



Burial and Cremation

Frequently asked questions

Questions people ask about Burial and Cremation

Cremation

How many people use cremation today in Great Britain?

Since 1968 when the number of cremations exceeded burials for the first time, cremation has increased considerably. Current figures suggest that around 74% of all funerals are cremations.

Do any religious groups forbid cremation?

Most current Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, allow cremation, as do Sikhs, Hindus, Parsees and Buddhists. It is however forbidden by the Orthodox Christian faiths, Orthodox Jews and Muslims.

Is cremation more expensive than burial?

No. Generally the cost of a grave is much higher than the fee charged for cremation although the funeral charges are similar for both services. The only additional charge for cremation arises when the death has not been referred to a coroner and two doctors need to be paid for the necessary certificates. This does not apply to burial.

What religious ceremony can I have with cremation?

The service for burial and cremation is the same apart from the form of committal sentences. The service may take place at your own place of worship with a short committal service in the crematorium chapel, or you may have the whole service at the crematorium chapel. Alternatively, you may prefer a civil ceremony be conducted, or even no service at all. The service can be held at the crematorium, a local church or any other place that you choose.

How is a cremation arranged?

The Cremation Regulations are complex and many people approach a funeral director immediately death occurs, and advise him that they wish to arrange a cremation. The funeral director will ensure that all the necessary statutory forms for cremation are obtained and presented to the Crematorium.

Can a cremation be arranged without the services of a funeral director?

Yes. The Executor or nearest surviving relative may arrange the cremation service themselves. Cremation authorities that are members of the Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management's (ICCM) Charter for the Bereaved will provide advice to persons arranging a cremation without the use of a funeral director.

Can relatives witness the committal of the coffin to the cremator?

Yes. Some crematoria have a viewing area that overlooks the crematory, where you may witness the committal taking place. Others may have a room equipped with CCTV enabling all of those in the room to clearly see the committal whilst other crematoria may allow a supervised group into the crematory to witness the committal. The Crematorium must be informed that you wish to witness the committal when the cremation is booked, so that staff can be informed who will then make the necessary preparations on the day.

Is the coffin cremated with the body?

Yes. The ICCM Guiding Principles state that the container and the body shall be placed in cremator and cremation commenced. The coffin or container with the body inside shall not be opened or otherwise disturbed, other than in exceptional circumstances, and then only with the express permission and in the presence of the Applicant for Cremation (usually the executor or next of kin)

How soon after the service will the cremation take place?

The ICCM Guiding Principles state that the container and the body shall be placed in a cremator and cremation commenced no later than 72 hours after the service of committal. Where cremation may not be carried out on the same day, the Applicant for Cremation shall be notified.

This means that under normal circumstances the cremation is usually carried out shortly after the service and certainly on the same day. However, when a service takes place late in the day or a limited number of services are booked, the cremations may take place within the 72 hour period. Retention of coffins should only be carried out where a secure and hygienic storage facility is available. The benefits to the community from this include a reduced impact on the environment as less fossil fuel will be consumed and the efficient use of machinery and equipment will be achieved.

How ashes are kept separate?

A cremator can only accept one coffin at a time and all the ashes are removed from the cremator before the next cremation. An identity card is used throughout the whole process until the final disposal of ashes, thereby ensuring correct identification.

What happens to the ashes after cremation?

The law relating to cremation requires that ashes are disposed of in accordance with the written instructions of the applicant (usually the executor or nearest surviving relative). Most crematoria have a range of options which might include scattering or burying in the garden of remembrance, placing in a columbarium, interring in a small family vault or niche. Options for memorials are also available which might include plaques beneath rose bushes, trees or shrubs and memorial benches with plaques. The simplest form of memorial is an entry inscribed in a book of remembrance. Your nearest crematorium will provide details of their facilities.

Ashes may also be buried in family graves that are full for cofined burials. Alternatively you may be able to purchase a new ashes grave in a cemetery.

There is no need to make a hurried decision with regard the final resting place of the remains with most crematoria having a facility to hold the remains until a decision is made. Should a crematorium not be contacted with a decision after a period of time has elapsed you may receive a letter asking if you are ready to go ahead. If you are not simply tell the crematorium that you need more time (a fee may be applicable). Should a crematorium receive no reply to their letter, they may legally scatter or bury the ashes within their grounds after giving 2 weeks written notice.

You may of course decide to take the ashes home with you.

Some people refer to 'Ashes' whilst others refer to 'Cremated Remains'. Is there a difference?

No. Ashes and Cremated Remains are one and the same thing and are defined as 'everything that is left in the cremator at the end of the cremation process following the removal of any metal'. There is no separation of what is perceived to be ash from the coffin and other items from what is perceived to be ash from the deceased person as this would be impossible.

Further questions about metal and what happens to it are answered below.

Are any ashes left after the cremation of a baby?

Most crematoria will have a modified procedure designed to minimise the potential for the small amount of ash being lost within a cremator. Turbulence within the cremation chamber is reduced, the use of a metal tray on which the small coffin is placed thus helping to protect the ash, and careful placement within the cremation chamber are some of the modifications to procedure that are employed. There may be some instances where it has not been possible to recover any ash however these are minimal. You can ask your local crematorium about their process and success rate in recovering ashes from the cremations of babies.

Can more than one body be cremated at a time?

The aperture through which the coffin passes in the cremator and the cremation chamber are of dimensions that will only safely accept one coffin. However, exceptions can be made in the case of a mother and baby or small twin children, so long as the next of kin or executor has made this specific request. There have been a small number of instances where elderly couples have died within a day or two of each other both being cremated in the same coffin. This is not unlawful provided that the applicant for cremation has made this request. The only thing that would prevent this happening is if the coffin were too large to pass through the aperture into the cremator as mentioned above.

Most crematoria will allow public inspection of the 'behind the scenes' procedures in an attempt to enlighten the public on all aspects of the cremation process.

Many crematoria will carry out shared cremations of fetuses in instances where parents do not want to make private arrangements. These are arranged via hospitals. Some parents gain some comfort from knowing that their baby was laid to rest with others. The practice of shared cremation is supported by Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity.

Are coffins sold back to funeral directors for re-use?

No. The coffin and the body inside are cremated together. There are occasions where the deceased or the family of the deceased have opted for using a cardboard coffin in which their loved one will be cremated. When this happens families sometimes want to have a more aesthetically pleasing coffin or container on the catafalque during the service. Families therefore will opt for either a pall (a cloth covering the cardboard coffin), or a 'cocoon coffin' (an

outer shell that covers the cardboard coffin) or will decorate a cardboard coffin themselves. Neither the pall nor the cocoon is cremated. It is important to understand that the pall and cocoon do NOT contain the body of the deceased; they are simply superficial coverings for a cardboard coffin.

What happens to the metal that is left in the ashes?

In the past all crematoria removed metal such as orthopaedic implants and screws used in the construction of the coffin and disposed of the metal by burying it within the grounds of the crematorium. In recent years the Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management introduced a scheme whereby the applicant for cremation can give consent for the metal to be recycled. Approximately 50% of UK crematoria are recycling scheme members. The surplus produced by the scheme, after transport, sorting and smelting costs have been deducted, is donated to charities nominated by member crematoria. By early 2015 the scheme had given £2 million to charities.

Precious metal such as jewellery left on the deceased will melt during the cremation process, combine with ash and become granular and hence unrecognisable. Some is lost within the cremator and some will be within the ashes. A proportion is found in the containers where other metals are kept whilst awaiting recycling. The Institute would strongly advise that jewellery is not left on the deceased but is retained by the relatives as it is more valuable to them.

An applicant for cremation using a crematorium that is in membership of the metal recycling scheme should be given the options of either recycling the metal or having it returned with the ashes.

The Institute believes that those crematoria that do not recycle should gain consent to bury the metal in the grounds of the crematorium or return it to the applicant.

Can I visit a crematorium and see what happens behind the scenes?

Yes. All crematoria will arrange for such a visit if given prior notice. The visit may take place whilst cremations are taking place or when not; the choice is yours. This open door policy helps to dispel the myths that have been explained above. On seeing the cremation process the viewer can be reassured that all cremations take place individually, coffins are cremated with the deceased and that identity is maintained throughout the process so that a family can be sure that they receive the correct ashes.

Where can I find out more information about cremation?

The ICCM Charter for the bereaved gives detailed information about all aspects of the cremation process and encompasses environmental and social aspects. Cremation authorities that have adopted the Charter for the Bereaved will provide information and guidance and you can obtain a full reference copy of the Charter document from the ICCM website at www.iccm-uk.com/iccm

No login password is required as the site is fully open to everyone.

Burial

Why are graves dug so deep? (it's distressing to see the coffin go down so deep)

Graves have to be dug to a sufficient depth to allow for future burials to take place should a family require more than one burial in a grave. Therefore the grave needs to be deep enough to allow not only for the depth of coffins/caskets that will be buried but also to accommodate legal requirements of undisturbed earth to be between each coffin and the amount of earth that must cover the last interment.

Why are there so many different types of grave available at some cemeteries?

Some authorities have introduced a wide range of graves to give people as many options as possible when arranging the burial of a loved one. For many the lawn grave is considered to be the best option but for others a more traditional, elaborate and larger type of memorial is required. Burial above ground in a Catacomb is available at some cemeteries as are vaults, brick graves and mausolea. It is really a matter of choice.

I have bought a grave. Do I own the land?

No. You have purchased the exclusive right of burial in the piece of land called the grave space. The ownership of the land remains with the burial authority. The exclusive right of burial in a local authority cemetery must not by law exceed 100 years.

I have a lawn grave. Why can't I put a full memorial over the surface of the grave?

The lawn grave was designed on the war grave principle (to have only a

memorial of limited size at the head of the grave with the rest of the grave laid to lawn). In this manner the limited area available for burial is best utilised. In addition maintenance is easier to accomplish with large mowing machinery being used to keep the area in a neat condition. These graves are sold on the understanding that only lawn style memorials are erected. Full memorials are only permitted on Traditional graves.

Care must be taken when selecting the type of grave. If you would prefer a larger, more traditional type memorial you should not opt for a lawn grave.

Are graves filled in straight after a funeral or are they left to the next day?

Graves are prepared for burial at least one full day before the funeral and are covered overnight. The ICCM Guiding Principles for Burial Services states that immediately after the mourners have departed the graveside, the grave shall be entirely backfilled and made tidy. This work is completed on the day of the burial and coffins should not be left uncovered overnight.

I understand that some people wait while the grave is filled in. Why is this?

Some cultures require that the grave is filled in while the family watch or they may wish to undertake the backfilling of the grave themselves. When families want this it is essential that the cemetery is made aware of their requirements when the burial is first arranged. This will ensure that the family's wishes are met and that their safety is protected during the backfilling process.

I've got a lawn grave. When will I be able to put a memorial onto it?

In cemeteries where continuous concrete foundations have been laid memorials can be erected on lawn graves, 'almost' immediately.

Where individual foundations are provided for lawn memorials ideally these will be situated on un-dug ground at the head end of the grave. In these circumstances and with the use of ground anchors and fixings that comply with British Standard 8415 and the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) Code of Practice, it is still possible to erect a memorial almost immediately.

In cemeteries where the headstone is erected directly on the excavated area of the grave there may be a period stipulated in the cemetery regulations which gives the ground time to settle and consolidate. During this period the

cemetery staff should monitor any sinkage that becomes apparent and top up periodically with topsoil until settlement ceases. This period may differ around the country due to differing soil types and conditions. Even after settlement has ceased it is advisable to ensure that your memorial mason adopts the NAMM Code of Practice as mentioned above.

Can anyone witness the grave being filled?

Yes, but the cemetery will need to be advised of this before the funeral takes place so that they are prepared.

What is a natural burial?

Natural burials are those where the environment is of paramount importance. Many local authorities and private companies provide a natural burial option where burials take place in existing woodland or meadowland setting. In some sites an open area is used and trees and natural wild flowers are planted and the setting is created. There may be restrictions such as memorials not being permitted and a requirement that the deceased is not embalmed. The intention is for the deceased to return to nature and by so doing assist the environment.

Why have I only been sold the grave for a set period of time? - I want the grave forever!

The law stipulates that graves cannot be sold for more than 100 years and authorities cannot go against that law. However, the law does permit grant of ownership to be extended and some accordingly write to owners every five years offering the opportunity to 'top-up' their lease. In this manner, the grave can stay in the family for as long as they wish, though ownership will never be issued for more than 100 years at any one time. Even where this topping up option is not offered then you (or your descendants/family) can renew the right at the end of the current lease.

It is important that the owner of the exclusive right of burial informs the cemetery office of any change of address otherwise correspondence on renewal will not be received. Similarly, should the owner die the nearest relatives should contact the cemetery office to arrange for the ownership to be transferred and thus the interest in the grave can be retained indefinitely.

I own the grave - can anyone else be buried in it if I don't want them to?

No. Graves cannot be opened without the permission in writing of the registered owner. The only exception to this is where the burial is to be that of

the registered owner in which case no written authority is required. The law protects your rights as registered owner of the grave.

I am told the grave is for two people - there is only one person in the grave and I now want two more burials to take place in the grave.

When a grave is purchased to take two full body burials, the depth to which the grave is excavated for the first burial must take into account the need for the second burial. There are legal requirements as to how much earth must be left on top of the last coffin, and it is therefore not physically possible to put an extra coffin into the grave without breaking the law. Lawful authority could be obtained to exhume those already buried in the grave, excavate the grave deeper, rebury those deceased that were exhumed and subsequently carry out the third burial. This action would require careful consideration by the grave owner.

After the grave is full for coffined burial ashes caskets or urns may still be buried within the grave.

What happens when the lease expires?

When you buy a grave you purchase the exclusive Rights of Burial in that grave for a set period of time. At the end of the period you should be given the option of renewing the Rights for a further period. It is vitally important that you keep the cemetery office fully informed should you change address otherwise you may not receive a notice of renewal at the appropriate time.

Also at the end of the period of rights to erect and maintain a memorial the cemetery staff will attempt to contact you to give you the option to renew the lease. Should you not wish to renew the lease or you cannot be contacted the cemetery staff can lawfully remove any memorial after giving a set period of notice for you to remove the memorial yourself. If you decide to renew the lease this may be on condition that the memorial receives a full inspection and stability test and any defects found are repaired.

Who is responsible for the memorial?

Whilst the burial authority is responsible for maintaining the cemetery in a safe condition you have a responsibility to maintain your memorial in a safe condition throughout the period of the Right to Erect and Maintain a Memorial. If you fail to do this the cemetery staff may take action to make the memorial safe.

Cemetery staff carry out routine inspections of memorials in the cemetery and when one is identified as being unstable and likely to fall and injure someone it might be cordoned off, laid flat or have a temporary support installed. You will receive a letter in these circumstances and it will be your responsibility to arrange suitable repair. Should your memorial still be under guarantee the memorial mason will be responsible to carry out repair at no extra cost to yourself. Should you ignore the notice sent to you your memorial may well be laid flat and when the lease expires you will not be allowed to renew it until repairs are made. Should no repairs be carried out and after further notification the memorial may be lawfully removed from the cemetery.

Your memorial mason also has a responsibility to provide a memorial of merchantable quality and to erect it in a safe manner. You should insist that the memorial is erected in accordance with British Standard 8415 and the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) Recommended Code of Practice and seek a guarantee of conformity from your memorial mason.

What happens if / when all the owners have died?

Ownership of the exclusive Right of Burial in a grave can be transferred from a deceased owner via that owner's estate. The means of transfer can be very complex and while there is a set procedure to follow, each case must be looked at individually. If you need to transfer ownership when all owners are deceased you will need to contact the cemetery office where staff will arrange for a transfer to take place with due compliance with law.

Why can't I have what I want on the grave?

When a new grave is purchased it is not the ownership of the land itself that is purchased, but the rights to have burials take place in that grave. These rights are sold, or to be more correct, 'granted' together with the rights to erect a memorial on the grave in accordance with the rules and regulations of the cemetery. It is important that you select the cemetery that will provide you with the type of memorial that you require as regulations differ from area to area. This can be checked out by contacting the cemetery office and making enquiries about the choices and options available.

Why is a permit needed?

Prior to a memorial being erected on a grave space, the written authority of the owner of the grave must be given on a permit / application form, authorising the proposed erection of the memorial. Memorials need to conform to cemetery regulations with regard to size and fixings, and the memorial also needs to be checked for stability under health and safety regulations. The cemetery staff need to check that the memorial conforms to regulations and will be erected in a safe manner. To a certain extent this helps protect your interests although you will remain responsible for the maintenance of the memorial in the future. You may ask your memorial mason for a workmanship guarantee or in fact details of insurance.

Some authorities will issue a separate Right to Erect and Maintain a Memorial and the purchase of this right will be made on submission of the application to erect a memorial. Other authorities may combine the Memorial Rights with the Burial Rights.

I want to bury ashes into the grave. Why do I have to decide whether there will be any more burials before this can be done?

It is against the law to disturb human remains without licence (including ashes in a casket or urn), and therefore no further burials will be possible in the grave until a licence has been obtained. Ashes can be buried in the grave at full depth, in which case they will not be disturbed by further full body burials, but by having to excavate a grave to this depth there will be additional charges for opening the grave.

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