

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF COVENTRY

Churchyard of St Laurence, Ansley

**Re: Francis Albert Buckler (deceased)
Elsie May Buckler (deceased)**

and

**Re: Raymond Owen Buckler (deceased)
Edna May Buckler (deceased)**

Roydon Buckler

Petitioner

**Private Petition for addition of wedge shaped base with
carved inscription beneath existing memorial stone.**

Petition C7608/2025

JUDGMENT

Overview

- 1) To the approximate North-North-West of the City of Coventry lies the rural village of Ansley, which is served by the Parish Church of St Laurence (albeit the heritage register and Historic England registration both refer to St Lawrence instead). Ansley is mentioned in the Domesday Book, together with nearby Hartshill, and has a name derived from *Ansetleah*, meaning an isolated hermitage in a woodland pasture. The Church of St Laurence has a grade II* listing and was first created in the mid to late 12th Century, with a tower and clerestory added in 15th Century.
- 2) The Church has a churchyard and annexe still used for burials, with also an area for burial of cremated remains. The Church website proclaims the following:

Ansley Church like so many village churchyards has been a burying ground for centuries. The former residents of the parish were laid to rest where the then incumbent, probably with the guidance of the parish gravedigger, thought fit. A wooden cross would be all that was possible to mark the majority of the graves. It would have been only the very wealthy who had a tomb or headstone made from the local sandstone. In the early C18th, with the arrival of the canals, Welsh slate was introduced and it is these stones that have survived the weathering.

There then follows the proud declarations:

The parish records go back to 1647 and are held at Warwickshire County Record Office

Followed by:

Today we have a comprehensive list of all the stones in the churchyard.

- 3) Upon the Parish website there is very clear guidance about the right to burial and concerning memorials within the Churchyard. The Parish should be commended for making the information concerning the churchyard so readily available. In particular it is stated: *All headstones are to comply with the diocesan regulations as to size, colour and inscription. All require the incumbent's permission or a diocesan faculty. Details are available from clergy, the Diocesan Registry and funeral directors. No changes to an existing stone can be made without a faculty unless it is for a conforming additional inscription authorised by the incumbent or Area Dean.*

The petition

- 4) There is before the Court a petition seeking the removal of the existing base from a memorial headstone and the introduction of a replacement wedge-shaped (or, more correctly, a splayed) base and flower holder, with further inscription, to commemorate two further interments in the same grave. The original headstone honours the memory of Francis Albert Buckler (who died in 1978) and his relict, Elsie May Buckler (who died in 1984). Subsequently the cremated remains of

Raymond Owen Buckler (who died in 2022) and his relict, Edna May Buckler (who died in 2023) were also interred in the family grave. There is only very limited space on the vertical headstone for any further inscription, and any such additional inscription would undoubtedly appear somewhat cluttered.

- 5) The original headstone is in part-polished grey granite with uncoloured inscription and a motif. The current base is in the same material with a central flower vase. The proposed splayed base would be 30" x 14" x 4", with a flower vase on the right hand side, and of part-polished grey granite. It is proposed that there be an inscription in keeping with that on the vertical headstone: RAYMOND OWEN BUCKLER \ BELOVED HUSBAND AND FATHER \ DIED 15TH APRIL 2022 AGED 91 \ EDNA MAY BUCKLER \ BELOVED WIFE AND MOTHER \ DIED 25TH NOVEMBER 2023 AGED 94. Although the inscription on the vertical headstone is uncoloured the proposal is for the new inscription to be painted black. No explanation has ever been given why this different style is proposed for the new base.
- 6) The Priest-in-Charge of the Parish signed the application for the removal and replacement of the base, having ticked the box that he was unable to approve the proposed memorial as it did not comply with the Churchyard regulations. Unfortunately, the 'for the following reasons' section of the form has not been completed.
- 7) The Churchyard regulations for the Diocese of Coventry incorporate the nationally agreed memorial regulations and came into force at Easter Sunday 2025, with a slightly amended memorial regulation applying from Advent Sunday 2025. The churchyard regulations include the following: (paragraph 8) *The general approach is that each churchyard should be harmonious in appearance and that it should remain as a worthy setting for the church. Harmony does not mean uniformity, but the design and choice of materials for a memorial, and the choice of words and images for an inscription, should seek to*

ensure that the memorial integrates into the established character of the churchyard.

That paragraph may be of importance here because with the petition were included several coloured photographs of the area surrounding the current headstone. These show that behind and to the right of the current Buckler headstone is a dark grey memorial with a far larger wedge shaped base than that currently proposed for the Buckler memorial. Many of the headstones visible in the photographs have flower holders, and the memorial regulations permit such items.

- 8) The members of the PCC of St Laurence Church unanimously, on 4th September 2025, passed a resolution that they ‘do not endorse the application’, giving the reason ‘because it is not in keeping with the other memorials in the row’. No further explanation was given.
- 9) The members of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for Coventry issued a certificate of No Objection at their meeting on 10th December 2025.
- 10) The public notice was displayed for the required period and no formal objection has arisen from that.
- 11) Given the stance of the members of the PCC directions were given. It was unclear whether a formal objection was being made to the introduction of the wedge-shaped base, or whether the members of the PCC were simply indicating dissatisfaction with the proposal. The directions sought clarification of whether the PCC, or any individual member, wished to formally oppose the petition. The Petitioner was then directed to respond, depending upon whether an informal or formal objection was being posed.

- 12) The response from the PCC was made by the Priest-in-Charge. He stated: *The PCC of Ansley, wishes to make clear that, while it does not seek to become a formal opponent to the proceedings, it does not endorse the petition. The PCC's decision is based on the view that the proposed memorial is not in keeping with the character and appearance of the other memorials in that row of the churchyard. In particular, the Council considers that it would be inconsistent with the established style and setting, which the PCC seeks to preserve in order to maintain the overall harmony and dignity of the churchyard.* (Reference to 'row' was, I anticipate, based upon the now superseded churchyard regulations, wherein the application of the regulations could be relaxed if there already existed 'in the same row or area' six other existing memorials of the same character/design/material)
- 13) The response from the PCC is, regrettably, lacking in detail. The directions had made it clear that details of the objection were required (direction 2 stated: *a representative of the PCC must set out in writing the specific reasons behind the PCC decision 'not to endorse' the petition (whether that be shape, material, finish, format of proposed carved inscription, text of proposed carved inscription, any other reason, or a combination of factors)*). It is still unclear whether the objection relates to the splayed design, the material (polished grey granite), the change from having uncoloured to black painted lettering, the fact the proposed flower holder was to be on the right hand side rather than central (as currently, and upon other grave memorials in the immediate area. The Court is not prepared to chase a more detailed response to formal directions.
- 14) The response from the Petitioner was equally as uninformative as the PCC response. He did, at least, formally confirm one point at issue that had been highlighted in the directions, when he confirmed that his parents, Raymond and Edna, had indeed been interred in the family grave. He stated: *Sorry but i don't no what the issue is hear to be honest (sic)*

But just wanted to let you know the cremated remains of Raymond Owen Buckler and Edna May Buckler are interned (sic) in the grave of Francis Albert Buckler and Elsie May Buckler

*Which was done thought (sic) the Church with a service for both of my parents
All i want is to have there names put on the stone so that they are membered (sic).*

- 15) The Petitioner and the PCC were informed that this matter would be determined on the papers unless anyone had requested in writing a formal hearing by 1st May 2026. Nobody has requested a formal hearing.

Determination

- 16) Ordinarily the Court would be loath to go against the expressed stance of the PCC, they being guardians of the Churchyard, and then only when very good reason has been shown why an alternative situation should be permitted. Here the members of the PCC, collectively and individually, have declined to formally oppose the Petition. The explanation why the members of the PCC object to the proposal is lacking in detail. It is certainly not clear whether it is material, shape, finish, wording, colouring of letters, inclusion of flower holder, position of flower holder, or a combination of the above. Looking at the photographs it is unlikely that material and finish are at issue, as many of the memorials are of polished or part-polished granite in various shades from light to dark grey. The splayed shape of the proposed replacement base is unlikely to be seen as ‘out of character’ as the photographs show a far larger wedge shaped base on a memorial very close to the current Buckler headstone. Two potential issues strike me as potential reasons for opposition, those being the combination of the splayed shape beside a square flower holder, and the colouring of the lettering being different to that on the vertical headstone. The first point is one of style. Other memorials, including the original Buckler memorial base, have centrally placed flower holders. However, it is certainly not unusual to see memorials with flower holders to one side, often on purpose so the flowers do not obscure the lettering

on the headstone. To require the base to have a centrally placed flower holder would create a noticeably different memorial to others I have seen in the Churchyard, especially if combined with an inscription to two further people. The second point has some merit. Although the memorial regulations permit inscriptions to be in one or two different colours, all other memorials seem to have inscriptions in a single colour. With the inscription on the original vertical headstone being uncoloured it seems likely that to permit black painted lettering on the base would clash or jar.

- 17) With the opposition from the PCC being unclear I must look at the available evidence. The several photographs included with the Petition do - just - persuade me that the proposed splayed base with inscription and flower holder would not be so out of harmony with the surrounding memorials that it should be refused. A faculty will be issued to permit the proposed replacement base with inscription and flower holder. I do, however, find that the proposed black lettering would be out of character with the other memorials in this part of the churchyard. The lettering will therefore either have to be uncoloured or painted in white.
- 18) Although directions have been given in this matter, involving the registry in additional works, I shall not claim the fee for the Chancellor where directions have been given. No fee will be charged for drafting this judgment, although I certify that consideration of the issues and drafting took three hours.

Conditions

- (1) The replacement base with inscription, worded as per the petition, and flower holder may be installed on the Buckler memorial and the original base may first be removed;
- (2) The inscription must either be uncoloured or painted in white. The proposed black lettering will not be permitted;
- (3) The Petitioner (whether in person or through his agents, the monumental masons) shall, within one month of installation of the new base to the memorial:

- (i) provide to the Churchwarden(s) of the Parish the final drawings/designs for the replacement base together with good colour copies of all photographs supplied with the Petition, so they can be kept with the Parish records; and
- (ii) formally notify the Churchwarden(s) of the Parish in writing that the works have been completed, so that details of this memorial can be entered in the church log book;

Glyn Ross Samuel
Chancellor
9th July 2026.