

Guidelines for arranging a funeral



Provided by
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SINCE 1855

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Introduction

The first few days following a death seem to consist of an endless succession of decisions, along with a great deal of paperwork. This booklet is intended to help you through the practicalities, with factual information and guidance regarding registration, arranging the funeral and any relevant legal matters.

Our experience has always been that dealing smoothly and conscientiously with the practical aspects of death is a good way of coming to terms with the loss in the early stages. Bereavement affects people in a great variety of ways, none of them 'right' or 'wrong'. As funeral directors, we feel that our primary responsibility is to assist a family and friends through the initial tasks that they face, so they can be satisfied that the funeral was conducted as they and the deceased person would have wished.

With this in mind, we have tried to include every alternative at all the points where a decision might be required, as well as giving brief descriptions of all the usual procedures involved.

Where the Death Takes Place

In Hospital

When somebody dies in hospital, a doctor will usually issue a medical certificate (often referred to as a death certificate, although strictly speaking that is the document the Registrar gives you) within 24 hours - probably longer if a weekend intervenes. Staff will then advise the family of how and where to register the death. It may be helpful to inform the hospital as to which funeral director you will be using, if you have decided at this stage.

Sometimes, for example if the death followed an operation, or if the person was only in hospital for a short time, the Coroner will have to be informed and a post mortem examination carried out to make certain of the cause of death. This is a legal requirement. When this happens the Coroner's Officer will keep in close touch with relatives, and inform you when you can proceed with the funeral arrangements. Usually, there is little or no delay in this situation.

If the deceased has expressed a wish for his or her organs to be donated, or for a voluntary post mortem to assist in medical research, this does sometimes involve an extra day or two before the funeral can be arranged. Corneal removal, however, is a quick and simple procedure, and is the most common sort of organ donation.

The family would normally visit the funeral director within a day or so of the death occurring, and arrangements will then be made to bring the body back to the Chapel of Rest.

In a Nursing Home or Residential Home for the Elderly

When someone dies in a Nursing Home or Residential Home, the staff normally contact the funeral director within a relatively short time, so that the deceased can be taken to the Chapel of Rest. The staff will liaise between the family, the doctor and the funeral director to some extent, and

ensure that a medical certificate is issued as necessary. The family may then register the death and arrange the funeral. *See insert regarding Registration and also on page 5.*

At Home

When a person dies at home, after an illness, the doctor who has been looking after him or her will probably issue a medical certificate, and confirm that the family can call the funeral director to take the deceased to their Chapel of Rest. They can also proceed with registering and making funeral arrangements.

If the death was sudden or unexpected, however, or if the doctor has not seen the deceased within the last two weeks, the Coroner must be informed, and the police called to the house. When they are satisfied as to the circumstances, they will call the funeral director, who will take the deceased to hospital for examination.

Elsewhere

Abroad: Procedures vary depending on the country concerned. If you want the deceased to be brought back to the UK, the easiest course is to contact a local funeral director, who will have experience of the required documentation and procedures and will guide you through them. If you choose to have the funeral in the country where the death occurred, the British Consul there can register the death, and perhaps nominate a funeral director.

An accident on the road or at work: The police will be called, and the case notified to the Coroner. If there is any possibility of a criminal prosecution, an inquest must have been opened before any funeral arrangements can be made.

Suicide: Again, the police and the Coroner will be involved, and a post mortem examination required. There is not usually any delay to the funeral, however.

NOTE: There is no foundation in the commonly held idea that there are legal or financial restrictions or penalties in transporting a body across county boundaries. The only factor is travelling costs, and it is common practice for funeral directors' employees to drive across Britain for people who have died whilst away from home, or who wish their funeral to take place in a different area from that in which they lived.

Registering a Death

1. This should be done within five days by a relative, someone present at the death, the occupier of the house where the death occurred, or the person responsible for arranging the funeral. The funeral director is not usually eligible to do this.
2. It must be in the sub-district where the death occurred. If you cannot personally visit the office because you live too far away please ask for advice about registration by declaration.
3. Check with hospital staff, funeral director, post office or police station when the Registrar is open. Advance appointments are usually required.
4. Take the medical certificate or pink Coroner's form (unless it has been delivered direct by the Coroner's Officer) and medical NHS card, if available.
5. Be ready with details such as address, maiden name, date and place of birth, occupation, date of birth of a surviving spouse.
6. Ask for as many copies of the death certificate as you think you will need, as they become more expensive if you apply later.

First Decisions

Burial or Cremation?

Most people have a clear preference about this, of which their family will be aware. It is likely to be the first question the funeral director asks you when you arrive to arrange the funeral. There may be a letter or Will which makes the wishes of the deceased person clear. There may also be a pre-paid funeral already arranged. If so, the main details will be on record at the funeral director's office.

(See paragraph on Prepayment Scheme on page 16).

Burial

Burial in a Churchyard

If the deceased person lived or died in the parish of an Anglican church with space available in the churchyard, and was a Christian of any denomination, he or she has a right to burial in that graveyard. Similarly, if there is already a family grave in that churchyard, with space for another interment, it may be used even if the deceased lived elsewhere. There are, however, some churchyards in this area which have no further space for new burials. The most problematic of these is currently Billingshurst, where the choice is effectively to buy a grave in a Horsham cemetery, or have a cremation, with the ashes interred in the Garden of Remembrance attached to the church.

There would usually be a funeral service in the church attached to the churchyard, but other options include a short graveside ceremony, or a service held elsewhere.

It is worth noting that there are currently a number of restrictions on the style and material of headstones and other memorials on graves in churchyards. If you are likely to want something at all unusual, you may prefer the less restrictive regulations of a cemetery.

Burial in a Cemetery

Cemeteries are owned and operated by the Local Authority. Rights of burial are sold for a number of years. The fee is normally substantially lower for a resident in the Borough or District than for someone from outside the area. If the family already own a plot with space for a further burial, there is a scale of fees depending on the conditions of the original purchase.

Many people have a funeral service in their own local church, and then go on to the cemetery for the burial. Others prefer to use the Chapel attached to the cemetery, if there is one. A third possibility is to have a brief ceremony beside the grave itself.

There are a number of small burial grounds in villages within the Horsham rural district, as well as the large Hills and Roffey cemeteries.

Burial elsewhere

It is not illegal to bury a body in your own garden. The chief requirement is a death certificate and sufficient distance from any water courses. For precise details, consult a Funeral Director.

Cremation

The crematoria in our area are: the **Surrey and Sussex**, north of Worth, near Crawley; **Worthing**, which is at Findon, north of Worthing; **Guildford**, which is between Guildford and Godalming; **Chichester, Brighton** and **Leatherhead**.

Many have two chapels, a large one and a smaller. In Worthing, only the large chapel has an organ. It has a library of recorded music to choose from for the smaller chapel. All crematoria will play CDs supplied by the family, if required. The majority of people choosing cremation now have the whole funeral taking place at the crematorium. A substantial number, however, do choose to have a church service to precede the committal at the crematorium, or a Memorial Service to be held in church afterwards. There is no

requirement that a minister of religion conduct the funeral at a crematorium, if a secular ceremony is preferred.

Non-Christian religions are also given ample opportunity to conduct appropriate ceremonies. For those whose faith demands that the actual cremation be witnessed, special arrangements will be made.

Worthing Crematorium has a video available, with full information as to what they can offer.

Time is booked at regular intervals by most crematoria (at Worthing the interval is forty minutes). In practice this leaves twenty to thirty minutes for the actual service. If a long service is planned, or a funeral with a great many mourners, there is an option of making a double booking. The cost of this varies depending on the crematorium concerned.

The Minister

Where the deceased was not a regular churchgoer, and the family did not have a particular minister of religion in mind for the funeral, but nevertheless would like a religious service, the funeral director will be able to find someone to conduct the funeral. In general, the Minister will come from the area where the deceased person (or the relatives) lived. He or she will normally make contact with the family, and discuss the details of the service.

Hymns and Funeral Music

It is helpful if you can have some idea about hymns when you come to arrange the funeral, particularly if they are likely to be at all unusual. The favourites are 'The Lord's My Shepherd' (23rd Psalm) and 'Abide With Me', but a great many others are regularly chosen. Alternatively, non-religious songs may be played or sung. At a crematorium, the organist will play voluntary music as people enter and leave the Chapel, and specific tunes may be nominated, if desired. Similarly, a particular piece of music may be requested for the Committal. CDs supplied by the family can sometimes be played, if preferred.

Transport Arrangements

The funeral director will supply a hearse as a matter of course, but further cars are optional. There are a number of varying-patterns of transport, as follows:

1. The most common at present is for the separate elements to meet at the funeral venue; that is, the hearse leaves from the funeral director's premises, and the mourners leave from their own homes in their own cars. If a limousine is required, it will usually go to the house to collect the mourners and make its way to the church or crematorium independently of the hearse.
2. Alternatively, the hearse and car(s) will go first to the home of the main mourners and proceed in convoy from there.
3. Or the mourners may prefer to assemble at the funeral director's premises and the vehicles all set out from there.
4. Other variations are possible, including a second journey from a church to cemetery or crematorium. In some cases, the limousines are only required for this part and the return afterwards.

For a child's funeral, the family will often prefer that a hearse not be used at all. A lighter-coloured vehicle is available if required.

The Chapel Of Rest

Many relatives and friends wish to come and pay a last visit to the person they have lost, a day or two before the funeral. There is a quiet Chapel for this purpose, where visitors may come for a private spell to use as they feel they need to.

It is often a difficult decision as to whether to do this, and nobody can adequately advise on such an emotional matter. It sometimes helps to think ahead to this time next year, and how you may feel if you have not said goodbye in the way you would wish. It is undoubtedly a distressing experience,

however, with tears almost inevitable. Many people do feel they have already done all that was necessary, especially if the death was expected, and took place, for example, in a hospice.

Similarly, there is no easy answer as to whether or not children should be brought to the chapel. Situations and individuals vary, but there are times when adults are afraid to show their distress to their children, which can leave a child quite confused. It is natural to be upset when someone dies, and there is no need to hide this from children, within reasonable bounds.

If the deceased person is unsightly for some reason (perhaps after a car accident or certain diseases) there is an option of coming to sit beside the closed coffin for a quiet moment.

It is very common for relatives to wish to put a small token inside the coffin a flower or photo or farewell note. For burial there are few materials that would raise objections. For cremation, slightly more care is required, but there are rarely any difficulties.

Jewellery

You will be asked by the funeral director whether the deceased was wearing any jewellery, and if so, whether it is to be removed or not. If it is to be removed, it is helpful if it can be collected before the funeral takes place. If this is difficult, jewellery can be given to one of the mourners at the funeral. In either case, it is usual for a receipt to be signed.

Clothing

Many people wish to provide clothes for the deceased to wear. These can be brought in at the time of making the funeral arrangements, or soon afterwards. It helps our staff if they know in good time that clothes are being provided. The alternatives are to use the nightclothes that were worn at the time of death, or a simple gown provided by the funeral director or the hospital.

Choice of Coffin Style

Almost all British funerals today use a 'coffin-shaped' coffin, as opposed to the rectangular caskets commonly seen in America. The cost of the coffin itself is a small part of the overall expenditure involved in a funeral. The largest part is payment to the personnel who will arrange and conduct the funeral.

The coffins used for the Basic Funeral (whether for burial or cremation) are made of an elm veneer over a type of woodchip with handles, for cremation, of a bronze-coloured plastic material. All our other coffins are now made of oak veneer, or solid oak, since elm has become very scarce in recent years. We have also introduced mahogany from managed forests. The more expensive coffins have inset panels and brass-type handles.

The 'top of the range' design has a hinged lid. The majority of coffins at Freeman Brothers are furnished on our premises.

We can also supply a cardboard coffin on request. These are currently all made in a single size.

Flowers

Many people feel that it is a needless extravagance for a lot of friends and more distant relatives to buy flowers, especially for a cremation. It can be difficult to know what to do with them afterwards, too. To satisfy the wishes of mourners to contribute something, there is very often a fund in memory of the deceased person, usually to an established charity. The funeral director will generally handle these donations, and forward them to the charity concerned.

Others, however, feel that a funeral demands a substantial showing of flowers - especially if it is a burial. When a young person dies, many people feel a particular need to send flowers. The usual system is for florists to deliver tributes to the Chapel of Rest in time for the funeral director to make a

note of all the names on the flower cards, and to arrange them appropriately in the hearse. If necessary a special car can be provided to transport a very large number of flowers.

After the funeral, suitable sprays or arrangements (that is, tributes which are not obviously funereal) can, if wished, be donated to a local nursing home or hospital - although they prefer reasonably small quantities to an overwhelming deluge of flowers.

Normally, the funeral conductor will remove cards from the tributes after a cremation and hand them to a member of the family, so they can be kept.

Attendance Cards

In the event of a large funeral, it can be very difficult for the family to know exactly who attended the service. Small cards can be supplied by the funeral director to be signed by all the mourners and given to the family afterwards.

Service Sheets

As a memento of the funeral, as well as a help to guide mourners through the service, printed sheets can be a good idea. The words of hymns can be set out, as can readings or addresses. Printing can be arranged at short notice of any quantity of service sheets.

Press Notices

The local [West Sussex County Times](#) is the usual place for death announcements in the Horsham area; notices can be inserted by the funeral director and the cost added to the final account. This applies to most other newspapers in the area, as well as the nationals, such as the [The Daily Telegraph](#) and [The Times](#).

Checklist for Arranging the Funeral

- Burial or cremation?
- Will a particular Minister be required?
- Any limousines needed?
- Start from the house or meet at the church, cemetery or crematorium?
- Hymns or special music?
- Chapel visiting?
- Flowers or donations?
- Newspaper announcements?
- Arrangements for the ashes? (*see page 15*)
- Service sheets?
- Attendance cards?

A Baby's Funeral

When a baby dies, or is stillborn, parents are presented with a range of decisions which they have probably not ever considered before. Most of the topics so far covered in this booklet are relevant to a baby's funeral, except for the style of coffin. For a baby or child, a special coffin is used, covered in white flock material.

It is not mandatory for a fetus of less than 28 weeks' gestation to be given a funeral, but some parents do wish to have a ceremony to mark their loss.

Such a death does not need to be registered. A funeral director can give guidance on the choices regarding a burial or cremation. After 28 weeks' gestation, the baby's death has to be registered. Whether the baby is stillborn or dies after being born alive does not affect the choices for a funeral.

Organisations such as The Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS); the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths; or the Compassionate Friends can offer useful support and information.

The Funeral Itself

The usual pattern is for mourners to follow the coffin into the church or chapel, but families might well prefer to be seated before the coffin is carried in, especially in winter, or if there are elderly or infirm relatives to be considered. The funeral will be organised throughout by a senior member of staff (usually referred to as the 'conductor') who will take charge of every detail. He will indicate to mourners the appropriate time to go into the church or chapel and direct them to their seats; guide them on when to leave, and will be aware of exactly what has been arranged regarding music, flowers, transport and other elements of the funeral. Crematorium or church staff will provide music as required. Four bearers are normally provided to carry the coffin. If the family wish to use their own bearers, this can be arranged.

In the case of a **cremation**, it is usual now for the crematorium curtains to close around the coffin, but not for it to be removed to the area behind until after everyone has left the chapel. Some families prefer the curtains to be left open. The cremation itself will take place later the same day. There is no possibility of ashes from more than one cremation becoming mixed together because ashes are carefully removed after every one. Arrangements can be made for a witness to be present at the cremation, if this is a religious requirement.

Flowers will be laid out in a special area outside the chapel for mourners to see. They will remain in the same position all day.

With a **burial** in a churchyard or cemetery, after the service has taken place in the church, the usual procedure is for the coffin to be carried out to the grave, with the Minister and family members, where the interment takes place.

The grave will be filled in immediately the mourners have left. Flowers may remain on the grave.

Afterwards

The Ashes

Once a cremation has taken place there are a number of options regarding the ashes. If the family wish them to remain at the crematorium, they will probably be contacted directly about the range of memorials and services available, if there is a significant choice. Different crematoria offer different selections.

If a member of the family has previously been cremated at the same crematorium, there will be a record of the position of the ashes, whether scattered or interred, and the two remains can usually be reunited.

If the family wish to scatter ashes privately, or to have them interred in a family grave, or in a new cremation plot, they will be collected from the crematorium by the funeral director a few days after the funeral. If required, the funeral director will liaise with a church Minister and arrange for an interment ceremony, with or without relatives present.

Local Horsham cemeteries have cremation plots which are supplied under similar terms to plots for burial. Precise details vary between cemeteries. Such plots can be marked with stone tablets. Most churchyards have a Garden of Remembrance, which is specifically designated for the burial of ashes.

The funeral director can provide a small wooden casket, rectangular in shape, appropriate for an interment of ashes. The name of the deceased is engraved on a small plaque on the lid.

It sometimes happens that a decision cannot immediately be made regarding the ashes, in which case they may either be temporarily left at the crematorium or at the funeral director's premises. After a month the crematorium will wish to know

what is to be done, but there is no official cut-off time at the funeral director. Charges may be levied for long-term ashes storage, but most people find that a few weeks is enough time for the decision.

Payment and legal Responsibility

A breakdown of the different expenses will be provided in the form of a full estimate for the cost of the funeral. This will also include other fees and disbursements made to the crematorium, doctors, the Minister and any others. This estimate is compiled at the time the funeral arrangements are made, and any financial complications or difficulties should be discussed then.

The individual who makes the funeral arrangements becomes responsible for the costs. It is generally quite acceptable for all financial matters to be handled by a solicitor, and the funeral director will be happy to send the account directly to the solicitor.

The DSS will contribute towards the cost of a funeral, if the relative making the arrangements can satisfy them as to the need for assistance. The full cost is unlikely to be met, but that is dependent upon circumstances.

All of the above are matters to be discussed and decided upon when making arrangements for the funeral during a visit to the funeral director's office. If required, a home visit by a member of staff can be arranged.

Prepayment Scheme

Freeman Brothers operate their own prepayment scheme, whereby the funeral can be paid for at current prices, with no further expenditure, regardless of the date of the eventual death. This scheme is extremely flexible, covering burials, cremations, style of coffin, newspaper announcements, and even choice of memorials. Arrangements can be made for funerals in other parts of the country, if the individual concerned has moved.

Funds are kept securely, with independent trustees, and clients are furnished with full documentation regarding their membership of this scheme.

There is still a role for families, of course. For cremations, there must be a signature from a close relative, and often there will be a number of decisions still to be made. The primary advantage is economic, giving as it does peace of mind about the funeral finances.

Collection of Donations

Money donated to charity in memory of the deceased is held by the funeral director for a month after the funeral, and then forwarded to the charity concerned with a list of donors and the amount given. A similar list, with the total sum received, is sent to the family. Some charities acknowledge every donation individually, as well as a letter of thanks to the relatives, whilst others merely send a single receipt to the funeral director.

Donors should be informed, where possible, that cheques should be payable to the charity, not to the funeral director.

Memorials

Many people feel the funeral is not completed until there is a permanent marker on the grave or ashes plot. Freeman Brothers' sister company, J. Gumbrill, handles memorial work. If a headstone has been removed from a grave for a second burial, there will be a follow-up letter suggesting an additional inscription. If it is a new burial or a cremation plot, appropriate memorials can be supplied. A grave needs to be left to settle for six months before a stone can be affixed, but a memorial can take two to three months to make, especially if it is a handmade one, so there need only be a short interval before thinking about the stone.

The Loss

It often happens that not until the funeral is behind them do people really become aware of what they have lost. In fact, one of the most positive aspects of a funeral is that it carries the newly bereaved through the first distressing days and gives them something practical to do. The rituals of death have always served this same purpose of easing the transition into the new phase of life for those left behind whilst at the same time acknowledging that a unique individual has gone forever.

One of the chief needs for many people at this time is to talk about the experiences and emotions of the recent days or weeks. There is often a fear that the deceased person will be forgotten, and talking about him or her, remembering episodes and habits from the life now ended can be very consoling. Particularly if there are children in the bereaved family, it is important for them to feel they can freely refer to Granny or Grandad, or whoever it may be, without a sense that this is unacceptable. This becomes even more important if they have lost a parent or sibling.

Many people in our culture regard it as undesirable to show strong emotion in front of children. Although this has the protection of children in mind, it can also lead to serious anxiety and confusion in the child. At the extreme, if there is no visible sign of grief, the logical conclusion the child may draw is that there is no justification for sadness, and their own feelings then become hidden and denied. Equally, at the other extreme, small children do need to feel that life goes on, and that death is an unavoidable part of our overall experience, so that there can be difficulties if a close relative is severely incapacitated by grief for any length of time.

Different individuals respond to loss in different ways. It is very common indeed for there to be an element of relief, for example, mixed with the sadness. This may be readily

understood when a very ill or old person dies, but it can also be a prominent emotion in other circumstances. It is important to remember that there are distinct positive aspects to death, alongside the obviously painful ones. There is often a tendency to feel guilty about this, and to believe that any show of humour or optimism is misplaced around the time of a death. This is unfortunate for a number of reasons - not least because guilt can lead to a disabling degree of depression and an interruption of the healthier process of working through grief and sadness.

Loneliness is probably the greatest enemy at this time. Even if there are other people around, there is unlikely to be anyone who can replace a lost spouse or parent effectively, at least in the early days and weeks. Each time someone close to us dies, we lose that facet of ourselves which only that individual knew. Shared memories, pet names, day-to-day habits, are all gone forever. This can be true of more distant relatives, as well. An elderly brother or sister will take many childhood memories with them, as will aunts and uncles, sometimes too. Worst of all, if a child dies, so do all our hopes and expectations for that life, and all that we inevitably invest in our own offspring. There is no real 'cure' for this, simply a resolve to come to terms with it. For most people there will be new friendships and interests in time to help fill the gap.

Letters of condolence from people who knew the deceased can be very comforting at this time, particularly if they include memories and anecdotes which help to mark the life that is over. Replying to them is for some people a very therapeutic task, too - while for others it is too much and printed cards are sent instead. The sense that others are sharing in the grief does help.

Groups formed for the purpose of helping with bereavement will often concentrate initially on giving considerable time and space to the expression of the more personal aspects of the loss. Then, little by little, members of the group are encouraged to look forward, and move into the new phase of

their life. People very often need some help in doing this, especially if they have devoted much of their own time and attention to caring for the person who has now died. The sudden absence of such a demanding focus can result in a sense of floundering and purposelessness which is hard to deal with.

The greatest long-term benefit of such a group is probably the bonds which grow between the group members, which may continue long after the initial sessions with a leader. It is quite usual for people to continue to meet informally and to offer friendship and understanding to each other over many months and years.

Local provision of support groups can vary very much. National organisations such as Cruse can be very helpful, as can local churches. Counselling services are patchy, but a few sessions with an appropriate counsellor can be extremely valuable in facing up to the loss. There are many private counsellors and counselling practices listed in the Yellow Pages.

The Careline

One of our professional associations, the National Association of Funeral Directors offers a Careline for the use of its members' clients. This telephone support service provides you with access to bereavement counselling, professional advice on inheritance tax and handling an estate and wills as well as information on various Welfare Benefits. The telephone number for this service is [0870 162 8247](tel:08701628247) and help is available day or night with all calls being held in the strictest confidence.

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