

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CREMATION SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

PHAROS

INTERNATIONAL



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DEATH-CARE
COMMUNITY



SPRING 2025

VOLUME 91

ISSUE NUMBER 1

FOUNDED 1934



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Dear Reader

If you have not yet booked your delegate's place, I would encourage you to book – it is an excellent opportunity not only to be fully updated on the latest changes in the sector but also to build connections.

I am very pleased to bring you the first issue of *Pharos International* for 2025. We are delighted to include CBCE presentations from our international colleagues in Belgium and Germany, who were well-received at last year's CBCE conference. We are also featuring an article on 150 years of crematoria architecture by our Chair, Professor Hilary J Grainger OBE, which I am sure you will agree provides a fascinating insight into how crematoria design has developed over the years and the role The Cremation Society has played in that.

We are looking forward to welcoming delegates to Southampton for this year's CBCE and are busy working with our FBCA colleagues on providing a high-quality programme of key speakers. We are pleased that this will include representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Law Commission and the Regional Medical Examiner for the South – and with the reality of the statutory medical examiner system now being seen in practice, I know there will be many delegates who will want the opportunity to ask questions on this. We are delighted that, at the time of writing, our exhibition stands are almost entirely sold out. If you have not yet booked your delegate's place, I would encourage you to book – it is an excellent opportunity not only to be fully updated on the latest changes in the sector but also to build connections which I know are just as valuable for the future.

We are grateful to all those crematoria who have already returned their statistics questionnaires. We know that the statistics are used widely across government departments, planners, researchers, as well as extensively within the funeral sector. We are already being asked when the cremation numbers will be published so I would encourage you to return your forms as soon as possible, if you have not already done so. We are always open to feedback on how we can make the process as easy as possible for crematoria, so do let us know if we can adjust the process in any way.

Finally, in case you were not aware, this publication is available in an online format and if you would prefer to receive your copy in that way, please let us know and we can make that change for you.

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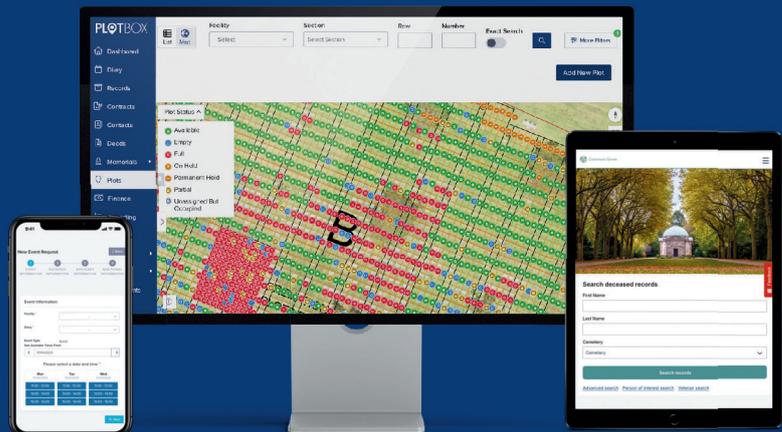
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Angus crematorium fight heading before Court of Session for second time

A new challenge has been mounted against Angus Council's decision to grant permission for the Duntrune development in August.

A fresh Court of Session challenge against Angus Council's approval for a new crematorium on the border with Dundee is being mounted.

It means the authority may have to defend its decision-making in Scotland's highest civil court for the second time.

And it could further delay farmer Guthrie Batchelor's hopes of starting work on the Duntrune facility in 2025.

A local objector is seeking a Statutory Review of Angus planning appeal committee's August green-light for the project.

It is the latest stage in the four-year controversy surrounding the rural site.

The Courier understands the same local objector is behind the latest Court of Session move.

In March this year, the court ruled a decision by planning review councillors to overturn a previous refusal by officials for the scheme was unlawful.

The authority was ordered to establish a new review committee to re-consider the application.

In August, it gave the Duntrune development the go-ahead for a second time.

Meanwhile, an application for another crematorium on farmland near Carmyllie was rejected by the Review Committee last month.

Road safety concerns were a key reason behind the refusal. But the knockback has led to claims of inconsistency in the Council's decision-making.

Ian Robertson, who was at the forefront of the campaign to stop the Duntrune development, believes the Council's reputation has been damaged by the handling of the two crematorium appeals.



Image: Kim Cessford/DC Thomson

Farmer Guthrie Batchelor at the Duntrune site which is now back at the centre of a Court of Session action

He wrote to Council Chief Executive Kathryn Lindsay asking her to refer the applications to the Scottish Government so they could be called in for scrutiny.

In response, Ms Lindsay said that since formal decision notices had been issued in each case, the Council had "no locus to reconsider either planning application".

She advised him: "Should you, or any other party, remain dissatisfied with a decision or decisions taken in relation to either planning proposal, you may consider seeking independent legal advice as to the avenues open to pursue these."

Mr Robertson said: "In my view, Angus Council is abusing its power by exploiting the fact there is no mechanism in Scotland to ensure planning appeals are determined in a consistent, fair and unbiased way."

Angus Council was asked for comment on the latest development in the Duntrune case.

**The Courier Evening Telegraph
December 2024**

Plans for new crematorium at Eastington off Bristol Road

Plans have been lodged for a ‘much-needed’ new crematorium near Stroud.

Proposals were submitted to Stroud District Council for the construction of a new crematorium building with memorial garden, associated access, car park, landscaping and natural burial ground at the site – land on the east side of Claypits, Eastington.

The group behind the scheme – Crematoria Management Limited (part of the Westerleigh group) – spoke to parish councils including at Eastington, Frampton, Whitminster as well as funeral directors serving the Stroud, Gloucester, South Gloucestershire and Cotswold districts before lodging the proposals on Thursday, November 7th.

The car park would consist of 126 parking spaces including overflow, electric vehicle, disabled and staff space while the site would be accessed via the A38/Bristol Road.

Planning documents – submitted on behalf of the applicant – argue that funeral directors ‘feel there is a compelling need’ for such proposals and that their service ‘plays a vital role in society’.

They also say that it would allow a large amount of Stroud district residents to have a crematorium within a 30 to 45 minute drive time.

The documents read: “The overwhelming view of

independent funeral directors is that there is a compelling need for additional capacity and that this additional capacity should be sited in Stroud district

“Principally Stroud district is currently serviced by three crematoria – Coney Hill, Gloucester to the north, Cheltenham even further north and Westerleigh to the south.

“The large populations of Stroud district are currently unserved, in terms of not having access to a crematorium within a reasonable 30 or 45-minute cortège drive time – this application site would rectify this.

“Crematoria are a key community-based asset and service and form a vital role in society.

“They are not a commodity which people can choose to forego if there is insufficient supply.

“The most appropriate location for a new crematorium is in the highly accessible location proposed by the applicant and this is also the view of local funeral directors.

“There is a compelling need for additional burial capacity, particularly natural burial space which the Stroud district is without.

“The application site, if approved will be able to provide families with this.”

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December 2024

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Ryedale’s first crematorium allowed after planning inspector upholds appeal

A developer has been allowed to build Ryedale’s first crematorium, after a planning inspector found its emissions wouldn’t interfere with research at a neighbouring science park.

North Yorkshire councillors rejected Westerleigh Group’s plan for the facility along with memorial gardens and parking beside the A64, at Sand Hutton, north of York, in October 2023, after hearing it could impact on studies undertaken at York Biotech Campus, including at the National Bee Unit. The meeting also heard funeral cortèges would “considerably impede traffic on the A64”.

However allowing the appeal, Inspector Matthew Woodward said emissions from the crematorium would be “generally much smaller” than from traffic on the A64.

He’d not been presented with any scientific evidence to indicate that the level of pollutant, even around the chimney stack, “would have a biologically detectable effect on bees so as to affect the validity of any research undertaken at the campus”.

There had been concerns over the junction on the A64.

Mr Woodward said it would be the closest facility for over 40,000 people in the Ryedale area and prevent family and friends having to travel long distances to other crematoriums in York, Scarborough and the East Riding.

Future demand “is forecast to significantly exceed 80 per cent at all three sites by 2033”, he said.

He said a cortège could safely negotiate the junction, with the help of a right turn filter lane, and the limited number of accidents nearby didn’t suggest there was a road safety issue.

He added: “Anecdotal evidence of traffic congestion during bank holidays and summer holiday periods has been referred to by interested parties. However, no cremations would take place on bank/public holidays or on weekends and the volume of traffic associated with visits to the memorial gardens would be limited”.

The Yorkshire Post

October 2024



New crematorium now open near Glasgow

A brand-new crematorium to the north east of Glasgow has officially opened its doors with the aim of providing exceptional care and support to local bereaved families.

Bishopbriggs Crematorium has been built by Westerleigh Group, one of the UK's largest independent owners and operators of crematoria and cemeteries, with 40 other sites across England, Scotland and Wales; all set within beautifully-landscaped gardens of remembrance which provide peaceful places for people to visit and reflect.

Bishopbriggs Crematorium is Westerleigh's fourth Scottish site, joining Borders Crematorium, Stirlingshire Crematorium and West Lothian Crematorium.

It is located mid-way between Bishopbriggs and Kirkintilloch and provides a peaceful and beautiful setting for families to mourn, commemorate and celebrate the lives of their loved ones.

Local people will be able to visit the new crematorium and its grounds on Saturday 1 February when it hosts its inaugural community open day, between 10am and 2pm.

Overlooked by Campsie Hills and surrounded by agricultural farmland, Bishopbriggs Crematorium is equipped with the latest technology and high-quality facilities.

The focal point is a modern, welcoming chapel which can seat 120 people, with significant additional standing room available.

There are 80 standard parking spaces, an overflow car park, seven accessible parking spaces, three taxi spaces and electric vehicle charging points.

Westerleigh Group has built its reputation on providing exceptional care in all that it does and working with the bereaved to create uniquely personal funerals for their loved ones.

Through its media partner Obitus, Bishopbriggs Crematorium offers an almost unlimited choice of music, whether it is a loved one's favourite song, sports club anthem or traditional hymn, and three high-resolution screens can display slideshow tributes and written words for extended personalisation of the service.

As with all Westerleigh Group's crematoria, the grounds, Garden of Remembrance and ash scattering area at Bishopbriggs Crematorium are carefully tended by a team of experts.

The first manager of Bishopbriggs Crematorium is Donnie Connor, who has been with Westerleigh Group since 2019, having previously worked long-term in social care.

He's no stranger to helping to establish a new crematorium within its local communities, having been the first manager of Westerleigh's Stirlingshire Crematorium when it opened in 2019.

He said: "I am proud to be the first manager of this exceptional crematorium, which is one of the most environmentally-friendly facilities in the UK.

"We are using the very latest in cremator technology, which makes a significant difference towards offsetting our carbon footprint.

"We have also installed a zonal heating system and low energy lighting."

He added: "Now we are open, we can warmly welcome and serve people from the communities in and around the Greater Glasgow area and provide them with the exceptional care that the Westerleigh Group is renowned for.

**Issued on behalf of Westerleigh Group by Empica.
January 2025**



Photo: Freepik

Paphos crematorium faces new delays, completion expected next year

The construction of a new crematorium in Paphos may not be complete until next year, according to reports.

News website *Reporter* wrote that while the initial plan was for the crematorium, which would be Cyprus' first, to be complete and operational by midway through this year, the project has suffered delays before construction has even begun.

The website reported that no tender has yet been put out for the crematorium's construction, and that given the time required for expressions of interest to be submitted and then for bids to be made and accepted, it may not be possible to build the crematorium before the end of this year.

It added that the delays are not related to financial issues but to "various situations", though it did not clarify what these may be.

A spokesperson for the Ayia Varvara village council, the village in which the crematorium will be built, told the Cyprus Mail that after the granting of an initial licence to construct a crematorium, a request has since been made for "more square metres", with the village council set to offer an opinion on the request in due course.

The Cyprus Mail attempted to contact the Paphos municipality and the Angel Guardians funeral home, of which Maureen Watt, director of MW Crematorium Cyprus Ltd is also a director, to confirm or deny the reports, but received no response.

The initial plan for the crematorium saw the building set to be 11,000 square metres in area and built from reinforced concrete and bricks, built over two floors – a basement and a ground floor.

The plot allocated to the crematorium was over 455,000 square metres in area, with the cost having been estimated at €2.2 million.

The plan foresaw that on the ground floor, there would be a main entrance and a waiting area for visitors, three offices for crematorium staff, a kitchen, a ceremony area with seating for 70 funeralgoers, as well as sanitary facilities.

In the basement, there would be facilities for receiving and preparing the bodies, an incinerator, an ash delivery office, refrigerators for the temporary storage of the body, as well as three parking spaces for cars.

Cremation has been legal in Cyprus since 2016, though no crematorium has yet been built.

MW Crematorium Cyprus' other director Neofytos Christodoulides had last year explained that those who wish to be cremated in Cyprus must make a declaration by filling out a special form. This form is then submitted to the interior ministry for approval.

To this end, he noted that the procedures in countries such as Greece and the United Kingdom are different, saying that if the deceased's child or spouse wishes for them to be cremated, their will is followed.

He said that he hopes such a simplification of the relevant laws and processes can also be implemented in Cyprus, "especially for cases in which someone dies suddenly without having completed the relevant application while alive.

He went on to explain the planned location of the crematorium, saying that there had been a "great interest" in the construction of a crematorium from third country nationals in the Paphos district.

Between 70 and 80 per cent of third country nationals residing in the Paphos district prefer cremation as their form of after-death care, as opposed to other options, such as burial."



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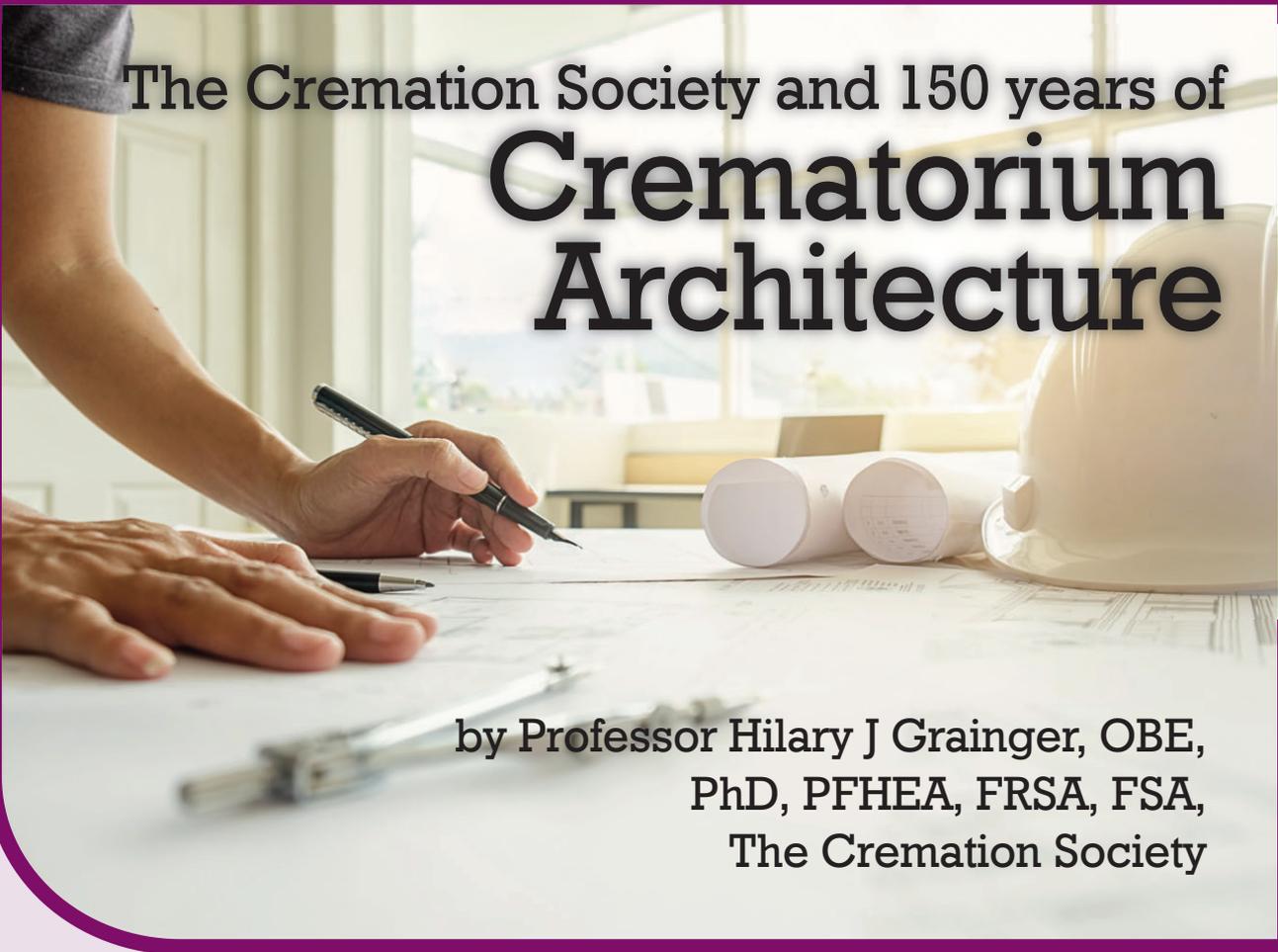
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The Cremation Society and 150 years of Crematorium Architecture

by Professor Hilary J Grainger, OBE,
PhD, PFHEA, FRSA, FSA,
The Cremation Society

Photo: Freepik

2024 marked the 150th anniversary of The Cremation Society of Great Britain. While the history of the Society has been well documented,¹ its involvement with the development of crematorium architecture is perhaps less familiar and therefore underrated.

At its Annual Conference in Eastbourne in 1967, Sir John Cameron reported in his Presidential Address that the Society was reviewing its position and planned to 'take on a new look . . . the outcome of which will be to your advantage'.

We propose, so to speak, to stand off and look at ourselves, but more importantly to look at the whole cremation movement and where we can see that changes for the better are needed we propose to bring the changes about. If you will co-operate with us we shall be delighted but in any event we shall examine the problems which we find exist and shall make available to you the findings. Having presented you with the facts as we see them, the decision as to whether the data is used must of course be your own . . . One of the subjects the Cremation Society is proposing to pursue is crematorium architecture. At the present time there is undoubtedly a desire on all sides for a strong lead on this subject. This we propose to give and it is my hope that as a result of this conference positive indications will be given as to the direction in which our future studies and

research lie. Whenever we have information – technical and non-technical – we shall make it available to everyone. When we have advice to give we shall offer it, but we shall not trespass. The Cremation Society's aim will be to help not to hinder; to serve not to command; to beckon not to drive; but – above all – to lead and not to follow.²

These comments are worth quoting in full since they encapsulate the position adopted by the Society to date. Its involvement with architecture, however, was nothing new but rather runs as a conspicuous thread throughout its history.

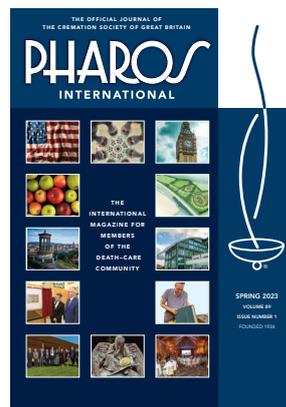
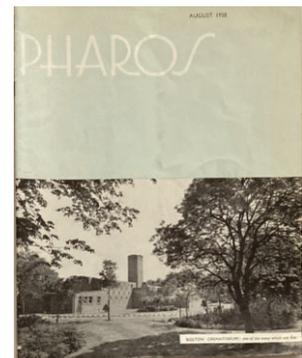
It is not insignificant that the early cremation movement found support not only amongst individuals drawn from the realms of medicine and law, but also from literature and the arts. Founder members included novelists Anthony Trollope and George du Maurier, the political cartoonist of *Punch* and illustrator of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* John Tenniel, Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais, landscape gardener and author William Robinson and Revd Charles Voysey (father of the distinguished

late Victorian domestic architect C.F.A. Voysey). Their involvement perhaps accounts for the prescience of the Society in recognising the role that architecture and aesthetics might play in the promotion and acceptance of cremation.

Over the past 150 years the Society has engaged with architecture in a variety of ways: through publications, articles and features on current and historical crematorium design in its journal *Pharos* first published in 1935: papers delivered by leading international architects and experts at its annual conferences, and its practical involvement in the industry. Through these channels it has made a highly significant contribution to the development of UK crematorium design. Furthermore, the Society has been involved in crematorium development, building the UK's first crematorium at Woking (1885) and in 1901 forming the London Cremation Company (LCC) to build the first, now world-renowned, metropolitan crematorium at Golders Green. The Society remains the largest shareholder in the London Cremation Company plc which operates six crematoria across London and the South East; Woking (1885), Golders Green (1902), St Marylebone (1937), Banbury (1999), Sittingbourne (2003), and Thames View, (2017). Another is soon to open later this year in the Solent.

The context is important. Crematoria were without architectural precedent and presented a challenge to architects faced with this new building type, combining the utilitarian with the symbolic and required to serve all faiths and none. The challenge was compounded by the lack of guidance provided by the architectural profession, which exhibited a conspicuous indifference to crematorium design from the outset. Indeed, when cremation was in its infancy copious publications appeared relating to the debate of burial versus cremation, but nothing specifically on architecture was published until 1904 with London architect Albert Chambers Freeman's (1873-1938) *Cremation in Great Britain and Abroad*. It is astonishing that this remained the only dedicated text until *Death Redefined: British Crematoria, History, Architecture and Landscape*, published in 2005 by Spire Books in Association with the Society.³ In these intervening years this persisting lacuna in the architectural press was expertly filled by the Society.

A consideration of the individual phases of crematorium building reveal eloquently the importance and impact of the Society's well-conceived and timely interventions. During the twentieth century only a handful of architects had the opportunity to design more than one crematorium with the result that few developed any accumulated wisdom on the subject. Notable exceptions were J. Seaton Dahl, J.P. Chaplin, Harold R.W. Orr, Harold Sanger & Rothwell, Martin Critchell and Hugh Thomas. Crematorium design was a complex field for architects to navigate, one dominated by stylistic pluralism and cultural



Pharos compilation

ambivalence. Given the comparative silence from the professional press, research suggests that architects consulted the Society, the sector press and visited existing crematoria to develop their expertise. To complicate matters even further, during the post-war crematorium building boom local authorities often turned to their Borough Surveyors rather than architects to save money. Many of these individuals were woefully ill-informed and wholly reliant on local, accessible examples. Throughout the twentieth century the Society was often consulted over the appointment of architects, a good example being Durham, where J.P. Chaplin was recommended to the Joint Committee as an experienced practitioner in the field. As we shall see, the role played by the Society in disseminating information, both historical and contemporary, cannot be overestimated.

A Conspectus of Crematorium Design:

Familiarity and Associative Values 1885 – 1914

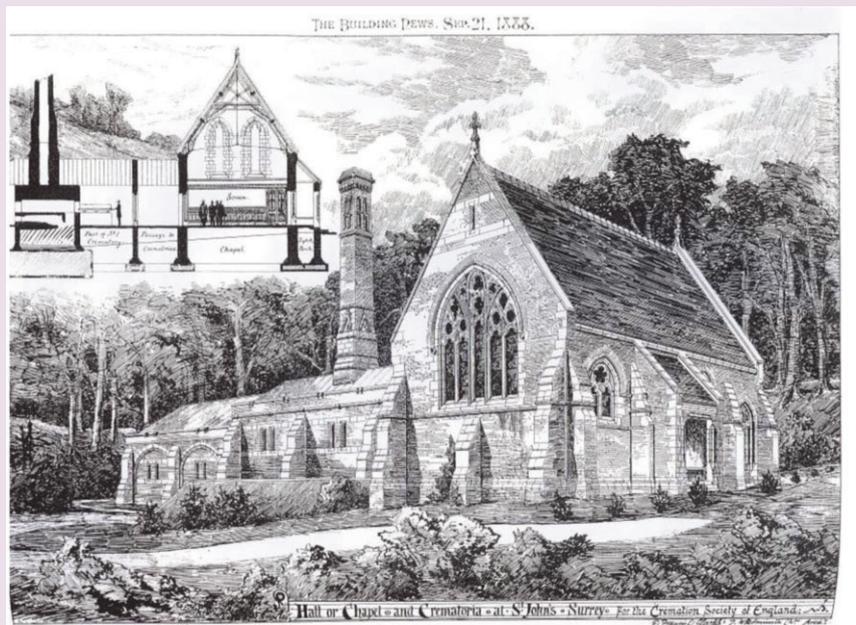
The Society realised from the outset that the most effective way of promoting the practice of cremation was to supply a dedicated building and in so doing it set the bar.

The first crematorium at Woking began in 1879 with a rudimentary crematory, a formidable 60 feet chimney with a furnace erected under the supervision of the Italian ►

engineer Professor Gorini. By 1884 the number of cremations had increased sufficiently for the Society to engage London church architect Edward Francis Channing Clarke (1843-1904) to design the cremation chapel and associated buildings at Woking. Being the first of its kind, Clarke had no British architectural precedents from which to work. It was at this point that the architectural challenge presented itself. The Society recognised that architectural style is redolent with associative value and embraced the challenge of alighting on an appropriate option. Clarke employed fourteenth-century Gothic at Woking, using soft red bricks to create a building which at first sight resembles a church. Woking set the tone thereafter and eight out of the first eleven, privately-owned crematoria were Gothic in style. Glasgow (1895), Liverpool (1896), Hull (1901) (the only publicly owned crematorium), Birmingham, Perry Barr (1903), Bradford (1905) and Leeds, Lawnswood (1905,) all followed suit by adopting the familiarity of Gothic in a deliberate attempt to reassure the sceptical by means of association with religious styles.

The early exception was England's second crematorium, Manchester (1892), which marked an immediate point of departure. Here Manchester architects Edward Salomons & Alfred E. Steinthal, broke with Gothic in favour of a loosely Lombard Romanesque style, infused with Byzantine. This perhaps the first suggestion that Gothic, by then the orthodox style of not only the Anglicans, but also of Catholics and many Nonconformists, might not be the most appropriate choice for a crematorium.

The opening of Golders Green Crematorium in 1902 by the LCC represented a key moment in the architectural expression of cremation in Britain, and the Society once again led the field. It was important in four significant ways. First, it witnessed the involvement in crematorium design of an architect of national standing, Sir Ernest George (1839-1922) who the LCC believed, would 'command the confidence of the public'. Second, it occupied a new metropolitan location within easy reach of central London and was the first crematorium to be built on a new site independent of a cemetery. Third, the collaboration between George and his friend, the landscape gardener, horticulturalist and cremationist William Robinson, resulted in a new landscape for mourning. But fourth and most significantly, Golders Green created a precedent in terms of architectural style, planning and landscaping which was to exert a profound



Woking Crematorium

influence on subsequent British crematoria. George introduced a series of important innovations: an alternative style, Lombard Romanesque, which was appealing in that it retained ecclesiastical overtones, but, significantly, was a definitive move away from Gothic; the porte-cochère as a distinctive feature; the cloisters; the design of separate columbaria and finally, the positioning of the catafalque. But most importantly perhaps was the circulation of mourners which initiated an alternative ritual by entrance through one door and departure by another into the gardens, as if to indicate the crossing of an emotional threshold, a change of state. The significance of this plan would not be appreciated fully until the 1930s when the number of cremations increased, making it necessary to keep groups of mourners apart. What is remarkable is that George identified these features as early as 1902, when modern cremation was in its infancy. Golders Green set the standard for new crematoria and many of its features were emulated elsewhere, particularly during the interwar period.

Throughout the early twentieth century, the Society's *Transactions* (published 1877-1934) supported cremationists, disseminating information including accounts of early designs. The first iteration of *Cremation in Great Britain*, designed to support those involved in the industry, appeared in 1909. It contained sections on *The Modern Cremation Movement – Description of British Crematories, etc., Illustrated with Numerous Views, together with the Cremation Act, 1902, and Regulations for carrying out Cremation* as well as a justification for cremation and crematoria, arguing that *friends are spared the discomfort and very considerable dangers, especially in*

inclement weather, of attending a graveside, thus obviating one of the most distressing features of burial. No part of the actual process of cremation is visible to those in the chapel adjoining the Crematorium.⁴

Stylistic Pluralism 1918-1945

The second phase of building between 1918 and 1945 gave way to stylistic pluralism brought about by the complexity of the brief. The Society republished *Cremation in Great Britain* in 1931. It included the familiar accounts of all the current UK crematoria arranged in chronological order, but came with a Foreword, *The Ideal Crematorium* by H.T. Herring (Hon Secretary of the Society) and an Introduction by George E. Noble, *The Crematoria of Great Britain*. Herring conceded that his description might be from an 'idealist's point of view, yet this may give useful suggestions to those contemplating such a scheme.' He called for a move away from Gothic and the 'mournful suggestions associated with earth burial'. Noble drew attention to the ancillary buildings such as Columbaria, Gardens of Rest and Remembrance. However, progress in the 1920s was comparatively slow. Only six crematoria opened, five of which were conversions of Gothic chapels, and one new building at Ipswich which also reverted to Gothic. Although the pace of building quickened slightly during the 1930s no consensus on style emerged. There was no espousal of European Modernism during the 1930s but rather contemporary interpretations of traditional vocabularies: Gothic at Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1934); Italianate at St Marylebone (1937); Romanesque at Mortlake (1939) and Neoclassical at London, Kensal Green (1939). The exception was Seafield (1939). The second to be opened in Edinburgh, it adopted a contemporary Art Deco style, described as 'decorous jazz modern'. The decade closed, as it had opened, with an article on *The Planning of an Ideal Crematorium*, this time by architect J.L. Seaton Dahl (1899-1987) and published in *Pharos*.⁵ The task remained challenging, and Dahl would take up the cause again in 1941.

1950-1970: The Heroic Age of Local Authority Crematoria

By 1939, fifty-four crematoria had been built and the cremation rate had risen

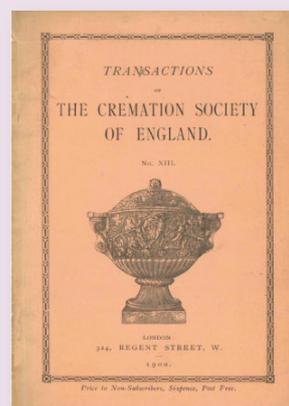
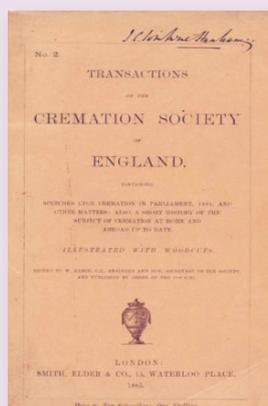


Golders Green Crematorium

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to 3.5%. Cremation was coming of age, but it would have been impossible for architects and planners to anticipate either the scale of post-war developments, or the breathtaking speed at which they would take place. This was the 'heroic age' of Local Authority crematorium building, with 161 opening between 1945 and 1975. The story of the dramatic increase in cremation rates began when the Government's wide-reaching ambitions were revealed in the 1940s. National economic problems led to proposals for population and employment distribution on a countrywide scale. Public ownership lay at the heart of the newly elected Labour Government's reforms, with the nationalisation of key industries and sources of supply. During the 1940s a host of government plans, committees, regulations and reports emerged, fuelled by the desire to mould not only the physical, but also the psychological shape of post-war Britain characterised by the Welfare State. The Cremation Society was active in propagandising regarding cremation and in negotiating a position for crematoria in the planning nexus.

After the death in 1938 of A.C. Freeman, the crematorium's first professional voice, the architectural mantle passed squarely to architect J.L. Seaton Dahl. He began by collaborating with landscape architect Edward White on an article for *Pharos* in 1941 on the *Siting and Planning of Crematoria*,⁶ an



Transactions Photo used with prior permission

indication of the Society's timely engagement with national policy. He followed with an essay on *The Ideal Crematorium* published in the final edition of *Cremation in Great Britain* in 1945. It was intended to provide guidance for those embarking on designing a crematorium at a critical point in post-war planning. Seaton Dahl drew attention to the fact that: *With one or two exceptions, the standard of design of crematoria in this country must be considered low in comparison with work carried out on the Continent or in America.* While Dahl suggested *The reason for this may be our lack of appreciation of architecture*, in his view the deficiency was due to provincialism: *It is generally local authority architects who initiate new schemes and the work is too often carried out in their own council offices.* He called for the employment of a *qualified architect of repute.*⁷

Lord Horder, then President of the Society, spoke in his Foreword of 'the possibility of chapels based on more advanced architectural design ... better conforming with the advancing ideas of cremation', but not being an architect, Horder shied away from discussing style.

As the pace of building accelerated, the Society seized every opportunity to make the case for better design by inviting architects of distinction to speak at its annual conferences. In 1950 it had the foresight to invite Harold W.R. Orr to deliver a paper at its Blackpool conference. Orr's 1939 design for Oxford had signalled the future, standing alone in the 1930s to show any influence of modern developments abroad. Orr provided nothing short of a manifesto for the countless local authority architects who were about to undertake the design of what was probably for most, their first crematorium. Whereas Dahl had trodden cautiously regarding style, studiously avoiding any serious discussion of architectural language and abrogating responsibility by suggesting that no rules can be laid down as to the external features of a crematorium, Orr was prepared to be more candid

*Today we design for to-day, in materials of to-day, and not imitatively in the dead language of architectural styles, each of which was expressive of its own generation. By this I mean we shall design neither with sentimentality, nor sensationalism, but now that cremation is of age, its buildings shall be expressed in unsectarian terms harmonising with the ideals of cremation in its common appeal to nearly every creed and denomination.*⁸

At the Society's conference in 1957 Douglas Robinson spoke on *The Architectural Approach* and cautioned that *there is a limit of austerity below which we should not sink, we must insist on a sense of quality in materials and workmanship, space and intimacy in planning, otherwise if we are not careful, in a very*

*short time the crematorium buildings of our generation will soon fall into disrepute and take on the forlorn appearances of morgues.*⁹

Robinson cautioned against the conversion of chapels and would appear to have been prophetic in his judgement.

Many local authority architects settled on a contemporary style perceived as being a more humane and flexible form of Modernism and one which drew heavily on the architecture of the Scandinavian Welfare State. It showed a readiness to use traditional materials. Dubbed 'The New Humanism' it offered a practical vernacular modernist aesthetic which some architects, such as Orr, had begun to pursue before the war. The new crematoria also showed a consensus in terms of planning and layout. At best the new crematoria were '*solemn, sentimental and modestly pious*' on the one hand and, on the other '*jaunty, efficient, hygienic and civic minded*',¹⁰ taking their place in the 'ambitious venture' of post-war planning and public building. At

worst they represented the formulaic dreariness of much municipal architecture and were not always to the public eye – humane. The Cinderellas of local authority provision, they were almost invariably denied the architectural embellishment reserved for prestigious civic buildings.

This great swathe of local authority crematoria built between 1950 and 1970 often attracted excoriating criticism. In 1960, as the opening of Middlesborough (the 150th UK crematorium) approached, The Cremation Society asked whether opportunities were being missed in terms of '*employing the best available talent in the design, construction and embellishment of our new crematoria? Are we genuinely trying to be original or merely imitative? Are we doing all that could be done by imagination and research to produce buildings of architectural merit which will stand the test of time, and which cater for the needs and emotions of those whose service they are intended?*'¹¹

The Society's review of crematoria built between 1955 and 1960 had revealed '*in the majority of cases a sameness of form which borders on the monotonous and a mock cinema variety of interior decoration which is frequently unfortunate. It is true that little can be done to mask the ugliness of a Victorian Gothic cemetery chapel, when regrettably it is resolved to "convert" it into a crematorium and perhaps it is a kindness to create the illusion of Hollywood within. But the creation of an entirely new building offers considerable scope for ingenuity and no excuse for the lack of it.*'

The Society called for first-class architects *whose vision should not be clouded by pre-conceived notions or shackled*

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by the prejudices of ill-informed though well-meaning amateurs.¹²

In 1960 the Society organised a symposium *Planning a Crematorium*,¹³ at its conference in Great Yarmouth. This was a further example of plugging the gap left by a still uninterested professional architectural press. It provided an invaluable resumé not only of the detailed planning and design processes involved in building a new crematorium, but also personal insights into the relationships forged between planners, clients, the public, architects and landscape architects. It took the form of a dialogue between J.P. Chaplin and Richard L. Sudell, who were respectively the architect and landscape architect of Peterborough Crematorium, opened two years earlier in 1958. Chaplin was by then a seasoned crematorium architect and Sudell was a past-President of the Institute of Landscape Architects, responsible for several influential crematoria landscaping projects, including City of London, Manor Park (1955). Chaplin and Sudell were typical of the high calibre of speakers at Cremation Society conferences.

Another was Edwin Maxwell Fry (1899-1987) who addressed the conference in June 1964 on *The Design of Modern Crematoria*.¹⁴ One of the pioneers of the International Modern Movement of the 1930s, Fry was arguably, together with Basil Spence, one of the most eminent architects since Sir Ernest George to engage with crematorium design.

Fry moved discussion on design away from its pragmatic base, which had hitherto placed emphasis on planning and provision, towards an acknowledgement of the psychological impact of the architecture and landscape of the crematorium. Fry's paper fell on receptive ears. In the audience was Mansell Matthews, the Surveyor to Pentybont Rural District Council who later approached Fry to design Coychurch Crematorium in Bridgend. Fry's partnership, Fry, Drew, Knight & Creamer produced a design owing an undeniable debt to Le Corbusier and one of the most important architectural statements of cremation in the UK. Fry called for the reinstatement of procession and ritual, believing that the procession of mourners through the grounds and the crematorium could in itself offer spiritual significance. This was expressed architecturally by the privileging of two elements – time and



Peterborough Crematorium

distance – which underscored the design and planning. Fry hoped to enrich the ceremony 'so that both it and our own lives thereby become significant'. In doing so he invoked sociologist Geoffrey Gorer, who was the first to suggest in his book *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (1965) that those who experience a more ritualistic form of mourning seemed able to adapt more readily to life after the funeral.

Fry, Drew, Knight & Creamer later added an impressive chapel to J. Seaton Dahl's Breakspear Crematorium at Ruislip in 1975.

In 1965 the Society invited Fry's wife Jane Drew to speak on *Lighting and Landscape for Crematorium Design*,¹⁵ another indication of the Society's interest in the wider aspects of design. Drew began by suggesting that mourning and the expression of grief was no longer encouraged. She pointed to the research of Dr John Bowlby and Geoffrey Gorer's book both of which ▶



Coychurch Crematorium

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counselled against the suppression of grief. Drew contended that the crematorium should provide 'the right kind of place where people can go, the right atmosphere for this' as an 'extremely important social duty for the happiness of mankind'. Drew, in common with her husband, was a Modernist who believed that architecture was to be experienced, by means of space, lighting, colour, materials, landscaping and water. Interestingly, all her examples of good practice were drawn from Europe. Drew made the point that: *The atmosphere required for crematoria is rather different from that which pervaded churchyards and cemeteries or the old Roman mausoleums. Our views regarding the precincts of death are changing – the old ideas of inspissated gloom and landscapes of yews, cypresses and other sombre trees and pompous and depressing buildings are no longer welcome. The atmosphere which is required is peaceful, serious and dignified.*¹⁶

At the 1966 conference in Worthing, R.C. McMillan MBE, the Director of Manchester City Corporation Parks Department delivered a presentation on *New Crematorium and Landscaping*,¹⁷ which provided a fascinating insight into the long history of planning and design of one of the most daring crematoria to date, Blackley, Manchester, by L.C. Howitt, then City Architect. First proposed in 1936, Blackley opened in 1957 at a cost of £171,000 and by special arrangement could seat 450-500 people. Its progressive design stood out from its counterparts by means of its dramatic configurations of form, its 98-acre site, detached Chapel of Remembrance (the first of its kind) and gates closing on the coffin which remains stationary (the gates McMillan's idea inspired by a visit to a Carmelite



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Blackley Crematorium

Convent). Reference was also made in the paper to the landscaping of a difficult windswept hill. Blackley was undeniably the inspiration for the UK's largest crematorium, The Linn, Glasgow which opened in 1962.

The Society's mission to advance good design included providing a platform for candid criticism while remaining impartial. A paradigm example dates from 1967 when the conference programme focussed on a session devoted to shortcomings of crematoria. Funeral Director, and NAFD member Councillor D.S. Farthing spoke about *Defects in Crematorium Design and The Cremation Service*.¹⁸ He conceded that style was a matter of personal preference and did not confess to be an expert. He compared Basil Spence's recently opened Mortonhall Crematorium with Plymouth's second crematorium. Clearly impressed by the distinctive style of the former he commented, *On the one hand at Edinburgh you have a pleasing, balanced elevation. On the other hand you have got a muddled conflict of styles that reminds me at any rate of a rather elderly lady with a most suitable facial makeup*



Photo: Steve Wallace

The Linn Crematorium

and the old mini-skirt.

Farthing raised the issue of steps at Plymouth, making the wider point that: *in the vast majority of cases there is no consultation with the local funeral directors, they are not consulted, nor are their opinions sought either at the planning stage and, as a consequence, some of the most elementary errors in design are manifested. Architects seem to feel they are so confident they need not seek advice.*

This criticism was felt quite widely in the 1960s when some local authorities maintained that architects were arrogant and temperamental. Farthing also raised the importance of atmosphere which he described as 'one of those intangible phenomena, either it is there or not, although it is usually there in one degree or another, and you can tell it.'

He felt that a *good crematorium should impart an atmosphere of peace, it should be a quiet place, intimate, yet perhaps light and airy, and it should be set if possible in a beautiful frame of gardens or views. There should be no gloomy atmosphere. Nor should there be distraction either in the form of architectural novelty or noise from the mechanics of operation.*¹⁹

The Revd Roderic Wilkins followed with the perspective of a chaplain at Lodge Hill crematorium in Birmingham.²⁰ He raised six points: the seating arrangement in chapels; the issue of steps; whether chapels should be capable of expanding to take greater numbers; the need for comfortable waiting rooms; whether there should be catering facilities, and were there ways in which local authorities could learn from a private company? It is fascinating to reflect that a conflation of these views has remained a constant for architects and those commissioning crematoria.

Peter P. Bond then gave a presentation on *Defects in Crematorium Design – Exploration of Future Possibilities.*²¹ Bond was an associate partner of Maxwell Fry and had recently published an article in the architectural press, *The Celebration of Death: Some Thoughts on the Design of Crematoria*²² which had been circulated to delegates in advance. Bond was concerned with the psychological and social roles that architecture might play in the emphasis on committal as the climax of cremation. He believed that architecture was only one component of a much more subtle combination of experiences encountered by

mourners, arguing 'But really there is a very complex series of relationships between the objects as seen and the emotional response that these call forward.' He argued for the architecture

to operate at an emotional level by means of underscoring ritual. Time and distance were of significance in creating a meaningful procession through the building and by default, the ritual which, somewhat arguably he advocated should culminate in the presence of mourners at a direct committal. He was controversial in proposing that the committal chamber be abolished and that three furnaces be placed around a courtyard. Mourners would leave the chapel to places of committal in the form of cloistered courts with pools and the opportunity for mourners to witness the charging of the coffin thereby finding emotional fulfilment. His ideas on the psychological benefits of ritual in the mourning process continue to hold currency today.

It was quite clear that attitudes were changing in the late 1960s, with a greater emphasis on what leading Modernists Sir Basil Spence and Jane Drew characterised as 'the elusive issue of atmosphere', and an emerging recognition of the role that the environs might play in assuaging grief. Despite the general level of mediocrity across the board in the 1950s and 1960s, there were exceptions, as the Society was swift to acknowledge, notably Edinburgh, Mortonhall (1968) by Spence and a cluster of fine Modernist crematoria in Glamorgan – Margam (1969), Coychurch, Bridgend (1969) and Aberdare (1970). It is interesting to note that four examples were all local authority owned and were in Scotland and Wales, reflecting their greater willingness to adopt Modernism. ▶

By the end of the 1960s attention was turning to how to address the issue of 'out of date crematoria' and converted cemetery chapels.



Margam Crematorium



Mortonhall Crematorium

By the end of the 1960s attention was turning to how to address the issue of 'out of date crematoria' and converted cemetery chapels. Conversions had been favoured during the 1950s and 1960s because they kept costs down at a time of material and labour shortages and required little in the way of landscaping and facilitated planning permission. But many were highly insensitive and the cause of much criticism, such as that voiced by Farthing in 1967. In response, the Society invited architect Francis Pym²³ to speak in Bournemouth in 1969 on how to approach issues surrounding the extension of existing crematoria or engage in new build. One delegate from East Anglia hoping to build a new crematorium was completely averse to the idea of conversion. He reported that examples in his locality had been described as 'a cross between a poultry packing station and a fire station tower' and had, in his view, 'very little heart, very little thought and very little use of local material.'²⁴ By the end of the 1960s, conversions of cemetery chapels were a thing of the past.

1970-2000: Towards the Millennium: From Public to Private Enterprise

To all intents and purposes, the great surge of crematorium building was over by the 1970s. During the last three decades of the twentieth century five major issues emerged which would affect the architectural development of crematoria: the dramatic downturn in building generally; the rise of criticisms levelled against crematoria; growing secularisation; changes in the pattern of ownership and, finally environmental issues. Only sixteen crematoria were built in the 1970s and only seven in the 1980s. By 1982 the *Architects' Journal* was arguing that 'the completion of a new crematorium in the UK is a rare occurrence'.²⁵

Criticisms of crematoria were rarely far beneath the surface. In 1980 Professor James Stevens Curl, the distinguished

architectural historian, spoke on the *Historical Problems of Designing Crematoria*²⁶ in which he was highly critical.

Many crematoria only add to the horror and grief caused by death, and fail to satisfy the ritual sundering of social and close relationships by the sheer awfulness of their design and by the lack of a real philosophy behind layout and planning.

Curl conceded, however, that one of the most successful and appropriate of all crematoria in Britain was Golders Green. He returned to the issue that had exercised Peter Bond before him, that of the lack of finality and the 'not knowing' of what has happened

to the coffin. Curl applauded Bond's views on matters of 'unresolved design' and 'unsatisfactory function' which he agreed stemmed from the use of an intermediate chamber. While Curl agreed on the principle of witnessing the committal, he suggested this could be at a distance, viewed across a pool to create some distance to soften the experience. These views remain divisive.

While design continued to be a topic of interest there was an acknowledgement of financial stringency. In tune with the times, in 1977 the Society invited architect Christopher Robinson, a partner in the distinguished firm, Dawber, Fox and Robinson, to talk on *Economy in Crematorium Design*.²⁷ An admirer of European Modernism, Robinson had completed Mid-Warwickshire Crematorium Leamington Spa in 1971, which he argued 'had been built for the living' with the intention of dispelling the notion that 'crematoria are not very nice'. His advice was timely and well measured, pointing to seven ways in which costs could be managed.

Robinson's design drew clearly on European Modernism but also heralded the importance of the relationship between buildings and landscape which would emerge more widely in the 1980s. This relationship would be progressed by Martin Critchell, arguably the most prolific crematorium architect of the 1980s and 1990s designing Bodmin (1989), Aberystwyth (1994), Heart of England, Nuneaton (1995), Holmsford Bridge (1997), and Sandwell Valley (2011). Chichester-based Critchell Harrington & Partners was the first practice to exploit fully the relationships between vernacular style, communities and landscape. Pitched roofs featured prominently, their low eaves offering the additional benefit of enabling easy extension to provide shelter over walkways and exterior waiting spaces. Critchell's domestic-inspired chimneys, made possible by the enhancements in cremator technology, were a far more acceptable alternative to the somewhat industrial examples in



Aberystwyth Crematorium



Holmsford Bridge Crematorium

some local authority crematoria of the 1950s and 1960s. Comforting in terms of their familiarity, these new crematoria provided peaceful, unthreatening spaces constructed from local materials, where modest scale, quiet detailing and interiors flooded with light combine to create the tranquil atmosphere sought by earlier critics. The interplay between interior and exterior encourages engagement with the temporalities of the seasons and the wider natural landscape. Critchell's neutral, non-religious spaces cater to both collective and individual experiences and have provided the blueprint for much of the crematorium architecture of the twenty-first century. The Society carried regular accounts of his work in *Pharos*.

2000-2024: Twenty-First Century Thinking

After the comparative slowdown in building in the

last three decades of the twentieth century, with only 132 crematoria built, the pace of building has increased with 98 crematoria opened since 2000, largely built by the private sector. Local authority involvement, however, is increasing with 11 of the 18 built since 2000 opening post 2019. The architectural landscape has changed considerably due in no small measure to the predominance of the private sector. The number of architectural practices specialising in crematoria has increased, partly because the three largest private providers, the Westerleigh Group Ltd, Dignity plc and Memoria Ltd have tended to return to the same firms, although not exclusively. Dignity plc, for example, employed Art-Tech Design Services Ltd, Acanthus Clews, an Oxfordshire practice which works as part of a Developers Design Build Team, working closely with specialist Planning and Landscape Consultants to respond to the individual nature of each site. Dignity plc has also turned to other individual practitioners such as, for example, Howl Associates Kidderminster for Wyre Forest Crematorium, Stourport, 2011. Westerleigh Group Ltd has commissioned Stride Treglown Tektus, a leading English practice based in the South-West, Pdp Green Consulting Ltd and architect Peter Greenwood before he moved inhouse with

Westerleigh.

Memoria Ltd turned to Richard Vest Architectural Design Services Ltd for its recent Memorial Parks & Crematoria. Horizon Cremation entered the field with Clyde Coast and



Arun crematorium

Garnock Valley 2018 where they employed the Robertson Design Practice who they subsequently employed at Cannock Chase and The Hurlet. Haverstock Associates, another major firm, are responsible for Telford, Nene Valley, Berton, Guildford, Lea Fields, Hemel Hempstead and Arun crematoria.

Over the last twenty-five years the Society has continued to publish details of all new and proposed crematoria and carried articles on recently completed projects, thereby providing valuable access to current architectural thinking. *Pharos* has published ten full-length articles on crematorium architecture following conference presentations since 2000,²⁸ which collectively provided a conspectus and discussion of issues and trends in crematorium design from 1885 to 2020 and importantly, provided the opportunities to engage with delegates drawn from across the industry.

In 2022, architect Kevin Smith of Marchini Curran Associates, presented at CBCE on the timely topic of *AUM – Designing a crematorium for Hindu Funerals*²⁹ where he discussed businessman Satish Chatwani's proposed project to build a crematorium in Denham, northwest of London, designed specifically for followers of his faith, so that they might be offered the opportunity to properly observe their cultures and beliefs in an appropriate space that was theirs.

The most recent architectural *Pharos* publication was by Mark Doohan, Managing Director of award-winning Benchmark Architects, responsible for Huntington, 2021, Hambleton Maple Park, 2021, Rushcliffe Oaks, 2022 and Welwyn & Hatfield crematoria, who presented to CBCE in 2023 on *Trends in Crematorium Design*³⁰. Here he concentrated on four case studies which illustrated effectively trends in current thinking. Harbour View Crematorium, by Western Design Architects for Tapper Funeral Service in 2017, illustrated a building designed to be fully integrated with the landscape and offering 'fantastic views over Poole Harbour'. Berton Crematorium, Buckinghamshire 2019, illustrated the different curtain options, such as voile, which are proving popular, arguing, 'I think that being able to see the landscape beyond and having a softer edge is a lovely way to be able to look away [from the coffin] and consider something further afield.' He turned next to Huntington Crematorium, which had



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Aylesbury Vale crematorium

been the subject of an earlier presentation by Phillip Peacock, the Town Clerk of Huntingdon Town Council, at CBCE in 2022. Huntingdon Council engaged the CDS Group as advisors and subsequently Benchmark as architects. The Council espoused this as an environmental project which has attracted a lot of interest across the sector. Benchmark Architects, who have recently published designs for the new East Cambridgeshire Crematorium, took a stand at last year's CBCE Conference in Blackpool, an indication of the value that they place on meeting representatives from the industry and the opportunity to discuss new projects.

Doohan's final example was Hofheide Crematorium in Belgium which had been considered in an earlier article in *Pharos*, *In Flanders Fields, Four Belgium Crematoria of Distinction*.³¹ These Belgian crematoria share a common mission to negotiate a subtle but profound relationship between structure and landscape, materiality and minimalism, to create



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Huntingdon crematorium

meaningful spaces designed not to impose any belief or cultural systems on mourners. Nature forms the backdrop to ritual and ceremony in all four cases. They present powerful evidence of the persisting appetite in Europe for forward thinking design. But one of the most interesting developments of late there has been the greater acceptance of a Modernist aesthetic in the UK as an alternative to the vernacular favoured over the last twenty years or so.

For 150 years the Society has held firm to its commitment to architecture. It continues to chronicle crematorium building through its regular features on proposed and completed crematoria, on a quarterly basis in *Pharos* and monthly in its online Newsletter. The Directory of Crematoria is widely acknowledged by architects as an invaluable source of information together with the cremation statistics published annually. In so doing the Society has expanded collective wisdom by providing a forum for architects and clients from the death care sector to share contemporary concerns and potential solutions. It has never felt the need to shy away from candid criticism or controversy but has always sought to showcase good design wherever possible. In the words of former President Sir James Cameron, it has sought to 'lead and not follow' but most importantly having presented the facts as it sees them, the decision as to whether the data is used must of course be made by the sector. Through its balanced and well-measured presentation of varied and often contested viewpoints, the Society has unquestionably advanced progress in the field of crematorium design.

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Barham crematorium



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The Chilterns crematorium

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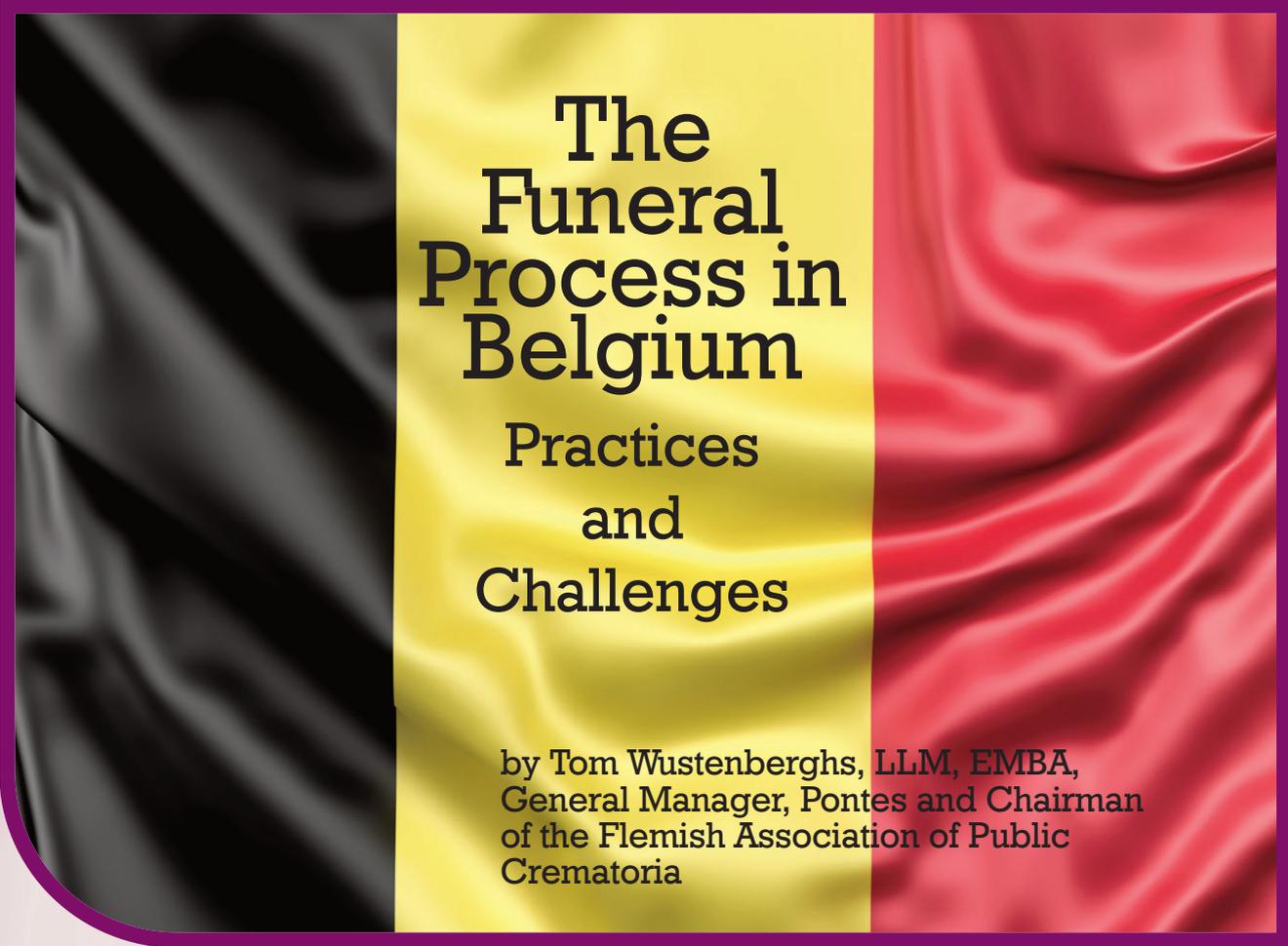
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The Funeral Process in Belgium

Practices and Challenges

by Tom Wustenberghs, LL.M, EMBA,
General Manager, Pontes and Chairman
of the Flemish Association of Public
Crematoria

Photo: Freepik

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you Hilary and Wendy for the invitation and for having me here at the CBCE Conference. The programme looks very interesting and I am honoured to be on the list of speakers.

I would like to address the topic 'The funeral process in Belgium' to make a comparison between our two countries. Our country's a little bit smaller than yours but we are only separated by the North Sea – the Channel – and coming from Brussels to here is only 375 miles which is not that far away. I'm not a native speaker, sorry I have to say that again because the former speakers also mentioned that, but not being a native speaker may sometimes give strange constructions of sentences, but I'll do my best.

I'll talk about Belgium to see how we do things differently, although there will also be a lot of things that we can perfectly compare to the UK. So I'll take you through the funeral process in our country.

I am going to address different topics. I have a legal background, I can't hide it, and so I'll start with the legislation. We will dive into different steps in the funeral process and we will also talk about crematoria in Belgium and the management of crematoria in particular.

We also will talk about a few challenges we have as crematoria managers, especially on an environmental level, and what the other future challenges are. At the end I will try to answer your questions. Hilary already introduced me so I'm not going to talk a lot about myself, but as I said I will start with legislation in Belgium (figure 1).

Belgium is in an administrative way a very complex country – you Brit's could learn something from us in that perspective. Obviously items are organised in their own different levels. First of all we have the Federal State, like for example in Germany too where we talk about state law but other topics then again are organised on a regional level and we talk about regional competencies. It's a little bit like here in the UK when you speak about legal differences between England, Scotland and Wales – it's quite similar but then much more complicated.

Belgium is a Federal State which means that besides the national level we also have three regions – maybe you've heard about it – we speak about Flanders, we speak about the capital

region of Brussels and we talk about Wallonia in the south. That means that we speak three different languages in one small country. We have three different governments for those regions and we have different rules in those regions. It really depends on the topic as to which government is competent to make rules and policies.

But we have one big luck. All funeral related matters are almost a regional competence. So mostly we have to look only to one government when it comes to cemeteries and crematoria. That's a little bit easier in a complex situation. But on the other hand it also means when it comes to the management of cemeteries and crematoria that it can be different in the north, in Brussels and in the south. So we have different policies and different rules.

Last year the Flemish Government in the north changed our legislation. It was published at the start of 2024 and a few topics on cemeteries, and in particular crematoria, were changed. Not that I'm going to dive into it but just to mention a few. I will explain what concessions are, but they were made possible for all types of body disposal, maintenance became obligatory, and for crematoria we have three important things.

Today, crematoria in Flanders are public organisations. This will possibly change in the future because private shareholdership is made possible. It's also allowed to have more technical crematoria in the future. Today we do need to have all infrastructure, technical rooms, waiting rooms, ceremony halls, catering rooms and cemetery functions. In the future it will be possible to only have technical crematoria. It is no longer compulsory to have public rooms and a cemetery function on the premises of a crematoria which is still obliged today. So a few changes that I will come back to later on.

But let me first start with the funeral process in Belgium which I tried to break down into nine steps (figures 2, 3 and 4). Of course the most evident point is the starting point – when a person has died, a life has come to an end. That triggers the funeral process.

What then usually happens, when somebody dies at home, is the family will call the family doctor and they will come to the home of the deceased person. It's mostly the family doctor and they have to establish the death. When somebody dies at the hospital or at a retirement home it will be mostly the doctor who is connected to that hospital or that retirement home.

The family will then contact a funeral director to organise the funeral process. The funeral director will come to the deceased

person's home, or to the families home, where they discuss all preparations for the funeral. Then they will take care of the transport of the deceased person and the grooming.

When the funeral director has collected all paperwork they will go to the municipality where the person has died. So not to the municipality to where the person has lived, but to the municipality of where he has died. So imagine you died in a hospital 20 miles away you will have to go as funeral director to the municipality of the place where the hospital is situated.

The funeral director has to take care of all paperwork, cover the medical certificates and will ask the municipality to take notice of the deceased person and ask for a death certificate.

The local municipality then draws up the death certificate based on the medical findings of the first doctor. But if cremation is considered then the funeral director will also apply for a cremation permit at the same municipality. In the case of cremation, the permit for cremation can only be granted after a second medical examination has taken place.

Earlier this morning you talked about the medical examiner system in the UK – well in Belgium it goes this way. The medical examiner is needed to verify the absence of any possible circumstance of a suspicious cause of death.

The second medical examiner has to confirm the natural cause of death before cremation takes place. So the second medical examiner is only involved when people opt for cremation, and only to verify the natural cause of death.

When the medical examiner finds circumstances that are suspicious then the authorities have to be informed such as the police or the public attorney, and then they will conduct a further criminal investigation or further medical examinations. During that period the funeral director cannot work. The cremation is postponed and they have to wait until the body is released by the public attorney. When the public attorney decides to release the body they will also declare not to oppose cremation and so the funeral director can continue his/her work.

In the legal rules it's also foreseen that a cremation permit cannot be produced then until 24 hours after the funeral director went to the municipality, just to give the second medical examiner a time lapse of 24 hours to conduct his second medical examination.

After that, and when the municipality has delivered the cremation permit, then the funeral director can bring the ►

The funeral director has to take care of all paperwork, cover the medical certificates and will ask the municipality to take notice of the deceased person and ask for a death certificate.

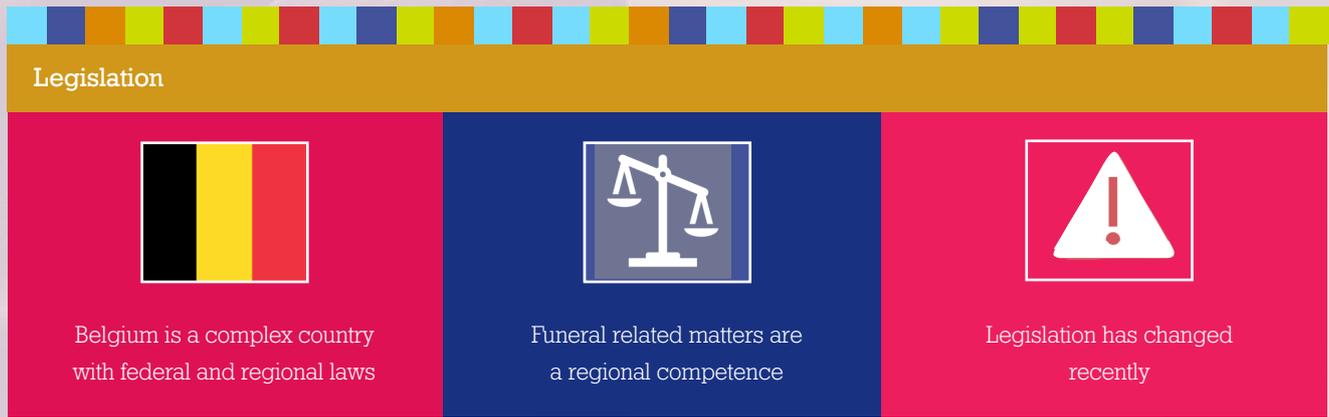


Figure 1

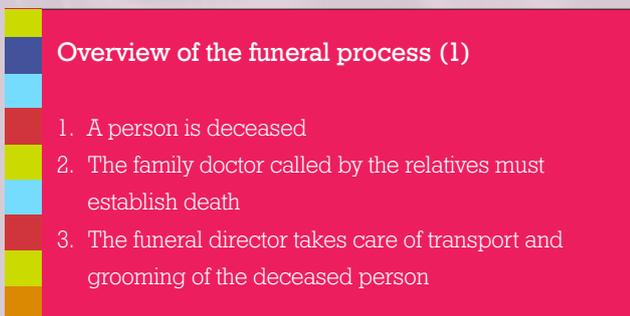


Figure 2

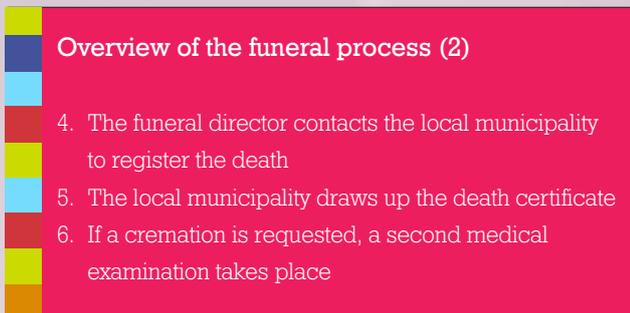


Figure 3

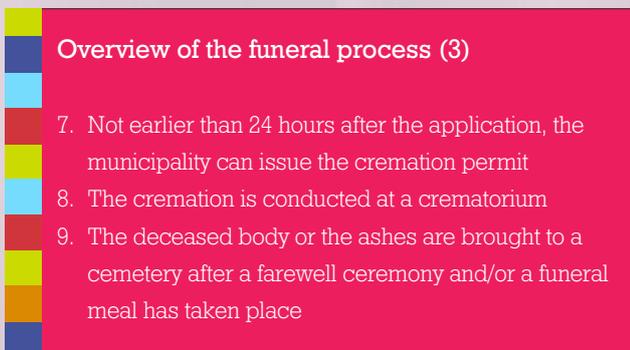


Figure 4

body to the crematorium. The cremation will take place and after at least two hours the funeral director can collect the ash urn. After the collection of the ash urn the family will get together for a farewell ceremony. They will go to the cemetery, and after coming back from the cemetery they gather together mostly for

what we call a funeral meal, and then we provide catering services.

When I put these nine steps in a timeline it looks like this (figure 5). For example when somebody dies on a Monday then the funeral director is notified, he will take the body to his funeral home, and the doctor will take the first medical examination. The second medical examination will mostly take place within those 24 hours as I already mentioned, so probably the next day. Then there are a few days for the transport, the grooming, the viewing of the deceased person and mostly on a Friday or Saturday the person will be brought to the crematorium. The cremation takes place and we will have a farewell ceremony on Monday.

I already stretched this farewell process because one full week is quite long. It could also be that when you die on a Monday you always have a farewell ceremony on a Saturday so the cremation will take place on Friday, so I stretched it a little bit. Then on the Monday before you go to the funeral meal, you will also go to the cemetery where you'll bring the coffin or the ash urn through.

I heard the question before of how long does it take in Italy or the US? Well in Belgium it's about one week to arrange a funeral.

It also means that most of the funeral ceremonies are held around the ash urn. Originally in the '80s and '90s when cremation came up, it was usual to have coffins in the farewell ceremony, but that tradition totally evolved and it is totally different from those days.

Today we have almost 95% of the farewell ceremonies which are organised around the ash urn, especially when you go to urban environments, it decreases a little bit when you go to more rural environments.

Why did this evolve? Because when you have a farewell ceremony around the ash urn it is cheaper for the family because you can choose a cremation coffin. It gives more flexibility to the funeral directors because they can more easily plan and organise their work, the transportation to the crematorium, collection of the ash urn, and for us as crematorium ►



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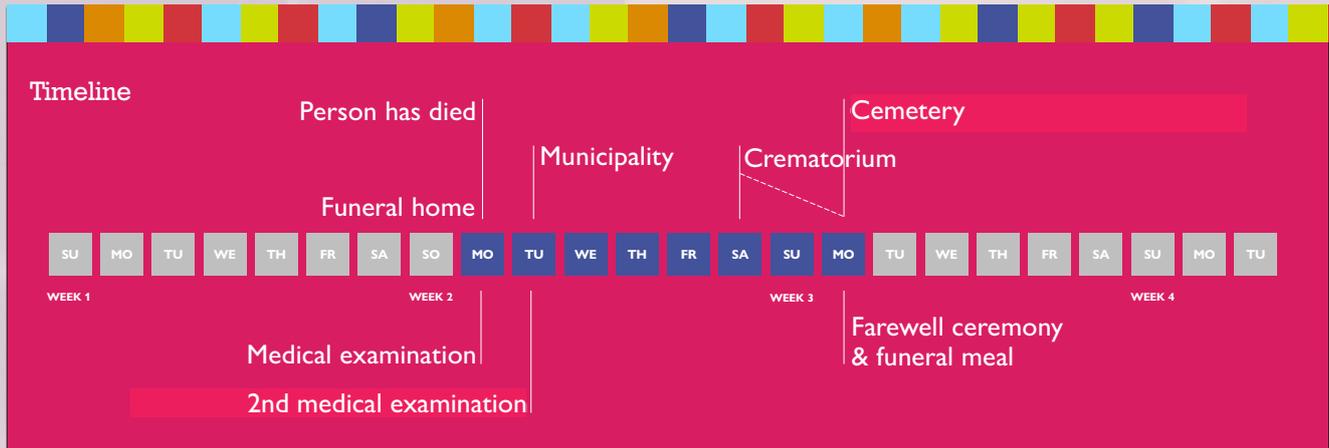


Figure 5

managers. It also gives more flexibility because we can plan more easily the time when the cremation takes place.

So all those mostly economic and flexibility reasons make this evolution possible for more urns during the farewell ceremony.

Let me talk about crematoria in Belgium and the management of it. This is an example of one of the three sites we manage in the north east – in Lommel in particular – this was one of the places Hilary and Wendy also visited (figure 6). In Belgium you have two options today. You choose for either burial or for cremation. I think that's still the same here in the UK. The choice for burial or cremation has to be made by the bereaved – by the family – of course, or the person in charge of organising the funeral.

But during life, every person in Belgium has the possibility to go to his municipality and declare his or her last wish. That is

not a will, like a testament where you go to the notary to arrange your legacy in an economic way, it's only a declaration at a municipality in which you register your preferences related to your funeral. What you have drawn up at a municipality has to be respected by everyone, it can't be ignored, even when the family has other wishes – you have to respect that last will.

The first crematorium in Belgium was taken into service in 1933 so a long time back. It was situated in the middle of our country in Brussels, but that meant that for more than 50 years Brussels was the only place you could go to when you wanted to opt for a cremation (figure 7).

In 1983 the second crematorium was opened in Antwerp and since that day between 1983 and 2024, 22 crematoria were built around the country.

Cremation came to play an important role in our funeral process. I will mention the cremation rate later. When you look



Figure 6



Figure 7

to our little country you see those 22 crematoria spread around the country at the same distance (figure 8). We always try to build a crematorium 25km to 30km from one another so that people don't have to drive a lot before they can go to a crematorium.

Now the management of crematoria is different (figure 9). Like I said before, we have different regions with different rules and policies so that means that in Flanders in the north and in Brussels we only have public organisations. That changed in Flanders at the beginning of this year [2024], and a mixed shareholdership will be possible and so we might get public/private partnerships in the future. In Wallonia you have all types: you have public crematoria, private ones and you have mixed organisations.

The cremation rate has grown up to 75% in Flanders and almost around 52% in the middle and the south of the country, and when you take the average rate over the whole of Belgium it is 65%.

A crematorium in Belgium has very defined duties. That means we do only four things – we of course execute the cremations, we assist during funeral ceremonies, we organise funeral meals, and a few of us also have their own cemeteries so also manage the cemetery grounds.

A crematorium in Belgium consists of different places. You have public spaces with waiting rooms, ceremony halls, and catering rooms so that is accessible for everyone. You also have

In Belgium we formalised them in a law and we made a list of possibilities for the things you can do with a coffin or with ashes.



Figure 8

the technical rooms where the coffin rooms are. They are in certain rooms where the furnaces stand and the abatement systems. That is not accessible for everyone of course, only on request after an appointment or during the guided tour can you enter. Like here we also work with technically skilled and professionally trained employees and for the farewell ceremonies we also have a lot of volunteers, mostly related to the different beliefs, who assist during a farewell ceremony.

When you look at the market situation in Belgium we have seen over the last two decades quite some consolidation. For a long time funeral homes were family businesses, family owned and family conducted. But then there is a time that the family owner wants to take his pension and there is no succession or his children are not interested, and so we saw a lot of acquisitions by funeral insurance companies or by private equity companies taking over those family owned businesses.

What we saw on the other hand were a relative number of new entrants. These are often individuals who organise a funeral but without a lot of their own infrastructure. Most of the buildings, cars and equipment they need are rented so they work more on a rental basis.

And funeral insurance – I don't know in particular how it is done here in the UK or what the situation is here in England – but the importance of funeral insurances is rather small in Belgium. I think 15-20% have funeral insurance which in comparison to the Netherlands or Spain for example, is quite a small number.

When it comes to the disposal of the body or of the ashes I think there are little legal restrictions here in the UK. In Belgium we formalised them in a law and we made a list of ►

Crematoria and cremation (2)



Figure 9

possibilities for the things you can do with a coffin or with ashes. The principle of course is always that whether it is a coffin or an ash urn it always has to end up at a cemetery. Cemeteries are always managed by local authorities, they're accessible for all, they are neutral and they are open for all kind of religions.

Another important aspect is that cemeteries are normally free of charge. That means when you want to dispose of a coffin or

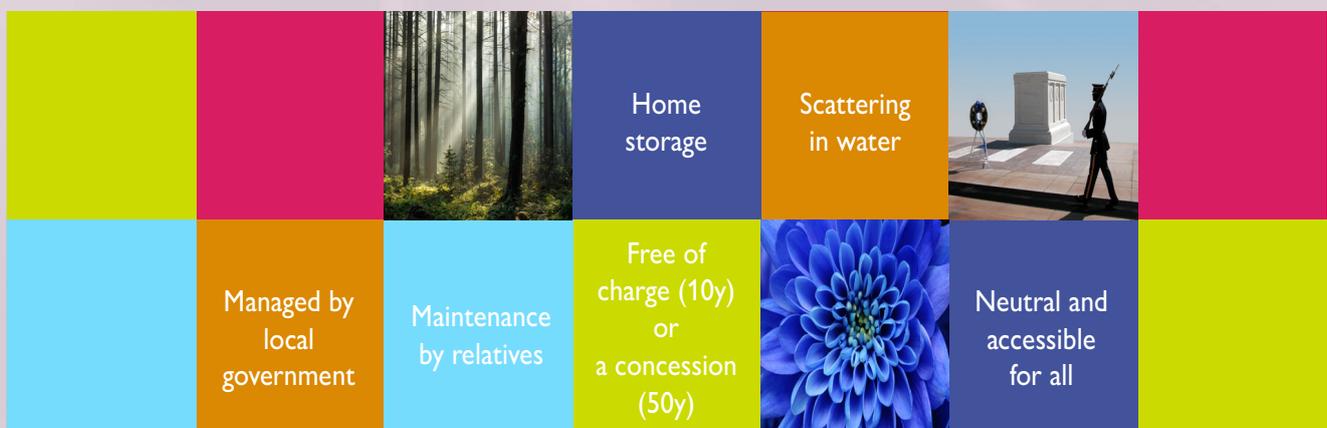
an ash urn, and you don't want to get longer than 10 years – the normal waiting time for a grave – then it is free of charge. If you want to stay longer or your family wants to have the coffin or the place longer in the cemetery, you can rent a piece of a land in that cemetery. We call it a concession, and you can rent it up to a maximum of 50 years.

Other possibilities foreseen in the law are home storage (you can take the ash urn home), scattering on water or on the sea is a possibility, or on private grounds, but then again you need permission of the land owner. We also see a rise of natural burial places, natural cemeteries, which are also growing in popularity (figure 10).

A few things about crematoria and environmental care (figure 11). In 2000 we saw the obligation of abatement and filtration systems. Before that it was not compulsory but then in the year 2000 our government published emission standards, and you see here the five products or components that are measured. So when we have measurements of our flue gases then these 5 elements are measured and that measurement has to be done annually, and by an external organisation, who then delivers a report on your emissions and then hopefully you comply with those standards and you don't have any infringement or anything like that.

We don't work with permanent measurement systems like in other countries, but we have only an annual measurement obligation. So maintenance is of high importance and we put a lot of effort and money in to keep our installations up and running.

The European Green Deal – maybe you heard about that? It is for us a challenge to cope with this new European setting



Whether one chooses burial or cremation, the intention is that deceased persons receive their final destination on a cemetery

Figure 10



Figure 11

and viewing on environmental care. The European Green Deal released by the European Institutions a few years ago has put a demand for crematoria to reduce the carbon footprint (figure 12).

It is more correct to speak about the greenhouse gas emissions because it is not only the carbon you have to reduce, but all greenhouse gases have to be reduced.

The reference here is 2019 so that means that everyone has



Figure 12

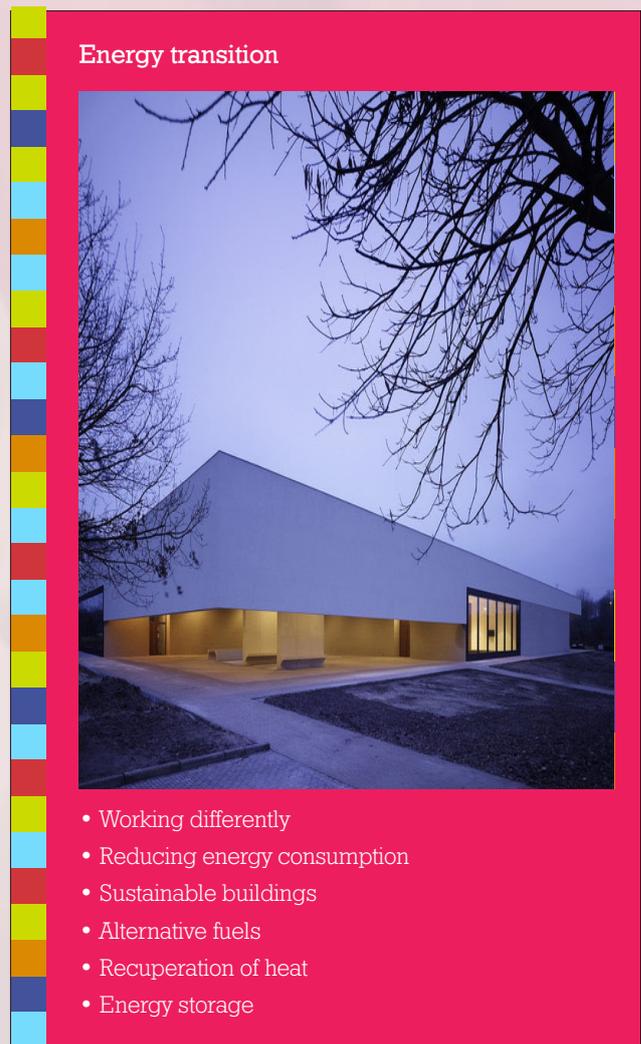


Figure 13

to make up its carbon footprint based on the data he or she has from 2019, and by 2030 we have to reduce this carbon footprint or this greenhouse gas emission by at least 40%.

Because of a dispute before court, the court said it has to be 55%, so that should be changed in my slides because this is quite new. There was a discussion before court by environmental groupings and they debated on the exact norm that the European Institutions imposed. The court decided in favour of them so we have to produce 55% less CO₂ within only six years, so that is quite a challenge to get there. By 2050 we have to become neutral so it will be for my successor, but anyway it is quite a challenge.

How we are going to do that? Well there are different methods – use of green and alternative energies, planting trees or buying emission rights – we don't know yet – but we are fully occupied by planning this energy transition (figure 13).

What we already know is that we started working differently. In the earlier days we worked from 9-5 and now we have started working in shifts and enduring a lot more hours in order to ▶

keep our furnaces warmer, to have a fully occupied agenda for one day of cremations and so to reduce the energy consumption.

We also make plans for new buildings because the renovation of buildings is a key issue in the carbon footprint reduction and the emissions you produce. We are thinking together with the manufacturers of our furnaces how can we work in the future with, for example, biofuels? Should we change to electrical furnaces, or is there a solution in hydrogen? It is all possible and we are investigating that at the moment. We are also implementing systems of heat recuperation and energy storage.

I end this lecture with a few general challenges we face in crematoria and in the funeral sector in Belgium (figure 14). We think that the consolidation of which I spoke about – the funeral homes that are taken over by investment companies will continue to grow because we see a lot of funeral directors in their 50s and 60s and so there are still a lot of funeral directors who need to be succeeded.

Then we also prepare for the upcoming new technologies like resomation and humusation (or composting). A lot of investigation has been done. Pilot projects are underway and we try to be first in the class when it comes to those new technologies. So I hope by the end of this year [2024], or at the latest next year, that we can evolve on those domains too.

Then a big question, not only for myself but where we are debating on in our organisation, how will a farewell ceremony be conducted within 5 or 10 years? What are we going to do? Are we still going to have funeral ceremonies, people together in the ceremony hall looking to the same PowerPoint template with the same photos we always use and with the same music? We know our top ten of farewell music – you will have that too here in Britain of course – but is this the way it will go for decades to come? Well we are thinking of course about more customisation and personal touch – everyone finds that important. Also the notice of not grieving about somebody passing away but celebrating his or her life. But then again we



Figure 14

are very busy on questioning ourselves, how can we organise an immersive experience in the future by implementing artificial intelligence and virtual reality? There are some nice movies and places in the world to visit who could give an impression of that, but that is something we are also looking at to have another way of farewell ceremonies in the future in Belgium.

So that concludes my story about my little country and I hope you saw the comparisons between Britain and Belgium.



Tom manages three crematoria in the north-east of Belgium. He originally started his career at the bar and worked for 14 years as city manager in a municipality and for the local police. Tom is also Chairman of the Flemish Association of Public Crematoria, is actively involved in the ICF (International Cremation Federation) and ECN (European Cremation Network), is member of the board of a Dutch crematorium, and finally is also a judge in the Court of Labour.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Professor Hilary Grainger, Session Chair:

If I could begin by saying thank you so much for such an interesting paper which dovetailed with the previous papers, and will actually lead us onto certain aspects of our next paper. Do we have any questions for Tom?

Question from the audience:

I'm doing a research project on Resomation with Durham University and Kindly Earth, and so I was intrigued to hear you speaking about the context of those new funerary methods in Belgium. I just wondered if you might elaborate on what you were saying about that, and was there anything specific to the Belgium context that creates challenges to those new methods?

Tom Wustenberghs:

Well we know that Resomation is possibly one of the new technologies to dispose of a body. There are already examples in other countries, in other parts of the world, and in Europe we are looking at this new technology – when are we going to do that and in which way are we going to conduct a resomation? Everyone is looking to each other and finally the different regional governments in Belgium were willing to accept Resomation as a form of future body disposal, so they all agreed on it, but there was no execution made in any law. The last change in our Flemish law – we also asked the Flemish government to implement Resomation into the law – they didn't want to do that at the first stage because they wanted to have a research project on the emission standards required for Resomation. You have an effluent when you talk about Resomation and they wanted to know which products should be in the effluent and which emission standards should we draw up related to a Resomation to be able to give a permit on organisations wanting to conduct Resomation.

Research project – who is going to do that? Then everyone looked again to each other and then nobody acted and then we said ok, we will try to pioneer and now we are talking to universities and to research institutes working together on a research project that will be released in the second half of this year [2024]. We hope then to start with that research and that means conducting Resomation on a preliminary basis and we hope to do that by the end of 2024 or the start of 2025. When that research project is confirmed, and when it is approved and results are acceptable for the Government, they will draw up emission standards in the law and then permits can be released I expect as soon as the end of 2025 or beginning of 2026. So that is about the state of Resomation in Belgium at this moment.

Question from the audience:

Just for my understanding how does your celebration farewell meal work? In the UK we have a ceremony at a church or a chapel then we follow the body, or we have it at the crematoria, and then we have a wake. How does it work in Belgium?

Tom Wustenberghs:

The farewell ceremony takes place in a church or crematorium, or at a premises of the funeral director. After the funeral ceremony has finished the family mostly goes to the cemetery and then the coffin is put into the ground, or the ashes are scattered, or the urn placed in a columbarium or an urn field. But after they visit the cemetery, the family, the relatives and the friends they invited, come together for a funeral meal which can also be provided at the crematorium or in a local pub or caterer – it doesn't matter actually – but the family, friends and relatives come together for a meal. It can be a simple meal with coffee and sandwiches or coffee and cake. In some regions it is even a warm meal of three courses and wine and it's a real party then. So it's a tradition that after the ceremony and cemetery you come together and have a funeral meal.

Question from the audience:

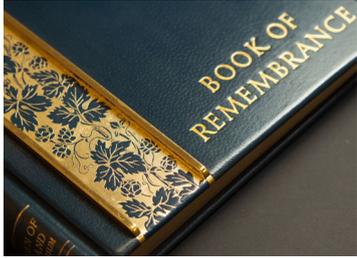
We often look to Europe for innovative design in crematoria. Interesting to hear you talk about new premises and new facilities. What are your thoughts on the trend for numbers of crematoria across Belgium? Is it an increasing trend? Is it a cultural shift? Is population change driving more and more crematoria or is it a fixed position?

Tom Wustenberghs:

I shall start with referring to what Barbara Kemmis said earlier in her presentation and the plateau we'll probably reach after some decades of cremation. I mentioned that we actually started cremation on a larger scale in 1983 so it's about 40 years now that cremation has been quite normal. We have a cremation rate in Flanders of 75% so 3 in 4. That means that cremation has already a very normal status in Flanders and in Belgium. The Government wanted to avoid that in every municipality or in every city you should have a crematorium. Excuse me for the Dutch colleagues but in the Netherlands almost every municipality has its own crematorium. That was not the intention in Belgium, so we made a sort of plan to spread the crematoria around the country, and like I mentioned with a distance of 30km between them so that when you need a crematorium it's not too far away. That is actually why we came up to those 22 crematoria, ►

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that's a result of that plan that was drawn up. So I don't think there will be any new crematorium in the near future, I think with those 22 we try to cope with all the demands to cremation.

Question from the audience:

Thank you Tom for making the challenging journey to join us today. Hilary and I had the pleasure of being shown around the Flanders region by you and your crematoria. One of the parts of the process that I think we were most fascinated with was the process that you have for the delivery of the coffins and collections of urns by the funeral directors, and the QR code system which I think a lot of people would not be aware of. Would you be able to explain how that's done differently in Belgium?

Tom Wustenberghs:

We managed the delivery of the coffins and the collection of the ash urns a few years ago in another way. One of the reasons for that was something you also know in the UK – the traffic jams on the highways. When you have crematoria across the country, so not in every municipality but across the country, and you have to drive potentially a few miles to get there then you often need to drive over the highway around big cities with a lot of traffic jams.

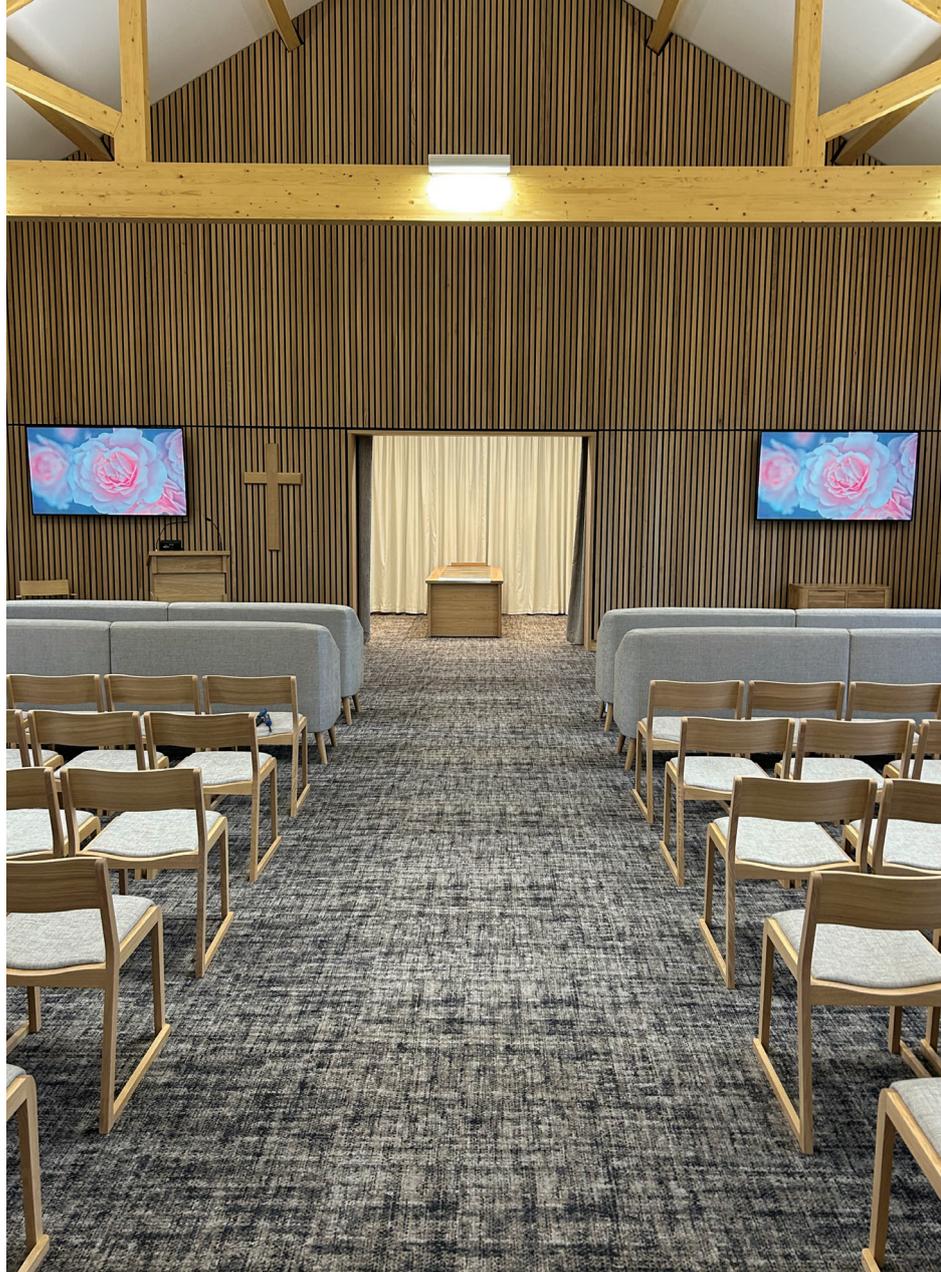
It was often a problem for funeral directors to get there in time at the crematorium and we did two things. We programmed other opening hours, so we extended the opening hours of the crematorium, but we also started to work with QR codes. That means that a funeral director makes a reservation for a cremation, he can print out his confirmation and on that confirmation there is a QR code. They then bring that QR code along to the crematorium, scan it, the doors open and the door of the refrigerator opens. The name of the deceased person can be stamped on the coffin and then he can put the coffin away in the refrigerator. Then he leaves the premises and comes the next day for the collection of the ash urn. He will receive a notice from the crematorium when the cremation is ready and the ash urn is available. The ash urn would be put in a locker and after receiving this message with a new QR code, he can come to the crematorium and the door opens again with that QR code. Not only the door but also the individual locker opens, specific for that one ash urn, so he can come at any time, during the day or night, in the weekend, to bring his coffin or to collect his ash urn simply by using this QR code which comes along with the reservation or message at the end of the cremation. So it offers more flexibility in getting to or from the crematorium.

Professor Hilary Grainger, Session Chair:

Well thank you very much indeed Tom. Testaments to the interest in your paper we've run out of time now, so it just remains for me to say thank you so much on everybody's behalf.

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ICF Country Report – Belgium



Pharos

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Spring
2025

**By Tom Wustenberghs, LL.M, EMBA, General Manager,
Pontes and Chairman of the Flemish Association of Public Crematoria**

Ladies and gentleman it may be blunt and disrespectful to talk about statistics in Belgium after this very important address that Dr Turner has made so I thank her for her contribution. It was very meaningful and I think we learnt a lot.

A lot of the things I have already mentioned yesterday in my presentation about the funeral process in Belgium, so I will keep it short.

A few things about Belgium in figures. We have a population of about 12 million people and so when you estimate that almost 1% of the people die, you have an average of around 110,000

deaths every year (figure 1).

You can see that the number of births and deaths are decreasing which was evident after the Covid pandemic. There is a huge rise of migration and that was due to the incoming people from Ukraine because of the East European conflict.

You can also see an important number of diversity – a lot of

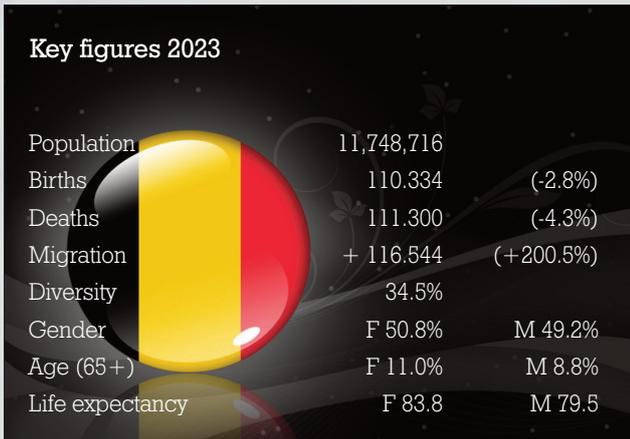


Figure 1

people with other backgrounds, other religions, other beliefs. You can see that 1 in 3 people do not have a Belgian background, and so we also mentioned here the importance of recognising other cultures and other religions. We also saw it in Australia's presentation so it is something to take into account.

People aged 65 plus form a group of 20% and that will of course increase in the coming years because of the baby boom generation.

Cremations are at about 75,000, and as I explained to you yesterday, we have 22 crematoriums in Belgium so that means that on average every crematorium does 3,000–4,000 cremations a year.

There are almost 500 funeral companies with 5,500 people working in the sector, but also there you can see the major problem of age amongst workers who are active in the funeral sector. Finding new people to get into the funeral sector is probably a problem, like in the UK, but in Belgium it is very hard to find people who succeed these businesses.

Mortality (figure 2) – we have the two big years

So people said that after Covid we would have a declining number of people dying, but we didn't see that. In fact there is still a higher rate of mortality in Belgium.

2020 and 2022 which was a high number of deaths because of Covid. But then still in 2023 we had a relatively high number of people dying, also on the cremation level. So people said that after Covid we would have a declining number of people dying, but we didn't see that. In fact there is still a higher rate of mortality in Belgium. Only this year – 2024 – we do see the first signs that we are getting back to normal as we have known before the pandemic.

Cremations did increase in the beginning (figure 3). It was especially meaningful in Flanders but last year it has also taken a growth in Wallonia, in the southern part, leaving us with a cremation rate of 70% (figure 4). It has still increased especially over the last few years – also influenced by the pandemic.

The conflict in Ukraine has given us a few matters of impact, probably also here in the UK, but it was a little bit different across Europe (figure 5). We saw a huge increase of costs – our suppliers presented us with higher invoices, energy became two

to four times as expensive as before, and also the salaries of employees in the funeral sector rose 10% and even to 20% in public crematoria, so that was a huge rise of costs and therefore we had to increase our price. The most crematoria increased their price about 20% and also the cost of organising a funeral got more expensive.

We tried to optimise our operations to temper these costs and you saw a few crematoria moving away from classic fuels like gas and they invested in electric furnaces. I know there was a lot of debate and discussion whether or not the electric furnace is the future, but anyway, a few went away from gas furnaces.

A lot of these costs that we have seen or which were raised during the crisis in 2022 and 2023 still exists today. Only the energy price has slowed down but that's the only thing that went down, not the other costs.

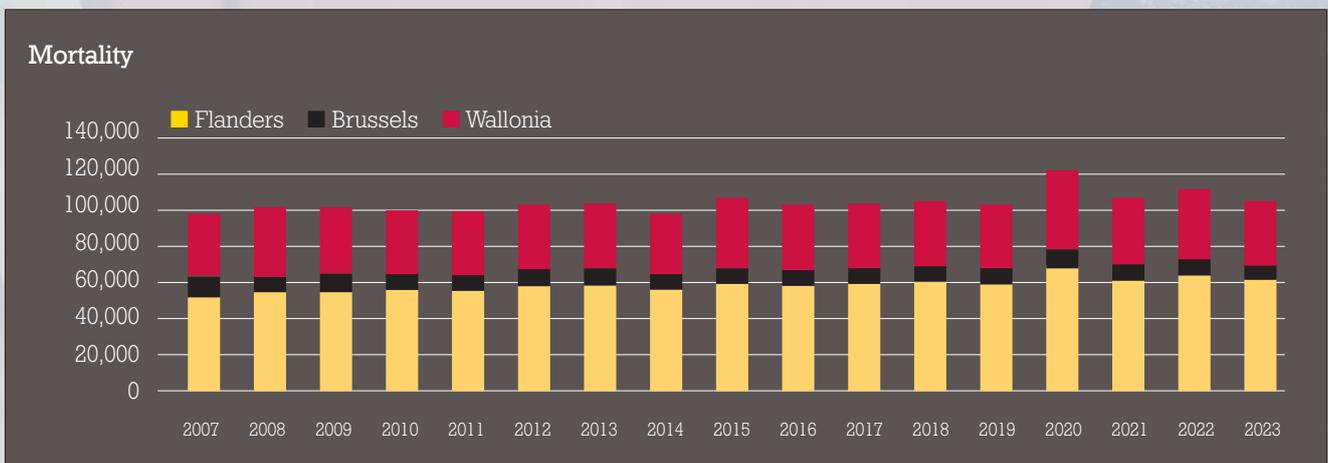


Figure 2

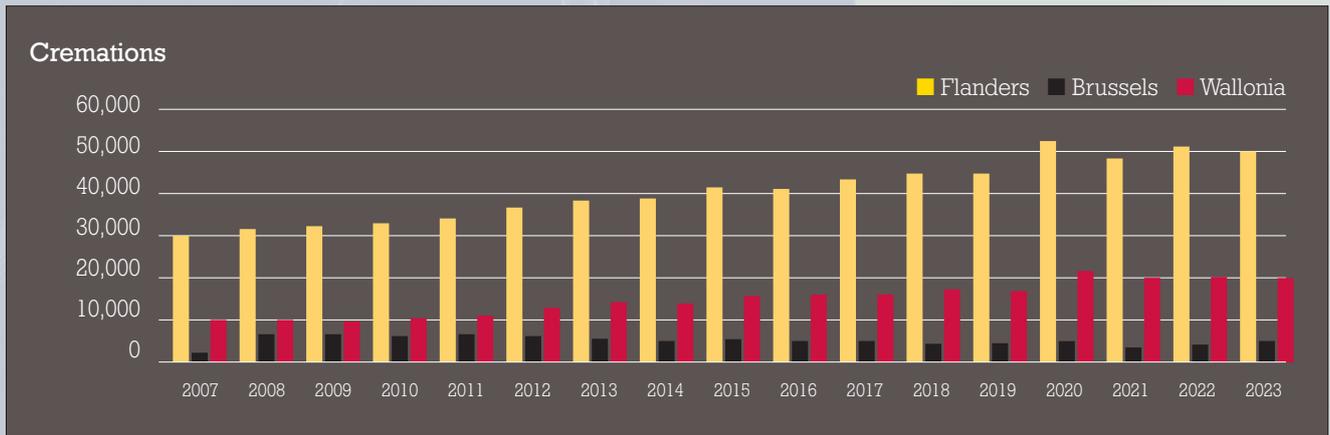


Figure 3



Figure 4

Pharos
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The Green Deal (figure 6) – I told you about yesterday so I will go over this slide. A few things about the latest legislation that is due in Belgium I also addressed yesterday (figures 7 and 8) – it is maybe interesting to see that Australia referred to it – but we just adopted the fact that persons and their pets can be

buried or cremated – not together – but the ash urns can be put down in the urn field or in the columbaria together. So that is something new and is recognised in the latest legislation.

What we also try to do in our public crematoria is to cooperate because we see a lot of benefit in doing things

Conflict in Ukraine

- Impact 2023
 - increasing costs (energy, suppliers, salaries)
- Solutions
 - increased prices (±20%)
 - optimising operation
 - transition towards electric furnaces
- Today
 - level of costs (except energy) and new way of working remains

Figure 5

European Green Deal

- Aim is to reduce the CO₂-emissions
- 2050 ► climate neutral operations
- 2030 ► reducing emissions with 40%
- Average 3% per year
- Year of reference = 2019
- Actions
 - alternative fuels
 - alternative energy sources (ORC, solar panels, windmills, ...)
 - renovating buildings

Figure 6

together. For example we tender collectively the energy needs we have so we go to market as one party, with 12 crematoria together. We also are investigating some collective initiatives on the energy transition, for example when you would like more green energy for your crematorium is there a possibility in buying solar panels together. Or even thinking about wind energy – can we build together – a windmill that can supply us all with alternative energy.

The latest thing we did was the development of a new ecological ash urn. Every ash is put in a standard urn we deliver as a crematorium, it's the same model all around Belgium. We used ocean waste that was recycled and we made a new urn of it, and when the ashes are scattered afterwards the funeral director can bring back the used ash urn and we recycle them once again so that the full circle is closed (figure 9).

The last thing I wanted to mention is while there are lots of parties involved in organising a funeral process like I described yesterday, we are working on a digital platform on which all parties can come together – the hospitals, doctors, retirement homes – they can put all their documents that they have made after the medical examination on a platform (figure 10). The new process will appoint the first doctor who is involved in the funeral process. We'll start in the future our funeral process – not a funeral director anymore – but the first doctor who is notified when he confirms the death, or when he examines the body and declares the person has died, then by drawing up his certificate he will put it in the digital platform and that will be the trigger for the start of the funeral process.

Of course the funeral director can add some documents like passports or other things about a wedding and the state of the person. He can add it to the digital platform and its municipality will find everything there related to the application for the certificate or a cremation permit.

Also in the future the crematoria will get access to the platform and we can find the cremation permit on that platform, so it will go much faster and with less mistakes, so we hope that will help to make our process more efficient.

In a nutshell that was just a few things I wanted to add on Belgium and my story from yesterday. Thank you for your attention. ■

We also are investigating some collective initiatives on the energy transition, for example when you would like more green energy for your crematorium is there a possibility in buying solar panels together.

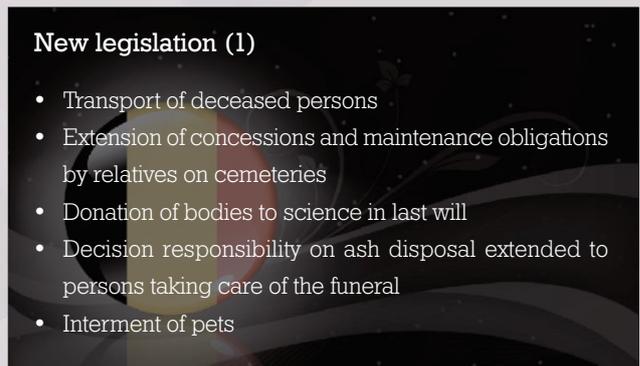


Figure 7

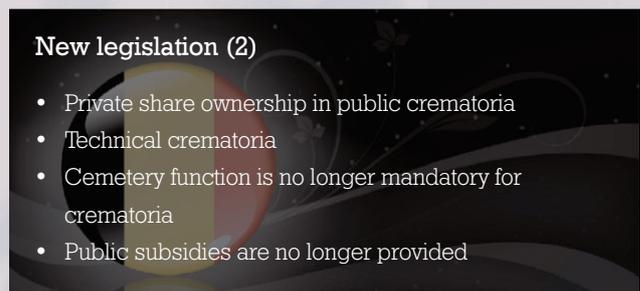


Figure 8

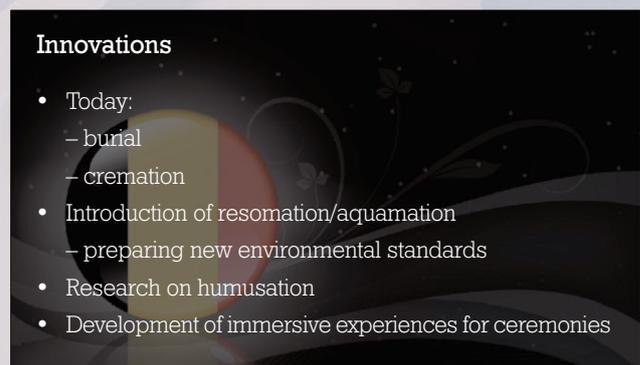


Figure 9

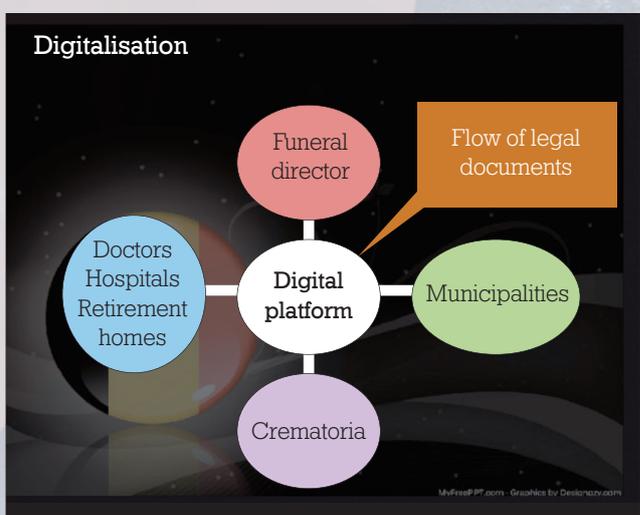


Figure 10

Cremation in Germany Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow



by Thies Heinrich,
Managing Director, CremTec GmbH

Photo: Freepik

First of all I would like to thank the Cremation Society of Great Britain for the invitation and the opportunity to present today's topic '*Cremation in Germany – Past, Present and Future*'.

I am a bit intimidated by the great presentations we have heard over the last two days and in German this presentation won't be a big deal for me but in English it's quite difficult I think.

Our agenda today leads us from the historical overview of cremation overall, particularly in Germany, to the current cremation market situation in Germany, and the technological and innovative developments in Germany.

So to keep my introduction short – my name is Thies and I'm the Managing Director of CremTec GmbH and three crematoria in the northern part of Germany. I literally grew up in a crematorium. My father, Svend-Jörk Sobolewski, founded and started one of the first crematoria that was privately operated in Germany, and so I worked there for pocket money since my thirteenth birthday. Right now I've nearly two thirds of my life connected to cremation.

As you all know cremation is a form of burial that is thousands of years old and once served as a ritual and act in many ancient civilisations. It has now experienced a remarkable revival in the modern world due to technological progress and social

changes. This presentation explores the changing nature of cremation, analyses current trends, and looks ahead to the future of this form of burial. The aim is to develop an in-depth understanding of the potential and challenges affecting the cremation industry in Germany.

The beginnings of cremation can be traced back to the Bronze Age, where practical reasons such as land use and hygiene were paramount. The urnfield culture emerged in the late Bronze Age in Central Europe, with burning on pyres and storing ashes in urns – urns out of bronze and ceramics – becoming predominant (figure 1).

On this map we can see the widespread urnfield culture (figure 2). Nearly the whole territory of what we call Germany today was covered by this ancient culture, except the area I am from which is north of the River Elbe. Historically we have not so much cremation in my area in Germany.

With the influence of Christianity, cremation disappeared in Europe slow but steady. The first really violent break occurred in the years 777 and 785, when Charlemagne introduced a ban

Historical overview

Early beginnings

- Bronze Age Europe: Practical reasons of land use and hygiene



Urnfield culture

- Emerged in late Bronze Age Central Europe
- Burning on pyres and storing ashes in urns became predominant

Influence of Christianity

- Cremation disappeared in Europe due to religious edicts
- Edict of Paderborn in 785 as the first formal ban on cremation in Germany
- Surrender of the Saxon tribe in 777: "Death penalty for those who bury corpses according to pagan custom by exposing the body to the flames"

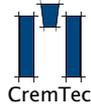


Figure 1

on cremation that was to remain in force in Europe for over a thousand years. The Saxon Tribe's surrender in 777 included

the death penalty for those who buried corpses according to this pagan customs by exposing the body to flames.

Fun fact – The principle of church tax. 10% of the income tax to the churches also originated in Germany from the same document. The fact that 8-9% tax still applies to members of both churches today is, I think, one of the biggest jokes in history, along with the ban on cremation. To be fair, today's tax does not apply to the entire income but makes up 8-9% of the income tax.

In the 19th century, industrialisation and urbanisation revived cremation practices. Hygienic and aesthetic advantages brought cremation back into public consciousness, with Friedrich Küchenmeister being a major lobbyist for cremation in Germany.

Another anniversary – The first person to be cremated in a closed fire in Germany was Lady Katherine Dilke. Lady Dilke was cremated in a closed fire in Dresden in 1874. Katherine died shortly after giving birth to her son, who survived. As a convinced supporter of cremation, Katherine had ordered it in her last will (figure 3).

I think there are some historians among you who should be familiar with the name of her husband Charles Dilke 2nd Baronet. After the loss of his second wife years later, Charles gained notoriety in one of the most famous sex scandals of the 19th century. This scandal which involved a ménage a trois and resulted in a court case, prevented a promising political career for Dilke. I read that he could have become a challenger to ▶



Figure 2

Historical overview

First modern cremation in a closed fire in Dresden (1874):

- Lady Katherine Dilke, wife of Sir Charles Dilke 2nd Baronet
- Charles later gained notoriety in one of the most famous sex scandals of the 19th century. This scandal, which involved a ménage a trois and resulted in a court case, prevented a promising political career for Dilke
- Charles himself was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium in 1911 and buried in Kensal Green Cemetery



Figure 3

William Gladstone without this affair. Charles himself was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium in 1911 and buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. I read that Freud was cremated there too.

The furnace in which Lady Dilke was cremated was a modified glass made by Mr Siemens and Mr Reclam.

Four years later the first German crematorium opened in Gotha in 1878 and is still operating today. They have modified the oven but it's still operating.

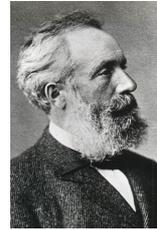
Another fun fact is that the older brothers of Mr Reclam and Mr Siemens are incredibly famous in Germany today. Every child knows the Reclams Publishing House. They publish yellow books with German high literature and every school child in Germany reads these books. Of course, maybe every one of you knows the Siemens global corporation, the electricity company with over 350,000 employees worldwide. The younger brothers were lobbyists and fighters for cremation in Germany (figure 4).

Cremation in Germany developed slowly but steadily so that by 1910 there were already twenty crematoria in operation.

The darkest period in the history of cremation began in 1933 with the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor. The

Historical overview

Pioneers of cremation and their famous brothers



Friedrich August Siemens



Wilhelm Siemens



Carl Heinrich Reclam



Anton Philipp Reclam

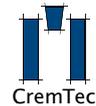


Figure 4

"Reich Law on Cremation" of 1934 was an important legal adjustment that made cremation the same as burial and whose content still affects all 16 burial laws today.

However, and how could it be otherwise, the National Socialists did not follow their own laws. They used the technical peculiarities of cremation to cover up their terrible crimes. Two manufacturers of cremation systems were particularly close to

the NSDAP, to the one and only party in the Third Reich, Kori from Berlin and Topf&Söhne from Erfurt. They won tenders with parameters such as kilos per hour with the lowest possible gas consumption – horrible!

After the allied victory over Nazi Germany, cremation developed very differently in the divided country. In the GDR, cremation almost completely replaced burial. In the Federal Republic, acceptance of cremation increased more slowly, even though the Second Vatican Council in 1963 declared cremation to be equal to burial (figure 5).

Since private crematoria entered the market at the end of the 1990s, there has been a steady increase in cremation rate, which was previously less than 50%. According to a recent survey by Reichs Quality Association (RAL Cremation Quality Association) the cremation rate reached 78% and cremation has become the norm!

On this map, we can see right now today the different numbers and percentages in eastern and western Germany

After the allied victory over Nazi Germany, cremation developed very differently in the divided country.

Historical overview

20th Century developments:

- World War II
- Tender competition for the favor of the NSDAP
- Post-war differences in East and West Germany
- High influence of the Catholic Church in West Germany
- Cremation was considered as marxistic in East Germany and as such actively promoted by the only political party (SED)
- Probably the only respectable success of the dictatorship

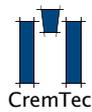


Figure 5

(figure 6). Let's take a look at the current market situation. There are currently 162 crematoria in operation in Germany, of which approximately half are municipality operated and half privately operated.

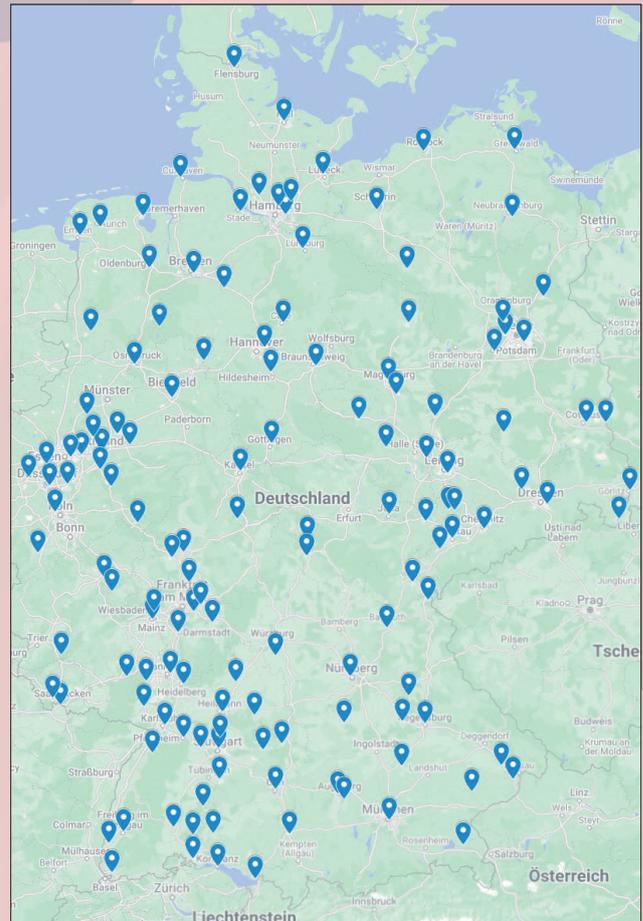
In terms of figures, the average number of cremations per crematorium in Germany is 5,000. It's ten times larger than we heard from my friend Barbara from the US, and a bit more than in Belgium.

We can find crematoria with numbers from 1,000 up to 40,000 cremated deaths a year. The Rhein Taunus Crematorium in the southwest of Germany gained this incredible number with eight ovens operating nearly 360 days a year.

However, there are fewer and fewer white spots on the map, leading to intensified competition and over capacity when new locations are developed.

When the first private crematoria entered the market, more comprehensive service portfolios were established, such as modern funeral rooms, integrated cafés, and accompanied cremations. We see a lot of influence through our Dutch neighbours here. Many modern crematoria have adapted to the change in customer needs. Today, differences seem to be emerging between purely technical orientated supra-regional crematoria and service-oriented, and more customer orientated crematoria. Both offer cremation of the deceased, but the range of services and the quality are obviously not at the same level.

The German market differs a lot in a number of ways from other European markets. Ashes have to be buried in cemeteries, there's no legal way to escape this. Crematoria in Germany are 100% business to business. This means that crematorium clients are always the funeral director. In Germany we have about 6,000



Current market situation

Overview

Crematoria in Germany:

- 162 operational crematoria, split between public and private operators
- Increasing competition and overcapacity

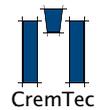


Figure 6

individual funeral parlours, which in turn are the service provider for the relatives (figure 7).

In Germany we have almost no private cemeteries. 99% of the cemeteries were run by the municipalities and the churches. Of course, we see tendencies towards consolidation of the market, but two facts make it difficult for capital from outside the industry. First, half of the crematoria are publicly owned and there are hardly any trends towards privatisation of public services in Germany. The second is we have nearly 6,000 independent funeral homes and those cannot be taken over overnight. So the acquisition of those requires a lot of effort and time.

Let's move on to the demographic change in Germany. It is characterised by an ageing population and a falling birth rate, further increasing the demand for cremations. Growing ▶

Current market situation

URN BURIALS IN GERMANY IN 2022

According to a survey by Gütegemeinschaft Feuerbestattungsanlagen e.V. August 2023

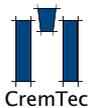
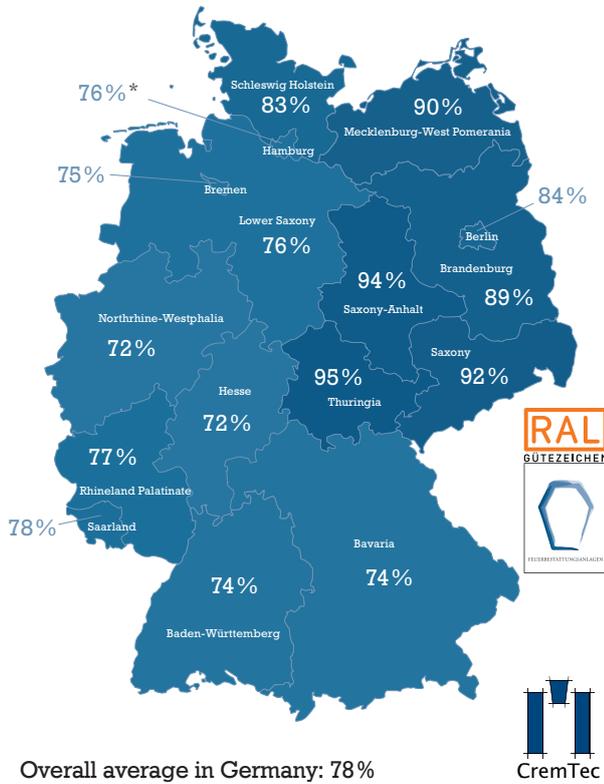
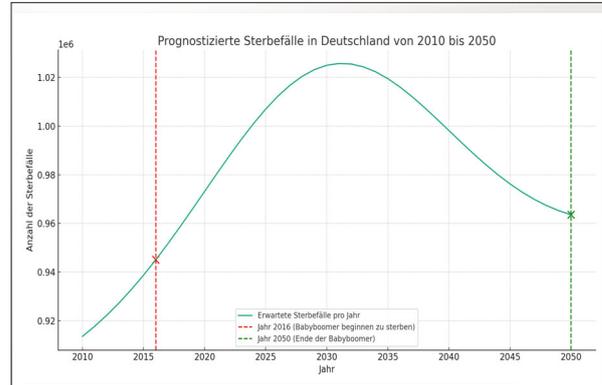


Figure 7

Current market situation



Visual representation of projected deaths, highlighting the baby boomer effect

Demographic developments

Ageing population:

- Baby boomer generation's impact on death rates
- Significant increase in cremation demand



Figure 8

acceptance is also reflected in the increasing number of crematoria, and the increasing social openness towards different forms of burial. The ageing of the baby boomer generation will have a significant impact on the death rate in Germany. As this group enters old age, deaths will increase simply because the mortality rate is higher in older age groups.

On this chart we can see the first point in time when the oldest baby boomer are at a potential age to die, which is 2016 for Germany (figure 8). It's a bit later than in other countries and it's also marked the last point with the green line in 2050. This development makes our market so interesting for venture capital.

The Russian war against Ukraine had a big impact on the gas prices in Germany and under previous federal governments, I think Germany made itself too dependent on Russian gas, but this might be a political topic for later.

However, what the rising gas prices show is that it is not

The Russian war against Ukraine had a big impact on the gas prices in Germany and under previous federal governments, I think Germany made itself too dependent on Russian gas.

smart to be too loose with gas consumption in crematoria. Thanks to good association work, it has been possible in some federal states to reduce the legal post-combustion chamber temperature from 850° to 750°C, which has led to an energy reduction of around 30% in modern oven systems (figure 9).

Large systems, such as the IFZW Freefall Cremators, are also able to operate almost around the clock and these 3-shift systems also have a major advantage over one or two-shift systems from an energy point of view.

Even if prices are stable again today, the reduction makes absolute sense both ecologically, environmentally and economically.

We move on to the technological and innovative developments (figure 10). Development of cremation technologies has expanded at a significantly faster rate. Flue gas cleaning processes, continuous monitoring of emission parameters, and exhaust heat utilisation are right now established. Hydrogen as a fuel for combustion plants presents a promising alternative to traditional fossil fuels, producing only water as a byproduct and reducing the ecological footprint – this might be the next megatrend.

Just to show you a funny German word I picked our emission law: 27. Bundesimmissionsschutzverordnung. But to be serious, there are tendencies to tighten this law up in terms

Current market situation

Reduction of energy consumption

Crisis Adaptations:

- Response to potential gas shortages from geopolitical events

Energy Saving Approaches:

- Permanent 3-shift operations
- Lowering post combustion chamber temperatures (750°C)

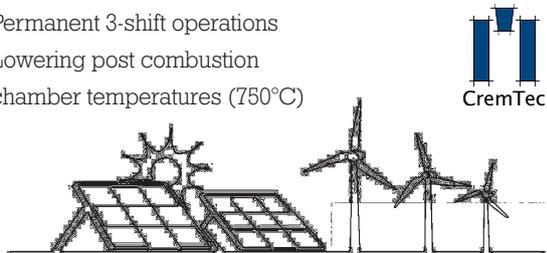


Figure 9

Technological and innovative developments

Flue Gas Purification:

- Established components like continuous emission monitoring since 1997
- Current efforts to tighten the emission laws in Germany (27. Bundesimmissionsschutzverordnung)

Hydrogen and Electric Furnaces:

- Promising alternatives to traditional fuels
- Efficiency and environmental benefits

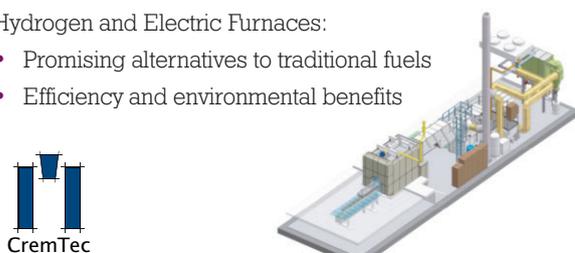


Figure 10

of mercury. We do not have a mercury law right now but maybe it will come.

Electric ovens can offer significant environmental and energy efficiency benefits in the cremation industry (figure 11). The integration of an Organic Rankine Cycle (ORC) system represents an innovative method of using waste heat to generate electricity. We have already seen those systems in Cologne where Facultatieve implemented it, and also in Diemelstadt where IFZW did the same, and in Kiel. It's becoming a trend I think in German crematoria.

Installation of photovoltaic (PV) systems can further improve energy balance, covering the majority of a crematorium's electric energy needs. Advanced fireclay and ceramic surfaces in incinerators offer temperature resistance, thermal insulation, and chemical resistance, leading to a longer service life and I think improved performance.

Another megatrend is the use of AI technology (figure 12). Integrating AI into control systems of the furnaces offers various benefits. AI can monitor and adjust the combustion process in real-time, optimise energy needs and enable predictive maintenance. AI also, I think, optimises the administration processes by minimising manual input errors and automating data extraction and processing.

The next megatrend. Sustainability is an important global topic. It aims for long lasting peace, prosperity, and protection of our planet.

The German sustainability code focuses on creating a long term plan for sustainability. It's the same for the new Green Deal for the EU, and it should be part of process management and consider the highest environmental standards. The social standards include trained skilled workers and ensure the wellbeing and health of employees. I think these two

Technological and innovative developments

Organic Rankine Cycle (ORC) Systems:

- Waste heat utilization for electricity generation
- Examples: Crematoria in Kiel and Diemelstadt

Photovoltaic (PV) Systems:

- Solar energy use for crematorium operations



Photovoltaic, Feuerbestattungen Stade

Figure 11

Technological and innovative developments

AI in Crematoria:

- Real-time monitoring and optimisation
- Predictive maintenance and administrative improvements

Sustainability Goals:

- Alignment with global and national sustainability standards
- Importance of long-term sustainability strategies



Figure 12

elements are key to managing a crematorium in modern times. This approach helps crematoria to contribute positively in society and towards the environment.

I will come to a short conclusion. We can see tendencies in German society and also in the German Government to play a leading role in new green technologies, and I think we have to go with the flow and invest today in technologies of tomorrow.

The current cremation rate of 78% in Germany is steadily increasing, with a future rate of up to 90% being realistic. The continued increase in acceptance of cremation offers a number of opportunities. Innovative progress, such as hydrogen fuel and electric furnaces, can reduce the ecological impact and increase efficiency.

ORC, PV and AI offer exciting possibilities for modern crematoria. Despite positive developments, there are challenges, such as increasing competition and market saturation. Stricter environmental regulations and demographic changes will require a constant adaptation and modernisation of cremation technology in Germany.

The ageing baby boomer generation will lead to an increase in deaths. The funeral industry must keep pace, and I think that's the same for every country, with the changing demands both technically and ethically. The key to future success will be developing sustainable technologies, promoting social

Conclusion

"There is no more dangerous and illusory idea than to believe that it is possible to arrive at conclusive knowledge on any subject of science."

Alexander von Humboldt

Final Note: Emphasis on the importance of staying curious and innovative

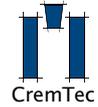


Figure 12

acceptance, and staying up to date with regulatory requirements.

Finally I brought a quote of one of the most famous Germans, Mr Alexander von Humboldt. *"There is no more dangerous and illusory idea than to believe that it is possible to arrive at conclusive knowledge on any subject of science."* So it means for me, modern cremation is a central element of a sustainable burial culture, balancing tradition and modern environmental awareness (figure 13). So let's stay curious and innovative in this evolving field. Thank you for your attention and please feel free to ask any questions.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

How fascinating was that! It just shows me that between René and Thies, and all our other international speakers, how important it is to learn from each other and compare and contrast between countries in terms of history and experience. Thank you so much. Do we have any questions?

Question from the audience:

You mentioned quite a lot about new technologies and issues of sustainability in your talk. Obviously with the FBCA opening up to new funeral methods yesterday morning, I was wondering if there is any appetite for those kind of things in Germany. If there's any interest in things like alkaline hydrolysis, cryomation, natural organic reduction, or whether it is really more for electric cremation or alternative fuels?

Thies Heinrich:

I think yes, right now there are projects. Do you mean composting – natural organic reduction? There are tendencies but I think right now it's too expensive for the bereaved, so the

cost factor leads them to cremation. I think it will come but it will come for a small amount of Germans who are able to buy it.

Question from the audience:

We all know it's prohibited to take ashes home in Germany. When will that end in your opinion?

Thies Heinrich:

We have 16 different laws state by state, and we did a lot of lobby work to open up these laws for taking ashes or part of ashes home. But I think the influence of churches in Germany is too big right now and they do not like this possibility, so it's forbidden.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

It was on one of your slides where you referred to service developments, and you mentioned accompanied cremations. I was very conscious that here we talk a lot about the rise in direct cremation so it almost felt like you're the other way round. I wonder if you could say a little bit about that.

Thies Heinrich:

Yes, it's the complete opposite. In Germany we have about 99% direct cremations, or what you call direct cremation. We have ceremonies, but at the funeral home and not at the crematorium. Our group offer this service but to the funeral director and the funeral director offers this to the families. So yes we do 1-2% in our crematorium, but for the whole of Germany I think it's less than 1% accompanied cremations.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

So with the ceremony, that would be at what time scale?

Thies Heinrich:

The ceremony is before with the coffin and also after the cremation with the urn.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

Is that a choice?

Thies Heinrich:

It's a free choice, yes.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

Would some people have both?

Thies Heinrich:

Yes, that is also possible and I think it's a matter of money. Grand parties with the coffin are very costly so a lot of people tend to use direct cremation also without any service.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

It's very interesting to see the differences, and I also noted that when you talked about AI you were looking at technological developments. Is that something that is already being used or is about to come in, or do you see it coming in the future? To what extent is that already with us?

Thies Heinrich:

For this theme I would like to give the microphone to Barbara or Dieter from IFZW. Are you already using artificial intelligence in your cremation systems?

More and more.

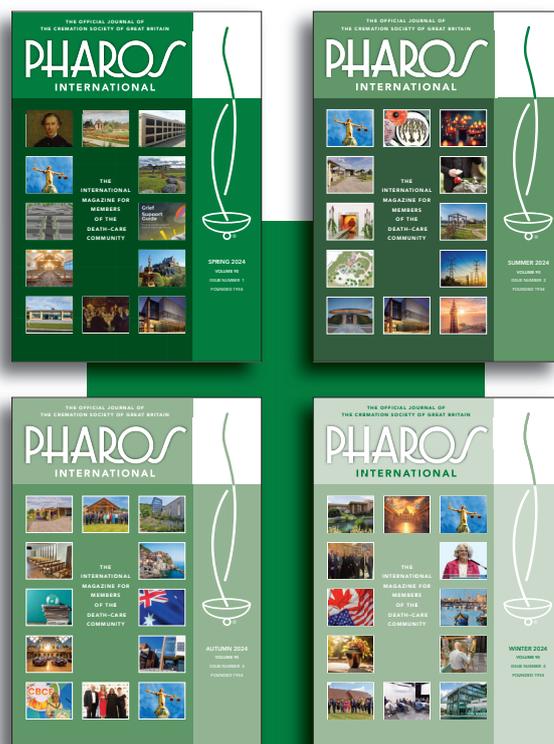
I think it's more kind of machine learning than real AI but it is maybe a pre-step of the real AI use in cremation systems.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

How do you think that AI could go on to the next step? How could it develop?

Thies Heinrich:

I think some of you should visit Berlin crematorium. They ▶



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have already some automated wagons grabbing the coffins out of the cooling rooms and moving them to the ovens. Maybe this might be more automated and I think a fully automated crematorium is possible in the next 30 years.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

One final question. From your experiences of meeting and talking to people here in the UK, are there things that we are doing that surprise you, or you might think actually I'll take that back and we could model ourselves on that?

Thies Heinrich:

I was impressed by the awareness for grieving and the talks we heard here. You are far away from Germany and I think yes,

maybe there are some smaller groups thinking about these themes. But nationwide we don't see that in Germany. It's awesome really.

Debbie Kerslake, Session Chair:

Thank you. It's not good to hear that it's not happening in Germany but it's good to know that we are doing something that the rest of the world can learn from. That's something I've learnt from international work, and I've heard that before, so that's really good to hear. As we heard from Emily we know we've got a long, long way to go, but actually in some respects we're doing something right. I would like to thank you Thies. That was absolutely fascinating. ■



Thies, who literally grew up in one of the first private crematoria in Germany, is now the Managing Director of 3 crematoria in northern Germany and also runs CremTec, a planning and consultancy company specialising in all aspects of the funeral industry. He is co-author of the textbook for the funeral profession in Germany and teaches at the vocational school for funeral directors and cremation technicians. He is interested in the topic of cremation not only from a technical and legal perspective, but also from a historical and ethical point of view.

In an honorary capacity, he is the first chairman of the RAL Quality Association for Cremation Facilities. In this position, he is committed to improving the quality of crematoria in Germany.

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The following details about any of the crematoria in Great Britain and The Republic of Ireland?

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Available to order online: The Cremation Society's *Directory of Crematoria* is available in online or hard copy formats. The hard copy comes available in a recyclable binder or can be purchased as an insert only. Over 100 pages of information checked and updated annually, this publication will be invaluable for anyone associated with or interested in the cremation movement. To order your copy, please visit our website www.cremation.org.uk/publications



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Obituary: Irene Arber

The Cremation Society was sorry to learn of the recent death of Irene Arber who died on Thursday 21 November 2024 at the age of 73, after a long illness.

Many sector colleagues, conference attendees, and members of the International Cremation Federation will have had the pleasure of knowing and meeting Irene when she accompanied her husband Roger Arber, former Secretary of The Cremation Society, at many events, both nationally and internationally. We wish to extend our sincere condolences to Roger and all who knew Irene, at this sad loss.

Durham University Cremation Society Archives

As part of the marking of its 150th anniversary, The Cremation Society has added the Society's original Declaration signed by its founding members in January 1874, to its Archives held as a Special Collection in Durham University's Palace Green Library.

The presentation of the original Declaration was attended by one of the Society's Honorary Vice-Presidents – Professor Douglas Davies, the Society's Chair – Professor Hilary J Grainger OBE and Executive Officer – Wendy Buchan. As part of the marking of this significant addition to the Society's Archives, presentations were given by Professor Grainger and by scholars at the University who have previously used the Society's Archives in their work. Professor Douglas Davies said:

'The comprehensive archives of the Society, housed in the University Library Special Collections since 2001, combine with the specialist ex-



perience of the academics at Durham to create what is widely acknowledged as a unique, world-leading resource for researchers in the history and practice of cremation.'

You can find full details of the Society's Archives at <https://libguides.durham.ac.uk/asc-other-collections-and-subjects/societies>



Cremation Society Tree Planting

Glasgow Crematorium

As part of marking its 150th anniversary, The Cremation Society has launched a tree planting scheme that will see trees being planted at a number of notable locations, including 150 trees to be incorporated into the landscaping of the London Cremation Company's new site being developed at Lee-on-the-Solent.

A number of trees have already been planted at a number of crematoria, including Glasgow Crematorium, being the first crematorium built in Scotland in 1895. Scottish Cremation Society's Chairman John Chapman said: 'We were greatly

honoured when we heard that as part of their commemoration, the Cremation Society of Great Britain wished to gift a tree to our Society. I'm very pleased indeed to have this opportunity to thank most warmly the Council Members and Officers of the Cremation Society of Great Britain for this kindness. The tree is a Persian Ironwood and we look forward to seeing it flourish for years to come here in our Garden of Reflection where it will add greatly to the serenity and ambience of the area. A commemorative plaque records the generosity of the Cremation Society of Great Britain'.



Garden of England Crematorium



Thames View Crematorium



Crematorium near Gainsborough receives award for outstanding environmental sustainability practices

Lea Fields Crematorium near Gainsborough has been awarded a Bronze Award from the Greener Globe Funeral Standard.

The accolade recognises the crematorium's commitment to adopting and implementing a comprehensive Environmental Policy, as well as ensuring that all staff are informed and actively engaged in its green ethos.

This achievement is a significant milestone in the facility's ongoing efforts to promote environmentally conscious practices within its operations.

Councillor Stephen Bunney, Chair of the Environment, Climate and Sustainability Working Group at West Lindsey District Council, which runs the crematorium, said: "This award is a testament to the dedication of the Lea Fields Crematorium team and their commitment to making sustainability a core part of their mission.

"By reducing environmental impacts and promoting greener practices, they are setting examples for other facilities in the region.

"As a Council, we are proud to see this initiative align with our broader environmental goals."

Lea Fields Crematorium on Gainsborough Road, Lea, has implemented a range of measures aimed at reducing its ecological footprint, from energy-efficient processes to waste reduction and sustainable landscaping practices.



Lea Fields Crematorium near Gainsborough has been awarded a bronze award from the Greener Globe Funeral Standard

These efforts are now officially recognised by the Greener Globe Funeral Standard, a highly regarded benchmark for eco-conscious funeral services.

Deborah Balsdon, Manager of Lea Fields Crematorium, said: "We are delighted to receive the Bronze Award from the Greener Globe Funeral Standard.

"Sustainability is at the heart of what we do at Lea Fields, and this recognition reflects the hard work and dedication of our entire team.

"We will continue to strive for even greater environmental standards to better serve our community and our planet."

Lincolnshire World
December 2024

Dunfermline Crematorium

We are delighted that Dunfermline has joined its sister site Kirkaldy Crematorium as Bronze Award holders.

The evidence provided by Dunfermline and Kirkaldy demonstrates they are providing clear leadership for the cremation sector in Scotland.

Their submission states 'It is important to us as a Service provider to recognise climate change and the impacts we cause as a result of our operations, and it is imperative that we strive to mitigate our actions through informed actions and

more efficient ways of working.

Making staff aware of the environmental policy as an aim will help us to work towards and achieve our goals to improve ways of working and lessen our impact.'

We are looking forward to hearing more about the steps being taken by Fife Council to reduce their impact on the environment.

Greener Globe Funeral Standard
December 2024





Obituary: Jonathan Heath

It is with great sadness that we have to report that our dear colleague Jonathan Heath passed away unexpectedly just before Christmas 2024.

Jonathan was a part of the cremation industry for more than 40 years and during that time his knowledge, skill and professionalism have become indispensable to us and our clients. He was always on hand to offer advice and guidance and possessed a genuine willingness to help. His calmness in the face of a crisis was an invaluable help to us.

We miss him as a colleague and a friend. He was very easy-going and had such a great sense of humour; his company

in the office, at conference or over dinner was always extremely enjoyable.

His passing is a huge loss; he made many friends in his work and will leave a massive gap in the lives of everyone that he came into contact with.

We will always hold him in our hearts and our thoughts are with his family at this sad time.

Barbara Fink
IFZW



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Improving Funeral Standards Inspections to increase public confidence

Inspections and other measures will promote the highest standards of care and increase public confidence in the funeral sector under draft regulations laid in the Scottish Parliament.

The Burial and Cremation (Inspection) (Scotland) Regulations 2025, if approved, will ensure minimum standards are maintained to safeguard the dignity of the deceased and promote compassionate and professional care for the bereaved.

Inspectors will support any non-compliant business to make the changes needed but can issue enforcement notices with reasonable deadlines for action if necessary.

Public Health Minister Jenni Minto said: "Bereavement can be emotionally overwhelming and being able to engage with the practical issues and funeral arrangements can be very difficult. It is, however, something everyone is likely to experience at some stage in their life, whether it's the death of a family member, a loved one, or a friend.

"The vast majority of funeral directors and the wider industry provide dignified and professional services, and these reforms will benefit the sector by ensuring it is not unfairly impacted by the failings of a few.

"These reforms have received widespread support within the industry and we will appoint additional inspectors to work with

the sector to ensure best practice. Publishing inspection reports will lead to greater transparency and can help improve standards.

"Having confidence in the care and dignity given to our loved ones, along with the compassionate and professional treatment of those bereaved, can go some way to alleviating the sorrow of bereavement."

Background

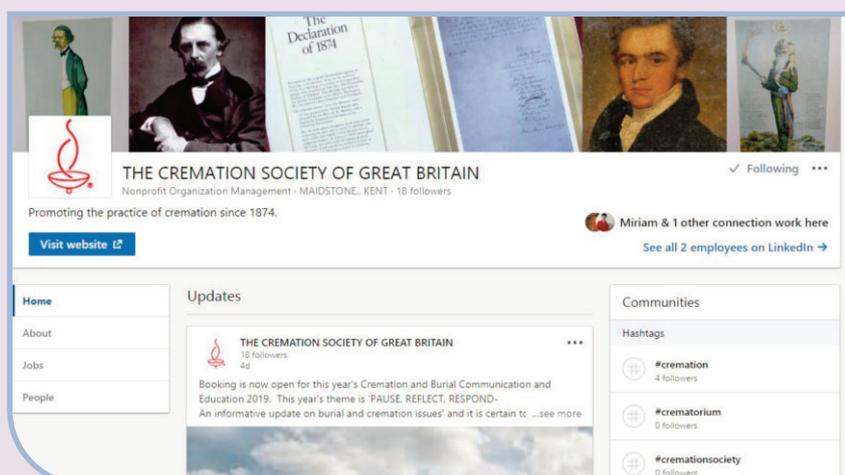
The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is expected to consider the draft Burial and Cremation (Inspection) (Scotland) Regulations 2025.

Cremation authorities have been inspected since 2019 when the Cremation (Scotland) Regulations came into force. Inspections of funeral directors and burial authorities will become statutory from 1 March 2025 – the same date that the Funeral Director Code of Practice and that new burial regulations come into force.

Separate regulations also laid out on Thursday 14 November 2024 cover management of burial grounds, the creation of statutory burial application forms and updated registers of burial.

**Scottish Government
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