

St Giles Church—Guidance on the Churchyard Regulations

March 2018

Minor Amendments Feb 2021



This booklet provides information about the burial of those who have died and whose families wish them to be buried in the churchyard at St. Giles. It is based on regulations issued by the Diocese of Chichester.

Background

St. Giles Church is a Grade 1 listed building and was built on a pre-Christian site. This means that it is of particular historical and archaeological importance. Parishioners have been buried here for many centuries, and the oldest marked graves are of the 17th century. Today the churchyard is still a place of beauty, remembrance and comfort to those who have lost loved ones.

All parishioners and certain other people have a right of burial in the churchyard provided there is space in the ground. There is also a Memorial Path in the churchyard for the interment of ashes. However, it is a misconception that a plot in the churchyard is being bought by the deceased or their family, or that they are entitled to choose whatever headstone and inscription they would like.

The churchyard is first and foremost a place of Christian burial whatever were the beliefs of those who lie within its soil. Those who have died are entrusted forever to the mercy and love of God, and those who mourn them have the infinite Comfort of God's love in His Son Jesus Christ.

The erection of a headstone on a grave may be made only with the authority of the bishop, although in most cases the priest makes such decisions on his behalf and must follow the regulations laid down. Families are therefore asked to submit a de-

scription and drawing of their chosen headstone and these must fall within the regulations about what is or is not acceptable. If the priest refuses a submitted design, the family may apply for a 'faculty' or permission to be granted by the chancellor.

Why have regulations at all

The churchyard is a place of Christian burial, and also of historical record. This affects the wording of inscriptions and engravings on headstones.

The Church maintains the churchyard, and ease of mowing, general tidiness, and the avoidance of overgrown graves have to be taken into account, when considering planting on or near graves, and the placing of flowers on graves.

Many people come to the churchyard. They are all different, and it is important not to distress or offend them.

Because the Church and its site are so old, the churchyard should be in keeping with its antiquity and beauty. There are therefore restrictions on the kind of materials used in headstones, and their finish, as detailed overleaf. Where possible, the use of local material is encouraged.

How do you arrange for a burial in the churchyard?

The family or the undertaker needs to contact the priest, and arrange either a burial in the churchyard, or interment of ashes. After a burial there is a mound of earth over the grave, but this is removed after the initial settlement has taken place. An application for a memorial or headstone is usually made six months or more after the interment. This is to allow the ground to settle over the grave. It also allows some time to pass before the family needs to make a decision about the headstone. During this time, a temporary notice will be put up on

the grave to mark the site, until a permanent memorial has been agreed with the priest.

What are the restrictions on graves and their headstones?

Headstone Materials - polished stone or mirror finish is not permitted.

Permitted stones are:

Limestone (Portland, Purbeck, Horsham, Derbyshire, Hopton Wood, Hornton, Nabresina, Caen/Normandy)

Sandstone (York)

Unpolished Granite (light to medium grey)

Headstone Size:

Between 2ft 6in (750mm) and 4ft (1200mm) high.

Between 1ft 8in (500mm) and 3ft (900mm) wide.

Between 3in (75mm) and 6in (150mm) thick.

Bases must not project more than 2in (50mm) beyond the headstone in any direction. They must be fixed on a foundation slab of any approved material which itself is fixed on a foundation slab of any approved material which itself is fixed flush with the ground. Sockets for flower vases set within the base of a memorial are no longer permitted.

Headstone inscriptions

The full name of the deceased, their dates of birth and death should be recorded. Photographs and representations of objects or motifs, and pet names are not permitted. Badges, crests or emblems may be used provided they are seemly and appropriate for the deceased. Lettering should not be coloured or gilt except on nabresina limestone (contrasting matt lettering) and unpolished granite (off-white matt lettering).

The following are *not* allowed in the churchyard

- Polished stone or mirror finish for headstones
- Coloured lettering, except in the specific circumstances detailed above
- Integral sockets for flower vases in headstone bases
- Kerbs, railings, fencing or chippings (these create difficulty/danger when mowing).
- Wooden head boards.
- Memorials in the shape of vases, hearts, open books.
- Memorials incorporating photographs or portraits.
- Mementoes, windmills, toys or little animals.
- The use of 'pet' names.
- Artificial flowers.
- Brass plaques.
- Crosses, other than a temporary cross for a recent burial.
- Unsuitable containers for potted plants
- Planting of trees or shrubs and trees in pots

Flowers and Plants

Bulbs and small annual plants may be placed in the soil, and plants or cut flowers may be placed in removable sunken containers (preferably of unpolished aluminium) in the soil. No artificial flowers or foliage may be placed on or about the grave except for Remembrance Day poppies (which should be removed by the end of December). Dead flowers and artificial flowers will be removed by those who maintain the churchyard. Trees and shrubs may not be planted beside a grave: as they grow, mowing becomes very difficult, and the roots may damage the grave.

Burial of Ashes - Memorial Path

As cremation has become the more usual way of dealing with mortal remains, the Church Authorities have had to consider the most acceptable way of disposing of ashes.

At Horsted Keynes the priest and the PCC some years ago hit upon the idea of making a memorial path, to be skirted on either side with stones marking the last resting places of parishioners. However, it has to be recognised that the path does, at times, present a less than pleasing aspect owing to the presence of dead flowers, empty containers and blown-over plant pots. It is now necessary to ask the relatives of those whose ashes are interred beside the path to do their best to keep debris to a minimum.

- Dead flowers should be removed and placed in the green wheelie bin, first removing non-compostable materials into the black landfill bin.
- Empty containers should be removed.
- Potted plants should likewise be removed when they die.
- Plastic flowers are unacceptable, as are unsuitable plant con-

tainers such as jam jars, plastic pots and pots designed to be used indoors.

- Flowers and shrubs should not be planted near the commemorative stones; this would set an unacceptable precedent, spoiling the effect of tranquillity and order. The grounds men mow right up to the stones. One exception can be made; it is acceptable that spring flowers, such as Snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils, may be planted near the stones as these are finished before mowing commences. It is appreciated that sometimes floral tributes are placed by relatives who do not live locally and that their removal is not possible. The groundsmen have therefore been given the direction to remove dead or dying plants. The empty containers will be placed behind the wooden shed near the Church gate.

Ashes are to be buried in a container which is biodegradable, brought to the churchyard by the minister committing them to the earth and then covered with soil. If a non-biodegradable container should be used, the ashes will be poured into the ground by the priest.

It is usual for the ashes of a husband and wife to be buried under the same commemorative stone and the names and dates of both can be recorded on the stone. Stones are usually placed either at the time of burial or very soon after and it is well to remember to leave room for a second inscription which will follow later or it will be necessary to have a new stone cut bearing both names at a later date. After an interment of ashes, it is now possible to reserve the next plot along the Memorial Path. A fee of £50 will be charged for this service.

The Church Authorities reserve the right to re-fix any stones which have become loose or have subsided. However, it is hoped that relatives will arrange this themselves when it becomes necessary. For

this reason, soft lime mortar is to be used to allow for possible re-setting.

Memorial Plaques

Memorial plaques must be of York Sandstone and it is critical that the size is 300 x300 x 50mm.

Maintenance of memorial headstones and plaques

Any memorial will belong to the heir-at-law of the person commemorated and that person carries the duty to maintain it and the legal liability for its safety.

In Conclusion

St. Giles Church hopes that families and friends will find these notes helpful in making decisions following the death of a loved one. The churchyard is a beautiful place and it will remain so, with the help of all those who come to the Church for burial or comfort in mourning.

The churchyard, like the church building itself, is the responsibility of the congregation of St Giles Church. Churchyard costs alone amount to several thousand pounds annually. Financial contributions are always very much appreciated and indeed some relatives of those buried here routinely support the upkeep in this way. Please help by placing your donation in the secure box at the back of the church. If you are able to Gift Aid the money please enclose it in a white 'giftaid it' envelope. For regular contributions, please consider joining the Parish Giving Scheme. White 'giftaid it' envelopes and details of the Parish Giving Scheme are available from the back of the church. Thank you very much.