

FUNERAL PLANNING CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVES



**Transition Approaches to Death and Dying
(TADD)**



Contents

Introduction

You Have Choices	5
Regulations	5

Care of the Deceased Before the Funeral

Keeping the Deceased at Home	7
Keeping the Deceased at the Funeral Home	8

Arranging a Funeral

Coffin or Shroud	9
Burial	10
Woodland Burial	11
Burial at Sea	11
Cremation	12

Recent Alternatives to Burial or Cremation

Alkaline Hydrolysis (Resomation)	13
Cryomation and Promession	13
Fungi Burial Suit	14

Other Considerations

Repatriation	15
Costs	15

Receiving Support from a Funeral Director

Some questions you may wish to ask a funeral director	18
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Further Information

Tell us once	20
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Introduction

The content of this booklet is not intended to criticise or compromise individual religious or personal decisions around care of the deceased or traditional funerals. The aims are to highlight concerns for the environment, offer information about alternatives within funeral planning and encourage people to reflect, discuss, plan ahead and make family and friends aware of your preferences.

You Have Choices

If you are thinking ahead about your own funeral plans or arranging the funeral of another person, there are alternatives to be found and opportunities to celebrate a life while, at the same time, leaving behind a healthier environment.

Regulations

Every burial site, crematorium or sea burial authority will publish their own regulations concerning the coffin or shroud and what may be placed within.



Care of the Deceased Before the Funeral

Embalming isn't a legal requirement unless the deceased is being internationally repatriated. A body offers no danger to anyone coming into contact with it unless the reason for death was from a contagious disease. Embalming will not make the deceased look like their natural self, as both death and embalming alter one's features.

Conditions surrounding the death may affect the appearance of the deceased, who may have been ill or in an accident that caused disfigurement. The deceased may not have been discovered for several days and could have deteriorated in that time. It may be preferable to keep the coffin closed and remember the person as they were before they died. Perhaps as an alternative a favourite photograph of the deceased could be placed nearby.

Some may feel that the only way they can truly say goodbye is to have one last look at their loved one. If you use a funeral director, they will discuss with you the use of make-up on the deceased.

Keeping the Deceased at Home

If conditions allow, you can choose to care for the deceased at home. This may also help some people with the first stages of grieving and acceptance of the death.

The temperature around the deceased could speed up natural processes and affect how soon the funeral must be arranged.

There is equipment available to help keep the deceased cool and practical actions that can be taken. Washing the deceased, using essential oils and having plenty of absorbent cloth and a waterproof layer under the deceased is to be advised.

There are people, other than funeral directors, who will help with laying out the deceased and preparing the deceased for the funeral. A death doula or funeral celebrant could help with this. If the deceased had been supported by one of the Hospice at Home team (St. John's Hospice, Lancaster), they may give advice on any expected changes that may occur and will carry out the early stages of making the deceased presentable. They will always take into consideration the wishes of the family in this respect. A district nurse may help with this if she/he has been involved medically with the deceased.

Keeping the Deceased at the Funeral Home

Funeral directors have the facilities for keeping the body cool and some will let you use these facilities, for a fee, without having to use all they have to offer. For instance, you may wish to utilise some parts of their service such as transporting the body.

If you choose to use a funeral director, some funeral plans offered may have set times for viewing (within office hours) and the time of the funeral/cremation service may not be your first choice but could be off peak i.e. not Monday or Friday and not between 11-3.



Arranging a Funeral

Before arranging a funeral for someone, one should check whether there is a life insurance policy or whether there is a funeral plan that has been paid for. You should also check whether the person has expressed their wishes and preferences in a document. You will need a cause of death certificate and a registration of death certificate.

The funeral arrangements do not have to be left to a funeral director. You can make decisions yourself, either when you plan your own funeral or when you make the arrangements for someone else. If you plan the funeral yourself, you can still be supported by a funeral director. Having a prepaid funeral plan will restrict choices unless you make additional payments.

The person whose funeral is being arranged may not want to leave an environmentally damaging legacy. There are options to make this possible, but no simple solutions as there are concerns with many funeral arrangements.

Coffin or Shroud

There are no legal requirements for the deceased to be placed in a coffin or casket with certain exceptions, for example, burial at sea.

Coffins can be made of materials such as wicker or cardboard as well as wood. It is possible to create a personalised coffin.

Shrouds are becoming more commonplace especially for woodland burials. As with coffins, the material must be both

absorbent and strong. Some people might be upset by the shape of the deceased being clearly outlined and so a thicker material, such as double layered felt, may be appropriate. Shrouds can be decorated to suit an individual but can be bought ready-made. All shrouds will need a solid frame of some sort to transport the body and perhaps to rest the body on at the funeral service or graveside.

Whichever container or wrapping is chosen for the body, it is important to remember a few basic requirements: it must be able to take the weight of the deceased without breaking or tearing and so must have strong and durable seams. It must also have an inner lining which is thick enough and absorbent enough, to contain any leakage of bodily fluids.

Burial

Burial may be arranged at places other than a church yard or local authority cemetery. It could, for instance, take place in a woodland burial ground or on private property. Some local authority sites have separate areas for both traditional and woodland burial. Within a local authority site there may be consecrated and unconsecrated areas.

Burial can take place in a garden. The local authority needs to be notified because there are laws which control where this can take place e.g. not near water. It would be worth considering whether the house might be sold while there are still friends and relatives living who may wish to visit the grave and it could cause difficulties in selling the house.

Woodland Burial

There are specially designated woodland burial sites as well as woodland burial areas within some local authority graveyards.

The top three feet of most soils is where biological activity takes place and graves must be no deeper than that if the deceased and all of its surrounding material is to break down naturally and completely. Some woodland burial sites require that nothing should be buried with the deceased that is not biodegradable. Examples might be metal handles on coffins, varnished wood, nylon clothes, etc.

Burial at Sea

Whilst many people buried at sea have been sailors or in the navy, anyone can be buried at sea so long as the person arranging the funeral has a licence, currently available for £175.00. Some funeral directors will arrange this and one firm, The Britannia Shipping Company, specialises in it. A charitable organisation, the Maritime Volunteer Service, may help carry out burials at sea. For naval veterans the navy conducts its own burials. The chaplain at the base where the deceased served should be contacted to arrange this.

Newhaven, East Sussex, and The Needles Spoil Ground, Isle of Wight, are the two main sites where sea burial is permitted to take place in England. A third site near Tynemouth can be used if there is no chance of using the other two. If burial in another location is required, this can be proposed when an application is made, giving co-ordinates and the reason why the location is suitable.

There are regulations regarding the deceased, clothing and the coffin which need to be complied with. There needs to be certification by a doctor that the deceased is clear of fever and infection and the coroner needs to be informed. A person should not have been embalmed. The requirements for the materials and design of coffins used in burial at sea are specified by the Marine Management Organisation.

In terms of scattering of ashes there aren't any specific regulations and there is no requirement for a licence.

Cremation

The energy requirements of cremation are considerable. The process can also cause the release of various toxic substances into the atmosphere. In the UK, crematoriums are regulated.

Please check with the individual crematorium which items, if any, can be left in the deceased or in the coffin and which types of handles and fixings are allowed on the coffin.



Recent Alternatives to Burial or Cremation

Although people traditionally choose burial or cremation there is now a greater choice of alternatives, however some of these are not yet easily accessible in the UK. There are many new initiatives all of which cannot be covered here.

Alkaline Hydrolysis (Resomation)

Alkaline hydrolysis is a water-based chemical resolving process using strong alkali in water to safely and rapidly reduce the body to ash. It is essentially a highly accelerated version of natural decomposition.

This automated, flameless cremation process takes only 3-4 hours and the pure white ash is returned in an urn as in traditional cremation. The main advantage of this process over cremation is that it uses much less energy than traditional cremation.

Cryomation and Promession

Both processes use freezing to neutralise the harmful pathogens and prions in organic material and both use less energy than traditional cremation.

Both use liquid nitrogen to freeze the deceased to -196 degrees C until the body is brittle. The body is then fragmented and metal objects removed. The remains are then returned to the process and freeze dried under a range of vacuumed

conditions to remove the moisture. This process ensures that the final powder is sterile and 100% free of all bacteria and viruses. Accelerated composting further reduces the mass leaving a material that can itself generate and sustain life.

Cryomation was developed in the US. It involves reducing the body to particles. Cryomation won a climate change innovation prize in 2010.

Promession, which was a later development, uses a process where the deceased can be reduced to particles using a gentle vibration.

Fungi Burial Suit

This refers to clothing that can be worn by the deceased. It is impregnated with natural fungi that aims to speed up the decomposition process.



Other Considerations

Repatriation

Some may consider that repatriation of the deceased should be included as part of the carbon footprint of a funeral. Similarly the distance travelled by people who attend a funeral could be taken into consideration. An alternative would be to have a separate celebration of the person's life held by family and friends who live far away, in their own home town.

Costs

Depending on what is chosen, costs will be incurred before and after death:

- The services of a death doula if used.
- A doctor's fee for the death certificate.
- A fee for the registrar. It is advisable to get multiple copies of the certificate when the death is first registered as copies ordered later will be more expensive.
- For a burial, there is a fee for the plot (prices may vary depending on location), digging the grave and, if the cemetery chapel is used, there may also be a charge.
- For cremation there will be crematorium fees and a fee for the resting place or receptacle for the ashes.

- A minister's, officiant's or celebrant's fee.
- A coffin or shroud.
- The services of a funeral director.

If you choose cremation, prices will vary at different crematoriums according to the day and time of the service. Locally, Lancaster and Morecambe Crematorium is more expensive than Preston, and Blackpool is cheaper still. Cremations that take place at the beginning and end of the day are usually cheaper.

In Lancaster and Morecambe prices of pre-purchased burial plots vary from £307 to £700. See online Lancaster City Council cemetery fees and charges.

See Further Information (page 21).

The cost of a funeral, if conducted by a funeral director, will vary depending on which services you choose: for example, a basic service may include picking up the deceased, providing a basic coffin, hearse, the funeral director and 4 pallbearers and also taking the deceased to the nearest cemetery or crematorium. A number of plans are available from different organisations. A basic funeral can be arranged for £1,645 but this applies to cremation only and does not include the price of the service.

Prices may vary considerably between different types of coffin and shroud. For those who have the necessary joinery skills, making a coffin is a relatively simple exercise.

Some general advice on keeping the costs of a funeral down can be found online.

Anyone on low income or in receipt of benefits may be eligible for a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund. To be able to get a Funeral Payment you must also be either:

- the partner of the deceased when they died
- the parent of the deceased child, or have been responsible for the deceased child (and there is no absent parent) (unless they are getting one of the above qualifying benefits or were estranged from the child at the date of death)
- the parent of a still-born child
- a close relative or close friend of the deceased (and it is reasonable for you to accept responsibility for the funeral costs)

A surviving partner may be entitled to a Bereavement Payment if their husband or wife dies.

Bereavement Payment is a tax free, lump sum of £2000. You can claim this if your civil partner, husband or wife paid national insurance contributions, you were under state pension age when they died or your wife, husband or civil partner was not entitled to category A state pension when they died.

See Further Information (page 21).



Receiving Support from a Funeral Director

There are funeral directors who are part of a chain and there are independents. Please note that anyone can set themselves up as a funeral director and some are better than others. There is no one benchmark or accreditation system. However, membership of either the National Association of Funeral Directors or the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors is usually a good sign. The Association of Green Funeral Directors was founded in 2009, but it currently has no members in either north Lancashire or south Cumbria.

If you want or need a funeral director to make the arrangements for you, they will tell you what services they offer. It is quite acceptable to say no to offers of cars, flowers, etc. It is best to clarify the prices by asking for a printed price list.

You can talk to several funeral directors before you commit to one, as prices and services vary. This discussion can take place in your own home rather than their office.

Some questions you may wish to ask a funeral director

- 1 Will the funeral director collect the deceased and look after them until the funeral? If so, how long are they prepared to do this and what would the charge be?
- 2 Is there a requirement for the deceased to be embalmed or is there an environmentally friendly alternative?
- 3 Do they have environmentally friendly coffins, shrouds, etc. and would they allow you to supply your own? If so, what requirements do they wish you to follow?
- 4 Will they transport the deceased outside their normal geographical area? What would the cost be?
- 5 Would they take the deceased to a private address in the case of a garden burial? What information would they require, for example; proof of distance from a water source, council approval, depth of grave?



Further Information

For funeral payments:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/funeral-payments>

Lancaster City Council Bereavement Guide

This can be obtained at council offices or refer to their web site or phone 01524-582635.

This will include information on how to register a death, Do-it-yourself funerals, cemeteries and the Charter for the Bereaved.

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay-Bereavement Book

This can be obtained from the Royal Lancaster Infirmary or at some doctor's surgeries. You can also ring the Bereavement Office 01524-512405/406. This explains what happens if a person dies in hospital, donation of organs and tissues, post mortem procedures, dealing with grief, and other useful contacts.

Cumbria and Lancashire NHS booklet

When Someone Has Died. This is available online and offers practical answers to often asked questions.

There is a '**Tell us Once**' service to inform all local and central government offices at the same time available online at www.gov.uk



Transition is an international movement concerned with community resilience in response to climate change. Lancaster and Morecambe Transition have compiled this booklet to help people become aware of choices when planning their own or other people's funerals.

This booklet was researched and written by Transition Approaches to Death and Dying (TADD), a group within Transition City Lancaster.

Transition City Lancaster website goo.gl/eVxxHw

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The authors, the Transition Approaches to Death and Dying group, wish to thank the Trustees of The Elspeth J. Thompson Charitable Fund and Lush Charity Pot Funding for their financial help towards publishing this booklet.



Transition City Lancaster