

First inspector of Crematoria appointed

The Scottish Government has appointed Scotland's first Inspector of Crematoria.

Robert Swanson QPM will take up the post of HM Inspector of Crematoria for Scotland, following a 41-year career in the police spent investigating some of the most serious and sensitive criminal cases. Mr Swanson also spent time in Thailand as the Senior Investigating Officer for UK police in response to the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami.

Mr Swanson was appointed to the role of Inspector of Crematoria at the start of March and he will shortly begin work, which will include undertaking an inspection visit to every crematoria in Scotland at least once a year. This will fulfil one of the recommendations from the Infant Cremation Commission led by Lord Bonomy.

The Inspector of Crematoria will:

- ensure Cremation Authorities in Scotland are adhering to current legislation and best practice
- respond to complaints or queries from the public about cremations
- inspect cremation registers and other statutory documentation to ensure they are being completed and maintained appropriately
- provide direction to crematoria managers and staff to ensure they are operating in line with the recommendations of the Infant Cremation Commission.
- support the development of future primary legislation on burials and cremations.

Minister for Public Health, Maureen Watt, welcomed the appointment of the Inspector of Crematoria and highlighted the

progress the Government had made towards meeting Lord Bonomy's recommendations.

Ms Watt said: "I am delighted that Robert has been appointed to the role of Inspector of Crematoria and he will bring a wealth of experience to this important role. As well as providing appropriate oversight and scrutiny of practices within Scotland's crematoria, the Inspector will also be a point of contact for families who have any concerns about crematoria practices, anywhere in Scotland

"With Robert's extensive experience of investigating serious crimes, and of working with families and victims of crime, I know he will be well-placed to deal with the sensitive nature of the work of the Inspector.

"The Infant Cremation Commission's report last year was clear that the practices of crematoria across Scotland need more appropriate regulation and scrutiny, to ensure that the events that arose at Mortonhall can never happen again.

"Since June, the Scottish Government has been taking forward an extensive programme of work to implement the recommendations of the Lord Bonomy's report. A quarter of the recommendations have now been implemented and the majority of those remaining will be addressed in the Burial and Cremation Bill, which is due to be introduced into parliament before the end of the parliamentary session.

"The independent National Cremation Investigation, led by Dame Elish Angiolini, is also progressing well, giving all parents and families with questions an opportunity to have their cases investigated.

"I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in the work of the National Committee of Infant Cremation, which is overseeing work to implement the Commission's recommendations. Those involved include clinical and neonatal experts, representatives from the crematoria and

funeral industries, bereavement organisations, parent representatives and local and national government officials.

“The important work the Committee is doing will provide families across Scotland with reassurance that changes are now being made to ensure practices we have seen previously will never be allowed to happen again.”

Robert Swanson said: “I would like to thank the Scottish Government for my appointment and whilst privileged to accept, I am saddened by the circumstances which gave rise to the creation of the post. As the Minister for Public Health has intimated, it is my role to ensure that the on-going changes to legislation and working practice are being adhered to, and to be the point of contact for any future complaints or queries from members of the public concerning cremations.”

Robert Swanson was born and brought up in the far north of Scotland where his late father served as Manager of the Castle of Mey Estate in Caithness, which had been purchased by HM The Queen Mother during the 1960s.

On leaving school Mr Swanson was employed as Herdsman on the Estate looking after Her Majesty's herd of Aberdeen Angus Cattle and North Country Cheviot Sheep.

Beginning his career with Edinburgh City Police in 1972, Mr Swanson served the Capital for a number of years before becoming a member of Special Branch in 1990.

In 2001, he then became Detective Superintendent Major Crime and Deputy Head of the Criminal Investigation Department, where he was in charge of many of the most serious and sensitive investigations. Following the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 he was appointed Senior Investigating Officer for the UK Police, and deployed to Thailand to undertake the role of Chair of the Tsunami Executive Committee on Disaster Victim Identification.

In 2004 Mr Swanson was awarded the Queen's Police Medal for Distinguished Service.

On retiring from Lothian and Borders Police in 2006, Mr Swanson was appointed Serious Crime Review Manager for the Force, a post he held until the creation of Police Scotland in 2013 when he formed part of the National Team on Homicide and Governance Review.