

## **Questions people ask about 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 78% 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. Our crematorium has a viewing area that looks into the crematory, where you may witness the committal taking place. You are also able to push the button to operate the automated charger which pushes the coffin into the cremator. 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 are ashes 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](http://www.iccm-uk.com/iccm)