

Churchyards and Memorials

Introduction

Churchyards are set apart for the reverent burial of parishioners: those whose names are on the church Electoral Roll and those who die in the Parish. These churchyards are therefore part of our Christian faith and heritage and are, usually, full of character. But, like people, they are all different. Just as a memorial that might be entirely suitable for one person would be altogether wrong for someone else, so a headstone that is appropriate in one churchyard may be unsuitable for another. So a memorial should respect its surroundings.

It should be in harmony with those around it and with the churchyard as a whole. The character of the churchyard depends on that of all the memorials within it: no one of those should spoil that general appearance.

Churchyards have to be maintained by the parish for centuries to come. This means that memorials should be designed to allow for that maintenance to be as simple as possible. That is why kerbed surroundings, railings, chains and chippings are not allowed. Inscriptions should be the most appropriate in all the circumstances, accurately commemorating the person who has died. Wording and symbols are best kept simple and dignified.

You will want the very best to commemorate your loved one, so do not become totally committed to any particular idea until you have thought it through carefully and do not actually commission any work until you have the Vicar's formal approval. You would be in a very difficult position if permission were not given for a memorial that had already been completed. The Vicar is only allowed to approve monuments that comply with the regulations.

These Regulations are intended to encourage good practices in order to create and maintain a place of peace, dignity and respect for the departed.

Principles

In accordance with Hereford Diocesan guidelines our policy endeavours to consider:

- *Sustainability* – the methods for the disposal and for commemoration must be economical in their use of space and must be capable of being sustained for as long as possible.
- *Practicality* – arrangements must be easy to explain and manage and must be acceptable to those who manage/look after the churchyard.
- *Appearance* – any area allocated must remain in keeping with the whole of the churchyard.
- *Character* – we wish our churchyard to be as pleasant as possible for all those who use it.
- *Environmental* – we wish to work, as best we can, to support God's creation and our environment; and to encourage natural conservation in our spaces.

Who may be buried in our churchyards

Unless the parish churchyard is closed (by Order in Council under the Burial Act of 1853) the PCC acknowledges that the following people have a 'right' to be buried in the particular parish churchyard provided that there is space so to do:

- A resident in the parish.
- Those whose names are on the church electoral roll.

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- Those dying in the parish.
- Those who have had long standing in the parish but have moved away in later years to live in care homes, with family etc.

An incumbent, with support of the PCC, can also allow anyone else to be buried in the churchyard provided that there is space, and a clear rationale exists.

Allocation of burial spaces

Our churches operate in the following way:

- For burials, providing there is space in your parish churchyard, we operate a 'next in line' (working systematically through the churchyard) policy for burials unless:
 - The burial is going into a pre-existing grave that has been specially prepared for a double burial.
 - A space has been reserved in a particular location after petition for an ecclesiastical faculty which is approved by the incumbent/PCC and granted by the consistory court/Diocesan Chancellor. (Please note that if space is limited, the consistory court might decide that this would be unfair to other future burials).
- For cremated remains, provided there is space in the churchyard, we operate a 'next in line' policy for cremated remains in our dedicated garden of remembrance unless:
 - The cremated remains are going into a pre-existing grave that has been specifically prepared for a second burial.
 - A space has been reserved in a particular location of our garden of remembrance after petition for an ecclesiastical faculty which is approved by the incumbent/PCC and granted by the consistory court/Diocesan Chancellor. (Please note that if space is limited, the consistory court might decide that this would be unfair to other future burials).

Monuments

Because burial space in our churchyard is on Church of England land/property, all monuments (size, colour, design and inscriptions) or monument amendments must adhere to the necessary churchyard regulations. Applications should be made to your Funeral Director/Monumental Mason who will complete a written application to the Incumbent for approval. Ultimate authority sits with the Diocesan Chancellor.

There is no general right for anyone (other than an approved Monumental Mason) to put up a memorial in a churchyard or to add an inscription to an existing memorial. Appropriate permission must be given by the incumbent before anything is put in place.

The "ownership" of the churchyard is vested in the Incumbent for use of the parishoners, (in a vacancy "*the ownership*" is vested in the Bishop). The 'owner' of a churchyard memorial is defined as the person who erected the monument in question and after his/her death the heir or heirs at law of the person or persons in whose memory the monument was erected. The primary responsibility for upkeep falls on the owners of the memorial who are the heirs of the person or persons commemorated. However, when the heirs cannot be traced, because the maintenance of the churchyard in a safe state is *prima facie* the responsibility of the PCC. The PCC must take appropriate steps to deal with any dangerous situation, such as an unsafe monument. Such action will be limited by the funds at its disposal.

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The removal of a memorial stone for further interment or its removal for repair, maintenance or inscription is permitted with the consent of the Parish Priest. In all other cases a Faculty is required.

A flower vase may be incorporated in the base of a headstone, or cross but separate vases cannot be placed elsewhere in the grave space unless it is replacing a headstone, cross or other memorial. In this case the vase, in a stone container with inscription may be used provided it follows the guidelines. Unfortunately, glass vase/containers are not permitted.

Please consult with your Funeral Director or Monumental Mason about the most appropriate method of cleaning your monument that will protect our natural conservation of flora and fauna (e.g., lichens); and the life of the monument.

Method of burial for cremated remains

Once authorisation has been given by the incumbent, all cremated remains must be buried underground (within strict parameters). The ash remains should be buried in biodegradable containers or appropriately sprinkled into the hole.

Items on graves

To maintain the appropriate look and feel of our churchyards, the PCC may remove dead or artificial flowers and any other items (e.g., Christmas decorations and wreaths; lights; additional statues; plant pots etc) after one month. Again, we are unable to permit glass items/vases/photo frames which may break and cause injury to animals or people.

Trees and plants

The PCC does not permit the planting of trees or shrubs on grave sites. This is because they can damage monuments, other graves, buildings or archaeological features.

Litter in churchyards

We provide a small compost and bin area for dead flowers to be composted in some of our churches. The PCC asks that all other litter (nappies, dog waste etc) is removed from the Churchyard and binned appropriately as it spoils the enjoyment of this place. Where there is not compost or bin area we ask that you take home all dead flowers and other items.

Exhumation

The interment of human remains is final. Exhumation can only happen in exceptional circumstances, and after due legal process.

The grave stone and memorial regulations are set out in the attached document entitled 'Churchyard Regulations 2008'.

The PCC reserves the right to amend this policy at any time.

Rev Tim G J Starling
Vicar
June 2024