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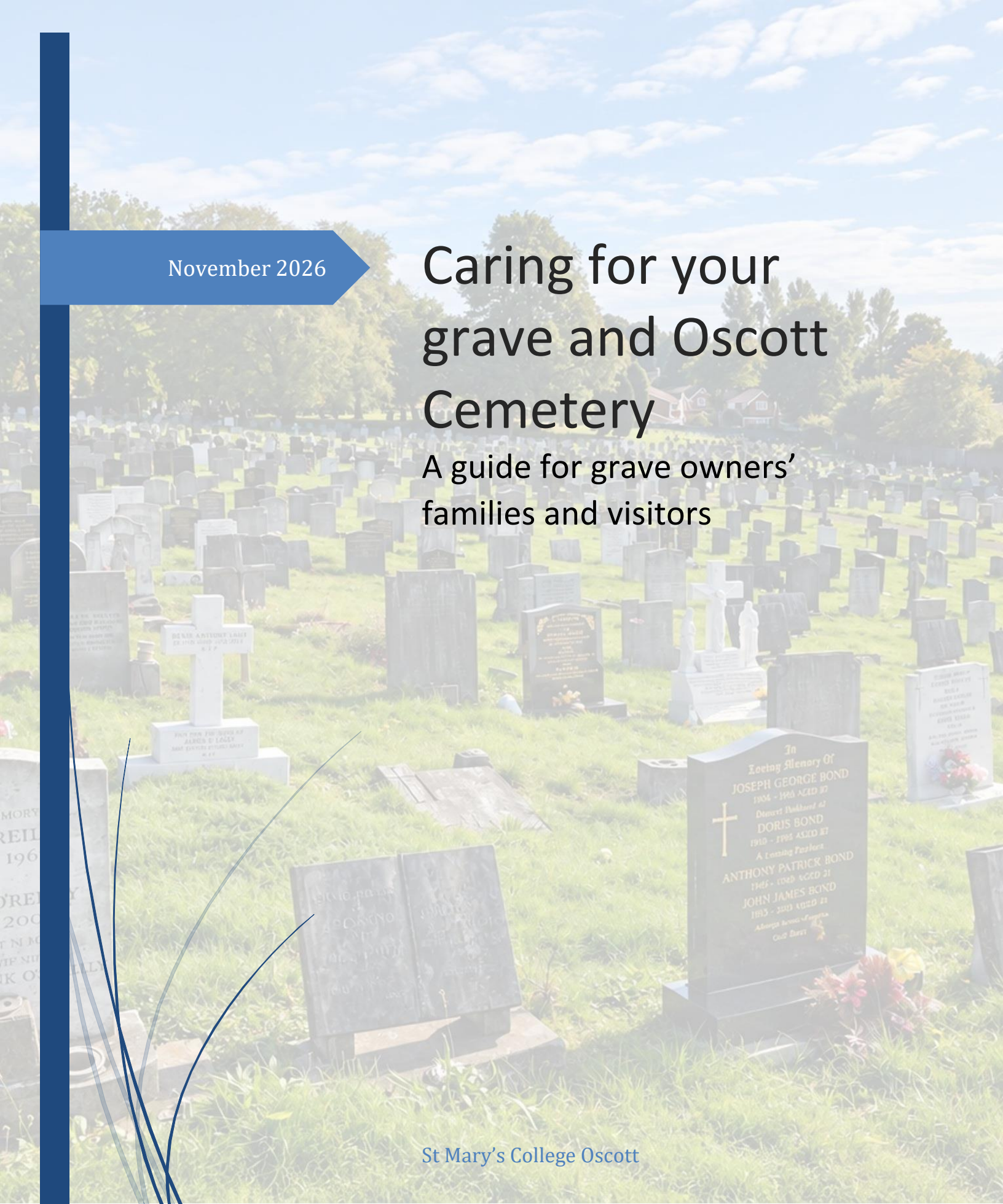
Caring for your grave and Oscott Cemetery

A guide for grave owners' families and visitors



St Mary's College Oscott

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Welcome from the Rector

A Catholic cemetery is a sacred place of prayer, remembrance, and hope. It is a place where the faithful departed are laid to rest with dignity and reverence, and where the living are invited to remember loved ones, pray for their souls and reflect on the promise of eternal life.

The Catholic understanding of burial is rooted in the dignity of the human person, the belief in the resurrection of the dead and the hope of sharing in the new life promised through Jesus Christ. The human person, created in the image and likeness of God and sanctified through the life of faith, is treated with respect in death as in life. Burial therefore expresses our belief that death is not the end, but a passage towards the fulfilment of God's promise of resurrection. A Catholic cemetery stands as a visible sign of this faith, bearing witness to the communion of saints and the enduring bond between the living and the dead.

The care of a Catholic cemetery is consequently a sacred responsibility. Its grounds, graves, memorials and shared spaces should be maintained with dignity and with compassion and respect for those who rest there and for those who visit to mourn, pray, and remember. This guide aims to support those entrusted with cemetery care, helping to ensure that this hallowed place remains peaceful, welcoming and worthy of its Christian purpose.

Canon Michael Dolman

A guide for grave owners' families and visitors

1. Introduction

Your help with the care of our cemetery makes a big difference. By tending your grave, keeping the grassed areas clear and considering other visitors, you help preserve Oscott Cemetery as a peaceful and welcoming place of remembrance.

This guide explains the practical steps you can take, how they help the cemetery as a whole, and the work our team carries out. Please share it with relatives and anyone who visits or tends the grave on your behalf.

Where we refer to the registered grave owner, we mean the person recorded by the cemetery as holding the Exclusive Right of Burial. Some arrangements, including memorial applications, require that person's authorisation.

Whenever this guide asks you to contact the cemetery office, please use our online enquiry form at **www.oscott.org/cemetery** . You can also scan the QR code on the cemetery notice board, where instructions for accessing the form are displayed. Make sure to include the grave number, your contact details and photographs, where helpful. Please use the form rather than telephoning the cemetery office about maintenance, concerns or complaints; this helps us keep an accurate record and pass your enquiry to the right person without delay.

To sign up to receive termly cemetery updates, please email **cemetery@oscott.org** with your name and contact details.

Thank you for the care you give to your grave and for helping us look after Oscott Cemetery for everyone.

2. Planning your visit and leaving before closing

What you can do

- You are welcome to visit Oscott Cemetery seven days a week throughout the year including bank holidays, from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm.
- Please make sure that you and your vehicle have left by 4.00 pm.
- Allow enough time to walk back to your vehicle and reach the exit. Please remind anyone visiting with you of the closing time.
- Please check the cemetery notice board for news, planned work, temporary restrictions and special event arrangements.
- Do not enter when the cemetery is closed.

How this helps

Leaving promptly helps us close and secure the cemetery safely and prevents visitors from becoming locked inside as the gates automatically lock at 4.00 pm.

Keeping visits peaceful and safe

Previous trials of later opening times attracted groups gathering in the cemetery for purposes other than visiting graves. There were incidents of vehicles being broken into, and some visitors felt intimidated while coming to remember their loved ones. It was also difficult to persuade some people to leave at closing time. Our closing arrangements help protect visitors and preserve the peaceful character of the cemetery.

We will use the cemetery notice board to keep visitors informed about activities, maintenance and any changes to normal access. Access may occasionally need to be restricted for essential work; wherever possible, we will give advance notice.

3. Helping us care for the grass

What you can do

- Keep the grassed area of your grave free from ornaments, containers and other items that obstruct mowing or strimming. Keep permitted tributes within the agreed memorial area.

- Remove faded flowers and loose packaging, and leave paths and the ground around neighbouring graves clear.
- Please allow time for the team to work through the cutting programme.
- If you notice a particular problem, report it using the online form with the grave number and, where possible, a photograph.

How this helps

Keeping grassed areas clear allows staff to cut safely and efficiently, reduces the need to move personal items, and helps protect memorials from accidental damage.

What the cemetery team will do

Our team maintains approximately eight acres of cemetery grounds, including thousands of graves, paths, trees, signs and borders. Grass cutting is carried out in rotation alongside burial work and other maintenance work.

Grass grows quickly during the growing season. Wet weather, soft ground and funeral arrangements can affect when an area can be cut. The grass will not always be short, and all areas cannot be cut at the same time. An area of longer grass does not mean it has been forgotten; we will get to it as soon as we can.

4. Tending the grass on your own grave

What you can do

- If you would like to tend the grass on your grave, please use the online form to check the arrangements before bringing mowing or strimming equipment, laying turf or carrying out reseeding.
- Keep any agreed work within the grave boundaries, protect neighbouring memorials, and pause any work if it could disturb a funeral or put another visitor at risk.
- Keep the plot as a level, grassed area. Please do not add raised edging, kerbs, fencing, stones or AstroTurf, and do not plant directly into the ground or create a raised mound.

- Use the online form to seek advice before using weedkiller or making changes to the ground level.

How this helps

We welcome families taking an interest in their grave. A clear, level lawn is easier to care for and allows the team to mow and strim around graves safely, without having to work around fixed obstructions, and reduces the risk of damaging personal items.

What the cemetery team will do

The cemetery office can explain the arrangements for your section and discuss suitable ways to tend the grass. The requirements for levelling, seeding, and turfing after the first year are explained below.

5. Caring for a grave after a burial

What you can do

- Expect the soil to settle after a burial. If you notice a dip, hole or other concern, please report it using the online form, rather than telephoning the cemetery office about settlement or routine maintenance.
- Keep clear of ground that appears unstable.
- During the first 12 months, please leave topping up and levelling to the cemetery team. Do not create a raised mound or arrange changes to the grave level yourself.
- After the first 12 months, you are responsible for arranging any further levelling and grass seeding or turfing needed on your plot.
- Please use the online form before starting any work, so that the finished level and method can be agreed. Please use the online form if you need advice about the work.
- Report any deep depression or sudden sinking using the online form before attempting work. Use the form to seek confirmation before arranging a permanent memorial.

How this helps

Grounds settlement is a natural process after burial. With appropriate topping up and care, the grave can become a level, grassed area that is easier for families and staff to maintain. Raised mounds make mowing difficult and can leave uneven surfaces around neighbouring graves.

What the cemetery team will do

During the first 12 months after an interment, we will deal with grave settlement by topping up with soil, levelling and grass seeding when the ground has settled sufficiently and weather conditions are suitable. After that period, ongoing levelling and grass seeding or turfing are the grave owner's responsibility.

6. Keeping the lawn clear and flowers at the head of the grave

What you can do

- Keep flowers within the permitted area at the head of the grave, leaving the grassed part of the plot, the space between graves and all paths clear. If you are unsure where this area ends, please ask using the online form.
- Until a permanent memorial is installed, you may place extra flowers at the head of the grave. Apart from an approved temporary wooden cross, please keep tributes to flowers only during this period.
- Please do not plant shrubs, flowers or other plants directly into the plot. Enjoy floral tributes in suitable non-glass containers within the permitted area instead.
- Please leave the plot free from kerb sets, fencing, railings, benches, stones and edging used to mark out the grave. Do not create a raised grave mound.
- Please do not place wind chimes, windmills, balloons or glass items on the grave. Balloon releases are not permitted. Glass vases and other glass or reflective materials pose a fire risk in periods of drought, and should not be used. We may remove any items that we view as posing a risk.

How this helps

Flowers are a meaningful way to remember a loved one. Keeping them together at the head of the grave allows a personal tribute while leaving the lawn accessible for care.

Mowing and strimming around thousands of graves is difficult when the grass contains edging, fencing, planted shrubs or personal items. These obstacles prevent equipment from reaching the grass and require staff to stop working, move items or work closely around them. They also increase the risk of damage to memorials and belongings.

Broken glass can become hidden in grass and can injure visitors or staff, particularly during mowing and strimming. Keeping graves free from glass reduces that risk and also the risk of fire during drought conditions. Avoiding wind chimes also helps preserve a quiet atmosphere for other families.

What the cemetery team will do

We will explain the permitted area for flowers in your section. If an item needs to be removed, we will normally ask you to arrange this within the period stated in our notice. Items posing an immediate safety or fire risk may need to be moved more promptly. Items left after the notice period will be removed by the cemetery team.

7. Keeping the grave naturally grassed

What you can do

- Please keep your plot naturally grassed and do not lay artificial grass or AstroTurf. If artificial grass is already in place, please use the online form to discuss its removal and restoration to natural grass.
- Please do not cover the lawn with gravel or stones or install borders, kerbs or fencing.
- Keep the finished grave level with the surrounding lawn once settlement work is complete.

How this helps

Natural grass keeps the cemetery's lawned appearance consistent. Clear, level plots allow staff to move between graves and maintain the grounds without working around coverings and fixed boundaries.

What the cemetery team will do

We can discuss suitable arrangements for restoring the grassed lawn. For graves more than 12 months after an interment, the owner is responsible for arranging further levelling, grass seeding or returfing.

8. Looking after flowers and seasonal tributes

What you can do

- Remove faded fresh flowers, dead plants and loose wrapping when you visit. Please also remove artificial flowers when they become faded, damaged or untidy, and collect any loose artificial petals or leaves. Keep flowers in suitable non-glass containers within the permitted area at the head of the grave; please do not plant directly into the plot.
- Please use the designated waste facilities and follow any recycling notices. Take large, bulky, or unsuitable items home with you, for disposal.
- Remove any Christmas wreaths you wish to keep before the second week of February.

How this helps

Regular care keeps your grave looking tended and prevents loose packaging or decaying tributes from affecting neighbouring graves and paths.

What the cemetery team will do

After a burial, staff will remove faded or dead funeral flowers, usually between two and four weeks afterwards. Faded, damaged or untidy artificial flowers may also be removed. Christmas wreaths are generally removed during the second week of February, weather permitting. Please collect anything you wish to retain before clearance.

9. Arranging a memorial or an inscription

Please use the online enquiry form for questions about memorials, inscriptions or ownership. Formal memorial applications must still be submitted on the cemetery's memorial permit form with the required payment.

What you can do

- The permit to erect a memorial may be applied for only when the exclusive right of burial for the grave space has been purchased. Only the registered owner has the right to apply for the erection of a memorial.
- No stone can be erected in the cemetery until it has been approved via the OSCOTT COLLEGE CEMETERY MEMORIAL PERMIT system, and an exact location and design has been agreed with the cemetery office.
- An application permit for the right to erect a memorial, to add an additional inscription, refurbishment, re-fix or replace an existing memorial must be submitted to the cemetery office on the cemetery's permit form with payment.
- Ask your memorial mason to check all dimensions, foundations and fixing arrangements against the approved specification before work begins.
- Permission is also required before removing a memorial from the cemetery

Transferring ownership of a plot

If the owner of the grave has died, ownership of that grave will need to be transferred to a person who is legally entitled to it, on payment of an admin fee. Please begin your transfer enquiry using the online form.

Choosing and checking the inscription

Include the deceased person's full legal forename and surname, together with their dates of birth and death, or their date of death and age. Maiden names or familiar names may also be included; the rules require these additional names to appear in inverted commas. Please include the complete proposed wording in your application.

Short personal messages, family tributes, suitable quotations, poems, hymns and religious wording may be included, together with approved natural or

religious symbols. Lettering must be clear and legible. Please provide an English translation of any wording in another language.

A person's name may appear on the memorial only if their body or ashes have been interred in that grave. A memorial must not name someone buried elsewhere or someone whose ashes have not been interred there, including any additional remembrance inscription.

Your responsibility for the wording

The registered grave owner is responsible for checking and authorising the accuracy and content of the entire inscription, including names, dates, spelling and family relationships. Cemetery approval does not confirm those details. The cemetery does not verify family relationships or the personal information supplied for the inscription. Please check everything carefully with your memorial mason before the stone is engraved.

Approval of the wording

All inscriptions must be approved through the cemetery's memorial permit process before the work is carried out. Wording must be respectful, non-commercial and theologically acceptable within the Catholic character of Oscott Cemetery. Offensive, derogatory or hateful language is not permitted. The cemetery may refuse wording or ask for amendments where it is inappropriate, misleading or likely to cause conflict or distress.

Allowing the ground to settle

It is necessary to let a grave settle before a permanent memorial is permitted (9 to 12 months). Please use the online form to obtain confirmation before booking installation.

Temporary wooden crosses and markers

An approved temporary wooden cross may be used to mark the burial, while the grave settles. It must not exceed 3 feet above ground level or 2 feet in width. Please keep it in good condition. When the permanent memorial is installed, please arrange for the temporary cross or marker to be removed. You may ask your memorial mason to remove it as part of the installation or remove it yourself. Please do not leave it beside or behind the new memorial. The cemetery may remove temporary markers that fall into disrepair.

Memorial sizes and installation

No memorial shall exceed 4ft high and 2ft 6 inches wide (48 inches high and 30 inches wide). Minimum thickness is no less than 2 inches, if not exceeding 2ft 6” in height or not less than 3” in thickness if over 2ft 6” in height. All cremated remains interred in the cremation section must be covered by a tablet or memorial measuring 18” x 24” (portrait style).

The sizes above relate to all new sections and lawned sections of the cemetery. In view of the varying cemetery sections, it will be necessary for each written application for a grant of memorial right to be considered on an individual basis and compliance with other appropriate regulations will be a requirement.

Any memorial work must be fixed to the foundation using an approved support system (as detailed in the National Association of Memorial Masons Code of Working Practice) or dowelled into the foundation slab using the specification of dowels as laid down in the above-mentioned code of practice. Foundation slabs must be 3ft 6” x 18” x 3” set into the ground with the top of the foundation slab level with the soil at the lowest point.

What the cemetery team will do

We will consider the design, inscription, location and installation proposals, explain any changes required and confirm whether the application is approved. Please wait for that approval before arranging the work.

10. Protecting your memorial

What you can do

- When you visit, take a look at the condition of your memorial without pushing or testing it. If you find damage, a loose or leaning stone, or another issue requiring attention, please keep clear and report it using the online form.
- If maintenance or repair is needed, arrange this through a competent memorial mason and obtain any necessary cemetery approval.
- Keep the memorial clean using advice from your memorial mason. Avoid products or methods that could damage the stone or lettering.

- You may wish to consider memorial insurance; check the cover, exclusions and excess before deciding. Insurance is a personal choice.

How this helps

Any memorial erected in the cemetery remains the property and responsibility of the owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial and remains in the cemetery at the owner's sole risk. All memorials must be kept in a good state of repair.

11. Reporting an unsafe memorial and arranging repairs

What you can do

- Please use the online form to keep your address, telephone number and email address up to date so we can contact you about your grave or memorial.
- If a memorial looks loose, leaning or damaged, keep clear and report it promptly using the online form, with the grave number and a photograph where possible. Do not push, pull or test it yourself.
- If a notice or tag is placed on your memorial, please contact the cemetery office using the online form. Arrange any required repair through a competent memorial mason with cemetery approval. Do not remove safety notices or attempt to lift or straighten a memorial yourself.
- Please use the online form to obtain permission before arranging removal.
- Where a further burial is planned, use the form to liaise with the cemetery office, regarding memorial removal and reinstatement, when this can happen and what charges apply, and discuss this with the memorial mason.

How this helps

Prompt reporting of issues, and up to date contact details help us protect visitors and resolve problems with the person responsible for the memorial.

What the cemetery team will do

The cemetery team inspects memorials once a year. Any memorial deemed unsafe will be tagged, asking the owner to contact the cemetery office using the online form. If a memorial is in danger of falling over, it will be carefully

laid down and tagged. We will explain the action taken and the requirements for repair. Memorials may also need to be moved temporarily to allow a burial; the arrangements for reinstatement should be agreed with the cemetery office before work proceeds.

12. Arranging the burial of ashes

What you can do

- All ashes burials must be arranged through the cemetery office. Please begin by submitting the online form. The registered grave owner must authorise the interment, and the cemetery office must confirm the available capacity and booking requirements.
- Do not bury ashes yourself, place them into the side wall of an open grave or scatter them on the grave.
- For an ashes grave in the cremation section, obtain approval for the required memorial tablet or desk-top memorial before ordering it.

What the cemetery team will do

The cemetery office must arrange and record the interment of ashes in the cemetery's burial records. A person's name can be added to the memorial only when their body or ashes have been interred in that grave and the interment has been recorded by the cemetery. Ashes buried privately, without an arrangement through the cemetery office, cannot be treated as a recorded interment or used as the basis for a memorial inscription.

A full burial grave plot can normally accommodate up to four ashes interments in addition to its permitted full burials, subject to the particular grave's capacity and cemetery approval. This must be confirmed for each grave.

13. Helping everyone enjoy a peaceful visit

What you can do

- Respect funerals and allow burials to proceed without interruption. Follow staff directions and keep access routes clear.
- Drive at no more than 10 mph and use the designated parking areas. If parking in section 14B, the John Henry Newman section, is full, please

return to the main parking area. Do not park on cemetery roads or block gates, paths or access needed by staff or funeral vehicles.

- Ensure children under 12 are accompanied by an adult, and supervise them throughout the visit. Ball games and disruptive behaviour are not permitted.
- Keep dogs on a lead, clean up after them and take responsibility for their behaviour.
- Cycling is not permitted within the cemetery.
- Do not sit, stand or climb on memorials, gates, walls, trees or hedges.
- Drones, flares and fireworks are not permitted.
- Speak respectfully to staff and other visitors. Please report concerns calmly and allow staff to carry out their work.

How this helps

Everyone visits for their own reasons. Considerate behaviour gives families the space to grieve, remember and reflect, and helps staff care for the cemetery safely.

14. Getting in touch and staying involved

For all enquiries, maintenance concerns, complaints and grave searches, please use the online form at **www.oscott.org/cemetery**, or scan the QR code on the cemetery notice board. Include the grave number, your contact details and photographs where relevant. Please use the form rather than telephoning the cemetery office about these matters, and avoid duplicate requests while your enquiry is being considered. We will aim to respond to all feedback, concerns, and complaints within 14 days of receiving the completed online form. If further investigation is needed, we will let you know.

If you would like to receive cemetery news and information about events or changes, you can choose to sign up via email to **cemetery@oscott.org** . Please share this guide with other people who visit your grave.

15. Cemetery office

The Cemetery office is open Monday to Thursday 10.00 am to 2.00 pm
Website: **www.oscott.org/cemetery** Email: **cemetery@oscott.org**