

*Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Dylan Thomas

# IN GRAVES WE TRUSTED

## BLACK PAPER

Mark Taylor & Quentin Boyes  
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# IMMEMORIAL

THE FUNERAL BUSINESS IS A £2 BILLION MARKET WITH 600,000 NEW JOINERS EVERY YEAR<sup>i</sup>.

Funeral Directors make healthy margins with the average funeral costing the customer over £9k<sup>ii</sup>.

Recent CMA legislation<sup>iii</sup> has injected long-overdue consumerism into a centuries old industry, largely isolated from market forces and competition. All very well and good for the recently bereaved, offering greater transparency, product and pricing comparison, and making easier difficult decisions around death and departure under pressure.

However, as things stand, 49%<sup>iv</sup> of people in a survey failed even to know if their loved one wanted to be cremated or buried when they die.

A mere 0.3%<sup>v</sup> of next of kin knew all of their loved one's wishes.

And a mere 1 in 5 relatives committed any time to compare funeral and cremation services and costs, in the same way they might compare supermarkets for a 'dine-in' deal.<sup>vi</sup>

The ultimate distress purchase is being made 'second hand' and mainly blind, based on commoditised convenience, drivetime and availability.

Accelerated by the forced collective experiences of COVID, people are fast-tracking to the crematoria. By-passing the traditional church burial in large numbers.<sup>vii</sup>

Furthermore, secularism and the individualism of society will slowly bury formula and formality in the funeral industry.

With the majority of people not yet planning for death, being offered very little beyond the formulas and conventions, the dead are getting nowhere near the funeral they might want in life.

This market will be challenged and shaken by the full scope and scale of consumerism, choice, competition, transparency and innovation.

And yet recent research highlights 'many funeral directors largely rely on their own judgement to gauge what they think their customers need'.<sup>viii</sup>

But the customers of the future are different – baby boomers – unlikely to 'go gentle into that good night', probably preferring to 'rage, rage against the dying of the light', when it comes to their own exit arrangements.

Consequently, many funerals will move from a low interest, last-minute, high avoidance category, compounded by cultural taboos around discussing death<sup>ix</sup>, to a pre-planned celebration of life by the person not yet dead.

**TIMES ARE CHANGING.**

# CHALLENGES AHEAD

FUNERAL DIRECTORS SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT...

## NO 1.

Society is becoming less restricted by the practices, processes and prescriptions of religious belief, in life and death<sup>x</sup>.

Secularism is breaking up the connection to religious scripture, uncoupling death from burial and its attendant ritual. Freeing people to fly straight by the church to cremation.

Leaving time and money to plan the after-party and celebration of life.

## NO 2.

Linked to the slow passing of religion is our collective insistence to fully express our individualism and difference to everyone else.

Seeing ourselves in death as in life, as a unique proposition, not part of the rank and file.

## NO 3.

New legislation is creating transparency and making competition easier, putting pressure on margins and undermining traditional business models. Forcing operators to earn the right to manage departures by being proactive and thinking imaginatively.

## NO 4.

How can funeral directors of today meet the exceptional, experiential, attention-demanding, service excellence that will be sought by the customers of tomorrow?

# GENERATION DEATH

WELCOME TO 'BABY BOOMERS'...

For them death will no longer just be buried, parting isn't only sweet sorrow. They drive and embrace challenge and change.

Born between 1946 and 1964, these over 55's are a demanding and often financially affluent group<sup>xi</sup>.

Opinionated, experienced, service-expectant, cocooned with comfort blankets of cash, baby boomers don't like fitting in or getting what everyone else gets<sup>xii</sup>.

They grew up at a time of prosperity, personal growth and societal change, in which the cult of the confident, self-directed and self-actualised individual flourished.

They are famed for their go-getting, hard-hitting, independent minds. So, they will be unlikely to leave behind something as important as their death and departure, to those they leave behind, in a panic.

People over 55 today are used to the world on their terms, and likely wanting to go out in a similarly, imaginative way.

Future customers, many of whom will be willing and able to pay for their death on their own terms, without ritual and prescription, in a fundamentally more individual and celebratory way.

# ARE YOU READY?

FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS FUNERAL COMPANIES AND CREMATORIA WILL BE CHALLENGED TO SERVE THE BABY BOOMER GENERATION.

So, how to master a mindset that better connects and communicates, builds trust, preference and advocacy, while they are still alive?

And with so very few decent marketers aged 55+ in agencies, who can bring the insight and strategy necessary to take the lead in provisioning a more vibrant, imaginative and personalised dance around death when it comes for the baby boomer?

**Humbug is the no-nonsense specialist in the baby boomer generation, appreciating that with their own money and marbles, they are a rewarding bunch, IF you understand and play by their rules.**

**WE DO.**

***Humbug to those who don't.***

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## CONTACT DETAILS

Quentin Boyes | 07970 458436 | [Quentin@bahhumbugs.co.uk](mailto:Quentin@bahhumbugs.co.uk)

Mark Taylor | 07554 889575 | [Mark@bahhumbugs.co.uk](mailto:Mark@bahhumbugs.co.uk)

**[www.bahhumbugs.co.uk](http://www.bahhumbugs.co.uk)**

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