

# RESPONSIBILITY AND RENOWN

WORDS: STEWART McROBERT

Leverton & Sons has undertaken funerals for royalty and ordinary families alike for more than 200 years. Here, Clive Leverton looks back on 50 years of service

**W**ith a history going back more than 200 years and as the funeral director for national figures such as Princess Diana, Princess Margaret, the Queen Mother and Margaret Thatcher, not to mention a central place in the formation of SAIF – it is fair to say that Leverton & Sons is a company of renown.

Established in 1789, with a head office and five branches in north-west London, the company carries out more than 1,000 funerals annually. Clive Leverton, who retired as a director in 2014 but continues to assist daughter Pippa and nephew Andrew, the two current directors, has been one of the most important figures in the company's history, and a positive influence in the profession as a whole.

He explained that, during his 50 years at the company, there has been a continuing commitment to the profession, to family involvement, and to independence.

Clive said: "We have never been interested in selling the business, but more concerned with stewardship to benefit the next generation. We have absorbed other family firms when they have no one left to continue the business. We are always adapting to what our clients want and remain committed, professional and, very importantly, independent."

That ethos saw the company entrusted with high-profile national funerals; that of Diana, Princess of Wales (1997), Princess Margaret and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (both in 2002), and Baroness Thatcher (2013). Conducting such funerals is an honour and a responsibility.

Clive reflected: "When you operate in the public arena you must be extremely diligent, although we try to treat every bereaved family the same way. When we were asked to take on royal occasions we were asked if we would be able to cope with



Clive Leverton



The timeless dignity of past Leverton funerals



Princess Diana's funeral in 1997



Funeral cortege for Baroness Thatcher

our existing clients, which I thought was a very thoughtful touch."

When SAIF was created in 1989, Leverton & Sons was a founding member. Clive recalled: "Several like-minded independents thought it would make sense if we had an organisation that looked solely after our needs and hopes. We thought there would be strength in numbers, and that proved to be the case."

That sense of mutual support was key when Leverton & Sons was given the task of directing Princess Diana's funeral. The company had 27 other funerals during that week leading up to her weekend funeral.

Clive explained: "We had so many calls

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## PROFILE CHRISTINE TORRANCE

**Processing team member and an original employee**

*Christine Torrance has worked for Golden Charter since its founding, as a receptionist and subsequently within Processing. Her connection even predates Golden Charter, as she worked with founder Gordon Kee in the 1980s.*



*Eco hearse is sign of firm's modern outlook*



**LEVERTON & SONS**

*Independent Family Funeral Directors since 1789*

from other firms offering help with staff, vehicles and so on. I was delighted.”

He has witnessed many changes over the years, including the increase in pre-paid plans and the notable link between SAIF and Golden Charter.

An optimist by nature, Clive added: “There are some great people in the profession, not just in independent firms.

“I think we should keep on striving to improve standards, be ready to adapt and, above all, we need to listen to our clients.

“As far as Leverton & Sons is concerned, we will continue to serve clients in the best way possible by being professional, caring and always operating with integrity.” ●

### **How did your time with Golden Charter begin?**

In 1984, I was working with Gordon Kee at Clyde Associated Consultants, and then, about six years after that, Golden Charter came into being. Gordon Kee joined together with his best friend Andrew Harvey to start the business up, when Andrew was with Jonathan Harvey Funeral Directors.

I was the receptionist for Clyde Associated Consultants, and then when Golden Charter began I started straight away. It was continuous employment for me, moving from one company to the other.

### **What did the company look like when you started?**

It wasn't the purpose-built office we have now; it was just a single floor upstairs in a Bearsden office building, with an Oddbins off licence down below. When the ground floor became available, Golden Charter was already growing and so it bought it out.

We grew quickly enough that we ended up putting the Marketing team in a big car park out the back. Three of them worked there in a Portakabin.

### **In the last 25 years, what has been the biggest change?**

The old office was packed with filing units full of plans and funeral director information. Even when we moved into the new office, the bottom floor, where I sit now, was all filing cabinets.

Since then, while the volume has gone up, it's also a lot easier now to get through the work. There is a lot more to do, but with scanning and computers it's so much more manageable than it was before.

### **What has kept you with the company since its inception?**

Golden Charter is a fantastic employer in Bearsden.

If you compare this company to what else is out there in the area then there is no competition.

A lot of that is about the people. While so many have retired, there are still lots of others who have been with Golden Charter for nearly as long as I have, but it's also a very young company full of new faces.

In all that time it's remained a great company to work for – and hopefully I'll be here until I retire.