

# Funeral Director's Outfit c.1920

John McVean (1876-1943) moved from Dumbartonshire to Craigellachie in ~ 1904. He was a carting and haulage contractor, using horses to move goods around the countryside for most of his working life.

Special funeral carts (biers) were used to transport coffins between the funeral home and the deceased's final resting place. Funeral directors were expected to dress appropriately for such a solemn occasion: black suit, frock coat, and ostrich-plumed top hat. The hat (displayed with a paper feather) was purchased from a prestigious London hatter by McVean.

McVean ran his haulage company throughout the First World War; the Rates Demand for the years 1932 to 1946 for his Craigellachie home (*Highfield*) includes rates for a stable, as well as the house.



John McVean's business card (actual size)

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the bier (or hearse) was usually drawn by black horses, often with plumes of ostrich feathers on their heads. During this period, ostrich feathers were a prominent feature of funerals for wealthy individuals. The black feathers, harvested from the body of the male bird, were predominantly imported from South Africa, through London, the centre of the feather trade. Their use as a sign of respectability went out of fashion as feathers became cheaper and thus less of a status symbol. The increasing use of motor vehicles for hearses also made the feathers impractical and many ostrich farmers went bust when the market collapsed in 1914.



A horse-drawn hearse with both driver and horses somberly dressed in black.

<https://pepperloves1.tumblr.com/post/45510170222/shadowhorses-fresian-horses-drawing-a>

***Display curated by Museum Volunteers 2023***