

St Nicholas West Thorney Churchyard Regulations

Preface

1. These Regulations have been made pursuant to a faculty dated 1 November 2020 issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of the Diocese of Chichester. They concern use of the churchyard of St Nicholas, West Thorney and apply to the Vicar of Southbourne, (and during interregna to the churchwardens) and to any visiting clergy including but not limited to army padres.
2. St Nicholas is a twelfth century church on Thorney Island, West Sussex. The military established an airfield in 1936, requiring most of the Thorney Island population to be relocated off the Island. RAF chaplains had the care of St Nicholas until the parish of West Thorney was merged with the Parish of Southbourne in 1980, following the closure of the RAF base in 1976. St Nicholas became a chapel of ease in 1980, whereupon the parishioners' statutory right to burial was terminated. Grave spaces cannot be reserved.
3. Since 1980 Thorney Island has been the home of various units of Her Majesty's Armed Forces, who control secure access to the island and thus to St Nicholas Church. Housing on Thorney Island is in married quarters, officers' messes and junior ranks' barracks, being supplemented by a small number of civilian properties.
4. St Nicholas is a Grade 1 listed building, whose upkeep is the responsibility of the Parochial Church Council of Southbourne with West Thorney in the Diocese of Chichester. As a chapel of ease, the church provides a spiritual centre for the Island community, where the army padre is customarily licensed to officiate. A small but dedicated congregation travel onto the Island to attend regular Sunday worship, to support the army padre, and to maintain the church building for use by islanders and visitors, who often include those relocated in the 1930s and 1940's.
5. St Nicholas bridges both military and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. These Churchyard Regulations are to be followed by all clergy including the incumbent of Southbourne and any army padre licensed by the Bishop. It will assist them in dealing with various pastoral enquires which they are likely to receive concerning the use of the churchyard.
6. These Regulations apply to the entirety of St Nicholas churchyard, whose boundaries encompass the Commonwealth War Graves area to the north; border the Old Rectory lawn and Parish Green to the south; the coastal path to the east; and the old gravel pit to the west. The churchyard is notionally split into several areas where burial plots have been allocated under previous policies (e.g. where the deceased was on active service or other qualifying connection), with areas reserved for access and assembly for acts of commemoration.
7. Churchyard records are generally good for recent burial areas but variable in older or ancient areas. The churchyard has been in use for over 900 years, with some previous ancient and a few recent graves unmarked. New graves are likely disturb existing remains. The churchyard contains a grass area in its southeast corner that serves as a Garden of Remembrance for the burial of ashes in a chequer-board of unassigned plots.
8. There is no vehicular access to the church or its churchyard. Approved pedestrian access is by the coast path from Church Road. The maintenance of the churchyard grass areas is by machine mowers only, in conjunction with the Defence Estates ground works contractors. Access routes are reserved for maintenance with other areas reserved for assembly and for acts of commemoration.

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Burial rights

9. St Nicholas now lies in the parish of Southbourne with West Thorney. Parishioners' rights to burial in parish grounds are the responsibility of the Southbourne and Westbourne Burial Committee whose cemetery in Westbourne serves both communities. Rights to burial in St Nicholas churchyard were terminated with the cessation of parish of West Thorney in 1980. Burials in St Nicholas churchyard will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances namely:
- i. In an existing family grave where depth permits (or preferably as ashes);
 - ii. For persons evacuated from the old Parish of West Thorney before 1938;
 - iii. For persons whom the Vicar of Southbourne is satisfied has a sufficient qualifying connection with St Nicholas church.

In the case of ii. and iii. (above) the precise location in the churchyard of any grave shall be conclusively determined by the Vicar of Southbourne, and prior to any interment the obligations under the St Nicholas' Churchyard Policy are to be explicitly accepted by the family of the deceased.

Burial of ashes

10. The burial of ashes of qualifying persons is permitted in the lawn area that serves as a Garden of Remembrance. Ashes must be poured into the ground without containers. The entire ashes must be used: ashes may not be split between different locations. Plots may not be marked with plaques, stones, artificial flowers, shrubs or in any other manner. Plots where ashes have been buried may be re-used after 25 years. A Book of Remembrance is kept at St John's Church for which an additional cartographer's charge will be made to those wishing a name to be added. Those qualifying for interment of ashes include:
- i. persons resident on, serving from or dying on Thorney Island;
 - ii. persons on the electoral role of the parish of Southbourne with West Thorney;
 - iii. persons whom the Vicar of Southbourne is satisfied have a sufficient qualifying connection with St Nicholas church.

The precise location in the churchyard of any burial of ashes shall be conclusively determined by the Vicar of Southbourne, and prior to any burial the obligations under the St Nicholas' Churchyard Policy are to be explicitly accepted by the family of the deceased.

Digging of graves

11. Graves may only be dug by the appointed funeral director, who must meet all diocesan fees due and bonds levied and must abide by these provisions:
- i. excavation shall be in the allocated location and in accordance with a written method statement and risk assessment approved by the churchwardens;
 - ii. the sides of the grave must be planked to protect grass areas and adjacent graves, with surfaces tracked by plant to be reinstated as soon as practicable;
 - iii. turf is to be removed and stacked on a porous membrane at the margin of the churchyard, separate from excavated subsoil;
 - iv. if articulated human remains are articulated, the grave is to be immediately infilled and a new site sought from the Vicar of Southbourne, Disarticulated remains are to be reinterred in a seemly manner.
 - v. surplus subsoil is to be removed to temporary storage; with turfs re-laid on the surface of the plot;

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- vi. the funeral director is responsible for all excavation costs, including reinstatement and levelling after 18 months settlement. A bond will be collected as surety to ensure full compliance with all obligations.

Headstones and Markers

12. Graves must be permanently marked within 18 months of burial with headstones approved by the Vicar of Southbourne from applications using the 'St Nicholas Application for a Memorial' form (or as may be approved by a faculty issued under the authority of the Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester). Applications should be made to the Vicar of Southbourne 6 months after the interment.

In the section of the churchyard designated for Commonwealth War Graves, headstones shall be of the type authorised by the Commission. Elsewhere, headstones authorised by the Vicar of Southbourne shall comply with the following provisions:

Design

An accurate design with the proposed inscription is required on the St Nicholas Application for a Memorial form with a specification suitable for issuing to a skilled craftsman. Recognised military badges, crests or emblems appropriate to the deceased may be included, but no other motifs nor inserts of bronze or ceramic. Fixings must be to current industry standards for long lasting safety and security.

Size

No more than 4ft nor less than 2ft 6in high (1200mm, 750mm);
No more than 3ft nor less than 1ft 8in wide (900mm, 500mm);
No more than 6in nor less than 3in thick (150mm, 75mm),

In the case of infant burials, headstones must be no less than 2ft x 1ft 3in x 2in (600mm x 375mm x 50mm).

A base forming an integral part of the design of a headstone may be included, provided it does not project more than 2in (50mm) beyond the headstone in any direction and provided that it is fixed on a foundation slab of an approved material which itself is fixed flush with the ground and extending 3in to 5in (75mm to 125mm) all round so that a mower may freely pass over it.

Materials

The following stone is permitted:

Limestone: Portland Hornton; Purbeck or Horsham Nabresina; Derbyshire;
Caen/Normandy; Hopton Wood
Granite: Light to medium grey

Position

No memorial may be erected within 5 yards (4.57 metres) of the outer wall of the church building save by authority of a faculty.

Appearance

Polished stone or mirror finish is not permitted. Coloured lettering is not permitted save as follows:

Nabresina limestone may have the lettering picked out in contrasting matt;
Granite may have the lettering picked out in black matt.

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Horizontal ledgers

Must be flush with the turf inclusive measurements not more than 7ft (2100 mm) by 3ft (900mm). Gravestones found to be leaning and in danger of falling will be laid flat, face up as a ledger, with costs to be borne by heirs (if they can be traced).

Crosses

The temporary introduction of a simple wooden cross is authorised to mark a recent burial. A brass plaque bearing the name and dates of the deceased must be affixed to the cross. Such crosses must be removed upon the erection of a stone memorial within a period of 18 months.

Prohibitions

For the avoidance of doubt, the following are not permitted:

- i. raised ledgers, kerbs, railings, fencing or chippings as these create difficulty or danger when mowing;
- ii. memorials in the shape of crosses, vases, hearts, open books;
- iii. memorials incorporating photographs or portraits;
- iv. mementoes, windmills, toys or little animals;
- v. the use of 'pet names';
- vi. artificial flowers;
- vii. the marking of places of interred ashes.