

Frequently asked Questions (FAQs)

Why are graves dug so deep? (it's distressing to see the coffin go down 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 graves are sold on the understanding that only lawn style memorials are erected. Full memorials are only permitted on Traditional graves.

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.

Can anyone witness the grave being filled?

Yes, but the cemetery will need to be advised of this before the funeral takes place so that they are prepared.

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

In cemeteries where continuous concrete foundations have been laid memorials can be erected on lawn graves, immediately.

In cemeteries where the headstone is erected directly on the excavated area of the grave we stipulate a period of eleven months which gives the ground time to settle and consolidate. During this period the cemetery staff should monitor any sinkage that becomes apparent and top up periodically with topsoil until settlement ceases.

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 of the registered owner of the grave. The only exception to this is where the burial is to be that of the registered owner. 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.

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. If you fail to do this the cemetery staff may take action to make the memorial safe. Cemetery staff carry out routine inspections of memorials in the cemetery. 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.

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. The means of transfer can be very complex and while there is a set procedure to follow, each case must be looked at individually. If you need to transfer ownership when all owners are deceased you will need to contact the cemetery 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 cemetery 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 cemetery 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.

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.

What happens when the lease expires?

When you buy a grave you purchase the exclusive Rights of Burial in that grave for 30 years. At the end of the period you will be given the option of renewing the Rights for a further period. It is vitally important that you keep the cemetery office fully informed should you change address otherwise you may not receive a notice of renewal at the appropriate time.

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 more than 100 years and authorities cannot go against that law. However, the law does permit grant of ownership to be extended.