

# Churchyard Regulations Diocese of Oxford

## A guide for funeral directors and stonemasons

- Nicknames or pet names (provided they are not irreverent or otherwise unsuitable) may be used in addition to baptismal names; they should, however, be included in inverted commas or brackets within the name of the deceased.
- Additions may be made to an inscription at a later date following a further interment in the same grave or for other suitable reasons. Any such addition must, however, be separately authorised by the minister. The lettering, layout and wording must, as well as complying with the Regulations, be consistent with the original inscription.
- Hand-crafted letter-cutting is welcomed and encouraged (see the examples given in *The Churchyards Handbook* and in *Memorials by Artists*). Cursive script is not permitted.

**Commemoration after cremation:** A ledger stone may be introduced only at the place where the cremated remains of the person to be commemorated by the ledger stone are interred.

If the churchyard is closed, a ledger stone may be introduced only if the interment of the cremated remains was authorised by a specific Faculty, or if the remains were interred in an area which has been set aside by Faculty for the interment of cremated remains generally. Ledger stones are not permitted where the parochial church council has adopted a policy of commemorating persons whose cremated remains are interred in the churchyard exclusively by other means (for example, wall plaques or a book of remembrance).

**Trademarks:** The mason's mark may be inscribed as long as it is not in a prominent position.

**Upkeep:** Graves may not be fenced or otherwise individually delineated; and

- Individual gardens or shrubs are not permitted, although the incumbent may permit the planting of a few bulbs or annuals.
- Only cut flowers or wreaths (not plastic ones) may be left at the graveside. Silk flowers may be left until they fade or decay.
- With the permission of the minister, up to three toys or similar objects may be left at the graveside for a period of twelve months after the burial or interment. The minister may then remove them.

The construction of a brick-lined vault, bricked grave or mausoleum in a churchyard requires the authority of a Faculty. Such a Faculty will be granted only if there are exceptional reasons. If there are, the Chancellor will require an assurance that

- any memorial to be erected over the vault will comply with diocesan and local churchyard regulations, and
- a fund for future maintenance will be established if the Faculty is granted
- any necessary planning consent has been obtained.

For further information, please see:  
[www.oxford.anglican.org/graveyards](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/graveyards)



This is a guide to help funeral directors and stonemasons involved in the design and erection of memorials in churchyards. The current Churchyard Regulations are available in full on the diocesan website.

Experience shows that where Churchyard Regulations are not fully understood, the process of choosing a memorial can be fraught with distress and disappointment for the bereaved family at an already difficult time.

We know what an important part funeral directors and stonemasons play in helping people choose a memorial that is appropriate and dignified. We hope that by setting out the regulations clearly the process will run smoothly to the benefit of all those involved.

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## Principles

The key principle is to make sure that all of our churchyards are places of peace and beauty, and form an appropriate setting for the church.

The aim is for harmony, but not necessarily uniformity. While we want to encourage creativity and imagination, we equally want to avoid memorials that look totally out of place. We need to balance the particular wishes of individual mourners against the concerns of other bereaved families and the community as a whole.

In summary, a memorial should respect its surroundings; not impose an unreasonable burden of upkeep on future generations; and the inscription should be appropriate to the setting.

## The process

A parish priest or Area Dean during a vacancy can approve a proposed memorial if it complies with the Churchyard Regulations. He or she can also approve the alteration of an existing memorial to incorporate the details of a second burial in the same grave.

If a proposal does not comply with the Regulations or is likely to be controversial in any way, a 'Faculty' will be needed. This is in the hands of the Chancellor, who will be interested in the views of the parish priest and the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

## Unauthorised memorials

If a memorial is erected without approval, the Chancellor may order it to be removed - at the expense of whoever erected it.

## The Churchyard Regulations

The Churchyard Regulations are published in full on the diocesan website:

[www.oxford.anglican.org/churchyards](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/churchyards).

Below is a summary of the key points of the Regulations relating to the design and erection of memorials. **It is important for funeral**

### directors and masons to refer to the Regulations themselves for the details.

**1.** The right to burial of a parishioner is confined to interment in the churchyard. The erection of a tombstone or monument over a grave remains a privilege, and strictly speaking no tombstone or monument may be erected in a churchyard without the authority of the Consistory Court and the Diocesan Chancellor. Because it is a churchyard, any memorial must be compatible with the Christian religion.

**2.** In practice, the Chancellor has delegated a limited authority to the incumbent, who may normally grant permission for the erection of a tombstone, monument or ledger. During a vacancy in the benefice, these delegated powers can be exercised by the Area Dean after consultation with the churchwardens.

**3.** No permission will be given for the erection of a memorial or ledger until six months after the date of burial or interment.

**4.** The ultimate responsibility for authorising a churchyard memorial or ledger lies with the Consistory Court. Application may be made at any time to the Consistory Court for authorisation by Faculty to erect a memorial outside the scope of these regulations.

**5.** Memorials or ledgers may be authorised by incumbents, priests-in-charge or Area Deans only if:

- the memorial or ledger falls within the Churchyard Regulations (and any supplementary regulations imposed by the PCC and authorised by the Consistory Court), and
- a formal application is made by the legal personal representative or executor of the deceased seeking to erect the memorial. The churchyard memorial or ledger application form is available on the diocesan website.

**6.** No memorial or ledger may be erected until all the provisions set out in paragraph five have been completed. This also applies to additional inscriptions. No commission to an undertaker or monumental mason should be accepted until the parish priest has signed the relevant part of the application form giving consent for the memorial.

**7.** The incumbent may not authorise any memorial that falls outside the Regulations. Any such application should be referred to the Registrar of the Diocese. Permission will be given only if there are exceptional reasons to justify this.

**8.** The Regulations include the following points:

**Materials:** A memorial or ledger must be made of natural stone with a non-reflecting surface, or of hardwood. Stones traditionally used in local buildings, or stones closely similar in colour and texture, are preferred. Black, blue, red, green or other brightly coloured stones, marble, synthetic stone and plastic are not permitted.

**Dimensions:** A memorial may be:

- no larger than 1220mm (4ft) in height from the ground, 915mm (3ft) in width and 155mm (6 inches) in thickness; and
- no less than 75mm (3 inches) in thickness, save that slate memorials may be no less than 40mm (1½ inches) in thickness.
- A ledger may be no larger than 460mm (18 inches) by 460mm (18 inches).

**Base and foundation slab:** A memorial must be inserted sufficiently into the ground to ensure stability or be supported by a pre-cast concrete shoe below ground.

- Due regard must be paid to the nature of the ground and the problem of settlement.
- A 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) away from the place of burial and 205mm (8 inches) towards the place of burial.

- The base may have up to two vases fitted into it.
- Foundation slabs must not be visible.
- If the base is visible, the headstone must be connected to it by non-ferrous dowels.

**Designs:** A memorial need not be rectangular in shape. Curved tops may be preferable to straight edges.

- Memorials must not take the form of a heart or a statue or be the shape of any object or animal except a book.
- Memorials must not include a portrait, photograph or other image of an individual, any moulding, any video or sound recording, any QR codes, kerbs, fencing, railings or chippings.
- A black, white or uncoloured etching or carving may be permitted if it is reverent and theologically acceptable. It must cover no more than one-fifth of the surface of a monument or ledger stone
- No form of lighting is allowed.

**Sculpture:** Figurative sculpture, or other statuary may only be authorised by Faculty.

**Inscriptions:** Inscriptions must be simple, reverent and theologically acceptable; they may include appropriate quotations from the scriptures or literary sources.

- A request for any other inscription must be made to the Diocesan Chancellor via the Registry. Inscriptions must be incised or in relief and must be uncoloured, grey or black. Plastic, lead or other inserted lettering is not permitted.