



Repatriation

Funeral Director Monthly talks to specialist repatriation service providers and funeral directors to understand the different considerations involved in supporting a family in bringing a loved one home for their funeral.



CARING FOR FAMILIES THROUGH COMMUNICATION

The concept of going home to your final resting place remains strong in many cultures around the world, including here in the UK, with the importance of a funeral being held where the deceased person had lived or was born coming through strongly in the results of the Competition & Markets Authority's recent consumer research.

Equally, during the commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice which brought WW1 to an end it was impossible not to be moved, once again, by the rows and rows of graves in France, marking the final resting place of so many soldiers who never made it home. Time is often no healer for families who aren't able to bring a loved one home. In last month's edition of this magazine we shared the story from Walter C. Parson of its work with the government-led project Te Auraki (The Return) which is helping to repatriate the remains of New Zealand Defence Force servicemen and women who, under a previous law, had been buried in the country they had died in, unless their families were in a position to pay for the repatriation themselves.

This desire to bring a loved one home can be complex even within countries - but the challenges are multiplied when an international journey is required. Repatriating human remains requires a diverse set of skills and an understanding of the complex legal requirements that must be completed before, during and after the journey. For many funeral directors, their preference is to seek the support of experts to carry out some or all of the task, rather than attempt this complex procedure entirely unsupported.

That's where specialist repatriation companies can be of valuable assistance to NAFD members who may have a family in their care who either need to bring someone home from another country - or would like to accompany them back to their country of birth for their funeral.

One of the key challenges can often be language - requiring an ability to communicate confidently with officials in other countries to deal with aspects such as technical procedures, legal documentation or the logistics of travel planning. As a result, a core service offered by many repatriation companies is multi-lingual translation.

As well as dealing with the practicalities, these language skills are also used to support the family. Says Steve Rowland, of Rowland Brothers International: "Just like a funeral, every repatriation is unique and individually tailored to respect faith needs, national and international protocols. Experience helps us to reassure families at a time when very little makes sense, but their need for information is greatest. Communication and anticipation are at the heart of repatriation and our great team helps to interpret not only other languages but also the intricate international requirements that affect families bereaved away from home. Expectations are always high, and distance adds yet another dimension to an emotional situation.

He describes the sheer variety of translation services Rowland Brothers might undertake: "Language skills help mourners at home or abroad, aiding communication or unlocking the content of important documents issued in another country. Sometimes certificates are in a multi-lingual format, but others need translation in order to progress funeral or estate matters in the UK or abroad. Some may need additional consular endorsements or legalisation



Rowland Brothers International's London headquarters



to be sure that they are accepted at their destination. Translation is an integral part of repatriation, which is why a multi lingual team is so important, combining language and logistics, translation and documentation, transfers to or from the airport and every other aspect of worldwide repatriation.

"We firmly believe working together is best, sharing experience and skills with funeral directors across the country and around the world."

Even knowing the right way to communicate with authorities in this country can have an impact on the smoothness of the process - and getting the documentation right is another key reason why funeral firms opt to call in the professionals. Key Air and Sea, based in Middlesex, has developed a direct, dedicated link from its office to HM Customs, enabling it to offer a 24/7 service arranging customs clearance for human remains arriving at London Heathrow and London Gatwick airports from outside the EU.

They say: "We are often contacted by airlines at weekends when funeral directors arrive at the airport to pick up human remains that have not been customs cleared."

The impact of Brexit on this part of the process, as discussed in previous editions of this magazine, still remains to be seen.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT REPATRIATION FIRM FOR YOU

Within the NAFD there are seven repatriation firms, including smaller one-man and family businesses; medium-sized experienced specialist firms offering international and domestic repatriation services; and large international businesses, offering repatriation as one of a number service areas. This choice offers NAFD members the flexibility to choose the firm that's right for them, depending upon client circumstances.

Hemsell Repatriation, based in Nottinghamshire is a small family-run team providing a high level of care, respect and compassion. They pride themselves on sensible pricing for their UK and Ireland coverage, "keeping

the cost to the funeral director and the family they are serving as low as possible without compromising on the high level of service we have the highly regarded reputation for providing." They offer a 24 hours a day service with a professional, uniformed team and use a discreet fully insured black Ford Mondeo Hearsette and VW Caddy Maxi Ambulette fleet, fully equipped and with bariatric capability. They also make no charge throughout the UK for carrying infants, children and young adults to the age of 16* (except third party fees).

Another UK-based service is Guy Elliott Repatriation Services, based in Aberdeen. Guy offers a 24/7 care and repatriation service, by private ambulance, of deceased persons and cremated remains from any UK city to another - including completion of all necessary documentation and liaison with English, Welsh and Northern Irish coroners and Scottish Procurator Fiscals.

At the other end of the scale there are larger firms such as freight forwarding firm TCB Group, based in Belfast, which offers experienced repatriation services, and firms like Kenyon International, which not only handles individual international repatriations, but is also specialist in mass fatality management and large scale incidents - deploying teams of trained specialists to arrange for the release and transportation of human remains to locations specified by

their family or other legal next of kin. In these large scale incidents, with many dead, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and Haiti earthquake (both of which Kenyon were involved in), they say it remains important to remember that, for the bereaved families, each deceased person is an individual and not just a number in a system, and must be treated individually, no matter how large the scale of the overall task.

GOING HOME AT CHRISTMAS

A death in December is always particularly difficult, especially with the festive season getting underway, as was the case of a client family of Homeland International, part of funeral firm CPJ Field. The need to repatriate the deceased person back to the Philippines before Christmas added additional anxiety to an already upsetting situation. Operations Manager Sam Tester explains.

"Homeland International was approached to support with a repatriation to the Philippines for an individual who had died in Beirut, Lebanon.

"In Lebanon, as well as in every other country worldwide, Homeland has a team member on the ground ready to assist with repatriation which ensures for quick and efficient service. On this occasion, the case had an additional challenge over and above those normally experienced when managing a repatriation - the date. It was 18 December, and we had



A complex case in Beirut for Homeland International

to work against the clock to complete the repatriation, returning the loved one home before Christmas.

"Repatriations from Lebanon require many different types of documentations to be completed and, to repatriate to the Philippines, we must follow additional requirements set out by their embassy. Acquiring all of these documents can be time consuming as the government offices are located all across the city of Beirut.

"The embassy was to close for Christmas from 22 December so, at this point, we only had a day-and-a-half to complete the paperwork and get the documents into the hands of the embassy staff. The other complication was that airlines at this time of year are incredibly busy, with much of the room taken up by the many cards and parcels being shipped internationally at the last minute before Christmas. Factoring these elements in we calculated that, to secure space on the plane, we would have to book a flight two or three days in advance. However, in order to book flights we had to ensure we had collated the necessary paperwork. The worst case scenario would be to book the flight and give the family false hope if we did not fully believe we would be able to obtain the paperwork in time. Drawing confidence from the strength of our working relationship with local agencies and our agent on the ground, we took a leap of faith and booked a flight in advance, departing Beirut on the evening of 22 December via Dubai.

"Over the next couple of days the team worked long hours, literally running from appointment to appointment to ensure we would make this flight, which was now non negotiable as the family had since booked funeral arrangements in Manila for 24 December.

"On the afternoon of 22 December, our local team had collected the paperwork, translated it and were sat on the edge of the reception room chair in the Philippines embassy waiting for the embassy staff to approve the papers and provide us with their permit. In what was likely to be the last task completed by the embassy before Christmas, they signed off the permit and we were able to complete the process by transporting to the airport and, so, we successfully

completed the work in Beirut and the deceased person was safely at the airport in time for the departing flight. Judging by how busy the airport was that day, it was likely that, if we had booked this flight any later, it would have been full and we would have had to postpone the repatriation until after Christmas, missing the family funeral.

"The flight landed in the Philippines the following day and the family were able to complete their funeral arrangements, a day later on 24 December, with their local funeral directors. We are ever grateful to our worldwide network for the hard work and support they provide us each and every day of the year, enabling us to bring a happy and timely conclusion for families at a time of extreme sadness."

HOW EAST OF ENGLAND CO-OP TRAINS ITS TEAMS IN REPATRIATION

Given the frequency they are asked to undertake a repatriation, or other business factors, some funeral firms decide they need to develop repatriation skills in-house.

Michael Davies DipFD MBIFD, the Professional Services Manager at East of England Co-op Funeral Services, explains the steps they have taken to ensure that colleagues across all of the firm's branches have the knowledge and confidence needed to deal with this complex area.

"Each year, between twenty and thirty funerals conducted by the East of England Co-op Funeral Services involve repatriation of those who have passed away overseas, or that need to be taken back to another country after dying in the UK.

"When families are dealing with the loss of a loved one, they can be at their most vulnerable. Having to bring their loved one back to the UK, or back to their native country, can be challenging and we need to do all we can to assist them with this. We have developed a bespoke training programme for all our colleagues to ensure that all our team members are confident in the process of repatriation so that, no matter which branch a family visits, we are able to support them in what can be a very difficult and confusing time.



"We firmly believe working together is best, sharing experience and skills with funeral directors across the country and around the world."

"When someone is on holiday or on business overseas, their travel insurance will usually cover the cost of repatriation, and specialist repatriation companies will deal with the processes needed to bring that person home. Expats living abroad tend not to have this kind of insurance cover, so often funeral service providers have the difficult task of explaining the process involved to bereaved families, whilst also informing them of the extra associated costs.

"Colleagues at the East of England Co-op Funeral Services are benefitting from enhanced training in this area, to help them understand the role of repatriation companies, how they liaise with funeral service providers and the costs and time

frames involved. This means that, when someone comes to a branch for help, they can access support immediately, from a confident and knowledgeable member of the team."

The training covers everything from the legal processes involved in repatriation - including the various legislation associated with different countries - timescales and costs, to the involvement of the Armed Forces when dealing with the death of service personnel overseas.

Michael adds: "At the East of England Co-op Funeral Services, we have always taken great pride in the level of care we give our clients and, when dealing with repatriation, this is no different."

Welcome - Tim Walker

Welcome to new repatriation specialist member - Walker's Repatriation Services

Having spent 40 years in British industry, Tim Walker decided it was time for a career change.

Says Tim: "After bumping into a local repatriation specialist by pure accident, we got talking and he told me he was so busy I agreed to help him out on a short term basis. After going into mortuaries and then delivering to funeral directors, I found this very interesting and rewarding work, which got me thinking that maybe this was something I could do.

"With my redundancy money from my previous job, I invested in a Mondeo Hearsette® from Wilcox Limousines, two trollies from Auden's and I officially launched the business in September 2017.



Tim Walker

"As a one-man business, I cover all roles, from the start of the process to the end, which includes:-

- advertising and marketing the business;
- answering calls from customers and providing fast accurate quotes for the work they require;
- communicating with mortuaries, care homes and airports to tell them who I am, who I am representing and what time I will be arriving;
- ensuring the vehicle is fit for purpose on the day;
- leaving in plenty of time, taking into consideration any traffic delays that could affect travel time;
- on completion, ensuring the customer is happy before leaving.

"I enjoy meeting people from all walks of life but, ultimately, providing a timely, quality and cost-effective service of high standard to my customers. I am committed to continuously improving the business, focusing on my customers and providing a quality service, to ensure that I can continue to provide this important service to bereaved families and funeral directors."

To contact Tim Walker, please call 07792 022 048 or email tjwalker60@gmail.com.

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