

Compromise over cross at crematorium

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As part of its recent £140,000 refurbishment of Haycombe Crematorium, Bath and North East Somerset Council removed a prominent window with a Christian cross etched on it and replaced it with plain glass. This was an effort to make clear that the building was for the use of the whole community, not just Christians.

The changes brought an immediate outcry from local Christians who claimed that the crematorium was a "chapel" and that the window should either be left as it was or replaced with another cross. They organised a 4,000 strong petition on the basis that the refurbishment represented a further "sidelining" of Christianity.

Now the council has compromised by putting a removable cross in front of the window which will be left in place unless there is a request for it to be removed.

Terry Sanderson, President of the NSS, said: "The idea that the crematorium is some sort of church or church-owned building springs from it being mis-named as a chapel. It is not a chapel or even a consecrated space, it is a council-owned civic facility for the use of the community as a whole."

Mr Sanderson said there was an increasing call for non-religious funerals and it was important for some people that they have a secular send-off. "Religious people are, of course, entitled to use the crematorium and bring in any religious symbols that they might want. But if it is that important to them, they can also have a service at their local church. People who don't want a religious funeral must be able to use a space that is free of the trappings of religion. Being able to remove the cross is an important concession to them."

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