

St Mary's Church, Pirton

Guide to the churchyard

Introduction

St. Mary's churchyard has been established and maintained by the church over many centuries to provide a pleasant and peaceful resting place for deceased villagers. The information provided in this guide is provided to families at or soon after the death of a loved one. Whilst we are sensitive to the feelings and wishes of families, we need to be clear about the type of memorials which are allowed. This is to help maintain the area as a dignified and tidy space where people may come to remember loved ones. Grave plots may not be reserved, as there is ample space for full burials and cremated remains. Regulations governing what is permitted in churchyards are drawn up by the Chancellor of the Diocese of St. Albans. The vicar has authority to approve applications within these regulations. A full copy of these (The Churchyard Regulations 2004) may be obtained from the vicar.

Burial of cremated remains

Cremated remains may be buried in the purpose-designed triangular area on the northeast side of the churchyard. Ashes may be buried in a wooden casket or poured directly into the grave. A minister will conduct a brief service at the graveside, at a time to suit the family. The grave is usually marked with a wooden cross provided by the funeral director until a stone plaque has been laid. The grave may be marked with a stone plaque (see below for types of stone permitted), laid level with the ground, and no more than 12" x 12". The inscription should include just the name and dates of the deceased in hand-cut incised lettering. The cross used to mark a grave should be removed once the plaque is in place.

Full burial plots

A new area for burials is now open in the north side of the existing churchyard, as marked on the attached plan view. Although this area has been used for burials in the past, the new graves will be made in the spaces between old graves. Most of the headstones from previous graves have been removed over the years. Great care will be taken to ensure that this is genuinely 'free' space. Whilst this may not be ideal, there is no other burial space available in or near the village. Families not wanting a burial within St. Mary's churchyard may of course apply to North Hertfordshire District Council for a burial in a municipal cemetery. New graves must be allowed to settle for a year before being levelled and a headstone laid. In the meantime, the grave may be marked by a wooden cross supplied by the funeral director.

Headstones and plaques

Graves may be marked only with a memorial headstone. Local funeral directors and monumental stonemasons will have the full details, as well as the required application forms and samples, but stones may be chosen from the following list of types, which applies to Plaques and headstones:

Sandstones	Forest of Dean, Serena (Italy), York
Limestones	Hopton Wood, Hornston, Nabresina (Italy), Portland
Slates	Welsh, Cumbrian
Granites	may be grey or red and should be: no lighter than honed Cornish and no darker than honed Rustenberg Grey
Marble	Dove Grey only

Monuments and memorials shall be of natural stone (including sandstone, limestone, slates and granite) and non-reflective or of oak. No monument shall be of black or pearl granite, of all-polished granite of whatever colour, of white marble, synthetic stone, or of plastic.

Inscriptions

Dedications should be simple, reverent and appropriate. The purpose of the epitaph is to identify the resting place of the person's mortal remains, to honour the dead, to comfort the living and to inform posterity. The engraving should harmonise with the selected material. Inscriptions should be incised or may be in relief and may be picked out in black or gold. Flush raised lead is also permitted. Plastic or other applied lettering, and incorporated photographs are not permitted. Hand-cut lettering is encouraged.

Additions to graves

In order to allow easy maintenance of the churchyard, and to maintain its appearance in keeping with its rural setting, mementos or embellishments to the grave are not permitted. This includes flower vases, plant pots or artificial flowers, or planted flowers, trees or shrubs. Cut flowers and wreaths may be laid on the grave, but these will be removed after a suitable time. Unauthorised additions may be removed and disposed of without notice.

Maintenance of graves

The church will maintain the grass, shrubs and trees in the churchyard. The maintenance of the headstone or plaque is the responsibility of the person who provided

for it. The church encourages families and next of kin to check and maintain graves regularly. Memorial plaques particularly can sink quickly, become overgrown and inscriptions fade unless they are cleaned and re-levelled regularly.

Application for memorials and approval

Applications for a memorial headstone or plaque may be made using forms available from local stonemasons, who will give advice on cost and on type and style, and will often submit the application on behalf of a bereaved family. Work should not be commissioned until a copy of the application has been approved and signed by the vicar. These are returned to the stonemason.

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