



*G Seller*

THE HISTORY

By Gregory Drozdz



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gregory Drozd is a native of Hinckley and was educated locally and at Edinburgh University where he gained an MA in History. Gregory was a fellow Rotarian with David Barsby from 2000-2008 in Hinckley Rotary Club and he worked collaboratively with Joseph and Amy Barsby and others from Burbage on a headstone for Boer War hero, Sharrad H Gilbert in 2017. Greg was awarded a British Empire Medal in the 2018 New Year's Honours list for services to the community in Hinckley.

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## Chapter 01

# BEGINNINGS

Death is a subject that some people might approach with trepidation. Yet, for others it is literally a way of life. For G. Seller seeing itself at the heart of the community, priding itself in its family roots and traditions, the firm and its team are a “family” serving other families in their times of need. The company ethos, espoused by 3rd generation Managing Director, Joseph Barsby, of care and compassion is often at the expense of rampant commercialism, whilst yet remaining ambitiously at the forefront of funeral care and facilities.

Where does the company sit in the history of an honourable profession of dealing with the families loved one’s that have passed away? Where does it sit in the history of a place like Hinckley? How did it come into existence over 100 years ago? How has it progressed and served the community in the intervening years and where does it see itself in the future?

You don’t have to be professionally qualified to be considered an undertaker. If you look at the trade directories and business almanacks from 19th Century Hinckley, a number of people were described as funeral undertakers. For instance, in the Baxter’s Almanack, the drapery company and shop of Dale and Reeves in the Borough are described as funeral



undertakers. They would have most likely fitted out coffins with frills and even provided shrouds for the deceased.

It was extremely common for local carpenters, who made the coffins, to also provide an undertaking role as well. Arranging for the laying out of the deceased – the preparation and presentation in readiness for laying the deceased to rest. This function was provided by local women, often for little money. The carriage of the coffin, often on a horse and cart to a Church or Chapel and then arranging with the cemetery authorities for the burial. The role of the monumental mason was considered a separate vocation and the firm of T. Morley in Upper Castle Street, was preminent in this regard. Their stones still stand the test of time in the town's cemetery with the name of their maker at the foot of the stone: "T Morley and Co". There were a number of funeral carriage providers in the town – people whose business was to provide the funeral biers and hearses to carry the coffins. One such firm was run by a William and Hannah Pratt.

A carpentry firm was that of John Cassell and Sons, of Upper Castle Street – my great great Uncle. I recall John's daughter Aggie, telling me that: "We would wake up and go downstairs for some breakfast in the kitchen cum workshop on the ground floor. Dad would have his coffins that he'd already prepared, lined around the kitchen walls. We sat there as a family not thinking for one minute that this was anything out of the ordinary."

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**First-class Coaches and Carriages**  
**TERMS MODERATE**

Printed and published by the Proprietor, Thomas Baxter, at the Printing Offices of John Baxter and Sons, 24, Castle Street, Hinckley, in the County of Leicester, where all communications are requested to be addressed. Saturday, November 2nd, 1918.

Arthur Seller in his book of childhood reminiscences, "Best Seller", recalls that:

"In Upper Castle Street was Cox's Abbey. On the other side of the Abbey was John Cassell and Sons, carpenters and undertakers. They were highly respected and many a time Mr. John Cassell and his sons, Bob and Lance, would carry the coffin to the deceased's home on their shoulders. No Chapels of rest in those days. Little did I know at the time, aged 6, that I would be involved in the trade for over 50 years myself"

Near neighbours of the Cassells were the Seller family at 142 and 144 Castle Street. The two sons, George and Charles, would enter the funeral profession, initially helping the firm of William Pratt and his wife Hannah, which had begun around 1910. No business records have survived from these days, so an actual date of establishment is hard to pin down. Arthur Seller, would join the firm in the proceeding years.

The takeover of the business by the Seller brothers, as the firm became to be known, must have been total. Seller Brothers started to develop their trade in the home of the Pratts. Young Arthur Seller would take his brothers' lunch, cooked at the top of Castle Street, to the offices in Coventry Road.

In between funerals, the horse was used for carting goods around the town. Arthur Seller recalls picking up bricks from Hudson's Pit at the bottom of Ashby Road and taking them to a building site on Coventry Road. As he passed Belmont Villa, his brother George called to him that the horse was needed for a funeral in an hour's time and that he should hurry up and make his delivery. The load must have been

## Remembers Days Of The Horse Drawn Hearses

Today, on his 65th birthday, Mr Arthur Edmund Seller retires from the undertaking business of George Seller and Co Ltd in which for over 50 years his dedication and sympathy has comforted many hundreds of bereaved people



The business has been established since the early part of the century and Mr Seller himself has been interested in the work since he age of 12.

His involvement began when he was sent by his mother to take the mid-day meal to his father, George, who worked for William and Hannah Pratt, the carriage masters in Coventry Road.

This was in the days of the horse-drawn glass hearse and Mr Seller well remembers his first funeral when he was in charge of a horse and trap at Earl Shilton.

Then Mr Pratt died and the firm was taken over by the Seller brothers to become Seller Bros. (Hinckley) Ltd. They operated with heavy, impressive, horse-drawn vehicles, but the scene was to change.

Soon the brothers were providing a complete funeral service and slowly, during the 1930s, cars began taking the place of horses.

The firm moved from Coventry Road to its present premises in Upper Bond Street seven years ago. Then, a year later, Mr

George Seller, who had retired 11 years earlier, died.

On the late Mr Seller's retirement Mr J. C. Bardsly came into the firm as chairman with Mr Arthur Seller as director and resident manager living on the premises.

**BUSINESS TO CONTINUE**

Although Mr Seller is retiring the business will continue in the tradition it has built up over the years, and will become even more of a family concern with Mr Bardsly's son David, becoming resident manager.

For Mr Seller it will be a quiet retirement, with time for gardening and walking, and visiting places he has not had time to see before.

He and his wife, Edna May, will live in Burtage at 27, Hillside Road. The couple have a son, Michael, who is an engineer, two daughters and seven grandchildren.

Demolition Orders are to be served by the Borough Council on Linden Cottage and adjoining cottage in Linden Lane, Desford.



SELLER BROS. (HINCKLEY) Ltd

too much for the horse because it collapsed and died. There was a mad rush to find a replacement black horse for the funeral. Advertisements appeared each week in the Hinckley Times.

William Pratt passed away in 1924 and the business in his name carried on by his wife Hannah Pratt, with the help of George Seller. The business also included a light haulage contractor sideline.

In 1938, G Seller started to employ its own carpenters and could call itself a complete funeral director.

The two Seller brothers had a falling out. Charles parted company with his brother and set up his own rival funeral business at the top of Castle Street, where Betty Ann's dress boutique is now located. The existence of two firms calling themselves Seller must have been confusing – G. Seller and Charles Seller and Co.

Arthur Seller again recalls:

“When I was a boy, at G. Seller and Co, we had 6 Black horses and 1 Grey horse for weddings. If the wedding was top class, we used to borrow a Grey horse from Mr. Frank Wells, who kept the Three Pots Inn. Now came the great day - my brother bought a large double six Daimler to be used as a hearse and he also hired two black cars for the first attempt at starting this new fashion with cars, getting rid of the old ways and starting to become a complete funeral Director. The very first attempt was a failure –



George Seller



This picture of the premises on Coventry Road must have been taken after 1938, the date when the firm started to call itself “Complete Undertakers”

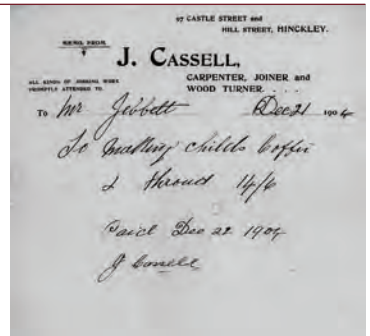
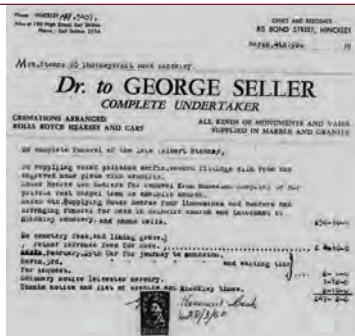


the magnificent hearse broke down on its first funeral. Fortunately, we still had the two horses and old glass hearse, so we were able to conduct the funeral”.

It seems the days of horsepower were not quite over!

It would not be until 1968 that the percentage of funerals at crematoria surpassed that of funerals at cemeteries in this country and so the natural working environment for G. Seller in its earliest days, would have been the municipal cemeteries in Hinckley and the surrounding villages, that had their origins back in the middle of the 19th Century.

Two invoices for undertakers in Hinckley from different eras.







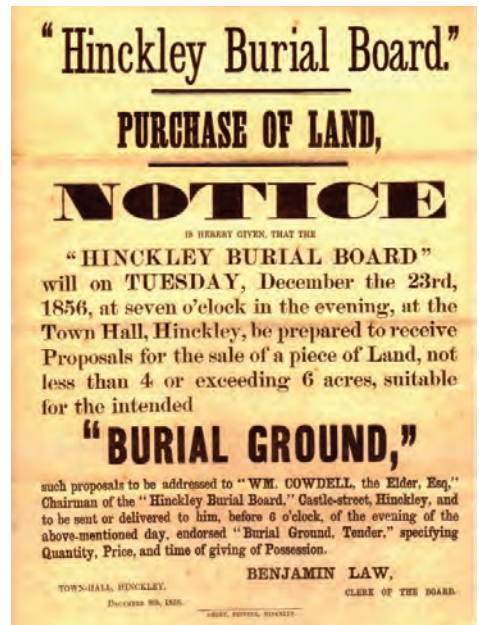
## Chapter 02

# SPARROW'S GARDEN

Hinckley Cemetery on Ashby Road was opened in 1858. This was six years after the Burial Boards Act which had created the local administrative infrastructure so that new burial grounds could be developed. Why it took Hinckley so long to open a cemetery space is not clear. What is known that the first option for a piece of land was considered for a plot on Burbage Road. At some stage that plan must have fallen through for the eventual cemetery as we know, is situated on what would have then been the very outskirts of the town. Today, it is surrounded by housing development of various eras and is now effectively landlocked within this development.

The Cemetery has the local nickname "Sparrow's Garden" – taken from a cemetery keeper from the turn of the 19th Century, who lived in the Cemetery Lodge. If a person was described as being ready for Sparrow's Garden, the prognosis was not good! Mr. Sparrow senior's son took over the role from his father in 1932 and continued until 1966. The cemetery had been Sparrow's garden for 65 years.

There had been several burial grounds associated with Churches and Chapels. In particular, the Churchyard at St. Mary's Parish Church in the centre of town was full and although extra ground had been purchased in 1835 it was not enough to keep up with the mortality rate. All burials within these



Churchyards were to cease with the opening of the cemetery on Ashby Road.

The land for the cemetery was purchased from a William and Jane Goode for #462 2s 7d. It was further extended in 1895, 1936 and 1951. In 2009 it was extended for a fourth time.

The grounds of the cemetery were laid out by a Mr. Marriott of Nuneaton. The cost of the Chapels was £900 built by Mr. Orchard of Banbury. There were winding paths and much planting of trees, shrubs and hardy plants.

A note in Baxter's History of Hinckley records the types of trees planted - Pink Chestnut, Weeping Ash, Cedar, Mountain Ash, variegated holly and silver birch. How many of the original species survive to this day is not known but the history describes the cemetery as: "one of the most beautiful places of resort in the town".

Mr. Thomas Paul was engaged as the Cemetery Superintendent by virtue of being the Sexton of the Church for the previous 20 years. The cemetery was divided into two – as faced from the road, to the left was the unconsecrated ground for Non-conformists, Roman Catholics and Dissenters. To the right was the consecrated ground for the Church of England. The first interment in the consecrated ground was a child named Oxford and in the unconsecrated ground again it was a child by the name of Crick.



Although the photo was taken in 1951 it shows the penchant for the old ways when coffins were carried on brewers' drays. This funeral was conducted by G. Seller



## Chapter 03

# THE BARSBY FAMILY

G. Seller would continue quietly serving the community for a number of years. The two adverts from 1959 and 1969, from left to right, show that the company was proud of its heritage and that the company had a second office in Earl Shilton.

However, the next developments in the business were to involve a new family with a new set of business aspirations. It was the Barsby family, from a local, but different business background, who would become involved with the funeral business in Hinckley and are indeed still the driving force behind the business today.

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Joseph Charles Barsby 'Charlie', who left school at the age of 14, undertook an apprenticeship as a wheelwright with Thomas Hodgkin, a master wheelwright in Barwell, completing his tutorage in 1937. After completing his apprenticeship, Charlie made coffins from a set of oak boards, made wooden car wheels along with making a bespoke body for the carriage masters of the day. He was determined to start his own business and with his savings of £25, he formed a partnership with Walter Bostock, to form Bostock & Barsby in the village of Barwell. Their craftsmanship and service impressed the community with their high standards and reliability. However, this successful partnership was brought to an abrupt end with the sudden death of Charlie's partner, Walter. He passed away at work by his bench in Charlies arms. The Bostock name was always kept as a sign of respect.

With the onset of the World War and the increase in Motor transport events opened a new chapter for Bostock & Barsby. They began trading as Coachbuilders and Funeral Furnishers. Hand made vehicle bodies were constructed upon various vehicle chassis', from flat bed lorries to fully enclosed furniture removal vans. In serving the community, Charlie took great pride in caring for the bereaved and made coffins in various solid woods.



This reputation of integrity meant that Bostock & Barsby were entrusted by the people of Barwell and Newbold Verdon (where Charlie Barsby and his family originated) with looking after their loved ones.

The trend for funerals in this period was for the deceased to be taken from those villages to a Chapel of Rest and then conveyed to the place of committal in a hearse and following cars – whether the cemetery or increasingly the crematorium. This meant that the relationship with George Seller of Hinckley began, whereby Charlie would use his company's Hearse, following cars and Chapels of Rest.

In the 1960's Charlie had a purpose-built factory on Stapleton Lane, Barwell built to house the Coachbuilding and Paintshop under one roof with 44,000 sqft of space. The company was now building vehicles for a number of Nationwide firms like Sketchley Dry Cleaners and Rugby Portland Cement. Having built an increasing customer base in the transport world, Charlie never put aside his commitment to serving the community in their time of loss. He never forgot the early days of the business and the principles upon which it was founded.

In 1964 George Seller was ready to retire and gave Charlie Barsby the news of his intention. Having considered all the options, it was formally agreed that Charlie would purchase the business, with the proviso that George's brother, Arthur, would continue to be employed by the company and look after the day to day running. This was the foundations for the company of today.

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The photograph shows Arthur Seller (left) and Charlie Barsby (right) as they look over details of the business.





## Chapter 04

# LATE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

In October 1968, G. Seller opened it's new Funeral Home at 75 Upper Bond Street. The old premises were demolished for the new Head office of Hinckley & Rugby Building Society. The new premises included modern Chapels of Rest, mortuary facilities and garaging for the new Rolls Royce fleet and living accommodation for Arthur Seller and his wife Edna.

This was the new Rolls Royce Fleet in front of the newly built premises. This consisted of a 1960 Silver Cloud I built Hearse followed by 2 Phantom V Limousines. These came with prestigious pedigrees, having been previously owned by Billy Smart of the Circus family and the other by Scottish office for conveying dignitaries in their duties. It was believed The Queen would have travelled in it while in Holyrood.



Rolls Royce Vehicle Registration Certificates from 1960 and 1961





In July 1971 it was time to prepare for the next generation to take over. Charlie's youngest son, David, relinquished all thoughts of a sporting career and devote himself entirely to the business. David recalls:

“At the age of 17, I went to Clapham in London to train. I would stay in London during the week and come home at a week-end. In January 1972 I passed my exams with the British Institute of Embalmers, with the highest marks for that particular year. I could now join the firm as a qualified embalmer”.



David Barsby

It was not long before Charlie Barsby was encouraging David to consider becoming a fully-fledged Funeral Director. David needed little encouragement and by May 1974 David had gained his Diploma in Funeral Directing and became one of the youngest ever fully qualified Funeral Directors in the UK. David very much took his cue from his Father;



“I recall his words to me and they were as true then as they are today and it continues to be our core ethos: “If something is worth doing, it needs doing well”.

David set about transforming the business.

“It was about putting some polish to the business with the greatest attention to customer service. In those days it was rare for someone to be buried in their own clothes, whereas today 95% of families choose their own clothes. We have served people across the country from Southampton to Glasgow. We have buried people at sea and have conducted funerals from the simple to the flamboyant – everyone has their own way of saying goodbye, and we are here to put a befitting service together for them, whatever the request.”

David has seen the onset of over commercialisation of the funeral industry and the swallowing up of the independent family firms across the country by big conglomerates.

“Some people forget about the clients and serve to keep the accountants happy. Profit and Loss is the be all and end all but for us we concentrate on the customer’s needs. Our job is not 9am to 5pm. We are entrusted with helping people carry out one of the last things they will do for a member of their family. That is a big responsibility and you have to get it right. Our role is to listen carefully, reassure and help those grieving to put together a service they would like”. He adds: “You can’t go back and put it right later. You have to ensure you do everything you can to make it as close to perfect as possible for the family.”



A view up Upper Bond Street before G. Seller purchased the Old Co-Operative store and four cottages

At the end of the 1970s the company purchased the four cottages and the old Co-Operative store on the corner of Well Lane and Upper Bond Street to use as a memorial showroom and stone workshop. This allowed David to make the decision to bring the memorial production in house. This allowed G. Seller to be in control of providing the same levels of customer service and attention to detail as they did with funerals, and providing more of a comprehensive service to the families they were privileged to serve.

# This Indenture

Made the 21<sup>st</sup> day of July 1871 between and amongst the following persons to wit: **Between** **John Farmer** of the County of ... and **John ...** of the County of ...

1871-10-1



**Whereas** the said John Farmer and the said John ... have agreed to sell to the said John ... certain premises situate in the County of ...

**AND** whereas the said John ... has agreed to purchase the said premises from the said John Farmer and the said John ... for the sum of ...

**AND** whereas the said John ... has agreed to pay to the said John Farmer and the said John ... the sum of ...

**IN WITNESS** whereof the said John Farmer and the said John ... have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and date first above written.

# The sum

of the sum of ... Dollars and ... cents, being the purchase money for the premises hereinafter described, which the said John ... has agreed to pay to the said John Farmer and the said John ...

And the said John ... has agreed to pay the same to the said John Farmer and the said John ... in the following manner to wit: ...

And the said John ... has agreed to pay to the said John Farmer and the said John ... the sum of ... Dollars and ... cents, being the purchase money for the premises hereinafter described, which the said John ... has agreed to pay to the said John Farmer and the said John ...

**In Witness** whereof the said John Farmer and the said John ... have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and date first above written.

*John Farmer* *John ...*  
John, Farmer, James, John

Above are the deeds dating back to 1871 to the old Co-Operative Corner shop, now the memorial showroom and Barsby Suite which incorporates the Service Chapel and Catering Suite.

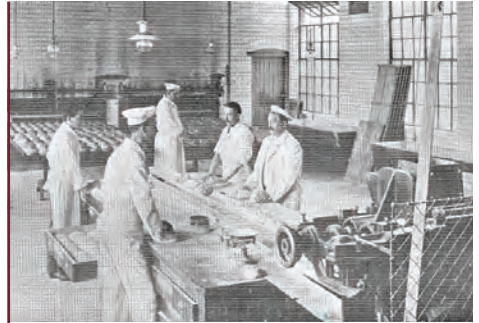
## Chapter 05

# EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

Business expansion took place when in December 1982 the car park and the old Co-Operative Bakehouse (dated 1907) were added to the estate when the old Sunbro Hosiery firm ceased to trade. Thus the firm now owned an extensive but compact series of buildings and offices. This meant that in 1982 a catering room could be opened and a full drinks licence was gained.

From 1981 to 1983 there was an updating of the funeral vehicle fleet with 3 new Rolls Royce Phantom VI Limousines. The firm were proud that one of these vehicles had an unusual pedigree – it had been previously used on a Royal Tour of New Zealand!

As is natural in a family firm, it was matters closer to home that also affected the business. In May 1988, Rose Barsby, David's wife passed away and in May 1990 Charlie Barsby passed away. There were to be happier times ahead. In January 1991 David Barsby married for a second time to Susan Dagley and in November 1991, Joseph Charles Barsby, named after his grandfather was born.



This is a view from inside the old Bakehouse, that is now the G. Seller Memorial Workshop.



The workers of the Co-Operative outside what is now the G. Seller Memorial Showroom & The Barsby Service Chapel & Catering Suite. The original clock pictured here is still in situ today.

If family matters did not stand still, so with the company. In 1995 there was the introduction of the first ever low line Volvo fleet. At the end of the 1970s, 1980s and early 2000's, stressing the family nature of the company, three employees began their careers with the company that mostly continue to this day. The company brochure describes all its employees as the "extended family", the concept that pervades every aspect of the business.



This is the new Phantom VI that G. Seller purchased in 1981, carrying out ceremonial duties in the Isle of Man.

In June 1979, Bernadette Gilchrist joined the company, who knew from the age of 15 that she wanted to become a funeral director. Working with Charlie Barsby, she arranged funerals from the age of 16 and went on to conduct funerals at the age of 22. She gained the Higher Diploma in Funeral Directing, awarded in 2002. Bernie held several roles within the business, being the manager and also overseeing the running of the memorial department, before latterly moving into being the accounts clerk. Bernadette retired from the company in 2017.



Bernadette  
Gilchrist

Rhonda J. Astill, Funeral Operations Director, recalls;

"Having suffered a close bereavement in my early teens, my decision to pursue a career in the Funeral Business was purely vocational. I joined G. Seller in 1984 on a Youth Training Scheme and trained as an embalmer."



Rhonda J. Astill

In the intervening years, Rhonda has specialised in areas such as the repatriation of air crash victims and she is a Member of the British Institute of Funeral Directors.

Kevin Draper joined G. Seller in 2001 as a casual Driver and Pall Bearer. He had his own business being a Haulage Contractor, but as he recalls:



Kevin Draper

"...as I spent more time working for G. Seller, I realised that I had found my vocation, and in early 2005, joined the company on a full-time basis."

Kevin is now the Senior Funeral Director and is professionally qualified.

## Chapter 06

# INTO THE 21st CENTURY

To maintain core values and not to stand still would seem to be the by words of the company as exemplified by current Managing Director, Joseph Barsby, son of David Barsby – the third generation in a row to run the company.

Joseph pursued interests in becoming a rugby player, but suffered a serious spine injury, which prevented any potential career. So like father, like son, when faced with a similar decision – he entered the family business on a full-time basis in 2011.

Joseph started off in the memorial department, becoming a qualified memorial fixer and safety inspector. He moved into having more involvement with funeral directing and the overall running of the business in 2014 when his now, wife, Amy Elizabeth Barsby joined the company full time, taking over the responsibility of the day to day running of the memorial department.

The company expanded its operation to Newbold Verdon in 2004 when another local family company, Gillivers



Joseph Barsby



Amy Barsby

of Barlestone, sold to the Heart of England Co-Operative. It was an incredibly proud moment for the family because they were now back in the village in which they originate.

In June 2015, the Newbold Verdon funeral home was comprehensively renovated. This also included changing the name from David C. Barsby to G. Seller.



Newbold Verdon before renovation



Newbold Verdon after renovation

The company has many services apart from the comprehensive funeral service; from memorial safety inspections, renovating war memorials, a grave tending service, memorials insurance and bespoke commissions, such as the Sharrad Gilbert memorial in Burbage Churchyard in August 2017 which was unveiled by Baroness Gretton, the then serving Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire.

The company does everything it can to give back to the local community. It sponsors Hinckley Rugby Club, Kingscroft Bowls Club in Earl Shilton and Wigston Brass Band. It has also sponsored the Golf Club and Football Club in the past as well.

The firm has passed on the trade discount on printing to some local Church magazines, hopefully saving vital funds that can then be used to benefit the community.

They have collected books for community libraries, donated clothes for the homeless at Christmas, made the Newbold Verdon funeral home a Food



Bank drop off point, put on coffee mornings for the Friends of the Elderly – aimed at combating loneliness, and also providing transport for residents of local care homes for the Christmas light switch on so that they can still be a part of the event.

Each year the company puts together a Service of Reflection to remember and bring bereaved families together, which is an incredibly special and poignant evening.



These are pictures from the Service of Reflection 2019, where Wigston Brass Band played some incredibly meaningful renditions.

Joseph elicits his business' aims:

“I am passionate about providing the complete service and to be able to have everything in one place for a family, taking the stress and worry of having to organise other elements of the funeral away. In August 2017 to December 2018, we have undergone extensive renovations of our main office in Upper Bond Street, creating modern, purpose made facilities to provide the highest levels of bereavement care. This includes 5 new Chapels of Rest to provide as much flexibility to families as possible for when they'd like to spend time with their loved one, respectful and private mortuary facilities, a new catering suite and a Service Chapel so that your loved ones funeral can actually take place on the premises.”

Joseph adds:

“We would welcome the advent of a crematorium in Hinckley which has been discussed since 1994. The vast majority of families choose for the service of committal to be a cremation and the community of Hinckley deserves to have our own.”



Joseph's ethos is close to that of his Father, whereby the customer will dictate what they want and the job of the firm is to be flexible enough to meet every need. He adds:

“We always want to increase service standards but I never want to get too big that we lose our core values of family and extended family serving the bereaved families of our area”.

Joseph's approach to running the business and the commitment and hard work of the team has paid dividends. The Midland Family Business of the Year award (2016), the Contribution to the Community Award at the Leicester Mercury Business Awards (2017) and the Niche Business Awards Employee of the Year (Rhonda Astill 2017) and Niche Business Awards Young Entrepreneur of the Year (Joseph Barsby 2018) are testament to the firm's approach to business.

More importantly the family's foundations are even more secure. Amy E. Smith, who joined the firm in 2014 married Joseph Barsby in 2016 and the happy arrival of Alexa E. Barsby in January 2018 marks the next stage in the family's commitment to the business. Joseph said:

“We have an eye on future business developments, but we are keen on our past and our tradition and how it can influence our future”.

# RENOVATION IMAGES







# *G Seller*

Our Family Caring For Your Family

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[www.gseller.co.uk](http://www.gseller.co.uk)

