



Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Little Hallingbury Churchyard & Garden of Remembrance Policy

Introduction

The churchyard at St Mary's is a place of quiet and repose, a place where comfort is drawn from the peace provided by being close to God and to his church. In all church burial places, land has been used to lay to rest earthly remains in the sure and certain hope of resurrection to Eternal Life.

We recognise how important it is for people to have a place in which they can mourn someone they have loved, and that it is natural for families to want to make the grave of their loved one special and personal.

However, the churchyard is a consecrated public space, dedicated to the service of God, and used by many other people, including other mourners. We need to ensure that the graves are marked and tended in ways that are acceptable to everyone and that they are in keeping with their surroundings. It is also important that the churchyard is safe for the people who use it and that, as a valuable habitat for wildlife, we do all we can to look after animals and plants that live in it too.

The Parochial Church Council, which has responsibility for looking after the church and its grounds, has agreed this policy to provide initial guidance to anyone considering the churchyard as a final resting place for their loved ones or themselves.

There are clear legal requirements that we must meet in allowing burials and monuments in the churchyard, whether or not a memorial gravestone is used, and so this policy should be read in conjunction with the latest edition of the regulations issued by the Diocesan Chancellor, which can be found on the Churchyard page of the Church website, and in hard copy on the noticeboard inside the church.

In the first instance, to avoid frustration and disappointment, any enquires for burials, interment of cremated remains or other matters concerning the churchyard should be made to the churchwardens or the Parish Priest. Contact details can be found on the Church website or on the noticeboard outside the church.

Monuments are governed by strict regulations, to ensure the continuing beauty and calm of the churchyard, and to guard against the addition of unsuitable memorials. The rules have changed and evolved over the centuries, and although exceptions may be seen in the design and materials of earlier monuments in St Mary's Churchyard, the Parish Priest and PCC must adhere to the current rules.

Burials and interment of ashes

Provided that there is space in the churchyard, by law the following have a right to be buried, or have their cremated remains interred, in the churchyard:

- Someone who was a parishioner at the date of death, or
- Someone who died in the parish, or
- Someone whose name was on the church electoral roll at the date of death.

However, after consultation with the PCC, the Parish Priest may in exceptional circumstances grant permission to someone who can be shown to have had a strong and real connection to the parish.

Permissions can also be sought through the Chancellor of the Diocese if a particular request falls outside what is allowed to be granted by local means - this is done through a more rigorous permission application known as a "Faculty".

Except where a relevant Faculty has been obtained, it is not possible to reserve a particular grave space for a burial. However, provided there is adequate depth in the existing grave then, in practice, the Parish Priest will usually permit another member of the same family to be buried in that grave. Similarly, the cremated remains of a deceased person can be interred in a grave already containing one or more bodies of relatives of that person. Otherwise, cremated remains will be interred in the Garden of Remembrance, a special area of the churchyard which has been set aside for the purpose. It is the responsibility of anyone requesting an additional burial in an existing grave to ensure that the proposed burial is acceptable to all close members of the family or families concerned. The same applies to the interment of cremated remains in an existing grave.

Cremated Remains in the Garden of Remembrance

The following rules apply:

- By canon law ashes cannot be scattered, they must be buried - preferably directly into the ground without any container.
- If a container is used, it must be biodegradable – for example, wood or cardboard
- A memorial rail is provided for plaques to be affixed in memoriam. The plaques must conform to the uniform size and design which has been prescribed.
- No other form of permanent personal memorial is permitted.
- A Book of Remembrance is maintained inside the Church in which an entry may be made if you wish.
- Fresh flowers or stems may be laid, but these will be removed on behalf of the PCC if they wither or become unsightly.
- Artificial flowers are not permitted.
- The PCC is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the Churchyard. Unauthorized objects placed in the Churchyard may be removed without notice.

Headstones

- There is no right to place a memorial or any other item in the churchyard. Permission must be obtained in each case. Anything placed without permission is unlawful and can be ordered to be removed.
- No application for permission can be made until at least 6 months after the date of the burial.
- Certain headstones can be authorised by the Parish Priest on submission of a form CRI. To qualify they must have parallel sides, a straight or curved top, and must not exceed certain dimensions. They must be in unpolished slate, or certain specified types of unpolished limestone or sandstone.

However, variety, individuality and creativity are encouraged. Headstones do not have to conform to the CRI criteria: other shapes and materials, and more elaborate or special inscribed decorations, may be permitted. These are simply subject to the more rigorous Faculty permission process.

The Parish Priest will be able to discuss a family's wishes for a memorial or headstone, advise and explain the different processes for permission.

Applicants should not place an order with a stonemason until permission to erect the headstone has been obtained.

Inscriptions

The words of the inscription are usually the most significant element of what appears on a headstone. However, some decoration is permissible provided that it is kept in proportion. Because a memorial stone is a record of the life of the person commemorated there must be formality in relation to the names and dates of birth and death of the person concerned. The person's names are not allowed to be abbreviated, but if he or she was usually known by a particular name then this name can be added in inverted commas after the Christian name at the discretion of the Parish Priest.

Simple, clear descriptions should be used that describe something of the character of the person. Incised lettering is longer lasting although any colouring will have to be carefully considered. The Churchyard Regulations give further guidance.

Inscriptions must be in English, must be consistent with the Christian belief in life after death, and must be agreed with the Parish Priest. Inscribed decorations of Christian symbols or flowers of an appropriate size may be permitted.

General rules about graves and the Garden of Remembrance

- Memorial vases and flowers may be permitted within the guidance of the regulations, but plastic wrapping must be removed from any flowers laid on a grave or in the Garden of Remembrance.

- Artificial and plastic flowers are not permitted, except for poppies which are permitted for two weeks at Remembrance Sunday and wreaths at Christmas.
- No loose vases, pots, planters, candle holders, lights, photographs, windmills or wind-chimes or any other kind of ornament are permitted on a grave or in the Garden of Remembrance.
- Grass should be allowed to grow over a grave, if possible.
- A few bulbs or small low plants may be planted in the grass on a grave.
- Fences or edging of any sort around a grave are not permitted, and chippings must not be put onto a grave.

Graves and memorials should be kept neat and tidy, and all rubbish taken away. This will help the PCC to maintain the church grounds efficiently.

These rules apply to everyone tending a grave in the churchyard. The PCC has the right to remove anything that contravenes them without notice. However, the PCC will always try to make contact with the family of a deceased whose grave does not conform to the rules – with a view to resolving any issues sensitively.

Other memorials

From time to time, the PCC gets requests for other memorials. There are several dedicated memorial benches already in the church grounds and the PCC would have to carefully consider the balance of any further such memorials in the churchyard. The PCC does not necessarily have authority to grant permission for any exceptional memorial. Memorials other than headstones or memorial plaques for cremated remains require permissions from the Archdeacon or Diocese and should not be taken as a right. However, any requests made directly to the PCC or through the faculty process will be considered carefully and sympathetically.

Care of the Church Grounds

The PCC takes its responsibility to look after the churchyard seriously. Sometimes, maintenance work is contracted out on a commercial basis but often it is the voluntary work of church members and the local community that help to keep the place clean and tidy. We hope and expect that families will keep memorials and graves for their loved ones tidy.

The PCC is grateful for any offers to support the work of maintaining the church grounds, in a practical way or by making a monetary gift towards its upkeep – which can be made via the churchwardens or Parish Priest.

Parochial Church Council of St Mary the Virgin Little Hallingbury

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