

## REGULATIONS

### Information

Regulations have always existed in cemeteries, most of which date from the Victorian period. Modern regulations are based upon the situation which developed about 40 years ago when authorities began to address the problem of derelict cemeteries. Levelling old plots and creating the simpler, lawn type graves dominated cemetery management. In most Local Authorities, regulations were created to support easy maintenance and smaller safer memorials. The creation and reliance upon regulations has continued since that period.

Regulations are a necessary requirement of managing a burial or cremation facility, and yet they also restrict the rights and choices of the individual. They often become "written in stone" and are subsequently difficult to amend or change. People and especially staff and councillors fear that relaxation means a sudden upsurge in unsuitable actions or materials will occur. This, of course, depends upon the purpose of the regulation and some currently exist that defy logic. For instance, would removing the regulation that "seashells shall not be placed on graves" see a sudden upsurge in this activity take place? If it did, would it really matter?

Regulations can also indicate a bureaucratic organisation, one that prefers to control rather than to consider. Regulations, and their arbitrary application, can be utilised by staff who know little or nothing about the needs of the bereaved. They can mask an unfeeling and uncaring organisation. The essence of bereavement is to allow people the freedom to express the individuality of death and not to conform to some universal idea or "sameness". Reducing the scope and extent of regulations requires an increase in staffing expertise. The Charter does not call for a completely unrestrained situation; simply that regulations should reflect a more caring and responsive management.

If regulations are sensible and serve a purpose, they will be supported and not seen as a limitation on rights. Regulations on the safety of memorials and road use are logical and necessary. It is necessary to regulate for neat, tidy grounds and the safety of people working. The prohibition of glass and plastics in cemeteries is based on these items becoming a hazard when mowers are used. It is not based upon aesthetic considerations.

Other subjects, though, pose greater difficulties. The most sensitive area is where regulations arbitrarily set standards of dignity, decency and artistic quality. Not only do they restrict choice; they can also freeze new developments. A good example is the historical tendency to ban the use of wood for memorials. This seemed sensible when graves were sold in perpetuity and wood could last little longer than 100 years. Now that graves are sold for a maximum of 100 years, it would seem sensible to allow the use of wood, which will naturally degrade over the period of grave rights. By allowing wood, the employment of a sculptor might arise, who would create a more personal and community based memorial heritage. Similarly, regulations for memorial stones have favoured the commercial uniform and bland memorial design that readily fits into a coloured brochure. This has seriously diminished the artistic quality of cemetery memorials. It has also seen the decline in local employment, as both the stone and much of the memorial work is completed outside local communities.

Regulations often cover the form and type of inscriptions allowed on memorials, which can be controversial. Recently, a dispute arose about the use of language on a memorial. The application to incorporate "mum" and "dad" in an inscription was refused, causing great distress. This type of situation should not arise under the requirements of this Charter. The language used in inscriptions has historically reflected the colloquial use of words. This has always been valuable for research into the changing use of language. Currently, the use of the deceased's "nickname", of poetry and of extracts from popular songs has become commonplace in cemeteries. This is very important if it allows the deceased's partner to place something meaningful, something which brings the deceased "back to life", through reflection. Restricting this choice, using regulations to formalise every inscription, is not acceptable.

It is worth, considering that in the past, people appear to have passively accepted regulations without question. Currently, people are more aware of their rights and anticipate less, rather than more bureaucracy. It is relatively easy to contest regulations; otherwise, the authority or company will experience adverse criticism, particularly from the media. Any media attention about unreasonable regulation tends to reflect poorly on the service provided, and is best avoided.

### Charter Rights

- (a) You have a right to be given a list of regulations used by your charter member.
- (b) You have a right to be given a written explanation why a particular regulation has been used to restrict or otherwise influence your rights. Where you remain dissatisfied, you can utilise the grievance procedure set out in the Charter

### Charter Targets

- (a) Charter members will develop a standard list of regulations for use throughout the U.K.
- (b) Charter members will ensure that regulations allow more artistic and individualistic input, particularly where this may create employment in the community.

To view a PDF copy of the Charter for the Bereaved, please click [here](#).