

The changing traditions of the Scottish funeral

✘ Farewells to Royals and the famous, from Princess Diana to Jade Goody, have transformed modern funeral customs, according to a major UK study released today.

Research by The Co-operative Funeralcare has found that favourite pop songs – like Candle in the Wind – football teams and hobbies have become the norm at one in three funerals. And half of today's send offs are a celebration of life and one in ten includes no religion at all.

The Co-operative Funeralcare, Scotland's largest funeral provider, responsible for 16,500 funerals each year, conducted the research across its network of 120 funeral homes in Scotland. The study is backed by the findings of a new ICM poll of 2,000 British adults which revealed that more than half of the Scottish population (57%) would prefer a celebration at their send off, and almost half (47%) would opt for a day that reflects their favourite hobby, colour, footie team or music.

Leading funeral historian Dr Julian Litten said: "The funerals of Princess Diana and Jade Goody have opened peoples' eyes to the array of choices available from cars to coffins, pop songs to white doves. Most importantly today's funerals are increasingly a celebration of life rather than mourning a loss."

Funeral Directors at The Co-operative Funeralcare report requests for pink Cadillacs, milk-floats, motorbikes and even a tandem bicycle alongside traditional hearses. Mourners are wearing bright colours, watching firework displays, blowing bubbles and releasing balloons. But Scottish families are still more likely to want to carry the coffin than in other

parts of the UK, and the Scottish tradition of lowering the coffin with cords still remains in Northern areas.

The Co-operative Funeralcare's study of funeral customs in the UK has been developed into a booklet called *The Ways We Say Goodbye*. It also revealed:

- Three out of ten funerals include personalised flowers, such as to 'Mum' or 'Dad'. Floral tributes have included a pint of Guinness, a cricket bat and a pigeon.

- Religious music is declining and love songs through to popular TV theme songs (match of the day, cricket) are becoming more popular. The top three songs are *My Way* (Frank Sinatra or Shirley Bassey), *Wind Beneath My Wings* (Bette Midler or Celine Dion) and *Time To Say Goodbye* (Sarah Brightman/Andrea Bocelli).

- One in 20 coffins is bespoke; requests have included a Lancaster bomber, a Tardis and a yacht. The choice of materials now includes wood, cardboard, wicker and even wool. People are also decorating coffins with flowers, images, flags or even clothing, such as tartan.

- In 60% of funerals the deceased is dressed in clothes that reflect their life, job or hobby. More unusual outfit requests have included a clown costume, cyclists' lycra, fishermen's waders and divers' wet suits. Common requests include wedding dresses, football strips, military uniforms, kilts and bikers leathers.

- A new trend for 'live' webcasts of funeral ceremonies for family and friends unable to attend the service in person.

Commenting on the research findings, John Williamson, Sector Manager – North, The Co-operative Funeralcare, said: "Our research, the largest study of funeral customs ever undertaken, reveals a significant shift in attitude. Funeral directors are going to great lengths to accommodate a wide

range of special requests as funerals become more a celebration of life.”

The Ways We Say Goodbye booklet has been produced by The Co-operative Funeralcare and will be available from its 120 funeral homes in Scotland. A copy of the booklet can also be downloaded from [The Co-operative Funeralcare website](#).

However, while funerals are becoming more modern, many people’s wishes for their funeral will remain a secret to the grave. An independent survey by ICM shows that funerals remain a taboo with 52 per cent of Scots refusing to talk about their own funeral wishes with friends and family.