

New ways to say goodbye

How do you pay tribute to a much-loved pet who has just died? **Rachael Buzzel** reveals how some owners are choosing to say goodbye.



Owners want more personal after-death care for their beloved pets.

We all want the best for our furry friends, and for many owners that love and care doesn't stop when their animals' lives come to an end.

The idea of pet funerals is becoming more popular with many owners and there are now companies across the country offering specialist services so that owners can demonstrate their devotion to their pets.

There are two main options open to pet owners once a pet has died: they can leave their pet with their vet to make arrangements for disposal, or they can make their own arrangements.

Choosing an independent company to look after their pet means there is a much wider range of services available, and owners can make the final goodbye more personal. "Over the years we have definitely seen a trend for more personal services," explained Kevin Spurgeon, partner of Dignity Pet Crematorium in Winchfield, Hampshire, and member of the Association of Private Pet

Cemeteries and Crematoria (APPCC).

"In recent times, at Dignity, we have had owners who wanted to take how they said goodbye to their pets a step further. Owners are requesting more personal services closer to the human equivalent; they want the absolute best for their pets.

"We had a Hindu family whose pet laid in state with us, in a bed with a blanket over it. The family wished to attend the cremation and conduct a Hindu-type service, including religious music.

"One family asked for their pet to be laid in a coffin while they spent time in our farewell room saying their goodbyes. We've also had people request that we read a poem for their pet, and we've even had families who have prepared readings and music prior to their pet's cremation."

Kevin explained that this growing trend for more personal services was largely

due to owners wishing to take control.

"Being flexible and allowing these types of services means that pet owners can tailor the services to suit themselves, allowing them to express their feelings and add that personal touch," he said.

It also seems owners are 'going green' when it comes to those final arrangements; traditional wooden coffins are being replaced by more eco-friendly seagrass ones, and the once popular metal urn is being overtaken by the simple, eco-friendly scatter pouch. "I believe pet owners are following the

human trend for woodland burials," explained Kevin.

"Our natural woodland area is becoming increasingly popular as owners don't have to have a memorial, but can instead choose to plant indigenous flowers such as bluebells, snowdrops, daffodils, or ferns

that will bloom each year, marking the final resting place naturally. We are also looking

"Pet owners can tailor the services to suit themselves"



Seagrass coffins and scatter pouches are increasing in popularity.

Photo: Dignity Pet Crematorium

into developing a bird box memorial so owners can remember their pet and give a bird a home at the same time."

Kevin believes that owners need to be made more aware of what options are available to them for after their pets have died. "It's important that pet owners know that there are many more options available for their pets than they may be aware of," he said. "A lot of pet owners are restrained by their vets, and many just go along with what their vets offer, but they need to know that they can go elsewhere."

"There are two types of after-death care: firstly, the service most vets offer, which is often a once-a-week collection from a larger company, where the pet isn't cremated until some weeks after its death; secondly, the other, smaller companies like ours that collect your pet from your vet or home, and can provide an immediate cremation service, meaning you will receive your pet's ashes back within 24 hours. These two services are poles apart."

"However, whatever service or memorial an owner chooses, it all boils down to the same thing: respect, care, and empathy, which is what we and other members of the APPCC put great emphasis on."

"It's important for owners to have the opportunity to express their love for their pets in whatever way they choose. This allows them to cope better with their grief and say 'thank you' to their pets for the good times."

The Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria

The APPCC is currently the only organisation in the UK that has set standards for the burial and cremation of pets. Association members must follow a strict code of practice to ensure high, professional standards, and so when that sad time comes choosing a member of the organisation can offer peace of mind. For more information on the APPCC call 01252 844478 or visit www.appcc.org.uk

Together forever

An increasing number of people are now choosing to be buried alongside their pets, much like the ancient Egyptians used to do.

Penwith Crematorium and Cemetery in Penzance, Cornwall, was established in 1988 for dogs, cats, and small animals. In 2000 it opened a woodland burial ground for people

and is one of the few licensed establishments that allows owners to be buried with their pets.

Penny Lally, who runs the crematorium, said: "The idea of our woodland burial ground for both people and pets came from the pet owners themselves."

"Many owners who were visiting their pets commented on how lovely the gardens were. The gardens are a

beautiful, natural area as we plant trees to mark graves rather than using headstones.

"Owners don't want to be separated from their pets, even in death. We have buried 30 owners alongside their animals, and interest is growing, with many plots reserved. I have even reserved a plot for myself between my husband, horse, dog, cat, and canary, who are already buried there."



Bluebells will bloom every year in your dog's memory.

Some more unusual requests

For some owners a burial or cremation isn't enough. Here are some more unusual requests:

- Taxidermy — stuffing and mounting your pet for display.
- Mummification.
- Cloning.
- Freeze-drying — another form of taxidermy in which all moisture is removed from the body, eliminating the decaying process and leaving tissues unaltered, ready for display.
- Skeleton articulation — bones are cleaned and presented as a complete skeleton for display.

Useful contacts

- Dignity Pet Crematorium; for more information call 01252 844572 or visit www.dignitypetcrem.co.uk
- Penwith Pet Crematorium Pet Cemetery and Memorial Gardens; for more information call 01736 731310 or visit www.petsandpeople.togetherforever.co.uk