

## CHILTERN CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MEETING 24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2010

### OPEN REPORT OF THE CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

#### 4. USE OF CHAPELS FOR BURIAL SERVICES

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4.1 During 2009 the Crematorium was approached on two occasions about the possibility of allowing a funeral service to be held in the chapel followed by a burial in a local cemetery.

4.2 There are no legal or practical reasons why this shouldn't happen. In fact, in the last few years funerals have occasionally taken place in the Milton chapel and the coffin, which was too large for the Chiltern cremators, has been taken away afterwards for cremation at another crematorium. (The Milton chapel is the most practical to be used in this way, allowing the coffin to be loaded back into the hearse after the service out of sight of mourners gathering at the entrance for the next service). Also, most local authority crematoria are owned by larger single authorities who also operate cemeteries and commonly use the crematorium chapel for burial services as well.

4.3 However, allowing burial services to take place at Chilterns Crematorium would be a change in policy requiring approval from the Joint Committee before it could be adopted.

4.4 For many centuries in the UK the majority of funeral services were held in Christian churches, cemetery chapels or at the graveside. When cremation was introduced into the UK at the end of the nineteenth century crematoria were built with chapels for the funeral ceremony to be held. Initially most funerals continued to take place in churches, followed by a very short 'committal' service for close family and friends at the crematorium. Gradually, with the decline in Christianity, and to a lesser extent the convenience of only having to travel to one location, this has changed with more and more families choosing to have all of the service or ceremony at the crematorium. With over 70% of deaths each year ending in cremation the majority of funeral services in the UK are currently held in crematorium chapels.

4.5 For those in the local community still choosing burial rather than cremation the options are not so good. The most practical solution of a service in a Christian church comes with the almost universally obligatory Christian service which is at odds with the beliefs of an increasing number of people. A few cemeteries still have operating cemetery chapels, although these are usually small and the facilities relatively basic. Another option is to hire a hall, but most of these do not have the facilities that are needed to satisfactorily host a funeral ceremony.

4.6 The Chilterns Crematorium is fortunate that neither chapel is built in the traditional style of churches as many of the older crematoria are, and so are equally suitable for religious or secular services. The chapels are already well equipped to meet the requirements of the 'modern' funeral service. The Wesley music system in particular enables every and any sort of audio reproduction; not only a vast array of music or people speaking but also all sorts of other sounds like birds singing, waves on the seashore, a Spitfire flying by etc. The latest innovations, a webcam (enabling services to be viewed remotely from the Crematorium as they are taking place) and audio/visual facilities are due to be installed in the next few weeks, bringing the chapels right up to date.

4.7 Being local authority owned the Crematorium is truly a community facility in every sense of the word, fully equipped to host every kind of funeral service as well as carry out the cremations. The opening of the Milton chapel in 2005 was essential to take the pressure off the Hampden chapel and also enable the time for funerals to be extended from thirty to forty five minutes, but it has also provided spare chapel capacity. The proposal is that this facility is now made available for burial as well as cremation services, so opening it up for potential use by all of the local community rather than just those who choose cremation.

4.8 The advantage of this proposal for the Joint Committee is additional income. The main disadvantage is the possibility that the number of burial services being booked could start to restrict availability for cremation services, although the Superintendent considers this highly unlikely. Another possible disadvantage is that some churches might interpret this as a competitive move. For both these reasons the suggested fee of £175.00 is deliberately on the high side, although it is considered that it fairly reflects the quality of the facility at the Crematorium. As a further safeguard, it is recommended that should the Joint Committee agree to this proposal the Superintendent be given the discretion to temporarily suspend bookings for burial services during periods of peak demand for cremation.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1. That the Joint Committee allow the Crematorium chapels to be used for burial services.**
- 2. A fee of £175.00 is charged for burial services.**
- 3. The Superintendent be given discretion to temporarily suspend bookings for burial services during periods of peak demand for cremation.**

*Background Papers:* None