



# Charter for the Bereaved

# *Charter for the Bereaved*

In recent years, adverse criticism about modern funeral practices has been increasing. The Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration (IBCA) recognised this situation and in 1996 produced the Charter for the Bereaved specifically to improve funerals.

The content of the Charter is based on the experiences of cemetery and crematorium managers with bereaved families. Professional and charitable groups involved with the bereaved have also been consulted. Regrettably, the Charter has not been supported by organisations representing funeral directing and embalming. It is hoped that their support can be obtained at some stage in the future to enable rights to be offered when these professionals are employed.

The rights in this Charter will be available at any cemetery or crematorium whose management have formally adopted the Charter for the Bereaved. In this document they are referred to as "Charter Members".

## ***This Charter:***

- ***is a commitment to improving the service by confronting rather than disguising the death experience, and by reducing ignorance;***  
***is intended to define the rights of every individual who experiences bereavement;***
- ***will set standards of service related to burial, cremation and funerals generally. It is a written statement of what can be expected and this can act as a measure for judging the service received;***
- ***recognises that bereavement services are critical to the health of the nation. That the benefits of a meaningful funeral are immeasurable, influencing both the physical and mental wellbeing of us all;***
- ***will give the bereaved greater influence over the arrangement of funerals, thereby controlling costs and offering more satisfaction.***



## THE CHARTER IDENTIFIES THE FOLLOWING 33 RIGHTS

- Burial procedure***
- 1 It is your right to have a burial organised and conducted in a dignified and orderly manner, supported by competent, professional and caring cemetery staff.
  - 2 It is your right to inspect statutory cemetery records.
- Grave choice***
- 3 It is your right to purchase a private grave for a period not exceeding 100 years. (This "Right of Burial" is a grave for one or more burials, and upon which you can place a memorial. To this purchase cost, a burial fee is also payable.)
  - 4 It is your right to choose to be buried in an unpurchased grave. (You cannot reserve space for further burials in this type of grave, nor do you have any right to place a memorial. Further un-related burials will occur in the future, the grave being "re-cycled". For each burial, a fee is payable.)
- Cemetery memorials***
- 5 It is your right to place a memorial within the constraints of regulations in force or to leave the grave unmarked.
  - 6 It is your right and responsibility to maintain a memorial upon a grave during the period of grave rights granted to you. The memorial cannot be disturbed or moved during this period without your express permission, unless it poses a safety hazard. The safe erection and maintenance of the memorial is your responsibility.
  - 7 Except where Charter members are the sole suppliers of memorials, it is your right to use any memorial mason of your choice, provided they are not prohibited by the Charter member.
- Baby and infant graves.***
- 8 It is your right to be offered an individual grave for a baby or infant.
  - 9 It is your right to be able to purchase an adult grave for the burial of a baby or infant, with sufficient depth remaining to allow adult burials.
- Burials in private land***
- 10 It is your right to receive factual information on burial in private land eg. gardens, farms, orchards, etc.
- Cremation procedure***
- 11 It is your right to organise and conduct a cremation in a dignified and orderly manner, supported by competent, professional and caring crematorium staff.
  - 12 It is your right to inspect the crematorium under normal working conditions.
- Cremated remains and memorialisation***
- 13 It is your right to be offered a Book of Remembrance memorial, set in a Hall of Remembrance. This must include a designated place for floral tributes.
- Ceremonies and belief***
- 14 It is your right to hold a burial or cremation service at the cemetery or crematorium and define the type of music and ceremony.

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- 15 It is your right to define the type of religious or secular (non-religious) format of the service.
- Coffins and alternatives** 16 It is your right to choose the type and design of coffin, within the constraints of availability, regulations and safe materials.
- 17 It is your right to obtain a coffin via your Charter member (bio-degradable type.)
- Communication** 18 It is your right to receive a prompt response to any form of communication within the times specified by each Charter member.
- 19 It is your right to be given a table of cemetery and crematorium fees upon request.
- Environmental issues** 20 It is your right to be made aware of all known environmental issues relating to bereavement services. (Full details are given in the Reference Copy of the Charter for the Bereaved).
- Social and community aspects** 21 It is your right to receive a service that recognises your needs, without unfairness or discrimination eg. religious belief, ethnic needs, disability, etc.
- Funerals without a Funeral Director (independent funerals)** 22 It is your right to organise a funeral without the use of a funeral director.
- 23 It is your right, as executor (or next of kin) to be given the body by a mortuary, hospital, etc. in order to carry out a funeral.
- 24 It is your right to be given a leaflet by your Charter member describing how to arrange an independent funeral.
- Maintenance of grounds and gravedigging** 25 It is your right to be shown a specified standard of grounds maintenance. Where standards fail to meet the specification, you have the right *Lo* complain.
- Regulations** 26 It is your right to be given a list of regulations used by your Charter member.
- 27 It is your right to be given a written explanation of the reason why a regulation has been used to restrict or otherwise influence your rights.
- Staff and expertise** 28 It is your right to receive a quality service provided by trained and qualified staff. Where service standards fail, you have a right to question the level of expertise shown and to receive assurances regarding the ability of those involved.
- Inspection** 29 It is your right to be given an inspection of the cemetery or crematorium at any reasonable time.
- 30 It is your right to be given- a copy of the "Guiding Principles of Burial and Cremation Services" or the "Code of Cremation Practice" under which your Charter member operates.



**Grievance procedure** 31 It is your right to use the grievance procedure if you are dissatisfied about any service provided by your Charter member. You can complain "on the spot" if you have the opportunity. If you continue to be dissatisfied, a series of stages leading to arbitration can be followed. Copies of the grievance procedure are available from your Charter member. Any Charter member who fails to offer the specified rights will have their Charter membership withdrawn.

**Using a Funeral Director** 32 It is your right to be given a copy of the item "Information on using a funeral director" (from the Reference Copy of the Charter for the Bereaved) by your Charter member. A small fee may be payable. This describes the funeral "package", the absence of price transparency, the impact of large commercial firms, funeral pre-payment plans, etc.

**Embalming** 33 It is your right to be given a copy of the item "Information on Embalming" (from the Reference Copy of the Charter for the Bereaved) by your Charter member. A small fee may be payable. This describes the process of embalming, often referred to as cosmetic treatment by funeral directors. It addresses the issues of environmental impact and whether the process is necessary.

### **IMPROVING SERVICES IN THE FUTURE**

The IBCA have identified many "targets" to continuously improve the service for the bereaved. These may become rights after consultation and discussion. They are detailed in the Reference Copy of the Charter for the Bereaved, which is used by each Charter member. These targets often reflect new funeral innovations in various parts of the country but cannot be guaranteed nationwide. As they may be of interest to you, they are briefly described below.

**Burial procedure**

- Charter members will develop national service standards regarding the reception and handling of funerals.

- Charter members will improve protection against inclement weather at burial ceremonies.

**Grave choice**

- Charter members will consider improving grave choice by offering three grave designs, the lawn type with a headstone; the traditional grave with a full memorial; and a natural option such as woodland burial.

- Charter members will support a change in the law to allow the re-use of old graves, particularly in areas where burial is not possible due to a shortage of new ground.

Charter members will provide graves for cremated remains.

**Cemetery memorials**

- Charter members will encourage greater artistic input into memorials. A memorial should reflect individuality and the spirit of the community.

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- Regulations should be flexible, allowing for artistic use of wood or stone and artificial materials. This will widen choice and give the bereaved control over cost and design.
- Charter members will appreciate that colloquial terms such as "mum" and "dad" and nicknames are appropriate for inscriptions. Bureaucratic regulations will not be applied.
- Charter members will oppose the selling of a memorial as part of, or immediately after a funeral. The bereaved make a more meaningful purchase after they recover from the initial distress of the funeral.

## *Baby and infant graves*

- Burial facilities should be developed to accommodate fetal remains, stillbirths and infants from local midwifery and gynaecology services. These facilities will allow for an individual grave and burial and the placing of a memorial, teddy bears, etc.
- The graves should be on specific purpose-designed sections ie. Babies Memorial Garden.  
Charter members will liaise with charities and support groups about the needs of bereaved parents.
- Parents who wish to use an alternative to the standard coffin should be supported.

## *Burials in private land*

- Charter members will consider providing a "green" burial scheme eg. woodland burial, as an alternative option to burial in private land.

## *Cremation procedure*

- Charter members will develop service standards and arrange annual memorial services. They will also promote a reduction in the medical certificates for cremation, to reduce costs to the bereaved.

## *Cremated remains and memorialisation*

- Charter members accept the benefits memorials can offer to the grieving process and will provide at least one type of inscribed memorial eg. plaque.

## *Ceremonies and belief*

- Charter members will develop and manage facilities for use in a multi-cultural society without the permanent placement of religious symbols.
- Charter members recognise that each ceremony is an highly individual and important occasion and will allocate a minimum 30 minutes for each service.

## *Coins and alternatives*

- Charter members will promote greater choice and will offer advice over coffins, containers and shrouds. A diagram showing the construction of a simple home made coffin will be provided.

## *Communication*

- Charter members will improve education on bereavement. They will promote research into attitudes about death and the satisfaction levels related to funerals.



- Dignity, death and you*** ● Charter members will promote the value of a Will and funeral directives to ensure that every person obtains a funeral in accordance with their wishes.
- Environmental issues*** ● Charter members will improve the natural environment of cemetery and crematorium grounds, to encourage wildlife and use nature as an integral part of the bereavement experience.
- Charter members will promote research into issues which waste resources or may cause pollution or global warming, eg. gas usage for cremation, chipboard and plastics in coffins, embalming fluid, grass mowing, horticultural chemicals, etc.
- Social and community aspects*** ● Charter members will meet representatives of their community to identify the needs and wants of every individual. Individual needs should be met where this does not impinge upon the majority.
- Charter members will be receptive to suggestions that challenge conventions in order to improve choice and service delivery.
  - Charter members will oppose the creation of monopolies within the funeral industry, eg. the sale of crematoria to companies with funeral directing interests.
- Funerals without a Funeral Director (independent funerals)*** ● Charter members should offer more advice about the supply of coffins, as these can be difficult to obtain in most areas. The bereaved should be able to obtain at least a standard veneered chipboard coffin or a bio-degradable type prior to a funeral.
- Charter members should consider whether new funeral options can be offered to the bereaved, which reduces costs and the monopoly control of funeral directors, eg. transferring the deceased directly to the crematorium to avoid the use of a hearse and limousines.
- Maintenance of grounds and gravedigging*** ● Charter members will develop minimum national standards of maintenance.
- Regulations*** ● Charter members will develop a standard list of regulations for use throughout the U.K.
- Staff and expertise*** ● Charter members will promote the employment of qualified staff in senior posts, eg. possession of the Diploma of the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration.
- Charter members will support the employment of members of all ethnic groups, particularly where the community served is composed of various groups.
- Inspection*** ● Charter members will develop greater community awareness of cremation and burial facilities, in order to reduce ignorance. Malicious, misinformed comment can upset the bereaved and leave them feeling uneasy about the service.

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**Conclusion** We want this Charter to improve funerals and we would like to take your views into account. Also, anything that interests you or leaves you with a feeling of disquiet is important to us. You can send your comments to the Charter organiser. If the cemetery or crematorium in your area does not have Charter membership, please encourage their management to join.

Finally, your Charter member has a 72 page Reference Copy of the Charter for the Bereaved. As well as giving extensive information on each of the topics in this Charter, it contains sections giving useful addresses and information about the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration and the laws and regulations involved with bereavement.

The Reference Copy of the Charter for the Bereaved can be purchased as follows:

Local authorities and companies = £25.00

Individuals and charities = £10.00

**Cheques payable to IBCA, p&p included.**

Order from the following address.

**Charter Organiser** The Charter organiser deals with the sale of Charters, enquiries on national Charter issues, proposed amendments to the Charter and the grievance procedure. The Charter organiser will report annually to the IBCA about complaints and comments. To enquire about local services and issues, you can approach a local Charter member.

Charter Organiser  
Bereavement Services  
Cemetery Office  
Richardson Street  
Carlisle CA2 6AL.  
Tel: 01228 625310  
Fax: 01228 625313

**Institute of Burial and  
Cremation Administration** The Institute produced the Charter for the Bereaved.  
For any enquiries regarding Institute activities contact:

Tim Morris  
National Executive Officer,  
107, Parlaunt Road,  
Langley,  
Slough,  
Berkshire SL3 8BE

Tel: 01753 771518

Fax: 01753 770984