

Burial of cremated remains

Traditional English churchyards are places of dignity and repose, their elements are generally bold yet simple - locally quarried headstones, walls, trees, paths and clear grassed areas. In many cases, they provide settings for some of our finest architectural heritage. The burial of cremated remains within established churchyards is a relatively recent phenomenon and the smaller memorials engendered can introduce an alien change of scale to upset the traditional harmony. Each churchyard is unique. The PCC should discuss policy and with the help of the Church Architect / Surveyor decide how best cremated remains may be buried and the person suitably commemorated. In a small rural churchyard scattered individual locations may be suitable, but in a larger urban churchyard a special area and scheme will probably be more appropriate as allowed for in the Churchyard Rules. Such a scheme would define an area for the interment of cremated remains and set out the manner and style of memorials so that a positive contribution is made to the surroundings.

Where it is intended to set apart an area for the interment of cremated remains a faculty is required. Provision must be made under the faculty for the mode of commemorating those whose cremated remains are buried in this area. The petition and public notice should specify what method of commemoration is proposed.

Although it is important to keep a precise record of burial locations separate memorials are not necessary. All burials of cremated remains must be recorded in the burial register of the church with a note "burial of ashes". Some possible approaches are as follows:-

- A purpose-designed common memorial of good scale, for example a calvary or stone cross, to provide a focus within a clear grassed area for the burial of cremated remains. This can create an atmosphere as peaceful and as dignified as in any area of conventional burials.
- A common memorial with provision for incising individual names.
- Panels for small plaques incorporated in the design of a common memorial.
- A flower shelf on the common memorial to house vases of approved design, with the details of those buried being recorded in a Book of Remembrance on display in the church.
- A specifically designed area for small inscribed tablets, set in grass or gravel over individual plots, relating to a common memorial with provision for flowers. This solution can create a conflict of scale and would generally only be suitable for an isolated area, remote from both the church building and conventional burials.

- A purpose-built wall for tablets or plaques, adjacent to a grassed area for the interments, with a gravelled margin at its base for flower containers.
- A formal, paved area, perhaps with seats, where paving stones are taken up as required, inscribed, and reset over buried cremated remains. Considerable initial expense but potentially a good urban solution.
- Where marking of the plots is considered essential, small numbered stone cubes or wooden blocks, referring to a Book of Remembrance in the church, can be set into the grass. Flowers are likely to be left on the stones initially, but, in time, untended markers will become lost in the turf. There is a risk of malicious removal of the stones.
- Small tablets grouped and set in grass or gravel to imitate the scale of traditional stone ledgers.

Memorial tablets should not be set into existing churchyard walls as the appearance, historic fabric and structural integrity of the walls would be impaired.

Cremated remains should not be scattered. If there is to be no memorial, cremated remains may be interred in any quiet, unused corner. Ideally it is best if, at interment, the cremated remains are carefully outpoured into a shallow excavation under a section of lifted turf. But if cremated remains are buried in a container it should be of a biodegradable material e.g. cardboard or wood. Cremated remains may be interred in an existing grave.

Each churchyard needs to be assessed on its own merits and advice should be sought from the church architect, archdeacon and DAC to determine what sort of solution and scheme is most appropriate. Preliminary informal advice should be obtained from the DAC before the application for formal approval.

The Churchyards Handbook (fourth edition) published by Church House Publishing in May 2001 gives further useful guidance on the subject.

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