

# Arranging a burial in Gozo

Il-Hadd, 17 ta' Jannar 2016

*"This article is written using information kindly made available by an British acquaintance who, back in July 2015 had to go through all the processes and procedures listed, following a sudden death in the family. Thanks and appreciation go to this person who took the time and trouble, for the benefit of others, to document all that needs to be done at a very stressful time in their lives."*

In Gozo all the offices which need to be visited are quite close together - a plus point.

Have a Maltese will to cover all assets, i.e. property, possessions, money held on Maltese Islands. Assets held in UK should be covered by a UK will. Be aware that from 17th August 2015 EU Cross Border Inheritance rules are now in force and you may wish to discuss the implications with your notary. Joint bank accounts held in Malta are frozen, they are NOT dealt with as in the UK (where the name is changed when relevant documents are presented to the bank.) It is a good idea therefore to have separate accounts.

Funerals can take place very quickly here; but try not to be rushed, especially if you are expecting people to travel from abroad.

Firstly you need the 'Certificate of Death and Cause Thereof' signed by a doctor. Be sure to keep copies.

Engage the services of an undertaker. A neighbour or friend can probably advise if you haven't already got one in mind. Discuss at length what your requirements are - an attachment to a Will can be made so a persons wishes can be followed easily - again, speak with your Notary.

Be aware that private burial plots are in very short supply and extremely expensive. However a Government plot can be very easily arranged. The undertaker can also arrange the services of a priest and any floral tributes. A Government plot is free of charge and is 'yours' for two years; very likely longer. If the plot is needed again the bones are removed from the coffin, placed in a small box and returned to the plot with the stone plaque in place. Many Government graves haven't been touched for years, and an extension to the cemetery is being built.

You can arrange to have a stone plaque made for the plot; these are quite small, usually white marble or black granite, and are free-standing. You will need to decide on the wording, and local custom is to add a small photograph, but this is entirely up to you. Such plaques can take around 4-6 weeks to be prepared; it is placed on the plot by you and is not allowed to be fixed in any way.

Discuss how many cars are required, if indeed any. It is normal to meet at the mortuary then follow the hearse to the cemetery. Or, you can meet up at the cemetery if there are no cars.

The undertaker will go through the legal requirements and paperwork which needs to be done. All the relevant offices are in Victoria (Rabat). First call is the Police Station. Here you will need the 'Certificate of Death' and the deceased's ID or residence card (keep a copy). They will enter all the details in their register, keep the ID card and issue you with the 'Burial Permit'. Then you go to the registration office in the Ministry who record all the details (you get no receipt) and tell you that the official 'Death Certificate' will be ready in about four to five weeks at the Public Records Office (which is where the Arms Office used to be before they moved round the corner). This is the only

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bit that takes time as without the official certificate you can't do anything else, neither can your Notary.

Once at the cemetery on the day of the funeral, you will follow the undertaker, coffin and pallbearers to the plot. The cemetery caretaker will have already lifted the concrete slabs off of the plot, the coffin is slid into what is effectively a concrete box and the slabs are then replaced and sealed with cement. It would be more correct, therefore, to call it an interment rather than a burial. All the plots are numbered. The undertaker will need to be paid, plus a little extra for their help if appropriate.

After the four weeks go to the Public Records Office and collect the Official Death Certificate. It is suggested you get at least four copies (you can go back for more if you need them) and take photocopies. The cost is €2.60 each. Your Notary will need one, which he/she can certify themselves but, several other people you may be dealing with directly may want one.

## **Some other agencies you may have to notify:**

**Pharmacy of your choice (POYC)** – Take a short letter and a copy of the official certificate to the POYC office at the hospital. There is usually no need to inform anyone else in the health service as the information should filter through their system - though check if you are uncertain.

**Driving Licence** – Return the licence with a short note to the office in the ministry.

**Passport** – Return to the UK Passport Office with a simple form which you can download from their website that explains all:

## **What to do with a passport when the passport holder has died.**

Once the Official Death Certificate is obtained, your Notary will prepare the submission to the court for them to issue a decree declaring the heirs. The Notary then places notices in the papers that any claimant on the estate has 30 days to respond. Once that period is over the court then issues the Decree Final. At this point proceeds can be distributed - your Notary will advise how this will be done.

In all, the system here in Gozo was thought to be much quicker and more simple than in the UK.

On behalf of ESCC Gozo

17th January 2016