

The Ryerson Index

INDEXING FROM FUNERAL DIRECTOR WEBSITES

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Version 1 – 2 August 2020 – first version

Version 2 – 15 August – change to the date used when saving FD notices

Version 3 – 11 February 2026 – revised and updated

Version 4 – 18 April 2026 – add naming details for FDs within a national chain

Introduction

Ryerson, for its entire life, has had the sole objective of telling a researcher where to find a published notice.

Of necessity, that meant notices published in printed newspapers, as these were the only notices guaranteed to still be around in a readable format in 50 or 100 years' time.

Notices published in "transient" publications were always outside our remit. So websites, and funeral director's data, were not originally considered suitable for indexing, because we could never guarantee to be able to direct a researcher to the original notice from which our index entry was derived.

As a result of the 2020 purge of Australian newspapers, which continues to this day with closures and amalgamations, we were faced with the sudden demise of a large number of printed newspapers in Australia, and most particularly in Queensland, where News Corp was the dominant player, and in NSW, where Australian Community Media (ACM) dominated. Nationwide, at least 150 mastheads from 2019 no longer exist in print form.

The impact on the publication of death and funeral notices has been huge. Even the major metro dailies on the Eastern side of the country now publish between half and two-thirds the number of notices published in 2019. Perth appears to be the outlier here, with only a minor decrease in published notices in the *West Australian*.

In an effort to improve our coverage of deaths in Australia, in 2021 Ryerson investigated the feasibility of saving and indexing notices published on the websites of funeral directors. Our investigations found that every funeral director's website we looked at in areas previously covered by a now-discontinued paper contained notices which had not appeared in the paper when it was in print. As the papers no longer exist in print format, we concluded that we should commence indexing these notices, which we did, backdated to 1 July 2020. .

But indexing such a transitory notice is not of much use if the original is not available when a researcher in the future requires it. So it was obvious to us that Ryerson had to save every notice we indexed.

Funeral directors have varying standards for their websites, both in terms of content and duration of exposure. With content, FDs range from name and funeral date, up to full birth and death details of the deceased, plus names of spouse and children. With duration, some FDs keep notices of past funerals online for many months, while others are quick to remove the notice after the funeral has been held. Additionally, some notices published on the website will also appear in one of the larger print papers – but our analysis suggested the number of website-only notices was sufficient to justify Ryerson recording them.

The use of social media to report a death has now grown significantly, with some Funeral Directors now publishing funeral notices only on Facebook, rather than on their own website. Many others duplicate a notice over Facebook and their own website. If necessary, we will now include Facebook as a source, as long as the Facebook account belongs to a Funeral Director.

Before You Start

Once you have decided to index the notices from a funeral director, there are some basic steps to take to prepare.

The idea is to effectively treat each funeral director in the same way we would treat a newspaper. Doing this means we can use the existing Ryerson structure without any changes.

Each funeral director is identified by a two-character code in the range 2A-99. We have ignored codes containing either 0 or 1, or O or I. That means we initially have scope for 256 different funeral directors.

The initial steps you need to take are:

1. Request an FD code to be allocated. This code which will identify your specific funeral director. Two items of information are required:
 - a. The town or city in which the funeral director is based.
 - b. The exact name under which the funeral director operates
2. If you do not already have access to the Dropbox folder "Ryerson_Gathering", request access. This folder enables you to submit your saved notices to the RNR.

Once these steps are complete, you will find a specific folder within the Ryerson_Gathering subfolder "Funeral Directors Notices" for your funeral director, set up to receive notices for the current month (or other months, by arrangement.)

All notices from larger Funeral Directors are saved in monthly folders, the month being determined by the funeral date. For smaller Funeral Directors, say up to 100 funerals pa, a yearly folder is all that is required.

It is vital for our lookup service that we save EVERY FD notice we index. No exceptions.

Saving the Notices

The rules we have put in place around saving these notices are simple.

1. Notices which are saved can be saved in their entirety if they fit on a single screen. For larger notices, we must save that part of the notice (usually the beginning) which provides the information required for indexing. We realise this may mean that some notices will not have some information saved which is of use to future researchers, but we believe that by identifying the funeral director, a researcher can approach that organisation directly to obtain the data if the complete notice is no longer on the website.
2. Wherever possible, the FD name or logo must appear within the saved notice. Sometimes this is possible, other times it isn't, because of the layout of the notice. If it is not possible to include such identifying information, it then becomes absolutely vital that the image is named correctly, so that the FD code is included in the file name.

These rules are flexible enough to allow any indexer to save and index from any funeral director's website, should they so wish. It is guaranteed that we will have some indexers with a personal interest in a locality who wish to do this, and we encourage it. Our investigations show that, even in areas with a print newspaper still being published, enough notices are published solely on the funeral director's website to make saving them a worthwhile exercise.

Funeral Directors belonging to a National Chain

Starting in 2026, we are now including FDs who are part of a national chain, ie they operate in more than one state or territory. Previous to this, we had not indexed them because it would be difficult to identify entries from different states when a search using the "State" filter was being carried out.

We have solved this problem in two ways.

Firstly, we include a state code in the image name when saving the notice. This enables all images to be grouped by state, and thus indexed by state, under the umbrella of the national FD.

Secondly, we allocate the FD for each state a separate code so they are treated as separate entities within the database.

Naming Saved Notices

There are three items of information which are vital when we are retrieving a notice following a lookup request:

- The funeral director
- The funeral date (or an alternate date)
- The name of the deceased

Consequently each notice should be named in the following format:

FD code_funeral date_ surname

(ie with each field separated by an underscore)

The funeral date should be in the format yyyy-mm-dd, to ensure notices are displayed within the folder in chronological sequence.

For a Funeral Director which is part of a national chain, the rules are slightly different. In this case, we add a state code to the filename, eg

FD code_State Code_funeral date_ surname

This enables all notices from one state to be filed together in the RNR, and indexed under their appropriate state code, so that the State Search function of the Ryerson search page is able to correctly identify the state for a particular notice.

Most funeral notices will either explicitly include the state in the notice, or provide enough information to implicitly determine the state.

Some notices do not include a funeral date. In that case, if there is a date shown indicating when the notice was loaded onto the funeral director's website, then we use that as an alternate date. In the absence of either of those dates, use the date of death (if present) + 1 day. If there is still no suitable date, select a date that best approximates the funeral date. It is important to note that, while the date you use will be considered the "Publication date" when indexing, that is just to satisfy the software. The only use of the date in the filename is for lookup purposes, so the notice can be easily found in the RNR by considering the date in the file name to be the Publication Date.

The surname should be in the same case as you would use when indexing (eg SMITHERS, de BORTOLI).

In the rare case of these three fields not providing a unique filename, add the initial of the first given name (or as much of the given name as is necessary to make the filename unique).

Some examples:

20_2020-07-15_De BORTOLI
36_2020-07-15_SMITHERS_J
36_2020-07-15_SMITHERS_Mark
36_2020-07-15_SMITHERS_Mary

The Mechanics of Saving Notices

Notices can be saved at any time, so that a notice for a funeral happening next week can be saved today. There is no restriction on when you can save notices – it is up to you to work out how the funeral director's website is organised, and how you can best save the notices so as to not miss any while not making life difficult for yourself.

Indexing the Notices

This is the simplest part of the exercise. Each day (or at whatever interval is convenient), you select from the “Funeral Directors Notices” sub-folder all the notices in the appropriate sub-folder for your funeral director, and the appropriate funeral date, and index them (using the date in the file name as the “publication date”).

An alternative is to index each notice as you save it (being careful to select the correct “issue date”). Indexing in advance in this way is fine, as long as you don’t create the .txt file in advance.

The choice of method is up to you. Given that we are generally talking about regional areas, the volume of funerals in any week will not be overly large, so you can index in whichever way you wish.

It is important to submit a file for each day (Sunday included) for each funeral director, whether or not there are funerals for that day. The funeral director’s definition record is set up to allow submissions on any day of the week – so to avoid dates showing up as “missing” on the Dates page for the funeral director, we need a NIL file on any day in which there are no notices. A folder of NIL files is kept in the “Ryerson Files” dropbox folder, and you can use this to submit your NILs rather than creating each one individually.

If you are taking on a new FD which involves back-indexing, a supply of NIL folders covering the period from the earliest date to be back-indexed until the end of the current month will be supplied on request as part of the initial setup.

Displaying the Results

What do the search results show?

Search results for FD notices look exactly as for newspaper notices, with the exception of the newspaper name and date published. The newspaper name will be replaced by the name of the funeral director, and the date published will be the funeral date.

What does the "Newspaper Coverage" page look like.

For each town, we list newspapers followed by funeral directors. All entries are ordered alphabetically by the town in which they are based. Where an FD operates from more than one town, but only has a single website combining all notices, then we will list each town separately, but all will point to a common details page for the FD.

What do the individual funeral director page look like?

Just as each paper has its own detail page (showing a link to the website, publication details, number of records, and any extra information), so too does each funeral director. Publication details will list only the start date for our indexing, and all notices except funeral notices will have zero totals, but otherwise the layout will be identical to the page for a newspaper.

The Windows Snipping Tool

By now, most indexers are using either Windows 10 or 11, which have a very simple snipping tool as part of the standard OS. Where possible, indexers are encouraged to use this to save notices – but if you have another preferred snipping tool (eg SnagIt), keep using it – we are concerned about the final destination, not the journey!

The simplest way to invoke the Snipping Tool under Win10/11 is to press Windows+Shift+S keys simultaneously.

An alternative method is to save it to your Windows taskbar – that way, it is accessible when required via a single mouse-click. To do this,

1. Click the Windows Start icon (bottom left)
2. Scroll through the list of apps until you find “Snipping Tool” or “Snip & Sketch”
3. Right-click on the app name
4. Select “pin to taskbar” (if not present, select “More”, then select “pin to taskbar”)

You will now see the little circular snipping icon in your taskbar. It looks like this:



To save a notice using the snipping tool,

1. Locate the notice
2. Click the snipping tool icon in the taskbar, or use the Windows+Shift+S keys
3. Click “New” – the window will go grey, and the cursor will change to a +
4. Outline the notice to be saved
5. Click the “Save As” icon
6. Select the destination folder, and a name for your file
7. Click “Save”
8. Close the snipping tool