

HELPING YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY



Glossary of funeral terms



Dignity Funerals

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Ashes

The ashes are the material that remains after a cremation. Sometimes known as cremated remains.

Ashes casket

A container for the burial of ashes. Usually wooden.

Bearer

One of usually four or six people who carry, or help transport, the coffin, throughout the stages of a funeral. Coffins are often moved on wheeled biers; but bearers are still needed. Also known as pallbearers. See also family bearers.

Beneficiary

The person entitled to something in a will, whether it is money, property or possessions. See also will, executor and intestate.

Bereaved

Those who have experienced the death of someone close. Typically used to refer to the immediate family of the deceased.

Bier

A wheeled device for moving a coffin during a funeral service. This is moved by the bearers. The bier is not to be confused with the hearse which is for transportation to the funeral. For more detail see hearse.

Body donation

The decision of someone to donate their body to science for medical research after their death. You can make your wishes known in writing, though it is not always possible for a body to be accepted.

Burial

A burial is the placement of the deceased in a grave. Also known as interment.

Burial at sea

Burial at sea is an alternative to a traditional burial, in which a loved one is laid to rest on the ocean floor.

Burial fees

The fees charged by a Church or cemetery authority for the rights to a burial; and the purchase and preparation of a grave. Also known as interment fees.

Burial ground

An area of land used for burial. Usually referring to a place owned by a small parish council rather than a church, large urban council, or private company. Not to be confused with a churchyard; graveyard; or cemetery. However, see also woodland burial ground.

Casket

A casket is rectangular in shape with four sides used to contain the deceased. Usually constructed of wood or steel and more elaborate in construction than most coffins.

Catafalque

A stand on which to place a coffin or casket during the funeral service or when the deceased is viewed.

Celebrant

A funeral celebrant is someone who officiates at a funeral service, overseeing and delivering the ceremony. They may, or may not, be a minister of religion. Both a priest and a civil celebrant are celebrants.

Cemetery

An area of land, which may be privately or publicly owned, used for burial. Usually referring to a place of municipal ownership, rather than church; small parish; or private ownership. Not to be confused with a churchyard, graveyard, burial ground or woodland burial ground.

Certificate for burial or cremation

A certificate issued by the Registrar to the person registering a death. Issued in most, but not all, circumstances. Not to be confused with a Death Certificate or Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, for which please see these listings for clarification.

Charity donations

Many families choose to remember their loved one with charity donations in lieu of flowers. Often made to a charity or fund, in memory of the deceased.

Chapel of Rest

A Chapel of Rest is a remembrance room often found in funeral homes where you can visit your loved one and pay your final respects before the funeral service.

Chief mourners

Often family and close friends of the deceased who will be part of the funeral procession. Also known as main mourners.

Churchyard

An area of land surrounding, or adjacent to, a church; and used for burial. See also graveyard. Not to be confused with a cemetery or burial ground.

Civil celebrant

Someone who leads a civil celebration funeral. Civil celebrants are credited by The Institute Of Civil Funerals.

Civil celebration funeral

A funeral reflecting the values and beliefs of the deceased, rather than any religion or society.

Coffin

A coffin is the traditional container for the deceased; four-sided and shaped at the shoulders. Made of wood, wicker, bamboo or cardboard.

Colourful funeral

Guests are invited to wear bright colours to a colourful funeral, celebrating the life of a loved one.

Committal service

A committal service is the final part of a funeral service during which the coffin or casket is buried, taken away for cremation, or remains in sight as people exit the church or crematorium.

Coroner

Coroners are paid by local councils to investigate sudden deaths or where the cause is unknown. It is the coroner's duty to identify how, when and where the person died for official records and the benefit of the bereaved. See also Procurator Fiscal for Scotland.

Cortege

The procession of vehicles carrying the deceased and mourners. Also known as a funeral procession.

Cremated remains

The material that remains after a cremation. More commonly known as cremation ashes.

Cremation

Cremation is the disposal of the deceased by incineration.

Crematorium

The venue at which funeral services are held and the deceased cremated afterwards. Usually a crematorium has a garden of remembrance for the disposal of the remains after the cremation.

Death Certificate

The statutory certificate issued by the Registrar, at the time that the person taking responsibility for the funeral arrangements registers the death. This is official notification that the death has occurred and is required for managing an estate. The Death Certificate is not to be confused with Medical Certificate Of Cause Of Death or the Certificate For Burial Or Cremation Issued After Registration.

Death notice

A notice placed in a newspaper or online informing people that someone has passed away and sharing the details of the forthcoming funeral. Also known as a funeral notice; funeral announcement; or death announcement. Sometimes confused with an obituary. See also window notice.

Direct burial

When someone is buried without a preceding, or graveside, service.

Direct cremation

A direct cremation is when someone is cremated without a preceding, or crematorium, service.

Disbursements

Those costs related to a funeral that are not the funeral directors charges. For example: ministers fees; cremation fees; florists charges. The various fees are paid by the funeral director who is reimbursed prior to the funeral by the client. Less often, known as third party costs or third party fees.

Embalming

Embalming is the process of preserving and protecting, which is carried out for the dignity of the deceased; the improvement of the experience of those visiting a chapel of rest; and the ongoing peace of mind for the deceased's family.

Estate

Everything owned by a person at the time of their death, including their finances, shares, property and personal belongings. This is often managed by an executor as named in the will.

Eulogy

A eulogy is the name given to a speech at a funeral, commemorating the life of the deceased.

Exclusive right of burial (EROB)

The allocation of a grave to a named 'owner', who has the right to decide who is buried in that grave and what memorial can be erected. Most graves are leased for a period of years and are not actually owned; but the principal of exclusive rights holds for the period of that lease.

Executor

Someone named in the will that will be responsible for managing the estate – usually a family member, close friend of the deceased, or solicitor. Not to be confused with beneficiary (which an executor cannot be). See also intestate.

Family bearers

Family members or friends who carry, or help transport, the coffin at some or all the stages of a funeral. Coffins are often moved on wheeled biers; but bearers are still needed. See also bearers and pallbearers.

Family car

Casual term for a chauffeur-driven limousine used to transport family members in a funeral cortege. Properly limousine, for which see listing.

Floral tributes

From small bouquets to casket sprays and wreaths to personalised arrangements, flowers and floral tributes are a popular way of commemorating a loved one's life. These vary in size, style and content according suggestions or instructions given by the deceased's family, and conveyed to the public by the funeral director.

Funeral

A ceremony that commemorates the life of the deceased and commits them to their final resting place; and also conveys the deceased and mourners.

Funeral arranger

An employee of a funeral director whose role is to arrange funerals.

Funeral directing

The profession of advising and supporting the bereaved; caring for the deceased; arranging and conducting all matters related to a funeral service; and supporting and advising clients in relation to funeral planning and other matters.

Funeral director

A senior position within the funeral profession, for which the individual is trained to perform all of the duties in the above, funeral directing, description.

Funeral home

A funeral directors' premises; more usually larger premises accommodating all of a funeral directors functions, rather than a smaller 'branch' premises.

Funeral Notice

A notice placed online, or in a newspaper, announcing a death and giving details of the forthcoming funeral. Funeral Notices is a new online service from Dignity, which allows family and friends of the deceased to share the details of a funeral via email, Facebook and Twitter. Also known as a death notice, funeral announcement or death announcement. Sometimes confused with an obituary. See also window notice.

Funeral plan

A funeral plan is a way of planning a funeral in advance and paying for it at today's prices, with no increase of the funeral director's costs over the time from purchase until use. Also known as a pre-need funeral or a pre-paid funeral.

Funeral Planning Authority (FPA)

The FPA is an organisation set up to self-regulate funeral plan providers in the UK, and protects provider's customers.

Funeral procession

A procession of funeral vehicles which often includes a hearse carrying the deceased and limousines carrying family members and close friends. They travel at a slow speed from the funeral home to the venue of the funeral service. Also known as a cortege.

Funeral service

A funeral service is the ceremony held to commemorate the life of the deceased. In some events at a different venue from the committal service; at others, with the committal service forming part of the commemorative service. See committal service for the distinction.

Grave

A plot is prepared in the ground to receive a coffin, casket and ashes. See plot.

Gravestone

A permanent stone marker placed where the deceased has been buried, usually upright and engraved with the deceased's name, dates of birth and death and a personal message or prayer. Also known as a headstone.

Graveyard

An area of land used for burial, more usually associated with a church; though not necessarily. See also churchyard. Not to be confused with a cemetery.

Grave marker

A temporary memorial, such as a wooden cross or plaque, placed on a grave before a more permanent memorial is installed.

Green funeral

An eco-friendly funeral or woodland burial that aims to be as environmentally-friendly as possible. It often involves the burial of a biodegradable casket in a green space, such as a woodland burial ground.

Headstone

See gravestone and memorial.

Hearse

A hearse is the name that's given to the large vehicle which carries a coffin or casket from the family or funeral home, to the funeral service and ultimately a cemetery or crematorium. A hearse is usually a motor vehicle; but may be horse-drawn; or an adapted vehicle, such as a camper van or motorcycle side-car.

Humanist funeral

A humanist funeral is a non-religious funeral which focuses on the life and personality of the deceased. Not to be confused with civil celebrations.

Humanist speaker

Humanist speakers are credited by the British Humanist Association. Not to be confused with civil celebrants.

Hymn sheet

A simple printed summary of the content of a funeral service; the words to songs and hymns to be sung. Not the same as, though see also, service sheet and order of service which are more comprehensive records of a funeral service, containing pictures etc.

Inquest

A fact-finding legal investigation which takes place after a post-mortem, if the cause of death is still unknown. During an inquest, evidence will be reviewed to determine how the person died and is presided over by a coroner.

Interment

The process of burying a coffin, casket or urn of cremation ashes. An alternative term for burial.

Interment fees

The fees charged by a Church or cemetery authority for the rights to a burial; and the purchase and preparation of a grave. Also known as burial fees.

Intestate

When someone passes away without a will and their estate goes to the closest family member by law.

Limousine

A chauffeur-driven vehicle generally used to transport mourners in a funeral cortege. When used for immediately family, as on most occasions, they are sometimes referred to as family cars.

Mausoleum

A mausoleum is a public or private building used for burial above ground.

Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

A Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is the certificate issued by a doctor confirming the time, date and cause of a death. It is required to register the death and should not be confused with a death certificate. Not be confused with a Death Certificate or the Certificate For Burial Or Cremation Issued After Registration, for which please see these listings for clarification.

Memorial

A memorial is an object which commemorates someone who has passed away. These can often include gravestones, monuments, garden benches, trees, plaques and statues. See also gravestone and headstone.

Memorial service

A service held without the deceased being present. Usually some time after a private funeral service. Similar; but less formal is a thanksgiving service, for which see listing.

Mortician

Also referred to as a mortuary technician, someone who takes care of the deceased and prepares the body for burial or cremation. Embalmers, funeral service operatives and funeral directors may also help prepare the deceased.

Mortuary

The room or building in which the deceased is kept and cared for before they are buried or cremated.

National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)

The NAFD is an association which ensures all of their funeral directors adhere to strict codes of practices, compliant procedures and full price transparency policies.

Natural burial

See green funeral and woodland burial.

Next of kin

Often used to refer to the person who was the closest relative to the deceased.

Obituary

An obituary is a written summary and review of the life of a deceased person. Not to be confused with a death notice or funeral notice.

Officiant

A person who leads or officiates a funeral or memorial service.

Order of service

A funeral order of service is a printed summary of the content of a funeral service; the words to songs and hymns to be sung; poems to be read etc.; and also containing photographs or other graphics relevant to the deceased. Given to mourners attending a service. Serves also as a keepsake, and in this capacity is also given to mourners unable to attend a service. Also known as a service sheet. Not the same as a hymn sheet.

Organ donation

The donation of an organ for medical use by prior consent of the deceased.

Pallbearer

A pallbearer is one of usually four or six people who carry, or help transport, the coffin, throughout the stages of a funeral. Coffins are often moved on wheeled biers; but bearers are still needed. Also known as bearers. See also family bearers.

Plot

A reserved space within a cemetery or graveyard used for the burial of someone's loved one. See grave.

Post-mortem

A post-mortem is the examination of a body after death, ordered by a coroner and carried out by a pathologist, to find out how the person died.

Private funeral

A funeral service attended by invitation only, usually for immediate family; and preceding a thanksgiving or memorial service.

Probate

Probate is the legal process for dealing with the estate of someone who has passed away.

Procurator fiscal

In Scotland, a procurator fiscal investigates the circumstances of a death, attempts to find out the cause of the death and considers whether criminal proceedings or a Fatal Accident Inquiry is appropriate. Similar to a coroner in England, Wales and N Ireland.

Pre-need funeral

A funeral paid for in advance, at current prices, with no increase of the funeral director's costs over the time from purchase until use. Also known as a pre-paid funeral or funeral plan.

Prepaid funeral

See above.

Procession

See funeral procession or cortege.

Reception (funeral reception)

A gathering held after a funeral for mourners to informally celebrate the life of the deceased. Food and drink is usually provided. See also wake.

Reception (into church)

The receiving of a deceased into a church by a minister at a time prior to the funeral. Especially for Catholic services on the evening before the funeral and where the deceased rests in church overnight.

Register office

A local government office that can help you register a death.

Registrar

An official at the register office who will provide you with necessary certificates and forms, including a Death Certificate.

Registration

The procedure of recording the details of a death for government records; and a legal requirement. Carried out at a register office and attended by a relative of the deceased, or other near associate. Part of the process of arranging a funeral for which a funeral director provides advice.

Repatriation

Body repatriation is the process of returning home a deceased person who has died outside of their home country. Someone is either repatriated to or repatriated from – the term is shared between those sending and those receiving.

Religious funerals

Religious funerals have unique and meaningful traditions, from the funeral preparations to the service itself.

Ritual washing

The ritual of mourners and family members washing and dressing a deceased person. Also known as washing. It is also carried out by funeral directors as part of their general service to the deceased.

Scattering

The process of spreading ashes over land or water: sometimes strewing, sometimes releasing; and so not always scattering in its literal sense.

Scatter tube

A cylindrical cardboard device for scattering ashes.

Service sheet

See order of service.

Survivors

Often used for family members who have outlived the deceased.

Third party costs

See disbursements.

Thanksgiving service

A service held to give thanks for the life of a deceased person. More usually open to anyone to attend; and held after a private funeral, often on the same day. Less formal or sombre; but much the same as a memorial service.

Trestles

Stands on which the coffin rests during a service, or at other times. Usually wooden and often decorative.

Undertaker

Archaic term for a Funeral Director. (The role of contemporary Funeral Directors is more complex and skilled than that of their predecessors. The role has grown with the expectations of levels of service and of services provided held by the public today).

Urn

An urn is a container used to hold cremation ashes, available in different shapes and materials. See also ashes casket.

Washing

The ritual of mourners washing and dressing a deceased person. Also known as ritual washing.

Wake

A reception held after the funeral to celebrate the life of the deceased. A wake is usually less formal than the funeral service and food and drink is often provided. See also reception.

Wheeled bier

A trolley which is used to transfer coffins into a church or crematorium. See bier.

Will

A legal document that specifies what happens to your estate and where it is distributed when you die. It also names an executor who will need to ensure the wishes in your will are carried out.

Woodland burial

Also referred to as a green funeral or natural burial, it is an environmentally-friendly alternative to traditional burials and cremation. They tend to involve the planting of a natural memorial, such as a tree, and take place at woodland burial grounds. See below.

Woodland burial ground

A burial ground planted and landscaped in sympathy with nature. Usually, exclusive of memorials; and where trees are planted instead.