

Lay celebrant creates personalised funerals

10:00am Tuesday 2nd April 2013 in [News](#)

By David Wiles



Hugh Milsom

FORMER lay minister Hugh Milsom is on a mission – to make funerals a lot more personal for families.

Hugh, 59, of [Blunsdon St Andrew](#), realised while he was taking church funerals in [Swindon](#) that although a religious service is important and comforting for some, other people want something more secular that is tailored to and reflects the personality of the dead loved one.

Therefore he quit his role as a lay minister for [St Peter's, in Penhill](#), and [St Philips, in Stratton](#), and became an independent funeral celebrant, working with families themselves to design services which include symbols, words and music that mean something to the individual and the bereaved.

In a tailored service for a football fan, for example, the congregation sang the team's anthem, while a service for a railway enthusiast featured recorded sounds of a GWR steam train.

Hugh, who took church funerals for about three years before moving into civic funerals, said: "As a licensed lay minister for the Church of England – as I

was for a few years – part of my role was taking funerals and I soon realised that there's more to it than just turning up on the day and reading a story about the person. It's far deeper.

“Quite often if you go to a funeral, it's possible to come away thinking we could have done things a little bit better, it could have been a bit more personal. Sometimes they probably just lack a little bit of feeling, a little bit of compassion, something to make it special.

“And my interest in this grew to the point where I wanted to be able to offer a personal service for the funeral, wanted to be able to do what the deceased may well have specified what they wanted to do in their funeral service or their family wanted, in such a way that the funeral service truly reflects the wishes of the deceased and the family.

“It does what they want rather than what happens when the church gets hired for a service and puts itself into the process, they have a set process, a set of words to use.”

Hugh, a grandfather, said his eulogies were special because he spent time with the family: listening, looking at old photographs, and trying to get a sense of the person - whether they believed in an afterlife, where they went on holidays, what music they listened to, which football team they supported.

So far, almost all of his services have been held at Kingsdown Crematorium, but he offers his services across Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire, parts of Somerset and Oxfordshire.

He has led 22 funerals since setting up as an independent funeral celebrant in November, and he believes there is growing demand for people wanting tailored, more secular funerals led by a man in a suit, rather than by a minister in robes.

Hugh, who formerly worked in sales and marketing in the broadcast industry, said: “What I'm trying to move towards is someone going to a funeral director and say ‘I want Hugh Milsom and I don't want to have it in a crematoria, I want to have it in a yurt in a woodland burial site’, for example.”

For details, visit www.swindonfuneralcelebrant.co.uk or email hugh@swindonfuneralcelebrant.co.uk