

EXAMINING the EXAMINERS!

How and when did you get started in the funeral profession?

Louise: “Funerals have been a part of my life from the day I was born. Until the age of 10 years, I lived on the premises of our funeral business with my father, the late Christopher Williams, mother Carol, and brother Simon. Our family home, built by my parents when they married in 1974, incorporated arrangement and working offices and was on the same site as our Chapels of Rest and mortuary. Throughout my childhood, I could be found sitting in the offices alongside mum and dad or accompanying them into the Chapel of Rest or workshop areas. I remember being in awe of the respect and love my father had for members of the community and them for him; he was viewed as such an important part of our local area and a dear friend to so many.

“In 2003, after working as a primary teacher in Telford for a number of years, a vacancy within the company arose for a funeral director. My father asked me if I would consider joining the family business, which had, by this time, grown and changed immensely since it was founded by my great- great grandfather in the mid-1880s. It was always my intention to join the team and the time felt right.”

Michael: “I started learning my trade in 1973 with a firm of funeral directors, called W H Shephard, in Colchester. My first job was tea boy! I then learnt how to make coffins and about the funeral trade in general.

“I passed my Diploma in Funeral Directing in 1980 and became a member of the British Institute of Embalmers in 1987. I moved to Neville Funerals in 1989, as their General Manager and I am still a director of Nevilles, having been their Managing Director for around five years.”

What do you enjoy most/find challenging about your profession and your work?

Louise: “For me, being able to spend time with the bereaved, guiding them through one of the most difficult periods in their life is by far the most rewarding part of my job. To be able to say ‘goodbye’ to a family as they leave the place of committal, knowing that they have found comfort in your

The NAFD recently appointed Louise Williams, of C J Williams Funeral Service of Telford as Lead Examiner, and Michael Liddle, of Neville Funerals in Luton, as Deputy Lead Examiner. The role of Lead Examiner and their deputy is to ensure consistency in the examination questions and marking standards across all NAFD examinations. Now that they’ve had a few weeks to get settled, *Funeral Director Monthly* has pitched a few testing questions of its own to see what brought them to their new roles.

Michael Liddle,
Deputy Lead
Examiner ▼



Louise Williams, Lead Examiner ▲



actions and that you have genuinely done your very best for them, is what being a funeral director is all about.

"I love the fact that no two days are ever the same and increasingly so, nowadays, families want help to provide a service that is unique to their loved one. In order to do this, they rely upon you for guidance, inspiration and support. I view this as an immense privilege, unique to our profession. There will always be challenging situations, never more so than what we have experienced over the last few months, but having a fabulous team around you enables you to come through it, feeling stronger and better for the experience."

Michael: "Being an 'old school' funeral director, I still enjoy working to help the families that we serve. This brings its own pressures now, as there is a lot more that families expect from us. The health and safety implications of running a business certainly bring more concerns in today's environment."

What has the experience of recent months taught you about funeral directing?

Louise: "That there is a way around everything. When obstacles appear in your way, changing what would be perceived as 'normal', then an alternative can often be found which can go some way towards finding a 'new normal'."

"As a profession, we have had to face many uncertainties and changes since March, sometimes on a daily basis, which has been incredibly draining and heartbreaking. I found those first few weeks incredibly difficult. You cannot put into words the feelings you experience having to ask someone's son or daughter to wait outside, because they exceed the number allowed inside the venue or to witness a widow unable to be comforted by her children due to social distancing."

"COVID-19 has also taught me to never underestimate the value of the grieving process, particularly the funeral ceremony and the importance of saying 'goodbye' to a loved one and that the profession we belong

to is unique. At its very heart are people who genuinely care about their vocation, striving on a day to day basis, whilst sometimes carrying their own burdens silently, to bring comfort to the bereaved. I am incredibly proud to say that I am a funeral director."

Michael: "Funeral directors have always been adaptable and COVID has proved that, as a profession, we can cope with whatever is thrown at us."

"Part of the role of being a funeral director is also that of being a diplomat – COVID has proved that too!"

What made you decide to become involved in leading the work of the examiners?

Louise: "I was invited to join the panel of examiners ten years ago and immediately jumped at the chance as, although I love my job, I missed education. At that time, the Diploma in Funeral Arranging & Administration was just being launched and I have watched the course evolve into what it is today. I have also worked alongside a number of excellent examiners, some of whom have now stepped down or retired, and have recently seen new members joining the panel."

"Ten years on, there are some really exciting changes planned for education within the NAFD, including the launch of the new qualifications, and I am honoured to be a part of it. I am looking forward to the challenges associated with the introduction of the new courses, and hope to use my experience in education and on the Board of Examiners to assist in the development of the new assessments, leading my fellow examiners through the changes."

Michael: "I have always been interested in helping others gain a greater understanding of what they need to do, to help ensure the families we serve receive the best attention and information to get the funeral they want. I see that, hopefully, I can have some input to improve the courses that the NAFD plans to deliver."

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

Louise: "I am married and have a seven year old daughter called Katie, who can regularly be found in the office after school or during the holidays doing exactly what I did when I was her age. Hopefully, she, along with her cousin, Sophie, as members of the sixth generation, will take an active role within our company, in time, and lead the family business forward for many years to come."

Michael: "I am married with one son and I live in a village in Bedfordshire, I am a Rotarian and a member of our local 41 Club and I am involved in the life of our village church."

"I am the NAFD representative on the International Examinations Board of Embalmers, for which I currently hold the position of chairman. I am also the National Treasurer for the BIE, along with being a trustee and fellow of the BIE. For holidays I enjoy cruising or, should I say, I did!"

