

The Evolution of the British Funeral Industry in the 20th Century

From Undertaker to
Funeral Director

Brian Parsons



EMERALD STUDIES IN DEATH AND CULTURE



THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH FUNERAL INDUSTRY IN THE 20TH CENTURY: FROM UNDERTAKER TO FUNERAL DIRECTOR

EMERALD STUDIES IN DEATH AND CULTURE

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FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

BRIAN PARSONS



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Abbreviations

Publications:

<i>BMJ</i>	<i>British Medical Journal</i>
<i>FSJ</i>	<i>Funeral Service Journal</i>
<i>TUJ</i>	<i>The Undertakers' Journal</i>
<i>TUFDJ</i>	<i>The Undertakers' and Funeral Directors' Journal</i>
<i>BUA Monthly</i>	<i>British Undertakers' Association Monthly</i>
<i>TNFD</i>	<i>The National Funeral Director</i>
<i>TFD</i>	<i>The Funeral Director (Monthly)</i>

Trade Associations:

BES	British Embalmers' Society
BFWA	British Funeral Workers' Association
BIFD	British Institute of Funeral Directors
BIE	British Institute of Embalmers
BIU	British Institute of Undertakers
BUA	British Undertakers' Association
IBCA	Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration
FBCA	Federation of British Cremation Authorities/Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities
ICCM	Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management
LAFD	London Association of Funeral Directors
NACCS	National Association of Cemetery (and Crematorium) Superintendents

xii Abbreviations

NAFD	National Association of Funeral Directors
NCDD	National Council for the Disposition of the Dead
SAIF	National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors

Others:

MMC	Monopolies and Mergers Commission
OFT	Office of Fair Trading
SCI	Service Corporation International

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Preface

In 1963, Robert Habenstein and William Lamers published *The History of American Funeral Directing*. Now in its sixth edition, the volume traces the origins of funeral service in the United States from the Egyptians to contemporary times. The subject has since been brought even further up-to-date by Gary Laderman's *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*. This side of the Atlantic, those wishing to investigate a similar period of history need only refer to Julian Litten's authoritative work *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450*. His survey, however, concludes towards the end of the nineteenth century. The intention of this book is to start at this point by providing a comprehensive account of how funeral service developed in Britain during the following 110 years. In a period that has seen a shift from burial to cremation, the replacement of the horse-drawn hearse by motor vehicles, the introduction of embalming and the growth of large funeral firms operating on a centralised basis, there has also been an increasing preference by the industry for the description 'undertaker' to be replaced with 'funeral director'. Endorsing the desire to be perceived as a professional, this new term reflects the increase in responsibility and complexity of funerals acquired during the twentieth century.

This book draws together research I have carried out over the last 20 years. Some material was presented in 1997 to the University of Westminster as a thesis entitled 'Change and Development in the British Funeral Industry, with Special Reference to the Period 1960–1990'. Teaching on the foundation degree in Funeral Service at the University of Bath prompted the revision of the original along with new material, a move greatly assisted by unlimited access to the *Undertakers' Journal/Funeral Service Journal* and the *BUA Monthly/National Funeral Director/Funeral Director Monthly*.

The development of the British funeral industry is a vast subject. It is hoped that this first text on the subject will provide a good starting point for anyone wishing to become acquainted with a fascinating but largely unexplored part of our social and industrial history.

Brian Parsons