

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is responsible for the provision of the Council's burial services?

The burial service is managed by:

Bereavement Services Section, Customer Service Centre, Town Hall, Workington, Cumbria
CA14 2RS

Postal Address: Allerdale House, Workington, Cumbria CA14 3YJ

Telephone: 01900 702620

Email: bereavement.services@allerdale.gov.uk

What services does the Council provide?

Facilities exist for adult and infant burials in both purchased and public graves. A Cemetery Chapel is available for funeral services.

The cemeteries are open to the public at all times (pedestrian access only after 4.00 p.m.)

A number of leaflets describing the services offered and burial provisions provided by the Council are available from the Bereavement Services Office.

For funeral bookings and further information, please contact the office.

What about other Churchyards in the area?

A number of small Churchyards operate within the Borough.

Who can I contact for information?

For Cemetery Provisions, Funeral Bookings and further information please contact the Bereavement Services Office.

Must I use a Funeral Director to arrange a funeral?

No, Bereavement Services staff will be pleased to advise those wishing to organise a funeral themselves.

For those who wish to use a funeral director a list of local funeral directors can be obtained from the Bereavement Services Office.

How can I arrange an environmentally friendly funeral?

The Bereavement Services Section publish informative leaflets which include differing formats for burial, including: coffins and alternatives, meadow burial and burial in private land. Copies are available from the office.

What is the Charter for the Bereaved?

Promoted by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management, and by the Confederation of Burial Authorities, the Charter sets out 35 rights or standards of service against which burial and cremation can be judged.

A reference copy of the Charter is available to view at the Bereavement Services office but an appointment must be made in advance.

Can I find Family History Information?

A record of all interments is held and maintained in the bereavement services office. During normal working hours bereavement staff will assist visitors to locate graves but an appointment must be made in advance.

Why are graves dug so deep?

Graves have to be dug to a sufficient depth to allow for future burials to take place. Therefore the grave needs to be deep enough to allow not only for the depth of coffins/caskets that will be buried but also to accommodate legal requirements of undisturbed earth to be between each coffin and the amount of earth that must cover the last interment.

I have a lawn grave. Why can't I put a full memorial over the surface of the grave?

The lawn grave was designed on the war grave principle (to have only a memorial of limited size at the head of the grave with the rest of the grave laid to lawn). In this manner the limited area available for burial is best utilised. In addition maintenance is easier to accomplish with large mowing machinery being used to keep the area in a neat condition. These grave rights are sold on the understanding that only lawn style memorials are erected. Full memorials are only permitted on traditional graves.

Care must be taken when selecting the type of grave. If you would prefer a larger, more traditional type memorial you should not opt for a lawn grave.

Are graves filled in straight after a funeral or are they left to the next day?

Graves are prepared for burial at least one full day before the funeral and are covered overnight. The ICCM Guiding Principles for Burial Services states that immediately after the mourners have departed the graveside, the grave shall be entirely backfilled and made tidy. This work is completed on the day of the burial and coffins should not be left uncovered overnight.

I understand that some people wait while the grave is filled in. Why is this?

Some cultures require that the grave is filled in while the family watch or they may wish to undertake the backfilling of the grave themselves. When families want this it is essential that the cemetery is made aware of their requirements when the burial is first arranged. This will ensure that the family's wishes are met and that their safety is protected during the backfilling process.

I've got a lawn grave. When will I be able to put a memorial onto it?

Where individual foundations are provided for lawn memorials, these are situated on un-dug ground at the head end of the grave. In these circumstances and with the use of ground anchors and fixings that comply with the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) Recommended Code of Practice, it is possible to erect a memorial almost immediately.

Why have I only been sold the grave for a set period of time? - I want the grave forever!

The law stipulates that graves cannot be sold for ever and authorities cannot go against that law. However, the law does permit grant of ownership to be renewed at the end of the current lease. In this manner, the grave can stay in the family for as long as they wish, though ownership will never be issued for more than the number of years specified within the authority's fees and charges.

I own the grave - can anyone else be buried in it if I don't want them to?

No. Graves cannot be opened without the permission in writing of the registered owner of the grave. The only exception to this is where the burial is to be that of the registered owner in which case no written authority is required. The law protects your rights as registered owner of the grave.

I am told the grave is for two people - there is only one person in the grave and I now want two more burials to take place in the grave.

When a grave is purchased to take two full body burials, the depth to which the grave is excavated for the first burial must take into account the need for the second burial. There are legal requirements as to how much earth must be left on top of the last coffin, and it is therefore not physically possible to put an extra coffin into the grave without breaking the law. However, after the grave is full for coffined burial cremated remains caskets or urns may still be buried within the grave.

What happens when the lease expires?

When you buy a grave right you purchase the exclusive Rights of Burial in that grave for a set period of time. At the end of the period you should be given the option of renewing the Rights

for a further period. It is vitally important that you keep the bereavement services office fully informed should you change address otherwise you may not receive a notice of renewal at the appropriate time.

Also at the end of the lease period, your rights to erect and maintain a memorial cease. Should you not wish to renew the lease or you cannot be contacted the cemetery staff can lawfully remove any memorial after giving a set period of notice for you to remove the memorial yourself. If you decide to renew the lease this may be on condition that the memorial receives a full inspection and stability test and any defects found are repaired.

Who is responsible for the memorial?

Whilst the burial authority is responsible for maintaining the cemetery in a safe condition you have a responsibility to maintain your memorial in a safe condition throughout the period of the Exclusive Right of Burial. If you fail to do this the cemetery staff may take action to make the memorial safe.

Bereavement services staff carry out routine inspections of memorials in the cemetery and when one is identified as being unstable and likely to fall and injure someone it might be cordoned off or laid flat. You will receive a letter in these circumstances and it will be your responsibility to arrange suitable repair. Should your memorial still be under guarantee the memorial mason will be responsible to carry out repair at no extra cost to yourself. Should you ignore the notice sent to you your memorial may well be laid flat and when the lease expires you will not be allowed to renew it until repairs are made. Should no repairs be carried out and after further notification the memorial may be lawfully removed from the cemetery.

Your memorial mason also has a responsibility to provide a memorial of merchantable quality and to erect it in a safe manner. You should insist that the memorial is erected in accordance with the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) Recommended Code of Practice and seek a guarantee from your memorial mason.

What happens if / when all the owners have died?

Ownership of the exclusive Right of Burial in a grave can be transferred from a deceased owner via that owner's estate. There is a set procedure to follow to transfer the rights and each case must be looked at individually. If you need to transfer ownership when all owners are deceased you will need to contact the bereavement services office where staff will arrange for a transfer to take place with due compliance with law.

Why can't I have what I want on the grave?

When a new grave is purchased it is not the ownership of the land itself that is purchased, but the rights to have burials take place in that grave. These rights are sold, or to be more correct, 'granted' together with the rights to erect a memorial on the grave in accordance with the rules and regulations of the cemetery. It is important that you select the cemetery that will provide you with the type of memorial that you require as regulations differ from area to area. This can be checked out by contacting the bereavement services office and making enquiries about the choices and options available.

Why is a permit needed?

Prior to a memorial being erected on a grave space, the written authority of the owner of the grave must be given on a permit / application form, authorising the proposed erection of the memorial. Memorials need to conform to cemetery regulations with regard to size and fixings, and the memorial also needs to be checked for stability under health and safety regulations. The bereavement services staff need to check that the memorial conforms to regulations and will be erected in a safe manner. To a certain extent this helps protect your interests although you will remain responsible for the maintenance of the memorial in the future. You may ask your memorial mason for a workmanship guarantee or in fact details of insurance.

Some authorities will issue a separate Right to Erect and Maintain a Memorial and the purchase of this right will be made on submission of the application to erect a memorial. Other authorities may combine the Memorial Rights with the Burial Rights.