



## The First Eighty Years

"To the Memory of my Grandfather  
Arthur Gresty 1908 – 1988"



*"Maintaining the traditional, modern and bespoke  
family run funeral service with dignity and care"*

Robert, Margaret and David Gresty (Arthur's Son, Daughter in Law and Grandson) are the current company directors of the family run funeral service, Arthur Gresty Funeral Homes.

The founder of the company, Arthur Gresty, was born in 1908 in Moor Nook, off Derbyshire Road South, Sale, and was the son of a Gentleman's Gardener. As a young man he trained and worked as a mechanic for a garage in Hale. In 1933, Arthur started to work for himself, after becoming unemployed.

In 1934, Arthur married Ethel, a member of the Gardner family, a very well known and respected family from Sale Moor Village. They had three children: Joan, Elsie and Robert.

After marrying Ethel, Arthur worked from his home, No. 33 Wythenshawe Road, Sale Moor, where he built himself a double garage, approximately eighteen feet long for his workshop and car garaging. Arthur based his business around vehicle maintenance, servicing and general car hire for public,



commercial and council contracts. His first car was a "Bull Nose" Oxford, which he bought for £35 and used as a taxi service, specialising in holiday trips to coastal resorts. He eventually changed his "Bull Nose" Oxford for a Morris Saloon, which then exchanged that for an Austin 18 Gordon Limousine at a cost of £280 (compared to a cost of around £128,000 for a modern limousine in 2013, some 70 years on).



Arthur attempted to sign up for wartime service but to his surprise was given an exemption due to his work duties (vehicle maintenance and service to the funeral profession). He enrolled in the Home Guard (Dad's Army), which he often said did not fall short in reality from the TV comedy. He spent many hours patrolling South Manchester and around his home town of Sale Moor. In those days, the towns and villages were surrounded by fields, farmland and woodland. He was very patriotic about the service they provided for their country.

In 1942, after working over a number of years for local Funeral Directors, hiring out vehicles and helping with funeral duties, Arthur started to offer his own complete Funeral Service in Sale Moor. As soon as possible, under war time restrictions, he studied the theory and practice of embalming, qualifying as a member of the British Institute of Embalmers in 1946 and so becoming the first qualified embalmer in the Sale/Altrincham area.





He bought an *Austin 20 Hearse*, which was the first motor hearse to be owned by a Sale Funeral Director. He changed his *Austin Limousine* for a *Rolls Royce 20/25 Hooper Limousine*, the first Rolls Royce to be offered by a Funeral Director in the area. The business acquired its first Rolls Royce Hearse when it bought a fleet of cars that had been operated by another Manchester based Funeral Director. The Limousines have been changed several times since the mid fifties, but the company has always owned Rolls Royce vehicles, supported at times by Daimler, Mercedes and currently Jaguar limousines, together with various models of saloon cars and removal vehicles.

In 1945, Arthur leased The Sale Moor Garage, his combined commercial garage and funeral directors premises (with the first private rest room facilities in Sale Moor). The following year, he managed to purchase the property which is still owned by the Gresty family. Around this time he also changed his *Austin Hearse* for a *25HP Vauxhall*.

Over the years, the company cars have been used extensively on weddings and high class chauffer hire. Indeed, the company has had the honour of appearing in a number of TV programmes, such as *Coronation Street*, and carrying many show business personalities, prominent politicians (incl. *Margaret Thatcher, Harold Wilson, Edward Heath & Jim Callaghan*) and also members of the Royal family (including *The Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Margaret, The Duchess of Kent and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester*) throughout the 60's and 70's. Our cars have also been part of the Royal Cortège on several occasions, when the Queen, *Prince Charles and Princess Anne* have visited Manchester and surrounding areas. Throughout the 50's, 60's and 70's the company had various contracts with Manchester City Council, coach and vehicle hire companies around the Manchester region.

In 1947, Arthur was proud to be accepted into The Masonic Lodge, Pax Vera (No. 6200) based at Tatton Road, Sale, and later The DeSala Chapter. He worked through the various chains of office and was a strong member of the lodge for 41 years until his death in 1988.

Robert Gresty was born in 1940, the youngest of three children. After studying Metal Work and Engineering Drawing at Sale Grammar School, Robert left school in 1956 and worked with his father, trading as a partnership. The company was incorporated as a limited company in 1965. He attended Newton Heath Technical College and obtained the *C. & G. Motor Vehicle Mechanics and Technicians Certificates*. Robert then took the *National Certificate Course in Heat Engines*, qualifying with endorsements in *Electricity and Workshop Technology*, completing his studies at UMIST.



In 1962, Robert took the National Association of Funeral Directors examination and proudly obtained the Diploma in Funeral Directing, thus becoming the first qualified Funeral Director in the Sale/Altrincham area. He later qualified for membership of the B.I.E. in the 1970's.

In 1960, the family moved from Sale Moor to Thorley Lane in Timperley. Then, in 1963, after the death of Robert's mother, he and his father moved to the current family home at Manchester Road, Altrincham. Robert mainly operated the garage repair centre, petrol sales, MOT centre and chauffeur hire side of the business from the Sale Moor Garage, whilst Arthur built up the Funeral Service side of the business. Operating an *Austin Breakdown Truck*, a *Land Rover Estate* and, later, a *Land Rover Recovery Vehicle*, the company offered an extensive 24 hour breakdown service to its clients, the A.A. and the R.A.C., whilst at the same time offering a 24 hour funeral service.



Robert married his wife, Margaret, in 1971 at St Alphonsus Church, Old Trafford and had two children, David and Helen. Margaret had trained as a nurse at the M.R.I. and after taking her S.C.M. course in Liverpool, she specialised in Midwifery. She took a Sisters post at Stretford Memorial Hospital before undertaking two years voluntary service in Nigeria. On returning home, she resumed her duties at Stretford, being promoted to Senior Midwifery Sister before getting married. Margaret became Robert's co-director when she received her father in law's shares as a gift. Arthur had decided to pass the company on to his son and daughter in law.

By the mid to late 1970's, the larger corporate garages and petrol suppliers had flooded the market with commercial garages, buying out and out pricing small privately run garages (ironically, the same was to happen in the funeral industry during the late 70's, 80's and 90's and thankfully Arthur Gresty Ltd. has managed to hold on to its own funeral



profession). There were large changes being made in other areas of the industry, such as the structure of the emergency breakdown service. Robert and Arthur could see the life of their garage was limited and decided to put 100% focus into the funeral side of the business to further its development. The garage work was closed down, but the garage was retained to store and maintain the company vehicles. Over the last 20 years, the car hire, taxi work and wedding hire have also been overtaken by the funeral side of the company, which is now the sole business concern and the family are delighted with the quality of service they offer to the community.



Arthur and Robert have always recognised the need for Private Chapels of Rest Facilities and this is an aspect of Funeral Directing which the company has particularly pioneered, not only in its own area, but also nationally. During the 1950's, planning permission was obtained from Sale Borough Council to use a room at their Sale Moor premises for this purpose, thus the company



provided the first approved private Chapel of Rest covering Sale and Altrincham. This room, while being the best available at that time, was not ideal and the company tried hard to provide better facilities, making several applications to Altrincham Borough Council. Both Arthur and Robert were amazed to find that they encountered total opposition. Every application was rejected and from their numerous meetings and discussions it became clear that neither the Councillors nor officials could understand the service required by a modern funeral director. They also encountered political opposition from certain Labour Councillors who publicly stated that rest room facilities should not be allowed in the hands of private companies and should be 'municipalised'. The Council built a barren, windowless, unplastered room at Hale Cemetery as a supposed Chapel of Rest. This structure was never used for its intended purpose and is now a store room for gardening equipment.

When the Council made the unacceptable suggestion that the only site they felt suited rest room facilities was 'the disused Council slaughterhouse near the gas works', the company directors were compelled to research the Town and Country Planning Acts. They found that the purposes of an "undertaker" were included in a Class 1 Shop. This section of the Act, however, had never been tested in law.

The company purchased a shop in Ridgeway Road, Timperley and renovated it for rest room use. The Council served an 'enforcement' notice on the company to prevent them from using it for the purpose of a chapel of rest. After lengthy legal proceedings and a public hearing, the company successfully appealed against the notice, creating a planning precedence which has been reported nationally and quoted all over the Country by Funeral Directors, ranging from small one man businesses to large multiple organisations. On appealing for costs, the Minister further ruled that the Council had acted irresponsibly and that they should never have served the order against the company.



The premises in Timperley were of a restricted size and after the successful appeal, over the following 15 years the company purchased extensive premises and garage accommodation at Hall Road, Wilmslow; Ashley Road, Altrincham; Washway Road, Sale; Church Road, Northenden and, more recently, property at Manchester Road, Altrincham (1992) and Marsland Road, Sale Moor (2005). During 1982, the Ashley Road premises were extensively rebuilt to appear like a home with an adjacent garage, rather than a shop front. Similarly, in 1983, the company completely rebuilt the front of its Washway Road premises to again remove the image of an ordinary retail shop. Both these premises have now been sold to make way for our most successful funeral home to date in West Timperley. This property was originally a 1930's private residence up to 1989/1990, when it was converted into a 12 bedroom hotel. Within 2 years it went up for sale and Arthur Gresty Ltd. purchased the property in 1992. The hotel has been transformed into a self contained funeral home offering full rest room, mortuary, arrangement, office, function room, garaging and parking facilities for its clients.

In 2013, the premises at 305 Manchester Road underwent a full renovation. There is now a state of the art mortuary, increased size of the preparation areas offering the best care of the deceased, facilities and working space for our team. Our buffet room was increased in size to cater for 45 people, for post funeral receptions. With a new porch on the front, carpeting throughout and an additional Chapel of Rest, the company now provides the funeral home it hopes Arthur would be proud to have his name put to. Still providing a PVI Rolls Royce Hearse and a Spirit Limousine, the company has also invested in a new Jaguar hearse and limousine.

Arthur died in 1988, sadly four years before the creation of the company's best and first fully self contained funeral home offering all the best facilities to the families it serves. As a tribute to his memory, his grandson David opened a new funeral home in Sale Moor in 2005, next door to the garage on Marsland Road (which is still owned by the Gresty family), where the business began all those years ago.

The company has always tried to be at the forefront of modern thinking and technology in its approach to the service it provides. In 1984, the company replaced its electronic memory typewriter with an ICL computer, becoming one of the first Funeral Services in the country to adopt a fully computerised system. Robert had to study, adapt and interlink several software programs to suit its purpose and the special requirements of writing invoices, keeping accounts, storing and sorting data for a Funeral Director's business. Robert has since been able to advise many of his colleagues on the pitfalls of buying a computer, and been able to assist a software house which was writing a specialised system to sell to Funeral Directors.

During the last three decades, the company has specialised entirely in providing a comprehensive and personal Funeral Service at a very competitive rate. Its phone lines are staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year to provide immediate service for its clients in their time of need. The company currently has four funeral directors, 3 full time funeral operatives and a number of office and casual staff to fulfil the company requirements.

The company is extremely proud of its standards of service, premises, vehicles and staff. The current fleet of vehicles include Rolls Royces & Jaguar hearses and limousines, a Mercedes Vito ambulance, plus a number of staff cars, including an

environmentally friendly Hybrid Toyota Prius. The company is able to offer private Rest Room facilities at their offices in Altrincham, Sale Moor and Northenden.

In 1969, Robert joined the Rotary Club of Sale, of which he was pleased to be president of in the 1980's, representing Funeral Directing in the community. He has been *National Representative for the Pennine Region of the British Institute of Funeral Directors* and *past Chairman of the North West Division of the British Institute of Embalmers*. He is currently *National President of the BIFD* and *National Representative for the North West Division of the British Institute of Embalmers*. He is also deputy Scout Leader for 1<sup>st</sup> West Timperley (St. Hugh of Lincoln) Scout Troop and his hobbies include Vintage cars. His collection of cars includes two Ford Model "T"s (a 1927 Tudor saloon and a 1924 Ton Truck which has been one of the prize winners of the Altrincham Festival for eight years running, through the late 70's and early 80's), a 1926 Rolls Royce Landalet, a 1940 Rolls Royce Wraith Limousine and a Silver Cloud.

The current owner of Arthur Gresty Ltd., David Gresty, was born in 1972. He attended North Cestrian Grammar School in Altrincham from 1984 to 1991. Following his studies for A-Levels, he went on to read engineering and business studies at Bolton Technical College and Salford University, obtaining a Bachelor of Engineering Degree with Honours in 1995. He has also studied and qualified for Membership of the British Institute of Embalmers in 1999 and the Diploma in Funeral Directing for Membership of The British Institute of Funeral Directors in 2006. He has been involved in the activities of the family business since he was 16, but fully joined the company in 1995 after completing his degree. He is now the current owner of the family business and runs the company from its main site at Manchester Road, Altrincham, with the two satellite branches, Sale Moor and Northenden. David is a *past Chairman of the North West Division of The British Institute of Embalmers* and has been and is Secretary and Social Secretary. He believes in professional recognition and national representation for Arthur Gresty Ltd. and has taken the company into Membership of the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) and The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF). He is currently second vice president of the BIFD, hoping to take on the chain of office in 2014. He married Clare in April 2003 and they live in Sale.

David and Robert Gresty are both very proud to still own a private independent family run funeral home whose company name has existed for some 80 years, and they look forward to what the future may hold for their company and the many changes in options that are provided to the funeral profession.....



Robert & Margaret Gresty



David Gresty

27<sup>th</sup> June 2013