



# West Suffolk

CREMATORIUM & CEMETERY

## Testimonials

*"Everything was beautifully organised, which helped us through a difficult process."*

*"Beautiful chapel and cemetery, and lovely gardens."*

*"It was such a comforting service — I will always look back with gratitude in my heart."*

*"All of the staff were very helpful and kind."*

*"So genuine and so helpful, knowledgeable and comforting — thank you."*

*"I genuinely could not have asked for, or got, a better service from every single person that I spoke to."*

## Message from the Chairman

West Suffolk Crematorium has been serving the Bereaved of Bury St Edmunds and surrounding areas for 30 years and Westerleigh is proud to mark this significant milestone by thanking everyone who has supported the Crematorium over that time. I am proud that West Suffolk Crematorium aims to provide an exemplary service to the Bereaved and our Manager and her Team are available to help so please do not hesitate to contact them if you need any assistance. On Saturday 3rd August at 12.noon Adrian Graves will be leading a Service of Remembrance for all those who have been cremated at West Suffolk during the last 30 years and will at the end of the Service formally present a new Lectern for the St. Edmunds Chapel.

Neil McCausland  
Chairman of the Westerleigh Group.

## Contact

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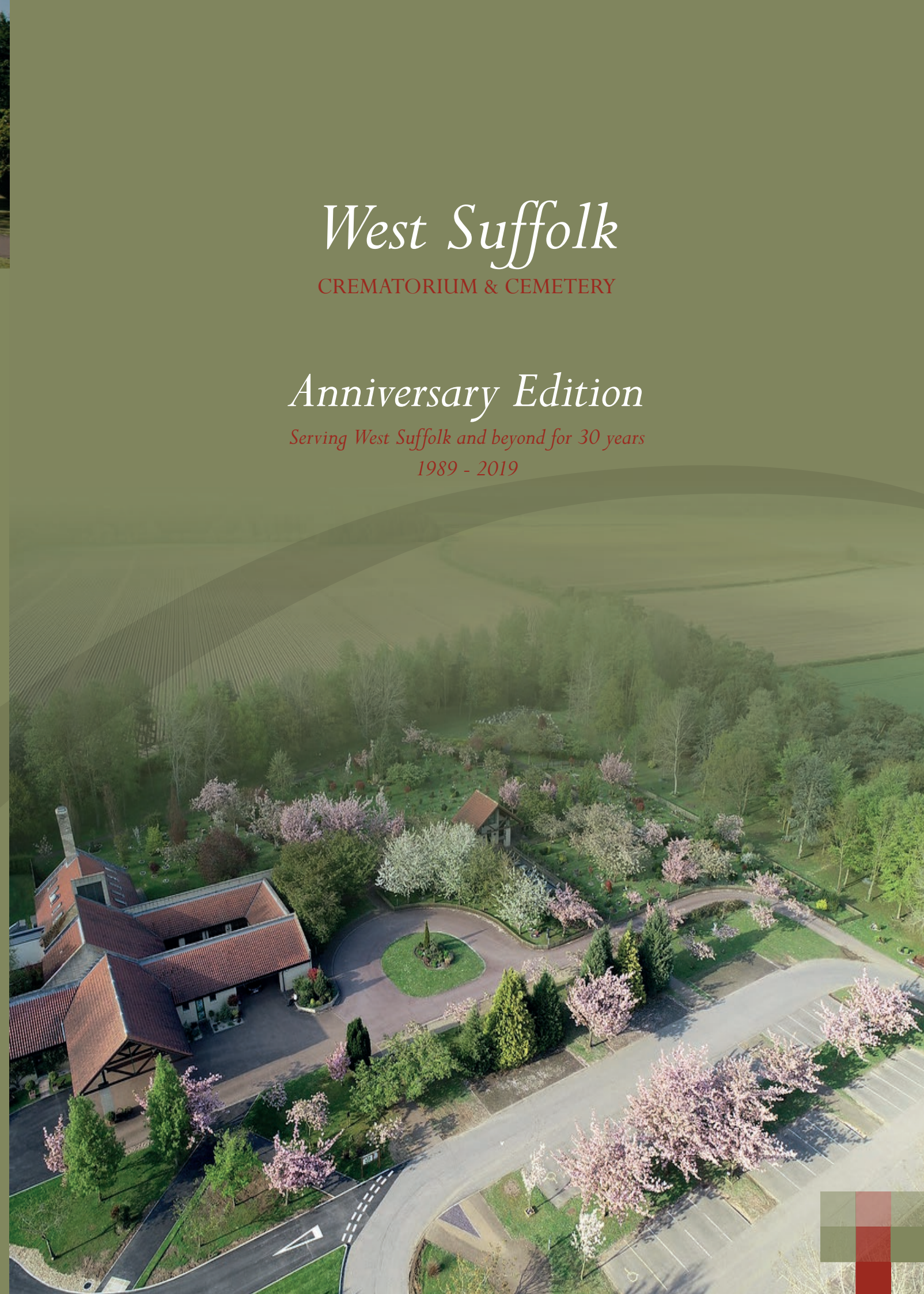
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 **westerleigh**  
GROUP  
*empathy, care & understanding*

## Anniversary Edition

*Serving West Suffolk and beyond for 30 years*  
1989 - 2019





# Memoirs of Chris Johns

Manager 1989 - 1992

I left the security of my job as Superintendent and Registrar at Portchester Crematorium in the March of 1989 to become the General Manager at the still in build site at Bury St Edmunds. When I started in March of that year the site was still a very muddy field with a site hut where the car park now is.

Prior to my arrival Peter Elmes of L. Fulcher and Company in Whiting Street, whose vision it had been, had managed the project on behalf of the highly respected funeral company J. H. Kenyon of London. The owning consortium at that time was made up of 80% Kenyon Securities, 10% Pompes Funebres Generales (a French Corporate Undertaker) and 10% The London Cremation Company owners of the world-famous Golders Green Crematorium. The company traded as West Suffolk Crematorium Company Ltd.

The local architects were Hugh Thomas Associates in Bury St Edmunds and he and his colleague Mark Miller were regular visitors as work progressed with the main contractor Bakers of Thurston. Given this was thirty years ago it may be seen as one of the formative designs that has continued to influence the very latest thinking.

As with all new builds there was some scepticism that it would attract sufficient work and some fears from independent funeral directors that they would not get the same treatment as those that belonged to the Kenyon company. However, both of these fears were quickly allayed as in the first year over 1,000 cremations were achieved.

Joining the team at day one in an administrative role was the present manager Royna Hill, an employee of L Fulcher & Son, and the late Michael Rogers who had previously worked for the Greene King Brewery as a dray man. Michael took on the gardening task with gusto and much of the initial layout, still very visible today, was his hard graft. Royna has since continued to serve the crematorium with distinction for the entire 30 years.

In those early days we were fortunate to have a great deal of help from the vicar of Risby, the Reverend Aubrey Ridge. A delightful man who would arrive from the village on his bicycle in true country vicar fashion. If we ever found ourselves without a clergyman, it has been known for clergy to forget funerals! then a quick call to the vicarage would have Rev. Ridge on his bike and pedalling hard to the crematorium.

In the very early days board meetings were held in the Angel Hotel and the very first Chairman was the Lord Marshall of Leeds who also happened to be President of the Cremation Society of Great Britain. Also a director and present was Mr Michael Kenyon, Chairman of Kenyon Securities, who were the majority shareholders and funders.

Shortly after opening major change to the British funeral industry occurred with the amalgamation of several companies including J H Kenyon into the PHKI Group which included the French PFG company and ultimately this conglomerate became S.C.I. and then Dignity Funerals. Not long after PHKI was formed they sold the crematorium to its present owners Westerleigh Group.

It is pleasing that it has become such an important part of the community here, fulfilling the vision of those that delivered it.

Chris Johns  
General Manager 1989-1992

## Staff

Past & Present



Thanks to everyone who has been part of our team  
over the last 30 years



# Gardens Of Remembrance

*Then & Now*

*In August 1989*

In August 1989 the grounds were very bleak and barren. There were a band of trees planted around the perimeter that were about 2' high but other than that there was nothing but lawns.

In the following months beds of roses were added, followed a few years later by cherry trees and then an assortment of new memorial choices over the years. In short, the grounds went from barren to beautiful, colourful and mature gardens.

Looking at these photos – where we have tried to show the same view in 1989 and 2019 – they are really unrecognisable.





# Abbey Chapel & Hospitality Suite

*From 2018*

In 2017 we were given the go ahead to build our long-awaited second chapel and the hospitality suite. The second chapel – named Abbey Chapel – opened in March 2018 and the hospitality suite – comprising of the Meadow Café and the Buttercup Suite and the Cornflower Suite, for holding funeral wakes – opened in the July that year. The Abbey Chapel is slightly smaller than the existing St Edmunds Chapel, and is bright, airy and more modern. It is a more intimate space for smaller funerals, seating 60 compared to 90 in the St Edmunds Chapel.

The Meadow Café is open to the public from Monday to Friday and has proved to be extremely popular. It is open to all visitors, whether visiting the memorial gardens or attending a funeral, and offers a wide selection of home-made cakes and biscuits, light lunches and even a cooked breakfast.

The Hospitality Suite offers funeral wakes in one of our two bright and airy function rooms and families have a choice of 3 menus and use of the room for 2 hours. There is also a bar facility in each room. This extra service is very popular as families can hold the entire event in one place, without the need to leave after the funeral to travel to another venue.



# Memoirs of Royna Hill

*Manager 1992 - Present*

In 1988 I was working for a funeral director as an Accounts Administrator. This funeral director was involved in building the new crematorium near Risby and asked if I would like to move there to run the office. I had never been to a crematorium before! But it seemed a challenge and I accepted. In 1992 Chris Johns moved on and I was offered the job of Manager. I studied for the ICCM Diploma which I was very proud to achieve in 1995.

The crematorium was bright and modern and a much-needed facility for the people of Bury St Edmunds, who previously had to travel to Cambridge and Ipswich Crematoria.

But it soon became clear that our catchment area spread much further than Bury St Edmunds – soon families were visiting us from much further afield. Newmarket, Thetford, Sudbury, Stowmarket, Diss – families wanted to come to West Suffolk Crematorium. That catchment area has continued to this day. In the early days we were expecting to carry out 1000 cremations a year but this has continued to rise and we now look after around 2300 cremations per year.

Because we were so busy, the decision was made to build a second chapel to give families a better service – more time without feeling hurried, and shorter waiting times. The Abbey Chapel opened in 2018 and has been a great success.

The other great news in 2018 was the opening of our Hospitality Suite. This was something I have been personally wanting for around 15 years so this was a dream come true for me.

We have always had a great team spirit at West Suffolk Crematorium and the staff have sometimes moved on to other areas of the bereavement service or simply retired. We now have a team of 9 looking after the funeral services, wakes and gardens as well as a team of around 5 looking after the hospitality suite.

