



# Planning a funeral in the Woodbridge Group of Churches



A guide including  
information about  
churchedyards and memorials

## **Introduction**

A funeral marks the end of a life here on earth. Sometimes this comes naturally, and on other occasions it can come quite unexpectedly. Whatever your circumstances, we would like to start by offering you our sincerest sympathy at this time. It is also hard that it is now that you have to begin thinking and planning for the funeral service, and so the purpose of this leaflet is to give you some helpful guidance as you meet the minister who will be taking the service for you, and to help you to think through the memorial that you would like to leave for your loved one.

## **Funerals in the Woodbridge Group**

The Woodbridge Group is the six Church of England churches in Brinkworth, Dauntsey, Garsdon, Great Somerford, Lea and Cleverton, and Little Somerford. These churches are served by a team of ministers, so the funeral service may be taken by a clergy person or one of our Licensed Lay Ministers. All are experienced in taking thoughtful and carefully prepared services.

In the days following your bereavement, the minister who will be taking your service will be in touch to arrange a visit. There are a number of things that they will want to talk through with you. Firstly, if they did not know the deceased person very well they will need to find out a bit more about them, especially if you would like them to deliver a tribute on your behalf. They will also want to talk through details for the service itself, including possible hymns and readings that you would like to include. They may have some helpful suggestions if you would like them.

If the death is especially difficult, sudden or unexpected, the minister taking the service will be able to help you to accommodate this appropriately and sensitively.

You may wish to browse the Church of England's Funerals website which gives lots of helpful information: <https://churchofenglandfunerals.org/>

## **What happens in a funeral service?**

There are some different options for funeral services. Some people will choose to do everything at one of the local crematoriums. Others would like a church funeral followed by a short service either at the crematorium, or of burial. Others will choose to have a service at the crematorium followed by a service of thanksgiving in a church. The funeral director and minister preparing the service will be able to give you guidance about what will best suit your circumstances.

The funeral service itself takes us on a journey that helps us to begin facing our grief and sadness. It recognises that we are there together mourning the loss of someone that we care for and love. It helps us to remember the person who has died. And finally, it gives us the chance to place our loved one into God's care.

The service will begin often with the minister leading the coffin, using some short sentences from the Bible. After a welcome, some words may be spoken about the deceased either by a friend or family member, or by the minister if you would prefer. There can be some hymns, and there will be at least one reading from the Bible, and maybe another reading of your choice, followed by a short sermon to help speak about Christian hope of life beyond death. There will be some prayers both for those who are grieving, and the one who has died.

The service ends with the prayers of commendation and committal, where we commend the person into God's loving care, and then we say goodbye to their physical body, allowing our personal memories of them to live on.

## **After the funeral**

It is often after the funeral, once the busyness of all the arrangements and planning have passed, that the full impact of what has happened hits us. Questions about why it has happened are quite natural. Questions about life and death come up, and you may wish to discuss this with someone. There are a number of things that we offer in order to help you in the time following a bereavement.

Firstly, we have a pastoral visiting team – people from each of our churches - and a member of that team would be very willing to come and visit you and talk through any of your questions, or just have a cup of tea and sit with you. They will contact you a few weeks after the funeral to see how you are.

If you feel that you might want to talk to someone who is trained in bereavement counselling, we can also help you to find someone suitable to speak to.

Secondly, each year we hold a special memorial service to remember those who have died. You should receive an invitation to this service which is usually around the beginning of November, but if you would like to find out more please do ask.

Most importantly, we would want you to know that although the busyness has gone, you are not left alone. We will continue to hold you in prayer, and will offer you as much support as we can as you journey through your grief.

## **Some Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Can a person be buried anywhere they choose?**

Everyone is entitled to be buried or have their ashes buried in their local parish churchyard (as long as there is still space), regardless of whether or not they have attended church. If there is a close connection to a parish, for example a person lived there for the whole of their life but recently moved elsewhere, the parish priest may also give permission for a burial to take place there.

### **What if there is no space in our local churchyard?**

The Local Authority will have made alternative provision for burial, and the church minister can take a service there instead. This applies in both Brinkworth and Little Somerford, where burials and interment of ashes take place in the council-run cemeteries.

### **Should children come to a funeral service?**

That is a decision that you really need to make yourselves. These days it is common for children to attend a funeral, and it is important that they are given the same opportunity to say goodbye to someone that they love. It is worth spending time talking to them about what is going to happen so they are prepared. We can also advise you on resources to help a child to come to terms with and understand death.

### **What happens following a cremation?**

The funeral director will give you information about receiving the ashes back following a cremation. We are not able to offer scattering of ashes in a churchyard – we can only bury them - but there are plenty of places that are available should you wish to do this. If you wish to bury the ashes in a churchyard or cemetery they can be placed either in an area reserved for this purpose or into an existing family grave. We can inter them in a plot in a churchyard either loose, or in a biodegradable casket. Again your funeral director can give you further information about this. A minister will be present to do a short service of interment if you choose this option.

**What happens about collections at church services?**

No collection is taken during a funeral service, but there is often a retiring collection as people leave the service. This can be for a charity or organisation of your choice, but if the service has taken place in church provision will also be made for people to make a donation to the upkeep of the church alongside this, as we rely on such donations to keep these small churches open and available for occasions such as this.

**Memorials in churchyards**

If you would like to place a memorial in a churchyard, there are some guidelines that will help you to know what is allowed, in just the same way as a crematorium or cemetery. The summary of information below is designed to help you to choose something appropriate and fitting. Each churchyard has its own local regulations and maintenance guidelines which are usually displayed on a noticeboard, but the following gives the core guidance which they are based on.

**1. Introduction**

Where churchyards are still open for burials and interment of ashes the Parochial Church Council (PCC) is responsible for the care and maintenance of the Churchyard. In the cases of Brinkworth, Little Somerford and the older part of Dautsey churchyard these are maintained by the different Parish Councils.

Any works (including the introduction, renewal or alteration of any item in the churchyard) may only be carried out subject to seeking permission from the PCC or parish priest. All applications should be directed to the Woodbridge Office, where it will be directed to the correct person.

**2. Permission for Memorials on Graves**

Placing a memorial in a churchyard is not a right, but is a privilege granted by the Church of England. Ultimately, the Chancellor of the Diocese has the authority to approve or reject an application, although some authority is delegated to the parish priest, limited by size, design and material.

Where the design falls outside these limits, the application must be referred to the Diocesan Chancellor who may grant permission, although this involves applying for a Faculty (the Church of England's 'planning permission' process). The process can be explained in full if this situation arises, and there is a fee applicable for this.

The parish priest can approve applications which meet the requirements set out below:

- a) Materials. The memorial must be one of the following:
  - English limestone or pennant stone, or
  - Unpolished grey granite, or
  - Nabresina (Roman stone), or
  - English oak, or
  - English or Welsh slate
- b) Form. The memorial must consist of:
  - A headstone not more than 4' (120 cm) high, or
  - A cross not more than 4'6" (135 cm) high, or
  - A horizontal slab sunk into the ground so the surface is flush with the surrounding earth, with dimensions not exceeding 18"x16"x2"
- c) There should be no identification of the maker or supplier, except for the craftsman or designer in letters no more than 13mm high.
- d) Any base for the headstone (or other memorial) must be sunk into the ground so that a mower can pass over it. There should also be enough room between headstones for a mower to pass through.
- e) Memorials should not include photographs, metal or plastic inserts, railings, chippings, statues, bird baths, trees or other items.

### **3. Existing Memorials**

It is not uncommon for churchyards to contain memorials introduced in the past which do not conform to the current guidelines set out in section 2. This does not mean they are to be viewed as a precedent as the rules have changed over time, and occasionally memorials are introduced

without permission. If in doubt, just ask and we will do our best to advise you.

#### **4. Applying for a Memorial**

You will need to speak to a stonemason, who will send an application on your behalf to the parish priest. Assuming it meets the criteria in this booklet it will be approved quickly, and returned ready for the memorial to be prepared. Where it does not meet the criteria, it will be returned with the advice that a faculty needs to be applied for, and a suggestion on how to change it to meet the criteria as an alternative.

### **Contacting Us**

Our administrator Maggie co-ordinates with the funeral directors, the ministers and churches to arrange the administrative and practical side of the funeral.

By post: Woodbridge Group Office, Suite 33, Brinkworth House, Brinkworth, Chippenham, SN15 5DF

Tel: 01666 337100, email [administrator@woodbridgegroup.co.uk](mailto:administrator@woodbridgegroup.co.uk)

Our Rector (senior minister) is Rev Steve Wilkinson, living in Great Somerford

Tel: 01249 723733, email [rector@woodbridgegroup.co.uk](mailto:rector@woodbridgegroup.co.uk)

The minister who is taking the funeral will also give you their contact details when they meet with you.

*We hope that this booklet has been helpful in what is a difficult time, but if there is anything that you would like to know that isn't covered here, please do let us know.*