

When it comes to your cat's cremation, a little research is vital to ensure your pet gets the send off you want says Kevin Spurgeon of Dignity



Care needed when it comes to cremation

In February this year I sat in a Crown Court alongside victims of the woman who ran an illegal pet crematorium undetected for several years. She wept as she was sentenced to 8 months in prison for coldly dumping pets in ditches and defrauding owners who had trusted their vet to organise a dignified send off for their much-loved family pets.

Several months have passed since then. The woman served just seven weeks of her eight month sentence and in August owners were disgusted to hear that she was ordered to pay back just £3100 of the fraudulent earnings, esti-

mated to total almost £90,000.

The vet who sold the woman's illegal services to their customers accepted a formal caution from the Environment Agency. Owners that have asked for a refund of the fees paid to their vet for a legal pet cremation service may even have to take their case to the small claims court in order to recover their money.

This case has highlighted that owners need to do their own research well in advance of their pet's death if they want to be sure of getting the service they want.

At present the standard of services on offer at different pet crematoria vary enormously. We're certainly not all bad; there are some very caring and professional services out there, but few veterinary practices offer a choice of different companies and prefer to contract to one service for all their waste disposal and



cremation needs.

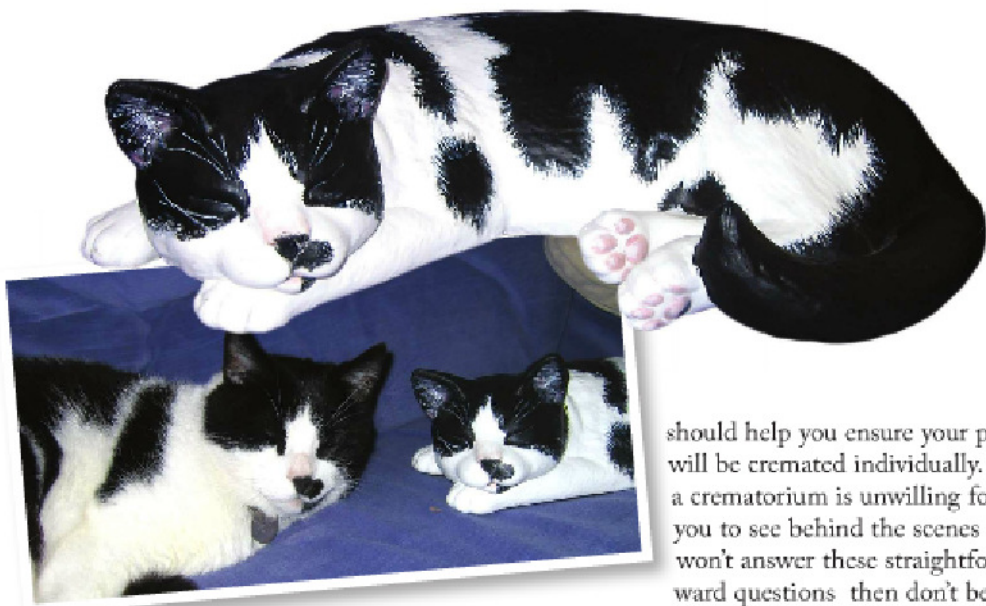
Veterinary surgeries have little understanding of the process of cremation and therefore often assume that all pet cremation services are the same. Quite definitely they are not! Very often a major factor in the surgeries' decision will be the disposal of their veterinary waste which, to provide a cheap service, will often be piled into a van with all the bodies. The best, or most convenient service for the veterinary surgery, does not necessarily mean the best service for the pet owner.

Whilst many pet crematoria describe their services as giving pets "respect" and "dignity", the sad truth is there is often no special handling and the ashes of pets cremated together end up in landfill sites instead of remembrance gardens. The



TOP: Gardens of Remembrance at Dignity Pet Crematorium in Hampshire.

LEFT: Dealing with the pet crematorium directly often means you get more choices for your pet's ashes like this hand painted ceramic cat casket from Dignity Pet Crematorium.



should help you ensure your pet will be cremated individually. If a crematorium is unwilling for you to see behind the scenes or won't answer these straightforward questions then don't be

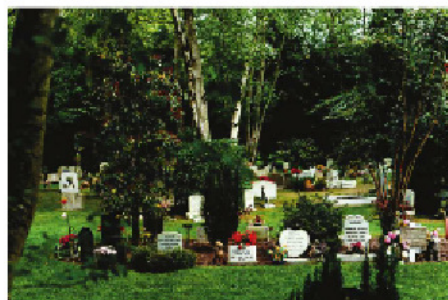
afraid to find somewhere that will!

Another potential danger is basing your decision on an appealing name as any site with machinery that meets the set criteria of the Animal By-products Regulations can start a pet crematorium. They may call themselves a sympathetic and attractive name but if you don't inspect them for yourself can you really be sure that they will meet your expectations?

Ultimately, however upsetting, it is far better for you to be in control of the after-death care your pet receives than trust someone else who may not share the same priorities as you when deciding which service to use.

By doing the groundwork in advance you can ensure your pet receives the send off they deserve when the time comes.

BELOW: Pet Crematorium & Cemetery for domestic pets at Chestnut Lodge in East Grinstead.



question for pet owners is whether they would rather have these services glossed up or be given an honest description of what they are paying for. Many people do not want to know what happens and like to think the best, but that only perpetuates the problem. Trading Standard Regulations make it clear that services have to be accurately described but how often does this happen for pet cremation?

By doing their own research and going direct to the crematorium, owners can eliminate any hidden extra costs from third parties and often receive a far more personal and caring service.

All shapes & sizes

Owners that visit their chosen pet crematorium can also inspect the facilities for themselves – this is especially important as there is no standard design for a pet cremator. To explain it in simple terms, whatever the size or shape of the machine there needs to be a chamber where only one pet is placed at a time. Some machines have multiple chambers but each chamber should be divided by walls that are at least two to three times the height of any pet that may be placed in there to ensure all their ashes are contained. Each time a cremation takes place the operator should ensure no remains are left on the hearth. It is an easy process to clean even a relatively hot chamber and all visible remains should be removed after each cremation.

After cremation the remains have to be passed through another machine to prepare them into a fine ash. This machine must also be carefully cleaned each time. Paperwork should accompany your pet at all times.

Asking the right questions and ensuring these simple guidelines are followed

Memorial jewellery

LASTING MEMORIALS using hair as the centrepiece of an item of jewellery are the ideal way to create a very personal keepsake for your pet.

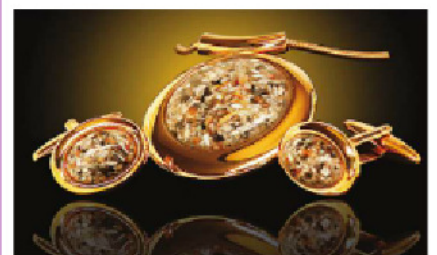
Sentimental Connections has perfected a unique, patented method of fixing the hair in clear hard polymer.

This non-destructive process maintains the hair in all its living colour and texture and makes the perfect centrepiece for a pendant, brooch, ring, earrings or cufflinks – in a gold or silver setting.

It can just as easily be a loving memento of a living pet as well as one that is sadly no longer with us. Sentimental Connections can also create memorial jewellery from cremated ashes in the same way. Memorial jewellery made from hair or cremated ashes can be worn daily as a tangible reminder of your pet.

Managing Director, Nick Cranham said: "Hair memorials are a well-loved and traditional way of creating a tribute to a favourite pet or person. Now we have brought the idea right up to date with a new way to create a timeless memento. The hair is preserved perfectly, as an everlastingly reminder of those fabulous times you shared with your pet.

"Our memorial jewellery is lovingly and individually crafted at a very affordable price and includes a lovely presentation box for safekeeping."



Useful contacts

- Members of the APPCC (Association of Private Pet Cemeteries & Crematoria) adhere to a code of practice that clearly defines the different after death care options on offer to promote good practice within the industry and protect pet owners. Visit www.appcc.org.uk or call their Nationwide Helpline on 01252 844572 for further help and advice or to find your nearest member.
- Kevin Spurgeon is a Director of the APPCC and one of the family partners at multi award winning Dignity Pet Crematorium in Hampshire. www.dignitypetcrem.co.uk