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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL PROCEDURES FOR ARRANGING INTERMENTS AT BOTLEY, HEADINGTON, ROSE HILL AND WOLVERCOTE CEMETERIES

At what is undoubtedly a difficult and traumatic time for family and friends alike, we are keen to make our procedures for interment as simple and practical as possible. Our intention is always to accommodate the family's wishes wherever possible.

All coffin interments are generally conducted at Botley and Wolvercote Cemeteries, all four cemeteries have space for cremated remains plots. Existing graves can be re-opened at all four cemeteries to allow subsequent interments in family plots.

Please contact the Cemeteries office for up to date information about our charges, or look on the Oxford City Council's website on the cemeteries page. Charges for Exclusive Rights of Burial and the Interment costs are doubled for people who reside outside the City boundary. Graves cannot be reserved prior to a death.

The Cemeteries office is open from Monday to Friday, 8.30 am to 4.00 pm.

Personal callers should be aware that it is not always possible to discuss matters with people without appointments, as the Cemeteries service staff may be attending funerals.

Interment times

Interments normally take place Monday to Friday from 9.30 am to 3.30 pm from April to September. From October to March, when daylight hours are reduced, interment hours are from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm or exceptionally up to 3.00 pm, Monday to Friday.

Funeral directors and families should endeavour to keep to the agreed time planned for the interment, leaving sufficient time for the journey to the cemetery. If there is an unavoidable delay, every attempt should be made to contact the Cemeteries Service staff to alert them to the problem, as this could affect the timing of subsequent interments at the same or another cemetery. All the contact details are shown above.

General Interments

Funerals are normally arranged directly between a close family member and a chosen funeral director. The funeral director or his arranger is then responsible for making the detailed arrangements to suit the family's wishes, such as booking an interment time with the Cemeteries Service, arranging for a celebrant/officiant (Minister, Imam, Priest, Humanist etc), an organist if required, a building in which to hold any service (church, hall, mosque etc) and a venue for any gathering following the interment. A small chapel is available in each of the four cemeteries, which may be booked for funeral services.

Prior to the interment taking place the Cemeteries Service will require a completed interment form, payment by cheque/cash (not credit or debit cards), and a green Certificate for Burial or a white Coroner's Order for Burial in the case of a coffin burial, or a cremation certificate for the interment of cremated remains.

You are always advised to arrange the interment with as much notice as possible to ensure the availability of a time that is suitable to the family and the availability of celebrants, organists and venues.

We offer new Lawn, Traditional or Woodland graves at Botley and Wolvercote Cemeteries.

If there are any specific needs during an interment, these requirements should be notified to the Cemeteries Service at the earliest possible opportunity and preferably prior to the day of the funeral.

Examples of these needs that must be notified in advance are:

- An attendance of more than 40 people.
- Family members requesting to backfill the grave themselves manually.
- More than four people needed to carry the coffin or casket.
- More than one limousine at the funeral.
- A shroud burial.
- Use of a horse drawn carriage hearse.
- More than a 30 minute period needed at the graveside or in the Chapel.

Please note that following recent problems caused by balloon and lantern releases in UK airspace the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) have issued guidelines to organisers of events that may use them in a document from the Directorate of Airspace Policy (CAP 736) entitled Operation of Directed Light, Fireworks, Toy Balloons and Sky Lanterns Within UK Airspace dated February 2011. The CAA requires 28 days notice of any planned release of balloons or lanterns to allow time for the request to be considered and notifications made to nearby airfields. Consequently as all funerals tend to be conducted in a timescale inside the 28 day notification requirement this means that we cannot allow balloon or lantern releases from funerals in the Oxford cemeteries.

Where the intention is for the interment to take place in an existing grave, the Cemeteries Registrar will need to be satisfied that the permission to re-open the grave is given by the appropriate person i.e. the Deed Holder, Executor or person acting on their behalf. An interment cannot proceed until the Registrar is entirely satisfied that there are no legal reasons that would prevent the interment taking place.

The Cemeteries Service will ensure that a suitable grave is prepared and dressed prior to the scheduled interment time. The grave will be excavated to the depth requested by the family through the funeral director. Single graves will be at least four feet deep and double graves will be at least six feet deep. Cremated remains plots will be around two feet deep. The size of the coffin or casket must be notified to the Cemeteries office staff in good time to ensure a suitably sized grave can be prepared. Where backfilling of the grave is to be undertaken by family members and/or friends the Cemeteries Service should be notified well in advance so the necessary arrangements can be made. Timber supports will then be used to maintain the integrity of the grave and will be left in place. The cost of this timber will be passed on to the family through the funeral director. Graves may be bricked, but an appropriate person(s) experienced in undertaking such work must do this. In some circumstances it may be possible for Cemeteries staff to undertake the brickwork. When applicable the funeral director will then add these costs to the overall funeral fee.

A member of the Cemeteries Service staff will be present at all interments to answer any questions and ensure that the interment proceeds as planned in a dignified manner.

Following the departure of the mourners from the graveside, Cemeteries Service staff will remove the dressing mats, boards and backfill the grave either using mechanical or manual means. Any floral tributes and grave markers will be placed neatly on the grave and the area left tidy. The floral tributes will remain in place until the flowers have died, unless the family request otherwise. The family should remove large frames containing floral lettering; alternatively after a month the Cemeteries staff will remove any remaining large frames.

Short Notice Interments

In certain circumstances, it may be necessary for a short notice interment to be arranged. In this instance please contact the Cemeteries Office at the earliest opportunity with your requirements. If we are contacted prior to 10.00 am every effort will be made to accommodate the interment, however it may not be possible to guarantee a burial for logistical or weather related reasons. If we are contacted after 10.00 am on the day of the proposed interment, we will endeavour to undertake the burial, but are unable to offer any guarantees because of the short timescale. To increase the likelihood of short notice interments taking place, we keep at least one semi-prepared grave that can be offered in certain circumstances.

Ideally family members should deal with a funeral director or his arranger, but may contact the Cemeteries Office directly if required. To ensure a prompt response and prevent potential confusion, one designated person should be the single point of contact between the family and the Cemeteries Office. If a Funeral/Death committee is involved, then an agreed person will be the designated point of contact with the Cemeteries office on behalf of the family. This person will be the point of contact for all arrangements and the Cemeteries Office staff will only take instructions from the agreed person or the funeral director/arranger to prevent any confusion arising.

Weekend Interments

The Cemeteries Service cannot guarantee a weekend interment, but will endeavour to accommodate requests for weekend services. Our ability to offer a weekend interment service is dependent on the availability of our staff. If there is a pressing need for an interment to take place on a weekend, the Cemeteries Service should be informed no later than 2.00 pm on a Friday to ensure that staff can be consulted on their availability. To ensure a burial can take place on a weekend the original Certificate for Burial or Coroner's Order for Burial must be produced before 4.00 pm on a Friday. It is acceptable for a copy of the certificate to be faxed or e-mailed to the Cemeteries Office at the earliest opportunity provided that the original document is produced on the day of the interment at the Cemetery prior to the interment taking place. The fax number and e-mail address are at the beginning of this procedure. Failure to provide an original certificate prior to any interment will result in the burial being cancelled. Applicants for weekend burials should be aware that the normal charges apply plus, an additional fee to cover the increased costs associated with weekend services.

Public Holiday Interments

As with our weekend interment service, public holiday period burials are subject to staff availability and additional fees will apply. No interments will be undertaken on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Day or Bank Holiday Mondays.

Bank holidays:

The Cemeteries Service is available by mobile phone between 8.00 am and 10.00 am on the Saturday of a bank holiday weekend, including Easter weekend. The contact numbers are at the beginning of this procedure; one mobile number will be allocated prior to each holiday period and this will be notified to funeral directors prior to the commencement of the holiday.

Christmas:

Before the holiday period we will inform all local funeral directors of our availability over the Christmas and New Year period. There will be a minimum of 3 days between Christmas and New Year during which interments can be arranged in the normal way.

Exceptional Weather Conditions

Exceptional weather conditions may disrupt our normal service. Cemeteries staff will make every attempt to open the cemeteries and where possible, all pre-arranged funerals will take place, but this cannot be guaranteed if there is an unnecessary risk to public safety.

If we change our operations or close due to exceptional weather conditions, we will endeavour to contact our regular users, and place information on our local website and in the local press. Where there are exceptional weather conditions, cemetery users or funeral directors should not presume that the cemeteries will be open for normal business and are advised to check in advance using the contact numbers at the beginning of this procedure.