

# New Buckenham Parish Council

10<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## St Martin's Closed Churchyard – memorials policy

### Background

1. New Buckenham Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of St Martin's Churchyard which is now closed to new burials. This, however, applies to coffin burials. Under Church of England rules, cremated remains of parishioners may still be buried in the churchyard.
2. The maintenance of the Churchyard extends to grounds maintenance and to maintaining the boundary walls, but not to the fabric of the church building itself.
3. Until 2017 maintenance of the Churchyard was carried out by volunteers, with an annual grant being made by the Parish Council to the Parochial Church Council to cover the cost of regular professional grass cutting. Since then the Parish Council has paid Broadland Tree Services direct for regular grass cutting and strimming and has also paid Mr and Mrs Baker for regular gardening work in the formal part of the Churchyard gardens.

### Memorial trees

4. Church of England rules specify the nature and dimensions of the commemorative plaques that can placed to mark the burial of cremated remains. There are around 60 such plaques near the entrance at the West end of the Church.
5. There are no provisions as to the planting of memorial trees or shrubs. Nevertheless, a small number of trees appear to have been planted along the west wall of the churchyard within the last twenty years. Three are identifiable by plaques attached to the trees, the most recent of these dating to 2014. The history of this is unclear. The current Priest in Charge, Canon Stephen Wright is occasionally asked about the possibility of planting memorial trees in the Churchyard. He has always, since becoming the incumbent, refused any such request because of the potential future maintenance issues that might arise, particularly if an inappropriate species is planted.
6. There is no documentary record of whether permission has been sought from, or granted by, either the Church or the Parish Council for the existing memorial trees/shrubs to be planted in the Churchyard. This has not been an issue until recently when the Church received a complaint about a May tree planted in 2002 in memory of a former Parish resident. The tree died after the very dry summer of 2018 and has recently been removed by Alan and Vicky Baker at the Council's expense. The widow (who no longer lives in the village, but visits from time to time) clearly expected the Church or the Parish Council to look after the tree and replace it when it died. Following correspondence with the lady's daughter this misunderstanding appears now to have been resolved. It does, however, raise some issues which should be clarified for the future.

### Future Policy

7. For the avoidance of doubt in future I would suggest the following policy on memorial planting in the Churchyard:
  - a. All trees and shrubs planted in the Churchyard are to be considered the responsibility of the Parish Council alone.
  - b. As such, any decision regarding the planting, removal or replanting of trees or shrubs will be that of the Parish Council.

- c. No liability will be accepted for the replacement at the end of its life of any tree or shrub previously planted in the Churchyard "in memoriam", once it reaches the end of its life.
- d. In the interests of fairness and of good management of the churchyard the Parish Council will not in future permit the planting of memorial trees or shrubs in the Churchyard.

Trevor Wenman

Parish Clerk