

## Welcome to your newsletter

Welcome to the twenty-second 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 the effect the economic downturn is having on the funeral industry, as well as issues that sometimes arise between family members over a deceased's wishes, and how to handle such a situation.

Our new feature, 'Iconic Funerals' which launched in Edition 21, features another great star - Freddie Mercury of the pop group Queen - who tragically lost his life to AIDS; whilst our regular 'Burials Through Time' feature explores the funeral tradition of the Vikings.

We also launch another new series this edition, which, over the coming months, will take a look at the work of the region's leading hospices. We hope you enjoy reading about the great work they do and learn something new about each of these wonderful centres of care.

Enjoy your read 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 Richard Anker*

In the event of a death at any time of the day or night, contact us at:

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## Credit Crunch Effects On Funeral Industry

Public opinion polls suggest that alongside debt collectors and supermarkets, people think the funeral industry is one of the most recession-proof sectors in the UK. But, this couldn't be farther from the truth, as the funeral industry often feels the effects of an economic downturn very early on with some families struggling to settle accounts.

### The cost of funerals is going up



An annual survey by insurers, AXA Sun Life Direct, indicates that, whilst salaries and spending are going down,

the cost of funerals is going up.

Manager, Edward Box said: "In the past people didn't always save as much as they wanted to simply because there wasn't the cash around. Ironically the same is true of people in 2009 but the reasons are different, debts are running high due to credit card spending / borrowings and, as a result, saving is often a lower priority.

"We don't like to think about the day when we lose somebody dear to us, so, when that day does arrive, a family member is often faced with a sudden, large expense that neither

they or the deceased had prepared for".

However, the tide appears to be turning.

As the credit crunch bites and the financial realities of daily life become increasingly apparent, many people have started to make preparations for their own death, to ensure surviving relatives are not left forking out any unexpected payments.

According to the AXA survey there has been a surge in the popularity of pre-paid funerals, with the number of new plans rising by 50%.

Edward added: "This is good, however, despite this change in attitude, there will still be families who undoubtedly struggle with the financial burden of losing a loved one.

### Cutting back

"Grieving families will always want to do their best for their loved one and arrange the best funeral they can afford. But, if times are tough and money is scarce, there are some simple measures that can be put in place to save cash."

For example, as part of a burial, relatives can opt for a temporary wooden grave marker and wait until things get better before purchasing a permanent memorial



which can be made from stone or granite.

Similarly, cheaper alternatives are available for cremated remains, including smaller keepsakes or urns made from materials to suit any price range.

Coffin covers are also becoming more popular, whereby a removable inner cardboard coffin is used for the actual cremation, but the outer wooden coffin is reused, dramatically reducing the cost to families.

Other cost saving initiatives might include cutting back on catering and floral tributes and, if people already have their own vehicles, they can avoid the cost of limousine hire.

Edward Box said, "It is also important that families are aware that many funeral directors will now ask for 50% of the funeral costs up front due to the credit crunch, however we do not agree with this practice as we believe that there is enough for the family to arrange without having to worry about the financial aspects as well."



## Spotlight on the Hospices: Introduction

Illness is something few of us ever want to contemplate but, in its mildest form, there's nothing that a few days in bed or a dose of antibiotics won't cure.

But, when that illness is extremely serious, terminal even, then the burden placed on a family is tremendous because most people are not geared up to dealing with what is, effectively, the complete breakdown of someone's health.

### Learning curve

Phil Hopkins, who helps edit this newsletter alongside the Box family, said: "My brother lost his daughter to a strain of cancer when she was less than a year old and it is hard

to articulate the effect it has on the wider family - truly devastating.

"You suddenly realise how little you know. Where do I go? What do I do? Who do I see? The learning curve goes into the stratosphere. The same, of course, happens with older people who may also become terminally ill."



And it is with experiences like Phil's in mind that we have been

prompted to turn the spotlight on the region's five hospices over the next few months - St Gemma's in Leeds, Martin House Children's Hospice in Boston Spa near Wetherby, Huddersfield's Kirkwood Hospice, the Sue Ryder Care-Wheatfields Hospice in Headingley, Leeds and Wakefield Hospice.

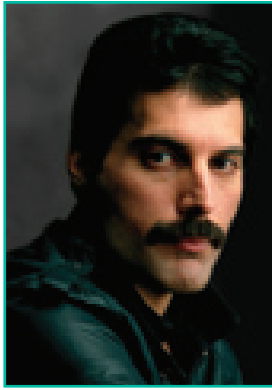
They do an incalculable amount of good work and we want to create a greater understanding of what they do and when, and to whom their facilities become made available. So look out for our future hospice editorials and, between us, we may all learn a little more about this very specialist area of care and bereavement.



## Iconic Funerals: FREDDIE MERCURY (1946-1991)

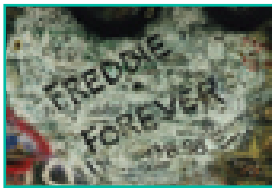
The contrast between his flamboyant stage appearances and small, low-key funeral could not have been greater - but that was how Freddie Mercury had planned it, in the weeks leading up to his funeral.

During his final months, he was cared for at his London home by close friends, including former girlfriend, Mary Austen and partner, Jim Hutton.



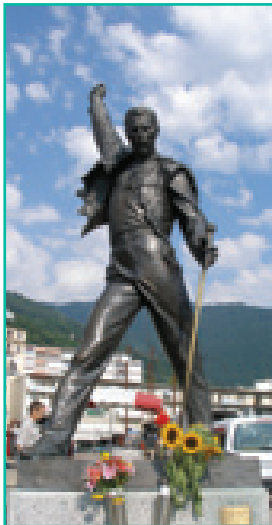
According to Hutton, Mercury was diagnosed with AIDS in 1987, but he didn't announce his affliction for four years, until the day before he died, stating "I felt it correct to keep this information private in order to protect the privacy of those around me."

Freddie Mercury tragically lost his battle with AIDS on November 24 1991, having caught pneumonia as a result of the disease.



The funeral, conducted by white-robed Zoroastrian priests (his family's ancient religion), was attended by around forty mourners. His family stood alongside some of the world's biggest stars including Freddie's Queen bandmates, Elton John, David Bowie and Dave Clark, who was with Mercury when he died.

Fewer than a dozen curious passersby stood by the crematorium entrance as the vintage black Rolls Royce carrying his coffin, drove in. In the months leading up to his death, Freddie Mercury's body had been ravaged by AIDS, which led to widespread



speculation in the press that he was gravely ill.

When he eventually died, his painfully thin body was placed inside a simple light tan coffin, with only a single red rose rested on top.

As mourners filed out after his body was cremated at West London crematorium, an operatic aria by Verdi was played. It was sung by Spanish soprano Montserrat Caballe - Freddie's duet partner in the dramatic song, 'Barcelona'.

Flowers sent from all over the world, covered a quarter of an acre. Afterwards, they were distributed to other AIDS sufferers in nearby hospitals and hospices. Wreaths were sent from stars not attending the funeral service, including Boy George, Ringo Starr and Gary Glitter, whose read "Sadly missed, never forgotten".

It is unknown where, exactly, Freddie Mercury's ashes were scattered or stored. Some claim they are in an urn in the possession of Mary Austen, who inherited the star's famous Logan Place house. Although after the cremation there was speculation that Mercury was taken back to Zanzibar, his birthplace, where he was born "Faroukh Bulsara" just 45 years earlier. Others say his ashes were scattered over one of Freddie's favourite places, Lake Geneva, where Queen owned a recording studio. A statue of the rockstar has since been erected at the site.

## Burials Through Time... The Vikings

The Vikings had a fearsome reputation as violent raiders and some would say that their funeral rites were no less horrifying than their reputation.



In Viking culture the 'level' of violence appeared to depend on the deceased's social standing. Chieftains for example, were often 'buried' on burning ships and one of the leader's thrall girls - a slave in Scandinavian culture - would voluntarily accompany her master in death. But, prior to cremation, she would have sexual intercourse with many men, each stating "I did this because of my love to your master".

The ritual was believed to give the thrall girl spiritual insight, enabling her to see into the next life and report back whether her master was at peace. This was achieved by lifting her into the air so that she could 'view' the afterlife through a doorway.

That done, the girl would have a rope put around her neck in preparation for sacrifice to her master and, as two men pulled the rope, an old woman, known as the 'Angel of Death' would stab the girl between her ribs with a knife. Men would beat on their shields so that the girl's screams could not be heard.

She would then be placed on a ship next to her master before relatives of the dead chieftain set it aflame. It is said that the fire facilitated the voyage to the realm of the dead.

Death was greatly feared in Viking culture, with worries that if the deceased was not buried and provided for properly, he might not find peace in the afterlife and would re-visit the bereaved as a revenant, someone returning from the dead.

The possibility of such a sight was deemed frightful and ominous and was usually interpreted to mean that additional family members were about to die. Drastic precautions were adopted to stop the deceased from finding its way back to the living by driving either a stake through the corpse or by cutting off its head.

## Family Feuds at Funerals

Nowadays modern funeral directing makes provision for people to pre-plan their funerals in a way they never could in the past.

However, this facility is not designed to promote some kind of macabre fascination with death amongst the living, but is a unique opportunity for individuals to not only state their wishes, but to prevent the possibility of family rows.

Although many adults write a will that states their intentions for their material assets when they die, few clarify how they want to be remembered, which can lead to many disagreements amongst relatives.

They have been known to disagree over funeral plans, from disposition of the body, to service format, religious references, flowers or music. Even if the deceased expressed a clear wish to be buried, disagreements can ensue over choices of casket, plot or cemetery location.

Mediator and author, Stephanie West Allen, suggests that although every family member shares a common goal to remember the deceased, each individual grieves in their own way and views the funeral service differently.

Therefore, agreeing why the funeral is taking place beforehand - whether for closure, a chance to say goodbye, to honour the deceased or enable people from different parts of the deceased's life to meet each other - can avoid many arguments.

If a dispute cannot be rectified, Stephanie suggests involving a mediator to consider all viewpoints, and to decide the fairest way to move forward. Unfortunately, many disagreements of this nature end up in court.

However, one thing is certain in disputed situations; the deceased probably would not have wanted their nearest and dearest to fight during such a difficult time.

## DUG BROTHERS - FUNERAL DIRECTORS

