

28 August 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen, Councillors of the Greater Gwent Cremation Joint Committee.

I am writing in follow up to my earlier correspondence dated June 2020, which was to make the strongest possible complaint concerning your policy, introduced in 2001, regarding the interment of human remains at Croesyceiliog, whereby family members were no longer allowed to attend.

1. According to the minutes of the 2001 meeting, the reason given for change of policy was, principally, staffing cost (although land usage has also since been mentioned to me). While such issues are, naturally, due consideration, there are ways in which Gwent Crematorium management can put this right whilst also satisfying their arising pragmatic concerns.
2. There is already a cost involved to the families (£90) for Remains Interment and my suggestion would be reinstate the service and increase the charge accordingly. Families will either pay it or not, but at least they will then have the choice and this is the key: choice.
3. Neighbouring cemeteries in Cardiff and Swansea, offer attended Remains Interments using a time-managed system (as you already have in place with memorial plaques); and as Remains Interments occupy only a small parcel of land, this small plot is sustainable and reusable over time.
4. In my previous correspondence I explained how significant being present at the interment of our father's ashes means to us. Although this is not a normal day-to-day topic of conversation, and usually only broached when faced with the situation, with one notable exception the consensus has been unanimous; one of disbelief and astonishment that the option to attend is denied us.
5. People deal with grief in different ways, but only one person out of the many I have spoken with on the subject, said that the funeral was the time to say goodbye and that the final act of ashes interment held little or no significance (to him). Interestingly, that person was Mr Paul Dundon, Manager of Gwent Crematorium. I was shocked to hear of his opinion, which he iterated was a personal one.
6. The loss of our mother on 23 July 1992 was both sudden and unexpected, and our family was thrown into deep, inconsolable grief; my father was devastated but over time managed to learn to live with losing the love of his life, Mair Morgan from New Tredegar. The funeral was a complete blur to me and to my sister, such was our grief and although there were no instructions as to her wishes, we knew without doubt that she must return to Wales as her final resting place. The attendance of the interment of her ashes at Croesyceiliog was, therefore, to our family, *even more* significant than her actual funeral (which took place at Ayr Crematorium in Scotland). We took great comfort, therefore, from that short final interment of ashes ritual when we returned her remains to her beloved Wales. Please do not underestimate the importance of this ritual, which helped us enormously with closure.
7. In 2001 a policy was introduced whereby families were no longer allowed to attend Remains Interments; a policy which it seems is unusual, and indeed which some current Committee Councillors and Council Officials were unaware of. Almost 20 years have passed since the policy's inception and the world has changed; people are now more involved with decision-making, they have different expectations and participate in making important life choices.
8. Organisations and Authorities are, therefore, expected to facilitate choice and provide options and service. To satisfy such expectations, Gwent Crematorium has commendably produced a comprehensive "Charter for the Bereaved" in accordance with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management. The Charter covers many things and, notably and

nobly, invites suggested improvements. In your own words it states “We exist to provide a service to you.”

9. Also, under the heading “Caring for the Community”, it is stated that “All cremation and burial facilities shall be managed with competence and efficiency, to ensure that the **entire bereavement experience** occurs without error or insensitivity, and meets the religious, secular, ethnic and cultural needs of the bereaved.” Fine words and bold intentions, however, there is a gap and it needs to be closed to prevent other families having to go through the same painful process that we have experienced.
10. It seems appropriate therefore that Gwent Crematorium should review their services for families and either revert to how Remains Interments were previously performed, based on my experience in 1992, or introduce an additional service to your Charter so that families who lay their loved ones’ ashes to rest at Creoisyceiliog are not disadvantaged. It is apparent that a section of ‘the bereaved’ are being discriminated against, ergo: families like mine, who are prohibited from attending the Remains Interment. This, I believe, is partly because of the way the interment is carried out, i.e. a mass burial of several batches of human remains which all go into the same plot together, every second Tuesday, with no family members present. This unceremonious practice, although expedient for the Crematorium, seems both distasteful and disrespectful. It is a means to an end; not necessarily a principled or ethical one.
11. My family and I feel strongly that this practice must be changed at the earliest possible opportunity. In our opinion, and that of many people who I have consulted, it is simply wrong to continue to impose a blanket ban on family inclusion during any form of funereal act, especially based on the expediency of staffing. I would go further, and suggest that the practice is contravening the Human Rights Act of 1998, specifically Article 9, Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion and also Article 14, Prohibition of Discrimination. I would respectfully suggest that these Human Rights should be taken into account.
12. In my correspondence in June, I asked for special permission to be granted in order that my sister and I (plus spouses) could attend the interment of my father’s ashes. That request is now reluctantly withdrawn as we feel that in order to fully satisfy my late father’s wishes, we cannot delay the interment due to time sensitivity, and intend to have the ashes interred on Tuesday 22 September. We have grudgingly resigned ourselves to accepting the process as is, although we are far from happy about it.

Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Stenner and those Officials responsible for tabling this matter, and would ask that all concerned carefully consider and fully understand the ramifications of the current policy, with its denial of access and attendance.

In my family’s case, the shock and disbelief that we could not attend has been a very painful addition to our grief. Please find a way to amend your policy. We feel very strongly that we have been denied a Rite of Passage.

Yours sincerely,

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