

St Philip and St James Church, Hucclecote



Taking care of our Churchyard together

Dear Friends,

Churchyards are an important part of communities, both as places to remember loved ones, spend time in or travel through. Caring for them is a balance between the needs and wishes of families, the church community, and the general public.

The Churchyard Regulations of the Chancellor of the Diocese of Gloucester aim to assist individuals who wish to make burial or cremation arrangements, ensuring that the wishes of the deceased and their families are respected, while maintaining the churchyard's integrity. These are in common between all Church of England churchyards across the Diocese and very similar across the whole country. They are designed to aid the safe upkeep of these important spaces for everyone and balance competing wishes so that all can respect and appreciate these places.

The PCC of St Philip & St James Church is ultimately responsible for ensuring the regulations are followed in the churchyard, as well as the upkeep of the churchyard as a whole, something we take very seriously. For example, we have also had a number of working parties over the past year or so during which we have trimmed some of the trees and hedges around the churchyard.

During the summer months we pay for a contractor to cut the grass once a month because we do not have the capacity to do this ourselves. There are times of year when the grass grows quickly between visits by the contractor, for which we try to make arrangements with volunteers, but this can prove difficult. The cost of the contractors is born by St Philip & St James Church – we do not receive any money for this from the Diocese – and unfortunately, we cannot afford to do this more frequently.

Furthermore, while responsibility for the general upkeep of the churchyard falls to the PCC and we do our best to keep the churchyard looking good, realistically there is a limit to what we can manage, and it is the responsibility of families to look after individual graves and their markers.

In November 2024 we reviewed our local policy and recognised that there were some things we need to clarify and tighten up on.

For example:

- Additional ornaments, vases, stones, garden/Christmas lights, small shrubs in pots, and plastic kerbing can be seen around some graves which are not in line with the Churchyard Regulations. While we understand that grieving families want to express themselves, these items make keeping the churchyard much more complicated. The contractors do not have the time to move every single one, and these are also a trip hazard to people walking in the churchyard.

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- Artificial flowers have not been allowed under the Churchyard Regulations since 2020 because they are not biodegradable and can cause damage to equipment if accidentally caught by a mower or strimmer. Artificial flowers are also easily blown around the churchyard in stormy weather, following which it is impossible to know where they came from.

As a result, the contractors sometimes avoid these areas, leading to concerns by families about how well the churchyard is maintained.

We know that this is an emotive subject, so we are seeking to take a gradual approach, ensuring that there is plenty of time for people to become aware of the need for changes and adjust accordingly. In particular, we are hoping that families will take responsibility for removing ornaments, artificial flowers etc. from the churchyard. We would rather they found a treasured place at home than have to remove and dispose of them ourselves.

However, we intend to purchase a weather-proof box which will be placed near the church office. From March 2026 unauthorised ornaments and artificial flowers will be moved to this box for a period of one month to be collected. After this time, we reserve the right to dispose of these items. We do not take this decision lightly, but feel the need to do so as part of our responsibility to ensure the churchyard is well maintained and safe for all to enjoy.

The PCC of St Philip & St James Church, Hucclecote
21st July 2025