

## Retirement of Mrs Barbara Grummitt

Barbara Grummitt, the manager of the Greenford branch of W. Sherry and Sons, retired on 29th July, 2011, and so Greenford lost one of its longest standing figures.



I attended the retirement party and made a short speech, the text of which is below.

would like to congratulate Barbara tonight on her retirement on behalf of everybody here, but especially the local clergy with whom she has worked successfully for so many years.

Barbara and George Grummitt had already put in 18 months of funeral work in Edgware before coming to Greenford when they started working for W. Sherry and Sons on 15th July, 1968. So today Barbara has completed 43 years and 2 weeks of continuous service. Something of which I think she ought to be very proud indeed.

I first met George and Barbara Grummitt in 1982 as I arrived to become the rector of Greenford Magna. George's death came at a low point for Barbara. Her brother, also a George, and her father Joe all died within a relatively small period of time, and she knew the emotions and problems of grief from a most personal series of experiences.

What Barbara has achieved is remarkable. She has worked carefully and consistently and, most importantly, brought a deep vein of continuity to the work in the Greenford shop, probably the busiest shop in the company. She has managed to meet thousands of people, all of whom were struggling at some level with grief, and successfully assessed what was the appropriate attitude to take in order to serve their deepest needs at such a difficult time.

The work requires a sensitivity to people, an ability to gauge whether a little humour or a smile or perhaps something practical was needed to make the mourner leave the shop feeling that matters had been advanced satisfactorily and that they were making progress towards the funeral. She has had the skill to turn around the confusion that people bring as they enter the shop and she has shed light on the processes of funeral arranging, much to the benefit of so many people. Many people will have been grateful to Barbara for this careful work. Indeed, I am one of them, as when my mother died, it was to Barbara that I went for help with her funeral.

She has done all this whilst living above the shop and being available at times when other businesses would have gone home. In addition, she has brought up Caroline, and then helped with Caroline's children, alone since 1984.

No wonder that Barbara won the **Pride in our People** Award in 2007.

I asked Barbara to talk to me about the high points and the low points, but retaining confidences was always a high priority, even on her last day at work. She admitted to smiling at some of the strange names that parents lumber their children with, and she admitted that the death of children always brought tears to her eyes. She added, "If the death of a small child doesn't tough you, then it is time to get another job!" I think she was right.

So, now Barbara faces the endless delights of retirement. She plans to spend more time with Caroline and Chris, Sophie, Joe and Ben, not forgetting the presence of Monty, of course. Now she will have more time to put on her wellies and dig the allotment, and continue hopefully with her charity support for Meadow House, using her card-making and craft skills to raise money.

However she uses the time, Barbara will leave the funeral world with a proud record of achievement, the inner assurance and sense of a job very well done and the respect and admiration of a community which has been consistently well served over her 43 years of work.

Congratulations and well done, Barbara. Please enjoy a very long and happy retirement.



**Funny, that!**

A study has found that of ten major professions or trades, funeral directors find Christmas cracker jokes the funniest. Vicars are the least likely to laugh at the sometimes terrible puns traditionally found on the slips of paper.

A total of 1000 people were involved in the study, undertaken by the Christmas cracker firm Robin Reed, with 100 from each job tested on their reactions to the jokes. Each person's reaction was rated and classified into three categories: an audible laugh, a smile or little or no reaction at all.

Funeral directors, followed by doctors and then accountants were found to be the most likely to laugh out loud.

Vicars were the least likely to laugh, followed by police and then butchers. The jokes used were firmly in the tradition of terrible puns and creaking word play.

One was: Q, "Why did the scarecrow win so many awards?". A. "Because he was outstanding in his field."

Another was: Q. "What kind of pants do clouds wear?". A: "Thunderwear".

Report by Harry Wallop, in The Daily Telegraph, 27 November, 2010.