

# OUR CHURCHYARD

A GUIDE FOR THE  
BEREAVED

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This leaflet is intended to guide bereaved families who wish to apply for a burial or the interment of ashes in any of our churchyards, or who wish to place a memorial on a grave. If you have any questions about the contents of this leaflet, your parish priest will be glad to offer help or advice.

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# CHURCHYARD MEMORIALS

Churchyards form part of our history. They matter to many people, especially those whose loved ones' remains rest there, but they are also important to parishioners, historians, ecologists, visitors and others. They are consecrated ground, set aside for burials, and are places for quiet contemplation and remembrance. To help protect their special character, the Diocesan Churchyard Memorial Regulations ("the Regulations") give guidance on what memorials should look like and what is allowed in the churchyard. It is important to remember that the family of the deceased do not own the land in which a body is buried (the grave) or the plot in which cremated remains are buried, but the land remains part of the churchyard.

As churchyards need maintenance and are often cared for by volunteers, graves must be flat and kept clear of obstructions so that the grass can easily be cut.

This means that graves may not be marked out by chippings, kerbs, chains, railings, fences or anything similar.

Although families do not own the land, they do own any memorial stone placed over the burial and are responsible for its upkeep and repair. A burial may be marked with a headstone and an interment of ashes with a flat memorial tablet.

## HEADSTONES

Coffin burials may be marked with upright headstones. Care must be taken to see that new headstones fit with their surroundings, so native natural stone is preferred, whilst polished granite or marble and artificial materials are not permitted (see the Regulations for acceptable materials and finishes).

Headstones must be simple in shape. Designs such as stone crosses, hearts and open books are not permitted.

Inscriptions should be composed with care as a gravestone in a churchyard is a public memorial in a public place and may be there for a long time.

Simple information – full names, dates and relationships (father/mother/husband/wife/ etc) – are the most dignified inscriptions. Any additional words should be simple and not incompatible with the Christian faith; they should honour the dead, comfort the living and inform posterity.

If the headstone chosen by the family is in accordance with the Regulations, then permission for it to be installed can be given by the parish priest.

If the headstone chosen does not comply with the Regulations, then an application must be made to the Diocesan Chancellor for faculty permission.

There is a charge for applying for a faculty and we cannot guarantee that permission will be given.

## MEMORIAL TABLETS

Burials of ashes, either in an area set aside for the burial of cremated remains, or in the existing grave of a close relative, may be marked by a flat stone tablet or plaque no larger than 18" x 18". Tablets must be laid flush with the ground. An integral flower receptacle, flush with the tablet or ground surface, is permitted.

Alternatively, when ashes are buried in the grave of a close relative, an inscription can be added to an existing headstone.

Upright memorials and desktop memorials are not permitted.

# PLACING ITEMS ON GRAVES

Families and friends may wish to visit graves and leave behind floral or other tributes to their loved ones. In order to keep churchyards looking at their best for all visitors, some items are not permitted.

Items which may be placed on a grave include:

- ✓ ·Cut flowers – these must be removed as soon as they start to wither
- ✓ ·An integral flower receptacle, or a removable container (not glass) recessed completely into the ground – separate free-standing flower vases or containers are not permitted
- ✓ ·Silk flowers – these must be removed when they become faded, dirty, dishevelled or discoloured
- ✓ ·Spring bulbs - these may be placed in the soil of the grave
- ✓ ·Easter and Christmas wreaths and Remembrance Day poppies – these should be removed after a period of not more than 2 months.

# PLACING ITEMS ON GRAVES

Items which may NOT be placed on a grave include:

- ⊗ Trees, shrubs, planted annual and perennial flowers – a grave should not take on a cultivated or garden appearance
- ⊗ Angel or dove statuettes
- ⊗ Garden ornaments, bird baths, solar lights or decorations
- ⊗ Pictures
- ⊗ Textiles or clothes
- ⊗ Food or drink
- ⊗ Artificial flowers (other than silk flowers in good condition)
- ⊗ Personal belongings or memorabilia (and this includes in the case of toys or teddy bears).

Please note: If any such items are placed upon a grave then they will be removed.





*Jesus* said:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.  
In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told  
you; for I go to prepare a place for you (John 14.2)

*Father,*

you know our hearts and share our sorrows.  
We are hurt by our parting from those whom we loved:  
when we are angry at the loss we have sustained,  
when we long for words of comfort,  
yet find them hard to hear,  
turn our grief to truer living,  
our affliction to firmer hope  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen*

Any enquiries regarding this leaflet may be addressed to:  
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The Churchyard Memorial Regulations may be found at:  
<https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/running-your-church/church-buildings/caring-for-your-churchyard/>