



CHURCHYARD BURIALS: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

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DIOCESE OF TRURO
DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM
GROWING THE CHURCH

BURIAL IN A CHURCHYARD

Sadly, one of the things many of us avoid talking about is death. This means that when someone we love dies, we can be left to make choices and decisions at a difficult and emotive time.

One of the things many people prefer not to discuss is what will happen to their body once they have gone.

This leaflet aims to help you through some of the choices and decisions you will need to make, and relates specifically to the situation in the Church of England, and the Diocese of Truro.

The rules for municipal and private cemeteries and gardens of remembrance will be different, and may vary from place to place.

In many cases a local funeral director will know the situation in a parish, but it is always worth asking them to check with the priest or Parochial Church Council (PCC).

CREMATION OR BURIAL

The first decision has to be whether you would prefer your loved one to be buried or cremated. Medical staff should ask you for an indication of your preference, as there are implications for some of the practicalities that need to be dealt with at the time of death. You should also check the will or any letter of wishes that may accompany it as these may also state a preference.





BURIAL IN A CHURCH OF ENGLAND CHURCHYARD

The law states that if you live within a parish you have a right to be buried in the churchyard, assuming that it remains open for burials. This applies to people of all denominations and faiths, and people of no faith.

If you are a worshipping member of the congregation and on the (church) electoral roll of the parish, you have a right to be buried in the churchyard.

Also, someone dying within the parish (of any faith, or of none) has the right to be buried in the churchyard.

It is important to note that this is only the case when there is a churchyard that is 'open' for burials. When churchyards become full there is a legal process by which they are 'closed'. However, the rules around closures are not always straightforward. For example, some may remain technically 'open' even though there are no new burial plots.

The first point of contact for anybody hoping for their loved one to be buried in a churchyard should be the parish priest or administrator, who will be able to tell you the local situation.

If the deceased did not live within the parish or meet the other criteria above, it is essential for you to make contact with the priest or parish administrator. The priest does have a general discretion to permit burials of people who did not live or die in the parish, but in exercising this they are obliged to seek guidance from the parochial church council (PCC). In some cases the PCC may have decided not to bury anyone other than those living or dying in the parish because of the limited availability of grave spaces. The situation varies from parish to parish, so it makes sense to contact your priest or parish administrator as soon as possible to see what is possible.

CREMATED REMAINS

In many instances it is possible for ashes to be either buried or strewn in churchyards. Special permission will need to be sought for the burial of remains in a closed churchyard unless there is an exemption that can be relied on under the order closing the churchyard, or formal permission has been given by the chancellor of the diocese. Again, the precise circumstances may well vary from churchyard to churchyard, so it would be wise to contact the parish priest or administrator to see what might be organised.

MEMORIALS

There are regulations governing many aspects of the type and size of memorial that can be put up in a churchyard. Any type of memorial requires permission. Again, it is best to speak to the parish administrator or priest, who will be able to explain these to you.

RESERVED PLOTS

In some cases, it may be possible to reserve a space in a churchyard, but the policy will vary from parish to parish. Decisions on this are ultimately made by the chancellor of the diocese following a formal application process which would include advertising the proposed application and consultation with the parish priest and the PCC.

FUNERALS

Once a decision has been made about your hopes and expectations, you will need to think about the type of service you wish to have. Within the Church of England, there are lots of possibilities and options open to you, which you would need to discuss with the parish priest if it is to be a church service. It may be possible to involve clergy or lay members from other denominations, but again, you would need to speak to the parish priest who will be happy to talk to you about the options.

CONTACT

In most situations you would be advised to contact the parish priest or administrator. You can find out who that is at trurodiocese.org.uk/directory-live/. If you are unable to use this website or have another query, please contact the Diocese of Truro on 01872 274351 and ask to speak to the archdeacons' assistant.

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