

CELEBRATING *Success* DURING COVID

HOW THE CLASS OF 2020 STUDIED FOR THEIR EXAMINATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Normally, at this time of year, this magazine would feature the annual graduation ceremony and celebration of the Association's Diploma graduates – with a photo showing them all with the NAFD President gracing the cover.

Sadly, this year, the event was not able to be held due to COVID restrictions, but the achievement of 'Class of 2020' graduates is no less amazing and worthy of celebration, so *Funeral Director Monthly* caught up with a couple of them to find out what it had been like to study for their final examinations during a once-in-a-generation global pandemic.

"What a year to sit the exams!" recalls Kristen Varty, of Vartys Funeral Directors in Wigan. "Luckily my revision had started and it had created a system that I could continue with in such busy and unusual times.

"I must say that I had fantastic tutor who supported me greatly and was always on the other end of a phone or via text or email. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kate Edwards.

"For the oral exam we did plenty of Zoom calls, etc, to get me used to the environment, but at this time I would say this practice was happening at work too. I think the fact that we are a small independent family-run business, the support and dedication from my team really helped through the pandemic and my revision - so I would like to thank them also.

"I found that I was more at ease with the settings for the exam, being more local - as this meant I did not need to travel and leave the business. It felt

more natural to do an arrangement in a home/work environment.

"I am a partner in my family business which my papa established in 1936 and I am very pleased and proud that I will continue to run Vartys Funeral Directors as my family wish. My next step is to continue my studying with Kate in 2021 and hopefully achieve the DipFD, furthering my knowledge to keep the business running to provide the best service for our clients."

Support from the business has been critical to all the graduates we spoke to. "Both my old employer and my new employer are big supporters of the NAFD and they inspired me to take the Diploma qualification," said Alexander Smithurst of Thomas Greateorex & Sons in Derbyshire.

"If a family bestows on us the honour of looking after a family member, there's both an extra level of assurance provided by knowing that the funeral home is an NAFD member – and they can also have confidence that the job will be done properly as I have been assessed and found to be capable in my job as a funeral director.

"I found the study extremely enjoyable and enlightening and it gave me plenty of knowledge that I can use in my role. It also gave me the confidence that what I'm doing and saying is correct. It was quite difficult at times; some aspects of the study took longer to research and master, but that's all part of the learning curve. The written exam was in a hotel in Solihull, near the NAFD. Everything was very professional and COVID-safe. The oral exam was held over Microsoft Teams and was completely seamless too. I would recommend

the qualifications to anybody thinking of doing them - it's not only great to do professionally, it's also a great thing to achieve in your career, something to be really proud of."

Gaining confidence is a common theme with NAFD Diploma graduates. Funeral Arranger Nicola Anderson, of AW Lymn – The Family Funeral Service in Nottinghamshire, agrees with Alex: "Doing the qualification highlighted things I would not have thought of in the past," she said. "Having this qualification gives me even more confidence and motivation, to keep doing all I can to best support families in making funeral decisions in the days following a death."

For Laura Walsh, who works for Dignity in Lincolnshire, 2020 has been a year of change for many reasons – but her desire to support bereaved families saw her career change dramatically, just as COVID-19 arrived in the UK.

"I started looking into the funeral industry a few years ago. It's something I've always wanted to do but, having a young child and not much confidence, I kept putting it off," she said. "I finally took the plunge when my son started school and took the Funeral Service Awareness course on the NAFD website. I funded it myself and passed.

"I then went on to look around Lincoln to see if there was anywhere that would take me on for work experience. Luckily, I went into Jonathan Whiting's funeral home and met Debbie O'Connell. She had just qualified as a tutor and was pleased to take me on as her first student (of many - she's wonderful).

"I thoroughly enjoyed my work experience and decided to self-fund the DipFAA when the time came.

"In March this year, one of the worst times of my life happened. My ex-partner and I split and so I was left as a single mum, trying to weigh up the options of carrying on with the Diploma I had just enrolled on or quit my dream. "I chose to keep going, even though I was at my lowest point and, by chance, I applied for the manager's job with Dignity at Priestley and Cockett. My first day was the day the country went into the first lockdown. Scary!

"I worked my socks off and, thankfully, the job is going from strength to strength. I also carried on studying hard and working full time, whilst still caring for my son on my own.

"I am so proud of myself for coming through from the darkest hour, carrying on, finding the dream job and going on to passing my Diploma.

"Dignity have been great, they've supported me with being able to study around things and have the time off for the exams. They've offered to fund my Diploma in Funeral Directing, as they are keen to see me progress.

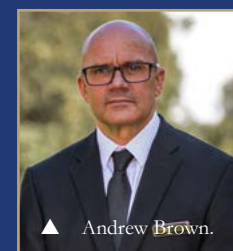
"I am incredibly happy and proud to have passed my DipFAA. Dignity have been great in supporting my studying. I am looking forward to going on to the DipFD. During this incredibly stressful time with COVID-19, it has been very difficult but I have nothing but praise for the NAFD and for my tutor Debbie for getting us through it all."



▲ Laura Walsh.



▲ Nicola Anderson.



▲ Andrew Brown.

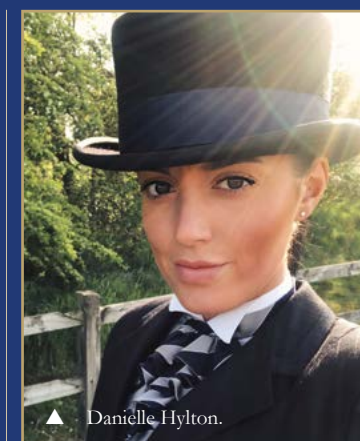


▲ Alexander Smithurst.



▲ Kristen Varty.

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▲ Danielle Hylton.

Funeral Director Danielle Hylton, of Devall & Sons in Warwickshire, says her studies have helped to broaden her awareness, which has given her resources to draw upon during the challenging recent months. "I decided to take the course in order to further my skills and knowledge within the funeral industry. I believe that having this extra understanding will allow families to feel more at ease with being looked after by myself, knowing that I am qualified.

"I found the time away on this course extremely beneficial. It broadened my awareness of different aspects of the industry and it was also interesting to gain an insight into how other companies function. The last year has been challenging for the funeral industry and this made it difficult for me to find the time and energy to study. However, overall I have really enjoyed the course and I am excited to begin the DipFD."

For Andrew Brown, who works for A.W. Lymn at its West Bridgford office, studying for the exam was done alone, with the help of information from the NAFD and studying past papers. He commented: "Working for a large company with a wealth of experience was useful as I was able to speak to colleagues with a vast knowledge of the industry.

"Having a good understanding of procedures and legislation learned through taking my Diploma, I feel I can communicate this with confidence when dealing with bereaved families. I will shortly be taking my first funeral as a director, and feel I am well equipped with the knowledge I have gained through the Diploma and practical experience putting this knowledge in to practice."

CELEBRATING *Success*



The National Association of Funeral Directors is delighted to advise that the following students successfully achieved their Diploma qualification following the examinations held in October 2020:-

Diploma in Funeral Directing

Congratulations to the following successful students:

Jamie Beattie	Hawick	Andrew Brown	Nottingham
Katie Bilclough	Shangton	Dale Martin	Carnoustie

Diploma in Funeral Arranging & Administration

Congratulations to the following students:

Nicola Anderson	Nottingham	Marc McClelland	Plymouth
Janet Beamish Mann	Bungay	Sam Morgan	Stafford
Sam Berridge	Stourbridge	Rebecca Perry	Salisbury
Nicola Cotter	Portishead	Amanda Porter	Worlingworth
Adam Dixon	Newport	Abbie Reeve	Windsor
Marie Frankum	Exeter	Sarah Riley-Ward	Lincoln
Charles Hackett	Bedworth	Paul Sharples	Barnoldswick
Esther Hall	Liskeard	Alexander Smithurst	Chesterfield
Laura Harvey	Leyland	Emma Tipler	Seaford
Anthony Holliday	Scunthorpe	Kristen Varty	Wigan
April Hunter-Walker	Scarisbrick	Laura Walsh	Lincoln
Danielle Hylton	Nuneaton		



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