

BURIALS AND MEMORIALS IN TRUST CHURCHYARDS

Guidance Notes

1. Introduction

It is unusual for a churchyard to be vested in the Trust together with the church. Currently we have about 80 vested churchyards out of an estate of just over 330. Generally, but not always, the churchyard has been vested because it is of particular importance in its own right e.g. for landscape or historical reasons, or because it contains a number of important memorials and headstones that are listed. Of these 80 churchyards, two thirds have been closed for burials by the Church Authorities, usually because they are full. Therefore, the Trust is able to give permission for burials in only about 25 churchyards, and a list of these is attached to these guidance notes.

2. Burials in a Trust churchyard

Our churches and churchyards remain consecrated but no person has the same legal rights that they enjoy with regard to parish churches. It is not reasonable to suppose that the Trust can give permission for everyone who wishes to be buried in one of its churchyards, or they might soon be full. We have therefore decided that there must be a personal connection between the deceased and the church, but this does not necessarily mean that they must have lived in the parish up until their death. They might have been instrumental in saving the church at the time of redundancy, or have been a 'Friend' or supporter for many years, or have family members buried in the churchyard already.

If anyone wishes to be buried in a Trust churchyard, we strongly recommend that they approach the Trust now in order to avoid delays and distress for family when the time comes. If friends or relatives of someone who has passed away wish for their interment in a Trust churchyard, please contact the regional Field Officer or, if unavailable, the London office. A decision will normally be given within a few hours so that funeral arrangements will not be delayed, and we will indicate that part of the churchyard in which an interment can be made.

There is a fee for a burial, and this is charged at the same rate as that payable to the Parochial Church Council in the Parochial Fees Order, and current at the date of burial. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Churches Conservation Trust'. Burials must be recorded in the register of the local parish church and the incumbent (vicar) can deal with this.

3. Memorials in a Trust churchyard

The Trust is a conservation body, charged by statute with the care and preservation of the churches, their contents, and any churchyards vested in the Trust. A churchyard provides the final resting place for generations, and the appearance of that churchyard is a record of their tastes and values, as well as being a vital part of our artistic heritage. Additionally the majority of our churches are listed Grade I, and the churchyard provides, and should continue to provide, an appropriate setting for the building, placing it in context.

A churchyard is a public, and not a private place, and burial does not confer a right to erect a headstone or other monument, even in a churchyard in use. As you would need to obtain permission for a new headstone in a parish churchyard from the incumbent, so you need to obtain permission from the Trust to erect a headstone in a Trust churchyard.

The Trust believes that care must be taken to ensure that any new memorial preserves the character of the churchyard, and harmonises in size and materials.

The following notes and guidelines have been prepared to help people when considering their own memorial, or that of a friend or relative. The most successful ones reflect the individuality of the person they commemorate and provides a fitting tribute to them.

Please note that all designs for memorials must be agreed by the Trust **in advance**.

4. Local distinctiveness

If you visit different churchyards throughout England, you will notice that, historically, each community has generally used its own local materials for the headstones of previous generations, reflecting the materials used to build the church. For example, you will find limestone memorials in most of the South East and East Midlands, but sandstone has been used in the North West and North East. The Trust believes that new memorials should harmonise with their surroundings and reflect this local distinctiveness. For this reason the design of new memorials should be preceded by a close study of the existing memorials in the churchyard.

We encourage the use of natural, native materials, such as limestones, sandstones, grey granites and slates. Non-traditional or non-native stones such as red and black granite, white marble and synthetic stones and plastics may not be used as they appear harsh against older headstones and the church. Similarly, polished stones of any colour and plain or coloured chippings should not be used. However it is not possible to be specific about the particular stone that will be right for each churchyard. Some non-English stones may be suitable because they are similar to or sympathetic with the surrounding historic materials i.e. a similar shade and texture. In urban areas or towns there may be instances where a greater variety of stones is acceptable. Advice on the availability and variations of stone may be sought from the Regional Office of the National Association of Master Masons or the Natural Stone Directory. A list of useful contacts is appended to these guidance notes.

Wood is a traditional, but rare, alternative and can be very beautiful as it weathers over time. For longevity, we suggest the use of oak or teak from sustainable sources.

5. Practicalities

The responsibility for the care and maintenance of vested churchyards can be onerous. We rely very much on the goodwill of local people and volunteers to keep our churchyards well kept, balancing the needs of relatives tending graves and conservation. The bases of headstones need to be placed slightly below ground, or horizontal slabs generally at ground level, so as to make using a lawn mower or strimmer easier, and so as not to damage these expensive tools, or memorials, unnecessarily. For this same reason, raised kerbs and railings are not normally allowed.

6. Design

The Trust encourages new, good design and for this reason we have not set out stringent guidelines for new memorials. However, all new memorials must be agreed in advance with the Trust and some standard alternatives to headstones will not be accepted. Because of their very modern appearance, memorials in the shape of a heart, birdbaths, and pictorial etchings are not permitted. One example of a good modern design is that provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which is visible in many of England's churchyards. Horizontal slabs are allowed, if space in the churchyard permits.

In considering the design of a memorial, please give due attention to posterity. It may be a fashionable statement now, but will it stand the test of time? Will future generations consider

it as beautiful and as understated as headstones from previous centuries? Some larger memorials may require planning permission from the local authority and the Trust will determine whether this is necessary early on in the process.

7. Epitaphs and Inscriptions

The best of these are both moving and delightful. Practically, certain information is needed – full name without abbreviation (to avoid confusion with others of similar names), and dates of birth and death in the most unambiguous form possible. Abbreviations such as ‘Nan’, ‘Gran’ and ‘Gramps’ will not be accepted.

It is not necessary to confine the choice of any text to the Bible. Quotations from the Prayer Book, hymns, or secular sources, poetry or prose are acceptable so long as they are truly appropriate. More helpful information on epitaphs and inscriptions is found in Chapter 12 of the Churchyards Handbook (see list of useful contacts).

8. Lettering

This does not necessarily need to be uniform in size, capitals, lower case, and italics – the design can be enhanced by mixing, say, the name in one font, and the dates in another. The mason or craftsman will be helpful in choosing the right balance and arrangement of the composition as a whole. Lettering should be incised or in relief, and may be painted, but not gilded.

9. Carvings

The Trust encourages quality carving of an appropriate subject. Please include a sketch of the design on the application form.

10. Cremation Tablets

The Trust is happy for cremation tablets in our churchyards but the design, materials and wording will be considered in the same light as headstones and other memorials, outlined above.

11. For more information (see attached list)

Designers and Craftsmen - the Crafts Council at local or National level should have the National Register of Makers from which a list of letter cutters can be compiled. The Council for the Care of Churches (Fielden House, Little College Street, London SW1P 3SH) has records of artists and craftsmen.

The Churchyards Handbook produced by the Council for the Care of Churches is a useful reference (c£10.00) and Memorials by Artists provides inspiration and examples of good headstones (this 40 page booklet is available for c£7.00)

12. Process

To make it as easy as possible for your memorial design to be agreed, the Trust has provided a form which gives plenty of space for a drawing. Please send the completed form and any additional details that you think might help to the London office at the address noted above. Your request will be dealt with by the regional Conservation Manager, who is responsible at the Trust for the care and maintenance of the fabric and fittings of the vested churches and churchyards. Please note that it may take some weeks for your request to be agreed, as many proposals for new headstones are seen by one of the Trustees. Please do feel free to discuss

your ideas and designs for a memorial informally with the Conservation Manager before making a decision.

13. Existing memorials

The ownership of churchyard memorials vests in the persons who erected them during their lifetime, and thereafter in the heir at law of the person in whose memory the memorial was erected. When no heirs at law can be traced, the Trust will assume responsibility for ensuring that memorials are kept in a proper state of repair, always bearing in mind the Trust's limited funds.

The Trust requests that it be notified of any re-cutting or painting of existing inscriptions as a matter of courtesy. Where existing memorials are replaced, such replacements will be considered in the same light as new headstones and memorials, as outlined above.

If you have any queries on the subject of burials and memorials or would like to discuss any of the points raised in this guidance note, please contact the Trust and we will be happy to help.

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