



Where all find a welcome and are nurtured in their journey with Christ

St Mary's Whitkirk: Churchyard Regulations

Our churchyard is a place of peace, where those who have died in this parish have been laid to rest for many generations. It is a privilege to continue to offer this space to those who are bereaved. This leaflet explains some of the rules that apply to burial (or interment of ashes) in a churchyard. These rules are determined by the Consistory Court (that is, the court that is concerned with the law as it applies to churches) of the Diocese of Leeds. A full set of Churchyard Rules (revised 2020) can be downloaded from the Consistory Court webpage: <https://www.leeds.anglican.org/how-we-can-help/dac/consistory-court2/>.

Churchyard FAQs (October 2024)

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

Sadly our churchyard is now full for new burials. Burials in an existing grave plot (for example, with a family member) are allowed. There are also plots available for the burial of ashes after a cremation. The following all have a legal right to be buried in the churchyard:

- a) anybody who lives within the parish boundary;
- b) those named on the church electoral roll;
- c) those who die in the parish.

2. Do I need permission to erect a memorial stone in the churchyard?

Churchyards are consecrated and set apart for sacred use; because of this, different rules apply in churchyards than in municipal cemeteries. Responsibility for the care and maintenance of the churchyard rests with the Parochial Church Council and is upheld by the Vicar. Permission must therefore be sought before making any changes to a churchyard. This includes the addition of a headstone, memorial, container for flowers, or any other object. The Vicar can agree to these changes within the limited boundaries allowed by the Consistory Court, which are set out in this leaflet. Applications will normally be accepted if the criteria set out in this leaflet (and more fully in the Churchyard Regulations agreed by the Consistory Court) are adhered to.

3. How soon after the funeral can there be a headstone?

You should wait at least six months for the ground to settle after a burial. This will also allow time to think about what sort of memorial and inscription you would like. A memorial slab can be laid immediately after the burial of ashes.

4. What kinds of memorial stones are allowed?

The type of stone, its design and memorial inscription is regulated by the Diocese. To avoid any disappointment, please first find out what is permissible and get this approved in principle by the Vicar. The stonemason will then work with you on the detail and will submit a final draft for approval. Once your application has been formally approved and signed, the stonemason is authorised to put the memorial in place.

Specifically, the following requirements must normally be adhered to:

Memorial plate (the upright stone)

Height (from base) 2ft 3ins (min) to 4ft (max)

Width 1ft 8ins (min) to 3ft (max)

Thickness 3ins (min)* to 6ins (max)

*except when slate is used, in which case 1.5 ins (min) is permitted



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Memorial base (if included)

Height (from ground) 3ins (min) to 6 ins (max)

Width 2ft (min) to 3ft (max)

Depth 10ins (min) to 1ft (max)

The base may incorporate up to 2 integral sockets for flower vases.

Materials

Monuments made of sandstone (including Yorkshire stone), slate, and granite (honed light to dark grey only) are permitted. One type of stone must be used consistently throughout the monument. Polished stone or mirror finish is not permitted, nor is black, red, blue, green, white or multi-coloured granite.

Memorials after a burial of ashes

If cremated remains are buried in an existing family grave then the headstone may be altered, after the necessary permission is granted, to add the loved one's name; or a new headstone may be erected if necessary. Within the area allocated for the burial of ashes a small (12" x 18") flat inscribed memorial stones (with permitted vase base if desired) is allowed, without additional adornment on or around the stone.

5. Are there rules about inscriptions on memorials?

Yes: this is governed by the Consistory Court rules. Badges, crests or emblems may be used provided they are seemly and appropriate for the deceased. Bronze or ceramic inserts are not to be used. Incised lettering may be painted in gold, silver, matt white, matt black or matt grey. Plastic inserted lettering is not permitted. Under Church of England regulations, photographs or representations of objects or motifs such as a child's toy are not permitted, nor is the use of 'pet names'.

A headstone or memorial slab is a public statement about the person who is being commemorated.

Inscriptions which give a flavour of the life of the person commemorated as well as their name and dates are allowed. Such inscriptions should honour the dead, comfort the living and inform posterity, bearing in mind that they may well be read far into the future. A memorial stone is not the right place for a statement about how members of the family feel about the deceased nor how they would address them were they still alive. Passages of or references to Scripture are welcomed: the Vicar can advise if necessary.

6. Are flowers allowed?

We recognise the importance of placing fresh flowers on the graves and memorial stones of people we have loved. Please remove the flowers from any plastic wrappings and remove or replace them before they decay. We will remove dead flowers if you do not do so. Artificial flowers are not allowed.

7. Is other decoration allowed?

Kerbs, free-standing vases, additional stones or pebbles, balloons, lights and ornamentation, are not permitted under the Consistory Court rules and will be removed. This applies to both the graves and the ashes area.

8. Is there any flexibility around these rules?

A case may be made for exceptions to these rules, but this will need to go to the Consistory Court for approval and there may be a lengthy wait for a decision. Please do talk to the Vicar in the first instance if you want to request something that appears not to be covered by these rules. We are happy to help if we can.

Contact us...

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