

## Being fair to everyone

We work very hard to be fair to everyone. If you are asked to remove something from your loved one's grave that you can see on other graves, please don't be offended. This might happen for several reasons:

- We have asked other families to remove these items at the same time as you.
- Some rules have changed in recent decades, so some things (e.g. kerbs) which were allowed in the past are not allowed now.
- We might allow some families more time to remove items for compassionate reasons (e.g. if someone has lost a child).
- Since the churchyard is so big, we will deal with different areas at different times.

## If we can't agree

If we ask you to remove some items, we will always offer to work with you to reach mutual agreement so that removal is always done on a voluntary basis. If we can't reach an agreement, and you refuse to remove the items, we will seek legal authority to remove the items ourselves. No-one wants this, so please do work with us to respect the law.

## We know this is hard

Everyone grieves for their loved ones in different ways, and many of us find it hard to find out that there are rules about what is allowed to be left on our loved one's grave. If this is especially difficult for you, please contact the Church, and we will always do our best to help. While upholding the law, we always care for our grieving families.

## Other laws to be aware of

**Legal permission:** Everything that happens in the churchyard (except for tending things that grow) requires legal permission, including burials,

*Other laws, continued...*

ashes burials, erecting a headstone or adding an inscription to a headstone, and placing a bench. Please don't scatter ashes, as this is illegal in churchyards. Please see here for more details: [www.stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk/churchyard/](http://www.stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk/churchyard/)  
**Ownership:** Headstones and benches remain the property of the family who placed them there, and they are responsible for their care and maintenance.

## And lastly...

In the long-term, all graves should look something like this:



## Contact details

### Churchwarden and Sexton – Anne Pepper

...for queries about the rules, grave plot reservations, benches, and general churchyard enquiries.  
[sexton@stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk](mailto:sexton@stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk)

### Vicar – Revd David Cattle

...for funeral services, ashes burials, and headstones.  
[vicar@stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk](mailto:vicar@stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk) 01245 956953

### Chelmsford Diocesan Registry

...to contact the Chancellor about churchyard law.  
Administrator: Miss Melanie Tucker  
[ChelmsfordRegistry@wslaw.co.uk](http://ChelmsfordRegistry@wslaw.co.uk) 0207 593 0314



# The Churchyard Code



Caring for our **sacred, shared** and **sustainable** memorial space

Please read this important leaflet carefully and share it with members of your family – it contains the rules for our churchyard.

Updated March 2024



## Our beautiful churchyard is...

**...sacred:** It is land which has been set aside and blessed for holy use. Here we can remember our loved ones, enjoy the beauty of nature, feel closer to God, and be reminded of the hope of eternal life.

**...shared:** The land is owned by the Church for the benefit of everyone, so it is a shared space. (No grave is owned by an individual family – it always remains part of the shared space, rather than being a private memorial garden.) And like with any shared space there is a list of rules to make sure the needs of all users are respected, and that what happens here is safe and fair for everyone.

**...sustainable:** In keeping with our desire to care for God's creation, everything in the churchyard (except headstones and some limited temporary items) must be living (i.e. not plastic or artificial).

## The rules of the churchyard

The rules are set by the Chancellor of the Diocese of Chelmsford, Philippa Hopkins KC, who is the senior legal officer for the Bishop. The rules are part of a legal framework, and so are part of English law, and they apply to every churchyard in the Diocese of Chelmsford. The full list of rules can be found in "The Churchyard Handbook" here:

[www.stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk/churchyard/](http://www.stmichaelsgalleywood.org.uk/churchyard/)

## Caring for the churchyard

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is in charge of maintenance, and the Vicar has legal responsibility for administering the law. The churchyard is lovingly maintained by volunteers and professional contractors, and we are grateful to those who care for the grave of their loved ones.

The care of the churchyard is paid for partly by fees for burials, headstones and plot reservations, with any shortfall made up by the Church congregation. We don't receive any funding from Government or local Council.

## What is allowed on graves?

**In the long-term, only 4 things:** (1) a headstone, (2) small things that grow in the soil, (3) bark chippings, and (4) cut flowers.

**Memorials:** Only 2 types are allowed: (1) A headstone, and (2) a temporary wooden cross featuring a small plaque which can remain in place until the sooner of the following: (a) a new headstone is put in place, or a new inscription is added to an existing headstone; and (b) three years after the burial. (No memorials or markers of any kind are allowed in the Garden of Remembrance.)

**Small things that grow:** Flowers, grass, bulbs and small plants, up to an area (including the headstone plinth) of 7ft x 3ft for full burials, and 3ft x 2ft for ashes burials; but not trees, shrubs or hedges, since these grow too big. We advise waiting until the ground has settled before planting anything, which can take up to six months. Until this time, plants in temporary pots and vases are allowed, but then must be removed.

**At special times:** Wreaths or other tributes at Remembrance, Christmas, Easter, and significant anniversaries (e.g. date of birth or death) are allowed for a period of two weeks before and two weeks after the event. Please help us by removing these items within this timescale.

## What is not allowed on graves?

Some items are not allowed on graves. If you place them on a grave, we will ask you to remove them. We would ask that everyone respects these rules, so that we can share in caring for this special place, and so that we can uphold the law; and to avoid any unnecessary upset.

*Please see page 4...*

*What is not allowed on graves? Continued...*

**Artificial flowers:** E.g. silk, plastic, or any other material.

**Any other memorial:** E.g. stone or plastic memorial vases, plaques, photographs or slates.

**Permanent or semi-permanent items:** E.g. kerbs, borders, stone slabs, loose stones, chippings, pebbles, loose slates, and vases.

**Personal items:** E.g. decorated stones, ornaments, toys, keepsakes, lanterns, solar lights, candles, windmills, wind chimes, balloons, and photos.

**An exception to this:** Personal items just mentioned are allowed until the sooner of the following: (a) a new headstone is put in place, or a new inscription is added to an existing headstone; and (b) twelve months after the burial.

Please note that the churchyard is a public space, and the Church can't accept any responsibility for items left on graves.

Some items will be removed by the Churchwardens without notice (for later collection, if still usable) if they are judged to be:

**Dangerous:** E.g. glass, rusted items, damaged ceramic pots, kerbs which are a trip hazard.

**Not in keeping with the ethos of this sacred place:** E.g. alcohol, and superstitious symbols such as gnomes and horseshoes.

**Impeding maintenance:** E.g. tools or other items left behind headstones.

**Out of season:** E.g. items for Remembrance, Christmas, Easter, or important anniversaries which remain on a grave for more than two weeks after the event.

**Unightly or dead:** E.g. plants in pots that can't be revived, empty pots, and dead cut flowers and associated wreaths, plastic wrappers and trays (including from funeral displays).