

The Garden of Remembrance was completely rebuilt in December 2021. The original construction had timber laid directly on to the soil and they had rotted to the extent that it was in danger of collapse and some of the plaques affixed to it were working loose. There is a link here to a Facebook post which includes pictures of the work. <https://www.facebook.com/page/105974547698383/search/?q=garden>

With hundreds of ashes interred in the area, we have to regularly clear dead flowers and pot plants. Unfortunately, we are totally reliant on willing volunteers from our congregation to keep the area tidy. At times, the area gets covered in so many trinkets and personal tributes, which then start to deteriorate or break and we then get complaints. The rebuilding gave us an opportunity to remove items which are not permitted. When the memorial was rebuilt in December 2021 we did retain the ornaments that were present at the time

On the current memorial and its predecessor, some years ago the following plaque was affixed:



Despite this, we often find various items, which pastorally, we appreciate are extremely important to those who leave them, so we have to take a view on what can remain and what, after a while, will need to be removed. We try to leave as many as possible, but they can become overwhelming.

Under churchyard regulations, such items are not permitted. <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/St-Albans-Churchyard-Regulations-2020-v-1-2.pdf> - a copy of which is in the church porch and is referred to on a notice at the entrance to the new churchyard.

We have to tread a fine line between respecting the wishes of the families of those buried or interred and do tend to turn a bit of a 'blind eye' to some for a short time. We have also had people nail things to the memorial, leave bottles of wine or beer as a 'tribute', huge plastic or stone ornaments, fairies, solar lights and other assorted items. As a listed building and a protected churchyard this is actually all against the regulations and we get complaints if we do allow them and complaints if we don't.

So, we are in a bit of an impossible situation.

Whilst we may personally agree or disagree with the regulations, we have to follow them. Unlike a municipal cemetery where there may be a more relaxed procedure, Church of England churchyards are governed in a completely different manner. It would clearly be unworkable if everyone who had a family member interred at St Mary's laid personalised permanent tributes or trinkets. We have the plaques which families can request and the Book of Remembrance in the Church and clearly, leaving flowers or wreaths at Christmas or other significant times is what the memorial is for.

I do trust that you understand our position and I am sorry if this has caused offence. We are trying to be respectful and balanced in our management of our churchyard which has been the focus for the community for nearly 800 years. If there is anything else we can do, please ask.

It sounds so pedantic, but sadly others will continue to leave trinkets and personal items, we will have to remove them regularly as they have begun to take over.

Of course, we try to be sensitive and not remove any left immediately as that could be very harsh from a pastoral point of view and we do not wish to restrict the grieving process. However, we need to keep within the spirit of the Regulations and not allow the Garden of Remembrance to become a shrine with multiple permanent items.

Please do not let this stop you from honouring your loved one's memory with real flowers or wreaths as appropriate. We aim to keep the area as tidy and fresh as possible so it may be open and there for all.

Blessings,
Ruth