

# **Above and Below Ground Interment Options and Grave Reuse**

**Information for Cemetery Managers**

Issued by

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# Burial

## Methods of burial

### Unpurchased graves

Unpurchased graves relate back to when churchyards catered for the majority of burials within their parish. Before private and municipally owned cemeteries were opened which introduced the private or purchased grave entitling the purchaser to the exclusive right to bury within the granted plot, deceased parishioners were interred by the church incumbent who, if the Exclusive Right of Burial had not been granted to a particular grave by the Bishops Faculty, retained all Rights and was only required to provide a grave located in any part of the churchyard, at his discretion.

This was also a provision of municipal and private cemeteries which allowed for a class of grave where it was not obligatory for relatives of the deceased to purchase an Exclusive Right of Burial if they could not afford or did not wish to do so. Religious denominations were respected in relation to the allocated denominational sections but the relatives were not given the option of selecting a grave within that area.

Graves of this type became known as unpurchased, common, ordinary or public and are still provided by today's burial authorities.

### Purchased graves

Purchased graves entitle the purchaser or nearest surviving relative or executor thereof the Exclusive Right of Burial and the right to erect a memorial in accordance with the regulations of the cemetery for a limited period of not more than 100 years (or less) with an option to renew within a six month period of

the end of the lease.

A change in burial law replaced the right to sell in perpetuity which, in the past proved costly to authorities in respect to graves sold in this fashion as a great deal of burial space was used up by graves for one or two interments which could never be used again. It was usual for graves to be sold according to several different classes and the cost of these classes was dependent on their location. Path side graves or those in a principal position cost more than those further into the section or less complimentary position. With the introduction of the lawn cemetery, this tradition has receded, the commonly adopted practice these days is one class of graves sold in numerical order unless specifically requested otherwise.

Traditional cemeteries contain a range of different types of graves, some more popular in the past than they are today.

### Lawn graves

Lawn graves are laid out on lawns where provision has been made to allow for a memorial vase or head stone to be placed not exceeding a height of 4 feet. The memorial is secured on a slabbed or concrete or individual raft foundation. Lawn type graves are neat and uniform in appearance and the grass is cut on a regular basis during the mowing season but can appear monotonous due to design restrictions.

# Burial

## Methods of burial

### Traditional graves

Traditional graves allow for a wider style of memorial to be erected. Kerbs surround the area of the grave and a memorial is usually placed at the head. The inner part of the grave can be either planted out with suitable plants or slabbed and covered with stone chips.

### Brick graves

Brick graves are generally built coffin shaped, built as 431 inch brick chamber on a grouted brick or concrete foundation to accept one interment. Subsequent interments require a further course of bricks laid on the sealing slabs of the original construction, if required.

### Vaults

Vaults consisted of full constructions within the grave containing two or three chambers, separated by slabs. Further slabs of stone or concrete placed onto supporting protrusions built into the wall would be used to seal the coffin after each interment. The vault was then used as a secure base for large memorials. This form of burial was popular in the early part of the century.

### Burial chambers

Similar to the vault but manufactured using modern casting techniques enabling affordable high quantity installations across entire burial sections. Burial chambers are proving to be one of the main additions to cemeteries in widening service provision and are especially popular with the Muslim and

Italian communities. Burial chambers are available in single, double or triple depth and can also be extended above ground if required.

### Sarcophagi

Sarcophagi are similar to burial chambers but installed above ground and clad in decorative stone or granite. Typically these are for single interments only although this can be increased if installed over below ground chambers.

### Mausoleum

Mausoleums are tombs constructed above ground, the design of which can vary but in the main are built containing a number of burial chambers under one roof. As each chamber is used, it is sealed with an inscribed plaque. This form of burial has gained popularity of recent years, especially with the Irish, Greek and Italian communities.

### Woodland burial

Earthen grave interment without memorialisation. A tree is usually planted on the grave in commemoration and to propagate a woodland feel. The burial area is allowed to naturalise and woodland plants such as bluebells are encouraged to grow.

# Diminishing Land Resources

## Grave re-use

There are two main reasons for considering the reuse of graves. The first is the problem of burial space, the second is the need maintain revenues which dramatically declines once the final grave is sold.

The issue of limited burial space is of growing concern for cemetery authorities in ensuring the option of burial as a choice for the future. Families with existing graves close to or full may be unable to acquire a grave space close to their loved ones or indeed anywhere else within the cemetery. In 2001 the Select Committee on Transport and Regional Affairs highlighted this as a major concern recommending immediate government action in introducing new policies to preserve and extend the burial facilities of existing cemeteries.

Currently the disturbance of human remains without lawful authority is an offence and a change in legislation will be required to permit the reuse of graves on a wide scale basis.

### Reclaiming unused space

Depending on the age of the cemetery, rights to certain graves may now be expired or a '75 or 100 year rule' could be applied. If any of these graves still contain space for one or more burials then that remaining space can be resold. Similarly, there may be reserved spaces which have never been used where the rights are no longer valid and these too can be reissued for burial. This method could also offer some help in addressing the problem of unsafe and neglected memorials as some people may be willing to 'adopt' old monuments for themselves, adding their own inscriptions to existing headstones.

In 2008 Bridget Prentice, who was then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, was working on proposals to allow cemeteries to use this process but in 2009 it was put back under review by Lord Bach, who was then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice. As of February 2013 it still remains under review.

### Lift and deepen

Another commonly considered method is known as 'lift and deepen'. This involves exhuming any remains which may be left in a grave after the rights have expired, and re-interring them in the same grave at a greater depth to allow space for new burials. This method is common in other European countries, and is also practised in Australia. Interestingly, it was also used across the UK in churchyards and cemeteries for hundreds of years up until the mid eighteenth century when the now familiar municipal cemeteries were introduced.

### Exhume and cremate

Exhuming human remains and cremating them for interment elsewhere to free up grave spaces seems extreme to our culture but it is a widely practised method used in many countries. Singapore, for instance has a fifteen year right of interment which upon expiry, allows them to remove the body from the grave, cremate and re-inter into a niche or return the ashes to the family. Acceptability is often influenced by necessity. We have not reached the stage yet where our burial land and population density requires us to consider such measures, although it is employed in certain situations for example to enable a or a road widening scheme.

# Diminishing Land Resources

## Grave re-use

*The following options include methods of grave reuse that avoid the disturbance of human remains.*

### Extending existing and full graves

Grave extending units allow for further interments in existing graves or previously buried-on land. At present grave owners with graves which are full will more often than not currently have to be content with a new burial plot (if there are any available) some distance from their original grave. Until now, their only option if intent on burying in the same plot was to cremate and inter the ashes, which is unfortunate for them and results in a loss of income for the cemetery. A single extension unit can be installed into the remaining soil area of a grave enabling a further interment to take place.

Further interments are also still possible because additional extending units can be locked onto each other. Once the extending units are above ground level they can be clad with granite and become memorials in their own right.

A grave for two which is full can be made to take one or more interments further extending the burial life of the cemetery. This method also offers a practical alternative to the reuse of graves where the Rights have expired and as no human remains are disturbed can be freely applied under existing regulations.

### Concrete Burial Chambers

Burial chambers are concrete vaults which are used for 'full body' burials. A variety of models are available to accept adult or child,

single or multiple interments. Once installed, the chamber provides the same function as a traditional brick or vaulted grave, with each interment sealed with concrete slabs.

Chambers can be installed above or below ground level to suit specific memorial needs and are especially advantageous in freeing up land for interment use that for many reasons is considered unsuitable for earthen burial.

### Mausolea

As with the Concrete Burial Chamber, mausoleum structures can be installed over previously buried-in ground or in areas thought to be unsuitable for earthen burial freeing up important land resources and opening new lines of revenue for the cemetery Authority.

Mausolea can be made for one interment or larger family sized designs are available. Larger still are Community Mausolea providing individual mausoleum interment within a communal structure.

#### *Note:*

*Above-ground burial has in some quarters been seen as only sustainable if 'niches are reused periodically, and the re-use of niches would be subject to existing regulation on grave re-use'. This argument could equally be applied to below ground burial in that no burial land will provide an unlimited resource for interment (unless the Exhume and Cremate method is applied). **The point of reuse is to extend the interment capacity of existing burial land thus postponing the inevitable for as long as practically viable.***

# Diminishing Land Resources

## Grave re-use

### Land raising

This was quite a common practise after the war where many cemeteries extended their burial capabilities by raising the land over (typically) existing unpurchased (pauper) graves by adding soil which in later years could then be excavated for additional interments.

### Land raising with burial chambers

Burial Chambers can be installed over buried-in ground. Once installed the land is built up around the chambers and reused without fear of disturbance to existing burials and the correct depth is always achieved as the chamber is preinstalled providing a safe year round interment facility to the cemetery authority.

# Identifying the Problems

## Creating the solutions

### Consultation

**welters®** have extensive experience in providing services and products to many local authorities and municipalities. Their consultation offers a valuable resource in deciding the best course of action for your service. **welters®** can advise on all aspects of land management issues, creating viable long-term plans and enhancing service provision. From initial site surveys to design & planning through to construction, landscaping and installation, **welters®** recognises the importance of consultation and their priority is to maintain a close working relationship with their clients through all stages of any given project to ensure an end result to the highest standards.

### Objectivity

**welters®** have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the needs of the bereaved and the management and political issues that require addressing when undertaking projects; be it developing new areas for interment or introducing new memorial systems to enhance the choice of service provided. Their unbiased approach means they can open-mindedly address each task, listening to the needs of their clients to ensure their services are specifically focused to deliver a truly specialised product.

### Commitment

Your goals are **welters®** goals. Their commitment to the industry is reflected in everything they do. From design to reality, **welters®** products, services and presentation ensure their clients receive the best and **welters®** pride themselves in setting the standards that others follow.

### Practical resolutions

Rash solutions to problems could mean bigger problems in disguise. A problem may be resolved in the short term but precedents might be set to create wider issues leading to further difficulties. Talk to **welters®** for practical advice and solutions that are long term and viable.

### Increasing choice

Solutions are also about choice. Whether its product or service, the ability to bring imaginative variations in design and functionality to a project is vital in realising and assessing its potential.

### Partnerships

Sometimes projects may require additional support to make them successful. Reducing the size or phasing the implementation due to budgetary or investment restrictions could be unnecessary with **welters®** Partnership Programmes.



# Realising Opportunities

## Design and innovation

### Viable systems

Harmonious integration between managerial responsibilities such as health and safety, staff procedures and public use. **welters®** can provide real and practical systems of work designed to suit your needs.

### Reducing overheads

**welters®** products and services are the most competitive available. This economic approach is achieved without loss of quality in their products or services and it is this ability to provide high standard services at low cost which makes **welters®** the right choice when faced with providing high-end provisions within tight budgets.

### Increasing income

High standards, low cost means minimum outlay and high returns and a competitive edge that will keep you ahead of your rivals. **welters®** can help you generate vital income.

**welters®** innovative products and services for all aspects of cemetery and crematoria interment and design needs. The **welters®** organisation prides itself on its commitment to the industry. Their expertise is in constant demand as a valuable resource to authorities across the UK and Ireland where the highest standards of service delivery is expected and required.

From initial consultation to final conclusion and beyond, **welters®** strive to ensure that their solutions, designs, products and installations are first class and a valuable asset to their clients needs and the needs of the bereaved.

**welters®**  
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