

John Blenkiron & Sons

Our Story

John Blenkiron & Sons Funeral Directors celebrated their 50th anniversary last year having been established in 1967. However, their family association with the Funeral industry started two generations before that, the current managers, James and John's, grandfather and great-grandfather were funeral directors in a village just twelve miles from where they are now in Richmond.

Besides the Richmond premises there is a second Blenkiron Funeral Directors situated in Barnard Castle. This was created in 1989, following the merger of two independent Directors. This means that the whole of North Yorkshire and County Durham can be proudly served by the Blenkiron name.

This is a rare industry where the owners really care about what they do and the effect it has on the community, so the decision to sell the shares to Funeral Partners wasn't one that was taken lightly. Indeed, it could only be taken at all if the twins, James and John, really felt like it was the right thing to do and wouldn't negatively affect their reputation, the staff or the community within which they served.



“We’re delighted that working with Funeral Partners has in no way diluted the good-will built up over the years towards the Blenkiron name. We can continue to serve the community in the way they have come to expect, and are excited about the future growth of the business.”

James Blenkiron

Your reputation is our reputation.

Considerations

With a large family, which included ten grandchildren, to take into consideration, owners, James and John, knew they needed to think about securing the future of the business. Their brothers Michael and Richard, who had already retired from the family business, were also shareholders, and James and John had to consider their options. These amounted to: buying out the other shareholders, or pursuing another route that would continue to see the business grow and prosper.

Funeral Partners had approached the twins previously, so the two decided to look further into what the potential deal offered. They weren't

comfortable with other options available to them as they felt that the 'corporate branding' that would be involved, (including staff uniforms), would swallow up the Blenkiron 'name' they'd worked so hard and so long for.

Had James and John not been completely comfortable throughout all the negotiations they always had the opportunity to walk away. The turning point for James, in particular, was when Sam Kershaw became Head of Operations at Funeral Partners (he is now Chief Executive). James knew that due to Sam's own experience as a Funeral Director he would understand and appreciate James' concerns. This was a pivotal point in negotiations and made the final decision much easier.

absolutely sure that things would run smoothly post-sale. Once the contract was signed internal systems were changed quite rapidly, and as change in any format is not always well-received, Funeral Partners have learnt from this experience that the initial stages, post-sale, need to be handled slowly and sensitively so that they aren't perceived as disruptive by the staff.



The Logistics

James and John informed their staff of their decision eight weeks prior to the changes, explaining their reasons for signing over to Funeral Partners and the positives it offered regarding growth and long-term opportunities. A whole year's due diligence had been carried out since this partnership was always about more than just finances. The twins wanted to be

Moving Forward

Keeping the close-knit community informed of the changes was important. Rumours spread that the twins were retiring, these needed to be negated and confidence instilled into the local area that nothing at the Funeral Directors would change

fundamentally other than the fact the twins are no longer shareholders.

They ran an advertising campaign in the local press highlighting the fact that, having spent fifty years serving the community, they were looking forward to doing so for fifty years to come. This proved successful and when it became apparent that in terms of the day-to-day running of the business, there was no obvious differences, things soon carried on as normal.

In addition, Funeral Partners rolled out a maildrop regarding pre-paid Funeral Plans, using photos of the Blenkiron family, thus reinforcing the message that the same people would be still be working within the community. This again gave much-needed assurance, the community weren't worried about who owned the shares, they just wanted to know that the people they would be dealing with and the quality of service would remain the same.

The Result

All staff chose to remain with the company and have welcomed the new opportunities that have presented themselves regarding training and development. In addition, James' and John's niece, Rebecca, has come onboard as a trainee funeral director as has Will Bellerdy.

James is delighted that Funeral Partners listen to his suggestions, and he's currently recommending areas where he would like to open new branches under the Blenkiron umbrella. In addition, as this business has always been part of a tight-knit community that supports each other,

he's requested that the printing for the business is kept with a local printer they've been using for thirty years rather than move to a Funeral Partners national supplier and this has been agreed.

The move to sell the shares to Funeral Partners has exceeded expectations. Opening hours at Barnard Castle have been extended and there has been a positive financial impact upon the business. Most importantly, perhaps, James and John don't feel like they have compromised on the quality of the service they offer and the goodwill towards the Blenkiron name in the community remains just as high as it has been for previous generations.



Funeral Partners invest in family businesses, protecting their heritage and retaining their local identity. As a former funeral director myself, I fully understand the importance of protecting your brand's hard earned reputation and continuing to provide the highest levels of customer and community service.

*Sam Kershaw
Chief Executive. Funeral Partners*

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