

# Eco-friendly funeral range gives jute industry a new lease of life

## BIODEGRADABLE COFFINS WILL PLAY PART IN BATTLE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Dundee's once great jute industry is making a comeback thanks to a local company that has launched a range of eco-friendly jute coffins and funeral accessories.

Sandra Thomson's family have been jute traders for three generations and she believes that producing biodegradable coffins is the best way to rejuvenate the dying textile. She said the concept has been especially popular with former jute-mill workers.

Mrs Thomson, 52, said: "I've had a huge number of old jute workers get in contact with me when I took a shop at a Dundee shopping mall. They loved to smell the jute, which is very distinctive. It brought back a lot of memories for them.

"Old spinners and weavers are very keen to be buried in jute, which you can understand, as it was a very large part of their life, especially here in Dundee."

She added: "I want to keep jute alive and kicking in Dundee, and this could be huge."

Dundee was once known as "juteopolis" and was the world centre for jute production. But after the industry moved to India at the beginning of the last century in

favour of cheap labour, Dundee's reputation for jute began to fade.

Mrs Thomson has started a company called J Funerals that uses jute for every funeral product, including coffins, urns, shrouds, remembrance books and even jewellery. Speaking at her office at Broughty Ferry, Mrs Thomson said that everyone needs to play a part in the battle against climate change, and that includes 100% biodegradable funerals.

### VERSATILE

She said: "I have always been involved in jute throughout my life in some way or other and always looking to find new ways in which to utilise it. Jute is such a wonderfully versatile product that we are able to make everything out of it.

"It's not just the coffin, which is made up of jute wood board, but everything that goes with it. Producing jute coffins doesn't release any carbon emissions and because it's a plant, there are no toxins. It is so sustainable,

because it's planted every February or March and harvested six months later."

While the coffins come in natural jute colours, Mrs Thomson says that they can be painted and tailored to any requirements. She added: "There is no difference to traditional coffins, except they are jute, eco-friendly and new. They can be painted in any colour and design. For example, if someone was a Celtic or Rangers fan, it could be painted in the appropriate colours."

Born in Calcutta, Mrs Thomson lived in India until she was 13 and has a great affinity with the country and the people. She imports her jute from India and still visits twice a year.

She said: "I only use small, independent family-run businesses, which I prefer. They might not be as cheap as the big mills, but I much prefer to work with them. They call me 'the jute lady' because of my family and because of the colour of my hair."

Mrs Thomson is now in talks with funeral directors and the initial feedback has been "tremendous". She has already received her first orders and believes that the business has the potential to go UK-wide.



NEW RANGE: Dundee businesswoman Sandra Thomson with a coffin made from jute