



BENN ABDY-COLLINS

The place and importance of funeral pets

I'd like to tell you a story about the dog who growled at a funeral; It was my first ever service, I was reading a restaurateur's eulogy and mentioned sausages, Tati (short for the Welsh name for potato), a Border Terrier, with a dash of Lakeland, growled! I was in her funeral home undergoing a mock exam during my training with Green Fuse; her input broke the tension. So, here I am a few years later, and my arranger is telling me a story of how her family wouldn't talk to the funeral director when her nan died but they would talk to the funeral home's pet. And, you'll never guess what? This was the very same Tati at work again, foiling their grief with her empathetic sensitivity.

Some animals naturally sense people's needs, emotions and distress, and seek to bring comfort and even joy to them. My arranger's dog, Norman, is a little, lively, bearded fellow whose both anxious and excitable, but he loves people and makes best friends easily; that's how this article started. Norman reminded her of Tati and how her presence made such a difference. Intrigued, I naturally interviewed Tati's team at Heart and Soul Funerals in Totnes to understand her role further (Heart and Soul includes Green Fuse training).

Tati's mentor was Rusty, a previous Terrier who played the same role. When Rusty died and was buried at home, Tati absolutely knew the loss and howled at the funeral service. This reminds me of Greyfriars' Bobby, about how dogs just know and have an innate understanding about life, in ways we just don't know ourselves. Tati is described as: "such a special dog who recognises people in distress – she just knows, she always does – and she makes people more approachable." She'll enter the hall to sit at their feet or snuggle down between the bereaved whilst they're with the funeral director discussing arrangements. At one funeral, someone left the chapel and the next moment, Tati trotted in and lay on the feet of the main mourner.

Tati brings something extra to the ambience of the funeral home and forms an important part of the team, who are all "dog mad", and include her in everything. Families respond to Tati as she makes them feel at home, where she distracts them and helps them relax, so they don't have to focus on the funeral director and arranging. Once, a SAIF inspector said: "She'll have to go," but, relented when the response was: "We'll leave the organisation rather than get rid of the dog."

Children automatically cluster around Tati as she comes into her own when children have lost a parent. Two children of eight and six absolutely adored the dog, she became their real solace and she was involved at the funeral itself. Heart and Soul have a picture of the children's hands petting the dog as their father was lowered into the grave; she gave them much needed distraction.

The importance and role of animals during times of human vulnerability cannot be underestimated. There's a long history of animals working alongside people in distress and bringing comfort. A recent article about a horse therapist – that's a real, live, big horse – visiting a hospital showed just this, though a horse is a little big for most funeral homes. Funeral dogs are a more realistic choice. So, if this column has sparked any interest for you to get your own funeral dog, here are some links to explore, which I found with a simple

Google search:

- <https://www.therapydogs.com/therapy-dogs-offer-comfort-funeral-services/>
- <https://www.funeralzone.co.uk/blog/therapy-dogs-at-funerals>
- <https://www.wideopenpets.com/these-therapy-dogs-work-at-funeral-homes-to-bring-comfort-to-the-grieving/>
- American Kennel Club: <https://www.akc.org/sports/akc-family-dog-program/akc-therapy-dog/training-selecting-therapy-dogs-funeral-homes/>
- <https://connectingdirectors.com/51646-therapy-dog-funeral-homes>

SOLIHULL MAYOR UNVEILS HISTORIC FUNERAL HOME'S NEW LOOK

This year, Thomas Bragg & Sons Funeral Directors will celebrate its 150th anniversary

Mayor of Solihull councillor Flo Nash and her consort Alan Nash unveiled the commemorative plaque at the newly refurbished Thomas Bragg & Sons Funeral Directors in Shirley, which has been serving the community for 150 years.

Funeral director Victoria Fallon and her team were joined by reverend Paul Day, who formally re-dedicated the Solihull funeral home along with reverend Gerardo Fabrizio and civil celebrant Suzi Lauder, who sang with funeral arranger Kayleigh Hughes.

The branch has been completely revamped, providing a place of comfort and calm for families needing their help. Members of the local community enjoyed refreshments including a cake baked by Fallon. The service concluded with the release of two doves and prayers in memory of those who have died.

Although the funeral home is now part of Funeral Partners, two of the former owners Malcolm and Maureen Bragg were among those attending the service.

Funeral Partners' area development manager, Ian Sommerville, said: "All the team members at Thomas Bragg & Sons are extremely proud of their extensively refurbished premises. I would like to thank everyone who attended the rededication service. Malcolm Bragg gave a wonderful potted history of the company as it enters its 150th year serving Solihull and its surrounding areas."

