

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

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 within the Transfer Shed).
2. For those directly involved with the Society and when specifically requested, ashes may be placed in the firebox of a locomotive in steam (minus any plastic urn). The requester should be advised of the likelihood that ashes placed in a firebox may go straight up the chimney and “rain down” on those in the vicinity.
3. Floral tributes and other items must not be left on site.

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 Santa 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, preferably with a suitable photograph. A copy of the Certificate of Cremation is also required by law.

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Memorial Board

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.

Memorial Board Decision Panel

A Panel appointed by the Great Western Society Board will welcome and consider applications for plates on an approved application form. 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. Applications for plates recognising individuals who have not been directly involved with the Society are unlikely to be successful for inclusion on the Board. For example, financial support alone is not sufficient.

Seats

Historic 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. However, donors may provide financial support for modern style seats or picnic benches with an appropriate dedication on the understanding that the items will be disposed of at the end of their serviceable life.

Recognising Financial and Other Support

A dedicated area will be developed to provide a location or locations for the display of plates to an unspecified design to recognise individuals, living or not, or organisations who have made financial or other contributions to the Society, but do not meet the criteria for a Memorial Board plate. A charge may be made for the display of these plates. Applications should be made to the Chief Executive.