

# Victorian funeral for 16 people discovered in dig

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## The Victorian funeral

THE bones of 16 people found in an unmarked grave in Solihull have been laid to rest following an extensive research mission to find out where they came from.

George John Funeral Directors, which organised a funeral for the remains earlier this year, revealed the bones were found in the Elmdon area of Solihull at the end of last year.

It is understood they are the same human remains that were uncovered on land close to the Jaguar Land Rover factory off Damson Parkway in November.

However the funeral firm was unable to confirm this.

The remains were found near to where police had previously been digging for the so-called Milk Carton Kids – 13-year-old David Spencer and 11-year-old Patrick Warren, who disappeared from Chelmsley Wood in 1996.

However, police later confirmed the bones did not belong to the missing youngsters.

George Cutler, who owns George John Funeral Directors in Solihull, said he was contacted in February about resettling the remains of 16 people, following an examination of the remains by archaeologists.

His team then set about trying to trace where the bones had come from by dating the coffin handles found in the unmarked grave.

“There were no identifiers among the remains apart from a headstone,” he said. “However, the parts that we would normally need to identify the remains, like the surname and the dates, weren’t there.

“We could see that it said ‘Sarah, the wife of’ so we based our searches on that and started looking at survey maps. However there was never a cemetery in the spot where they were found. It was a bit of a mystery.”

A carbon dating test concluded the bones belonged to people who died some time between the 18th and 20th centuries.

The coffin handles were then dated back to the 1800s.

Using ancestry, old survey maps and reports on headstones in the Elmdon area, researchers surmised that the people had originally been buried in the nearby Elmdon Churchyard, although questions remain as to why they ended up so far away from their intended resting place.

A traditional Victorian funeral was held for the bones, with a horsedrawn carriage carrying a coffin marked “unknown persons” to what is thought to be their original resting place at Elmdon Church. Mr Cutler said: “With their graves having been disturbed and moved, we wanted to put these people to rest in a way they would have been when they died.

“We agreed with the church to use one of their very old copies of the Bible and got hold of some torches, which is what they would have used back then.

“We wanted the coffin to be suited to that era so we liaised with the Coffin Works in Birmingham and they donated a set of handles too.”

He said a headstone is due to be erected at the graveside in due course.

See Video by John Stephens Photography & Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmJ2cTZabuE>

or Google for “JLR George John Funeral Directors Solihull JSPV”