

THE ART & SCIENCE OF EMBALMING

Information provided by The British Institute of Embalmers in association with your Funeral Director, allowing you to make an informed choice about care for the person who has died.



Who are the British Institute of Embalmers (BIE)?

Founded in 1927, we are a membership organisation with a robust training and examination system. This means that all our members are trained to a high standard. As an Institute, we provide many opportunities for our members to gain further education and knowledge with the aim to continually improve the art and science of embalming.

Our members abide by a strict Code of Ethics which are: -

- 1) **I believe that the practice of Embalming is in the interest of Public Health and promise to promote embalming to the best of my ability.**
- 2) **I will treat with respect each dead human body.**
- 3) **I pledge a complete confidential relationship to those I am called upon to serve.**
- 4) **I will endeavour to promote scientific research in the problems affecting Embalming.**
- 5) **I undertake to abide by the regulations of the BIE and to support, to the best of my ability, any meeting or gathering arranged by them.**

We recommend that you seek the services of a qualified embalmer who is a member of the BIE.

How do I know an embalmer is qualified?

All qualified members of the BIE will have the letters MBIE or FBIE after their name. They will have a membership number and their membership can be checked with the International Office of the BIE.

What is embalming?

Embalming has a long-standing association with funeral service and has evolved over many years to become the modern, highly specialised service available today. Though optional, embalming is a recommended service which provides a bespoke level of care for the deceased.

Why should I have the deceased embalmed?

After a person dies the natural process of decomposition begins. This process, which is influenced by many factors, will continue even when the deceased is refrigerated. Decomposition is associated with many undesirable characteristics such as physical changes and unpleasant odours. Embalming helps to prevent these changes, as it temporarily preserves the deceased until their funeral has taken place.

After death, it is common for the deceased to look different. This could be due to illness, medical intervention, dehydration, and processes linked to decomposition. Embalming can help restore the deceased to their former appearance, which is why a recent photograph is always helpful.

Many people will need to interact with the deceased, from funeral staff to family, friends and/or visitors who pay their respects. Embalming will ensure these experiences are as comfortable as possible and that the dignity of the deceased, and the well-being of all others are protected.

Embalming has several advantages: -

Protection

Pathogens (typically bacteria and viruses) can cause disease and often contribute to a death. Embalming can render these agents inactive and this provides a safe and comfortable environment when visiting the deceased.

Appearance

Modern embalming solutions are designed to restore a more 'life-like' appearance. This is achieved by imparting natural colouration and by rehydrating and restoring body tissues. The process obscures evidence of previous illness and is sometimes complemented with the use of specialist and subtle cosmetics to achieve the 'art' within modern embalming.

Preservation

Typically, the time between death and the funeral is more than 2 weeks. To ensure a comfortable environment for family and friends who are attending the service and those who may wish to carry the coffin, embalming is recommended.

What does embalming involve?

The embalming process can take between 1.5 – 3 hours but some specialist work may take longer. This should take place in a dedicated embalming theatre.

The deceased's needs will be assessed, and the embalmer will prepare a suitable embalming solution. Modern embalming techniques use the body's circulatory system to deliver this solution to the tissues of the body.

In most situations the process is achieved by making small, discreet incision(s) to give access to the most appropriate blood vessel(s) and organs.

When an autopsy has taken place, the embalming process is achieved using the pre-existing incisions but the principle behind the embalming remains unchanged.

The embalmer will endeavour to closely follow your instructions regarding hair style, facial hair instructions, cosmetics, and dressing. Please share as much information as possible including recent photographs.

Is embalming a requirement?

Embalming is a personal choice, though not legally required, we strongly advocate for the service. There are very few circumstances where embalming cannot take place. In these situations, this will be discussed with you and your expectations will be managed accordingly.

F.A.Q.

Will the embalming process change how the deceased looks?

Any changes in appearance should be beneficial and intended to improve your experience. Feedback received previously has been overwhelmingly positive.

Will embalming delay the funeral or visits to the chapel of rest?

No, in most circumstances. The completion of legal documentation is required before the deceased can be prepared for visiting. This is needed whether they are to be embalmed or not. Any difficulties will be communicated to you by your Funeral Director.

I have had a bad experience previously, is this likely to be repeated?

Embalming techniques, very much like medical procedures, are constantly evolving and the processes and techniques used even a few years ago have changed and improved in this time. If you have any concerns, you can talk to your funeral director or the embalmer so they can put your mind at rest and answer any questions you have.

Is embalming bad for the environment?

No. Formaldehyde, the common preservative within the embalming solution is naturally occurring in the environment. The concentrations used within the embalming process are minimal and will not be sufficient to damage the environment (even if the service is a burial).

I don't want to see the deceased so why have them embalmed?

It affords the opportunity to comfortably accommodate visits should you or anyone else change their mind. However, the benefits of embalming extend beyond the deceased's appearance. Embalming prevents and treats the changes and odours associated with decomposition. It also restores the dignity and maintains the integrity of the deceased and ensures the well-being of all concerned.

Does the type of funeral affect whether I can choose embalming?

No. Embalming is permitted for burial, cremation and resomation. In the circumstance of woodland/natural/green burial, the embalming solution ingredients can be adapted if requested by the burial authority.

If you require further information, please contact:

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