



IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH  
AT ANY TIME OF THE DAY  
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ISSUE FIFTEEN | SUMMER 2007  
**NEWS**

# Welcome to your newsletter

Welcome to the fifteenth edition of Eric F. Box News, the newsletter compiled by some of the country's leading experts from the UK funeral industry. In this edition we take a look at birth and death rates in England and Wales as we overview what's happened to the mortality rate over the decades.

We also have a new industry feature and, this time, look at exhumation. There is also our regular slot on 'Burials through time' and, over the coming months, we will be looking at the history of cremation as well as Royal funerals, starting in this edition with the Queen Mother's.

We hope you enjoy reading this Summer newsletter and if we can assist you in any way, please contact us. Remember, if you have any questions or subjects you would like us to include in future editions, please let us know.

*Edward*  
*Andie* Richard

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## IT PAYS TO BE FEMALE !

The debate about which is the stronger sex will burn eternally! However, if you want a few tangible answers, then a look at birth and death statistics makes interesting reading.

In 2006 there were 502,599 deaths registered in England and Wales, of which 240,889 were male and 261,710 female.

The provisional age-standardised death rates for males and females were 7,111 and 4,997 deaths per million population, respectively, representing a fall on the previous year of 3.4% for males and 3.7% for females. But, if you travel back in time, the picture was very different.

Over the course of the 20th century there have been fairly steady falls in the death rate. For example the rate for males fell from 25,829 per million population in 1901 to 8,477 in 2000 – a 67% improvement within 99 years – whilst the rate for females fell from 21,705 to 5,679 over the same period representing a move in the right direction of nearly 74%. So, over time, women DO appear to be living longer.

However, despite the benefits of an improved diet, better working conditions and more leisure time, there have been noticeable fluctuations

in the death rate over the decades, some of which can be blamed on cold winters, war and even influenza epidemics.



These variations were particularly noticeable during the first half of the century when it was estimated that the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 killed around 200,000 people in England and Wales.

And just a few years earlier at the start of the 20th century, it was reported that over half of all deaths occurred under the age of 45. Infant mortality (at ages under one year) accounted for 25% of deaths in 1901 although this had fallen to 4% by the middle of

the century and was less than 1% by 2006.

Childhood mortality has also declined, whereas deaths at age 75 and over are on the increase. At the start of the last century they accounted for 12% of all deaths but this rose to 39% in 1951 and 66% in 2006. Clearly the population of England and Wales is living longer and, whilst child mortality has fallen, deaths over the age of 75 are on the increase.

This could be blamed on colder winters, smaller pensions, or, perhaps, the fact that there are more elderly people alive in the UK than ever before.

One thing is for sure, women ARE living longer than men. In 2005 there were three times as many women as men aged 90 years over and, in case you are interested, the oldest lady in the UK is 111 years old and alive and well in Pudsey, Leeds!

Source:- <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>



# ROYAL BURIALS: QUEEN ELIZABETH I (1900 – 2002)

Queen Elizabeth I, the Queen Mother, knew she was going to die as far back as 1979. In fact she played a key role in planning her own funeral!

Royal funerals are such state occasions that it would be inconceivable for such events not to be planned ahead and, for 23 years prior to her death, the Queen Mother, her private staff and her daughter – the present Queen – were instrumental in mapping out the elder Royal's funeral, working throughout under the pseudonym 'Tay Bridge'!



In the event the Queen Mother died peacefully in her sleep in 2002 aged 101 years, and the Royal funeral took place in Westminster Abbey at 11.30am on Tuesday 9th April, 2002, the service being delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey.

However, the majesty of this high profile event had begun somewhat earlier. Around 200,000 people visited the Queen Mother in the nearby Palace of Westminster to pay their final respects as she lay in state days before the funeral service.

On the day of her funeral the coffin left Westminster Hall at 11.18 am and passed through Parliament Square, en route to Westminster Abbey; thousands more people lined the streets to say their final farewells.

At the Abbey more than 2,000 people attended the service and mourners included politicians, church officials, Royal workers and key members of the armed forces. The service was preceded by 101 chimes from the tenor bell, marking each year of the Queen Mother's life. At the same time a two minute silence was held across Britain at 11.30am

On the evening of Tuesday 9th April, the Queen Mother was laid to rest next to her beloved husband King George VI who had died 50 years earlier and was buried in the King George VI Memorial Chapel. The cremated remains of Princess Margaret were also interred in the Memorial Chapel at the same time.

# BURIALS THROUGH TIME – POST MEDIEVAL

In the year 1485 Henry VII came to the throne marking the beginning of the post-medieval period.

However, the study of burial rites during this time has been limited and is, therefore, poorly understood.

But, what we do know, is that there was a crypt culture and that there were some established 'patterns' followed by people in this era including the 'stacking' of coffins on their ends and, sometimes, in precarious positions!

The post-medieval period also saw a change in how gravestones were used. Images moved away from dark icons such as winged skulls to more contemporary icons such as cherubs.



This move from death images to classic icons not only signified a change in fashion, but also represented a growing unease with the process of physical decay – a way of thinking which has remained with society through to the modern day.

# INDUSTRY FOCUS – EXHUMATION

Exhumation is the process of digging up a body in its current resting state. It is sometimes referred to as disinterment and, under normal circumstances, would be considered sacrilege although there are circumstances where it is permitted.

One such occasion is if a person is deemed to have died in suspicious circumstances. Where this has happened an official organisation, such as the police, will get permission to dig up the body as part of their investigation into the cause of death.

A less controversial reason for exhumation may be if a more 'suitable'

resting place for the deceased has been sought by an interested party. And, in the past, bodies were sometimes exhumed for posthumous execution and even gibbeting when the body – invariably a criminal's – was publicly displayed in order to discourage other people from the path of wrong doing!

Historically a recent example of widespread exhumation can be seen during the Holocaust. Workers at the Plaszow concentration camp in Poland were ordered to dig up the bodies of Jews as part of the Nazi Party's attempt to cremate them so that there would be no evidence of Hitler's 'Final Solution'. Again, in a historical context, exhumation

has often been used to ascertain the cause of death of a historically relevant person which is why Tutankhamen's mummified body was exhumed in 2005. The process brought clarity to the work of historians and archaeologists.

On a more practical level, the widespread use of exhumation is sometimes used to make more room for the recently deceased in modern day cemeteries. Once buried, it is deemed socially acceptable to exhume them - after many years have passed - and move them to an Ossuary which can be a chest, building, well or site serving as a final resting place for human remains.

