

# **HOLY TRINITY FRECKLETON**

## **A Guide to the Churchyard for the newly-bereaved**

Losing a loved one is a traumatic experience. The person who has been so much a part of one's life is suddenly not there any more. It is difficult to get used to the reality that he or she is no longer going to walk into the room. There is just an aching gap where that person used to be. There will be grief and there may be tears to be shed, possibly for some time to come.

If that loved one has been buried in the churchyard, or their ashes interred there, those who are bereaved may sometimes find it helpful to visit the grave and spend some time quietly alone with their thoughts and memories. Some find tending the grave helpful. Others might like to sit on a churchyard seat or just walk around and let their thoughts run free.

Churchyards should be places of tranquillity and dignity, open to anyone who wants to come and enjoy the peace that such a setting can bring. They are places which remind us of our mortality, and perhaps encourage us to think again about the importance of what we do with our lives. They give us time to pause in our busy lives to reflect on the fundamental issues of life, death and our relationship with God.

Churchyards not only provide a focal point for present-day mourners, but also an historical record for future generations. It is because of all these functions that it is important that the quality and the dignity of the churchyard be maintained for present and future generations. That is why churchyards are governed by various laws and guidelines, both legal and ecclesiastical.

Understandably, families who are newly bereaved may be unfamiliar with what is permissible or desirable in a churchyard—i.e. with what may be placed on or around a grave. In this Diocese, what is permissible in a churchyard is governed by a document called:

The General Directions of the Chancellor of the Diocese  
Concerning Churches and Churchyards (1980)

To avoid any misunderstanding and to help to achieve a mutually satisfactory result, the following advice is given, based on the above document. The clergy or churchwardens are, of course, very happy to offer further advice personally, or to clarify any matter.

The Directions state that:

“Nothing is to be erected or placed ... in a churchyard without the authority of a faculty, or ... the written consent of the incumbent.”

This means that a grave should be left as it is, apart from the following:

“(i) Bulbs and small annual plants may be planted in the soil of any grave;

(ii) Plants or cut flowers may be placed in removable sunken containers (preferably of unpolished aluminium) in the soil of any grave;

(iii) Wreaths and cut flowers placed on graves and plants and flowers in containers may be removed, when withered, by those authorised to do so by the incumbent;

(iv) No artificial flowers or foliage may be ... placed on or about graves.”

(CD, p21)

The Directions also make it clear that no artificial borders should be placed around a grave and, in the area for cremated remains, nothing should be planted or placed anywhere other than in a container built into the plaque.

It is, of course, quite acceptable to leave a grave to grass over, in which case it will be mown along with the rest of the churchyard.

However, once a grave is dug over and planted, it is the responsibility of the family to maintain it.

### **Stone chippings**

It is expressly forbidden to cover or surround a grave, or a cremated remains plot, with chippings, not least because of the danger from flying stones when mowing takes place.

### **Monuments**

The dimensions for a monument are clearly laid down in the Directions, and all monumental masons should be familiar with these. The usual material is granite (though certain other types of stone are permissible), which must be "light or medium grey". No black or dark grey is permissible, neither is any polished finish. The finish should either be rough or eggshell. No statues or other objects are permissible. Plaques for cremated remains are usually green slate.

### **Inscriptions**

Inscriptions on monuments and cremated remains plaques need a good deal of thought, and it is strongly recommended that anyone planning an inscription should discuss possibilities with a member of the clergy or the churchwardens before approaching a monumental mason. The Directions support this and remind us that inscriptions will be there for future generations as well as present mourners, and are a tangible record of parishioners' lives.

Because they will be on display to the public, probably for generations to come, a certain degree of formality is required. The Churchyards Handbook, published for the Council for the Care of Churches, recommends that "nicknames or pet names like 'Mum' or 'Dad' are inappropriate when inscribed in stone. The more formal 'Mother' or 'Father' are much more appropriate.

Similarly, the deceased's full name must be used, although a nickname or diminutive can be added in brackets or parenthesis.

The names of the living should not be inscribed on a monument, since this detracts from the person who is being commemorated.

An ancient practice, which has fallen into disuse but is well worth reviving, is the inclusion of a person's occupation, or any role they played in the local community, which might be of interest to future generations.

An example of a good inscription would be:

In memory of

JOHN ERIC SMITH

Farmer, musician, sidesman of this parish

Died March 16th 1992, aged 85 years

"Praise the Lord with the sound of the trumpet"

For advice about graves, monuments, inscriptions, monumental masons or any other aspect of the churchyard, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the clergy or a churchwarden.