

Questions & Answers about the Cremation

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How many people use cremation today in Great Britain?

The number of cremations exceeded disposal by burial for the first time in 1968. Since this time the proportion has increased and nearly 70% of all funerals are now cremations.

Do any religious groups forbid cremation to their members?

Yes. While all Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, now allow cremation, Orthodox Jews and Moslems forbid it.

Is cremation more expensive than burial?

No. Generally the cost of a grave is much higher than the fee charged for cremation. The Funeral Director's charges are much the same for both services. There may be an additional charge for cremation when the death has not been referred to the coroner and it is necessary to consult two doctors to obtain the right papers.

What religious ceremony can I have with cremation?

The service options for burial and cremation are much the same. The service may take place in one's own church or chapel with a short committal service in the crematorium chapel, or the whole service may be conducted in the crematorium chapel. You may arrange for your own minister to conduct the service. The form of service should be arranged with the minister and if hymns are to be sung at the crematorium, you should inform the organist in advance. Alternatively, you may choose a simple civic ceremony or none at all. Some choose to have a memorial service conducted separately from the cremation ceremony.

How is a cremation arranged?

We recommend you inform a Funeral Director as soon after the death as possible that you wish to arrange a cremation. Discuss with him how soon you would like the cremation to take place, whom you wish to officiate at the service and also the form of service. The Funeral Director will then procure the necessary statutory forms for the cremation. You may need to sign the statutory forms and register the death.

At this time, you will probably be asked how you wish to dispose of the cremation ashes. If you know what you want to do at this stage, you may sign an authority for the crematorium to carry out your wishes. If you are undecided, DO NOT sign any authority. Most crematoria will retain the cremation ashes for a month, giving you time to make a decision.

What happens to the cremation ashes then?

In 80% of cases the cremation ashes are strewn or buried in the Gardens of Remembrance at the crematorium. A few crematoria have niches where urns may be placed but these are usually on a rental basis and, if not renewed, the ashes are strewn or buried. You may also remove the cremation ashes from the crematorium in a suitable urn for disposal elsewhere, for example, in a family grave, at another crematorium or in some favourite spot. However, please do keep in mind that prior permission must be sought and any Local Rules or Regulations obeyed when you strew ashes in some other place.

What are the Gardens of Remembrance?

The Gardens of Remembrance are areas set aside for the disposal of cremation ashes. Ashes may be strewn or buried but no spot may be reserved to any one person and no individual memorials are permitted in such gardens to mark the spot. This is because the areas are used again and again and will be for as long as the crematorium is in operation.

What memorials are possible at the crematorium?

Usually the only permanent form of memorial is an entry in the book of remembrance. This book is usually displayed in a special memorial chapel and the entries for that day are on display so that a person is remembered on the anniversary of the death. Some crematoria allow plaques but these must be renewed periodically by further payments. At some crematoria it is possible to dedicate a rose bush or other garden item with a small plaque, but this also is for a limited period with the option of renewal. Some crematoria accept donations of such items as seats or stained glass windows where you may place a memorial inscription, while others have memorial funds to which relatives can make donations toward embellishments for the grounds or buildings. If you are anxious about memorial facilities at the crematorium, please ask the Funeral Director at the time of making the arrangements.

What happens at the crematorium on the day of the funeral?

The coffin is usually brought into the chapel followed by the mourners in procession. As it is placed on the catafalque the mourners take their seats. At the moment of the committal of the body the coffin may be obscured from view by curtains, or may be withdrawn through a gateway or lowered from the catafalque and descend into a committal room below. At the end of the service mourners leave the chapel and may read the floral tributes before leaving.

What happens to the coffin after the committal?

The coffin is withdrawn into a committal room where the nameplate on the coffin is checked with the cremation order to ensure correct identity. The coffin is then labelled with a card prepared by the crematorium giving all the relevant information. This card will stay with the body until the final disposal of the cremation ashes.

Does the cremation take place immediately?

Where possible, the cremation immediately follows the service. The Code of Cremation Practice, which is adhered to by the members of the Federation of British Cremation Authorities, requires that the cremation take place on the same day as the cremation service.

Is the coffin cremated with the body?

Yes. The Code requires that nothing be removed from the coffin after it has been received from the chapel.

What happens to the handles and other coffin fittings?

Cremation regulations require all fittings to be of combustible material. The handles and nameplate are usually made of hard plastic. Ferrous nails and screws do not burn and stay with the ashes until they are removed by means of a magnetic field.

What happens to precious and other metals?

The temperature at which a modern cremator operates is so high that such metals are fused with other material and are not recognisable. The Code of Practice states that any metallic material resulting from a cremation should be disposed of in accordance with the instructions of the Cremation Authority and recommends burial within the cremation grounds.

What about jewellery?

We recommend that any jewellery be removed from the deceased unless you intended that it should be cremated. Once the coffin has been placed in the chapel there is no way of recovering such items.

Is more than one coffin cremated at one time?

No. The only exceptions permitted are a mother and baby or twin children, when the next of kin requests that the two be cremated together.

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

Yes. Normally two people are permitted to attend and the superintendent should be advised in advance of this wish.

How do I know I will get the right cremation ashes?

Each coffin is identified on arrival and the identity card is placed on the outside of the cremator as soon as the coffin is placed into it. The card stays there until the ashes are removed. The ashes then go to a preparation room and the card stays with them as they are placed in the urn. As each cremator will accept only one coffin and the ashes must be withdrawn before the cremator is used again, all cremation ashes are kept separate throughout the process.

How are the ashes prepared?

When the cremation is complete, the ashes are withdrawn from the cremator into a cooling tray. When cool, the ferrous material is removed by means of a magnetic field. The remaining ashes are then placed into a machine that reduces them to a fine white ash. The ashes are now wholly bone ash, weighing between four and six pounds. They are now ready to be strewn.

What happens to ashes strewn on the ground?

As the highest biochemical activity exists at the surface of the soil, weather and biochemical action quickly break down the ashes to form part of the earth and within a short time there is no trace of them. The area where ashes are strewn should be dressed with a suitable loam or sand mixture to cover the remains.

What if I want to bury the ashes and have a gravestone?

You would need to have the ashes buried in a cemetery or churchyard. The gardens of a crematorium are not a burial ground within statutory law, and when ashes are buried there this is merely an extension of the idea of strewing and the ashes are not enclosed in an urn.

Can I keep the cremation ashes or must I dispose of them?

You may keep the ashes if you wish. Some crematoria will place ashes in a repository at the crematorium for an annual charge. Please check with the Funeral Director for possible options.

How can I ensure that I am cremated when I die?

If you wish to be cremated, you should give clear instructions in writing to the person who will be responsible for your funeral when you die. Such instructions are not binding in law so you should ensure that the person instructed is someone who is likely to carry out your wishes. The final decision will rest with your executors.

If I wanted to know more about cremation, how should I go about it?

Telephone or visit your local crematorium and discuss the matter with the superintendent there. He or she will be pleased to answer your queries and conduct you through the crematorium to see how it is operated.

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