# THOUGHTS ON CHANGES TO ALDERBURY CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

Like many small cemeteries, Alderbury has been run for many years by clerks with no proper training. Very few issues have resulted, but the risk of something happening which would cause embarrassment or offence clearly increases as the number of burials increases. Poor practice is handed down from clerk to clerk, if no attempt is made to improve standards of administration.

My recommendation is that rules are tightened up and that all future clerks receive proper training from the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematoria Management as soon as possible after starting. I have recently completed their initial training and found it informative. Thank you for supporting this. Suggestions for change come from that course and from what I have learnt at my other position in Wilton, where the cemetery is run to very high standards.

It was openly acknowledged on the course that many cemeteries are run without strict reference to the law and best practice. Alderbury is nowhere near a worst offender and the basics are in place. On the course, we were advised to

1. set a date when stricter rules will be enforced
2. not to go back and try to right the wrongs of the past
3. agree a way that they are dealt with as they arise

Our working practice should start from this summary of the law, which I suggest we add to our regualtion: *Alderbury cemetery is managed in accordance with the Local Authorities’ Cemeteries Order 1977 under which burial authorities are responsible for maintaining statutory burial registers and grave plans, establishing rules and regulations relating to the management of the cemeteries and the memorials permitted with them and setting fees for burials and memorials. The regulations include the statutory requirements contained within the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 together with any other relevant legislation that governs this service.*

We do have a good set of regulations which form an excellent starting point. The key omission, and this is so, so common, is keeping track of grave rights ownership. In many cases, there is no record on an initial Exclusive Right of Burial (EroB) ever having been issued. This is less true under certain clerks, so the record is patchy. Whilst ERoBs are not a statutory requirement they are key to good management of rights. It provides a right to bury a body or cremated remains and to erect a memorial for a set number of years. Grave ‘owners’ never own the land. Such rights can be handed down by a will, but need to be transferred (assigned) to the new owner. In small cemeteries like Alderbury this is rarely done correctly and tends to be ‘assumed’. Why might this matter? There are plenty of horror stories out there of families being estranged and having very different views on who ‘controls’ the grave rights and what can be done with them. A will, with probate or letters of administration as appropriate, or a statutory declaration can clarify in law who owns the rights. As the administrator you can then make decisions on further burials or memorials confidently.

APC invested in Scribe Cemetery a couple of years ago and former clerk, Steve Milton, did make a start on transferring records but the work is incomplete. A comprehensive transfer would allow the burial books to be archived and we could rely on just the Scribe records.

I checked cemetery fees in Alderbury against some other local cemeteries: Redlynch, Downton and Wilton. A table of selected fees is below. Income in the past 4 years has been pretty steady at around £2,000 pa. This is to be set against admin costs, grass cutting and path and other maintenance - probably break even unless a more major project is needed eg improving the car park or the current path improvements. It is common for local authority cemeteries to be subsidised in this way and just important that councillors understand what they are providing.

**Recommendations**

1. The Council commits to the transfer of all records past and future to Scribe and archive the traditional books and paper records. Mapping to be added. *IMPACT on clerk’s working time*
2. The Council adopts a more rigorous policy on the ownership of grave rights. From a date to be determined assignments must be legally completed to allow additional burials in a plot or the erection of a memorial by anyone other than the original owner (assumed to be the person buried with 99 years rights, where no other record exists). Such a transfer may incur a charge.
3. Over the course of the next 12 months (or timeframe to be determined) the Council introduces policies and procedures for the management of the cemetery including reviewing our published regulations *IMPACT on clerk’s working time*
4. Consider setting aside an ear-marked reserve for cemetery projects *IMPACT on other plans for reserves*
5. Agree how often to review cemetery fees

## Table of a selection of fees charged nearby

NOTE that Salisbury cemeteries are substantially more expensive

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Alderbury** | **Downton** | **Redlynch** | **Wilton** |
| Adult interment | 150 | 171 | Included | 315 |
| Ashes interment | 75 | 99 | included | 125 |
| Double depth EroB burial | 300 | 463 | 266 | 310 |
| Cremation plot ERoB | 100 | 135 | 179 | 135 |
| Assignment |  |  |  | 50 |
| Headstone | 100 | 191 | Included | 95 |
| Flat cremation plot stone | 50 | 40 | included | 50/55 |
| Non parishioners | trebled | n/a | Roughly trebled | doubled |