

# A Natural Undertaking

By Farah Locke-Islam

Carrie and Fran are passionate undertakers who work day in, day out ensuring that their clients receive the best possible treatment after death.

Their business is located at 290 Vicarage Road, not far from Kings Heath park– and is called “A Natural Undertaking”. Both Carrie and Fran are not your usual looking undertakers as they are not necessarily dressed in black with a dour look, however they have one main focus in their work which is to reassure their customers that their lost loved one is given an appropriate funeral and memorial.



Carrie left Fran right

Recently, Fran came into newspaper club to talk about her work. Carrie and Fran believe in a more caring approach rather than a business-like attitude. Due to this belief, they wear no uniform as the less formal approach can often put the customer at ease. They put all their effort into work and the families they have worked with are always their top priority. The pair offer cremation and burial services. However, there are slightly more wacky choices available to those interested; you can be cremated and then sent out to sea on the back of a biodegradable turtle model that will spread the ashes across the world. Another opportunity is that your ashes can be planted with the roots of a baby tree and become an asset to nature itself as you grow into the tree. Burial options are either a natural burial ground or the good old burial ground. In a natural burial ground your body disintegrates faster as you are closer to the surface of the ground.

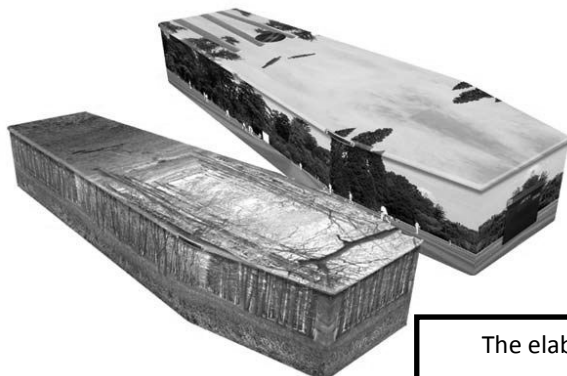
Some of the more elderly people that have died, often as a result of old age, have had metal body parts substituted for their real body parts and those body parts are left at the end of the cremation and are then recycled or re-used.

Carrie and Fran were the only workers in their small business but are looking for a new colleague. It is a very difficult position to fill as all staff are expected to be pleasant, hardworking, dedicated and sensitive as the needs of those that have been bereaved. There have been occasions where a person has known that their life was going to cease pretty soon and it has been great to get to know the person before they die so they can give them the funeral that they really wanted.

Sometimes when a relative dies unexpectedly, they may never have discussed their desires for the end of life and funeral. This means the family have to guess at what they might have wanted. So, to be able to actually meet the person who is planning their own funeral has been a blessing for both the soon-to-be-departed person and the undertakers. It is an essential role of the undertaker to comfort lost ones relatives and allow them to take control when planning the funeral. Fran told us of a particular occasion when a dying lady with cancer came to her and as she didn't want to give her daughter a headache with planning her inevitable funeral she and these two lady undertakers planned her funeral ahead of time.

After a death, the duo fill out paperwork, registering deaths for the government. There is a lot to do in making sure the body is ready to be buried or cremated and this might mean the family come to wash and dress the deceased in their favourite clothes. They might play appropriate music while they do this and talk to the corpse. It can be a very happy experience and give great comfort to the family. It isn't what everyone wants and Carrie and Fran work hard to find what is best for the dead person and their family. It certainly is a job with a lot of talking but essentially, a lot of listening.

Fran told us that cremation takes two to three hours. At some time later the ashes can be taken away and the families often have another service or get together to scatter or bury the ashes.



The elaborately decorated coffins .

There is an amazing selection of boxes, coffins and baskets to use at the funeral. Sometimes the family get together to decorate the coffin or box and some even take the opportunity to help weave the basket. It is often comforting and helpful for the families to bond, share stories, sing and remember their dearly departed at this sensitive time. Carrie and Fran can help you out with all your desires to make the passing of a loved one easier.