

The Churchyard

Churchyards usually are owned by the local church. This means that the people who worship at the church have to make sure the churchyard is maintained and find the money to do so.

There are many regulations that lay down how this should be done. Some matters are the responsibility of the local church council. Some are the responsibility of the vicar. Often their purpose is to ensure that due respect is paid to graves and the memory of those who are buried there.

In the past it was common for churches to leave each grave to be tended by relatives. What this usually meant was the more recent graves would be kept tidy, but over time families would move away or die out and most graves became overgrown.

Today most people expect graveyards to be kept tidy. This means that the Church Council has to employ someone to mow the grass and carry out general gardening tasks or rely on volunteers.

Churchyards are difficult to mow because they are never flat. Mounds, kerbstones and bushes make it harder still. This is why some things, like kerbstones, are no longer allowed.

It may seem disappointing to be told that a particular kind of memorial is not allowed, but the regulations have to be fair to everyone and most people would rather see a tidy churchyard even if it means restrictions on what can be done.

The Headstone

Placing any kind of monument in a churchyard, or even altering a monument which is already there, is covered by regulations. Whether you want to erect a headstone, add an inscription, or install a receptacle for a vase, there is a procedure to follow.

If you are not sure what to do, the best thing is usually to ask the vicar. For most purposes there is a set of forms. Two identical forms need to be filled in and there is a covering sheet which explains the kind of stone allowed.



The reason for restrictions is to avoid having some stones that do not blend with the appearance of the church and churchyard. Stones that look very attractive in a stonemason's yard can sometimes be totally inappropriate in a particular churchyard. This is why local stone is usually the best choice.

To decide what might be appropriate, it is a good idea to take a walk round the churchyard. Look at the style of the church, the kind of stone used and the setting.

Headstones should be polished only on the front where the inscription is placed. Surfaces that are not polished gradually attract lichen. Over time they change their appearance slightly and this helps them to blend in with the environment.

Before a headstone is erected you need to allow time for the ground to settle. Usually it is a good idea to leave the ground for at least six months.



The Grave

When you buy a headstone from the stonemason, it belongs to you. Part of the cost is a fee that goes to the church. This fee is for permission to erect the stone. The piece of land still belongs to the church.

Sometimes, after the funeral, when a grave has been filled in, there is a mound of earth on top. This mound only has one purpose, to fill in the grave as the earth settles down over the next few months. The relatives do not own the mound; it is just part of the churchyard. The Church Council usually allows enough time for the ground to settle and then arranges for it to be flattened so that the grass can be mowed.

Flowers

The usual arrangement for flowers is to incorporate a vase with the headstone. If it does not have a receptacle for a vase, you can usually have one added.

We request that fresh flowers are always used as the diocese does not permit artificial flowers with the exception of Remembrance Day poppies. Wreaths may be placed on a grave at the time of Christian festivals such as Christmas or significant personal anniversaries.

Please do not use breakable vases especially glass, as they are dangerous when mowing is taking place.

We request that plants and bushes are not planted on the mound as at some point it will need to be flattened to allow for mowing.

It is best if you remove flowers from a family grave when the time comes. If you leave them they will eventually be removed during churchyard tidying, but dead flowers or artificial arrangements which are past their best make a churchyard look uncared for and volunteers who help tidy up risk causing offence when they throw things away!



A Fitting Memorial

The Church Council does its best to make sure the churchyard is a worthy place for people to remember the lives of those who have died and give thanks to God for them.

To achieve this we depend on voluntary support. We value the care taken by relatives to tend graves and welcome offers of help with general maintenance.

We hope you find our churchyard a peaceful place for reflection and a fitting memorial for your loved ones



Further Help

If we can support you in any way in your bereavement or if you require further advice or help after reading this pamphlet, please contact the Vicar who will be pleased to help.

Vicar – The Rev'd Jan Waterfield
The Vicarage, Christ Church Lane, Lichfield
01543 410751



St James the Great
Parish Church of Longdon

A Fitting Memorial

Answers to some common questions about graves and churchyards.

When somebody we care about deeply dies, we naturally want to remember them in a way which is appropriate and dignified.

Often this means erecting a gravestone in the churchyard at the place where the person is buried.

What would be the right choice?

Will it still seem appropriate – and dignified – twenty years later?

Who will maintain it?

What is allowed?