LIFELONG LEARNING
THE 2016 SAIF EDUCATION DAY FOR INDEPENDENT FUNERAL DIRECTORS

PLUS
THE SHIFTING TRENDS OF FUNERALS
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SAIFCHARTER’S SEARCH FOR GOLDEN TALENT
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Your new SAIFInsight is packed with the latest news and features, with the best business advice, education and training, plus a handy directory.
SAIF EDUCATION DAY
This year’s SAIF event centred on the topics most relevant to independent funeral directors right now. Read part one of our coverage in this issue.

ONE LAST CALL
Unusual and non-traditional funerals that personalise the life and interests of the deceased are on the increase.

SAIFCHARTER
The search is on to find the next generation of funeral directors to join a new Golden Talent group.

REPORTER
This issue is packed with all the latest news, including the extension of Golden Charter masterclasses, MIND’s charity support call and the SAIF Education Day.

SAIF AGM
Sign up now and book your place at the 2017 SAIF AGM and Banquet Weekend.

POLITICS
We look at the Scottish Parliament’s debate on mortuary standards and Labour’s calls for bereaved parent funding.

BUSINESS MATTERS
Advice on risk assessments and the consequences of not learning when to say no.

DIRECTORY
Contact Golden Charter RSMs or BDMs, or find your local SAIF Associate, in our comprehensive listings section.

REGULARS

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Call us today on 01392 409760
www.funeralzone.co.uk


**Thank You**

**With Your Support We Have Already Raised Over £30,000**

The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland help members of our Armed Forces, veterans and their families all year round.

In recognition of the work they do, £25 is being donated for each Golden Charter Funeral Plan purchased.*

We’re aiming to raise £100,000 over the next 12 months, and with your help, we have already raised over £30,000.**

Whether it’s travel to see a loved one in hospital, food vouchers or emergency accommodation, the money raised will make a massive difference to the most vulnerable members of our Armed Forces community.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT WITH OUR WINDOW DISPLAY COMPETITION

There’s still time to enter our Remembrance Window Display Competition. Categories include Best Overall Display, Most Creative Display and Best Community Engagement.

To enter, simply send photos of your display to competition@goldencharter.co.uk no later than 5pm on Thursday 10th November 2016.

"You Must Have Passion For The Cause - People Can Spot Faking Interest"

Terry Tennens

Community Social Responsibility and Your Business Values

SAIF’s Chief Executive wants all members to build strong, positive relationships

For the past decade, I led the UK operations of the largest international anti-slavery organisation. The global charity benefited from business partners who supported the work we did through financial sponsorship, pro-bono service of their talented employees, from corporate lawyers, to detectives, marketing and media professionals, IT wizards, parliamentarians and local community activists. It was incredible to receive such support for the mission.

In this article, my definition of CSR is ‘community social responsibility’.

Small, medium and large private businesses make an outstanding contribution to their communities.

CSR can be seen as a means to an end. The firm increases the profile and thereby the number of funerals increases. But is that short sighted?

Might CSR be an end in itself?

The possibility of engaging in community support has far reaching opportunities and the key questions for your business begin with what your company values are, which will inform your brand identity – this is what the public see as the personality of your business. Also, what is your company mission – how will you go about doing business? How will you treat your clients? Even those who are difficult?

These questions are vital because your company mission and values need to ensure that it aligns with the CSR you engage with. There are a multitude of charities and causes to be engaged with, but which ones reflect the priorities of your business?

CSR is important for the following reasons:

1. CSR improves your public image: Consumers are making choices on professional services based on the character of the business, that is, family history, the present staff, the mission and values, staff interests and community concerns.

2. CSR increases media coverage: The majority of people prefer not to think about funeral services. We are there at their time of need due to the personal loss.

Make sure you have connections in the local and regional media so that they can shed light on the community activities you do.

3. CSR boosts employee satisfaction: Output is consistently strong at an organisation with a strong public image and contented employees.

Encourage your staff to have a voice in the philanthropic activity of the business that matches the firm’s mission and values, staff interests and community concerns.

4. CSR attracts and retains clients: When owners spend time raising resources for charities, and staff volunteer their time to serve those ends, it provides an attractive proposition for new clients to see the ethos of your firm, that you have an interest in local and global needs and make a positive impact on the lives of others.

Of course, before launching into a time-consuming search for a partnership with a local, national or international charity, it’s necessary to explore the following:

- The niche in the community: Even if competitors support high profile local causes, that should not detract you from supporting your own cause. This could include links with local schools, faith groups, or healthcare organisations.

- Cause-related profiling: What causes resonate with your local community, what are the opportunities and how does that relate to your organisational identity? Build relationships around a cause that can lead to a partnership agreement of goals, responsibilities and outcomes for both parties.

- Employee buy-in: Set aside time to include the staff in the selection of the cause. Once the cause is chosen, allow time for your staff to learn about the charity as clients will ask questions and first hand stories will be vital.

- Set aside time and scale: Set annual goals for fundraising, activities and media profiling. Start with sensible targets and build a five-year plan.

SAIF members do remarkable work in their communities. Having a social conscious as a business is more than adding value to your marketing; you must have the passion for the cause – people can spot faking interest.

As Mahatma Gandhi said: “Be the change you want to see.” It all leads to CSR.
We know how much you value your independence. The funeral industry may have changed but our passion for supporting our members has remained the same. We represent you on the issues that matter, from improving understanding of funeral pricing to influencing the legislation which affects your future.

Let us take care of the big picture so you can focus locally on what you do best.

For over 20 years SAIF has been promoting and protecting the interests and values of independent funeral directors. Supporting our members is at the heart of everything we do, listening, responding and engaging to secure your independent future.

Create the independent future you want.

While SAIF represents you on the issues that matter.

Change is always just around the corner in the funeral profession. It is at least as complex and contradictory as any other field: many families are comforted by the traditional service and values offered by funeral directors, but those same families are also sensible, pragmatic consumers, naturally willing to try something new if it benefits them.

That change has been positive for Independents for some time now. Growing market share, beating the conglomerates and flourishing in the field of funeral plans have all been rapid, positive moves. You have ridden that wave of change, but now, as those long-term goals start to come to fruition, the question is how you deal with the next wave.

So what is so very different now and into the future? Much of it boils down to three main points: value, variety and, of course, the role of the internet.

Value comes in many forms; people describe very different things when they talk about it. Golden Charter’s view, as we are making increasingly clear in our work, is that value is about the quality of what you offer. Families trust you for a reason, and it cannot be stressed enough that the vast majority of them care far more about a quality funeral than a cheap offering. Remember, just this year YouGov found that “only 7%” called value for money the main reason for their choice – and 3% looked for the “cheapest” option. We are right there with you on the quality focus, working only with third parties who meet your standards.

Of course, a look at the papers or in any UK parliament confirms that funeral poverty is a real concern. For those people who do need to think in more financial terms though, value again vindicates Independents – you are the most reasonably priced, according to a Guardian article from September, and we are currently looking at options for establishing the facts about pricing across the UK, to make that clearer than ever.

Variety is linked to that quality focus, as it is something that people increasingly care about.

Choosing a future

As the funeral profession increasingly opens up in different directions, Independents may have to decide on their own new status quo. Whether moving in any of these directions or continuing along lines which are working for you, Independents have to be cautious and choose their personal future with care.

VARIETY IS LINKED TO THE QUALITY FOCUS, AS IT IS SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE INCREASINGLY CARE ABOUT.
Sandy Sullivan, resomation speaker.

First you Hurt, Then you Heal, an e-book written by Dr Bill Webster, now available from Amazon.

Dr Bill said: “I realize the title of this book may not be the trendiest one I could have chosen. So often the focus these days is on hope and healing, we have heard people say within a short time of the death, “the healing has begun”, I understand that this is the simplest wish of all of us. But how can the healing begin when the hurting has even begun? It hurts to lose someone you care about, thus I felt it was appropriate to title the book ‘First you Hurt, Then you Heal’. The book is aimed both at people going through grief and those unsure what to say to help others who have experienced loss. In more than 230 pages and over 100 articles, Dr Bill outlines a road map for the grief journey. The book opens with the early days after a loss, covering understanding grief, insights into various situations of loss, and strategies to help work through the process. The book can be found through www.goldenews.co.uk.
A sculpture at Birmingham's Custard Factory, one of the creative venues where October’s Masterclasses were held.
The family bond that ensures a personal touch

Five generations have served their community

Five generations of one family have dedicated their lives to caring and supporting the community when the worst happens. Established in 1916, James Giles and Sons Funeral Directors in Worcestershire has steadily been growing in strength with the fourth and fifth generation now integral staff members. According to James’ grandson, Raymond Noble, it is the reassuring family bond which has enabled the business to succeed.

“We were proud of our grandfather for starting this firm and we proudly carry on his legacy. Originally launched as a carpenters and joiners, it quickly switched to become a funeral home, bringing the local community with personal care when they suffered bereavements. That attention to detail was so highly regarded that James Giles and Sons were soon supplying cars for weddings, a practice which only ended 40 years ago. And business expansion is still a trait being used today, with the firm also running a fleet of Jaguars and two removal vehicles.

Over the years, there have also been changes to the types of funerals requested, and Raymond explained: “We have made several improvements to the business and we have many plans for the firm. We listen to the families and really let them decide what they want. I think a lot of people need to listen more, to provide those grieving with what they need and want. When we first started bringing in the colourful coffins and wicker baskets about 30 years ago I wasn’t too sure about them, but now I realise how nice it is to make everything more personalised for the family.”

While funerals have changed from traditional to involving individual celebrations of life, James Giles and Sons are still true to their roots, serving their neighbours.

“With that commitment to being an integral part of the community also extends to the local football team that the firm has sponsored for the past three years. To mark its 100 years of success, the firm’s 11 staff members – six family members, two more full-time and three part-time employees – recently host a celebratory event in Bromsgrove for 150 people, with 80 to 90 of those guests being descendents of James Giles.

Shawn Peel, with Malcolm Flanders from Golden Charter

Golden Charter Chief Executive Ronnie Wayne recently visited Lady Haig’s Poppy Factory in Edinburgh to help with the charity’s campaign to hand-assemble around 500,000 poppies each year.

Ronnie said: “Supporting The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland, and through them the Armed Forces community, is important to Golden Charter. Shawn is a passionate about charity fundraising and volunteering in his community. A former Air Reccenaissance Intelligence Photographer in the Royal Air Force and current member of The Royal British Legion, Shawn realised that with Golden Charter’s support, thousands of pounds could be raised to help serving men and women, veterans, and their families.

“It seemed the obvious choice to work support The Royal British Legion’, said Shawn. “The public really care for the charity and show that in their generosity to remembrance collections. However, there is a belief that The Royal British Legion only works once a year with the Poppy Appeal. With Golden Charter supporting it all year, we can promote their excellent work.”

With that belief, Shawn approached Malcolm Flanders, Golden Charter’s Director of Funeral Director Sales, and was quickly given the go-ahead to approach The Royal British Legion on behalf of the funeral plan provider.

“Malcolm Flanders has been proactive and fully supportive,” explained Shawn. “How many managers would listen to a third-party company and take their plans on board?”

Funeral directors do a lot of charity work, so the Golden Charter plans we sell should reflect that.

From September, funeral directors have been able to offer Golden Charter plans that support the charity, with a £25 donation made for each badged plan. The campaign’s aim is to raise £100,000 in 12 months.

Shawn, who was recently handpicked to lay a wreath at his local war memorial on behalf of The Royal British Legion, commemorating the Battle of the Somme, is overjoyed by the campaign. “This partnership means a lot to me. Often, when people think of The Royal British Legion, they think of older veterans, but we have young people coming back with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other issues. They need our support.”

“David Butterfield’s is a small family firm, dealing with around 150 funerals a year. We sell 40 to 50 plans annually and since this launch I have already sold 10 Golden Charter plans that support The Royal British Legion. For me, Golden Charter now ticks every box as it fully protects the funeral plan and raises money for an excellent cause!”

All funeral directors selling Golden Charter plans should have received a briefing and today explaining all the relevant detail about the campaign. Speak to your local Golden Charter representative for further information.

Golden Charter visits Lady Haig’s Poppy Factory

Funeral director leads national charity campaign with the support of Golden Charter

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The factory employs veterans with disabilities to hand-assemble around five million poppies. Ronnie added: “Supporting The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland, and through them the Armed Forces community, is important to Golden Charter. Shawn is a passionate about charity fundraising and volunteering in his community. A former Air Reccenaissance Intelligence Photographer in the Royal Air Force and current member of The Royal British Legion, Shawn realised that with Golden Charter’s support, thousands of pounds could be raised to help serving men and women, veterans, and their families.

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Funeral director leads national charity campaign with the support of Golden Charter
Award sends a clear message

Golden Charter recognised as top communicator

Golden Charter has won a top industry award for Excellence in Communications.

The company had lots to celebrate at this year’s Glasgow Business Awards at the Hilton Glasgow on Thursday 6 October.

Gordon Swan, Director of Communications, said: “We were delighted to shortlist for the Excellence in Communications award, so to take it home on the night meant a great deal to us. “A big part of our role is to engage with and inform independent directors, and the two real drivers of that have been

SAIFInsight Editor Michael Fern (bottom row, second from the right) at the awards

SAIFInsight and the Funeral Planner of the Year Awards. The magazine is in better shape than ever, and our surveying shows that more than 90% of Independents are reading it following our revamp. “To have that work acknowledged is fantastic.”

The communications award is only the latest in a long line of recent successes for Golden Charter.

The company won Most Outstanding Business at the Glasgow Business Awards in 2014, and is listed in The Sunday Times Virgin Fast Track 100 league table of Britain’s fastest-growing companies for the second consecutive year. Last year, Golden Charter also secured Scottish and UK Institute of Directors Awards for CEO Ronnie Wayte and Chairman Magnus Swanson.

Ronnie Wayte said: “Our awards success is a reflection of the growth we have sustained over a number of years. To be recognised now for our innovative communications shows that we have another string to our bow.

“When working with trusted local businesses in a field like funeral planning, the quality of our work is paramount. This award helps show that we are serious about that quality and have the talent to do justice by our market leading position.”

Funeralbooker closes £750k investment

SAIF associate Funeralbooker has announced that it has closed a £750,000 seed round to help the business to accelerate its strategy for long-term growth and to support its transition to the independent funeral market.

The round was led by White Cloud Capital with additional support from existing investors including Laurence Laffey, Director, Secret Escapes.

CEO Ian Strang said Funeralbooker plans to use the funds to further invest in technology, marketing and operations. It also aims to continue to build Funeralbooker’s customer experience both on and offline for greater transparency and ease of use at a stressful time.

Advertising feature

Advertise your funeral services with us, be seen by families in need of your expertise.

Advertising feature

Memory giving - donations, funeral details and maps simply integrated into your website

£Millions collected for charity by our UK funeral network

set up today - no fees only help ring 0118 9799633

www.memorygiving.com
Help SAIF’s charity of the year keep momentum going for mental health

It has been an important few months for mental health, with a wave of high-profile people speaking out about their own experiences and a growing commitment from government, politicians and employers to improve support for people with mental health problems. Earlier this year, SAIF President Paul Allcock announced that Mind would be SAIF’s chosen charity of the year.

Mind provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing mental health problems, and campaigns to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding. It won’t give up even if its mental health problem gets support and respect. Mind does this through its network of more than 140 local Minds that provide services specific to local needs, supporting more than 341,000 people each year. Mind also supports more than 3 million people through its information services and guides.

Last month, SAIFstrong looked at mental health in the workplace and how to go about improving wellbeing for SAIF workers. Emma Mumma, Head of Workplace Wellbeing at Mind, said that one in six workers are currently dealing with mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression or stress.

Mental Health Awareness Week is the perfect time to discuss the topic and how to support employees, so here are five tips to help your workplace be more mental health-friendly:

1. Ensure employees are aware of the Mental Health At Work Act 2014 and what it means for their workplace.
2. Encourage open communication and provide support for employees who may be struggling with mental health issues.
3. Provide resources and information for employees to learn more about mental health and how to manage it.
4. Implement mental health policy and procedures to ensure a supportive workplace environment.
5. Consider offering mental health training to employees and managers to increase awareness and understanding.

Get crafty
Getting creative is therapeutic and can help relieve stress. So why not get together with your colleagues and take part in Mind’s national fundraising event, Crafternoon, which is one of the biggest, craftiest mental health fundraisers. Organise a Crafternoon at work, school or at home during Crafternoon week and enjoy a craft-themed event while raising lots of cash for Mind.

Get active
Being active is really important for both physical and mental health. Research shows that walking or outdoor exercise can have huge benefits for people’s health and wellbeing. So if you are feeling more anxious or depressed, perhaps you could enrol in a half marathon or challenge event like Mind’s 2017 Mind Hike. On 23-25 June two groups of Mind supporters will be trekking for 40 miles through the Lake District, so why not join them?

For further information please call us on 01905 213991 www.allsons.net
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A PROUD NIGHT FOR GENESIS

Two Golds and a Silver for SAIF’s PR and
marketing agency at industry awards event

September, Genesis won Gold for Outstanding Mid-Size PR
Agency, Gold for Corporate
and Business PR and Silver
in the overall Outstanding
PR Agency award.

The regional PRide Awards recognise the
outstanding work of leading
public relations teams who
demonstrate commitment to
excellence and best practice
in nine regions across the
UK. This year, over 1,300
entries were submitted
from more than 300
consultancies.

Judges of the Outstanding
Mid-Size Agency category
commented: “Genesis
demonstrated clear business
objectives and a real sense
of where they’re heading. The judges were highly
impressed by Genesis’
excellent commitment to
professionalism and GDPR,
matched with a social
commitment to local
causes and institutions.”

Speaking about the
awards, Penny Arbuthnot,
Director of Genesis PR, said:
“We’ve enjoyed a successful
year to date and so are
thrilled to be named the best
mid-size PR agency as well as
winning the top gong in the
Corporate and Business PR
category”

In May, Genesis was the
only PR agency in the East
of England to be nominated
for the prestigious UK title of
Outstanding Small PR
Consultancy of the Year in the
national CIPR Excellence Awards.

A PROUD NIGHT FOR GENESIS

www. Colourful Coffins.com
The Original Colourful Coffin
Helping you create a beautiful memory

Golden Charter is considering updating
the way you receive paperwork
about new plans, changes to plans, and
cancellations, after sampling opinions
from Independents and the SAIF/Charter
Executive.

FGDs sent via email and downloads
from the portal are the most
efficient options being considered, with
consolidated mailings a possibility for
the few remaining funeral directors who
do not have an email address.

Malcolm Flanders, Director of
Funeral Directors Wales, said: “Feedback
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Malcolm added: “With the benefit of
this feedback, we would like to start
to make the changes by the new year”

Independents with a view on these
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Making storage efficient

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Entrepreneur
Leader of the Year
Damian Melville

Entrepreneur
honoured in business awards

Of Britain’s leading
entrepreneurs has been
conferred on Damian
Melville, Director at
Melville & Daughters
Funeral Directors, who was
named Entrepreneur Leader of the Year.

Melville founded the firm in 2010 after
winning the Federation of
British Independent
Funeral Directors (FBID)
Entrepreneur Leader of the Year award.

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DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDELINES FOR CREMATION AUTHORITIES

Dear Sir,

The Cremation Associations, namely the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA), the Institute of Cemetery and Cremation Management (ICCM), the Association of Private
Crematoria and Cemeteries (APCC) and the Cremation Society of Great Britain (CSGB) wish to make it quite clear that they are in the process of developing guidelines for Cremation Authorities, whether publicly or privately operated, on the operation of Coffin Accreditation Schemes.

This process is still in the early stages, and all that has been issued to date is an initial draft which has yet to be approved by the appropriate groups in each organisation and therefore it is anticipated that further suggestions and changes will be incorporated into the final document. However, every effort is being made to complete the exercise in the shortest practicable timeframe.

All relevant parties throughout the sector will be fully consulted and legal advice obtained prior to the finally agreed version of the guidelines being published.

In addition the associations also wish to make it clear that they have only endorsed the test protocols, not the operation of the accreditation schemes themselves. Ultimately it will be up to Cremation Authorities to decide whether they accept both schemes currently available or not.

In closing, we would just like to emphasise that the associations’ overall objective is to ensure that all their members have adequate guidance in relation to the safe handling and cremation of coffins at their crematoria.

Yours faithfully,

The changing face of funerals

Memories and leaders of the Institute of Civil Funerals (IoCF) enjoyed a thought-provoking day at this year’s seminar and AGM. The theme of the conference was: ‘The changing face of funerals and funeral celebrancy’.

The seminar, held in Bournville in Birmingham, looked at the impact of digital technology, the evolution of the funeral system and how the arrival of direct cremation will impact on IoCF members. The day was started by IoCF Chairman Christine Ogden, Dip CFC, and with seminar sessions led by Tony Walter, Honorary Professor, University of Bath, and James Norris, a lecturer in digital studies, Anne Barber, IoCF President, the world’s only professor of death studies, Arne Barber, IoCF President, and James Norris, a lecturer in digital and social media at UCL and founder of the Digital Legacy Association and the website, www.deadsocial.org

The seminar sessions raised some interesting questions and examined how direct cremation could be the catalyst to change in the way funerals are considered and arranged. Members were assured that, in its role of promoting greater choice to families when arranging funerals, the Institute will be at the forefront of working with all funeral arrangers and families alike to meet the exciting innovations and challenges that clearly lie ahead.

The afternoon focused on the AGM with the Chairman reiterating that the past 12 months have proved to be a time of change throughout the profession and the statistics showed growth financially, in membership numbers and in the rapid rise, year on year, in the number of civil ceremonies led by members.

In a final message to members, IoCF Chairman Christine said that she was leaving office knowing that the Institute is going from strength to strength and will always represent all that is professional, reliable and up to date in the changing world of funerals.
Always room for improvement

I find myself approaching seven months as your National President. Last month I celebrated (a loose term) my 50th birthday, and both those seven months and 50 years seem to have flown by.

On my travels, I have met many interesting individuals in various roles connected in some way to funerals. Last week was a case in point, when I attended the open day of Andrew Smith Funeral Services in Macclesfield. Andrew’s premises are second to none, and even more impressive was the fact that he still saw the need to improve, where many others would struggle to find fault.

This, I believe, is something that all independent funeral directors need to learn from. However good we perceive our premises or indeed ourselves to be, there is always room for improvement. My year as President is proving an expensive one as I see things in my own business which can be improved. But I also see the need to keep my standards as high as possible.

Looking back over the last seven months I am pleased that during this period we have nurtured a good working relationship with both the Department of Health and the Department of Work and Pensions.

Meetings are continuing with both departments, and although progress on any reforms is inevitably slow, there are many positives in having an input and being able to air the views of SAIF clearly.

The DWP in particular is very keen to discuss various aspects of the Funeral Benefit Payment Scheme. These include establishing the essential elements of a simple funeral, and simplifying the application process. This would save valuable time for DWP staff but will also ensure that payments to funeral directors will be much quicker. There is a telephone helpline for applications and I would suggest that you point your clients towards this number if they are known to be making a claim (0345 606 0265 or for Welsh language applications call 0345 606 0275). If you have any comments or views on the application process I would be pleased to hear from you.

Finally, I touched last month on the number of new businesses ‘jumping on the funeral bandwagon’. This week I was advised that my business doesn’t show on the first two pages of Google when a search is made for ‘Funeral Director’, and subsequently that I need to pay xx amount to ensure that I am at the top of the search. It seems that many of these companies only recognise the national or international capabilities of the internet, whereas for any SAIF member the importance is being highlighted on a localised search only.

Thankfully my business is always at the top of a search for ‘Funeral Director Norwich’. The only place I need to be, and I pay nothing for the privilege. Don’t get sold something you don’t need, and if you’re anything like me, you most certainly don’t want.

PAUL ALLOCK, SAIF PRESIDENT

SAIF ASSOCIATE’S £1M IN FUNDING

An innovative website which helps the bereaved has secured £1 million in investment funding from business ‘angels’.

Funeral Zone, launched by Ed Gallois and Kevin Honeyard in 2013, allows the bereaved to compare funeral directors in their local area, as well as providing valuable help and resources when somebody dies. The investment will support www.funeralzone.co.uk.

Funeral Zone has already grown to become the number one funeral resource in the UK and is also rapidly gaining traction in Australia and South Africa.

CEO and co-founder Ed Gallois said: “After a close friend passed away, I realised there was very little help out there for the bereaved. What should you do first? Is it a doctor, a neighbour or a funeral director?”

“With all that information in one place at the touch of a button, we realised it would be one less stress-factor for people to deal with.”

Funeral Zone, which is based in Exeter, secured its £1 million backing through a number of seed-funding investors, including The Minerva Business Angels.

“You need straightforward and practical information when you are grieving and at your most vulnerable. Our mission is to help the bereaved.”

Advertising feature
When relatives approached Paul Allcock to see if there was any way the deceased, an ex-BT employee, could be buried in his beloved red telephone box, which he proudly displayed in his front garden, Paul was initially taken aback. But as the wishes of the family have always been at the heart of his funeral practice, he said he would see what he could do. A few days later he was able to square it with the council and hire a JCB to make the man’s last wishes come true.

Paul, joint-owner of Norwich-based Allcock Family Funeral Service and SAIF President, said: “The family did not think it was possible but wanted to ask the question and, as I like a challenge, I looked into it and gave them some options. We had a service in the local church with a traditional coffin, then the funeral party drove to the deceased’s house where we had prepared a grave large enough to accommodate the red telephone box, which would contain his coffin, and it was lifted down into the grave in the garden.”

It’s not an everyday request but many funeral directors are being increasingly asked to accommodate more unusual requests to help families celebrate the lives of their loved ones. Paul said: “In this part of England, we’ve noticed the growing trend in non-traditional funerals, but it has really taken off in the past five years. There is more media coverage of unusual funerals and more people are attending these types of ceremonies and becoming aware of the choices available.”

It’s all about personalising the funeral experiences to reflect the life and interests of the deceased, and Paul thinks this is a good development. He said: “We’ve had clients that have wanted simple cardboard coffins, not just because of the cost, but so that the family could decorate them in their own way. A nice example of this was when everyone put their handprints on the coffin in a way when it was carried by the pall bearers it looked like many more hands were helping them lift the coffin.”

Many of these new ways of celebrating the life of the deceased are carried out without a religious service, but Julian Walker from A B Walker and Son, who runs seven branches throughout Berkshire and Oxfordshire, said that many people still like to include favourite prayers or hymns in the service. Julian said: “In our area we have witnessed a decreasing choice for a church service in favour of using a civil celebrant in a non-religious setting, but that does not necessarily...”

Unusual and non-traditional funerals that personalise the life and interests of the deceased are on the increase.
Some people find that Christian churches are not a flexible option when it comes to meeting their funeral needs. Julian Walker explains: “When I discuss what a ‘do-it-yourself’ funeral means to the newspapers, they should embrace it and see it as a way of helping us raise our game. At the end of the day, the industry has always been about family, such as a singing of a hymn or saying of a prayer, is welcome.”

The media plays a influential role in highlighting unusual funeral ceremonies featuring eye-catching imagery, such as a Darth Vader lookalike leading a funeral cortège or unusual hearses, from tanks to motorbike sidecars. Their coverage of the funerals of celebrities, from the outpouring of grief for Princess Diana to the no-nonsense and minimalist funeral arrangements for David Bowie, also influences public perceptions of how funerals can be conducted and many aspects of these are adopted by the public. This trend is muddying the waters when it comes to defining what a non-traditional funeral really is any more, as most funerals today adopt some measure of personalisation to represent the deceased, from favourite songs through to order of service leaflets that celebrate the life of the loved one through photos and words. Of the more ‘unusual’ funeral arrangements picked up by the media are definitely unique. Julian said: “When I discuss what the newspapers are reporting with other funeral directors we often scratch our heads because it’s rare than any of us have ever come across these types of funerals – these are definitely one-off events which are not reflected in actual practice on the ground. It’s like the media interest in the ‘do-it-yourself’ funeral stories that have been picked up as being unusual but are actually statistically totally insignificant.”

The most significant trend over the past few decades has been the growing demand for cremations, compared to burials, which has enabled people to gather and celebrate the lives of their loved ones beyond the graveside. According to the statistics, today nearly 75% of people in the UK choose to be cremated, up from 68% 30 years ago. Many people continue to have services at the crematorium but there is a trend to celebrate before the cremation as Paul described: “We organised a funeral for an ex-Norwich footballer recently where some 200 of his family and friends gathered at the St Andrews Hall in the city to give him a send-off, and then the body was sent on its own to the crematorium, with the ashes delivered later to the family.”

Like most things in today’s world, technology is playing an increasing role in the modern funeral service and creating what the Guardian termed the ‘virtual mourner’ in its interview with Paul Allcock. A recent survey said around a fifth of Britain’s 281 crematoriums already offered a live streaming service, while 61% of funeral directors had received requests for services to be live-streamed.

Paul believes it has a role to play but its continued popularity could have a potential drawback. He explained: “It’s wonderful for those relatives who live abroad, but there’s also a danger of pandering to people’s laziness and not attending personally and sharing your condolences, which is such an important part of the grieving process.”

“Many funeral directors will tell you that a few kind words shared over a sandwich after the funeral can never be replaced by watching the event from a distance via a web-camera.”

Paul is comfortable with the growth in non-traditional funerals and enjoys the creativity and challenges it brings to help celebrate someone’s life. “I don’t think funeral directors should fear this trend; they should embrace it and see it as a way of helping us raise our game. At the end of the day, the industry has always been about family, such as a singing of a hymn or saying of a prayer, is welcome.”

However, in our area we’ve retained a fairly consistent level of religious services – around 80% – but we know that in other parts of the country it has changed significantly due to demographics, particularly in metropolitan areas.”

Julian added: “We’ve got to be mindful that there is a shift in the market which is happening now. Although funeral directors in the Salford network may not have noticed this, there is collective group evidence that it’s occurring and it’s accelerating, so we need to prepare and adapt to the market so we don’t lose control with what we have to offer.”
Aft er receiving the accolade of Gravedigger of the Year 2016 last month, it’s more or less back to business for David Homer, gravedigger of nine years. When I speak to him, he has just got off the phone with a funeral director, passing on a family’s gratitude, saying they were really pleased with how the graves looked. That, he says, makes it all worthwhile.

To become a decent gravedigger, David informs me you need, as an aptitude for hard work and attention to detail. Hard work comes naturally, as he digs every single grave by hand, to avoid the machinery of diggers disturbing the peace and quiet of the churchyard. Meanwhile, his exacting standards have their own origin: “I think that came from being in the Royal Navy. For that, everything’s got to be very smart. There’s no vocational training or qualifications, not that I’ve come across anyway.”

David’s own start in gravedigging was almost accidental: “I’d been working as a pallbearer when my wife Amanda was let down by the gravedigger she’d hired, and so she asked me. I thought I could probably do a better job and make the grave look nice.”

He now owns DTH Burial and Churchyard Services and has five members of staff to help dig the 300-odd graves a year, with two working for him part-time. “I train them up to exactly how I want things done. There’s no corners cut because ultimately they’re representing me. Otherwise they don’t get paid. Only joking, of course.”

“The other skill you need for gravedigging is to be good with people. You need to be absolutely spot on when you’re interacting with the families. This afternoon a family stopped by as we were digging the grave. It can be quite distressing for them, but then after the funeral service they came up and thanked me. Those moments are really nice, when you know you’ve done your best for the family, and for the funeral director.”

David, 49, started his working life as a miner before joining the Royal Navy, and then left to work in the Fire Service. In 2007, he began work as a gravedigger. “All the jobs I’ve had, you’ve got to be respectful in everything you do. At the end of the day I’m trying to provide a service for the families. You only get to bury your parents once, so I make the graves look as nice as I can, to take away some of the harshness. It is quite a harsh environment – to look at it plainly it’s just a hole in the ground. I don’t see it like that though, I see it as somebody’s final resting place.”

To transform the grave from just a ‘hole in the ground’, David dresses the grave in fabric, lays down turf, lines the bottom of the grave with sawdust and then places flowers in each corner.

“I’m a big believer that there is nothing that I can’t do, nothing is too much trouble. I’ll always go out of my way to help the family.” David describes gravedigging as a ‘Cinderella’ job. “You’re not there to do the heavy lifting, it’s your assistant. But then I’ve never gone for nine to five office jobs. Some people think it’s a low-skilled job, but it’s not, you’re providing a service to families. It’s also challenging, depending on the area, the season and the kind of soil, but you’ve just got to be prepared.

“We have a minimum of a week’s notice so I’ll always think ahead, take a look at the weather forecast and sometimes we’ll get out and prepare things a few days in advance. We never leave anything to the last minute.” This preparation is important as, besides gravedigging, David also takes on exhumations and the burial of ashes.

“It’s a full diary all the time; the paperwork gets taken care of by my admin department – my wife Amanda. And I’ve got an accountant to manage the finances. I think if you take on too much you’re at risk of becoming a jack of all trades, master of none.”

Although the majority of David’s work is gravedigging, occasionally he is asked to ‘rod’ a churchyard. This involves sticking a large rod into the soil to find out which plots are vacant.

“I’ll make a note of where it’s free in the churchyard. Often people reserve graves that don’t end up being used, and there aren’t always burial records for a churchyard.”

Speaking on the shortage of burial sites, David isn’t too worried. “There aren’t as many as they think, because I can imagine people offering a good service, it’s fairly expensive. Some people are offering one-off services to people who are new to the industry and they’re really nice, when you know you’ve done your best for the family, and for the funeral director.”

Since David began work as a gravedigger he’s observed some substantial changes to the funeral world. “The industry as a whole has changed so much in the short time I’ve been a part of it. There’s a trend of people new to the industry providing cheap funerals. The question is, are they really any cheaper? I think there’s a problem where customers will be quoted one price but by the time you’ve added on the other costs it’s far more expensive. It certainly undermines these established, longstanding family-run funeral homes. Some people come into the funeral industry thinking they can make a quick dollar out of it, but the question is are they offering a good service? I’d say stick with tried and trusted ones.”

David is equally suspicious of the move to online funeral services, worrying that browsing online does not give families the support they need. “In my opinion, online services are too impersonal – I’d want to sit down with a cup of tea and receive a bit of sympathy.”

David’s main concern is how families are looked after: “I’ll always go out of my way to help a family in need. Online, you can’t do that. I don’t think it’s an industry that can operate entirely online. But for me it’s not a worry – after all, there’s no such thing as a virtual gravedigger!”

Quality Assurance Assessor
(Part-time)

SAIF is looking to expand its Quality Assurance team and is seeking a suitably experienced person to carry out premise assessments.

The assessor will be responsible for arranging his/her own schedule, for which administration support will be given. The successful applicant will be proactive and work with the current team of Assessors to continue the development of a quality assurance programme for SAIF members.

Excellent communication skills, team player and able to work on own initiative. Due to working from home, transport and an email account are an essential requirement for this post.

If you believe that you could offer this service please contact, in strictest confidence:

Linda Jones, SAIF Business Centre, 3A Bullfields, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN2 7RP
Tel: 0345 230 6777 Email: linda@saif.org.uk

**FEATURE**

Gravedigger of the Year and Associate SAIF member David Homer talks about how he maintains impeccable standards and puts families first

**WORDS: DEBORAH YOUNG**

**PHOTO:** David Homer digs every single grave by hand, to avoid the machinery of diggers disturbing the peace and quiet of the churchyard. It’s quite a harsh environment – to look at it plainly it’s just a hole in the ground. David dresses the grave in fabric, lays down turf, lines the bottom of the grave with sawdust and then places flowers in each corner.

**I’m trying to provide a service for the families. I make the graves look as nice as I can**

David Homer

Gravedigger of the Year 2016

Gravedigger of the Year 2016
I want my husband out of the house, said Terry through her tears.

I have heard that statement before… thankfully not by my wife. At least, not in my hearing!

Terry’s husband just sits in the family room, and it is driving her round the bend.

It’s not what you think – Terry’s husband Joe died by suicide just over a year ago.

They had enjoyed a reasonably good marriage and were blessed with two girls now in their late teens. Joe had suffered with mental health issues since his teenage years, but had seemed to be doing quite well with everything under control. While he had appeared mildly depressed in the months before he died, his death came as a complete shock.

One weekend last summer, the family was visiting Joe’s parents who live in a high-rise apartment building in the city. The day seemed to be going fine, when the unthinkable happened. Joe had simply excused himself for a minute but, unbeknown to anyone, took the elevator to the roof of the building and simply jumped off. Complicating things further was that his fall and the aftermath were witnessed by Terry and all the family.

Obviously it was a very difficult situation for everyone. At the funeral, everyone spoke in glowing terms of Joe’s contribution to work, friends and the community, and how stunned they were that this had happened, apparently completely out of the blue.

Terry attended a support group and sought one-on-one counselling to help her deal with the traumatic effects of that terrible day. As months went by, the anniversary of his death approached, and Terry found herself reliving every moment of the days leading up to the event.

Her counsellor helped her decide what would be meaningful on the first anniversary, and the day itself proved to be manageable if emotional. Joe had been cremated, and his two daughters insisted the urn be kept prominent in the family room. The girls obviously had a difficult time with the death, and felt having the remains at home kept him close, almost as if he was still with them.

That worked for a while with Terry, but soon after the anniversary of his death she lost interest. That work was for a while with Terry, but soon after the anniversary of his death she had difficulty with the idea of revisiting the memories. Terry’s grief had clearly not dissipated. She felt anger rising at Joe’s actions and her situation.

Importantly for funeral directors, many people only start to think creatively about what they should do long after they’ve brought the ashes home.

Of course, they are more than just ‘ashes’, and they deserve a fitting destination. But from a grief perspective, we need to remind ourselves of Vanderlyn Pine’s statement: “A funeral helps to separate the deceased from the living.”

While I understand the theory of ‘continuing bonds’, there are dangers with misapplication of that model, particularly when the ‘holding on’ to cremated remains allows the person to psychologically keep the deceased in the present, as though still in the house.

Here is an opportunity for funeral directors at the time of the funeral, if the family is uncertain what to do in the confusion of the time. Why not suggest that in six months you meet for a discussion on ‘permanent dispostion’, when after the initial shock has dissipated they have finally decided what they want to do.

I believe we need to be more proactive in encouraging people to “do” something with the cremated remains that allows for a place to leave their loved one, and place they can go to reconnect.

Thus it was last month that the family met together and, with permission, scattered the remains on Joe’s favourite golf course, beside a bench they have donated in his memory. Terry’s only problem now: Does anyone want to buy a used urn?
AWARDS FOR STAFF TRAINED IN FUNERAL PLANNING

Months of hard work by colleagues at Alexander Burn Funeral Directors have been recognised with a Certificate in Funeral Planning.

Alexander Burn Funeral Directors has become the latest Independent to make use of the increasing array of training options now on offer to funeral directors.

Last month, various members of staff received their Certificate in Funeral Planning. The course, the first devoted entirely to funeral planning, is run in conjunction with the IFD College.

Steve Renney, Alexander Burn’s local Golden Charter representative, said: “Alex has made training a key priority within his business. At Golden Charter we are delighted to support Alex and his team in broadening and deepening their understanding of funeral plans and later life planning, and the benefits they provide to their families.”

Alex Burn himself also received recognition last month. Golden Charter’s National Sales Manager Drew McAllister presented him with a certificate after his business produced outstanding legal service referral numbers in 2015-16.

Golden Charter’s Director of Funeral Director Sales Malcolm Flanders said: “It is great to see someone as keen to invest in training and developing staff as Alex.

“Every company that has put staff through the Certificate in Funeral Planning is making an investment and gaining expertise in a major part of the profession. To put a whole range of staff through the process, as Alex has, is an excellent commitment to future growth – both for the company itself and for its staff.”

Alexander Burn Funeral Directors is a family firm from Gloucestershire. It serves a wide area, with branches in Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and Winchcombe.

Funeral directors interested in putting their staff through the Certificate in Funeral Planning should contact their local Golden Charter representative for further details.

TO PUT A WHOLE RANGE OF STAFF THROUGH THE PROCESS IS AN EXCELLENT COMMITMENT TO FUTURE GROWTH”

Malcolm Flanders

HISTORY OF EMBALMING

When we think of the history of embalming everyone usually thinks back to the Egyptian times, and of course one of the most infamous examples of the time is Tutankhamun. Anyone who has visited the Valley of the Kings and the Cairo Museum would be strung by the splendour and the work involved in preserving their dead.

So why did the Egyptians feel the need to embalm? There were two reasons. The first reason was because the Nile would flood, and burials could not take place causing a risk to public health. The other reason was that the Egyptians believed that they would go into a state called the Circle of Necessity for thousands of years, and when they returned they would require their body still to be in one piece so they could use it again.

There were different procedures involved depending on your rank in society. The Pharaohs were treated as gods with great dignity and respect. Their internal organs would be removed from the cavities and placed in jars called canopic jars which were filled with natron, a sodium salt. The trunk would be dried and filled with spices, herbs, bitumen and then sewn up. The body would then be placed in a sarcophagus (coffin) which was then sometimes placed inside more sarcophagi and then placed in a tomb with much pomp and ceremony.

The middle-ranking Egyptians were similar but had a corrosive chemical placed inside to dissolve the organs and would be given back to families with or without mummification, depending on how much they could afford, and the peasants were just placed in the natron solution and had no mummification.

So how does this compare to embalming today? Some of the reasons for our embalming are the same – we embalm for preservation and sanitation as did the Egyptians – but the third reason for our embalming today is presentation.

When a family come to view, we want to leave them with a pleasant memory of their loved one. During the 21st years that I have been working in our profession, the equipment and products available for embalming have changed considerably, making our lives easier and safer with the introduction of formaldehyde products.

Extra for sizes up to 60” chest

BLACK JACKET & W/COAT Wool mix £129.00 inc. VAT 36” - 46” chest

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Also - Frock Coats - Tailcoats Rain coats - Suits - Shirts - etc.

Next day delivery or visit our new showroom by prior appointment.

Telephone 020 8527 4249 or 07768 848166
A five-day course will be held at Anatomy @ Edinburgh, the University of Edinburgh’s Medical School in the heart of the city. It will provide a unique opportunity to study a hands-on practical approach to cranial/facial reconstruction, soft tissue injury and the responsible use of this valuable resource. The course will commence on Monday 17 April 2017 at 9am and places will be limited to a maximum of 10. The cost of the five-day course will be £1,200.00. Also covered in this will be the Dodge reconstruction kit which has been made available only as part of this prestigious programme, and a set of surgical scrubs. On completion of the course, those attending will be presented with a certificate of achievement having completed 40 hours of specialised instruction in facial / cranial injuries to the face and airbrush cosmetics.

Anatomy @ Edinburgh is regulated by the Anatomy Act (Scotland) and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Anatomy for Scotland. Before anyone can work with cadavers, a form must be designed to demonstrate compliance with all regulations, which safeguards the responsible treatment of the cadavers and the responsible use of this valuable resource.

The reconstruction course will be held with Martin Jeffrey M.B.I.E. Dip FD. and Ross Corney M.B.I.E Dip FD. As resident embalmers at William Purves Funeral Directors, Martin and Ross have more than 50 years experience in the funeral profession. 30 years of practical embalming experience and have dealt with over 20,000 cases. In addition to this experience, they also have an impressive list of specialist courses and affiliations to other organisations:
- British Institute of Embalmers
- National Association of Funeral Directors
- American Association of Embalmers
- Fountain National Academy of Reconstructive Surgery, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale USA
- Omega Academy of Restorative Art and Embalming, Medical Science Campus, University of Puerto Rico

The course will take place at one of the oldest medical schools in the country.
MEMORY GIVING’S GIFT TO GRIEVING FAMILY

Donations contributed through the service’s website paid for a new pulpit at the church of a young minister who died of cancer, a fitting and comforting tribute to a good communicator.

Online donation service Memory Giving, first established by brothers Julian and Matthew Walker, has now served tens of thousands of bereaved families.

One family was that of Richard Scholes, who died of cancer at the age of 38, leaving a wife and four children.

Richard’s father, Stephen Scholes, said: “Richard was full of fun, a fantastic dad, a fantastic husband, a really great guy. He was an ordained minister and had started a new church with his wife, Home Church in Morecambe. He ran it for 10 years until he became ill.

“When we lost Richard we didn’t know what in the world to do; we wanted to have a special offering but we didn’t know what for, and Memory Giving came into its own for us.

“Richard was quite well known in different areas and people were able to contribute through the Memory Giving website from all over the world. The donations went to the church and they bought a new pulpit which they dedicated it to him; there’s a little plaque on it. It was terrific.

“Without Memory Giving, it is a bit of a mess at the end of the service. When people have finished a funeral they want to go out and talk to family, loved ones and friends, they want to see the flowers and then they want to get off to the reception. They don’t want to be worried about money or who to give it to. With Memory Giving you can make the donations before the day, you can do it on the day, you can do it after the day.

“When Richard died we asked for donations instead of flowers. The new pulpit in his memory brings comfort. Richard was a good communicator and very hard working. He would be thrilled to bits.”

The SAIFCharter Executive’s John Byrne, of J T Byrne Funeral Directors, said: “Memory Giving makes life so much easier for us. It’s a fantastic service to be able to offer our clients and we are proud to do so.

“We are banking fewer cheques and less cash so it has reduced administration. It is accessed through our own website and is another way of creating traffic through our website.

“It helps us to support charities and organisations, creating an easy flow of online donations from the donator through to the charity or organisation. It is very effective.

“It has definitely been well received by bereaved families, and the fact they can include a personal message means a lot. It becomes very personal, rather than just sending a cheque through the post with a piece of paper explaining what it is for. Relatives in different parts of the world can donate easily.

“Memory Giving really does strengthen the services we offer and we would highly recommend it.”

For more information about Memory Giving contact:
Helen Reynolds
0118 979 8533
theteam@memorygiving.com

“We didn’t know what in the world to do. Memory Giving came into its own for us.”

Stephen Scholes

SAIFCharter Executive Member John Byrne
At a debate in October, the Scottish Parliament agreed to investigate mortuary standards, following one family’s “harrowing” experience.

After Frank Whyte’s death in a boating accident this year, his wife Maryan and granddaughter Isla attended the debate, which centred on the family’s experience after being taken to identify the body at an Elgin mortuary.

Richard Lochhead MSP quoted Mrs Whyte as saying: “Just two steps for us to be inside that awful place and there was my husband, just lying, wrapped in a blanket and throw, on a trolley. No warning of what we were entering. No place, no time for composure — just there he was.”

Following the family’s complaints, long-term change in Moray is planned and the Elgin mortuary is no longer used. However, Richard Lochhead noted that similar issues could be found across the country.

Parties across the spectrum agreed on the need for reform, with Conservative and Labour MSPs also speaking.

Graham Simpson MSP, Conservative member for Central Scotland, said: “The bereaved are already in great pain following their loss and it is appalling that pain should be compounded unnecessarily by neglect from those in authority, who should know better. We constantly fight for the basic rights of the living, but we are surely entitled to dignity in death, too.

“Aileen Campbell, Minister for Public Health and Sport, responded on the Scottish Government’s behalf that guidance “was not adhered to” in this case, and that while NHS Grampian had made changes, wider questions were raised. She said: “I have instructed officials to begin a thorough review of the present guidance to ensure that it is fully up to date, is sufficiently detailed and leaves nothing to doubt. Once the review is completed, the renewed guidance will be issued to each health board chief executive.”

Labour calls for bereaved parents funding

Labour has called for £10 million to fund assistance for the funerals of children.

The party has asked that Chancellor Philip Hammond set the money aside in the Autumn Statement, due later this month.

Teresa Pearce, Shadow Secretary for Communities and Local Government, said: “Sadly, each year, around 5,000 children die, many of them in their infancy. If the Government accept our proposal to provide free burial for children, it would go some way to reducing the strain for those grieving families.

“While we must always be careful with public expenditure, the cost of this scheme for Government is minimal when compared to the benefits it could bring.”

In England, systems for charging vary between councils: some supply free child burial or cremation, while others charge varying amounts. The proposal would cover burial plots or cremations provided by local authorities for a death under the age of 16.

In October, the Financial Times said that Philip Hammond was looking into no longer holding the Annual Statement, as part of a move away from “gimmicks”. This month’s would still be held, according to the paper, but in future a system where there was only one Budget may be introduced.
We need your help with a families survey

As funeral directors, we are very conscious of standards of care and customer satisfaction, despite the difficult circumstances when we provide our service to families. There is, after all, a direct relationship between this and their intention to use your firm again or recommend you in the future.

Many SAIF Charter members conduct a post-funeral feedback survey, usually using a freepost response-type card. Concurrently, Golden Charter has been requesting feedback from its funeral director shareholders, policyholders and staff, measuring performance through a structured online survey.

We at SAIFCharter have now instructed Golden Charter to extend that exercise to measure the views of the plan holder’s family after the funeral, using a sensitively worded survey. We can quickly present powerful data to the membership – and importantly to the media – about the true peace of mind Golden Charter funeral plans truly deliver.

What can you do to help?

■ We want to make sure that the key person in your business receives survey invitations. Please ensure that your RSM holds that person’s direct email address (which may of course be different from the email used for general plan administration).

■ Always complete the survey when requested.

■ Scan and email or post your own client survey to Gordon Swan (gordon.swan@goldencharter.co.uk) so we can consolidate the very best ideas.

■ We are shortly to conduct a detailed, confidential, independently verifiable member survey; it is critical that every member responds.

Remember: by working together, we are stronger.

JULIAN WALKER
SAIFCHARTER CHAIRMAN
Make your SAIFCharter declaration at saifcharter.co.uk

As we add members’ website functionality, the latest feature is the ability to electronically sign your annual SAIFCharter declaration, saving you another stamp.

You can only do this by paying your SAIF membership fees, although by next year SAIF plans to enable you to pay online and the two transactions will be available in one visit.

Of course, we need to validate the declaration, so it is only available in the secure members’ area.

To log in for the first time:

■ Go to the site and click ‘login’ at the top right of the page

■ Click ‘create new account’

■ Enter the same username and password you use to log in to mygoldencharter.co.uk website

■ Have your membership number on hand for the set up process.

From then on, you can log in at any time with your mygoldencharter.co.uk username and password. In case of any issues, contact fieldsupport@goldencharter.co.uk

What is your view on funeral planning?

Funeral planning is an essential part of our business. Sales nationally are growing at an ever increasing rate, and we believe this can only be a good thing for both the business and consumer, allowing families peace of mind coupled with financial protection against rising funeral costs. We feel it gets people talking about their wishes and end-of-life plans, which we feel can alleviate the financial and emotional stress.

What are your goals for funeral plans volumes?

We believe it is essential to keep a close eye on all aspects of our business. However, we must stress that we don’t set targets or goals in relation to volume. Our goal is it is always was: to treat every single person we encounter with the professionalism, care, dignity and respect that has served our company since 1921.

Why do you think your company has excelled in funeral planning?

Firstly to remain an independent family-owned business, but we believe being involved with an independently regulated, reputable funeral planning service is essential. Many smaller funeral directors appear to be missing the benefits of Golden Charter membership and are maybe not considering the long-term benefits to both their clients and their business.

What difference did your win make?

The award was well documented in the local media, and on all of our digital platforms, and when it was featured we noticed a change in funeral plan enquiries.

How do you envisage the planning market looking in five years time?

We believe the industry will continue to grow as it has throughout the last few years. Recent SunLife research showed that in the last year 12% of funerals were covered by a plan, which can only be a good thing. Sadly, we believe that it will only be a matter of time before unscrupulous companies start to emerge and may cause damage to the industry’s reputation.

How has Golden Charter assisted you?

Since our joining with Golden Charter it has worked incredibly hard in assisting us in our development as a funeral plan provider. Anthony Parkinson and Drew McLelister have been a constant source of support, and we would like to thank them for all their hard work and dedication in looking after our company.

What is your vision for your company in the future?

Firstly to remain an independent family-owned and operated funeral business. Brian Halliwel M.B.E Dip FD brought the company up from one funeral home to 10, and is well known for saying that if you stand still you will go backwards. R Banks & Son will continue to strive to ensure that we are the best we can be, through maintaining our reputation and standards of service to our clients, and continually evolving and developing to ensure we meet the demands and needs of an ever-changing industry.
Concern over clinical waste

SAIF Quality Assessors have been doing a sterling job during the course of this year’s inspections, helping to ensure our member premises comply with criteria. But disappointingly, results show that of the failings, clinical waste seems to be high on the list. A majority of funeral homes will have clinical waste and you should therefore employ the services of a registered contractor to remove the waste. Any transportation of clinical waste, unless in a registered vehicle is against the law, so please don’t put the waste in your car and take it to the local mortuary or hospital for disposal. Engage the services of a suitable contractor to collect it.

Keep your safety data sheet safe

Law dictates that each business should have a COSHH register/inventory. It sounds daunting but is really isn’t. All you have to do is get an A4 folder, determine which hazardous substances requires a COSHH sheet – this could simply be washing-up liquid or toilet cleaner – and Google a COSHH sheet for that particular item. The COSHH sheet, which is very often called a safety data sheet, is simply that, a list of what is contained in the product. An easily accessible folder with all this information is all that is needed. Having the details filed and saved on your computer is not acceptable; the idea is to have the safety data sheet readily available to hand.

The waste of cancelled inspection appointments

Most doctors’ surgeries now highlight each month how many appointments have been ‘wasted’ by non-attendance or cancelled at the last minute. So, just like the surgery, we wish to point out that a little over 20% of inspection appointments made were cancelled at the last minute or not convenient at the pre-booked time.

SAIF chooses to advise members in advance of an inspection, but is disappointed when there are cancellations. We can’t emphasise enough that SAIF is about quality and all members are aware that they must meet certain criteria, and premises are required to be inspected regularly. We fully appreciate the need for small independent businesses to be mindful of their time per chance of a funeral being booked, and of course if they have limited staff. That is all perfectly understandable, but please stop and think – don’t cancel unless it is absolutely necessary.

Cancelling an appointment can ruin that day’s inspections and cause the inspector to return at a later date at more expense, particularly if you are the only member in that area. The inspectors are all very aware of Independents’ needs and really do try to help, so please help us too.

Thank you.

TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK

Keep when it’s time to say no... or the consequences could be devastating

Another concern this year is for you the manager, the funeral arranger, the funeral director, the funeral administrator and any staff working within the funeral profession! It was brought to our attention that, very often, staff would finish their day by going to the pub, for what used to be called early doors, to have just a beer or two to help them to relax after a distressing or upsetting day.

Seemingly, that one or two could very often be three or four or more, and the after-effects would still be in your system the following day.

If you have an early-morning funeral to attend to and are required to drive the limousine or hearse, would you be completely over the effects of the night before?

It isn’t only driving that needs to be taken into consideration – any amount of alcohol affects your judgement and can affect your co-ordination, reactions and vision, as well as the obvious upset to any clients or colleagues who can smell alcohol on you.

If you fail a roadside breath test and are found guilty of drink-driving, you may get six months imprisonment, an unlimited fine and a driving ban for at least 12 months. This would negate your insurance. You would gain a criminal record and being dismissed would be an almost certain outcome.

SAIF has a professional helpline specifically set up to help managers and their staff should they be feeling stressed or in need of a counselling service.

You may only need to use the service once but it is there to help you.

You can reach SAIFSupport by calling 0800 077 8578 or emailing help@saifsupport.org.

Know when it’s time to say no... or the consequences could be devastating
In my day-to-day role I visit many companies, looking at the premises and how the organisation works safely. Part of this is to look at risk assessments, and you might not be surprised that the standards of some fall well below what is acceptable. As I see it the regulations are quite clear. An employer should look at what can go wrong – then assess the significant risks that they find.

So, do we need to concentrate on risk assessments for coffins being stored upright or lying flat when our bearers are struggling under the weight of coffins because of the increasingly obese society we hear we are living in? Should we be concerned about assessing the risk from furniture polish, when there’s infectious material coming into our workplace every day?

No, we shouldn’t. We should be looking at what is going to do us the greater harm and then putting something in place to make sure we aren’t affected by it.

This is what can happen when the lines become blurred between levels of risks, and much of the blame needs to be levelled at health and safety ‘professionals’ when they get involved. What we need is a little pragmatism in all of this. Maybe we need to take account of our own levels of risk-taking for example.

So, what does Lewis Hamilton have to do with all this?

You might be a fan of Formula 1 like myself and if you are, you may already be aware that many Formula 1 drivers and some of the teams are lobbying for a new device developed by Mercedes, named the ‘halo’, to be fitted over the front of car cockpits. The halo is designed to shield drivers from pieces of flying debris, but opinions are divided; Lewis Hamilton was quoted as saying it should be optional and that he prefers to take the risk. Others say it should be in place regardless.

There is a disparity between apparent personal freedoms in the workplace, the ability to accept some risk and the feeling of being stifled ‘because of health and safety’.

This contrast can lead to risk-averse decisions of the sort branded in recent years by the Health and Safety Executive and referred to in shorthand as “conkers bonkers” – a reference to the myth that a head teacher asked his students to wear eye protection when playing conkers in the playground.

I would much rather everyone celebrated how much safer workplaces in the UK have become in recent years. But with accidents becoming more and more infrequent, what will happen instead is that we will get a feeling of interference from health and safety professionals in the way that people wish to behave in their own space.

The role of health and safety professionals is to help their colleagues and organisations manage risk more effectively. But there should be a limit; we don’t want handrails along all the footpaths across our countryside, just in case walkers stumble. It must be recognised that there is a crucial distinction between the workplace, where an employer has deliberately brought people together to work, and the public domain, in which people make personal choices.

**Things sometimes just happen**

The challenge is to bring in a more realistic approach to assessing risk, where an acceptance by all that minor accidents do happen, despite our best efforts. Because that’s what happens in life, things sometimes just happen. If decisions are informed, our personal health and our personal safety can only benefit in the end.

**Help is at Hand**

- If you would like to learn more about health and safety, as well as the legal obligations of employers, we’ve got you covered. Talk to Safety For Business free of charge, by calling 08456 344164.

**What have you got to lose?**
If your business doesn’t have an assigned Regional Sales Manager, speak to Golden Charter’s Business Development Managers (BDMs) about growing your business. Your local BDM can help you to identify your business requirements. To get in touch with the BDM for your area, use the contact details on the map above.

YOUR RSMS

The map shows the numbered regions that our Regional Sales Managers (RSMs) cover. See the RSM below for your region and their contact details. You can get in touch with your RSM regarding anything you need to know about Golden Charter.

YOUR BDMS

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People are searching online for great independent funeral directors.

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No monthly fees.

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