



# HOW FAR WE'VE COME

TO CONTEMPLATE HOW FAR MODERN PRACTICES HAVE COME IN THE LAST 150 YEARS – YET HOW ESSENTIALLY OUR NEEDS AS A COMMUNITY HAVE REMAINED UNCHANGED – LOOK NO FURTHER THAN TWENTYMANS FUNERAL SERVICES IN GRAHAMSTOWN, THAMES.

**T**wentymans is the oldest surviving funeral home in New Zealand, of which owner and Managing Director Adrian Catran is extremely proud. A descendant of tin miners from Cornwall, Adrian has his own long association with Grahamstown. It follows the arrival of the six Catran brothers from the small town of Ludvgan in Cornwall, England, to seek gold in the newly established township on 'the Thames'.

Living a few streets from where Adrian now lives and runs his funeral directing business, the brothers feature in the occasional newspaper report of the time for their noisy shenanigans after evenings in the town's busy hotels.

Men had arrived in their thousands in the months following the Thames goldfield proclamation on 1 August 1867.

It was a life where hardship and opportunity were encountered in equal measure and miners were no pushovers. They suffered miserable conditions in the cold, muddy hills that had been stripped of their magnificent cloak of kauri forest and they endured it with patronage at one of the numerous hotels that sprang up.

The realisation of riches in the Coromandel had a huge impact not only on the landscape and Maori population, but on Auckland, which was in the throes of a depression at the time.

This was one of the richest goldfields ever discovered. But in the hillsides rising as a backdrop to the Firth, it was hard quartz rock that held the precious metal in its embrace and

it required heavy machinery rather than pick and shovel to release it.

Within a few short years the haphazard miner's shacks were replaced with Victorian houses built of kauri, and companies had overtaken the small mining claims.

Mills were constructed with giant metal 'stampers' to crush the ore, working day and night with no respect for the sabbath. Laws were swiftly enacted to try to safeguard the

population from the most dangerous of the practices, such as the risk of being crushed to death by a stray giant boulder that had been blasted from the hills above the town.

This was clearly a land of opportunity for an established undertaker.

By 1868, William Twentymans had set up his building contracting and undertaking business in Owen St, Grahamstown. He hired horse and carriage from Mr White on Pollen St -



Adrian Catran (pictured). The Twentymans' fleet includes a one-of-a-kind Presidential Hearse, along with a 1939 Chevrolet Hearse among other vehicles.

whose stables were situated on the corner of Kirkwood and Cochrane Streets - for deliveries to the cemetery.

Shortland Cemetery is where William and his wife Mary Jane Twentymans were buried; Mary having died on 1 May 1888 aged 42, followed by her husband William less than five months later, aged 47.

The business carried on under the management of their sons Robert and William and the sawmilling and building department of Twentymans closed down only in 1976. Twentymans stayed in the Twentymans family until the early 1990s, and Adrian kept the Twentymans' name when he bought it in 1993.

Adrian renovated the old house on Pollen St that serves as family meeting room and casket room for Twentymans, so that families have somewhere homely and comfortable to meet and discuss their needs for funerals.

The tastefully decorated historic Thames house is the shopfront of the business, while the rear of the building houses a mortuary where the dead are cared for; housed, embalmed, dressed and made up prior to their funeral and burial or cremation.

And this is where the historical merges with the 21st Century, for Twentymans is not only the oldest surviving funeral home in New Zealand, but among its most innovative.

The business has chapels in Whitianga, Paeroa and a building in Whangamata and many are surprised to realise what other facilities lie behind the seemingly unchanged cottage on Pollen St Thames. At the rear of the building is an office for staff, a roomy secure garage for the numerous Twentymans vehicles, an award-winning eco-chapel, with seating for 200 and provision for another 60-80 outside.

From its audio and video booth, friends and family worldwide can view the funeral service taking place by accessing a password-controlled live stream on the Twentymans' website [www.twentymans.co.nz](http://www.twentymans.co.nz).

Across the road from the chapel on the service lane off Queen St, the former Judd's Foundry - where huge lighthouses and other industrial machinery were built - has been restored by Adrian with the aim of housing a small cremator to serve the Coromandel Peninsula community.

Currently families must drive to Hamilton or Auckland to see their loved ones cremated,

which means that funerals held on the east coast of the Coromandel must be conducted earlier in the day and the families face a lengthy journey on one of the most emotional days of their lives.

Twentymans' chose to apply for a Certificate of Compliance to establish a cremator that would sit inside this restored warehouse building on its large commercial site.

Unfortunately, a Certificate of Compliance application was not issued and this decision is now under appeal.

Adrian wants the crematorium to operate a separate pet cremator, and anticipates just 170 cremations per year would be performed, amounting to 21 working days of operation.

"There is a need for a cremator here. This is not about a big money spinner - I won't see any return on the costs of this in my lifetime - but for families that wish to have their loved ones cremated close to home, it's a loss," he says.

In New Zealand, more than 60 per cent of families now choose cremation after someone has died. "For us, that figure is 70 per cent," says Adrian. This is still well below Japan, where cremation occurs after 99 per cent of deaths.

He is buoyed by comments on the Twentymans facebook page following his decision to appeal, such as: "I hope that you succeed in providing that extra level of care for the Thames community!", "I certainly hope people will watch it and trust that Twentymans have the town's best interests at heart - Go Adrian!" and "There would be less smoke and pollution from the crematorium than Judds Foundry on the original site of the proposed crematorium in the era!"

Preparing the deceased for burial is always going to be a community need. There are numerous options being trialled worldwide, though each has its critics. Resomation - in which a deceased is treated with heat, chemicals and water before being cremated into ashes; composting - in a 'pod' with compost material added until compost is formed months later; and freezing the body before reducing to ashes.

Modern cremation techniques ensure there is no residue or odours, and the cremator is a unit about the size of the modern residential laundry.

"We will stand by our customers and our commitment to keeping local businesses



Twentymans' award winning chapel, located behind the historic Pollen St funeral home, has been designed to provide world class acoustics and leading edge technology that enables friends and family from around the world to join funerals on the day.

employed with our service," says Adrian. "Many people don't want to discuss the disposal of their body when they die, hence cremation or burial are the principle options and have been for decades. There is a need for a cremator here. This is not about a big money spinner - I won't see any return on the costs of this in my lifetime - but we are doing this for families that wish to have their loved ones cremated close to home."

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[www.twentymans.co.nz](http://www.twentymans.co.nz)  
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