

Grave business is a dead cert

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Business Staff

A former salesman who spends his life in cemeteries tending the graves of other people's relatives has won a major contract to look after the memorials of war heroes.

Mark Room, who set up Remembering You three years ago after spotting a gap in the market, will carry out work for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which helps to make graves more accessible to loved ones.

Clients already include a former Mayor of London, who now lives in Australia but used to live in Walsall, and a chief police officer in Oregon in the US who was born in Sutton Coldfield.

After building up his business to a client base of 40, Dudley-based Mr Room has now become a sub-contractor for Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

He said: "If you walk into a cemetery nine times out of 10 war graves are congregated together or scattered memorials. The Commission employs people like

myself who are in graveyards all the time to tidy the graves so if someone traces a relative and wants to visit they should be able to walk up to it without wading through vegetation."

Mr Room is now expanding the business to cover the wider Midlands area after a competitor ceased trading.

He said: "The aim of the business is to tend the graves of those who for whatever reason cannot attend the graveside. My customers range from the elderly and the disabled to expats."

"There was another company based in Coventry which started at the same time as myself called Still Remembered Grave Tending Services.

"We had a gentleman's agreement that I wouldn't go further than Chelmsley Wood and the vice versa. He unfortunately stopped the business so I now cover all the Midlands."

Mr Room used to work as a salesman but became tired with the long hours and time spent travelling to meetings. It was during a visit to the cemetery with his partner whose parents had died that he came up with the business idea.

He said: "My partner lost her parents and we went to the cemetery to tend their graves and I saw an old lady struggle to put the flowers on the grave she was



Mark Room has created a business tending graves for people who can't visit

visiting, she was trying to kick the leaves off. That was where the idea came from.

"I admit it's not the easiest business in the world to market. People get pink mail through the door but you can't do that with this type of thing. It's a sensitive area."

"A lot of it is word of mouth and the internet has been a big help.

"My first client came through a bit of research. In Dudley there was a grammar school called Dudley Boys and I found a website which lists a lot of old boys and their email addresses so I got in contact introducing myself and the business.

"I had an email back from a gentleman who lives in London who asked me to tend the grave of his parents and grandfather so I went and did that. It was quite a shock when I got the cheque through - he was a Knight of the Realm, a guy from Dudley made good. He uses my services twice a year.

"I am building a substantial portfolio of influential people but I have also got a very strong local client base who can't or don't want to, for whatever reason, go to the grave.

"I have got a lot of elderly and disabled who can't go, so it feels good to be helping them out."