



In the past, cemeteries offered a wide choice of grave types, with an associated variety of memorials. Due to various reasons, such cemeteries fell into disrepair. Consequently, grave choice became limited and gradually, a perception developed that memorials were a nuisance and that they should be rigidly controlled as to size and design. Added to this was a concentration on grounds' maintenance costs. The culmination of these two aspects was the introduction of the lawn type grave.

The lawn type grave is generally the only option available at most cemeteries. The design is perceived as offering the cheapest maintenance regime, allowing easy and unimpeded mowing along the lawns between parallel rows of identical headstones. The loss of individual artistic skill and any element of choice is evident, and this type of grave can be seen as regimented and boring. However, the lawn type grave reduces the many disadvantages of the traditional grave including the need for a more expensive memorial, the removal/replacement of the memorial for a burial, and higher maintenance costs.

The absence of full grave memorials and/or kerb surrounds enables people to walk unimpeded over the lawn grave. This upsets some and is disliked by certain religious groups. In reality, the grass on lawn graves is intensively mown, which is relatively expensive and wastes fossil fuel, thereby harming the environment.

This restriction on burial choice has occurred in parallel with the increasing adoption of cremation. In 1994, over 70% of deaths involved a cremation based funeral. This increase has not occurred without adverse criticism. This is focused on the effect of cremation on the environment, and the accusations that a "factory line" system has developed. These issues are detailed elsewhere in the Charter.

The extensive focus on the provision of cremation facilities is evident, even though there is now an increasing emphasis on burial provision. This is concentrating on offering a wider choice of graves, including a "green" or natural form of burial, and generally to widen memorial choice. The latter aspect is detailed under "CEMETERY MEMORIALS".

The green burial option is available as woodland burial in some parts of the country. This involves burial followed by the planting of a tree. Subsequently, the "return to nature" concept allows the graves to form a woodland nature reserve, without routine maintenance or the use of chemicals. Restrictions on the use of embalming and a requirement to use bio-degradable coffins might apply. Schemes do vary, and costs, particularly if you are not resident in the vicinity. Some private, farm based schemes are now developing and variations on environmental burial may begin to arise. Such schemes may deny your right to place any memorial on the grave.

Most graves are "bought", thereby reserving them for the burial of specific persons. The reference to buying a grave is not strictly correct. The "Right of Burial" is purchased, giving the owner control over the burials in the grave, and the right to place a memorial. The ground itself is still in the ownership of the landowner. The right cannot be purchased for a period in excess of 100 years, and much shorter periods are usually offered. You may be able to reserve the right in advance, if you wish to secure a grave in a certain area or if you wish to save the cost when you die. Most graves allow for two burials, one above the other. As each burial takes place, you will be charged an additional interment fee, to excavate and backfill the grave.

In the past, unpurchased graves, usually called common or pauper graves, were used for many burials. These graves are still available and, as no Right of Burial is given, are relatively inexpensive. They are used for the burial of unrelated people, and no right to place a memorial is given.

The choice of graves is limited to areas covered by detailed grave plans, and a precise grave numbering system. Nonetheless, if you are concerned about the precise position, you should arrange to visit the cemetery and be shown the available unused graves.

The re-use of graves is under consideration throughout the country. This is a response to the absence of new ground for graves in some areas. In addition, it would also address the high annual cost of maintaining many acres of old graves. New legislation would be required and this scheme will not be introduced without extensive consultation. It would involve only graves which are no longer visited and in which the last burial was over 75 years ago. This would take place only where there are no objections from relatives.

## **Charters Rights**

- (a) You have the right to purchase the "Right of Burial" in a grave, for a period not exceeding 100 years. (This Right usually includes placing a memorial).
- (b) You have the right to be buried in an unpurchased Grave.

## Charters Targets

- (a) Charter members should consider the provision of a "traditional grave". This should allow the placing of a full grave size memorial, or kerbs around the grave. To reduce the maintenance liability, the grave should be entirely covered by stone or hard landscaping. The burial authority should have no responsibility for maintenance within the grave curtilage. The purchasers of this grave type must be made aware of the increased cost of such memorials, and that additional costs arise when the memorial is moved to allow further burials.
- (b) Charter members should consider the provision of a natural burial choice, such as woodland burial. This should be designed and used in a manner that offers environmental benefits, including habitats for wildlife. Long term the area may form community woodland, a country park, or similar. The long term economic and environmental benefits of well-managed schemes are considerable.
- (c) Charter members should be supportive of other Authorities proposing the re-use of graves. Support for other authorities contemplating re-use in areas where no ground for burial exists, is important in order to maintain a local burial option. Support for this concept may increase as it is gradually and sensitively introduced. The potential social and economic benefits of utilising this concept are considerable.
- (d) Charter members should consider limiting the maintenance period when grave rights are sold in order to reassess periodically the rising costs of maintaining graves. The historical transfer of maintenance to future generations creates a severe financial burden.
- (e) Charter members should consider the provision of graves specifically for the burial of cremated remains, in all cemeteries.
- (f) Charter members should expand grave choice to enable the bereaved to obtain individuality and some element of choice. The standard should include a minimum of three grave types, e.g., lawn, traditional and a natural option such as woodland burial.

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