

St Paul's Church, Wokingham



Burials, Interment of Ashes and Memorials in the Churchyard

(Updated from 1st January 2017)

'Churchyards exist like small islands of time past in the midst of the modern world. Here can be found time for reflection in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, not only a resting place for the last mortal remains but a place of ease for those who go on living'.

from the 'Living Churchyard Project'

A Churchyard is a special place. We take our responsibility to maintain it as seriously as you would hope. It has to be a place where you can safely come to remember your loved ones. It also has to be a place where others are able to come to remember those they love who have died. Further, it is a place of quiet reflection and natural beauty for the local community, and the area which surrounds the church of St Paul, the backdrop against which people come to worship, come for their wedding or baptism, come for a concert or school service.

It's important to say three things at the start of this booklet. One is that it is a privilege for us to care for the Churchyard in which your loved one has been buried. Managing and maintaining the Churchyard is the job of the Incumbent and PCC of St Paul's and neither the Town nor the Borough Council, or indeed the Government, play any role in this. The fact that the Churchyard looks as good as it does is due entirely to the willingness and commitment of a small number of volunteers.

The second is that this is a partnership. 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.

The third is that, since part of our responsibility is the overall feel and protection of the Churchyard, we have a role in making sure that everything about the Churchyard is balanced and generous. It is our responsibility to make sure that everything in the Churchyard conforms to the rules set out by the Church of England nationally.

Some of the information that follows will be of use to you now; other bits might become relevant when you're thinking about commissioning a headstone or memorial plaque, or focusing on how to maintain the grave.

Do keep this booklet in a safe place: and, if you have any questions at any stage, or if there is anything we can do to help, or if you would ever like to chat to someone, then please don't hesitate to contact us.

The Rector and PCC of St Paul's Church, Wokingham
Parish Office 0118 979 2122
www.spauls.org.uk

1. Who can be buried in St Paul's Churchyard?

If your loved one lived in the parish (which covers Woosehill, Emmbrook and the North, West and half of the centre of Wokingham) and you wish for them to be buried in the Churchyard then this can be arranged through a Funeral Director, or by contacting the Parish Office.

www.achurchnearyou.com is a quick way of checking the parish boundary. All parishioners have a right in law to be buried in their local Churchyard if room permits. Unfortunately, because of the limited space in the Churchyard, we cannot normally allow anyone who has never lived within the parish boundaries to be buried in St Paul's Churchyard (unless the burial is into an existing family grave).

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 then realise that the regulations on headstones do not allow the style of headstone you were planning. The 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 either at the north-east corner of the Churchyard, near the Reading Road, or near the railway line to the south of the Church. The Churchyard is 150 years old and so, inevitably, we are now using the corners of the area. The final decision on where the grave will be dug is taken by the Church. (It is worth noting that there is noise from the road in the NE corner.)

The burial of ashes happens to the East of the Church in the area which is marked by flat memorial plaques. We also continue to do burials and the burial of ashes in family graves in any section of the Churchyard.

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 always maintained but the area between the paths is encouraged to grow.

The Rector and PCC aim to retain the existing character and appearance of the churchyard, in accordance with the national Regulations, for the benefit of all who visit the Churchyard.

3. Churchyard Regulations

The Churchyard Regulations are set by the Church of England nationally and are intended to make each Churchyard maintainable (e.g. it is easier to mow where there are no kerbs) and to 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 the Rector and PCC will ask the next of kin / executor to sign a burial request form confirming that they understand, and will comply with, the terms and conditions pertaining to burials and memorials within this area. This agreement will include a requirement by the next of kin /executor to ensure all other members of the family and friends understand and comply with these terms and conditions; and to be responsible for the removal of any unauthorised items placed on grave plots by relations or friends.

4. What is allowed on a grave?

Generally, the whole burial area will be kept as lawn. Grave plots will be re-grassed as soon as the earth has settled. No individual gardens should be created on grave plots without the permission of the Rector. This is to ensure that the volunteer working parties can get grass-cutting equipment around graves. Well-maintained small plants or shrubs may be permitted subject to them not restricting grass cutting.

Kerb edgings, other boundary markers (except sunken wooden edges), gravel or any other additional surfaces are not permitted. Pots, bowls and vases (except those provided in the headstone or cremation stone), artificial flowers or plants, balloons or any other decorative item will not be permitted to be placed on any grave plot. (There is a year-long exemption for up to three toys and ornaments given in 5.9 on page 8 of this leaflet). The only items allowed to be placed on grave plots after the burial will be fresh unwrapped cut flowers, which may be removed by Churchyard maintenance volunteers when faded.

5. 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. Because it's a Churchyard, any memorial must be compatible with the Christian faith.

Permission has to be sought from the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oxford before anything is placed on a grave. For convenience, the Chancellor authorises the Incumbent to give permission for the erection of a memorial, which must be of an approved design. The authorisation given by the Incumbent on behalf of the Chancellor of the Diocese only permits memorials to remain in the churchyard for a period of 100 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 Parish Office with the appropriate fee for approval. We will check the design against the regulations and either approve it and return it, or seek clarification or alterations. These are normally very minor because all responsible Stonemasons know what is permissible in Churchyards.

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 anyway. This is normally around six months.

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, but we may have to act to make a grave safe or tidy without consultation if we fail to make contact or to get a response. If the 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. The full Regulations are available here: www.oxford.anglican.org/registry/churchyard_regs.html

Here is a short summary:

5.1 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.

5.2 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; and no smaller than 75mm (3 inches) in thickness, save that slate memorials may be no smaller than 38mm (1½ inches) in thickness. When ashes are buried a memorial tablet may be placed after an application to the Incumbent has been approved. This type of Memorial must be set flush to the ground and not exceed 18 inches by 18 inches. The material, colour and design of this memorial must conform to the regulations on memorials in this section.

5.3 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.

5.4 Designs: No portraits or photographs on the headstone, no kerbs, fencing, railings, chains, chippings, heart shaped stones. No lights.

5.5 Sculpture: Figurative sculpture, or other statuary may only be authorised by faculty, which involves seeking the permission of the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oxford.

5.6 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 baptismal names; they should however normally be included in inverted commas within the name of the deceased. Handcrafted letter cutting is welcomed.

5.7 Plastic or Artificial 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.

5.8 Individual gardens, fencing or shrubs are not permitted, although the Incumbent may permit the planting of a few bulbs or annuals within the grave and sunken wooden edges (width no wider than that of the base of the headstone, length no more than 6ft). Please contact the Parish Office before planting anything.

5.9 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. They must then be removed by the family or the Churchyard maintenance volunteers, after sensitive consultation between the family and the Incumbent. However, please avoid glass vases as these easily get broken and can be dangerous to those maintaining the Churchyard.

6. Fees

The fees payable to the Incumbent and the Parochial Church Council 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 Parish Office.

7. A Final Comment

Volunteers from the Church and Community, often supported by a Community Payback Team, work to maintain the Churchyard. A number of people also take responsibility for keeping a specific area tidy. There is also a group from the community which is meeting to plan the future look of the Churchyard and to ensure that it is still a place of calm beauty many decades from now.

Again, if you would like to find out more about anything to do with Churchyard maintenance please contact the Parish Office.