

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council
Fairground and Cemetery 18/01/2024
Cemetery Regulations and Brochure

Agenda item 23/029 4.0:

- a. To receive a report and consider the points raised and agree further actions needed.**
- b. To receive and review the draft brochure.**

Background

The various documents and forms associated with the cemetery have evolved over a period and have not been reviewed as a whole for a number of years. My original intention was not change any of the rules etc. but to rewrite them in a way which would be easier for the public, funeral directors, and stone masons to understand and minimise the amount of discussion which the officers are forced to have with any of these people.

I found that Burghfield Parish Council have a friendly brochure outlining how the cemetery is operated and a set of regulations which do not have to include the explanations but just have clearly stated rules. I set out to emulate this without changing our rules but have, however, found digging into our documents:

1. SMPC Cemetery Regulations 2019
2. Memorials in Stratfield Mortimer Cemetery 2019
3. SMPC Memorial App Form 2014
4. SMPC Cemetery Fees 2023
5. SMPC Notice of Interment 2012 (not on website as given to funeral directors in person)

These documents contained a lot of duplication (often only **almost** the same) and some inconsistency, and I ended up with many questions. The purpose of this document is therefore to present the areas I found needing discussion and resolution so that revising the cemetery documentation can be subsequently completed.

For Consideration and Agreement

Do we permit burials where an exclusive right to burial has not been bought?

In other cemeteries this is an option. However this means family/next of kin, etc, can't subsequently request to bury another person in the same grave nor erect a memorial on the plot. In theory the cemetery owner (in this case Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council) can bury another person in the same plot.

We have not ever had this happen (do we insist on the purchase of EROB?). And yet our documents say:

Document 1 para 2: *If an Exclusive Right of Burial is purchased,*

Document 5: FULL NAME & ADDRESS (INCLUDING POSTCODE AND TELEPHONE NUMBER) OF GRANTEE IF THE PURCHASE OF EXCLUSIVE RIGHT OF BURIAL IS REQUIRED

If it is the case that an EROB must be purchased for all first interments, we should say so.

TO BE AGREED: Do we allow a burial in a new plot without an EROB? Or do the regulations just need rewriting?

Fees paid by those moved from Mortimer less than 5 years ago

As well as the set of fees for residents we have a set for non residents (the rate is approximately treble). In document 4 it says:

'Resident' is a person who was an inhabitant of the civil parishes of Stratfield Mortimer or Wokefield immediately before their death.

'Non Resident' is a person who moved from the said parishes within a five year period prior to death (will need to be supported by documentary evidence (e.g. Electoral Roll). Please see Cemetery Regulation No 1.

In document 1 it says:

The only persons with a RIGHT to burial in The Cemetery are residents of the civil parishes of Stratfield Mortimer and Wokefield and ex-residents of the said parishes who have moved from these parishes within a 5 year period prior to death. The Council may at its discretion consider applications in respect of the burial of other persons who it considers have strong local connections (with documentary evidence); the non-resident scale of charges will be payable in this case.

So it is clear that the "never resident but strong local connections" people pay the non-resident charge, but was it really the intention to charge those who may, for example, have moved to The Hollies because of ill-health and then die within a short time, 3 time more than if they had stayed in their own house? As we have no care home in Mortimer that seems draconian.

People who are out of the village for a short while before death are then being asked to pay the same as the people with strong connections who have never lived here but who the Council decides to exceptionally allow? What do we do when one person has moved to a care home and dies there but their spouse (who is buying the grave) still lives in Mortimer?

TO BE AGREED: What should be paid for the burial of those who have moved to a care home and died within 5 years, in particular where this has been a care home? Especially if spouse still living in the village.

Aspects of memorials especially flowers

One of the issues that take up office time is the "what is and what isn't" allowed on graves and dealing with families who did not stick to the regulations. Our various documents are detailed about what isn't allowed – eg no glass or pottery, but it would be more helpful to say what is allowed. We have a discrepancy between documents where Documents 2 and 3 says flowers are not permitted anywhere other than in a flower holder incorporated into the base of headstone or memorial tablet, while document 1 allows more options: *"flowers may be placed only: a) in a receptacle incorporated within the base of the memorial or b) in one suitable non-*

breakable container which must be placed on the base of the memorial or c) if no memorial, then at the head of the grave, in line with adjoining memorials". Clarity is needed.

Can we say receptacles for flowers must be made of stone or metal only (unless incorporated into the headstone)? Burghfield consider plastic receptacles dangerous as when hit by mowers they create sharp shards.

The current regulations do not specify what may be left on a grave at the time of burial; it just says: *All dead or withered floral tributes will be removed at The Council's discretion if the owner first fails to do so. Artificial flowers are allowed. In order to maintain the dignity of The Cemetery, no lanterns, or other ornaments/decorations will be permitted. Relatives should note that these will be removed without notice.* Should we have rules about what can be left after the funeral? While there is no memorial stone and once there is. At Christmas, birthday, anniversary of death?

TO BE AGREED: What can be left on a grave after a funeral, subsequently but before a memorial is in place, once a memorial is in place and in addition on special dates?

What happens after 50 years?

The exclusive right to burial is only purchased for 50 years. Once the exclusive right to burial runs out, the Parish Council becomes responsible for the grave and in particular maintenance of any memorial. Other cemeteries have options to buy additional periods. Is this something we should consider? We should in any case provide information about what happens after 50 years.

TO BE AGREED: What happens 50 years after the purchase of an exclusive right to burial?

No funeral director

We have recently had our first case of a family organising the funeral themselves; this is legally permitted. We need additional rules to ensure they use a proper grave digging company. Do we need a new document for this case which may become more common?

TO BE AGREED: To draw up necessary additional rules for non-funeral director funerals.

Cremation Memorial Plaques

In the cemetery extension there will be the option of cremation memorial plaques on a wall (does this include burying the ashes below?). We need to draw up some prices and regulations to define this and it would be worth incorporating in this revision of cemetery documents.

TO BE AGREED: What needs defining and who will do it?

Cllr D Morsley
12/01/2024