

life

Issue 6 | Spring 2019

in the community with  Funeral Partners

Yorkshire Dales business
joins Funeral Partners

PAGE 5

In this issue...

Caring community
converts cards to cash

PAGE 3

Remembrance
time capsule

PAGE 3

Piper marks rededication
of funeral home

PAGE 16





Sam Kershaw

Chief Executive Officer

Sam Kershaw took over as Chief Executive Officer of Funeral Partners in January 2018, having joined the business in 2016 as Chief Operating Officer. Sam has over 35 years' experience in the funeral profession, having worked his way up from Trainee Funeral Director to senior management.

"2018 was a very successful year with 13 high-quality businesses across the country choosing to join our Funeral Partners family. We expect to attract a similar number of acquisitions in the current year.

I have enjoyed travelling from Scotland and North East England to our new Merseyside and East Midlands areas and to London and the Kent coast to meet the former owners and their teams who have chosen to become part of Funeral Partners.

Most of the former owners have built up their successful businesses and reputation over many years and all have earned the trust and respect of their local communities. As part of integrating them into Funeral Partners, we discuss what investment is required to secure their continued success and further development.

In 2018-19 we are investing £5 million in our existing and new businesses –

refurbishing funeral homes and their facilities to provide the best possible environment for the families we work with and our own teams, ensuring they have modern hearses and comfortable limousines, as well as introducing and upgrading the most efficient and effective IT systems.

In the past year we asked our teams what improvements they would most like to see and, in response, we are improving our computerised Funeral Management System and introducing a new HR system.

One improvement, led by our Chief Operating Officer Matthew Barber and Director of Central Operations Richard Van Nes, is our new system for responding to families' inquiries during evenings and weekends.

Providing a high-quality funeral service is a 24-hour operation. Our system improvements will ensure our on-call Funeral Arrangers and Directors will

have a tablet giving them access to all the information they need to ensure they can provide the best possible service to bereaved families.

Giving families quality care and choice is at the heart of everything we do. Hence, we continue to participate fully with the Competition and Markets Authority

“

Giving families quality care and choice is at the heart of everything we do.

(CMA)'s investigation into the UK funerals market, which recognises this can be a vulnerable time for families and seeks to ensure they receive high quality funeral services with a full understanding of the costs involved.

We believe the best way forward is for funeral businesses to be members of the trade associations, such as the National Association of Funeral Directors, of which we are a member. With their stringent codes of practice, they promote and ensure high standards and offer an effective means of regulating the industry.

After publishing its interim report, the CMA is carrying out a more in-depth investigation. We have urged them to look across the whole profession, including smaller independent funeral firms, to gain a rounded understanding of the market and the issues families face.

We share the same aims – placing bereaved families at the centre of what we do. This magazine contains many heart-warming examples of how our teams go the extra mile to support families and their local communities, I hope you enjoy reading about them.”



Sam Kershaw with Richard Lloyd whose business, Richard Lloyd Funeral Services of Woodley near Reading, joined the Funeral Partners family last year

Time capsule will help future generations to remember

Future generations will be able to remember the sacrifices of those who died in the conflicts of the 20th century, thanks to a time capsule established to mark the Centenary of the Armistice.

The idea came from Funeral Arranger Jacqui Williams of **Abbotsfield Funeral Directors** in Hereford, who collected memorabilia from local organisations, businesses, schools and care homes.

Jacqui explained: "Because 2018's Remembrance Sunday was such a significant one, and because of Hereford's long connections with the military, I wanted to do something to remember those who died serving their country.

"The community's response was amazing. I wanted contributors to add poignant reminders of present-day Hereford and its history as well as writing pieces of advice and memories. I have received so many fascinating documents and items."

In February, Jacqui presented the time capsule to Andy Taylor OBE DL, Rifles County Colonel of Herefordshire and curator of the Light Infantry Museum. The items are stored in a special casket decorated with images of Hereford provided by Funeral Partners' supplier JC Atkinson.

Col Taylor said the museum would take care of the time capsule for 50 years, with it due to be re-opened to mark the 150th anniversary of the Armistice, helping people to remember the First World War and other conflicts.

Items stored in the capsule include: Remembrance coverage by the

Hereford Times and Ross Gazette; BBC Hereford & Worcester's 100th anniversary of Armistice day breakfast show; pictures of Holmer School's poppy cascade; memorabilia from Hereford Football Club marking their historic 1972 FA Cup run; information from the Mayor Sue Boulter and about the Town Hall and painted stones and reflections from children at Hereford Cathedral School.



Jacqui Williams with the time capsule

Read about more Remembrance commemorations on page 15

Caring community converts cards to cash

The caring team at **Thomas Bragg & Sons Funeral Directors** in Solihull collected a staggering 30,000 Christmas cards for recycling to raise funds for St Giles Hospice.

The team quickly surpassed their 10,000 target as news of their collection spread through social media, posters, newsletters and even a man who stood up on a bus urging passengers to take their cards to Thomas Bragg's.

Thrilled Funeral Arranger Kayleigh Hughes explained: "After a successful Christmas Card collection of 5,112 cards from 2017, this time we aimed to receive 10,000 cards.

"We decided again that for every 2,000 cards we collected we would dedicate a new tree via The Woodland Trust. We have now dedicated a quarter of an acre of woodland at Uffmoor Wood."

Kayleigh thanked The Knowle Society, local businesses and churches for promoting their collection. She added: "We cannot thank the community enough for their support, the response has been amazing. We even had a volunteer who brought her children in after school to help count the cards to show them the importance of charity and how they could help."

Sally Insley, Community & Corporate Fundraising Manager, St. Giles Hospice, said: "It takes a community to make a hospice and this is a great example of people coming together to help raise funds for such a valuable cause - one person's trash certainly is another's treasure."



Kayleigh Hughes (second right) and Loraine Hawkes (second left) hand over the cards to St Giles Hospice

Funeral Partners continues to grow

Funeral Partners has welcomed three respected businesses to its family of funeral homes across the country.

Ian Brown Funeral Director of Carstairs becomes the third Funeral Partners business in Scotland with **Melia Powell Funeral Service** of Keighley and **Simon Barningham Funeral Directors** of Swaledale supporting growth in West and North Yorkshire.

Funeral Partners expects to welcome more new funeral businesses to its family over the

next few months. Chief Executive Officer Sam Kershaw said: "We are delighted to be working with these respected businesses and enhancing their enviable reputations for professionalism and service to their communities. We are committed to investing in and supporting these businesses while maintaining their heritage."

Melia Powell Funeral Service Community-focused West Yorkshire business

Keighley-based **Melia Powell Funeral Service** is looking forward to a bright future, building on its strong roots in the local community after becoming part of Funeral Partners.

Established by Brian Langford in 2013, the business has built a reputation for high quality care and service in Keighley and the neighbouring Bradford and Skipton areas.

Brian added his mother's maiden name 'Melia' to the business name to represent the strong family values and the care, compassion and sensitivity he was brought up with which he set out to bring to the funeral home.

He explained: "I worked closely with a variety of funeral directors during 31 years in the police service and I saw first-hand the important role they played. When I retired, I wanted to give something back to the community by providing the very best quality funeral care."

Brian recruited Paul Cook, who has trained and progressed to the role of Funeral Director. To give him more time for family and community, Brian has now reduced his hours to three days a week but continues to be involved in the business along with Paul.

Brian has strong roots in the Christian community of Keighley, serving as a church organist for 40 years, and Paul Cook is a Eucharistic Minister in the church. The business has also established strong relationships within the local Sikh and Hindu communities.

Brian said Funeral Partners offered a strong family ethos and shared the same values and community focus he had established. "Funeral Partners are passionate about the quality of the funeral care they provide and dedicated to enhancing the excellent service and reputation we have in Keighley.



The Melia Powell Funeral Service team, from left, Paul Cook, Rachel Wysocki, Brian Langford and Merv Pemberton.



"They are people focused and committed to maintaining the trust and confidence of our diverse community and further developing the business. I am confident Melia Powell Funeral Service will go from strength to strength."

Funeral Partners' Area Development Manager Keith Clegg welcomed the team and said: "Melia Powell has an excellent reputation for serving the diverse Keighley, Bradford and Skipton communities and makes a strong addition to our family of businesses."

Simon Barningham Funeral Directors Established Yorkshire Dales family business

Established family business **Simon Barningham Funeral Directors** has become part of Funeral Partners as it strengthens its presence in North Yorkshire.

Based in the Yorkshire Dales, where Simon Barningham has spent his whole life, the business has a long tradition of serving its rural and farming communities.

In 1961 Simon's uncle bought the established Swaledale funeral business Ernest Bagshaw. Simon joined straight from school and his father also worked for the company.

After his uncle died, Simon took over the business supported by his family and re-named it.

Simon said: "It's been such a way of life, I will continue to work with local families, but being part of Funeral Partners, I will have more support."

"I am amazed by the intimate and supportive family atmosphere of Funeral Partners, I feel very much at home with them. They will help to move the business forward in the same style."

Funeral Partners' Operational Support Manager Phil Barr said: "Simon Barningham Funeral Directors has established a strong reputation for providing high standards and personal service to the rural communities around Swaledale and Wensleydale."



Funeral Partners' Operational Support Manager Phil Barr (right) welcomes Simon Barningham



Ian Brown Funeral Director Serving Carstairs and Lanark for decades

Long established family business **Ian Brown Funeral Director** in Carstairs has become Funeral Partners' third funeral home in Scotland as it grows its presence north of the border.

With the retirement of Ian Brown Snr, who acquired the business in 1958, a new funeral director has been appointed as part of securing its long-term future and growth.

Funeral Director Shannon Maxwell-Doyle has been promoted from ML Williams of Ayr, also part of Funeral Partners. University of Glasgow graduate Shannon joined the funeral profession in 2017 after working in a number of caring roles with vulnerable people.

Shannon said: "It's a privilege and honour to join a business which has been run by the same family for 60 years. I've had fabulous support from the team and the community already. Everyone has been so welcoming and accepting."

Shannon is working with Ian Brown Jnr, who joined his father in the business from school over 40 years ago.

Ian Brown Snr originally acquired the business from Wm Gray & Sons as a traditional joiners and undertakers. In 1988 he decided to focus solely on funerals to ensure a professional, personal and value for money service to families. The business then became known as Ian Brown Funeral Directors.

Ian Brown Jnr said: "We are looking forward to the future with Funeral Partners. We all know the world is continually changing,



The team at Ian Brown Funeral Director, from left, Mark Evans, David Howitt, Linda Brown, Ian Brown, Shannon Maxwell-Doyle, Tom Duncan, James Stewart

from technology to new legislation. These all impact a family business too and take time and energy. I wanted to ensure that the personal care and service, which has been my father's focus, remains.

"Working with Funeral Partners allows me to concentrate solely on the funeral side of the business, the part of the job which means the most to me, allowing me to carry on my father's values."

Ian and Shannon will be supported by Funeral Director Assistants Tom Duncan, David Howitt, James Stewart and Mark Evans, with Ian's wife Linda continuing as a part-time Funeral Administrator.

Fraser Mackay, Funeral Partners' Operations Manager in Scotland said: "Shannon is a great addition to the team at Ian Browns. This is a high-quality funeral business serving the local communities."

Serving their community

In recent years, the funeral profession has seen many changes but the commitment of our Funeral Directors to caring for bereaved families remains central to their role.

Life in the community talks to three long-serving funeral directors about their work and what they enjoy most about their job.

Keith Ellis • 55 • Funeral Director • Dawe Brothers Funeral Directors • Hereford

When did you join the profession?

I joined Dawe Brothers over 20 years ago. Prior to that I worked in an NHS hospital as a shift porter and a moving and handling trainer. In that role I got to know the team from Dawe Brothers and they invited me to work with them, initially as a casual operative and I then joined permanently. I have worked my way through to become a Funeral Director and, most importantly, one of the Dawe Brothers' team.

What do you love about the job?

It is an absolute honour and a privilege that families let you into their lives at their lowest point and that you can do something to help them. It's humbling when I see families for whom I have previously arranged a funeral coming back to ask me to arrange a funeral for them again. I love being part of a team that provides this service and that every day I am learning from the team and the families we work with.

What is the most difficult part of your job?

Not having enough time. We try to spend as much time talking to families as they need but sometimes this isn't possible.

What community activities do you get involved in?

For nearly four years I ran our branch in Ross-on-Wye. We started supporting the Food Bank with Easter Egg collections and Christmas Selection Boxes. I'm a big kid at heart and I hated to think of children not having a



chocolate treat because their families couldn't afford one. In the first year we collected 135 eggs and it just grew and grew.

We negotiated with Sainsbury's in Ross-on-Wye to collect in store and ended up with 19 boxes of groceries and toiletries. It was marvellous being able to help families in this way. I have also been involved in organising events for the local hospice and raffles for nursing homes.

What are your future plans?

I returned to our Hereford branch in 2016, I am now a senior Funeral Director and Diary Manager. My wife and I both plan to retire in about five years' time, although I hope to still help out on a casual basis. We love going out for afternoon tea, shopping together, going to our caravan and walking. We don't have children but we hope to continue to spend time with our godchildren and nieces and nephews.

Sam Bryan • 61 • Funeral Director • Woking Funeral Service



When did you join the profession?

I was a late starter and joined the profession as a Funeral Operative when I was 46. After an earlier career in the Army, I had become a delivery manager but the job relocated and I wanted to stay local as my daughter was young. I saw the ad for Woking Funeral Service, went for an interview – and was asked if I'd like to help out that day at a couple of funerals as a pall bearer. It really was a hands-on interview! The rest, as they say, is history.

Why did you become a Funeral Director?

When Funeral Partners took over the business, I was given the opportunity to progress. I was taken under the wing of some experienced senior Funeral Directors and they helped me graduate into the Funeral Director's role.

What do you love about the job?

What makes me feel so humble is when a family member or loved one says how I've made a very unpalatable day much more bearable and they thank me for guiding and supporting them through a very difficult time. I'm local to Woking so a lot of people know me and I have an affinity with them without being intrusive when they come to say goodbye to a loved one.

How well known is your branch in the community?

Woking Funeral Service has an iconic 24-hour clock face on the front. When the clock was removed for a couple of months for restoration, commuters kept asking where it was as it helps them get the train on time.

What sort of activities do you get involved with?

At Woking Funeral Service, we do a lot to support the local community and I can often be found at the local fair by our limousine filled with balloons, so people can guess the number and win a prize. In my spare time, my wife Sue and I enjoy our culinary delights and spending time with our grandchildren. We also enjoy sports, horse racing and dog racing and particularly like travelling. I'm a great fan of England – even if people do slate the weather, but you can't have everything!

Stuart Drake • 54 • Funeral Director • Drakes of Torbay Funeral Service

Why did you become a Funeral Director?

My late father Jim and his brother Harry were Funeral Directors, running Drakes of Torbay – but I had absolutely no intention of becoming a Funeral Director. However, I was medically discharged as a qualified electrician from the Royal Air Force when I was 27 as I had diabetes, and my dad – who'd sold Drakes by that time – helped me set up Andrews of Torbay; that was in 1992.

So how did you end up back at Drakes?

Following various purchases, both Andrews and Drakes came under the same ownership and then became part of Funeral Partners. I came full circle, ending up back at Drakes in the premises that I helped my dad build, back in 1983.

What was it like running your own business at such a young age?

Back in those days you did everything – Funeral Director, bearer, looking after the deceased to even washing up the tea cups! It was a great way to learn.

What's changed in those 27 years?

There have been many changes. For example, you would have had a second car for flowers, whereas nowadays people leave donations. Before, you would have had a choice of three coffins; now you can choose from three brochures. Previously, you didn't have prepaid plans; now it's such a big part of our industry.

Will your children continue the family tradition?

No, my son – who's an excellent cricketer – is now a primary school teacher, whilst my daughter – who has just qualified with a degree in criminology and sociology – is working in Human Resources.

What's the best bit of your job?

People will often question how I can do such a job but really I was born into it. My mother was the first woman in the country to achieve the Diploma in Funeral Directing in 1981. My dad was always talking about it at the table. I'm now well known in the community as I've been doing this so long and many people knew my parents. It's a real privilege to be able to help people in their hour of need.



Community pinboard

Jamie's marathon supports bereaved families



Keen sportsman Jamie Groves is tackling his first marathon in April to raise funds for bereaved families.

Jamie, who is Acting Regional Development Director for Greater London – South, has already raised more than £1,000 for the charity Child Bereavement UK for taking part in the 26.2-mile Brighton Marathon.

He explained: "When I was a young teenager, I lost a cousin who was still a child. Losing a loved one is one of the hardest things anyone has to go through.

"Seeing bereaved families on a daily basis, I have witnessed on many occasions their stress and uncertainty. Completing a marathon is nothing compared with what someone goes through when they lose someone close to them."

As a former semi-professional footballer who now plays at amateur level, Jamie runs as part of his training and has tackled shorter distances and ten-mile runs. His home-town marathon on 14 April will be his first attempt at this distance and he is targeting a time of four hours.

To support Jamie's marathon effort, visit:
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jamie-groves1>

Braving the cold as sleepout raises funds for homeless

Caring members of **F Curtis and Son Funeral Directors** in Warminster, Wiltshire, braved a bitterly cold wind during a night sleeping out to raise funds for homeless people and the heating fund for their local church.

Funeral Director Damian Eyres and Funeral Arrangers Sarah Hughes and Vanessa Fry were joined by family members and the vicar of St John's Church, the Rev David Prescott, for their 12-hour stint.

Sarah explained: "Throughout December and January we collected blankets and bedding from our generous community to support homeless people.

"We thought spending a night getting some understanding of their life would be a great way to raise awareness of homelessness.

"It was certainly an eye-opener. It was quite a mild night although there was a bitterly cold wind. I didn't get much sleep and was counting down the minutes between the chimes of the church bell.

"At least we had a mug of warm soup from my mum to drink before trying to settle and, at the end, we got to go home to sleep in our warm beds."

The team have raised more than £600 to be divided between St John's Church's heating and roofing fund and Alabaré, a charity which supports homeless and vulnerable people.



Commended at Darcey's Dream Awards

Daren Persson Funeral Directors in Tyne & Wear has been commended at the annual Darcey's Dream Charity Ball and Awards.

The team was one of three shortlisted out of 22 nominated funeral homes for the most supportive Funeral Directors. Although they narrowly missed first place, they were commended.

The black-tie awards ceremony took place at the Crowne Plaza Newcastle and included an auction to raise money for Darcey's Dream, a charity which supports bereaved parents and siblings.

Heather McBeth, Daren Persson's Area Development Manager said: "I am so proud of our close-knit team, as to have been recognised by Darcey's Dream is such an achievement."



The F Curtis team prepare to sleepout, from left, Rev David Prescott, Ian Pearce, Les Fry, Vanessa Fry, Sarah Hughes, Damian Eyres

Cuddle Cot gifts time to grieving parents

A bereaved family, who very sadly lost their six-month-old baby, have raised funds to donate a Cuddle Cot to **Sterry Funeral Service** in Folkestone and Hythe, Kent.

Local couple India Gibson and partner Jamie Hayes suffered the loss of their son Toby while on holiday in Liverpool last year and originally started a fund to raise the £500 needed to bring him home.

Within three hours of the fundraising plea going live, donations of over £2,000 came in. India said: "The generosity of friends and family at such a difficult time was overwhelming. We were able to spend some precious extra time with Toby thanks to the use of a Cuddle Cot kindly lent to us by charity Cariatad Angel Gowns.

"It really helped with our grieving process and we wanted to use the extra money donated to us to gift Cuddle Cots to local funeral branches. Our wish is for other parents experiencing loss to have a chance to spend more time with their baby, give them love and make memories before saying goodbye."

The Cuddle Cot, which uses a cooling mechanism to maintain a baby's condition after they have died, was presented to Sterry Funeral Service on what would have been Toby's first birthday.

Funeral Director Clive Sterry said "We really appreciate this kind donation. When parents lose their baby, it is devastating, and our job is to give their child the best of care. By having our own Cuddle Cot we can offer local families the gift of extra time with their baby in our branches or in the comfort of their own home."



Clive Sterry(right) receives the cuddle cot from India and Jamie

Wedding window wins wonderful support



The wedding dress on display at Hemming and Peace

The team from **Hemming and Peace Funeral Services** in Alcester, Warwickshire, won the support of their local community with an eye-catching wedding dress window display.

They decided to support two non-profit organisations which turn wedding gowns into beautiful outfits for babies and children who have passed away.

After securing a donation of two dresses from Tessa Francis Bridal Studio of Alcester, their unexpected display captured so much attention that they collected a further 36 dresses from members of the public to donate to Heavenly Gowns and Dresses for Angels.

Funeral Arranger Emma Gibbons said: "Seeing a wedding dress on display in a funeral directors got people talking and, as I live in the town, some people were even stopping me when I wasn't at work.

"This is a cause close to my heart and it is a privilege and an honour to help families at such a difficult time.

"We even had someone who saw the dress in our window and asked if they could buy it for their own wedding, in return for a donation."

The team has also donated £100 between the two organisations to support their work to continue.

Grant's marathon cycle challenge

A Funeral Arranger from **Wythenshawe Funeral Services** cycled 144km in challenging conditions to raise funds for a local charity supporting heart patients.

Keen cyclist Grant Longden visited seven Funeral Partners funeral homes around Manchester, Stockport and Liverpool and hopes to have raised £250 for The Ticker Club at Wythenshawe Hospital.

Grant said: "It was a difficult challenge, made more challenging by the adverse weather. The more it rained, the colder I got. When the bad weather came, it was a case of digging in and getting it done.

"I had great support from Funeral Partners, my colleagues and the teams at all the branches. The next day I felt proud of what I'd accomplished."

Grant's seven-hour 'Tour de Partners', involving climbs of over 1,000m, started at Wythenshawe Funeral Services.

He visited GW Turner Funeral Directors, Edgeley; Raymond Massey & Son Funeral Directors, Dukinfield; Michael Kennedy Funeral Services, Blackley; Kavanagh & Coates Funeral Services, Heywood; Howard's Funeral Directors in Southport and Ainsdale and Graham J. Clegg Funeral Services in Maghull, Merseyside.



Grant and Jean Kerins are greeted by Gemma Kennedy (left) at Michael Kennedy Funeral Services

To find your local branch visit
www.funeralpartners.co.uk

Help for families to meet funeral costs

Choosing a loved one's send off is an important part of the grieving process – but what about those who can't afford the funeral costs?

Government support is available to help those on low incomes with a contribution to funeral costs when there is insufficient money available from the family or from their loved one's estate.

The Funeral Expenses Payment from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is available to those receiving certain means-tested benefits and tax credits including income support, universal credit and housing benefit.

It won't cover the whole funeral bill, but can help to pay for:

- death certificates or other documents
- cremation fees, including the cost of the doctor's certificate
- travel for arranging or going to the funeral

- cost of moving the deceased within the UK, if more than 50 miles
- burial fees for a particular plot
- Up to £700 contribution towards funeral expenses, such as funeral directors' fees, flowers and the coffin.

How much the person organising the funeral - who may be the partner, a close relative or a close friend of the person who has died - receives depends on their circumstances. If the deceased had a prepaid funeral plan, the maximum payment is £120 to help pay for items not covered by the plan.

The Funeral Expenses Payment will either be paid directly to the funeral director, or into the claimant's bank account if they have already paid. Claims can be made up to six months after the funeral. However, a Funeral Expenses Payment will have to be paid back from the deceased's estate, if sufficient funds are available.

In real terms, the support provided by the government is reducing as maximum payment amounts have remained frozen for the last

15 years. Funeral directors, including Funeral Partners, have been lobbying the government to address this funding shortfall for the poorest families.

In the year to May 2018, the government received more than 40,000 funeral payment applications but only paid out 25,697, totalling £37 million. The amounts paid out each year and the number of successful claims has been falling. Successful claimants received an average award of £1,427, covering around one third of their total costs.

Changes are planned in Scotland with the Scottish Government aiming to introduce Funeral Expense Assistance this year. The £700 maximum payment will be index-linked from next year and the benefits criteria will be widened to open the payment up to more people.

Making a claim can be confusing but the DWP has a Bereavement Service helpline available on 0800 731 0469 (weekdays) to allow families to check eligibility. Benefits claimants may also be eligible for a Budgeting Loan.

Funeral Partners trials Funeral Safe credit service

Recognising that some families struggle to pay the funeral bill, Funeral Partners is trialling offering credit facilities in four areas of the country.

George Meudell, Head of Change, explains: "We want to trial the offering of credit to families as a way to help them pay for our services, and as a benefit of using Funeral Partners."

Credit will be provided through a third party called Funeral Safe. Launched in 2016 by funeral industry and financial industry experts, Funeral Safe is a consumer credit company providing simple, accessible and affordable finance to cover funeral costs.

Funeral Safe is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and governed by an independent supervisory board.

Chief Executive Officer for Funeral Safe, Robin Hyde-Chambers, said: "We are excited to be working with Funeral Partners, the third largest funeral group across the UK and a company that reflects our own business ethos of responsible client care."

"As a responsible and tailored finance partner we hope to assist Funeral Partners clients in being able to have the funeral they both want and can afford and, in addition, removing the huge stress that financial pressures can place upon the bereaved."

The trial started in February, with the service offered in the following areas:

- Yorkshire
- North West
- Berkshire
- New Forest, Dorset and Wiltshire

FUNERAL SAFE

Families requiring free impartial advice after losing a loved one can contact the National Bereavement Advice Helpline on 0808 164 2239

Lines are open Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, Saturday 9am - 2pm

Your Choice, your peace of mind

We all know there are a number of companies offering Prepaid Funeral Plans, all with varying options, prices and often lots of small print.

So how do you choose which company to entrust this very important personal decision with, and be confident your wishes and money will be safe and secure?

Whilst we can't speak for all these other companies we can tell you about the significant benefits of purchasing a **Choice Prepaid Funeral Plan**.

Our aim is always to help you plan in as much, or as little, detail as you wish. We don't have rigid plan types to choose from, instead we take a flexible approach, as we believe every funeral is unique and our experienced staff are always happy to advise and provide ideas and options.

- We have a large network of local funeral director branches throughout the UK, most of whom have been established for decades in their local community
- We are more than happy to discuss your plan in branch or we can visit you in the comfort of your own home which many of our customers prefer
- Our plan covers all the Funeral Director costs at today's prices so however much those costs go up over time, you secure and fix the price at the time of purchase
- Your invested funds are held independently with UK-based life assurance companies regulated by the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) so are completely secure
- You can express your wishes about any element of the service including transport, hymns and readings - all for safe keeping, so less worry for your loved ones during a difficult time
- Your personal wishes can be added to or amended at any time
- If you move house, your plan moves with you
- We are always here to offer support and advice to you and your family whether this is on the phone, in person, in the branch or via our independent free bereavement helpline.

As a business we pride ourselves on our services, so we try to keep the rules of our plans simple. There are no upper age limits, health screening and no financial credit checks and we offer a number of flexible ways to pay for your plan that include cash, cheque, credit card or monthly instalments calculated from 12 to 60 months to suit your budget.

We are members of NAFD, the National Association of Funeral Directors, the country's leading funeral trade association so you can be sure we adhere to strict regulations to protect you and your family.

We are always here to talk through options and pricing in more detail - we'd love to hear from you. Pop in to branch or call the Choice team on 01803 298 243 or email us at info@choiceplan.co.uk

What's your choice?

Life Magazine
Discount of £300 off
is available until
30 June 2019.

Quote: LIFE2019

Thank you Letters

Our teams regularly receive messages of thanks from families they have helped. Here is a recent selection.

HAVEN Funeral Services, Acton

The service provided by HAVEN was efficient and everything was clearly explained. The staff were pleasant, sympathetic and very helpful, and we were gently guided through every stage of organising my mother's funeral.

We felt that the staff, particularly Anna and Brian, went out of their way to make sure that everything was perfect for us beforehand and on the day. It felt like nothing was too much trouble for them and they absolutely took the stress away from us.

G

Howard's Funeral Directors, Southport

Thank you for helping me through such a difficult time. Having my husband repatriated to the UK was made easier by Chris at Howard's. He treated me and my husband in a caring and thoughtful way and kept me informed of my husband's journey to the UK from Cyprus.

I also must thank Derek, the funeral director, who managed most of the arrangements via email and phone until I was in the UK. The service at Southport crematorium was dignified and extremely well organised.

GJ

Roy Quinton Funeral Directors, Walsall

All the stress of arranging my aunt's funeral was taken away from me by the wonderful staff at Roy Quinton Funeral Directors. Every aspect was covered, even small things that I was likely to have overlooked. Flowers, orders of service, music, a wonderful minister, I was telephoned the day before the funeral to check the arrangements were all as I wanted.

The whole process was smooth and dignified, it allowed me to give my aunt a funeral with love and lovely memories.

GS

W Hodges Funeral Directors, Sevenoaks

The staff (Sophie and Sally) in the office were great, thoughtful and kind and guided me through the whole process. On the day of the funeral, there was a mix up with some of the mourners who went to the wrong venue and then one of their cars broke down! W Hodges were happy to dispatch the limo to collect them and bring them to the church and saved the day.

SJ

Exeter & District Funeral Service, Exeter

Excellent service from beginning to end. Very helpful at a difficult time. Organised everything and took all the pressure and stress away. Always on the end of the phone and able to answer any questions.

The funeral was beautifully organised and turned out to be a lovely day that was just as our father wanted. Special mentions to Lucy and David for their professional yet friendly manner.

Mrs F

Blackheath Funeral Service, London

We were very happy with the service provided, particularly from Jill who dealt with us and handled every process of the arrangements. She was kind and caring as well as helpful and efficient.

On the day of the funeral she attended the service and it was reassuring to see her presence there. Donna, the Manager, was first-class, led an excellent team and the entire day went extremely well.

P & A

Thomas Bragg & Sons Funeral Directors, Solihull

My family and I found Thomas Bragg & Sons to be professional, sympathetic but not patronising and the attention to detail on the day was second to none. Kayleigh in the Knowle office was exceptionally kind and understanding.

We can't thank Kayleigh and the team enough for helping us get through the most traumatic time of our lives to date and giving our father the best send-off we could have wished for.

BH

Daren Persson Funeral Services, North Shields

I had two funerals to arrange within a month. Everyone at Daren Persson was very empathetic and professional and ensured everything was taken care of. In particular, Kenny Wheatley was so supportive and caring, he made sure everything went as it should, which made a big difference at a very difficult time.

GB

John Blenkiron & Sons Funeral Directors, Richmond

John Blenkiron and Sons provided an excellent service on the death of my uncle. Carl Tate, in particular, was very supportive and made the necessary arrangements with both great efficiency and sensitivity. The funeral service itself went very smoothly and my uncle was sent off with great dignity.

JC

Earl & Co Funeral Directors, Ashford

Cannot thank the staff at Earl and Co enough for all their help and advice at such a traumatic time. The funeral for my elderly mother was the first funeral I have ever had to arrange and the help, support and advice was fantastic. The staff were very patient in answering all of my questions that were playing on my mind.

We also managed a few giggles through my tears which made the whole process easier for me to deal with and made some of the sadness easier for me to cope with.

C

First NAFD-approved tutor for Funeral Partners

Ian Reynolds, Standards and Compliance Auditor, has qualified as Funeral Partners' first National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)-approved tutor.

After two years studying, Ian recently graduated with the Certificate in Education and Training from Birmingham City University.

Going back to studying was a tough challenge for Ian, who said: "I travelled up to the NAFD National Office in Solihull regularly and completed my assignments and assessments in my own time."

"Funeral Partners have supported me and I'm now tutoring three colleagues in the Diploma in Funeral Arranging and Administration and spending a significant amount of time developing the course to NAFD requirements."

Delia Fletcher, Learning and Development Manager, said: "Funeral Partners is proud of Ian's commitment and achievements. He is now qualified to support our colleagues to develop their skills and knowledge and gain an industry-recognised qualification."



Online donation and tribute service for families

Families have the opportunity to share memories and tributes online as well as making charitable donations and providing funeral information through a free personalised service offered by Funeral Partners.

The online funeral notice, tribute and donations service is provided in partnership with bereavement charity **MuchLoved**.

The service provides three important elements:

- allows families to create their own online funeral notice and communicate it to friends and family
- friends and family can share photos, videos, memories, and tributes including lighting a 'virtual' candle, helping those unable to attend the funeral to contribute condolences and view others' posts
- an efficient way of donating to the family's chosen charity, with the benefit of integrated Gift Aid processing.

Once the online site is set up for the family by their Funeral Director, full control of the pages is handed over to one or more nominated Tribute Guardians, usually close relatives or friends. It is quick and simple to set up and use.

Family members share the link with friends and relatives, and keep the pages updated as funeral arrangements are confirmed. A link is also available on the Funeral Directors' website.

Friends and relatives can make online donations to the chosen charity.

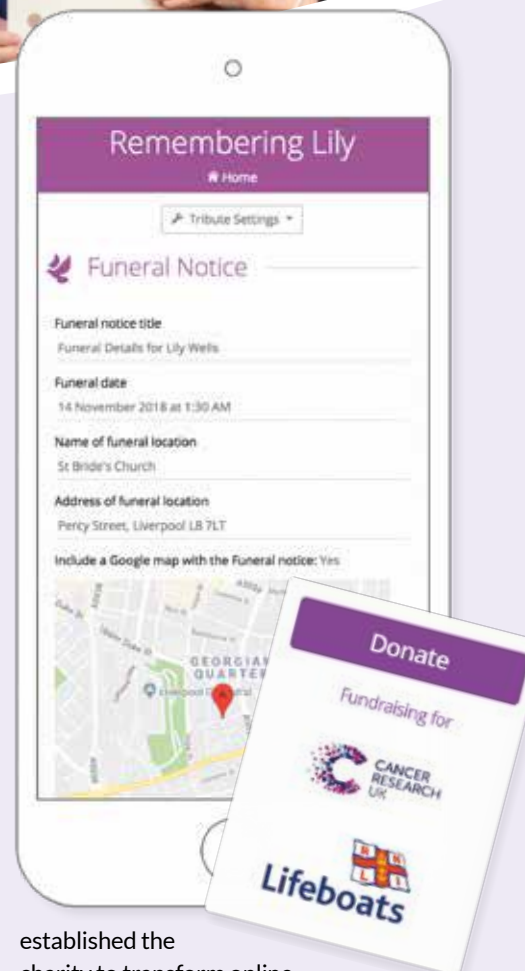
Much Loved's charitable status means administration fees are lower than those of commercial fundraising platforms.

Funeral Director Robin Taylor-Jones of John Nodes Funeral Service in London said around 40 per cent of families they work with take advantage of the free service, which saves them having to phone everyone with funeral details or put a notice in a local newspaper.

"This service increases the personal choice available to families, enabling them to personalise the memories they share of their loved one"

"When we see the tributes and people have 'lit candles' and made donations, it is touching and gives us the satisfaction that we are providing families with something to help them with the grieving process," Robin said.

Much Loved was founded by Jonathan Davies 20 years ago following the deaths of his brother and mother. He found limited online resources available and



established the charity to transform online memorialisation. The service has hosted sites for more than 300,000 people, raising over £35 million for charitable causes.

Kelly Hailou, Head of Marketing at Funeral Partners explained: "This service increases the personal choice available to families, enabling them to personalise the memories they share of their loved one."

"It is particularly helpful when families and friends are widely dispersed – those unable to attend can feel part of the send-off. The ability to collect donations online is greatly appreciated by families, really helping them to support their chosen charitable causes."

Restoring Polish pilot's headstone

The headstone on a heroic Battle of Britain pilot's grave has been restored – thanks to support from **HAVEN Funeral Services** and stonemason Made On Earth.

Polish Wing Commander Walerian Żak, who received the Distinguished Flying Cross, died in 1969 and is buried with his wife Jeanne in Northwood Cemetery. Their eroded marble headstone has been extensively restored, free of charge, to recognise Żak's service to Britain.

Recently retired HAVEN Funeral Services Northwood Branch Manager Karen Petersen explained: "The Polish Air Force Memorial Committee approached us and, after discussing this with our head office



Karen Petersen and Brian Hartland at RAF Northolt

and our monumental stonemason and sculptor Francis Sancisi, we agreed to waive the £1,200 cost".

In gratitude, the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee awarded HAVEN and Made On Earth one of its coveted commendations.

Karen was invited to the 100-year anniversary service at the Polish War Memorial followed by lunch in the Officers Mess at RAF Northolt where she was presented with the Commendation.

She was also invited airside to see a Spitfire which had been flown in, which was the plane flown by the Chairman of the Memorial Committee's own father.

Walerian Żak arrived in England in 1940 and flew Hurricanes from Northolt. During the Battle of Britain he shot down two enemy aircraft. Żak was shot down in September 1940 and seriously injured but returned to operational flying and went on to command 308 (Polish) City of Cracow Squadron and also commanded Nos 3 and 133 (Polish) Wings.

Proud and poignant memories of the Unknown Warrior

John Nodes Funeral Service of North Kensington was run as a family business for six generations before becoming one of Funeral Partners' longest established businesses. Life in the community researched a poignant moment in its history.

Horace Kirtley Nodes, the fourth generation of his family to enter the funeral profession, was the National President of the British Undertakers Association when it was asked by the Government, in the last week of October 1920, to make the casket for the Unknown Warrior.

Kirtley Nodes proposed that the Association, forerunner of the National Association of Funeral Directors, should gift the casket to the nation.

Members were asked to contribute one shilling (5p) per head to the appeal.



It was Army Chaplain, Rev David Railton's, suggestion that an unidentified fallen soldier should be transported from Flanders and buried in Westminster Abbey to represent all those who died on the First World War battlefields whose bodies were never identified.

After the initial meeting with HM Office of Works the casket, to be designed like a 16th century treasure chest with wrought-iron handles, was completed in just over a week and transported to Westminster Abbey in John Nodes' Rolls Royce hearse.

The next day, it was loaded onto the train to Boulogne, accompanied by Kirtley Nodes and John Sowerbutts, Secretary of the London Centre of the Association.

In Boulogne, the body of the Unknown Warrior was placed in the casket and was transferred with pomp and ceremony to the Royal Navy destroyer HMS Verdun. It was accompanied by six British destroyers and four French cruisers as it left France.

At Dover Harbour, bands played Land of Hope and Glory as the casket was carried ashore and crowds lined every station, crossing, and bridge as the train took it to London.

Kirtley Nodes received a letter of thanks from Sir Lionel Earle of HM Office of Works, which stated; "On all sides I have heard nothing but praise for the admirable way in which the duties entrusted to you were carried out."

Area Development Manager Hayley Carney said former owner Michael Nodes was "immensely proud" of the family connection with the Unknown Warrior.

"He was passionate about serving the community and about the family's long tradition of military service. That connection with the community remains at the heart of John Nodes Funeral Service."

Funeral homes re-dedicated after investment in branch improvements

Four funeral homes invited members of their communities to services in their refreshed and refurbished branches after investment from **Funeral Partners**.



Mayor unveils Thomas Bragg & Sons' fresh look

Mayor of Solihull, Councillor Mrs Flo Nash and Mr Alan Nash unveiled the commemorative plaque at the newly refurbished **Thomas Bragg & Sons Funeral Directors** in Shirley, Solihull, which has been serving the community for 150 years.

Funeral Director Victoria Fallon and her team were joined by Reverend Paul Day, who formally re-dedicated the funeral home along with Reverend Gerado Fabrizio and Civil Celebrant Suzi Lauder, who sang with Funeral Arranger Kayleigh Hughes.

Former owners Malcolm and Maureen Bragg attended the service, which concluded with the release of two doves and prayers in memory of those who have passed away.



Funeral business celebrates reopening

The team from **Richard Lloyd Funeral Service**, Woodley, Reading, formally rededicated their Chapel of Rest and funeral home following a major refurbishment.

Funeral Director Karen Carter and her team were joined by the Mayor of Woodley, Councillor Sam Rahmouni, who officially re-opened the funeral home. Karen said: "We are very proud of our new modern facility."

Rev David Webster blessed the Chapel of Rest and guests enjoyed music from a Scottish piper and an impressive cake in the shape of the funeral home.

Former owner Richard Lloyd, who remains involved with the business, attended and said: "I am delighted to see the extent to which Funeral Partners have been able to revitalise the funeral home, while retaining its welcoming feeling."

Brass band celebrates branch's transformation

The team from **Douglas Mercer & Son Funeral Directors**, St-Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, has celebrated the funeral home's complete refit.

All areas have been refreshed including new flooring, repainting and converting the two smaller Chapels of Rest into one, more spacious, room.

Mayor of Hastings Councillor Nigel Sinden unveiled a commemorative plaque and formally opened the new Silverhill Chapel, which was blessed by Rev Charlie Hill and Father Eamon Monson. Civil Celebrant Jonathan Mendenhall led the service.

Members of the community enjoyed music performed by the Salvation Army's Brass Band. One of the former owners, Keith Martin, attended and said: "I am truly thrilled with how the home looks following the refit, retaining the welcoming feeling that it had, while giving it a new lease of life, ready to continue serving the local community for many more years to come."



Mayor supports historic funeral home re-dedication

Mayor of Brent, Councillor Arshad Mahmood, cut the ribbon as the team from **John Nodes Funeral Service** in Cricklewood, North London, re-dedicated its two Chapels of Rest and historic funeral home.

The Chapels of Rest were blessed by Father Paul Teece of St Mary of the Angels Catholic Church in Bayswater.

Trainee Funeral Director Maria Garofalo organised the event and helped to redecorate the funeral home. Area Development Manager Hayley Carney said: "Maria and the team are continuing John Nodes' 190 year-tradition of serving its local community, while ensuring our Cricklewood funeral home feels modern, welcoming and peaceful."

