

Direct cremation and direct burial

Why direct cremation or direct burial?

Increasing numbers of people are turning to direct cremation or direct burial as alternatives to a conventional funeral.

Direct cremation and direct burial are for

1. People who, in line with their beliefs and values, do not feel they need to have a formal, public, ceremonial funeral **at which the body of the person who has died is present**. Most people who opt for direct cremation or direct burial could easily afford a traditional funeral but they choose not to.
2. People who cannot afford a traditional funeral. Because of its simplicity, direct cremation is the cheapest way of disposing of a dead person. Direct cremation costs as little as £1000 all in.

What happens?

You don't go to visit the person who has died in the funeral home. You do not choose the day and time of the cremation/burial. There is no hearse, no procession, no service in the crematorium or at the graveside -- nothing. The body goes straight off to be cremated or buried without ceremony and without anyone else there.

A way to go home

Direct cremation is an attractive option for people wanting to take the person who has died abroad to their home country; it saves the considerable costs of embalming and air freight.

No last goodbye?

Direct cremation and direct burial do not stop you from having a farewell ceremony – a funeral – if you wish, after the event. If you choose direct cremation you can hold a memorial event of your own devising with, if you wish, the ashes present. Alternatively, you can have the ashes scattered at the crematorium. Whichever you choose, you can have a memorial service.

Direct cremation is a way of preparing a body for a funeral

Direct cremation is for people who regard cremation as a way of preparing a body for a funeral – because you get the ashes back. For them it offers the opportunity to say farewell to someone who has died in their own time and in a way they find more personal, more fitting and more satisfying.

A Good Funeral Guide factsheet

Once the body has been cremated, the ashes are

- Durable (they'll keep forever)
- portable (around 6 lbs)
- divisible (you can share them out, you don't have to scatter them all at once)

You can carry them to any venue you choose, whenever you choose, and hold a commemorative event of your own devising — in a church, a village hall, a restaurant; on a mountain top; at the seaside. The ceremony may conclude with a scattering of ashes – as the sun sets or rises, perhaps. But not necessarily. They can be divided up amongst certain people and kept.

Not the done thing?

Direct cremation is still reckoned unconventional, especially as an alternative to a normal funeral. If you choose it, it may well raise an eyebrow here and there. Alternatively, some people are likely to say “I wish I'd thought of that”.

Have a think about the issues involved, then decide. Read on.

It's all about what you believe

Ask yourself: What good will a conventional funeral do, really? There's no point in just going through the motions. There's no point in holding a funeral unless you know exactly why you're doing it and what you are intending to accomplish.

Ask yourself: What is the status of a body after death? If you think the spirit has departed from the person who's died – that the body is no longer the person – then you may feel that their body is just so much old clothes. Which is why, when John Lennon was killed, Yoko Ono wanted no focus on his bullet-ridden corpse. She had it cremated unceremoniously, unwitnessed. She held a memorial ceremony instead, to take place “everywhere and anywhere. Pray for his soul from wherever you are,” she said. And people did. Presumably this is what John wanted, too.

When the playwright Arthur Miller was asked if he'd be going to the funeral of his ex-wife, Marilyn Monroe, he replied, “Why would I go? She won't be there.”

You can dispose of a body in a ceremonial way by holding a funeral, or you can arrange to have it buried or cremated with no one there. The consequence for the body is the same in either case.

Who does it?

Many funeral directors now offer direct cremation and direct burial. Some funeral directors see it for the positive choice it very often is – an alternative to a conventional funeral.

But not all of them get it: they think it's inappropriate, it's just for poor people and skinflints. You can tell by the tone they use when you phone. Many funeral directors offer direct cremation under separate branding, often on the internet, to keep it well away from their 'conventional' business. Don't deal with anyone who views it as an under-the-counter and shameful thing to do.

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It's important to do your research and ask the right questions because there are some less than satisfactory outfits out there.

What do you pay for?

- Funeral director's time and overheads
- Storage in funeral director's mortuary
- Removal of pacemaker, prosthetic, etc if necessary
- Simple coffin
- Transport
- Crematorium fee
- Doctor's fee x 2 @ £80 each. You need 2 doctors to certify cause of death. If the person who has died has been seen by the coroner there is no fee.

ENDS