

(d) The Natural Death Centre, 12a Blackstock Mews, Blackstock Road, London N4 2BT, 0871 288 2098, www.naturaldeath.org.uk (reg.charity no: 1091396). *The Natural Death Handbook* (ISBN 9781844132263), pp382 (to obtain a copy see website), goes into great detail over some of the topics listed above. Chapter headings include: Inexpensive, Green, Family-Organised Services; Coffins & Professional Services; Natural Burial Grounds; Good Funeral Guide; Good Crematoria and Cemeteries.

There is a comfort in the strength of love,
Which makes a thing endurable that else
Would upset the brain and break the heart.

Wordsworth

Annie Seddon, Clerk of Elders
Alan Russell, Clerk of Overseers

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EAST CHESHIRE QUAKER MEETING

FUNERALS AND THE SUPPORT OF THE BEREAVED

'Death is a necessary part of the rhythm of being, just as sleep is a part of the rhythm of night and day.'

(from *Death is an Horizon* by Ruth M. Fawell)

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INTRODUCTION

When someone in one of our meetings dies we all have a duty to care for the bereaved and to see that the funeral arrangements are properly made and carried out. In addition to our formal duties we must be open to what love requires of us.

Elders have particular responsibility for this laid upon them. **Friends to be Informed of Deaths** have responsibility for the passing on of information; and Friends in general, sometimes with the support or guidance of **Elders And Overseers**, have a responsibility towards the care of bereaved Friends. It is the purpose of this document to make clear the duties that arise from these responsibilities and to offer guidance for carrying them out.

We remember that to those who are bereaved death brings grief, bewilderment, anxiety and perhaps even anger, feelings of guilt and animosities. The first response of Friends in a Meeting must be support and care from those best able to offer it. **Elders and Overseers** should ensure that this is indeed happening. Do remain alert to need, even after some months have passed. The natural feelings of loss, anger, bewilderment and depression can increase as time passes. Bereaved people have to live through their grief, but often find they need to ration the pain they feel each day, the better to weather it. It does not necessarily pass away quickly. Giving reassurance that improvement will occur is not always the most helpful response, but a loving sharing of these mixed feelings will bring healing in time.

(9) Friends may gain greater understanding of the process of grieving by their own reading and seeking advice from those in our Area Meeting who have much experience and/or a professional understanding of supporting the bereaved. The following books are recommended: *Living with Death and Dying*, ISBN 0-285-64957-4, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross; *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, J. William Worden, ISBN 0-415-07179-8; and for young people *When Parents Die*, Rebecca Abrams, ISBN 0-72253131-1

(10) Green burial sites at Buxton, Hope, Glossop and Thornsett run by High Peak Borough Council are among those listed in great detail in the book mentioned under (11)(d) below.

(11) Very helpful information may be got from the following:

(a) Leaflet D 49 *What to do after a death*, obtainable from the Stationery Office or free at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2006/d49_april06.pdf . It is suggested that Meetings keep an up-to-date copy available.

(b) *How to obtain Probate* (form PA2) published by the Lord Chancellor's Department. Free at http://www.netprobate.co.uk/resources/ProbateOffices/pa2_0206.pdf
Probate and Inheritance Tax Helpline on 0845 30 20 900; www.theprobateservice.gov.uk

(c) The Human Tissue Agency website: http://www.hta.gov.uk/about_hta/donating_a_body_to_medical_science/how_to_donate_a_body.cfm

taken first from the hospital or undertaker's chapel of rest to the home, to proceed in procession to the grave or crematorium, or to have cars provided for mourners. The cheapest casket can be ordered. Music and flowers are for personal decision: for example, garden flowers may be appropriate. For more information see 11(d).

(6) Burials can take place in the Quaker Burial Ground at Lower Whitley, near Frandley. The Friends appointed to issue Burial Notes at Frandley and Higher Whitley should be approached. (See under Frandley Meeting in *List of Members and Attenders*.) Within the Area Meeting there is experience of alternative burial sites. Friends recording their wishes for their own funeral are advised to make enquiries if they so wish.

(7) There are many legal and practical tasks, which may include: claiming or changing state pensions, employment pensions, bank accounts, building society accounts, covenants, subscriptions, paying bills etc. and notifying membership organisations, especially if an office is held, and health and welfare agencies etc. These are all jobs which require a great deal of time, a methodical approach, and a familiarity with admin of this kind: a bereaved person may well value help with them. The bereaved may wish to acknowledge letters of condolence but may be defeated if they run into hundreds, unless there is some offer of help at least with addressing envelopes.

(8) Application for Probate is often done through a solicitor but it is worth remembering that, if the Friend's estate is straightforward, a personal application may be made. The staff of the Probate Office are most helpful in assisting such applications. Overseers need to be alert to possible financial difficulties, which can last until after probate is granted.

THE FUNERAL AND THE PRECEDING ARRANGEMENTS

Quaker Faith and Practice section 17.02 reads in part: 'The funerals of Friends should be held in a spirit of quiet peace and trust.' One way in which Friends can ensure this spirit is to see that all the arrangements are made with informed confidence. All those concerned with the conduct of a funeral would benefit from a careful reading of chapter 17 of *Quaker Faith and Practice*. Friends may also find helpful information in the leaflet *Quaker Funerals*, available from Friends House.

(1) Information among Friends

Each Local Meeting has two ***Friends to be Informed of Deaths*** (see *List of Members and Attenders*). It is also helpful if Meetings have a telephone circle, email list, or similar means of conveying information so that the work can be shared: such arrangements may avoid some of the difficulties that can arise when no Sunday meeting falls between the death and the funeral.

It is most important that early and accurate information is given, firstly about the death and secondly about the time and place of the funeral. The following sequence is recommended:

(a) In the Meeting where the death has occurred the ***Friends to be Informed of Deaths*** tell all those especially concerned as soon as possible. All the remaining members of the meeting and anyone known to have been in special contact with the deceased should be told as soon as convenient and in any case when the arrangements for the funeral have been made. There are many informal networks among Friends: do not assume that any particular individual would not wish to be informed. The ***Friends to be Informed of Deaths*** pass on the information of the death to the ***Friends to be***

Informed of Deaths in the other Local Meetings. Similarly, the details of the funeral arrangements, when they are known, will be passed on.

(b) The **Friend to be Informed of Deaths** ensures that the **Clerk to Area Meeting Elders** is informed.

(c) Within each Meeting the **Friends to be Informed of Deaths** make sure that the **Clerk**, and all **Elders and Overseers** have been informed, as well as all those who may have known the deceased or who might be expected to support the funeral by attending,

(d) Sometimes it may be important to inform **other Area Meetings**.

(e) A notice may be sent to *The Friend* and/or to newspapers as appropriate.

(2) Communication with the bereaved

The deceased may have been a member, or an attender, or even someone whose connection with Friends was very tenuous. Such distinctions may influence the nature of our dealings with family members but it has always been the custom that East Cheshire Friends, once we have agreed to accept responsibility for a funeral, commit themselves wholeheartedly to it, whatever may have been the status of the deceased.

Our members and attenders are encouraged to fill in the form *My funeral arrangements*; and Local Meetings are encouraged to see that completed forms are suitably stored, and on hand as soon as the need arises. A completed form may ease or eliminate the serious difficulties that can arise between Friends and family. Copies of the leaflet *Quaker Funerals* might be made available, for those who may be about to attend a

The number of the entry in the Register and the number of the Registering District should be noted in case more copies are needed.

(3) If the death is reported to the Coroner, e.g. because the cause of death is not known or is uncertain, then the Coroner may be requested to issue a Coroner's Interim Certificate of the Fact of Death, which for some purposes can be used instead of a death certificate. Following a postmortem or an inquest the Coroner will notify the cause of death to the Registrar, who will advise the next of kin that this has occurred; and the formal registration of the death, which is still needed, can proceed as above.

(4) Where a Friend has donated parts of their body, e.g. eyes, the appropriate hospital must be informed quickly. If the whole body has been bequeathed for medical teaching purposes, the University Medical School (or if out of hours their appointed undertaker) needs to be notified of the death immediately. In the case of Manchester this is Stephen Lindsay-Smith, 0161 275 5259 (out of hours: Leech's Funeral Service 0161 226 5111). Acceptance of the bequest will depend upon space being available to store the body and whether any illnesses and operations nullify its usefulness. A postmortem examination automatically disqualifies the bequest. If the bequest is accepted the University authorities are responsible for making the necessary arrangements for the funeral. When this occurs, usually two years after the death, there could be a request for assistance with this service.

(5) An undertaker usually needs to be engaged and if asked will give an estimate of costs when s/he knows what is wanted. S/he needs to be told that there is no fee for arranging the Meeting for Worship at a Quaker funeral. Friends may well wish to practise simplicity in the arrangements. It is not necessary for the body to be

(5) The role of Overseers

- (a) There may be heavy administrative duties for the bereaved. Overseers should be ready to give practical or emotional support if needed.
- (b) Overseers need to be aware of the financial difficulties that may follow a death, such as cashflow difficulties before probate is granted.
- (c) Advice on such matters follows in the next section.

PROVIDING SUPPORT: OTHER ASPECTS

If the assistance of professionals, relatives and personal friends is not available to help the bereaved with the practical arrangements surrounding a death, Friends may find the following information helpful:

(1) The Medical Certificate and Notice to the Informant must be obtained from the deceased's doctor. Two signatures are needed for cremation and there are special arrangements needed if the doctor certifying the death was not previously acquainted with the person.

(2) The informant has to take these papers and the deceased's medical card to the Registrar of the Sub-District *in which the death has taken place*. This can present difficulties if the death takes place at a distance from home, but can be done by anyone in that area if they are briefed to answer simple questions such as the birth-registration district of the deceased, birth date, maiden name etc. The Registrar will issue a free Certificate of Registration of Death and a Disposal Certificate, both of which the undertaker will need before the funeral can take place. Further certificates have to be purchased for the purpose of obtaining probate, changing bank accounts, and dealing with other financial affairs.

Quaker funeral for the first time. Local Meetings may decide to keep a stock and perhaps offer some for sending out in advance.

The strong emotions that are liable to beset the bereaved have already been mentioned. Friends appointed to discuss arrangements must be ready, from an early stage, to seek support from others within the Area Meeting in this potentially demanding situation.

(3) The Funeral

Local Elders, in liaison with the Clerk to Area Meeting **Elders**, normally accept primary responsibility for the arrangement and conduct of the funeral. (In the case of a smaller Meeting, Friends other than Elders will perhaps do so.) They will have consulted the family and perhaps others who were close to the deceased and will have sought early decisions between burial and cremation and perhaps on other basic questions. Although there is no legal requirement for a religious ceremony, it is usual for a Meeting for Worship to be held at the crematorium or place of burial, and the **Elders of Area Meeting** are responsible for the conduct of that meeting.

Local Elders will have asked about burial or cremation and perhaps other basic matters. There may be a further Meeting to give thanks for the Grace of God in the life of the deceased and this does not have to be at the same time or in the same place as the cremation or burial. For example, Stockport Meeting House has sometimes been used for this purpose, following funerals held at Stockport Crematorium. In this case the Friends responsible will need to make the arrangements for everything, including the preparation of the room, the Meeting for Worship, refreshments and clearing up: all that local Friends may be expected to do is provide the premises. It must be borne in mind that the Meeting House is currently very well used, so it cannot be assumed that it will be

available at any particular time.

Every member of Area Meeting, and Elders and Overseers in particular, should consider whether they should attend, bearing in mind the comfort that a well-attended funeral may give.

Where a burial takes place, or where ashes are interred, in a Quaker burial ground, an order for burial must be issued by the Friend appointed to do this. (For East Cheshire see under Frandley Meeting in *List of Members and Attenders*.) However the informal scattering of ashes can take place anywhere, with the permission of the landowner.

(4) The responsibilities of Elders

(a) To make sure that one or more Elders have taken charge of the arrangements for the funeral and for any associated Meeting for Worship.

(b) To ensure that all those taking responsibility, whether or not Elders, have considerable experience and understanding of Quaker funerals. The Clerk of Elders is consulted as appropriate. Contact with the undertaker by the responsible Elder before the event can be useful, and is particularly appreciated by undertakers who have not previously encountered a Quaker funeral. It gives a chance to resolve any queries such as whether an organist is needed; the arrangements for playing recorded music; how seats for the Elders who are leading the funeral might be arranged; who will press the button for closing the curtains around the coffin; etc. It is often extremely useful to ask for a *double slot* (i.e. twice the normal funeral length), in order to give space for both programmed and open worship.

(c) To liaise with anyone having a part to play in any practical arrangements that may affect the nature of a Quaker funeral, being ready to give advice to family and friends on such matters. It is important to liaise with the family/friends about what will happen during the funeral. They may have prepared material (such as family reminiscences) which they wish to be included. They may want a hymn. It is important to be flexible but at the same time to ensure there is reasonable time for open worship. It is important that early in the meeting everyone is told of any 'programming' so that everyone knows what is going on. Non-Friends should be encouraged to participate in the open worship.

(d) Either to conduct the Meeting for Worship, opening and closing it in appropriate ways and making sure that all those present understand the purpose and form of worship; or to ensure that these things are carried out by one or more Friends experienced in overseeing such meetings. (It will probably be important to the Friends most closely associated with the deceased – that is, those from the deceased's own Local Meeting – that they see members of their own Meeting taking a leading role in the funeral meeting, whether they hold the post of Elders or not.)

(e) Distress can bring challenging feelings to the surface during the meeting for worship. Elders bear in mind that they have the ultimate responsibility for the right holding of the meeting. They will be ready to support the vocal ministry, and if necessary to guide it.