Carrying a coffin

Carrying a coffin (or acting as a pallbearer) is a highly respected role. It typically requires 4 to 6 people. You can carry it by the handles (if rated for weight) or on your shoulders. A funeral director will always be present to brief you, support the weight, and guide your pace.

The Step-by-Step Process

Following professional funeral guidance, the process generally unfolds as follows:

Arranging and Lifting

Bearers are lined up by height, with shorter individuals generally placed near the front. When the coffin is drawn from the hearse, you will take the weight by placing your hands flat underneath the coffin rather than using the decorative handles - these tend to not be weight-bearing unless it's willow

Shouldering

On the funeral director's cue (e.g., "Ready lift"), you will lift the coffin onto your shoulders. The heavier, 'head' end usually goes to the stronger or taller bearers. Alternatively, you can carry the coffin in-hand if the handles are weight bearing. This can be advisable, for safety reasons, if walking on uneven ground.

Walking

On the cue "Ready left... left", you will begin walking with your left foot first. Keep a slow, steady pace, and match your steps with the person in front of you.

Lowering

Just before reaching the final resting spot (such as trestles or the catafalque), the funeral director will give a command (e.g., "Into hands"). You will lower the coffin from your shoulders and gently place it down into your hands before resting it on the platform.

Helpful Tips

Safety First: If you have an existing shoulder or back injury and are unable to bear the weight, let the funeral director know in advance. You can always walk alongside the coffin with a hand resting on it instead.

Using a Bier

If the ground is slippery or steep, or if the coffin is exceptionally heavy, a wheeled stand called a 'bier' may be used, with bearers simply guiding it.

Preparation: Try to focus, keep even shoulders, and avoid sudden twisting motions while carrying the load.

Please note: Coffins are often far heavier than people expect. Whilst women absolutely can and do help carry, we encourage everyone to carefully consider their own physical strength and comfort. Men naturally tend to possess greater upper body strength and grip strength on average, which is why families have traditionally often chosen male relatives or friends for the main carrying roles.

There are many meaningful ways for loved ones of all ages and abilities to take part, whether by helping to carry, walking beside the coffin, or simply resting a hand upon it for part of the journey.

Our team will always be there to gently guide and support you throughout.