



Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)

MANAGING YOUR CHURCHYARD: TIDYING UP MEMORIALS

From time to time, PCCs may undertake a tidying up operation dealing with unsafe or broken memorials, including kerbs, footstones, mounds etc. **As a general rule this type of operation requires a faculty and needs to be approached systematically.** The purpose of this note is to suggest a typical procedure together with advice on how to proceed with the most common problems.

Planning ahead and faculty petitions

As part of the process of applying for a faculty, and for the very important purpose of enabling people to see whether there will be any effect on a grave in which they have any interest, it is essential to produce a plan of your proposals. If you have an existing plan of the churchyard, then this can of course be used as a basis.

If no accurate plan of the churchyard exists, this would be a good time to consider preparing one. Bear in mind that a Church of England churchyard is an amenity to which the public may have rights of burial, and with these go the expectation of access to proper information. Further advice on record keeping and the preparation of a plan is set out in the Churchyards Handbook (4th Edition, published CCC, 2001). It may be possible to get help from local historical societies.

Representations by Interested Parties

It is most important that reasonable efforts have been made to contact those with an interest in any grave affected by tidying up proposals. The Diocesan Chancellor will normally expect as a minimum that the proposals have been advertised in the local newspaper. This should refer to a place where details of the proposals can be examined. Every effort should then be made to resolve any concern about any particular memorial, preferably before the proposals are submitted to the DAC for consideration.

Removal or Relocation of Monuments

Safety considerations aside, the general principle is that memorials should not be moved unless it is strictly necessary, and then only if the alteration has been approved by faculty. As a rule, the DAC is unlikely to recommend relocation of memorials purely to assist maintenance, because once a memorial has been moved, it loses much of its significance. The once-common practice of moving memorials to the perimeter

of the churchyard or relocating them either side of the main path is no longer viewed favourably. On the other hand, where memorials are broken or illegible, and assuming that the associated grave is no longer being tended, then there will not normally be any objection to their removal and disposal. Footstones, where these survive, can cause a particular hazard for maintenance, and if the associated headstone is to remain, then it may be acceptable to relocate it behind the headstone, with the inscription facing in the opposite direction, so that both stones can be read.

Kerbs present a particular problem to maintenance, particularly where in uncertain soil conditions they have settled and broken. In these circumstances the DAC would normally recommend disposal of the kerbs (provided that any inscription is recorded) together with associated chippings or infill.

Safety

Please note that it is not necessary to obtain a faculty simply to make safe genuinely unstable memorials. The PCC should undertake a check of all memorials in the churchyard at least once a year, and any which appear to be unstable should be carefully lowered to ground level, immediately. Where memorials have to be lowered in this way, the family concerned should be notified if contact details are known, and asked to have the memorial re-erected safely. Likewise, headstones which are severely tilted but stable, can be straightened - this is a task usually entrusted to a professional monumental mason.

In assessing stability, a good test is that the memorial should be sufficiently secure that it would not topple over if someone held onto it to help themselves up, if they had knelt down to tend the grave.

A note of the survey should be recorded in the PCC minutes, together with a record of any stones lowered or other action taken. Such a record could be of vital importance in the event of any subsequent accident in the churchyard.

Inscriptions

Inscriptions generally should be recorded, even if they are only partially legible, before memorials are relocated or disposed of. A copy of the record should be sent to the Diocesan Archive at the County Record Office, Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester GL1 3DW (01452 425295).

Mounds

It is common practice to level grave mounds as soon as they have fully settled, probably after 6 months, so as to assist mowing and prevent accidents. This does not entail a faculty.

Older Memorials

Older memorials should normally remain in situ unless they are in very poor condition.

As a very approximate rule of thumb, memorials dating from before about 1830 are more likely to

be of historical and visual interest than later ones. After that date memorials became increasingly standardised, often using imported stone and pattern-book design (though there are plenty of exceptions to that statement).

Quite often interesting fragments of older memorials have survived, including attractive carved work with cherub's heads etc. Ideally these should remain in situ, but it may be acceptable for them to be moved to facilitate maintenance and/or reuse of burial spaces. The diocesan archaeological advisor will be happy to advise.

Older stones are usually made of local material and where carved work and/or inscription no longer remains or is minimal, they may be of use in paving in the churchyard. Any carving or inscription which does survive should face downwards to ensure its preservation.

Some memorials, particularly table tombs, pedestal tombs etc. are listed. Since 2010 listed structures considered to form part of the 'curtilage' of the church (walls, boundaries, lych gates, tombs and monuments, etc.) are also covered by the ecclesiastical exemption and therefore will not require Listed Building Consent. Prior to 2010, Listed Building Consent may have been needed in addition to a Faculty. In most cases only faculty permission will be needed for proposals to remove or relocate listed memorials.

For table or pedestal tombs see the separate Guidance Note 'Table Tomb Repairs'.



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