



# Funeral Celebrancy

Creating a Unique Farewell for a Unique Life

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*Losing someone close is a traumatic and stressful time in anyone's life. Each day is an unknown and planning the service can be overwhelming.*

*This guide is based on the hundreds of meetings that I've had with bereaved families and is simply there to help and maybe allow you to think about some parts ahead of our meeting.*

*The questions are designed to be used as a prompt, not a questionnaire. Some questions may not seem relevant, but often are.*

*I conduct services for all ages and the questions reflect that range.*

*When we meet, the whole meeting is framed around these notes and we start with a blank sheet of paper.*

*Throughout the process, I hope that you feel that you have ownership of the service.*

*Our aim throughout will be to create a very special and personal service that honours your loved one and is focused on the celebration of their life.*

*After the meeting, I will:*

*Write the contents for the Order of Service - it's my template for writing the service.*

*Order the music for the service.*

*Write the service and e-mail it to you so that you can make sure that you are happy with it and amend if need be. This can take a few days depending on the time before the service itself. The final physical print is usually done the night before.*

*Ensure that the service is personal and respectful and accurately reflects their character, personality and life.*

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## THE QUESTIONS

The answers to the questions help shape the whole service and bring relevance to each part, but especially the Eulogy, their story.

There are two reasons for the questions that follow - the first is simply to get a reasonable chronological timeline of their life. The second is to use some of the answers to add colour to the whole thing. It's what made them special. Anecdotes will reinforce memories and remind people about their life. Both parts will make their story. Tales of their early life, for example, will help paint a picture in words of who they were and how those days affected their adult life.

Allow about two hours for the meeting - it is a chance for you to get to know me and me to get to know them. It's worthwhile having any certificates handy - long birth certificates, marriage certificates, enlistment papers, discharge papers all provide useful information for the meeting.

How were they known? This is how I will refer to them during the service.

- Their maiden name or other name changes:
- The names of key family members - this should be kept to people who will be mentioned by name (especially if they will be at the service):
- Parents names:
- Siblings (brothers and sisters) names:
- Partners name(s):
- Other family members:
- Children:
- Grandchildren:
- Great Grandchildren:

### **Birth details:**

- Where were they born?
- When were they born?
- What were/are their parents names and what did they do at that time?
- Did they have brothers and/or sisters?
- What were their names in order? What was the difference in ages of their siblings?

### **Life as a child:**

- Can you describe their character and personality as a child?
- Are there traits that are family traits in behaviour or attitude?
- Who did they take after anyone in a particular skill or talent?

- Are there stories of the games and sports that they played with each other, trouble that they got into or things that they enjoyed doing and sharing with their siblings?
- Did they have a particular close/best friend either in childhood or later life? Lists of names are always a sensitive part of a service - better to have no list, than miss out a person.
- Where did they grow up? Where were they brought up? Someone brought up in the country would have a very different background to someone who lived in a big city. If at some point their family moved, say to a New Town like Harlow or Stevenage the contrast in their life might be great. Why did the family move?
- What was their house like? If they lived in a Victorian terraced house in the 1920's and 30's, they probably had gaslight, an outside toilet, a tin bath. Is their childhood home still there?
- Where did they go to play?
- Were they close to extended family members, grandparents, uncles and aunts etc?
- If they were a child during the war, were they evacuated - if so where to? Children were often evacuated more than once and not always kept with their siblings.
- Was it an experience they enjoyed? Did they revisit years later or keep in touch?
- When they were young did the family take holidays. Where to? What type of holidays were they?
- Did they go to Sunday School or belong to any clubs or groups... Cubs, Guides, Army, Air or Navy Cadets or go to swimming, dancing lessons etc?

#### **Life as a teenager:**

- What schools did they go to?
- What did they enjoy about school?
- When did they leave school? (The leaving age was 14 up to 1947, 15 to 1972, 16 afterwards)
- Did they win any awards - sporting trophies, school prizes etc.
- When did they leave school?
- Did they go on to further education?
- What was their favourite music at this time? Favourite films or TV?
- Did they have a big crowd of friends?
- When they were old enough to go away by themselves were there special holidays then?
- What was their favourite subject?
- Did they pick up on the culture of the time - fashions, music, films, TV etc?

- The decade that someone hits their late teens is often very significant and impacts on much of their later life.

### **Homes:**

- **Where** people lived is a wonderful source of memories. What were the houses like?
- What addresses? E.g. 45 Engleheart Road in Catford was always a happy place. Norah simply had an open door policy - everyone was welcome and somehow she always had food to feed them.'
- Who else lived there?
- Were there special neighbours?
- Did they have a 'family forever home'?
- Why did they move to particular areas?
- For some people in their younger days it might be appropriate to discuss their bedroom - perhaps it was covered in pictures from a sport or a pop artist?
- Were there garden/garage features that reflect their hobby? Perhaps there was a very tidy and organised shed, or a chaotic garage - 'John was a just in case man... his garage was full of things that he kept - just in case. To anyone else it was disorganised but he knew where every last thing was!'

### **Working:**

- What was their first job? How did they get it?
- Where did they work and how did they get to work?
- Did they do National Service?
- What jobs did they do?
- Where did they work?
- Are there amusing stories of them in the workplace? Are there work colleagues that might have useful input?
- When did they retire?

### **Holidays:**

- Where did they go with their own family?
- Where did they go in later life? Are there any funny holiday stories or stand out holidays?
- Did they go away with other people - friends, family etc?
- Did they prefer to relax on holiday or were they very active?
- What sort of things did they enjoy doing?

**Love & Marriage:**

- How did they meet their partner?
- How long did they court for? How long were they engaged?
- Are there stories about the proposal, the wedding day or the honeymoon that could be shared?
- Where and when did they get married?
- Was it a big wedding?
- Where did they start married life?
- Where was their first proper home together?

**Family:**

- Did they have children?
- What are their names (in order)?
- When were they born?
- Are there grandchildren, great grandchildren?
- If they didn't have their own children are there any others that played an important part in their lives (nephews, nieces etc)?
- Are there special memories of them as a mum or a dad, an uncle or aunt or as a grandparent?
- Were they a good homemaker?

**Hobbies & Pastimes:**

- What hobbies did they have? (E.g. gardening, knitting, crocheting, DIY, walking, cycling, driving etc?)
- What were they good at?
- Did they keep in touch with family and friends by letter, phone calls or visits?
- Did they belong to any clubs or teams (sport, hobby or social)?
- Did they do puzzles - e.g. jigsaws, Sudoku, crosswords?
- What sports did they enjoy/follow/participate in? E.g. football, cricket, boxing, bowls

**Likes & Dislikes:**

- What types of music, books and movies did they enjoy?
- Did they have favourite TV programmes?
- Did they like animals and have any pets?

- Did they like the outdoors?
- Did they enjoy cooking? Did they have favourite foods or perhaps ones that they didn't like?
- Did they embrace technology - TV remotes/computers/the Internet etc?

### **Character & Personality:**

- Did they have any particular sayings, phrases or stories?
- What do you think they will be most remembered for?
- Is there anything that they would have been particularly proud of?
- Can you come up with say 10 words that describe their character and personality honestly – remember everyone listening to the service knew them, so make it realistic?
- Looking at the words that describe them can you give examples of why those words were chosen?
- Did they have a personal philosophy on life?
- Are there any stories that show their character?

All of these can provide a rich source of memories and anecdotes...

- Someone born during the 1920's is likely to have done some sort of work for the War Effort.
- Anyone born up to about 1940 may have done War service or National Service. Regiments etc as well as postings and jobs are useful. Discharge papers often have a testimonial that we can use in the service. As a member of the Armed Forces, they are entitled to have a Union Jack draping their coffin. Men born before the 1st October 1939 were eligible for National Service.
- During the War, women over the age of 18 had to work for the War Effort in either the ATS, factories or as a Land Girl. Many enlisted.
- Someone born in the 1930's may well have been evacuated during WWII - for many this played a very big part in their lives. There may be other wartime memories - sights and sounds. For some the war had a huge impact on their families, for others very little. They may well have remembered times spent in Anderson shelters or Morrison shelters. Children loved watching the dogfights high above and exploring bomb sites.
- Whichever decade a person experiences their late teen years may influence the clothes they wore, the music they liked, their social life. Their mode of transport will be very much linked to the time. The 1950's were a time when motor bikes with sidecars were popular, as was cycling.
- The period after the War finished was a time of austerity and rationing. Make do and mend was the rule and living during this period often formed people's attitude to money and waste. For many families in East and South London hop-picking was a memorable part of their lives.
- Holidays in the 1950's were generally family orientated, revolving around camping, caravanning and holiday camps. The late 1960's were the beginning of package holidays.

These were important times and often the only break a working parent might have. Often companies had an annual shutdown so work colleagues might meet up at the seaside.

- One of the great attractions of a holiday camp was being waited on. The entertainment of an evening may have been the only time the family went out socially together.
- In many towns the period from 1950-1990 was the time when every large company had a social club with lots of varied entertainment. Life often revolved around them.
- Sometimes you won't have all of the information - if you are the son or daughter of the person who has passed away, you will have missed say 20 years or so of their life - you weren't there. There may be older family members, brothers or sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins or even just lifelong friends who are worth asking. The worst that will happen is that they will say they don't remember - but sometimes the most wonderful information comes back. Not only does it enhance the service, but it makes them feel remembered and included.
- From the early 1950's the music charts are a good source of evocative music and a great way to fix a point in time. When they got married Love Me Do by the Beatles was at Number 1. News events may also be relevant.

This is not an exclusive list - we can add anything that you think is appropriate. Sometimes it is useful to discuss things that wouldn't be appropriate as part of the service - most families have something that falls into this category. Knowing what to avoid or even imply is very useful. For example: dates can be difficult, particularly when a child is born a few months after a wedding! Prison is difficult and will vary from family to family - some like it mentioned in a light hearted way, other really don't want it shared in any way. The service is a positive way to celebrate a life, not to share negative points.

There may be great sadnesses that need to be mentioned - often the loss of people very close.

Many families have estranged members and the immediate thought is not to mention a miscreant brother or a troublesome sister.

Fallings out generally happen later in life. They can be mentioned as part of the beginning of the Eulogy - *John was the oldest of four. By the time he was five he had been joined by George, Paul and Ringo. It's just stating a fact and they need not be mentioned again. Much harder implying he was an only child.*

The more information we have to choose from, the better - we can leave out the less significant bits. The questions will simply be a starting point.

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## THE SERVICE

It's worth remembering that a funeral service is **about** a special person, but is **for** everyone who will be there.

From when we meet or talk, we work together to create the service that **you** want. The meeting is my opportunity to get to know you and your loved one. When I have written the service you will get a word for word draft prior to the service. Accuracy is important, but so is your involvement, your ownership of the whole process.

As a celebrant I am there to do as much or as little as you wish. Occasionally, I act as a 'master of ceremonies' linking contributions from family and friends. More often, I conduct the whole of the service as the 'voice' of the family.

The service is a 'civil service'. This means that we can include whatever the family feel is appropriate and is 'about' your loved one in particular. It is about making it as personal and fitting as we can.

### What is The Committal?

The service is a celebration for the life of the person who has passed away. The Committal is the part of the service where traditionally we say goodbye to them. In my services the emphasis is on **us** making a pledge, a commitment that we won't forget them. It can include a commendation to Almighty God if you wish.

### How long is a service?

The service will be limited in length to the time booked at the crematorium. A service in a 45 minute 'slot' should last no longer than 30 minutes. **Some families book a 'double' slot which allows more to be put into a service.** It also allows time to move large numbers of people - a few hundred mourners take far longer to assemble at the beginning and to leave the chapel at the end.

The length of time in a chapel varies from venue to venue and sometimes the time of day. Slots can be 30 minutes long, some are 40 minutes long. (West Herts and South Essex both run on 40 minute slots). Some have an hour slot - Bentley and Hendon for example. These times will impact on the length of the service. Some venues will charge if a service goes over.

A good way to look at the service is the number of words in it. The total service should be about 2750 - 3000 words - plus three music tracks it will make a service about 30 minutes long. The Eulogy would be about 1500 words. More music means less words.

**Any contributions from others need to be concise - from a practical point of view a total of no more than a 500 words - 4 people 125 words each maximum, 2 people 250 words etc. A service with more than 4000 words will ALMOST CERTAINLY be rushed and go over the allocated time. Some crematoria will charge for extra time.**

Sometimes speakers will say that they are going to talk for a set length of time. Unfortunately, different people have their own version of 3 or 4 minutes! Using a word count is a far more accurate way of gauging how long pieces will take.

If there are other speakers, it is generally better for them to do their contribution early in the service both from an emotional point of view and so that they can take in the rest of the service without worrying about having to stand up to deliver their part.

If they are reading, it is important that I have a copy of their script beforehand. There are several reasons for this, but particularly time and content. In addition, it helps if for some reason they cannot speak their contribution. It really is important for them to rehearse their piece beforehand. The more that they rehearse it the easier it will become.

Are there other people who will be speaking or participating? If possible what will they be doing? If they are using any form of technology are there back-ups? Something as simple as no plug can cause havoc - some chapels were built 50 years ago or more and may not have the facilities.

Are you having a slideshow? If you are making your own, please call before you start. On the day a tribute is far removed from the idea of a business presentation and needs to fit into the service discretely without impacting negatively on the service or mourners.

When things go well they enhance a service beautifully, when they don't ... 30 minutes can soon disappear on 'techy' things.

### **Religious Readings**

A Civil Funeral Service is essentially 'secular' but can include some religious elements such as readings, hymns and prayers. Bible readings can be an important part of a service for some families. This link has some of the more usual ones.

### **Poetry in the service**

Poetry in a service should be chosen carefully to reflect the person who has passed away and how the people at the service are feeling.

It has a purpose beyond sharing the words – focusing everyone's attention on the same thing for a few moments. Some poems are better early, some better in the closing stage of the service.

Are there any particular poems or music that have already been chosen? (Click here for a collection of [POEMS AND READINGS](#))

Many poems can be personalised:

For example 'She is Gone' by David Harkins is a very appropriate poem for the end of a service. The opening words are 'You can shed tears because she is gone...' would become 'You can shed tears because Steve has gone...'. Even better is when a reading is written in 'first person' - 'You can shed tears because I have gone'. It's what they might want to say to you.

The outline of the service may be something like...

#### **Partly Religious**

Entry music  
A welcome and introduction  
Reading  
Tribute  
A Hymn (optional)  
The Eulogy (the story)

Music for reflection  
Quiet reflection  
The Lord's Prayer (optional)  
The Committal (The formal farewell)  
Closing words  
Reading  
Exit music

### **Non Religious - Humanist style**

Entry music

A welcome and introduction

Reading

Tribute

The Eulogy (the story)

Music for reflection

Quiet reflection

For a burial, the structure will be similar - the Committal is taken from the chapel service and conducted at the graveside - it helps to have a reading first.

The Committal (The formal farewell)

Closing words

Reading

Exit music

The order above does work very well and splits the service into sections that help the service to flow. The tribute section allows for people to write/say what the deceased person meant to them - tributes are usually very personal and don't include too much in the way of anecdotes - those can be included in the Eulogy.

The Lord's Prayer is useful in a partly religious service as it embraces people with faith into the service. It is also a communal moment and helps focus people before the Committal. Even without it, we can include a period of silence for those with (any) faith to say their own private prayer.

This version seems the most well known and is the version that I use:

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us;

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,

For ever and ever. Amen

The Catholic version omits "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, For ever and ever"

Anything else, subject to time can be included. This can include readings and poetry delivered by myself or others. Hymns don't have to be a part of the service.

Poetry does play a useful part during a service, particularly when the message is positive and personal and appropriate for the part of the service that it is read. They are also useful where family members want to make a contribution, but are not ready emotionally to write and deliver their own piece.

There are some questions that I will need to ask you that are worth bearing in mind:

- Will family members carry into the chapel?
- Will your guests follow behind or enter first?
- Closing the curtains is a symbolic and painful moment. Would you like the curtains closed during the last piece of music, at the end or not at all? Traditionally

curtains are closed during or at the end of the Committal - remember there is always a choice.

- Some crematoria still have a system where the coffin is physically moved. This tends to be the case with the oldest buildings. If this is the case you may wish for nothing to happen, in which case the coffin will remain on view at the end.
- Are you having a wake/reception and where?
- Are you supporting a charity?
- Is the service to be semi religious? Including the Lords Prayer allows for people who have faith and makes them feel a little more comfortable.

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## MUSIC IN THE SERVICE

Generally, families choose three pieces of music - we can include more, but unless they are short tracks, they will impact on the length of the service. Each track is likely to take up at least 3 minutes.

Choosing music can be hard. It really works so much better if music reflects the tastes of the person who has died.

The music used for the reflection time is very important. Instrumentals work well, as do songs with deep and appropriate meanings. It's there to give space for people to think about the person. A karaoke track at this time isn't always the best choice!

The exit music is equally important and a chance to perhaps choose something to lift the spirits of people there.

Many crematoria use Wesley Music. (In the area that I mostly cover - West Herts, Enfield, Harwood Park, Parndon Wood, Milton Keynes use Wesley. The exception is the Vale Crematorium in Luton which uses a similar system) Wesley Music has hundreds of thousands of tracks and most music can be ordered **if available commercially**. This link will let you search their central database. [Wesley Music](#). Occasionally a venue has a system that only plays CDs - Golders Green and Epping Burial Park, for example.

There are plenty of funeral music guides on-line. This list is a useful starting point, though. The first 10 was a 'Top 10' compiled by the Telegraph.

The next are linked to YouTube and are more unusual choices.

Frank Sinatra - "My Way" - For a woman it might be better to use the version by Shirley Bassey.

Andreas Bocelli and Sarah Brightman - "Time To Say Goodbye"

Bette Midler - "Wind Beneath My Wings"

Eva Cassidy - "Over The Rainbow"

Robbie Williams - "Angels"

Westlife - "You Raise Me Up"

Gerry & The Pacemakers - "You'll Never Walk Alone"

Vera Lynn - "We'll Meet Again"

Celine Dion - "My Heart Will Go On"

Nat King Cole - "Unforgettable"

[Nat King Cole and Natalie Cole - "Unforgettable"](#)

[Louis Armstrong - "What A Wonderful World"](#)

Kenny G and Louis Armstrong - "What A Wonderful World"

Morecambe and Wise - "Bring Me Sunshine"

Kenny Gee - "The Moment"

Acker Bilk - "Stranger on the Shore"

Israel "Iz" Kamakawiwo'Ole - "Somewhere Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World."

Charles Aznavour - "She"

Kirsty MacColl - "Days"

The Beatles - "In My Life"

Katherine Jenkins - "Do Not Stand At My Grave and Weep"

Vicki Brown - "Look For Me In Rainbows"

Jenn Bostic - "Jealous of the Angels"

"Last of the summer wine theme" spoken by Bill Owen

Michael Jackson - "You Are Not Alone"

Ronan Keating - "If Tomorrow Never Comes"

The Hollies - "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother"

Cat Stevens - "Morning Has Broken"

Luther Vandross - "Dance With My Father"

Nana Mouskouri - "The White Rose Of Athens"

Treorchy Male Choir & Sir Harry Secombe singing "Cwm Rhondda"

John Williams - "Cavatina"

Glenn Miller - "Moonlight Serenade"

Westlife - "I'll See You Again"

Labi Siffre - "Something Inside So Strong"

Yiruma - "River Flows In You"

## **TOP 10 HYMNS**

Hymns can be difficult. Many people do not feel up to singing. They won't sing hymns or versions of hymns that they don't know.

Another way of including hymns is to use a popular music version - for example Morning has Broken by Cat Stevens, The Old Rugged Cross by Johnny Cash, Abide With Me by Il Divo or HM Royal Marines Band or Amazing Grace by Elvis Presley. They work well, although can be longer than the traditional versions.

If the service is at a crematorium they have recorded versions with singing and without. If you are creating an Order of Service booklet, please check the verses and words with me before printing! Some hymns have been shortened especially. Some crematoria have a resident organist.

Abide With Me

The Lord Is My Shepherd

All Things Bright and Beautiful

Old Rugged Cross

How Great Thou Art

Amazing Grace

Jerusalem

Morning has Broken

The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended

Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace

## **TOP 10 CLASSICAL MUSIC**

Nimrod from Enigma Variations - Elgar

Canon in D - Pachelbel

Ave Maria - Schubert

Nessun Dorma - Puccini

Pie Jesu from Requiem - Faure

The Four Seasons - Vivaldi

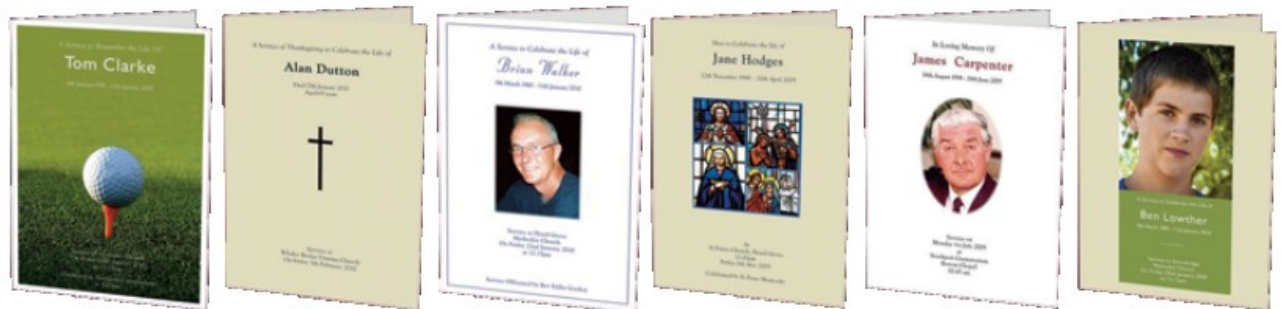
Adagio Albinoni - Bizet

Air on a G String - Bach

Largo from Xerxes - Handel

Clare de Lune - Debussy

## **ORDER OF SERVICE SHEETS AND DONATIONS**



You may be unsure about whether to have Order of Service Sheets. The choice is yours, but it might be useful to understand my workflow.

Most Funeral Directors supply this service - some people make their own - it is a way for younger family members to make their contribution to the day. If you are producing the sheet yourself - **please check the spellings!**

As part of the meeting we will decide on what is happening where in the service. My first job is to type this out and it will become the template for my writing.

This list needs very little tweaking to be used as the basis for the Order of Service Sheet to give to your Funeral Director or printer for printing.

For anyone attending, they act as a guide to the service - a reference point for any pictures, an address for the reception afterwards, a charity and how to donate, a hymnbook, a prayer book, and a keepsake.

Donations are never obligatory - usually a message along the lines 'should you wish to make a donation to a charity in John's memory please make it to Garden House



Hospice'. Collections are done on the day and you may opt for your Funeral Director to handle donations on your behalf. Some charge for the service, some don't.

An alternative is to set up a page using Just Giving - you need someone with a computer to set this up for you.

## **SLIDESHOWS**

I have made these for hundreds of services and receptions. There are examples here...  
[www.funeralslideshows.co.uk](http://www.funeralslideshows.co.uk)

There are a number of ways that these can be used.

### **As a tribute**

Very powerful, very personal and can add enormously to the person's story - the Eulogy. For some families, they have such a wonderful set of pictures that the slideshow becomes the Eulogy.

The most common is a static picture that is shown throughout the service with a slideshow shown during the '*music for reflection*' part of the service. At the end of the slideshow the static slide stays on screen for the rest of the service. At the end of the service you get a presentation DVD which includes electronic versions of all pictures used.

The cost is £149 for the slideshow, £150 for the equipment hire. Other file formats - for iPad, PC and YouTube are supplied free of charge on request. If I am conducting the service for you there is £50 discount on the slideshow.

### **As a 'rolling' tribute'**

For a number of services, I have included a rolling slideshow instead. Usually these are be up to 20 pictures that change every 30 seconds or so and last the duration of the service. They would not include 'funny' pictures, simply because there are parts of the service where it wouldn't be appropriate. If I am conducting the service, there is a charge only for equipment of £125.



## **INTERMENT/SCATTERING OF ASHES**

Many families like a small gathering sometime after the formal service to inter the casket of ashes or to scatter the ashes. I can help create a very special ceremony that allows space and time to lay the ashes to rest and includes specially chosen words against a background of gentle, appropriate and soothing music. This can be arranged privately after the funeral service, or through your funeral director.

Please let me know if you would like me to be present at this very special time.

## **FEEDBACK**

Everything on this website has been designed to help families that I work with. Feedback from you is the most valuable way for me to develop my role. Please feel free to contact me with any suggestions. [steve@funeralcelebrancy.com](mailto:steve@funeralcelebrancy.com)

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