for the alleged brevity of his funerals. They even took the joke to the point of creating in card a "league table" on which they placed the best (or fastest) performing clergy, with Mullett the Bullet on top, of course, and my name always down at the bottom.

One day, the Area Dean made an official visit to the crematorium led by the superintendent and, on entering the room occupied by Jim and Bill, he enquired what the league table was for. Jim and Bill were really taken aback. They managed to bluff their way out of the situation, but the league table disappeared immediately thereafter!

In 1982 I left Oldham for London but, a year or two later, went back to visit my old haunts. Of course, I went to see Jim and Bill but was shocked to be told that they had both died soon after I had moved south. At least we had some fun before I left!

So, from the perspective of the pulpit how have things changed during my 40 years of performing final farewells?

It has always been my practice to visit the bereaved whenever possible prior to the funeral to assess their needs, and try to meet their expectations. In 1974, there was little demanded apart from the conventional Order from the Book of Common Prayer, but these days I always start my visit by asking the questions "How do you see the funeral? What would you like to happen at it?" And the answer today is they want it to be swift, not too religious and definitely not heavy and depressing. Funerals are upbeat, positive and full of promise for the future. I understand this desire. Set in the context of our present day when, socially, death is a very unwelcome subject and pretty much invisible, the funeral needs to be celebratory, even if the life of the deceased wasn't!

My relationship with funeral directors 40 years ago was very much the same as it is today. The telephone is the key, with instant communication, especially in the days before the ubiquitous answering machines. However, when I started, this communication was a little more relaxed than it is now.

Competition for slots at the crematorium wasn't so tough and a funeral director would often ring to ask if I was available on such a day and such a time and negotiate a better time. These days, the phone call is a virtual ultimatum. Can you do the funeral on this day and time, or not? If not we will find someone else who is available. Pressure to get things sorted is part of the problem and with many clergy having answering machines, but not being very good at ringing back quickly, the frustration at the funeral director's office must get very high indeed.

I have always got on well personally with the funeral directors in my parish. I rate their work very highly. They do an excellent job helping people at their time of need and this work is not acknowledged sufficiently in my opinion, and rarely has been. Is it because many like death to be 'invisible', thus promoting this lack of appreciation?

The cemeteries and crematoria I have been accustomed to have remained constantly competent at providing a good service to mourners and also shown supportive and appreciative attitudes towards the clergy who drop in and sometimes try to rule the roost, if only for 20 minutes!

One of the major changes visible 40 years on is the decline in the choice of religious music and the playing of the organ at funerals. At my local crematorium it is perhaps a sad sight to see the organists sitting in the waiting room, sipping tea and looking bored whilst waiting for the next funeral at which they are required to play, which could mean sitting there waiting for an hour or so.



The modern funeral has become more of a pop concert than an act of worship which is central to the traditional funeral where the life of the deceased is placed in the context of God's creativity and love. Crematoria have aided this 'development' by making it easy to choose from a huge range of both popular and classical movements on CDs or downloaded from the world wide web. A look at my 1978 diary shows that on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January (my birthday) I conducted a funeral at which we sang two hymns, 'Rock of Ages' and 'Abide with Me', and these were typical. At the time, I remember being sometimes impatient with the repetitive nature of hymn choices; 'Amazing Grace' and 'The Lord's My Shepherd' seemed to be sung several times a day.

The titles have changed but the repetition continues, as 'Wind Beneath My Wings' and 'My Way' dominate the playlist at crematoria.

Successively, from Jim and Bill back in 1974, chapel attendants have all appreciated a joke and shared something of their life with me. Being in one post for 31 years has meant that I have developed good personal relationships with staff and I value this aspect of my life very highly. Generally speaking, the trend has been away from staffed coffee and refreshments provision to the coin-operated dispenser which is hardly an improvement, but with the current emphasis on finances, it is easy to see why such a change was made by managers.

In my parish, most of the post-funeral contact with the bereaved has been handled by a team of lay visitors who would alert me to the needs of any they visited to any further help, such as counselling or other support.



A popular innovation some years ago was a special communal service on a Sunday in November close to All Souls' Day, depicted here by William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905). We invited the families of all the deceased whose funerals I had conducted in the previous 12 months and around one hundred mourners would arrive at Holy Cross Church where I conducted a service of remembrance with hymns and preached a sermon addressing the issues of loss and hope. We served tea and cakes afterwards in the Parish Room.



In 2012, my last full year of working, I conducted 24 funerals with about the same numerical split between cemetery and crematorium, and in 2013, the clergy fee amounts to £160, except that this is now divided between the PCC and the Diocesan Board of Finance with the poor vicars having no financial gain for all their efforts!

The choices people have today have really impacted on the church's role, both in funerals and weddings and I suppose choice is a good thing, especially for those with negative feelings about religion or negative experiences of individual clergy, of which there are many – as I have learnt only too well during the last 40 years.

Life has changed but death is one thing which hasn't – although we have changed our way of responding to it in the way we conduct funerals.

**Prebendary Neil Richardson**



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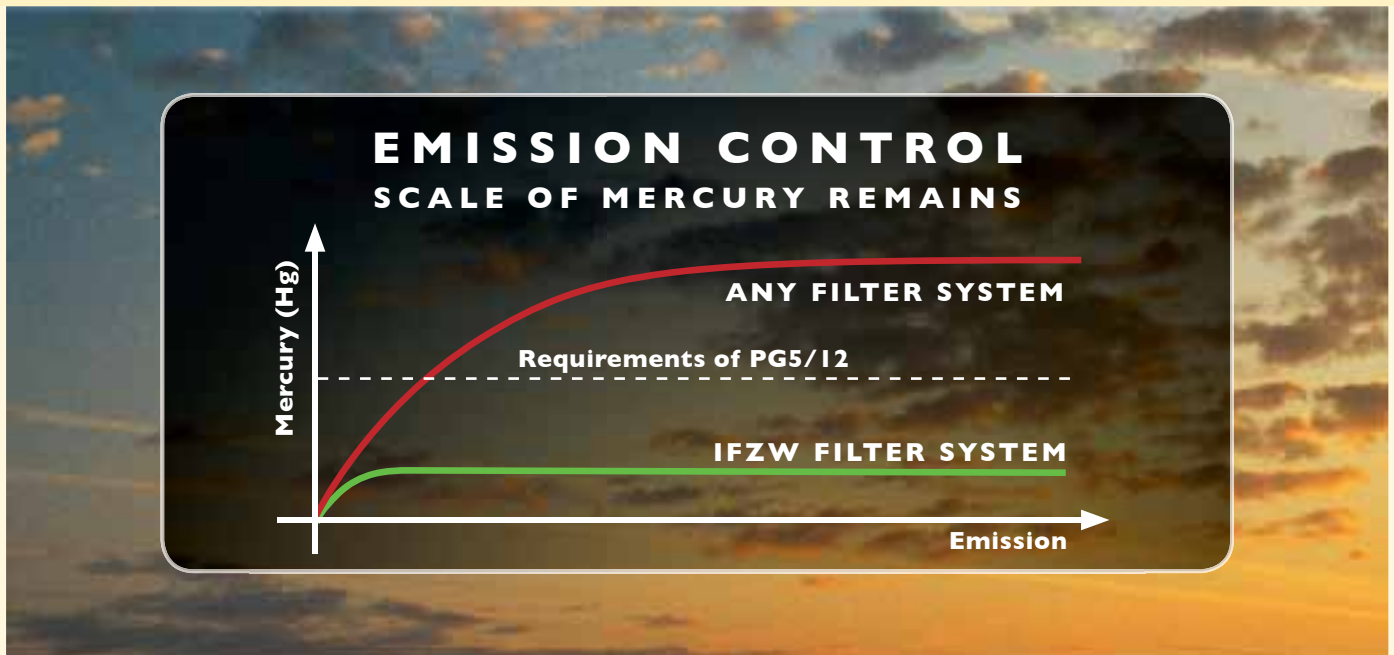
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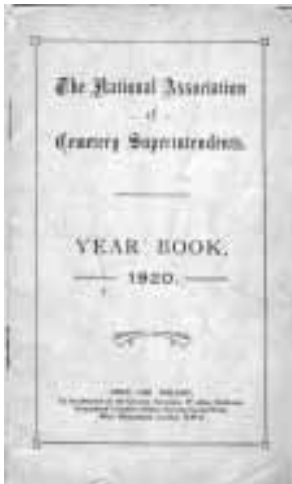
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## moments in history 1920 & 1953

Four national congresses had taken place before the first Year Book of the National Association of Cemetery Superintendents (NACS) – later to become the ICCM – was published in 1920.



Production of this early 'Journal' had been delayed as a consequence of the War. Members of the Institute who had played their part in the conflict were remembered, and it was also noted that the Institute had offered the services of its members as volunteers to help the Imperial War Graves Commission in their cemetery work. This offer was declined, 'unless the Association was able to recommend permanent gardeners and caretakers.'

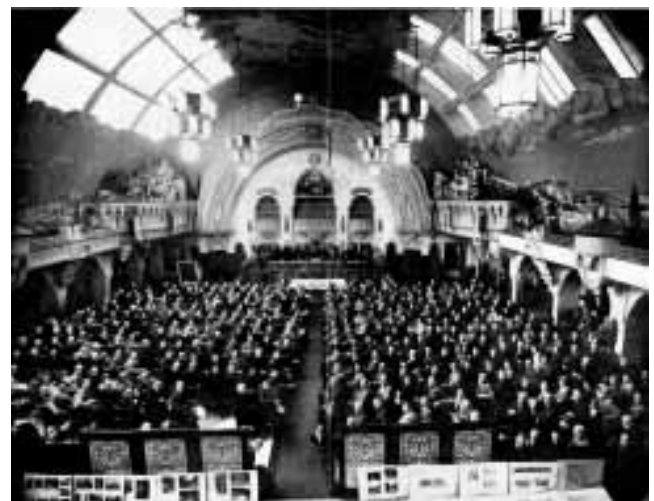
Charles Cook, making a Presidential address at the Fourth Annual Congress, said he was pleased with the progress made by the Institute so far: 'We shall resolve that every effort will be made to see that no superintendent is left outside the circle if persuasion can get him to become a member.'

The Institute had gone through testing times. For Cook, the Spanish Flu Epidemic had meant his borough (Hampstead) dealing with 2,528 interments over a nine-week period in which 700 burials was the usual average. Cook projected changes including an increasing use of the motorised hearse, and looked towards a time when 'all cemeteries will be made self-supporting.'

The Fourth Congress had been held in Sheffield. The delegates toured the Vickers gunworks, and afterwards arrived at the City Road Cemetery for a 'real Yorkshire tea.' After a tour of the General Cemetery Company the following day, the Congress visited Chatsworth House and - returning late in the afternoon - declared the Fourth Annual Congress 'a complete and grand success.'

In 1953, thirty-three years later, the Official Report of the IBCA [ICCM] Joint Conference was published.

Pictured right are delegates (all looking over their shoulders to face the camera with the top table in the background) in a packed Spanish Hall in the Winter Gardens, Blackpool. Lavishly themed in the 1930s with its three-dimensional frieze representing an Andalucian village, it provided a unique backdrop to conference 1953 and still retains many original fittings today as can be seen below.



You may be interested to note that the conference recorded the prevarication of the Minister of Housing and Local Government: 'the Minister felt that he could not be in advance of public opinion, and would like to have further demonstration that the majority of the population is not opposed to the reforms which we consider desirable.' In this instance, they were talking about the removal of derelict memorials, but nothing much changes.

**Dr Julie Rugg**  
Centre for Housing Policy, University of York

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## looking back – 75, 50 & 25 years ago

As further acknowledgment of our 100 year history we reproduced in the Summer issue the presidential address by Mr J R Ramsden (Hyde) given 75 years ago, and in the Autumn issue that given 50 years ago, in 1963, by Harold Welsh (Hampstead).

This issue features the address by George Wright (North Tyneside) speaking in 1988 – 25 years ago, at the Scarborough conference.



As I sat in the tranquil setting of Piesport Cemetery situated on the Mosel, I couldn't help but compare the beauty of the German approach to the maintenance of the last resting place of their loved ones to that of Great Britain and I use the term very loosely. In many cases we should be exceedingly disturbed at the condition of many of our churchyards and cemeteries. Whilst some members will disagree with me and say that there is no cause for concern, I wonder how many of us actually visit or indeed have an annual inspection to view the facilities offered and the condition of same. I remember in my own Authority last year, on the annual committee inspection one or two members, who I put down to being disturbed or distressed were overheard to ask the question; 'Why did we have to include a visit to a cemetery/crematorium in the itinerary? We should never have come here!' What a statement for an elected member to make. Fortunately those councillors were not members of the appropriate committee.

It takes, I feel, a person with feeling, dedication, keen interest and understanding to be a member of such a committee responsible for the maintenance, upkeep and upholding the tradition of perhaps the most important service that we offer. There are those who will only pay lip service to the high standard that we search for, fortunately, there are many others who are supportive of these same standards which we try to achieve in our cemeteries. There are those who *ad nauseum* say 'we are only concerned with the living', of course we are, and by this we do not mean the neglect of cemeteries, on the grounds that we are short of finance and that such finances should according to them be channelled into other more important services.

Let us look at the Social Services aspect. One hears the statement 'what about the less fortunate, who cannot afford to pay for certain services?', and it is this very point why I feel it is incumbent upon us all to maintain our cemeteries and churchyards to as high a standard as possible to the benefit of all and not just the few. 'How can this be achieved?' you may ask. With one's hand on one's heart one can consider the Audit Commissioner's Report on the Management of Cemeteries and Crematoria and ask 'are there areas within this report that do need to be considered and our own methods overhauled?' The Audit Commission in my view is not saying that any finances saved should be ploughed back into the 'financial pot' to be used in the reduction of rates, but it is saying that any savings so made could well be used more advantageously to the betterment of the service in which we serve. As an example, some 30 years ago Liverpool fully centralised the administrative arrangements of their cemeteries and it is only this year, the time opportune, that my own authority has now fully centralised its service. There was a very minor outcry, not from the general public, I might add, but from our own employees and as far as I can ascertain this lasted a very, very short while.

People do not like change, but if one is to progress in these rather difficult times it is absolutely imperative that we examine most closely all our activities, to ensure that financially, we are carrying out these activities in the most economical way. Cemeteries do have an exceptional excess of expenditure over income, and one should therefore be asking how can this be reduced to the betterment of the next of kin and to the general public.

I started this address by saying I was sat in a Piesport cemetery, and here there is not one grave, and I mean not one, that is not an absolute picture of care and attention. It is this continental approach to maintenance that excites me. I know that I will never see here in Great Britain such changes in my lifetime, but there are ways in which improvements can be made. Scotland, I notice, apart from a few, maintain the majority of their cemeteries to an exceedingly high standard, so much so, that they can be considered to be sterile, nevertheless giving an appearance of caring Authorities. It is far better to maintain in this fashion than to do little or nothing. It was John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843) who said that, 'A general cemetery in the neighbourhood of a town,

properly designed, laid out, ornamented with tombs, planted with trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants all named, and the whole properly kept, might become a school of instruction in architecture, sculpture, landscape-gardening, arboriculture, botany, and in those important parts of general gardening, neatness, order and high keeping.' He also wrote that 'Churchyards and cemeteries are scenes not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches to cultivate the intellect, but they serve as historical records. I put to you that if this philosophy was carried out today one would be going a long way towards uplifting and improving the standards that we are trying to achieve. As far back as 1831 cemeteries in the U.S.A. were designed with just this very aim in mind and one wonders why, in this day and age and some 100 years on, one still cannot seem to achieve this effect.

At the Llandudno conference some of you may recall, I made reference to what I considered the ultimate after use for cemeteries and that was the botanic garden, why not? Loudon would certainly have approved, who again wrote, 'All burial grounds, when once filled, should be shut up as burying grounds and a few years afterwards opened as public walks or gardens; the grave stones and all architectural or sculptural ornaments being kept in repair at the expense of the town or village; such trees, shrubs or plants being planted among the graves as the town council may determine.' Muchen Gladbach one of North Tyneside's twin towns has made a 7 acre botanic garden from a closed cemetery and it is indeed a joy to behold.

I was delighted that my own Authority, North Tyneside has over the years allowed me a lot of licence in treating our own cemeteries in a manner in which I believe in, for example:-

(a) Preston Cemetery our largest, with its heath and heather gardens, acer, hydrangea, rhododendron and azalea collections, these together with a conservation policy is producing a place worthy, in season, to visit. The odd complaint does occur while we are awaiting the after effects of snowdrops, bluebells and primroses, but I might add these are very short lived once explanations are forthcoming.

(b) Benton Cemetery has been treated in a different manner and is maintained to an exceedingly high standard and extremely colourful with an almost continental flavour.

(c) St. Paul's Churchyard converted under the auspices of the 1906 Open Spaces Act, is situated in the centre of Whitley Bay and is, in my opinion, the correct treatment in this particular situation, being a place where one can enjoy one's lunch break, or the elderly can rest awhile, particularly in the summer. Here I was able to introduce and indulge myself in a rose specie collection. Too many authorities use this licence to turn such valuable assets into sterile and uninteresting open space.

(d) Earsden Churchyard, is currently being converted under Section 215 of the 1972 Local Government Act and whilst the treatment, or perhaps lack of it is causing concern, ultimately I feel visitors and local residents will come to appreciate ones endeavours, which after all, is the accepted policy of my Local Authority, without which support, officers could never operate to the advantage of the community.

It is customary on the domestic scene to make reference to the activities of your President during his year of office and in this connection I must really pay tribute to all the branches, their officers and members as to the manner in which my wife Joyce and I were received.

Without exception, and I make no attempt to highlight any particular branch we were received with tremendous friendliness and the hospitality afforded to us on every occasion was much appreciated. At the 8 branches I attempted to present different papers highlighting the subjects that I am particularly interested in and I do hope that perhaps a little of my own enthusiasm has converted some of my colleagues to my way of thinking, at least I hope so. These subjects included conservation, public relations, memorialisation, landscape design, layout of cemeteries and comparison between continental cemeteries and our own. Comparison of pricing and costings, which is certainly an eye-opener. Use of bulbs in the landscape. After use or indeed current use, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, home and abroad.

To the fraternal Institutes to which we were able to visit, I say thank you so much, to those Institutes I was not able to attend my sincere apologies. My grateful thanks however to Reg Gill and his charming wife Val for supporting and representing Joyce and me on these occasions.

I am not sure whether this is the time or place to put on record my appreciation to Peter Wilson and his wife Mary for what I am sure is going to be another great conference. I know that several of the papers are dear to my heart and will say something, in this connection, about the support given to me later. It would be remiss to me if I did not pay my respects and appreciation to my own authority for 27 great and tremendous years, for the unstinted support that they have given me not just in cemeteries and crematoria but in all aspects of leisure provision.

---

*Mr. G Wright,  
F.Inst. B.C.A. (Dip)  
President 1987-88*

Mr. President of the Federation, ladies and gentlemen I thank you for your indulgence and the courtesy afforded to me here today.

Thank you.





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## two decades and the iccm

Although it is twenty years since I opened the world's first natural burial site at Carlisle in 1993, ours is not a profession packaged into neatly defined periods. The feasibility study I completed for natural burial looked forward by looking back. That was to the 1960's, when, as a member of the chemical spraying team, I killed all the wildflowers at Shrewsbury Cemetery and realised, years later, that the habitat loss destroyed the barn owls.

It taught me that the past always informs the future. Neither is the past always comfortable; if my boss's infatuation with American herbicides, a new science in the 1960's, was wrong, what is wrong with my thinking today?

Retrospective review is also challenging to established patterns and it can upset people. As the godfather of natural burial, some of my most aggressive assailants have been ICCM members, cremation advocates, acutely aware that their cherished process and technology has fundamental weaknesses. That is because twenty years ago cremation was unassailable; the modern way forward. It suited our body disposal culture; everything was focussed on improving times and turnover. Smoke was the enemy, and if it was not emitted from the chimney then we were upholding high standards. The pollution in the unseen gasses was not a concern because it was not understood. Gas was also cheap.

Cremation shot itself in the foot with the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Whilst I was in a steep learning curve with the first green funerals in the 1990's, Charles Howlett, at Chilterns Crematorium, telephoned me to express his concern at how much gas his new EPA cremators were using. His question was whether I had noticed the same with my new Tabo cremators? I had! The microprocessor was fixated with pre-set temperatures, and gas consumption quadrupled overnight. I felt guilt at how I had cremated for decades with low temperatures and undoubtedly caused far higher emissions. The intention, in those past days, was to ignite the coffin, then immediately switch off the gas jets. If it was a male body, especially a male body with cancer, we anticipated the need to switch them on again due to the lack of fats, and that was always the case. A female body, especially a heavy one, was the opposite, and we could save gas.

Twenty years ago burial had a bad press. That was unfair, as the burial itself was not the problem; that lay with subsequent maintenance and memorial issues. We, as a profession, should have reviewed the burial process, and pushed much harder for limited tenure, following the European approach. In truth, we charged far too little and conventional burial has proved to be unsustainable.

The irony, of course, is that our neglected cemeteries became wildlife reserves, full of big, old trees and even wild honey bees, rare then, as now. It was when I introduced

conservation management at Carlisle in the 1980's that I first noticed that people wanted to be buried in amongst the wildflowers. Even some years later, in the early days of natural burial, a random survey of people attending cemetery walks would still find a preference for burial on the old Victorian plots. They preferred the established parkland trees and wildflowers, not the bare field of natural burial, to be planted with whips and turned into an oak forest, which would take many years.

These people, the ones who attended cemetery walks, and whom became advocates of natural burial, were not typical. Most people deplore cemeteries, in part a matter of death denial and, in part, because most people are completely disengaged from nature. That psychology suited our body disposal process; get the funeral over with as quickly as possible, warm and comfortable indoors, and the technological cremation process fitted the bill.

In the last twenty years, lifestyle, spirituality, individuality, call it what you may, has displaced God at funeral services. The service now reflects family, work or other passions whether to do with the environment, recycling, or even cycling or knitting and home skills. Not one of those people would support a profession that destroyed the barn owl habitat, but have we really changed? All the crematoria and parks still look the same; slaves to the demon mower. Those roadside verges that are covered in wildflowers are there purely because it saves money, which is not the same as conservation management. Only the Dutch took up ecological parks and stopped mowing. If we stop and think about it, people have changed significantly in the last 20 years but our approach remains broadly the same.

Another significant change is the nature of commerce; riots against capitalism are now a worldwide movement. If you assume that this has passed us by then think again. Within grounds management, wreath production and funeral directing, significant changes have occurred. As I write, the Chelsea Flower Show is on television. The show gardens, really rich people's idea of a garden, are massed with imported plants, sterile F1 bedding plants, plants held back from flowering through expensive chilling, and plants with induced flowering due to chemical sprays. A token wildlife garden will be included but nobody will notice the absence of bees on the flowers displayed. A token peat replacement substance will be paraded, but vast quantities of peat will hide in anonymous black plastic pots. The conglomeration

of concrete, expensive water features and palms that is Chelsea, is paraded as nature and severely distorts the true perspective.

Likewise, flower production, once a neighbourhood nursery business, has gone worldwide; now all glasshouse production, masses of chemicals and air freighting. Not content with natural colours, the dying of flowers is now routine, scent has disappeared, stems must be straight and leaves immaculate. Now, I even have concerns over whether this plant waste is fit to compost.

It is no surprise then that many people describe natural burial and wildflower verges as unkempt. Neither is the ecological value of the seasons understood, such as the seed maturing period between August and autumn, when wildflowers look scruffy. Or the need to leave dead tops to shelter insects and amphibians. People just don't get it; they want immaculate Chelsea – in January!

Chelsea is an example of how commercialism, the drive for profit, has overtaken us in the last twenty years. Funeral directing has undergone the same transformation. In my early days it was all family firms, most of them commercially unsophisticated. Many did not own a hearse or limo's and, in the 1960's, brought the body to Shrewsbury crematorium in a van the day before the service; they were cheap and cheerful. But in the 1980's, entrepreneurs like Howard Hodgson identified the small family funeral directors as inefficient and was the first to buy up small firms. The industry then began to vertically integrate, and embalming and viewing became essential to a good send off. The cheap production of veneered chipboard coffins, in-house, offered the prospect of massive mark-ups on what appeared to be a pure wood coffin. Transparency reduced; memorial and floristry sales were integrated. Now, it mattered that the funeral director used his fleet of vehicles, sold the flowers, the coffin and the memorial; the funeral package flourished.

So, twenty years ago, when I propose natural burial, a concept opposed to embalming, chipboard, hothouse flowers and memorial free graves, it was not welcomed. Even worse, its informality facilitated DIY funerals. It was too transparent and a war of words broke out with funeral directing, even though the process of natural burial had virtually nothing to do with them. They collect, prepare and transport bodies; where those bodies go should be of no concern.

I now realise that in my ignorance, I had effectively de-professionalized the funeral, putting it firmly back to the family funeral director days. Decades spent by the big firms promoting the funeral director as the key person were conflated. What was the point of their lobby group in parliament, the pseudo science of embalming and the 'professional services' they charged so much for, if anybody could do a funeral? The answer, of course, was to expand

into owning or leasing crematoria and natural burial so that they could control the entire process.

This is evident in the recent lease of Emstrey Cematorium in Shrewsbury, the place where I started work. Shropshire Council required the lessee to offer services in accordance with the Charter for the Bereaved. Now, the Emstrey website does not mention the Charter and it states that it is a Cooperative Funeralcare service, yet is operated by Cemetery Services Ltd. If that sounds a little complex then it is because the service is no longer transparent. I only realised this after I telephoned the crematorium office to enquire about a DIY (Home) funeral arrangement I was considering. It was immediately obvious the staff had no awareness of the Charter. Persevering, it was agreed I could arrange the funeral but no facilities, like an overnight chapel, or other help was available, such as a leaflet. As to what coffins they would accept, I was pointed to a specific coffin supplier website but, after some time choosing a coffin, when I went to buy it stated that they only sold to bone fide funeral directors. Who would want to do a Home Funeral at a place where it is simply not welcome?

The fact is, over twenty years, the much vaunted economies of scale of the Hodgson approach have not benefited the bereaved; funeral charges have not reduced and what they saved went into higher profits. A quick scan of private crematoria websites illustrates the problem. Phrases like 'we provide a distinguished service in beautiful surroundings' abound, but no mention of the Charter, the environment, or anything meaningful. The Co-op crematoria reduce their transparency to zero when they tell us to decide 'Which funeral director you wish to take care of all the family arrangements'. No hint that we do not have to use a funeral director, of course, which brings to mind the Charter. These issues upset their fellow funeral directors and reminds us that private crematoria customers are other funeral directors; not the bereaved.

Over the past twenty years, the funeral directing strategy has been about professionalizing the funeral, increasing the need for advice and even bereavement counselling, all of which validates high charges. There is no interest here in low input funerals, such as the simplistic direct cremation. There is also evident greenwashing, with media coverage of token wildflower meadows being opened in Gardens of Remembrance at new private crematoria, yet no mention of holding over or coffin covers. It is that old bugbear, transparency, which means they typically ignore the Charter for the Bereaved, and are often silent on the environment and recycling of metals from cremation. They would have ignored eco-coffins were it not for the impact of natural burial. As their transparency decreases, so the influence of local authorities similarly falls because social capital is no longer a concern. Once, local authorities deliberately held down burial and cremation fees, and lauded anti poverty forums. Now, the service is a cash cow, with charges

increasing significantly in recent years, and contributing to funeral poverty. I repeatedly hear stories of how managers are forced to raise cremation and burial fees whilst also cutting standards and staffing. It is naïve and simplistic to think that deficits can be covered by increasing fees, especially where massive acreages of decrepit cemetery are still expensively mowed. More complex strategies such as utilising conservation management or, in London, using reclaimed graves, are often ignored.

Evidence of this declining local authority influence recently arose with a report by Wiltshire CAB highlighting the dramatic increase in the number of clients in funeral poverty. To whom did they approach to seek a solution? You guessed it; funeral directing. Not to the local councils, the ICCM or to the Natural Death Centre. I wrote to CAB to point out the fundamental flaw in their analysis of funeral costs; that the cremation and burial fee, doctor's fees and price of a coffin were essential; the funeral directors fee was the only one that could be dispensed with. As that represents perhaps 70% of the average £3,500 cost of a funeral, that element should be the focus.

The good news is that the last ten years has also seen the emergence of a different private sector, one with ecology at its heart. Private natural burial sites, many farm based, eco coffin suppliers and green funeral directors are prominent amongst these. Often, their passion (lifestyle!) is the driver and Howard Hodgson would doubtless call them commercially unsophisticated. The internet is also emerging as a force and a new kind of funeral director offering fixed price direct cremation services that may yet break down the monopoly operation of the larger firms. Yet a word of caution, as some of the firms that started selling coffins direct to the public in the 1990's no longer do so. To keep funeral directors sweet they now only sell to the trade. We have also seen the emergence of an intellectual internet presence, people like Charles Cowling and the Good Funeral Guide. He is a funeral celebrant and at the forefront of the challenge to market domination by the men in black. He neatly fits the description I first saw inscribed on a memorial in Carlisle Cemetery; about the deceased's 'disinterested advocacy of the poor'. The word means free from bias, to be objective. Clearly, when considering the bereaved, funeral directors cannot be disinterested. More to the point, it poses the question as to whether the ICCM can be disinterested advocates for the bereaved? The ICCM put social capital back into local authorities through the Charter for the Bereaved, an endless list of customer benefits whether recycling metals from cremation, facilitating DIY funerals, grave-re-use or creating and developing natural burial. Brendan Day, then managing at Cardiff, encapsulated this approach by devising the concept of Bereavement Services. It suggests a fully transparent service approach whereupon a bereaved person could ask any question and expect an unbiased, disinterested, answer.

To conclude, if the past twenty years informs the future, what questions does it pose to the ICCM Directors? Firstly, that if the large funeral conglomerates continue to expand, there is no future for the ICCM. An example of this is that the USA never had an ICCM; the reason, domination by the private sector and local authorities with no social objectives. ICCM objectives, not least the Charter, see transparency as virtuous, yet private sector crematoria and some natural burial sites know that transparency upsets funeral directors, and they will not go there. The big companies use us, purely for training, because we are here, a remnant of the days when local authorities dominated the burial and cremation market, and had social capital.

Secondly, for twenty years religious services have declined, now down to 38%, and only 18% of Catholics believe in the resurrection. That word 'disposal' (of the dead), conveyor belt cremation, and concern with speed and turnover is no longer appropriate. There appears to be a demand for more spiritual, meaningful funerals, so how do we respond to this?

Thirdly, the past twenty years has seen the funeral market become more distorted. The only way those in funeral poverty can control costs is if low input alternatives can emerge, such as Direct Cremation, coffin covers, basic natural burial and even Home Funerals. The past twenty years suggests that the vested interests, those keen on the expensive funeral package, see no reason to tell the bereaved about these options; poor transparency is a serious consumer impediment. The new private crematoria are no more transparent, and worse, operate inefficiently on low numbers whilst also reducing cremations at larger, environmentally efficient established crematoria.

As for ICCM membership, the past twenty years has seen a fundamental shift. The potential for schism is increasing because a variety of agenda's is evident. There is now a much stronger interplay between private sector and public sector members. When I developed the Charter it was on the assumption that members would automatically support it, yet, with my limited knowledge, members in private employment do not appear to do this. Should all members be expected to support the Charter as a condition of membership? As in the past, a high percentage of members remain cremationists, yet nobody can or will defend the process on environmental grounds. As an example of this, both the FBCA and the Cremation Society have lost their *raison d'être* over the past twenty years. Also, as cremation destroys the body it appears to offend those seeking more spirituality at the funeral. Yet the private sector build more crematoria, for financial, not social reasons, content to operate on financially risky, small margins, perhaps protected by their monopoly interests in local funeral directors. Meanwhile, increasing membership builds from the natural burial market, some of whom oppose cremation to the degree that they will not even inter cremated remains.



If grave re-use is legislated for, conventional burial will also recover its social capital and membership from this sector will recover. They could re-use by utilising urban natural burial, a form of conservation management that could put low cost graves back into the centre of communities. The question is how do we manage such a diverse membership?

The Natural Burial Charter is, in effect, a schism because it identifies the natural burial members as part of a separate doctrine. Ian Quance, in developing this exemplary initiative, highlights harmony by not seeking to adversely criticise cremation. People like me, no longer muffled by full-time employment, seek to liken cremation with waste incineration; say it as it is! I believe that the Bereavement Service approach is best, stay together, unity is power, but it is a fine line to walk. I would like to see the Directors giving us their views on this?

In 2001, the Ministry of Justice created the Burial & Cemetery Advisory Group (now the Burial & Cremation Advisory Group) in the face of 'deteriorating cemeteries'. Twelve whole years and what have they achieved? Similarly, in the 1990's, the OFT looked into funeral directing and nothing happened. The Social Fund now creates onerous rules to reduce support for the bereaved.

That summarises the last twenty years; an indifferent Westminster that despises local government, the place where all the initiatives arose, whilst an ever more powerful funeral directing monopoly develops. Surely, success or failure can only be measured by outputs? It is and failure is evident by reducing burial options throughout the UK and a dramatic increase in funeral poverty!

**Ken West MBE**

## booked: R.I.P. Off! Or The British Way of Death



**Author: Ken West MBE**  
**Paperback Published: 14 Oct 2013**  
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**£8.99**  
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**Print Length: 194 pages**  
**£4.99**  
**ASIN: B00FHACERO**

The novel depicts the trials of Ben, a cemetery and crematorium manager, attempting to bring about change to the services offered to the bereaved and the opposition met during the journey.

The book describes people in both humorous and sad ways which any persons involved with the service will instantly recognise by their stereotypical traits and loyalties.

Ben never quite convinces the opposition that his ideas could actually enhance their services if they would only be receptive to change, except one who cannot quite admit it but sees a potentially growing commercial opportunity. The receptive but quiet one most likely fears castigation by his peers however he appears to be ready to take on change but can't quite bring himself to combine with Ben.

The book focuses mainly on a period set in Cumbria however there is a gap between departure from this northern area and Ben's retirement. Perhaps this gap will be filled with a sequel? If so please let us know the reaction of BALU to Ben's inclusion in the New Year's honours list.

Very amusing at the start and broken by the very sad tale of one woman's end, the book was an enjoyable read and hard to put down. Do the latter chapters indicate a slight disillusionment with 'the system' due to an inability to break the Victorian hangover? However, change in our business is notably slow. It took years for cremation to catch on so don't give up.

The book is available as either a download or paperback from Amazon; details above.

**Tim Morris**

## burial spaces; past, present and future

Jenny Neesam, Cemeteries & Amenities Manager, Gravesham Borough Council writes:

"'In Touch' in the Autumn 2013 edition of *The Journal* highlighted a wooden cross and kerb set, and a gate-type memorial. These wooden memorials are in 'my' cemeteries.



"Grave 36A at Northfleet Cemetery, right, has a wooden cross with a tiled roof. The first burial was of a young girl aged 19 in 1923, although there is no record of when the memorial was erected. The wooden hurdle, left, is on grave 3347 A14 at Gravesend Cemetery. The grave is that of Charlotte Gibson, another young lady, aged 28. Her name does not appear on the memorial. On one side is a quote from the Book of John and on the other a line from Psalm 39, both in Latin. There were copper sheets attached to the top of the end pieces and along the board but sadly they were stolen a couple of years ago.



"We also have memorials made of concrete (far left) and Portland cement (left), as well as one made from cast iron, pictured right."



A magnificent new burial area at Camberwell Old Cemetery is due to be opened. This is a great step forward for a burial authority running out of space.

In April 2011 the London Borough of Southwark undertook a programme of works in their existing cemeteries to ensure that it could continue to provide a burial space for residents until 2040.

After consultation with the residents regarding the longer term options for burials the first new large area, pictured, was created over a public burial site. This has achieved 800 new double depth spaces. These pictures give a flavour of the quality of the work at the site and its pleasing landscaping.



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## victorian brickworks to pet crematorium

The privately owned Hampshire pet crematorium, Dignity, is based at the Spurgeon family home 'Brickfields' in the rural village of Winchfield, near Hook. A former brickworks, it is steeped in history having also been home for 40 German and Italian prisoners during World War II. The Grade 2 listed brick kiln, which Barry and Carole Spurgeon traditionally renovated prior to locating the original pet crematorium within it, was once used as a chapel by the prisoners.

My parents, Barry and Carole, moved into Brickfields in 1989. Several months passed before Hampshire County Council advised them that the brick kiln located in their garden had been designated Grade 2 listed and needed to be restored. The kiln itself, built in 1830 had been derelict for several years and was covered in ivy which was causing structural damage. The building was damp and in serious need of some TLC.

*The ivy clad kiln*



*Traditional repointing in progress*



*Workers in the brickyard circa 1900*



The restoration began that year and took around eight months to complete; first the ivy was carefully removed and then the kiln repointed using traditional methods of mortar and lime. Hampshire CC said it was a shame such a beautiful building was disused and suggested Barry and Carole could look at finding a use for the kiln as long as the structure remained unaltered.

Over the next few months my parents tried to think of different uses for the building. They watched a TV programme detailing what happened to deceased pets when they were left at the vet for disposal and were shocked to see family pets being taken out of chest freezers in bags and thrown into vans like rubbish, alongside the clinical waste generated by the vets during the week. There was no respect or dignified handling of the bodies and what they saw really upset them. Over the years they had left their own pets at the vet to be "looked after" without knowing what really happened. You wouldn't leave your doctor to arrange your relative's funeral so why leave it to the vet to organise your pet's final journey?

Barry felt so strongly about the subject that he investigated starting his own pet crematorium. After extensive research of both human and pet crematoriums he approached the local planning department and explained his idea of starting an individual cremation service. He met with mixed reactions from some of the councillors. It was an unknown service at the time but he gained their support and planning permission was subsequently granted in 1992.



*Lowering and guiding in the flue – with not much room for error – for the original single cremator installed within the kiln.*





The former Guard Hut, far left, was converted to a Farewell Room, where owners say a final goodbye to their four legged friends.

By 1999 Dignity had outgrown the Guard Hut and brick kiln so Barry and Carole demolished their garage and took the brave step to build a purpose-built pet crematorium.

In more recent years, the large disposal companies began fighting for veterinary contracts, promoting their pet cremation services on the basis they could offer a very low cost price to the vet, who they then encouraged to uplift the cost by £100+ to make an easy and substantial profit from the pet owner for "arranging" their pet's cremation. This has led to most vets now contracting to the cheapest (and not necessarily the best) companies for pet cremation. Owners are rarely given a full description of the service on offer prior to being sold the cremation and most vets have never inspected the facility they use. If they have they may not know what to look for to ensure the correct working procedures are in place to guarantee the pet cremation service is operated to an acceptable standard.

Hart District Council granted planning permission in 2011 allowing us to scatter human ashes. Now both humans and pets are scattered in the Gardens of Remembrance, where prisoners were once housed in billet huts, and plots have been reserved by pet owners for their personal use in the future.

In 2012 we considerably improved the facilities and extended the original pet crematorium, created a Remembrance Walkway linking it to the kiln and widened our gateway (amongst other things!). We feel our facilities now match our first class service.

Since opening our doors we have cremated pets of all shapes and sizes from hamsters and goldfish to pigs and tortoises. Most owners just want a respectful send-off but some opt for humanist or religious services and the pet crematorium can even supply a vicar, celebrant or dove release should clients require it

*Remembrance Walkway*



*Entrance to the Farewell Rooms and newly extended crematory*



Having previously gained national recognition after being assessed 'Best Pet Crematorium' at the Cemetery of the Year Awards we hope to add to our growing list of accolades having been shortlisted in the final three for the Home Business Innovation Category of *The Guardian* Small Business Showcase competition. The finalists were featured in the newspaper on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September, but we will have to wait until May next year when we assemble at the awards ceremony to hear if we will be crowned the overall winner. The other finalists provide some tough opposition but even if we don't win we are over the moon to get this far.

There have been constant challenges for us to overcome since starting Dignity 21 years ago and undoubtedly there will be many more! The aim of our service will continue to be to dedicate ourselves to providing pet owners with the very best after death care and to offer an affordable alternative to the ashes back services provided by the weekly companies offered through vets. Going into the future we are committed to continue to refine and improve our service; as I believe standing still means you will ultimately go backwards. With the emergence of aquamation (Resomation) perhaps we will even offer human services one day?

**Kevin Spurgeon**

## vintage visits; South Bristol cemetery & crematorium

South Bristol Crematorium was the destination for my first Bristol-bound funeral some 11 years ago. In those days before the advent of the 'Vintage Visits' page I didn't take pictures of crematoria, so when I knew that I was to visit South Bristol for the second time I rang to ask about the porte-cochère; my memory isn't as good as a photograph!



Linda Smith kindly arranged for the clearance to be measured but I needn't have worried as it was over 12 feet, and there were no obstacles that would prevent me going into the Woodlands section of the cemetery for the interment.

The funeral was of a gentleman known locally as 'Santa Jim'. He was buried in his Santa Claus outfit which he'd worn most days between November 1<sup>st</sup> and December 24<sup>th</sup> for the past 10 years when he became Father Christmas at the Mall Galleries. He had also appeared on popular TV programmes including *Casualty*, *Dr. Who* and *Gavin & Stacey*. I have heard many different songs played when the coffin leaves my lorry, including Johnny Cash's 'Ring of Fire' and Rod Stewart's 'Hot Legs'. However, the sound of sleigh bells and the occasional 'Ho, Ho, Ho' seemed totally appropriate for this funeral. For once I'm included in the picture which was kindly provided by *Western Daily Press*. I'm the one crouching, screw-driver in my hand, rotating the rear display to create space to turn the wicker coffin.

## Stockport crematorium

When I was awarded a funeral in Stockport I was told by the funeral director that I wouldn't get into the crematorium as the entrance off the A6 is very narrow; it was suggested that the coffin should be transferred to a hearse on the main road.

My wife did some due diligence on the site and, whilst I was confident that I could get through the narrow gate, there was a high risk I could damage the flower bed in front of the building immediately opposite the gate. Mark Darbyshire, Site Registrar, kindly measured the clearance between the main gates and the flower bed and found it to be only 15 feet, which confirmed the initial concerns of the FD. But there was another point of entry at the northern edge of the site off Bullock Street and I asked if it would be possible to use this entrance; primarily used for service vehicles. However, Mark had seen the vehicle in previous *Journal* Vintage Visits articles and agreed that the 62 year old could make its entrance through these double gates. Detailed planning took place with the staff to ensure the entrance would be clear of cars, and also analysis carried out to determine the best route around the site where low slate walls are a feature.



As the cortège entered the site Mark ensured that one of the team was on each corner to provide clear directions. We arrived at the chapel without any problems – apart from avoiding a photographer from the local paper who was intent on getting close-ups. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mark, on the right in the picture with Jonathan Gauthier, Chapel Attendant, and his team for all their help. It was a beautiful day with a clear sky which wouldn't have seemed possible the previous day having spent 7½ hours driving through fog, snow and hail to get to Stockport. Heavy snow was forecast near my home so I decided to stay in Walsall after the funeral and trundle home when the conditions had calmed down. The weather was bad in the morning with black ice causing the Leyland Beaver's rear axle to snake. Heavy snow at Redditch caused whiteout conditions with sign posts obliterated and the road ahead white. I was the head vehicle in a convoy and normally cars are desperate to get past me but no one was keen to overtake that morning when, travelling at 30 miles an hour, my vintage vehicle's tracks became the most sensible option for those behind.

David Hall

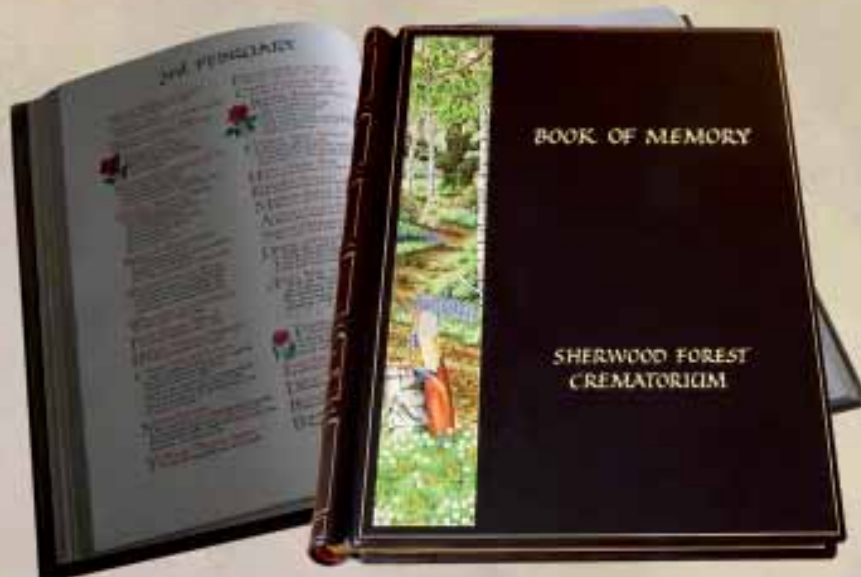




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## south eastern branch meeting; Kemnal Park

On Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September Michael Burke, Operations Director of Kemnal Park Limited and his team welcomed members to Kemnal Park Cemetery and Memorial Gardens in Chislehurst, Kent.



Arriving on a beautiful sunny morning, members were greeted by cemetery staff with refreshments before Michael Burke, left, introduced us to this very attractive and well-maintained facility.

Kemnal Park is the newest addition to London's 140 cemeteries. It goes a long way to resolve the inner and outer city challenge of lack of space and improve the standard of service and presentation that families receive in comparable cemeteries and crematoria throughout the south east. Developed across a fifty-five acre 'green belt' site, the cemetery is beautifully landscaped. To date the company have developed the first ten acres with beautifully landscaped memorial gardens; further phases are to be undertaken over the next five years. Kemnal Park is quite rightly called 'a park'.

The catchment area for Kemnal is calculated within a 45 minute drive and this area includes the London Boroughs of Bromley, Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham, as well as parts of Southwark, Croydon, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking – to name just a few. Because of the premium setting and service offered the catchment will arguably be wider as the availability of burial space is limited. With 40% of cemeteries in the catchment area having no space left this gives Kemnal a significant boost within an ever-shrinking market approaching crisis point.



The chapel where we were gathered was designed to blend in well with the local surroundings and created using natural materials; wood, slate and glass. The interior is simple yet stylish and the non-denominational design appeals to everybody, whether they are religious or not. It seats 144 mourners, however they are able to cater for larger services by opening doors to the side of the chapel and placing television screens around the entrance.

After the very informative introduction from Michael we split into three groups and were given a tour of the grounds. Listening to our group leader it was very apparent that he was very proud and passionate about the service they offer to the bereaved.



To the right of the bridge on the north side of a natural brook there is a beautifully landscaped area which is the memorial garden for the interment of cremated remains. This provides families with a host of memorialisation options integrated into a simple landscaped area which provides opportunities for loved ones to enjoy the tranquil natural beauty. Burial options include lawn graves, traditional graves, woodland graves, silver birch graves, mausoleum burials and private gardens (right) as well as an 'In Readiness' option for anybody wishing to pre-purchase a plot. Although not a crematorium, Kemnal Park offers cremation services; recognising the need to offer high quality facilities and to deliver comfort to grieving family and friends. There is no time pressure as the minimum slot is 1hr and as such there is no conveyor-belt-like feeling which can be experienced elsewhere. The committal is held at a local crematorium.



The variety of memorial options offered in the grounds is matched by the opportunity to individualise each funeral service, and bottles of water and packets of tissues are provided on each seat in the chapel. When visitors to the Park call in for a chat with staff they are offered a variety of beverages.





The company plan to work in partnership with the charity Child Bereavement UK (CBUK) to perpetuate the work that they undertake. This will be done by promoting school workshops on site and creating opportunities for children to become involved in the future design of the park, whilst acting as a fund raising agent for the charity should families wish to make donations in lieu of flowers.



The tour of the cemetery was concluded with an excellent buffet lunch kindly provided by our host. The best way to experience the Park is to see it yourself!

The afternoon continued with the Branch Meeting; our guest speaker was Mohamed Omer, pictured below, from the Gardens of Peace Muslim Cemetery which opened in 2002.



Mohamed is the Board Member of External Affairs at the Gardens of Peace Muslim Cemetery in Hainault, London. The Gardens of Peace is a registered charity that provides burial space and funeral services for local Muslims. Mohamed is also a member of the Burial and Cremation Advisory Group (BCAG) where he represents Muslim interests. Presenting with enthusiasm, he talked through all of the Muslim requirements before burial and the cultural variances that he stated are not necessarily religious rules. The day concluded with refreshment before leaving the cemetery. Mohamed has kindly invited us to visit his cemetery next year. Look out for the invitation.



This proved to be yet another very successful SE Branch Meeting thanks to our Branch Secretary Natasha Bradshaw, pictured right with Michael Burke.



*Images courtesy of Dr Brian Parsons and Kemnal Park Ltd*

Over the years I have gained great knowledge about the industry in which we work by attending Branch Meetings. They are informal, friendly and a great way to meet others offering bereavement services. Kemnal Park was great day; with a great turn out of Branch Members.

**Dammie Rutter**



## company news

### Welters Organisation Worldwide Setting the Standard for Future Interment Provision

Our work this year continues to pioneer grave re-use schemes extending the life of existing cemeteries, and engaging exclusive new-build crematorium partnership agreements.



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### Butterflies, a metamorphosis to a nice memory



No other animal or insect is as symbolic for transformation as the butterfly. From ancient times the metamorphosis that the little insect undertakes from caterpillar to butterfly has been compared to the transformation from the physical to the spiritual. It's a symbol for immortality and rebirth.

The same can be said after a loved one has passed away, where we say farewell to the human body and beautiful memories are born. From this point of view no other memorial article is more suitable to remember someone than a butterfly.

These handmade replicas, which are only available through Funeral Products – our contacts details are on page 56, have exactly the same vibrant colours as real butterflies.

The collection consists of 6 different designs; the larger model measures 19 cm wide x 21 cm high and the small 12 cm wide x 14 cm. The butterflies are made of high quality birch and in the body there is a reservoir (4 ml) for containing a small amount of ashes.



Due to the special finishing on the wood this butterfly is very suitable to be placed outside. Both the large and the small models are supplied with a plastic stand that can be used both indoors and outdoors.



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## coffin specifications – meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

During 2012 the Funeral Furnishing Manufacturing Association (FFMA) was approached by Rick Powell, Secretary and Executive Officer of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA) regarding the difficulties being experienced at crematoria particularly in relation to the safe loading and cremating of certain coffins constructed from “alternative” or “green” materials. Also in 2012, the Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management issued initial guidance to its members on the safe handling and charging of such coffins in order to reduce the potential for repeats of some unfortunate incidents that had occurred. This was the first time the ICCM had been made aware of these problems and of the need to ensure that all such coffins are fit for purpose, in terms of being able to be handled safely at each stage of the process by crematoria staff.

In order to get a fuller understanding of the issues involved, members of our manufacturing association visited, through the good offices of Rick Powell and by kind invitation from Dignity Crematoria, Wyre Forest Crematorium at Stourport-On-Severn. The visit certainly gave us a more comprehensive understanding of the cremation process and the mandatory health and safety procedures involved.

Further discussions were held with other contacts in the sector which resulted in our meeting with representatives from the three cremation ‘trade’ associations namely the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA), the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and the Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries (APCC) with technical input being provided by key equipment suppliers to the sector. It was agreed that the issues be sub-divided for the purposes of evaluation into the following elements, namely:

- The collection and assessment of data relating to the materials used,
- Coffin construction and the manufacturing process,
- Operational handling,
- Impact of particular coffin types on the cremation process.

After this group met, Material Data Safety Sheet and Technical Data Sheets were designed, approved and issued to our members for completion for each type of coffin they manufacture or import. Most members have submitted their information so this part of the exercise is nearing completion.

Following further discussions, it was agreed that a comprehensive test programme should be carried out. Currently much work is in progress in this regard and the current situation is as follows:

- Draft specifications for the test programme have been developed and are in the process of being finalised. These concentrate on testing the penetration characteristics of the materials used, the structure of the coffin and the impact of the cremation process on the product.

- The structural tests are seen as pivotal to the programme partly because of the widespread adoption of automatic chargers by crematoria operators whereby all coffins must be capable of withstanding the pressure applied during the loading process. It is also essential that the coffin be able to enter the cremator unimpeded and therefore there must not be an opportunity for its passage to be disrupted, for example by snagging on the rollers of the charging bier.
- It is also essential to know exactly what happens when various different types of coffins are cremated and therefore the test programme will also include flash / flame and combustion tests.
- After a detailed search and evaluation, a highly reputable testing organisation has been identified and we hope to confirm our commercial arrangements with them over the next few weeks. All tests will be carried out in UKAS (UK Accreditation Scheme) Laboratories to ensure the credibility and acceptability of the results.
- It should be emphasised that every care will be taken to avoid re-inventing the wheel in terms of evaluating relevant existing data and currently available test information in order to keep costs down to a practical minimum.

In summary what are we trying to achieve? The intention is that every coffin, of whatever type, which is successfully accredited through the testing programme will carry an identifiable mark which will give both funeral businesses and crematoria the assurance that the coffin is totally suitable for cremation. We are in the early stages of discussing how and in what form accreditation information will be made available to funeral directors with all interested parties and to this end an initial meeting has already been held with Alan Slater MBE.

The FFMA would like to thank all those from both the funeral and the cremation sectors who are giving so much of their time and expertise to ensure we reach fair and appropriate decisions for all concerned.

*A similar article recently appeared in Funeral Director Monthly*





## learning convention and exhibition 2013

### quiz night gallery





## learning convention and exhibition 2013 exhibitor gallery











## learning convention and exhibition 2013 gala dinner gallery



## fasten your seatbelts for the next 100!



Charles Cowling BA, of The Good Funeral Guide, delivered this key note address to delegates at the ICCM Learning Convention and Exhibition, Forest Pines Hotel, Broughton, North Lincolnshire on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013.



The journey that will take the ICCM to the year 2113 begins in the here and now.

We live, we like to say, in interesting times. And we do, we really do. Where are we headed? Before we look forwards, let's glance back and see where we're coming from.

As we look back, can we confidently and consensually point to a time which marked the Golden Age of the British funeral? Was there ever a time when we did funerals especially well? Because if there was, there may be example and inspiration to be found in it. Was there ever a Golden Age of the British funeral? Our state funerals have always been pretty darn good. But a state funeral is not the sort of funeral you can easily adapt for everyday use for everyday people.

The truth probably is that we've never done funerals terribly well in Britain. And we still carry with us the cultural baggage of the Protestant death ethic and the stiff upper lip.

Can we agree on a time when we did funerals especially badly? Was there ever, do you think, a time when we did them worse than we've done them in living memory? Many of you remember the days of the duty minister at the crematorium. Many of you have horror stories of funerals which you've dined out on for years. Rock bottom may have been no more than twenty years ago.

Social change – the onward march of secularism, the decline of deference, the advance of individualism – these and many other factors are changing the face of British funerals. Even the f-word itself is seldom heard, nowadays. One-size-fits-all generic funerals are morphing into bespoke, one-off celebrations of life.

Lots of people reckoned that the old order would come crashing down virtually overnight. It ain't happening, is it? A lot of people still go for a trad sendoff; the top hat, the big cars, the bowing...? They're clinging to the familiar ritual landscape they grew up in, most of them. People may not want a full-on religious funeral – but they don't want something completely alien, either. It's got to be recognisable.

Now we have secular ceremonies led by civvies. What do you make of those? You have witnessed a good many funerals led by secular celebrants. Are they doing something radically different; or are they merely making the best of things as they are?

Most of their ceremonies *resemble* religious ceremonies – the same element of processional with music; in place of a priest, a celebrant. The same basic template. In the words of American theologian Thomas Long, they 'evoke a vague impression of the sacred'.

Thomas Long has also written: *'Even when they are crafted by caring people who are full of goodwill, these services often lack coherence. At their worst they are formless and aimless, without tradition or structure, sail or rudder. They can so easily slip into random odds and ends thrown together, a pot-pourri of made-up pageantries and sentimental gestures combined with a few leftover religious rites that have broken loose from their moorings and floated downstream ... a pot of ritual spaghetti thrown against the wall in hope that something will stick.'*

A bit harsh?

I think the big question people are going to be asking themselves, and each other, over the next twenty years is: What good does a funeral do, really?

Are we living in a time of fumbling aimlessness or a time of dynamic, focussed progress? Are we marching forward with confidence or merely muddling through? I want to come back to this. But as we peer into the future, I think we would be mistaken if we were to confidently suppose that the funeral will always be with us. It may not.

Let's peer into the immediate future. The next thirty years will witness all manner of easily predictable changes.

There will be fewer undertakers. We all know that there are far too many of them. The consolidation of the sector will continue, but under new management. The purpose of consolidation is, of course, to generate efficiencies through economies of scale resulting in lower prices. The fact that the major consolidators charge more for their funerals than the boutique businesses, the independents, is a matter that will not escape intensifying consumer scrutiny for much longer.

Consolidation will continue, though. That's capitalism. How will the new consolidators be different? A question I always like to ask myself is, 'What if John Lewis did funerals?' I've actually gone further than that. I've even been to pitch the idea to the John Lewis board. 'You should do funerals,' I told them. They were very interested – but pulled back at the last minute.

What would John Lewis do differently? Well, they would prioritise consumer experience in a much more intelligent way. They would recognise that, in this new era of the bespoke, one-off funeral, getting the ceremony right is paramount. So: they would award a much bigger role in the planning of funerals to ceremony makers – celebrants.

And this will happen. A successful business is the one that best meets its clients' needs and wishes. If the funeral is to survive, if the industry is to survive, we need better funeral ceremonies. And better customer service all round. Fewer undertakers, but more good ones.

In recent years you have weighed the merits of technological alternatives to cremation, some of them decidedly beguiling. You all remember Promession, and the excitement it generated. A concept built on wishful thinking. A will-o-the-wisp. More credible is alkaline hydrolysis – Resomation. But what's the future actually going to look like?

The deciding factors, of course, will be, first, aesthetic acceptability. And, second, cost, both financial and environmental. My guess is that cremation has legs. It's acceptable, it's relatively cheap and it's cleaned its act up environmentally.

You have watched the rise of natural burial, a great, British invention. Now you have embraced it and produced a charter, which I look forward to reading. But burial, as you know, has an urgent systemic sustainability problem of its own. The tenant of a grave enjoys exclusive use of it until Doomsday.

We know better than the politicians what a pragmatic and sensible people the British are. I'll always count myself privileged to have attended the public meeting in Redditch, where I live, when, shock horror, we were asked what we thought about warming our sports hall with the heat extracted from waste gases from our nearby crematorium. The good townspeople listened attentively to the arguments... and voted pretty much unanimously for good sense – good sense which is presently worth around £14,500 a year. If the good people of this island reckon it entirely acceptable to heat a swimming pool in this way, I can't see them objecting to the re-use of graves. We all know it's going to happen. It's got to happen. And of course it will.

We reflect that, in this business of farewelling and disposing of our dead, the best ideas seem to come from the past. Progress happens in this industry not as a result of discovery but, instead, as a result of rediscovery – of winding the clock back.

A good funeral, as you know, is not a cure for grief. The support and sustenance of bereaved people throughout

their period of grieving is shared by many. You are aware of the often overlooked importance of your role in supporting bereaved people. When the funeral's over and behind them, bereaved people look for ways to perpetuate, and pay tribute to, the memory of the person who's died. You all offer all manner of memorialisation options and, increasingly, crematoria are holding remembrance services which are proving very popular and valuable.

I think you can play an important part in the next hundred years if you seek to expand these commemorative opportunities proactively. An awful lot of remembrancing in Britain remains a solitary activity. You see people come to your cemeteries in ones and twos with their little bags bulging with water bottle, j-cloth, flowers, snippers – the grave-tending kit. And it's good grief-work for them. It's useful mourning – mostly. But, as your remembrance services show, there is also an appetite for communal remembrancing.

Soon, it will be November and this year there will be even more celebrations than ever of the Mexican day of the Dead. It's a lovely, colourful festival. But does it translate, culturally, to Britain? I wonder. It derives from a completely different belief system. And is November in Britain a good month for doing stuff outside? Possibly not.

The Chinese have Qingming; which translates roughly as Gravesweeping. It's a springtime festival when families come to tidy the graves of the ancestors, have a chat with them, fly kites and go on outings. It's a public holiday. Can you adapt and build on this, I wonder? Hold vibrant outdoor festivals of celebration and remembrance with a ritual, formal element and a carefree, picnicking and kite-flying element? The sort of occasion where families can drop in and spend some time chatting to and about their dead in the warm part of the year? Spring bank holiday suggests itself as a very suitable day.

Good commemoration underscores good funerals and facilitates good grief.

So far as social attitudes towards death and bereavement are concerned, I think we probably all agree that they can only get better in the course of the next 100 years; because they couldn't get much worse. The emotional wellbeing of the nation requires it. We live in a society which has a very un-grown-up relationship with death.

The isolation of the bereaved is, I am afraid to say, abetted by crematoria, situated as they are, out of town, on their own, a bit like the old isolation hospitals. Presently, there is an outbreak of new-build crematoria. New cremes are springing up everywhere. I predict that this will turn out to be a bubble. And end in a heap of rubble.



Crematoria suffer from all sorts of shortcomings. The people who work in them are great, for the most part. But cremes lack customer focus – in all sorts of ways, many of which you know about, and which I haven't time to list. In short, it's not all that easy to have a good funeral in a crem, try as you may to give your clients a good experience.

In any case, I suspect that funerals need to be held in the midst of life, in buildings which witness life in all its seasons and vicissitudes, in all its quotidian normality.

Death needs to be normalised; to be brought back into the social mainstream. This is essential to the emotional health of our communities.

Crematoria are very inefficient, which is why they are so expensive. They only function for 250 days out of 365. The basic concept is faulty. Why build ceremony halls with incinerators attached? Wouldn't it make far better sense to build dedicated incinerating plants, nicely appointed, with a viewing gallery, set in a couple of acres of landscaped grounds, which serve several geographically dispersed ceremony halls and cremate around the clock? You have seen the difference 'holding over' can make to fuel consumption. You can do better still by running a cremator 24/7.

Have you considered the psychological significance of holding over? If families, knowing that mum may not be cremated for up to 72 hours, agree, as they do, to accept that, when the curtains close, that's it, The End, is it likely that they are going to have much difficulty in accepting that, after the curtains have closed, she's going on a road trip for 24 miles to be cremated? It's all about vanishing points, isn't it?

There's an awful lot of talk these days about funeral poverty. And there's rising consumer demand for direct cremation.

Compare British prices with those in America. I can arrange a direct cremation in New York for £860 *including* all undertaker's fees. The cremation part of that comes to just £265. In Florida I can buy the complete direct cremation package for £525. In Maryland, using a very nicely-appointed crematory, I can buy the complete package for £618. And in San Diego I can do the whole thing for just £416 all in. In Britain I'd be looking at £1100 at least. A price that could be halved.

I think you will play an important part of change in the next 100 years. I believe that there is much you can do to enhance people's experience of funerals, expand their memorialisation options and support bereaved people long after the undertaker has driven off in his empty hearse.

I want to peer further into the future, now.

First, I want to consider the impact of longevity. According to government statistics, you will live to the age of 79.9. We are all living longer, hurrah.

Of those 79.9 years, 68.6 will be healthy years. The remaining 11.3 years will see the onset of ever more severe chronic and degenerative illness. 11.3 years of lingering. We're all taking a lot longer to die – boo-hoo. This is leading to a reconfiguration of our attitudes to the way we die and, as a consequence, a renegotiation of our relationship with death. The concept of the sanctity of life, so precious for centuries, is about to be subverted by a brand new human right – the right to die. Death is suddenly the Good Guy. Assisted suicide will shortly be a standard treatment-option for dying people.

Historically, the event of a death was attended by some considerable drama. Still is, in some cases; those taken too soon. When death happens fast or suddenly it's a drama all right. People need to get their heads around it. Funerals help them do that. You help them.

But for the vast majority – those whose deaths will be a lingering business of fading away, petering out, often in great discomfort, or with their minds subverted by dementia, whose leave-taking will be a very, very long goodbye, and whose end is likely to be received as a blessed and merciful release – how do you think their deaths are going to influence the way the living are going to want or need to say goodbye to their dead? What more to say? What more to do?

I can hear newly-bereaved people talking about this over a cup of tea. 'What good will a funeral do, really?'

There's all this talk, isn't there, these days, that funerals are too expensive? There's all this talk about funeral poverty? Stick me in a binbag and put me out with the rubbish. Are funerals really so very expensive? Are they? Well, it's all relative, isn't it? Relative to what? With what is the cost of a funeral comparable?

What I suspect people mean, when they say that funerals are too expensive, is not so much that funerals cost too much as that funerals aren't worth what they cost. If I'm right, that's an altogether different problem.

What constitutes value? What constitutes a high value funeral? What does a high value funeral look like? What does a high value funeral feel like?

Direct cremation has taken hold in a way that was unimaginable only five years ago. Some of those people who choose direct cremation create private, family-led,

home-made ceremonies for the ashes – ceremonies which can be very effective – and inexpensive. Are these private, homespun obsequies any less fit for purpose than the public, ceremonial statement of a conventional funeral?

Why is it necessary to bring a dead person to their funeral? What's the rationale?

People are already rightly asking, 'What's a funeral actually *for*?' If the answer increasingly is, 'Erm... good question; yes, would it make a lot of difference if I didn't have one?' then funerals as we know them won't die out completely. But they may well stop being the default course of action when someone dies. Low expectations lead to no expectations. People will begin to turn their back on them, and there's a danger we may lose something we subsequently might have to reinvent.

If there *is* a case to be made for public, ceremonial funerals at which the dead are present, it needs to be made. In a concerted way by everyone who works with the bereaved. And that includes, of course, you.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the way things are going, I cannot confidently predict that the funeral will still be with us in 2113. But if, as I suspect, you have strong feelings that good funerals and good commemoration are essential to the health of our society –

If, as I suspect, you believe that the way that a society behaves towards its dead is a reflection of its emotional and spiritual health –

If, as I suspect, you believe that Britain is a good place to live because we get it right for people who die and for those who are left behind –

If you believe in the value of what you do, then your voice needs to be heard.

Now is the time for all good people in all fields of the funeral industry to lift their eyes from the day-to-day, engrossing as it is, and focus on the big picture. We, here, think about this stuff. A lot. The year 2113 urgently requires us to make the case for good grief, good funerals and good commemoration now.

## iccm education seminar 2014



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## the journal

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