

Didcot Railway Centre
Home of the Great Western Society
Management of Requests to Scatter Ashes and/or Install Memorial Plates at Didcot
Railway Centre

The context

Our Vision is to recreate the golden age of the Great Western Railway.

Our Mission is:

- To be a nationally accredited independent organisation
- To maintain Didcot Railway Centre as a working museum dedicated to the Great Western Railway
- To provide suitable facilities to demonstrate restoration and maintenance of the Collection
- To be open to the public for the enjoyment, benefit and education of the community.

Our challenge is to become a more commercially orientated organisation in order to achieve the Vision.

Introduction

An increasing number of requests are received from members and others to place ashes of deceased relatives/friends at Didcot Railway Centre and/or to provide memorial plaques. Each of these requests needs to be treated sensitively. However, it is important that this sensitivity also extends to our own visitors/volunteers/staff – and the site.

In the past, urns have been interred on site, normally around the Didcot Halt nameboard opposite the Halt platform. However, this has the potential to cause problems – not least if civil engineering work means that the site has to be disturbed.

Managing the initial contact

Requests may be made via a number of means. All requests should be directed in the first instance to the person nominated by the Board (currently the Deputy Chairman). This should ensure that a consistent approach is taken.

However, we should also be aware that it is possible a visitor could arrive on site and scatter ashes without any notification.

What we cannot offer

Burials of any type, funeral pyres.

What we can offer

Scattering of ashes at identified locations (no charge):

1. Currently, by default, this is from a platform edge onto the tracks (excluding the Transfer Shed).
2. For those closely linked to the Society, the option of scattering ashes around the “Radley Junction for Abingdon” nameboard opposite Didcot Halt platform remains.

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3. When specifically requested, ashes may be placed in the firebox of a locomotive in steam (minus any plastic urn).

Any operational issues and personal sensitivities of the operating staff should be considered prior to the event. Health and safety guidance has been provided by South Oxfordshire District Council Environmental Health. The only issues relating to the ash are from inhalation or eye contact, as for other fine particulates. However, the material is considered benign. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that the ashes do not become airborne.

Ideally, the process should be carried out at the start or the end of operations on operating days. It is very unlikely that the scattering will be permitted on major operating days, particularly Thomas events.

For those who wish to have a more formal ceremony, a Pastor can be provided (currently Fran Childs). Any expenses need to be met by the requester. If the requester intends to provide their own religious ceremony, full details must be provided.

Records

A record should be retained of the name of the deceased and the date and location of the scattering. Ideally, a one page (A4) summary of the person should be requested.

Memorial Plates

A free-standing Memorial Board is located in the fenced garden by Welford Park ticket office. To ensure dignity and respect, and to acknowledge the many examples where someone's contribution may have been significant but relatively unknown, a standard design for individual plates, that simply records the person's full name, has been adopted. This design will also maximise the use of the board and the quality of the plate's presentation whilst keeping its overall dimensions to an accessible size. Additional inscriptions will not be permitted. A supporting register containing more details of the individual will be kept and can be viewed at reasonable notice. For consistency, plates will be sourced centrally and affixed by persons appointed for this purpose. New plates will be unveiled in a ceremony usual in November each year.

Decision Panel

A Panel appointed by the Great Western Society Board will welcome and consider applications for plates on an approved application form. Applications for groups, to the same format, will also be considered. If you cannot secure the six GWS member signatures required, the Panel will still consider an application. All applications will be decided by the Panel. The Panel will meet bi-annually in April and October, if there are applications for consideration.

Seats

Seats with memorial plates will not normally be permitted. In exceptional circumstances, such as to recognise a long-term volunteer, an application may be made to the Board.