

APPENDIX 2

Exchange of Information – Burial Records

Steve Cox asked me to update the Register of Burials and Register of Graves as he had not done this during his tenure as Clerk. The information he provided me was incomplete, which led me to search through the files and emails on the Clerk's PC (courtesy of Alison), the Clerk's paper files and the register records that had been held by Gregg. During this activity I found a number of issues with our files.

There is no record of the grave number or site of the coffin burial for XXX on XXX. Collation of all other records shows an unbroken sequence of plot numbers from 2006 to 2021, which leads me to conclude no grave number was ever allocated. There is also no unexplained plot marked on the site plan between 2006 and 2021, which leads me to conclude no record was made of the site of the burial.

I am arranging a site inspection with Steve and Julian to try to close out the unrecorded site of this grave. Hopefully, we can resolve the issue before a relative wishes to erect a monument.

Other observations:

We have been undercharging since 2012 in that the £8 fee for issue of a Certificate for Exclusive Right of Burial has not been charged. I do not propose we recoup these charges, but we need to decide whether to charge or drop this fee in future. Steve had recommended we review charges as we are so much cheaper than Tavistock cemetery. This is an action for next year.

The Register of Burials record of interment of cremated remains in grave XXX on XXX has only a surname, whereas the full name is required. I have approached the local family for the missing information.

Four burials since 2017 are missing the signature for the officiating clergy, because Steve thought it unwise to take the Register of Burials to the cemetery in case of inclement weather. Two were definitely Geoffrey Fenton and we will need to approach him at some stage.

There are many other gaps of information in the Register of Burials that I do not think worthy of tracking down. They mostly involve professions and places of death – easy to discover at the time but overly pedantic to research with the bereaved families years later.

The same plot number may have been used for two different graves on more than one occasion (I only list those since DFPC took ownership of the cemetery - I have made no attempt to reconcile records before DFPC took control of the cemetery).

A19 – Stanley Charles Brook 12 December 1983.

A19 – Harry Edwards 27 September 2006. Approval for an RAF memorial stone was granted on 6 July 2007.

A30 – John William Newman 26 March 1983. Approval for a memorial cross on A30 for John William Newman was given on 26 March 2021, 38 years after burial..

A30 – Matthew Lawrence James White 22 February 2008. Approval for a memorial tablet on A30 for Matthew Lawrence James White was given on 3 January 2013.

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Only one A30 plot is shown on the Cemetery Site Plan. There is no reason to believe both memorials are not on the correct plots, but we have no means to prove it.

Grave numbers were not routinely recorded in the Register of Burials until 1997, and those in the Register of Graves have pencilled amendments (I think from Ann Inman's attempts to produce a site plan from scratch).

The grave numbering system appears to have changed in the mid 1970s and there is no surviving Cemetery Site Plan before 2006. Consequently, there are 47 unmarked graves whose occupants are unclear. Consequently, grave numbers are being reused – for example we have just buried Charlie Vinnicombe in new grave B60 but a different B60 was recorded in 1912; and there is also an A140 from 1950, whereas we are only up to A80 in our system (both older graves are now recorded as 'unknown'). Unless we can find a site plan of the old system it is doubtful this will ever be resolved.

I have made significant but minor amendments in the Burials Procedure and associated forms to ensure future Burials Clerks are aware of the need to seek and record information at the time of the burial. I think we can just save the amendments rather than formally upissue the procedure with minuted council approval.

The Register of Burials Index has been checked for accuracy by Gregg. I have transferred it from a Word document to an Excel spreadsheet. It is now fully searchable with sub-indexes by grave numbers, which has helped highlight some of the anomalies.

Some of the advance plot purchases have been made by relatively young people and our records must remain intact and searchable for perhaps 50-70 years. Steve had mistakenly believed computer records were acceptable, but this is only allowed where they can be guaranteed to last forever, which the council cannot do currently. I have printed paper copies of all key documents and placed them in the Burial File.

I have also modernised the computer and paper file structures to a more logical format to aid better record keeping. It is now based on the Plot No with all records pertaining to the grave (advance purchase, burial, monument, subsequent ashes interment, correspondence etc) in one place. Formerly it was partly chronological and partly by name (but confusingly some by deceased and others by the bereaved). This should enable future Clerks to quickly determine what approvals have been granted and whether advance fees have been paid. (I still need to double check that all computer records have been carried over to the new structure.)

I have resolved the issue of the 'unofficial plot' for Mr Beattie. This is the missing plot A72 and was reserved by DFPC for Mr Beattie in 2005 but has not been formally purchased. The site plan has been updated accordingly.

The cemetery Site Plan is a statutory document, but is kept as an unwieldy MS Word document with periodic printouts. For ease of use and amendment, it ought to be transferred to a more suitable software in due course (but not before its veracity has been checked).

I have resolved many relatively minor anomalies I have found in the records but others remain. It is questionable how much further time should be spend in trying to close these out.

NKT