

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

Introduction

Ryerson has, for 21 years, 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 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.

Now we are 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. It remains so, but the 2020 closures of 21 papers, and the conversion of another 38 to digital-only production, has effectively robbed the state of more than half the number of papers which were in print at the end of 2019.

It is still too early to tell what the effect these closures will have on the publication of death notices. Will a notice appear in the nearest large paper which is still in print? Will a notice be published on the News Corp website (in which case Ryerson will pick it up)? Or will people no longer bother to submit a notice to any type of publication? The jury is still out.

In an effort to improve our coverage of deaths in Australia, Ryerson has 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.

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. Some 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 early analysis suggests the number of website-only notices is sufficient to justify Ryerson recording them.

Hence, we have decided to commence indexing notices from funeral directors' websites, backdated to 1 July 2020.

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-digit code in the range 20-99. We have ignored codes beginning with zero (can easily be confused with O) and 1 (can easily be confused with I). That means we initially have scope for 80 different funeral directors.

The initial steps you need to take are:

1. Request an FD code to be allocated. This is the two-digit 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 are saved in monthly folders, the month being determined by the funeral date.

Saving the Notices

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

1. We will concentrate initially on funeral directors based in areas where the local newspaper no longer has a print presence.
2. It is left to the local indexer to choose whether or not to save and index the local funeral director's notices.
3. 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.

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.

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.

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 + 1 day.

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.

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 funeral date as the “issue 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 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.

Displaying the Results

What will the search results show?

Search results will look exactly as they are now, 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 will the "Newspaper Coverage" page look like.

In the same way that we now have a section on the webpage papers.htm for digital notices, we will have another section for funeral director notices, where each funeral director we index will be listed, with a link to the individual page for that funeral director. Like newspapers, the funeral directors will be ordered by the town in which they are based.

What will 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 will 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 mid-2020, the majority of indexers are using Windows 10, which has 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, keep using it – we are concerned about the final destination, not the journey!.

The simplest way to invoke the Snipping Tool under Win10 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