

Burial at Sea . . .

By Nick Britten
Wordsmith Communication

Burial at sea is a practice that has been carried out for centuries. Although traditionally the preserve of the Royal Navy, for sailors lost in battle or during long voyages, you don't have to have any seafaring connection to be buried at sea; anyone can choose this option for their funeral as long as certain stipulations are met.

There are currently three available locations in the UK where burial at sea is permitted. These are off The Needles, close to the Isle of Wight; between Hastings and Newhaven in Sussex; and off Tynemouth, in North Tyneside.

Burial at sea remains a rare method of disposal. According to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), only five applications were received in 2016, yet it is one that retains a certain mystique.

Before someone is buried at sea, the funeral director must apply for a licence costing £175 and which the MMO can only grant on receipt of a death certificate, a certificate of Freedom from Fever and Infection (FFI) and a notice of intention to remove a body out of England (OOE).



Jackie Lynn Rose

Recently, AW Lymn, a family firm of funeral directors based in Nottingham, carried out a burial at sea at the request of a foreign national. Director Jackie Lynn Rose said that, like many funerals, the family had some specific requests. She added that there were significant hurdles they had to overcome in order to carry out the ceremony.

Jackie said: "The gentleman's country of residence did not permit burial at sea, so they came to us.

"The first dilemma was that the body had to be shipped to us and, to comply with EU and International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations, that meant it would have to be embalmed, which would have then precluded burial at sea. The body had not already been embalmed so the gentleman's family decided to fly him to us, privately, in their own jet.

"Time was of the essence, but I was kindly informed of his size, by his family, so that I could order a casket to the appropriate specification. I also requested an electronic version of both the Death Certificate (which I translated) and the Free From Infection Certificate (FFI), which was in English. I forwarded both to HM Customs with the OOE application. I very quickly received the OOE acknowledgement."

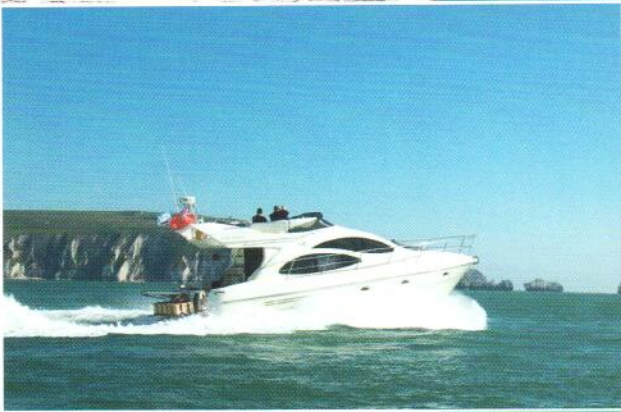
She added that JC Atkinson, AW Lymn's regular coffin supplier, constructed the casket appropriately and weighted it to 200 kilos, which included encasing it in a rigid steel structure as one of the requirements for burial at sea is to have a coffin that will take the body to the seabed quickly.

Representatives from AW Lymn met the handling company at East Midlands Airport on 8 May 2017 to transfer the body to Nottinghamshire.

Jackie said: "The handling company was extremely efficient to the extent that our ambulance was permitted, under escort, to drive airside and await arrival of the jet which taxied to us for a swift, discreet transfer of the gentleman's remains.

"Erring on the side of caution, I had applied to the MMO for the licence to run from 12 May for three months in the event that weather may have been against us.

"However, the deceased gentleman's family was very keen that the burial at sea should take place on Saturday, 13 May, and I was keen to comply with that wish. I had already discussed our requirement with the skipper of a boat from burials@sea.co.uk, which is a vessel equipped to carry and suitably eject the casket. I tentatively arranged for the burial



ceremony to take place at high tide which was at 15:00. The skipper organised the embarkation point and liaised with the Harbourmaster."

The point of embarkation of the boat was Lymington, in Hampshire and nine family members were scheduled to attend.

On the day of the ceremony, AW Lymn staff travelled to Hampshire in a closed hearse with the sealed, laden casket and three floral tributes in biodegradable basket bases. The casket was transferred manually from ambulance to wheel bier and then to the boat.

It was then secured to a platform at the back, draped with the national flag of the deceased person with a floral tribute on the top.

Jackie said: "Throughout the time that the casket was on board, the Licence for Burial at Sea had to remain on the boat. The Harbourmaster has the right to inspect the casket and the Licence but, whilst he was there as the family embarked, he did not intervene.

"The private jets, with the family onboard, landed to schedule at Bournemouth Airport but, due to extremely heavy traffic, the journey to Lymington took longer than the expected 30 minutes, thus delaying proceedings.

"Furthermore there were 12 family members present, more than the original nine scheduled, which exceeded the maximum weight load for the main boat. Fortunately we had also hired a rigid inflatable boat (RIB) for us so three of the younger family members - three generations were represented -



Coffin requirements for burial at sea

There are strict regulations for coffins that can be buried at sea. The Marine Management Organisation dictates that the coffin used must be made of solid softwood and must not contain any plastic, lead, copper or zinc. It must have:

- between 40 and 50 50mm (two-inch) holes drilled throughout;
- corners that are butt-jointed and strengthened with mild steel right angle brackets, screwed internally, or substantial wooden bracing struts measuring 50 x 38mm;
- circa 200kg of iron, steel or concrete clamped to the base of the coffin with brackets of 10mm made of mild steel bar, or blocks of weak concrete mix;
- weight distributed evenly to prevent the coffin from turning to the vertical;
- two, long, mild steel bands running from the top to the bottom of the coffin; and
- several mild steel bands across the coffin, at about 30cm intervals along its length.

The coffin and any inner box or lining must be made from natural, non-toxic and biodegradable materials. They must both be able to withstand any impact and be able to carry the body quickly to the seabed.

travelled with us behind the main boat. Sailing time to The Needles was about 35 minutes and the sea was quite rough with a 1.5 metre swell."

Jackie said that, on arrival, at the burial site the family members in the RIB transferred "with some difficulty" to the main boat.

She said: "A service was held inside the main cabin and included music and religious content. All present went on to the rear deck for the committal, the words for which I had translated to their own language. The skipper released the casket and it slipped gracefully into the sea, quickly submerging and leaving the floral tribute floating serenely on the surface. After a few moments of silence both boats returned to Lymington."

On return to Nottingham, she emailed the MMO the exact latitude, longitude and time of committal.

While burial at sea is unusual it is, according to AW Lymn, growing in popularity - especially for those seeking a more environmentally-friendly funeral.