

Funeral workers' insult to the dead: Staff chanted 'Chelsea scum' before sealing man's coffin, making racist remarks and cruel jokes in TV expose

- Staff filmed watching pornography while driving a hearse
- Bodies stockpiled because of 'inadequate refrigeration'

Nikki Murfitt

A shocking new documentary shows staff from one of the country's biggest funeral firms making lewd and racist comments towards the dead and their families.

An undercover reporter spent three months working for Gillman Funeral Services, which has six branches in South London and is part of Funeral Partners Ltd, owners of 70 UK funeral businesses. In scenes certain to upset viewers, staff show a blatant disrespect for the bodies of the deceased in their care, even chanting 'Chelsea scum' at one before sealing his coffin.

While driving a body in a hearse, staff watch pornography on a mobile phone, and when collecting one woman's ashes they joke that her favourite song was Shake, Rattle And Roll.

In another shocking scene in the ITV programme, a corpse is stripped by an embalmer as she and a colleague joke around, singing David Rose's Sixties hit The Stripper.

They also make derogatory remarks about the woman's skin.

Clothes brought in by families to dress their loved ones are stuffed in a bag and put into the coffin because the embalmer responsible claims she doesn't have time to do it – despite company literature saying the wishes of the bereaved are paramount.

Bodies are also stockpiled because of inadequate refrigeration and a new warehouse used to store them has mouldy walls and a leaking roof.

As one employee tells undercover reporter Tom Ellis: 'If you knew one of your family was put here you wouldn't think it was good, would you?'

Another employee is secretly filmed making racist remarks at a funeral attended by mourners from the Afro-Caribbean community, while a funeral director encourages the bereaved to spend as much money as possible.

Merv Moyes, a former car salesman, suggests one way to drum up business is to target nursing homes. He tells a meeting: 'One day a week we send a member of staff to hold bingo sessions at a nursing home. Apparently that's brought in huge amounts.'

Professor Christian Twigg-Flesner, an expert in commercial law, says: 'The funeral directors' code of practice states that they are not allowed to solicit business. What this company is doing acts in breach of that code.'

Phillip Greenfield, chief executive of Funeral Partners Ltd, said he apologized unreservedly for any inappropriate comments made by staff.

He added: 'We have launched an internal investigation and an external company is reviewing procedures in all our businesses.'

l Exposure: The British Way Of Death is on ITV1 on Wednesday at 10.35pm.