

Diocese of Newcastle

CHURCHYARD MEMORIALS AND THE CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF CHURCHYARDS

Faculties are normally required for any work undertaken in churches or churchyards. This includes alterations to their lay-out, the re-siting or levelling of gravestones, the making of new paths, changing boundaries, and, most frequently, the introduction of memorials to commemorate the departed.

It is important that those requesting an interment be made aware that there are rules which have to be followed if and when it comes to introducing a memorial; and that these are not the same as apply in public cemeteries. Care and sensitivity in explaining the position can save many pastoral problems at a later stage. A locally produced leaflet, consistent with what follows, can be valuable, as those arranging an interment may, because of their natural distress, find it hard for them to hear what is being explained.

The Chancellor of the Diocese has given delegated authority to incumbents, priests-in-charge and team vicars with responsibility for the area in which the churchyard is situated permitting them to allow simple headstones which fall within the Churchyard Rules set out below. Where there is no incumbent, priest-in-charge or team vicar, the Chancellor's authority is delegated to the Rural Dean and it is important to remember that it is exercisable only by him.

In any case of difficulty, even one seeming to be within the Rules, and so within the scope of his delegated authority, the incumbent may insist on the applicant petitioning for a faculty. The incumbent may seek the advice of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches at any stage.

If a proposed memorial falls outside the scope of the Rules, the applicant may still petition for a faculty. Where an applicant wishes to erect a memorial which differs from the normal standards indicated in the Rules, but which appears to be of good design, the incumbent should encourage the proposal to be sent forward.

PCCs may find it helpful to make local rules in respect of the churchyard in their parish. Such local rules must be compatible with the Chancellor's rules. It is essential that before PCCs make their own rules they should consult the Diocesan Registrar to ensure that this is the case.

Good relationships with local memorial masons can make the administration of the rules much easier.

RULES IN RESPECT OF CHURCHYARDS

made by the Chancellor of the Diocese on [date]

1 Location of graves

No burial may be permitted and no memorial erected within 3.5 metres of the walls of the church except where authorised by faculty. A grave space may not be reserved except by faculty. A memorial in such a space requires the same permission as any other.

2 Procedure for the Introduction of Memorials

Permission must be obtained for the introduction of any memorial. The incumbent may give authority for the introduction of simple memorials in respect of burials complying with the rules set out here; but other types of memorial must be authorised by the Chancellor under faculty.

Every application to erect a memorial should be made in the first instance in writing to the incumbent, with a full description of the proposed work. A minimum period of six months should elapse between the death of a person to be commemorated and the application. Permission to erect a memorial should be obtained before the applicant accepts an estimate or otherwise enters into a contract with a funeral director or stonemason.

3 Dimensions of Headstones

Headstones should be no larger than 1200mm (4ft) high, measured from the surface of the ground, 900mm (3ft) wide and 150mm (6in) thick. They should be no less than 750mm (2ft 6in) high, 500mm (1ft 8in) wide and no less than 75mm (3in) thick (except in the case of slate memorials, which may be thinner but no less than 38mm (1½in thick). These measurements are not intended to define standard proportions of memorials, and memorials may be of any dimensions within the given maxima and minima. (The metric equivalents given above are slightly less than the Imperial dimensions, but are recommended for use by the National Association of Memorial Masons.)

4 Base and Foundation Slab ; Kerbstones

A headstone may stand on a stone base, provided that it is an integral part of the design and does not project more than 102mm (4in) beyond the headstone in any direction, except where a receptacle for flowers is provided, in which case this may extend up to 200mm (8in) in front of the headstone. Due regard should be paid to the nature of the ground and the problem of settlement; where a concrete sub-base is necessary for these reasons, it must be below the surface of the ground.

Other methods of fixing the memorial in the ground are not discouraged, and the base of the memorial may be so shaped that it can be inserted directly into the ground at sufficient depth to ensure stability.

Kerbstones are not permitted without a faculty except in parts of churchyards where both the following conditions are met: (a) that kerbstones are already common in that area; and (b) that the introduction of the proposed kerbstones would have no adverse effect on the maintenance of the churchyard.

5 Materials

All memorials should be made of natural stone (in which case they have a polished surface on the front and on the top surface of the base only), or of hardwood. Stones traditionally used in local buildings, or stones closely similar to them in colour and texture, are to be preferred. White marble, synthetic stone or plastic are not permitted. Black, blue or red granites, and granites darker than Rustenburg grey, are discouraged and are not permitted where they are not already common in the churchyard. Railings, chains, chippings or glass shades are not permitted.

6 Sculpture

Figure sculpture and other statuary must be authorised by faculty.

7 Epitaphs and other inscriptions

Inscriptions must be simple and dignified, but this does not preclude the use of familiar names such as 'dad' or 'auntie'. Words should be incised, or in relief, and may be painted. No new memorials with plastic or other inserted lettering may be introduced. Additions may be made to an inscription at a later date following a subsequent interment in the same grave or for other suitable reason. However, any such alteration must be separately approved. The lettering, lay-out and wording must be consistent with the original inscription.

Photographs or porcelain portraits are not permitted. Where the stone is to bear any embellishment other than lettering, this should be fully described in the application. What is appropriate in a local authority cemetery may not be appropriate in a churchyard, and in case of doubt the incumbent may require the applicant to seek a faculty.

8 Trademarks

No advertisement or trademark should be inscribed on a headstone. The mason's name may be inscribed at the side or on the reverse in unleaded letters, no larger than 13mm in height.

9 Cremated remains

The deposit of cremated remains is permitted in areas designated for the purpose by faculty. The faculty may make provision for some form of memorial stone within the area; individual memorial tablets are not normally permitted. The interment of cremated remains in a casket is a burial and is not within the scope of a faculty authorising the deposit of remains.

10 Commemoration after Cremation

Commemoration in a Book of Remembrance is appropriate, but a suitable addition to an existing memorial stone relating to a close relative may be permitted.

11 Flowers and other objects

Except where the design of a headstone includes an integral receptacle for plants or cut flowers, they may be placed in a removable container (not of glass), which must be sunk completely into the ground.

Wreaths and cut flowers may be placed in such containers or laid on any grave, but must be removed as soon as they appear to be withered. Artificial flowers are not encouraged (except for Remembrance Day poppies), and where they are used they may be removed after three months or earlier if they should deteriorate. Bulbs may be planted in the soil of any grave.

Families sometimes wish to place other objects on a grave, especially where the burial is of a child. This should be gently discouraged, or removal after a stated period agreed.

12 Repair and removal of memorials

The repair of memorials is the responsibility of the family concerned, but PCCs may act if the family cannot be traced or will not act. Action should be taken if memorial becomes unsafe (for example laying down a tall headstone which is leaning dangerously). No memorial may be removed without a faculty.