

WHO'S WHO IN CHURCHYARD AND BURIAL GROUND CARE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

CHURCHYARDS, CEMETERIES AND BURIAL GROUNDS

A churchyard is the enclosed area that surrounds a Parish church. It may also have an extension or nearby burial ground. Cemeteries are also consecrated for burials but are administered by the Local Authority, usually Parish, Town, District or Borough Council.

Management of Cemeteries

The Local Authority is responsible for the upkeep of cemeteries and it is they rather than the church who decide on rules, regulations and methods of management. Local people can make their views known through their elected councillors - the 'members' or through the appointed 'officers' [staff] of the Local Authority. Secular laws such as designations under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 or Local Authority Tree Preservation Orders may apply.

Management of Churchyards

The organisation described in this pack applies to the Church of England. Systems may be different for other denominations and faiths. Here is a brief description of the parts of the organisation that have an impact on management of churchyards under their care:

A Diocese (there are 43 in England and 6 in Wales) is divided into **Archdeaconries** which are further subdivided into several **Deaneries** of around 15 benefices. A **benefice** is the area of an incumbent's (vicar or rector) responsibility and may include several parishes and churchyards..

For a list of English diocese: www.cofe.anglican.org

For Welsh diocese: www.churchinwales.org.uk

WHO DOES WHAT

A Diocesan Bishop [Most Reverend] is responsible for the management of all the affairs of a Diocese.

A Diocesan Synod [both laity (general public) and clergy] is responsible for representing the views of the clergy and laity to the Bishop. Much of the work is done through committees with specific areas of responsibility.

A Diocesan Chancellor is the Bishop's Legal Officer. He issues rules and regulations for churchyards e.g. types of monuments, and authorises any major alterations to churches or churchyards. This is done by a **faculty** (church permission) issued through the **Diocesan Registrar**.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee DAC is responsible for advising on the care of churches and churchyards. The Bishop appoints its members for their specific expertise e.g. for architecture, archaeology, glass, design of memorials, etc. Wildlife Conservation Advisors might well be added.

Archdeacons [The Venerable] have specific responsibility for Church property. This involves an annual inspection of all the churches in the Archdeaconry once a year. All clergy and churchwardens are summoned to an annual **Visitation** at which the Archdeacon delivers a **Visitation Charge** on care and maintenance of church buildings and churchyards.

Rural or Area Deans [The Reverend] and lay Vice Chairmen together preside over the **Deanery Synod** which consists of clergy and elected representatives of the Parochial Church Councils in the deanery. This Synod apportions the amount that each parish has to contribute funds to the **Diocesan Quota** which goes towards clergy stipends (pay) and the general work of the Church of England. It might be possible for parishes in a deanery to co-operate in the purchase of equipment for churchyard maintenance.

Each Parish has an **Incumbent** [Reverend] who may be a vicar or rector who owns rights over certain aspects of the churchyard [particularly 'products' like timber or hay]. They are also the ex officio Chairman of the **Parochial Church Council** [PCC] which is responsible for managing the churchyard. A PCC is made up of lay people elected by the members of the Church on the **Church Electoral Roll**. This includes

the Officers of Vice Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary but any resident of the Parish can vote at the Annual General Meeting of the PCC for the **churchwardens**.

The Churchwarden

A parish church at its Annual General PCC meeting elects two churchwardens and a PCC secretary. The Churchwarden or PCC secretary are usually the first point of contact for any enquiries about the churchyard. Their contact details will be available from the Diocesan office. The Diocesan office is situated in the Cathedral City of the Diocese.

Closed Churchyards

A closed churchyard is one where no further burials can take place. It remains **'consecrated'** i.e. 'holy' ground lying within the jurisdiction of the church. Responsibility for care and maintenance can be handed over to a Local Authority [Parish, Borough or District Council]. After this the PCC and incumbent have no further say in the management of the churchyard.

Redundant Churches

If made redundant, a church may be taken on by the Redundant Churches Trust or offered for alternative use. Agreements about maintenance of the churchyard and buildings are made between the church and the person who buys or leases it.

Summary

Normally, the incumbent is responsible for the churchyard and can make any decisions as long as they lie within the faculties issued by the Diocesan Chancellor or Visitation Charges issued by the Archdeacon. Where the PCC are collectively charged with the responsibility of the upkeep of the churchyard, the Diocesan Advisory Committees could be influential in promoting conservation in churchyards. In some cases, the responsibility for the care and upkeep of a churchyard, more particularly larger burial grounds, is vested in the hands of the civil parish council.

Caring for God's Acre

Caring for God's Acre charity which began in 2000, is concerned with developing interrelationships between

conservation issues, principles and practices in the work of the churches & in the management of its landholdings.

Who to contact regarding Churchyard conservation work or projects in any particular parish

The first people to contact are the Incumbent (Parish Priest, Rector, Vicar) or a Churchwarden. Their contact details can be found easily through an approach to the local diocesan office, which will be situated in the Cathedral town for the Diocese. E.g. Hereford Diocesan office is in Hereford.

The Diocese will have a team of people who may be able to help. The Diocesan Communications Officer may be able to include items in Diocesan publicity such as newsletters and direct emails to Parish Clerks or the incumbent.