



## St Michael's Churchyard



Burials, Interment of Ashes  
and Memorials

*The churchyard remains one of the enduring images of this country. Every part of England has these precious places, precious not only because they hold the remains of the departed but also because they embody the history of their community.*

*From The Churchyards Handbook*

*Photo on front page by Revd David G Brown*

A Churchyard is a special place of quiet reflection and natural beauty, available for the whole community. In particular it is a place where families and friends can come to remember loved ones.

This booklet gives lots of important information, which will help you and us to keep the churchyard in good order. It's most likely that you are receiving this soon after a loved one has died. We very much hope that first and foremost you feel supported in your loss, and that the funeral service is helpful and meaningful for you and your family as you begin to come to terms with your loss.

We know that there is much to do and lots of information to take in following the death of a loved one, so we hope it will be helpful for you to have this booklet. Some of the information that follows will be of use to you now, and other parts might become more relevant when you're thinking about commissioning a headstone or memorial plaque, or focusing on how to maintain the grave.

Please keep this booklet in a safe place, so that you can refer to it in the future. If you have any questions at any stage, or if there is anything we can do to help, then please don't hesitate to contact us.

In the meantime, please be assured that we want to do all we can to make the churchyard a beautiful and peaceful place for all who use it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David G Brown', with a stylized, cursive script.

Revd David G Brown  
Senior Minister and Area Dean

## 1. Who can be buried in St Michael's churchyard?

Anyone who lived in the parish (that is, the ecclesiastical parish, not the civil parish) has a right in law to be buried in the local churchyard if room permits, as does anyone who died in the parish, even if they were resident elsewhere.

A quick way of checking whether an address is in the parish is to go to **[www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com)** and put in the postcode of where your loved one lived.

Additionally, anyone who is on the Electoral Roll of Warfield Church may be buried in the churchyard, even if they live outside the parish.

Unfortunately, because space in the churchyard is ultimately limited, we cannot normally allow anyone outside these criteria to be buried here, unless the burial is into an existing family grave. Additionally, if someone has lived in the parish for many years but has moved into a care home or similar outside the parish at the very end of their life, burial may also be possible.

**Before you make the final decision on where to have the burial of your loved one it is important that you are aware of the regulations regarding memorials in all Church of England churchyards.** Once someone has been buried it is too late to realise then that the regulations on headstones do not allow the style of headstone you were planning. **It's also very important to know that burial (including the burial of ashes) in the churchyard is your loved one's final resting place. Any subsequent request to rebury them elsewhere is likely to be refused.**

## 2. The Layout of the Churchyard

New burials happen in the graveyard extension, at the far end of the graveyard on the opposite side of the road to the church. Graves are

normally allocated in a sequential way, and the final decision on where the grave will be is taken by the Vicar.

The burial of ashes happens on the left-hand side of the graveyard, near the car park fence, in the area which is marked by flat memorial plaques. Again, plots are allocated in a sequential way. We also continue to do burials and the burial of ashes in existing family graves in any section of the Churchyard.

### **3. Maintenance of the churchyard**

Managing and maintaining the Churchyard is the responsibility of the local church (formally, the Vicar and the Church Council), and neither the local nor national Government play any role in this. It's a great privilege for us to care for the churchyard in which your loved one has been or is to be buried, but it's also important to realise that almost all the work is done by a small number of volunteers.

It's also important to say that we seek to do this in partnership with the families of those who are buried here. We are responsible for the overall care and maintenance of the churchyard, and you and your family continue to be responsible for the grave itself. You do not own the grave, but you are responsible for maintaining it, within the regulations that are set by the Church of England.

Part of our responsibility is the overall feel and protection of the churchyard, and it's important that we make sure everything about the churchyard is balanced and generous. This includes making sure that everything in the churchyard conforms to the rules set out by the Church of England. This means that, although we will always seek to work with you, there will be times when we need to ask for something to be done differently.

Broadly speaking, the areas of the Churchyard which are actively being used are kept mowed throughout the year, but the PCC has chosen to

mow other areas of the Churchyard less often to encourage a range of plants, wildflowers and insects to flourish through the spring and summer months. Pathways are maintained but the area between the paths is encouraged to grow.

#### **4. Churchyard Regulations**

The Churchyard Regulations are set by the Church of England and are intended to help with keeping the churchyard maintainable (e.g. no kerbstones because it is easier to mow where they do not exist). They also make sure that headstones and individual graves fit in with the overall feel of the churchyard.

It is worth noting that municipal cemeteries allow things on graves and headstones which the Churchyard Regulations do not.

Before a new burial takes place, we'll ask the next of kin or executor to sign a burial request form confirming that they understand, and will comply with, the terms and conditions pertaining to burials and memorials in the churchyard. This agreement will include a requirement by the next of kin or executor to ensure all other members of the family and friends understand and will comply with these terms and conditions, and that they will be responsible for the removal of any unauthorised items placed on graves by relations or friends.

#### **5. What is allowed on a grave?**

**Generally, the whole burial area should be kept as lawn.** Grave plots should be re-grassed as soon as the earth has settled.

**We welcome fresh flowers being placed in vases on headstones, or placed unwrapped on the grave, but no individual gardens should be created** on grave plots without the permission of the Vicar. This is to ensure that the volunteer working parties can get grass-cutting equipment

around graves. Well-maintained small plants may be permitted subject to them not restricting grass cutting.

Pots, bowls and vases (except those provided in the headstone or cremation stone), balloons, pictures and other decorative items are not permitted to be placed on any grave. Flowers or plants which have died or faded may be removed by those working in the graveyard.

Kerb edgings, other boundary markers (except sunken wooden edges), gravel or any other additional surfaces are not permitted, as they make maintenance of the churchyard very difficult.

(There is a year-long exemption for up to three toys and ornaments given in **Note 6.9** on page 9 of this leaflet.)

## **6. Memorials and headstones**

There is no automatic right in English law to erect any memorial. A churchyard is very different from a local authority cemetery, and because it's a churchyard, any memorial must be compatible with the Christian faith.

Permission must be sought from the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oxford before anything is placed on a grave. For convenience, the Chancellor authorises the Vicar to give permission for a memorial to be installed, which must be of an approved design. The authorisation given by the Vicar on behalf of the Chancellor of the Diocese only permits memorials to remain in the churchyard for a period of 50 years.

When you are ready, you should discuss the memorial with a stonemason. Your Funeral Director can help you to find one, or you can seek a recommendation from a friend. They will agree a design and a price with you and then send the design to the Church Office for approval. We will check the design against the regulations and either approve it and return it or seek clarification or alterations.

There is usually some delay between commissioning the memorial and it being installed because stonemasons tend to be busy and, in the event of a burial, there needs to be time to let the earth settle before the memorial can be installed. This is normally six months or more.

The memorials are not the responsibility of the Church. They belong to those who purchased them and therefore the Church does not insure or maintain them. In the event of any concerns, we will attempt to contact the family to advise them that the memorial requires attention, or that the way the grave is being kept needs to change. Sometimes we may need to act to make a grave safe or tidy without consultation if we are unable to make contact or to get a response. If a memorial is unsafe we will, if possible, lay the headstone flat on the grave to ensure the safety of everyone.

These regulations may be different from historic rules affecting older graves in some parts of the churchyard, and indeed from what is permitted in many local authority cemeteries. There is a link to the Diocese of Oxford Churchyard Regulations on this webpage:

[Diocesan Registry - Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](http://www.anglican.org/diocesan-registry)

*[Scroll down the Diocesan Registry page to “Church & churchyard advice”, click on the “+” sign, and “Churchyard regulations & memorials” is the second item.]*

**6.1 Materials:** A memorial must be made **of natural stone with a non-reflecting surface** such as limestone, or hardwood. For other memorials, stones traditionally used in local buildings, or stones closely similar to them in colour and texture, are to be preferred. Black, blue or red igneous rock (granite), marble, synthetic stone or plastic are not permitted. Painted or polished stone is not permitted, although a small area of non-reflective polishing (honed) may be permitted, to take an inscription.



**6.2 Dimensions:** A memorial may be no larger than 1200mm (4ft) in height from the ground, 900mm (3ft) in width and 150mm (6 inches) in thickness.

When ashes are buried a memorial tablet may be placed after an application has been approved. This type of memorial must be set flush to the ground and not exceed 18 inches by 18 inches in size. The material, colour and design of this memorial must conform to the regulations on memorials in this section.

**6.3 Base and Foundation Slab:** Due regard must be paid to the nature of the ground and the problem of settlement. The headstone may stand on a stone base, provided that it is an integral part of the design and does not project more than 50mm (2 inches) beyond the headstone in any direction. Foundation slabs must not be visible. The headstone must either be set into a below-ground pre-cast concrete shoe or be connected to its base or plinth by non-ferrous dowels.

**6.4 Designs:** No portraits, photographs or lights on the headstone are permitted, and no kerbs, fencing, railings, chains, chippings or heart shaped stones are allowed.

**6.5 Sculpture:** Sculptures and statues may only be authorised by faculty, which involves seeking the permission of the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oxford, for which there is an additional fee.

**6.6 Inscriptions:** must be simple, reverent and theologically acceptable. They may include appropriate quotations from the Scriptures or literary sources. Nicknames may be used in addition to full names, but they should normally be included in inverted commas within the name of the deceased.

**6.7 Plastic flowers are not permitted** except Remembrance Day poppies or Christmas wreaths which must be removed after a period of one month. Silk flowers appropriate to the season must be removed when they become faded or bedraggled.

**6.8 Individual gardens, fencing or shrubs** are not permitted, although the Vicar may permit the planting of a few bulbs or annuals on the grave. Please contact the Church Office before planting anything.

**6.9 Up to three toys or other similar ornaments** may be left at the graveside for a maximum period of twelve months after the burial or interment, after which time they must be removed. However, please avoid glass vases as these easily get broken and can be dangerous to those maintaining the Churchyard.

## **7. Fees**

The fees payable for a funeral service, a burial (including the burial of ashes), the placing of a memorial, or the addition of an inscription, and certain register searches are not fixed by the Parish but are set nationally. We will confirm with the Funeral Directors all the fees payable and they then pay us directly. If you have any questions about anything to do with fees, please contact the Church Office and ask to speak to Ali.

## **8. A Final Comment**

The graveyard is maintained by volunteers from the Church and the community, along with members of the Community Payback Team. It takes many hours of hard work to maintain such a large area, and we are very grateful to anyone who is able to help with this. If you would like to find out more about anything to do with maintenance of the graveyard or if you are able to offer help, please contact the Church Office and ask to speak to Alan.



**Warfield Church, Church Lane, Warfield RG42 6EE**

**[www.warfield.org.uk](http://www.warfield.org.uk)**

**01344 886900**

For enquiries relating to funerals and memorials, please contact  
Alison on the number above or by emailing [admin@warfield.org.uk](mailto:admin@warfield.org.uk)

For enquiries relating to maintenance of the graveyard, please contact  
Alan on the number above or by emailing [operations@warfield.org.uk](mailto:operations@warfield.org.uk)

