

## Natural Death Centre

For those who wish to consider the subject of funerals and dying, the Natural Death Centre offer a range of services. Their details are as follows:

12a Blackstock Mews  
Blackstock Road  
London  
N4 2BT

**Telephone:** 0871 288 2098.

**E-mail:** [contact@naturaldeath.org.uk](mailto:contact@naturaldeath.org.uk)

They issue a handbook which explains the issues of obtaining coffins and organising funerals in an innovative way, as well as much other detail. Request a leaflet on the Natural Death Centre if you wish to contact them.

Many other publications on this subject are available through your local library or through the Natural Death Centre.

If you require further information, please contact Sandwell Valley Crematorium, where the staff will be pleased to assist you.

### Sandwell Bereavement Services

Sandwell Valley Crematorium  
Newton Road  
West Bromwich  
West Midlands  
B71 3SX

**Tel:** 0121 569 6700

**Email:** [bereavement\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:bereavement_services@sandwell.gov.uk)



# A guide to an independent burial in Sandwell

## Introduction

The majority of people use a Funeral Director to organise a funeral “package” on their behalf. Although convenient, this can be quite costly and can reduce the amount of personal input the bereaved have in the funeral. If you have suitable means of transporting the coffin and body, you can make all of the necessary arrangements directly with Bereavement Services. If you cannot provide your own transport, you can use a Funeral Director to collect the deceased and transport the coffin to the crematorium or cemetery.

The enclosed notes outline the procedures followed by a Funeral Director when using our services, to which matters of interest to all bereaved have been added. This, it is hoped, will help the bereaved to understand their rights and complete as little or as much of the funeral arrangements as they wish, even to not requiring the services of a Funeral Director.

These notes are merely provided to widen choice and it is hoped that they do not imply the promotion of any particular course of action that you may wish to take.

## Funeral booking procedure

Initially you need to arrange the funeral by telephone:-

The number is (0121) 569 6700 and you can contact us at the following times:

<b>Monday - Wednesday</b>	9.00am	-	4.30pm
<b>Thursday</b>	10.00am	-	4.30pm
<b>Friday</b>	9.00am	-	4.00pm
<b>Saturday</b>	9.00am	-	12.30pm

\*\* Please note that all fees are reviewed each year. For this reason, no fees are set out on this leaflet as they would quickly be out of date. If you arrange a funeral directly with us, only the fees mentioned on this leaflet will be applicable. These cover, administration, registration and all other costs. The cost of the coffin, conveyance, flowers, obituaries, etc will be your responsibility.

**(h) Flowers** - you can provide your own flowers or alternatives e.g. Rosemary for remembrance, dried flowers, garden flowers, etc without using commercial florists.

**(i) Obituaries** - if you require these in local newspapers, you will need to make these arrangements yourself, or through your Funeral Director. Due to hoax calls, the newspapers may not accept telephone entries. If you call at their offices, you should take some evidence of the death to prove that you are genuine.

**(j) Symbolism** - one of the chief complaints about funerals is the rather routine process that they follow. You can vary this by introducing symbolic acts as part of the service. Every mourner, for instance, can be given a flower to throw into the grave to signify their parting from the deceased. If you or your Funeral Director arrange a Minister to take the service, it is courteous to ensure that any arrangements are acceptable to him or her.

**(k) Services** - you may wish to devise your own funeral service, provided that you or somebody else can deliver it at the funeral.

**(l) Green funerals** - this is a new trend, although there is no clear definition of a true “green” funeral. Burial graves are an obvious choice, perhaps using a shroud of natural materials. In the past, bodies were wrapped in a blanket or woollen cloth. Coffins, in fact, were not routinely used before the Victorians brought in the type of funeral we still know today. The body can be transported over short distances by horse drawn vehicles if these are available. Many details about “Green” funeral options are covered in the Natural Death Centre handbook. In the near future, we are hoping to introduce “woodland burial” graves to one or more of our cemeteries.

**(f) Interview** - these details outline the arrangements necessary without going into fine detail. If you need further help or advice, please contact us telephone or personal visit to the Bereavement Services Office.

**(g) Fees** - a table of fees is available on request. The particular fees that you need to consider are:-

**(i) Right of burial** - this gives you the Deed of Right of Burial for 50 years. This in effect makes the grave “private” instead of being an “unpurchased” grave. These rights can be purchased in advance in some cemeteries. Increased fees are applicable if the deceased resided outside of the borough, although qualifying criteria have been determined for previous residents.

**(ii) Burial fee** - this is for excavating the grave, shoring and dressing the grave before burial, and backfilling and leaving it neat and tidy after the funeral. A contribution to ongoing grounds maintenance costs is also included. Lowering tapes are provided. A member of staff is included to supervise the burial. The burial fee can only be paid at the time of the funeral as charges increase each year. Premium fees are again applicable for deceased who resided outside the borough, subject to the same qualifying criteria.

**(iii) Chapel usage** - it is possible to use the Chapel at Rowley Regis for holding a service for which a fee is payable. An organist is included in the fee or you can provide your own music if you wish.

**(iv) Erection of memorials** - for all new graves, a fee is now included in the burial fees for registering the memorial, checking the inscription and ensuring that the memorial is placed on the correct grave. Memorials cannot be placed on un-purchased graves.

The funeral will then be provisionally booked and we will require the following information over the telephone:-

**1. Funeral place** - we have 8 cemeteries. Both new full burial graves and cremated remains graves are available at Canalside, Heath Lane, Fallings Heath, Tipton and Thimblemill Cemeteries.

**2. Funeral date and time** - this should be when the funeral will arrive at the cemetery gates. A member of staff will be waiting to supervise your time in the cemetery, until you leave. We need a minimum of 3 working days notice in which to get the grave excavated and ready for the burial.

**3. Details of deceased** - name and address.

**4. Grave number** - this is indicated on the grave deeds, if you already have a grave. You will need to give the name & date of last interment if known. If you do not have a grave, we will allocate a new one or you may wish to visit your chosen cemetery to view the sections where burials are taking place.

**5. Coffin size** - you may not know these details at this early stage. If not, you will need to notify us when we receive an interment form, so that we can ensure that the grave is dug to the correct size.

**6. Funeral type** - this will depend upon how your funeral is organised. If you have a funeral service elsewhere than the cemetery, you will simply go “direct to grave” when you arrive. The grave will be prepared and a small “committal” service can take place or whatever you require.

If you prefer to hold a service at Rowley Regis, you can arrange to use one of the Chapel for however long you wish (extra charge applicable over 20 minutes). The funeral will then go directly to the Chapel for the service, then walk or drive to the graveside and proceed with the “committal” service and burial. Religious or non-religious ceremonies can take place in the Chapel.

You could hold the entire service outside the cemetery and send only the body, with a minimum of 4 attendants to the cemetery for the burial. There are no legal requirements related to the service and you have free choice over this decision.

**7. Religion of deceased** - if you wish to tell us this, it does enable us to anticipate the type and length of service, and graveside requirements.

**8. Person arranging funeral** - this can be a private person or Funeral Director. In the case of private individuals, fees must be paid in advance of the funeral.

**(a) Registration** - the death must be registered with the Registrar of Deaths, who will require a certificate of the cause of death issued by a Medical Practitioner. The Registrar will issue a Certificate for burial or if the death occurred in Scotland, an "Extract" of an entry in a register of deaths. The Certificate or extract must be passed on to us as soon as possible as the funeral cannot take place without it.

The above certificate will not be issued in some cases i.e. cause of death unknown, sudden death, accident etc, which may result in the Coroner or Procurator fiscal being involved. If this occurs, the Coroner or Procurator will issue an alternative Certificate, which again must be passed to us. In this instance, a post mortem may be required, or other investigations which could delay the funeral by a day or two.

**(b) Notice of burial** - you must complete and sign an interment application form to us for the burial. This can be obtained from us. This form confirms your telephone booking and completes a binding contract for the funeral. It is required at least 48 hours before the funeral time to reach us by 10am. This will complete the legal requirements and you must now consider the funeral.

**(c) Coffin** - A traditional coffin, American style coffin, those made of wicker or cardboard can be used for burial. The coffin must be interred with the body and not moved during or after the ceremony. The coffin must be acceptable environmentally and biodegradable without using lead, zinc, PVC or other such pollutants. A nameplate or other form of identification must be placed on the coffin. It must be noted that fluid can leak from a body, particularly when a funeral is delayed. The use of a plastic sheet and/or wadding can help to prevent or minimise this. All coffins must have a secure lid which cannot be removed for any reason.

The coffin must be lowered into the grave when the burial takes place. The grave will be 6' deep for a new grave for two and 4'6" for the second interment, and it is possible to have a grave to 7'6" to hold 3 interments. You must advise at the time of booking if this is the situation. As it is neither safe nor sensible for anybody to enter a grave, tapes must be used for lowering the coffin.

All full size graves have a shoring system in place in order to comply with Health and Safety requirements.

**(d) Conveyance** - any form of transport can be used to convey the body to the cemetery, as well as the hearse. An estate car or van would seem suitable, depending upon how easy it is to slide the coffin in and out of the vehicle. It may be possible to hire a hearse from a local Funeral Director and do the remainder of the funeral yourself. You may also wish to look into a horse drawn hearse.

This completes a summary of the funeral arrangements. A few other helpful details now follow:-

**(e) Location** - we have location plans of our cemeteries in relation to main roads should you require one, available on request. Plans of grave sections are also available on request.