

St Leonard's Churchyard

St Leonard's Parochial Church Council (PCC) recognises how important it is for people who have lost loved ones to have a place in which they can mourn their loss. It is natural for people to want to make the grave of their loved one special and personal. The PCC is sensitive to this need. However, the maintenance of the churchyard is controlled by regulations issued by the Diocese of Bristol and the PCC and there have been several instances recently, where the regulations have been contravened because people were unaware of the rules and failed to seek the appropriate advice. The regulations are not new and have existed for a number of years. To help understand what is allowed and what is not permitted the regulations are listed below:

A Summary of the Churchyard Regulations issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of Bristol and St Leonard's PCC

The entire churchyard of St Leonard's is vested in the incumbent (vicar) alone. No right of ownership is conferred upon relatives of the deceased or upon any other person by any of the following:

- the reservation of grave space
- the exercise of the right of burial
- the erection of a monument

Parishioners (including those on the church electoral roll) and others who die in the parish have the right of burial in the churchyard, if there is space remaining. The incumbent, PCC and churchwardens may also grant permission for the burial of other persons at their discretion. A grave space may only be reserved by faculty (written permission having regard to suitability and availability).

The erection of a monument is a privilege and not a right and permission must be sought from the vicar in writing before any monument may be installed or erected. Statutory fees are payable.

The requirements for a memorial are as follows:

Materials

- English limestone or pennant stone; or
- Unpolished grey granite; or
- Nabresina (Roman stone); or
- English oak; or
- English or Welsh slate.

Form

The monument must consist of:

- A headstone not more than 120cms high; or
- A cross not more than 135cms high; or
- A horizontal slab sunk so that the surface is sufficiently flush with the surrounding earth to allow a mower to pass over it.

Advertisements or trademarks

No identification of the maker or supplier must appear on the monument other than the name only of the craftsman or designer in letters not more than 13mm high.

Base

Any base upon which a memorial or other headstone is fixed for stability must be sunk low enough into the ground to allow a mower to pass over it.

Spacing

Headstones must be placed conveniently for the churchyard mower to pass around them.

Additional features

A monument shall not include any photograph, metal or plastic inserts, railings, edging, chippings, statutory, bird baths or other artefacts. Loose glass vases or pots are discouraged as these can be easily knocked over and broken, leaving shards in the grass.

Bulbs and small plants may be planted on a grave, but not shrubs or trees

Artificial flowers, including ones made of plastic or silk, windmills, wind chimes, plastic or stone based representations of people or animals or any other object may not be placed on a grave or its surrounds. Exceptionally, the PCC has agreed that artificial flowers may be placed on graves from 1st October each year, providing they are removed one week before the following Easter. The PCC maintain the right to remove any object from a grave it considers inappropriate or contravenes any of these rules. The churchyard will be checked during the week before Easter and any remaining artificial flowers removed.

If the grave is that of a member or ex member of the Armed Forces a British Legion wooden cross, wreath of poppies or small national flag may be placed on the grave from October to December each year and/or for a month either side of the date of death.

Only monuments which conform to the above rules can be permitted under the powers delegated to the incumbent.

Existing memorials

Memorials erected in the past with or without faculty, which do not conform to the rules as set out above, may not be cited as precedents for similar memorials in the future.

Permission to proceed

Stonemasons are well aware of the rules and seek permission as a matter of course with appropriate drawings, descriptions and measurements. They do not proceed until permission has been granted in writing by the incumbent. The incumbent may require the removal of any monument for which permission has not been given in writing.

Vernon Manfield
Church Warden