

The Parish of
Curdworth,
Middleton and Wishaw
Churchyard Memorials and Churchyards
A Guide for the Bereaved

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Introduction

Coming to terms with the death of someone you loved or for whom you were responsible is inevitably painful and difficult. And for those who were closest to the person who died, there are also numerous practical tasks to be attended to, many of which are not at all straightforward. The business of choosing how the body should be dealt with (by burial or cremation), selecting a place in which to bury the body or the ashes, and in due course deciding what headstone to put up and what it should say – all this, too, can be a source of anxiety and distress. But it can be part of that process of coming to terms with it all, of saying good-bye and moving forward. Once the body or ashes have been buried, you will sooner or later have to choose a headstone or other memorial of some kind. This too is not an easy matter – not least because it can re-open old wounds – but it is important to get it right. This booklet aims to explain what needs to be done, and how you can go about achieving a memorial that will be a fitting tribute to someone who has died. Take time to read it carefully, and remember:



Most decisions can and should be delayed until you feel ready to make them; a decision made in a hurry may be regretted later, and we are not allowed to accept applications until at least six months after an interment.

At any stage, if in doubt please feel free to consult the Rector he is more than willing to talk it all through with you.

It is important for you to realise from the outset that no one has a right to have a monument or stone erected in the churchyard and that changes or additions afterwards require the express written permission of the Rector or the diocese in a process called “faculty.”

The Rector is only allowed to approve monuments which comply with what are called the **Churchyard Regulations** and is required by law to ensure that they are followed. They are the same throughout the Diocese of Birmingham. The Rector is aware of the relevant Guidelines and just as important, he is familiar with the churchyards, and with the monuments in them; and will be able to guide you as to what would or would not be suitable in your particular case.

Right to Burial

Legally only parishioners, those who have died in the Parish or are on our electoral roll have the right to be buried in our Churchyard. The PCC have agreed with the Rector that he may allow other interments for valid pastoral reasons and these are broad ranging, but in such cases there should have been involvement of a Christian minister in the funeral otherwise an additional Christian service will be required to allow the interment to take place.

The headstone.

All, of our Churchyards are 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 for one churchyard may be unsuitable for another. And the same is true in some cases as between different parts of the same churchyard. So the first principle is that

A memorial should thus be in harmony with those around it, and with the

A memorial should respect its surroundings

churchyard as a whole; and the appearance of the churchyard should harmonise with that of the surrounding village and countryside. But a memorial should not stick out like a sore thumb. The reason for this is that the churchyard will last for many years to come; and its character depends on that of all the memorials within it.

In practice, this means that the choice of stone for a memorial, and its size, thickness, shape, and general design, should only be finalised after looking carefully at the churchyard as a whole, and in particular at the part of it containing the grave under consideration. Memorials that are much darker, lighter, taller, or smaller than those nearby, or which are of a completely different stone, are unlikely to fit in harmoniously.

In Birmingham Diocese this means that a Headstone must be within the following shapes and sizes

- The monument must be in the shape of an upright headstone or of a book, which is basically rectangular in shape, but the top edge should be flat or in the shape of a cross. There must not be a sculptured figure protruding from the top of the headstone.

- The headstone or cross may be no larger than 1.25m x 0.65m x 0.11m (4' 1" x 2' 2" x 0' 4") and no smaller than 0.60m x 0.50m x 0.08m (2' 0" x 1' 8" x 0' 3").
- The width of the rectangular flat slab may be no larger than the grave itself and must lie flush with the ground. It must be installed carefully.
- The headstone or cross may stand on a stone base provided the base is an integral part of the design and does not project more than 0.11m (0' 4") in any direction beyond the upright stone, unless a vase hole is included, when the front projection may be extended to 0.18m (0' 7") in front of the stone.
- The upright stone, or base if used, is fixed onto a foundation slab that must extend 0.08m to 0.15m (0' 3" to 0' 6") beyond the stone or base in every direction and lie flush with the ground (not the grass) so as to allow a grass cutter to pass over it, freely.

For Ashes interments the stone must be laid flat to the ground and can only be 0.45m (45cm) x 0.30m(30cm) and no more than 0.025m (2.5cm) and must be laid flat on the ground to allow a mower to pass over it and for environmental reasons we ask that Ashes are interred loose or in a biodegradable (cardboard casket) with no plastic.

It is appreciated that over the years the lines within our Churchyards have become blurred as to what is allowed, but the regulations are clear that just because something has been allowed in the past that was in contravention of the regulations, the Rector is not at liberty to approve it now, and you would have to apply for its introduction into the churchyards via the faculty route.

In particular the Rector has **no authority** to allow the following

- Monuments made of marble or granite (other than unpolished grey granite), artificial stone or plastic and, in particular, monuments made of black granite or marble;
- Monuments made of more than one type of stone;
- Monuments in the shape of hearts, urns or statues depicting human figures or otherwise (e.g. Angels)
- Monuments with more than one side polished;
- Monuments with pictures or photographs on them;
- Kerbing, railings or chippings; or
- Any kind of lighting.

Experience suggests that stones used in buildings nearby or traditional in the local area, or stones closely similar to them in colour and texture, are usually much more appropriate.

If you want a copy of the **Churchyard regulations** the Rector is happy provide you with a full copy on request.

Inscriptions

Often the most difficult decision is what to put on the headstone. It is important not to rush into this; what seems suitable just after the funeral may seem less so after a little time has passed. Here the only guiding principle is that.

The inscription should be the most appropriate in all the circumstances

The first consideration is thus that the memorial should commemorate, accurately, the existence of the person who has died. It should therefore record either his or her full name or else the surname and the first name by which he or she was generally known (for example, "Thomas Joseph Smith" or "Thomas Smith"). It is perfectly appropriate to include any term as well by which the deceased was widely known ("Tommy"), perhaps in brackets or small type. The memorial should also record the date of death, the date of birth and the age at death.

Secondly, however, a name on its own says little; and a memorial is possibly the only place to say something publicly about the person who has died. It may be appropriate to record what she did ("Local Member of Parliament" or



“midwife in this village for forty years”); or some feature of his character (“a much-loved father and grandfather”). And some may wish to add a scriptural text, or an extract from a poem, or some other suitable words, inspired by reflection on the life of the departed. The registry are unlikely to approve colloquialism such as “mom”, “granny” or other terms.

But any inscription should be short and to the point; and should avoid the trite or overly sentimental **it must not** intentionally, by implication or otherwise, draw a comparison of any sort with anyone else buried in the churchyard for instance First rate....

Here, particularly, any decision should not be rushed.

Thirdly, the choice of lettering – Generally, the inscription is in words and numbers only and is incised without any colouring, gilding or silvering.

Fourth, artwork may be added, but If it is sought to have an incised carving representing a special aspect of the life of the deceased on the headstone then, in addition to the Rector’s agreement, specific permission must be sought from the Chancellor. Such a carving must not be inappropriate for a Christian place of burial and must be no larger than 0.15m x 0.15m (0’ 6” x 0’ 6”).

Once again, if in any doubt, the Rector should be consulted – either to see whether what you have in mind would be suitable, or to make suggestions.

Particular care will be needed in relation to the choice any visual image or other artwork; and the Rector may wish to seek advice from the Diocesan Registry, the Chancellor or the Archdeacon

Future maintenance

Churchyards have to be maintained by the parish for centuries to come. This means that memorials should be designed to allow for that continuing maintenance to be as simple as possible, which is for everyone’s benefit – you would not wish to find the churchyard full of untidy and unkempt graves when you return to visit the one you have introduced.

So, the final principle is that

A memorial should not impose an unreasonable burden on future generations as those who apply to have the memorial placed in the churchyard are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the memorial.

No new graves or memorial tablets can contain kerbed surrounds or chippings as these impede the cutting of the surrounding grass.



This is also part of harmonising of the memorials in the Churchyard with others nearby. We understand that for a number of families this has been carried out previously and it has been their practice to do this, but it is **expressly forbidden** by the Chancellor and the churchyard regulations. We respectfully ask that if you have installed such edgings and gravel chippings that they are removed when it becomes tired and that it is not replaced. We will provide you with new turf to fill up to the stones or over the grave.

You should also consider carefully how you want to deal with flowers. Cut flowers are a traditional form of showing affection or respect for the departed; but dead flowers should be removed as soon as possible. Some types of headstone provide a place for a small vase or jar for flowers; this enables them to be kept in water, and thus to last for longer, but they still die in due course; and an empty jar, or simply an unused space, looks worse than no flowers at all. Alternatively, you might wish to consider planting a few spring bulbs on the grave, in front of the headstone – although anything in the nature of a garden is not appropriate and again addition of plants requires the express written permission of the Rector.

Artificial flowers obviously last longer than natural ones, but in due course they too decay and look tatty; they are also considered by many to be inappropriate in a churchyard and are **expressly forbidden**. Given the impact on the environment of plastics this rule will be rigorously enforced in our churchyards.

If a headstone is erected above a grave, the ground should be levelled before it is put in place. In other cases, once 12 months have elapsed since the latest burial in a grave, it may at any time be levelled by those responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard – although if at all possible, the close relatives of those whose bodies are buried will be contacted first.

Procedure

Local stonemasons will be able to help with ideas for memorials and will give you an estimate as to costs. They will usually have a range of standard memorials and will probably be able to indicate where you can see an example of any particular pattern. However, you do not need to consider only “standard” designs – the person whose life you are commemorating was, after all, presumably not a “standard” person. An individually commissioned memorial will almost certainly cost more but may be a more fitting tribute.

If you have not already chosen a stonemason, the funeral director who assisted you with the funeral arrangements may well be able to guide you towards local masons who supply standard memorials.

Alternatively, a list of others who may be suitable for non-standard requirements may be obtained from: Memorials by Artists, Snape Priory, Saxmundham, Suffolk, IP17 1SA (tel. 01728-688934; <https://www.letteringartstrust.org.uk/>).

Obtaining a memorial via the **internet does not avoid** the need to obtain consent, or to comply with these guidelines.

As has already been emphasised, do not rush this process; The Rector is not normally allowed to consider any application until at least six months after the burial, when the ground will have settled. Do not become totally committed to any particular idea until you have thought it through carefully and discussed it with the Rector; and do not actually commission any work until you have the Rector's formal approval – as you would be placed in a very difficult position if approval was not given for a memorial that had already been completed.

Approval by the Rector

You should seek approval via your stonemason for your chosen memorial by them requesting an application form by emailing the Rector, they will complete it and send it to the Rector either by post or email. The form must be signed both by you and by the stonemason and accompanied by the appropriate fee (the money raised in this way helps to pay for the maintenance of the churchyard, which after all will be the setting, in years to come, for the memorial you have chosen). By signing this form, you are agreeing to abide by the Churchyard Regulations of the Diocese of Birmingham, a full copy is as we have said is available from the Rector.

Once the Rector has considered the application, if the proposed memorial conforms with the relevant guidelines, it will normally be approved without further ado.

Occasionally, it may be necessary for others to be consulted: for example, where a memorial is in some way out of the ordinary. This does not necessarily mean that it will not be approved, but the approval process may take a little longer.

Once a particular design has been approved, it must not be altered without further approval. If you do change your mind, you should fill in and submit a new application form for the revised proposal; but you will not need to send a second fee.

The procedure set out above also applies where an alteration is to be made to an existing memorial (for example, to add the name following a second burial).

Approval by the Chancellor

The Rector will not be able to approve a proposed memorial (or the alteration of an existing one) if he considers that it does not comply with the relevant guidelines as outlined above; this will include where additional changes or additions to graves have been made in contravention of the guidelines, and no approval will be granted until such time that it is rectified; or that it is likely to be controversial for some reason, or that it is in any way inappropriate.

Instead, if the Rector supports it in principle, he or she will suggest to you that you need to apply for a faculty. In this case he will forward the proposal to the Diocesan Registrar together with a letter of support, but a substantial additional fee is payable— and will let you know that this has happened, and why.

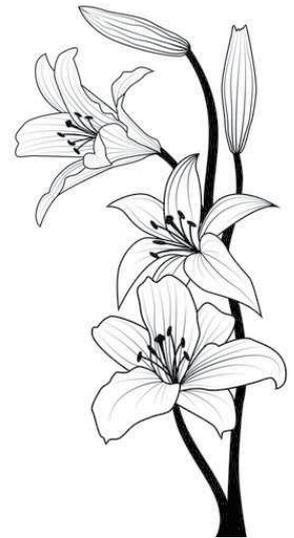
The proposal will then be considered by the Chancellor of the Diocese, who will either grant or refuse approval (known as a “faculty”).

If on the other hand the Rector is unable to support the proposal for any reason, he will let you know, together with a brief statement of the reason why – and will refund the fee. You are then at liberty to apply for a faculty if you wish; the name and address of the Registrar, from whom you will be able to obtain the necessary application form is at the end of this booklet.

The Registrar will also be able to tell you what the current fee is, to be paid at the time of submitting the application; this covers the administrative costs involved and is not refundable. Alternatively, you may wish to discuss with the Rector whether there is some alternative form of memorial that gives you what you are seeking but which also complies with the guidelines then that is the simplest course of action.

Unauthorised memorials and additions to the Churchyard

Finally, you should note that, if a memorial is erected without being approved either by the Rector or the Chancellor, the Chancellor is able to order it to be removed – at the expense of whoever erected it. This applies also where approval is given for a particular memorial, but a different one is erected without further approval.



Where to find out more:

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, OR NEED ANY MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE RECTOR, WHO WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO TALK THROUGH WITH YOU ANY OF THE ISSUES RAISED IN THIS BOOKLET, OR ANYTHING ELSE THAT IS ON YOUR MIND AS YOU COME TO TERMS WITH YOUR BEREAVEMENT.

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