



What shall we do with the ashes?

Channel 4's recent Ashes to Diamonds documentary explored some of the imaginative ways bereaved families are choosing to dispose of their relatives' ashes.

Behind the scenes in a crematorium

You can't explore what people decide to do with the ashes until you've explained exactly what happens to the human body after it's been fired at 1,000oC for 90 minutes, so producer/director David Brindley began by taking viewers behind the scenes at the crematorium.

Viewers were told how 'metal residues' - from hip joints, coffin screws and coins, for example - are removed before the bones are transferred to the cremulator to render them more of an ash like substance. They were, no doubt, fascinated to learn that the process results in 7lb of ash, which means that most of us weigh more or less the same when we leave this world as when we enter it!

Three personal family stories

With less than half an hour in which to provide an insight into this aspect of the bereavement industry, David Brindley chose to follow the stories of three families and introduced the audience to Helen Todd, whose husband Steve (59) died following a brain haemorrhage. Keeping the ashes in a Chinese takeaway container (!), we learn that Helen now has big plans for them.

Some of the ashes were transferred into a small pot which was then placed in the drawer of a cabinet in Steve's workshop - it turned out to be a funeral director's ashes cabinet - while some were loaded into 56 special shotgun cartridges and, at a memorial shoot at Clacton Gun Club, family and friends blasted Steve's ashes into the sky as they fired, simultaneously, at a single clay pigeon.

However, the main focus of Helen's story was her decision to hand over a portion of Steve's ashes to

Phoenix Diamonds, which used them to create a 1.05 carat brilliant cut canary stone.



Helen's 1.05 carat brilliant cut canary stone

CEO Mike Kelly admitted Helen's is the best gem the company has ever produced.

"It just turned out that way, honestly, Helen's was a particularly beautiful stone and we were thrilled that, although her emotions got the better of her at first, she was absolutely delighted with her memorial diamond," he says.

Excellent public response to the programme

Mike reports that the Ashes to Diamonds documentary has helped people who were previously a little sceptical to realise that memorial diamonds are a serious subject and this, in turn, has endorsed what Phoenix Diamonds is doing.

Having had the memorial diamond mounted in a ring, Helen Todd reveals towards the end of the show that she is planning to buy another in two or three years' time - so that her late husband's daughters will have one each. What's more, in her will she says the girls should use her estate to have two further diamonds made from her own created remains so that, ultimately, they will each have "one of me and one of Steve".

Painting with ashes

Next, David Brindley turns his attention to George and Jill Filkins from Wolverhampton, who had been together for 37 years when 57 year old George had a heart attack following complications with a stomach ulcer on his return from a holiday in Menorca. Having kept most of Wolverhampton Wanderers FC fan George's ashes for nine months - some were scattered under his long held seat at the Molineux stadium while the remainder were in an urn on a coffee table - Jill decides the time is right to create a special memorial to her late husband.

On reading a local newspaper article about artist Val Thompson and her business Ash 2 Art, Jill commissions a painting depicting the view from the window of the couple's Menorca holiday apartment. The plan is that Val will incorporate some of George's ashes by incorporating them into the paint. Emotions invariably run high in this documentary, yet there is time for levity too as a portion of



George's ashes is despatched by Special Delivery from Jill's local post office.

Viewers catch up with Jill when she travels to Val's Sunderland home to collect the painting. Reduced to tears when she set eyes on it for the first time, Jill was delighted with the result, especially since the ashes are clearly visible in the texture of the paint. Hanging the



framed painting in her home, Jill determined it was "nicer than a gravestone" because the essence of George had gone into it and joked that her husband would be able to keep an eye on her!

Memorial pendant helps Charlie move on

Christopher Lamb was just 25, when he was thrown off a moped during his travels in Thailand and died of a head injury. This engaging story centred on Christopher's younger sister Charlie, 15, and her relationship with her brother, as she explained that she wanted to commission a memorial pendant from the Ashes into Glass range to keep her brother close and help her to move on with her life. Looking forward to starting a new school, Charlie made it clear she didn't just want to be known as the girl whose brother had died.

Bill Rhodes, a partner in Billericay-based Ashes into Glass, says filmmaker David Brindley was very impressed with their service when he visited the glassblowing studio,



especially since he had not heard about the process before commencing research for the documentary.

"After the initial meeting, the crew were filming with us for about a day and we put them in touch with Charlie so that they could tell her story," says Bill, whose company has become an established choice for many funeral directors.

"We didn't meet Charlie ourselves, but she was obviously impressed with the crystal pendant we made for her and we're delighted that it is helping her through her bereavement. Ashes to Diamonds has been a good experience for us, generating interest in our products and resulting in fair few enquiries."

The bereaved want to know more

A quick visit to the Channel 4 website shows that Ashes to Diamonds generated a great deal of public interest, with several message board requests for further information about the companies featured in the documentary. It just goes to show that bereaved relatives want to learn more about their options - not only in terms of the funeral arrangements, but what happens afterwards, particularly when there is such a diverse range of memorial items out there to help them cope with their grief.

Article sourced from *The Funeral Director* magazine.