

# **Guide to self-arranged funerals**

## **Introduction**

It is often assumed, quite wrongly, that funerals can be arranged only with the services of a funeral director. Some people, however, find great comfort from being involved, partly or totally, in the arrangements for the funeral of a loved one.

The following information is intended to assist you by outlining what is involved. Yeovil Crematorium and Cemetery Committee does not wish to promote any particular type of arrangement and the following information is intended simply to widen the choice when making funeral arrangements.

## **When death occurs**

If the death occurs at home, contact the General Practitioner (GP) who attended the deceased during the last illness. The GP will confirm the death and issue a certificate stating the cause of death. The GP may give you the certificate straight away or advise you to collect it later from the surgery. If it is known then, that a cremation will be carried out, advise the GP so that the relevant forms will be prepared.

If the death occurs in hospital, normally, the doctor attending will issue the certificate to you or via the hospitals administration office.

When a death occurs and the doctor attending is unable to state the cause of death, or where a medical practitioner had not recently attended to the deceased, the Coroner will be informed.

## **Registering the Death**

The next of kin or the person arranging the funeral must take the certificate issued by the doctor to the Registrar of Births and Deaths within five days from death. Most Registrars' operate an appointment system, so contact your local district office first:

South Somerset Registration Office (Yeovil)  
The Library  
King George Street  
Yeovil  
BA20 1PY

Tel: 01935 411230  
Email: [yeovilro@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:yeovilro@somerset.gov.uk)

Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.30pm

When you register the death, make sure that all the details are given fully and correctly, as it is very difficult getting any changes, made later. It is also advisable to obtain extra copies of the death certificate at this time in order to be able to claim the deceased's assets at a later date.

If the Coroner has been involved, and an inquest is to be held, then the Coroner will issue a form to the registrar and allow the cremation to proceed by issuing a Form E for cremation (yellow colour certificate) or issue a Coroners Order for Burial (buff colour certificate).

When an inquest is not held the nearest surviving relative can register the death only when the Coroner has confirmed the cause of death to the Registrar.

### **Statutory forms**

Before any cremation or burial can take place, certain forms are required by law to be submitted to the burial or cremation authority. Please contact the Crematorium Office to discuss exactly what is required.

### **Last offices**

If the death occurs at home and once the doctor has issued the certificate, the last offices can be carried out as reasonably soon after death as possible, by you or the local district nurse. This involves placing the body on its back, hands at the side, the eyes are closed, cotton wool on the eyelids will assist, and the chin supported by a pillow. All natural outlets of the body are plugged with cotton wool. The body may be washed and dressed.

### **Storing the Body until the Funeral**

If the death occurs in hospital, the Mortuary Manager may agree to keep the body in the hospital mortuary, until the day of the funeral, possibly at no charge.

If the death occurs at home, a local funeral director may agree to provide the mortuary facility only, to help you. In the meantime, the body should be kept in a well ventilated, cool room. Wrapped ice could be placed by the body.

### **Embalming**

Historically, the embalming process was to preserve the body from decay but the current use of the word refers generally to the cosmetic appearance of the deceased and to slow the deterioration in the short period prior to the funeral.

The process itself involves the removal of the body fluids, replacing them with a solution of about two percent formaldehyde, which often contains a pink dye. The body fluids are treated and disposed of via the public sewer. Formaldehyde is an irritant and volatile acid, the long-term effects of which in air quality, when the body is then cremated and in soil and soil organisms when the body is buried, have not yet received further independent research.

There is no evidence that a body poses a threat to the living, except where the death was due to a notifiable disease and in those cases embalming is not allowed anyway. Embalmers suggest that the process thoroughly disinfect the body removing any risk to any person who may come into contact with the body. However no evidence exists of funeral directing, crematorium or cemetery staff obtaining an infection from an un-embalmed body. It would be

logical to assume that if a real health risk existed embalming would be a legal requirement.

## **Transportation**

Where the body has to be removed from a hospital, remember to contact the Mortuary Manager first and check what documentation is required.

If you intend to use an estate car or van, ensure that the coffin or container you intend to use will fit in it.

You will need help whenever you have to handle the coffin, so make sure you have at least three people available to, help you.

## **Coffins**

The body must be suitably transported to the Crematorium or the Cemetery in a container, clearly identifying the name and age of the deceased. The container most commonly used is a standard coffin, made from chipboard with a good quality veneer. The metal effect handles, nameplates etc. are actually plastic which, when cremated will melt. Coffins and caskets are available, at a cost, in solid wood, which when used for burial will last longer in the ground than chipboard. Recently, a move towards a more environmentally friendly container is becoming popular. A cardboard coffin or casket can now be obtained and decorated in water based colours, if required to personal taste, or covered with a pall, quilt or similar, which can then be removed at or after the committal. Cremation or, with biodegradable benefits, burial is possible as the coffins are rigid, carry well and retain any potential leakage that may arise. Further alternatives, for burial would be to use a shroud of natural material or a woven wicker basket.

As a rule, if you plan to make your own container, use the smallest size possible to accommodate the deceased but strong enough to hold the weight. If cremation is decided, do not varnish or paint the container in oil paints. The materials used must be such that it minimizes the use of fossil fuels. Clothing man made fibres, shoes or rubberised items will cause smoke if cremated and should not be placed in the container. If you are in any doubt please contact the Crematorium staff first.

## **The Ceremony or Service**

The chapels at Yeovil Crematorium and Yeovil Cemetery can be used for a service. Contact your local minister to conduct the service or you may prefer a non-religious service with all religious emblems removed from the chapel. The content of the service can be to your choice. Organ music is provided along with CD facility.

If you require any further advice on any aspect of the arrangements required, please do not hesitate to contact the Crematorium staff for advice.