

Neutral Citation Number: [2025] ECC She 2

DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

In the Consistory Court

Her Honour Judge Sarah Singleton KC

Chancellor

In the Matter of

ST MARY'S, CATCLIFFE

AND A PRIVATE PETITION CONCERNING A HEADSTONE

Judgment

1. On 9th February 2024 a baby boy was born to the Petitioners. They were devastated when he did not live beyond fifty three minutes. His remains have been buried in the churchyard at the church of Saint Mary's Catcliffe. I offer them my sincere condolences for their loss.
2. The Petitioners wish to introduce a memorial to the churchyard which fully expresses their love for their lost son. They have worked carefully with the incumbent priest to try and achieve a design for the memorial so that it complies with the Diocese of Sheffield Churchyard rules.
3. The Petitioners have gone to the trouble of accompanying their petition with large numbers of photographs which show other memorials in this churchyard which have been installed without regard for the rules. A substantial number of them would not have been approved had they been the subjects of similar petitions. It would be invidious to identify the worst examples.
4. Diocesan chancellors are only too aware of how unfair it seems when someone has just suffered a tragic loss to find that the memorial they have chosen and designed cannot be introduced because it does not comply with the rules. That disappointment is felt more acutely when there are a large number of apparently unlawful memorials in the churchyard. Often, as here, those other memorials are obviously in breach of the rules which the proposed memorial infringes more subtly. Unfortunately, as has been explained in a number of judgments, the presence of memorials which break the rules does not justify the introduction of other non-compliant memorials. I can only express my regret that local stone masons, who are familiar with the rules, continue to offer designs to the bereaved which they know carry the risk of not being permitted.
5. The Petitioners in this case have changed their proposed design considerably after working with the incumbent and following some of the informal guidance offered.
6. The black granite colour, conventional shape and dimensions of the memorial stone do comply with the rules. The design includes kerbstones which are not allowed under the rules but are prevalent in this churchyard. The main reason for the prohibition of kerbstones is that they make the maintenance of the grass in churchyards rather difficult. Given the number of other kerb sets in this churchyard that consideration has less weight and therefore I permit the kerbstones.
7. The Petitioners wish to include a number of sentiments on the memorial as follows:

On the memorial stone :-
In Loving Memory Of

.....
9.2.24 Age 53 Minutes
Our precious baby boy
Gone from our sight, but not from our hearts
You will be loved and missed every day by
Mummy, Daddy and our family.
We love you so much
We miss you every single day baby boy
Shine bright little star

On the base:-
I love you all the world to the moon and back forever and ever

On the foot kerb:-
We love you Son

8. I consider that fewer words would convey the messages of these tragically bereaved parents more powerfully than their final proposal. However, I propose to approve these words. The sentiments are consistent with the beliefs and doctrines of the church and it is not for me to regulate matters of taste.
9. The Petitioners wish to incorporate two etched images on the memorial stone. The first is of a baby giraffe toy which their son had before he died and which is a precious reminder of him to them. The second is of a knitted heart presented to them by the hospital to mark their bereavement; the original knitted heart is retained by them and is an important symbol of remembrance for them. The person to be remembered on this memorial was a tiny baby who died tragically early. I therefore permit these images.
10. The Petitioners wish the colour of the engraved words and the etched baby giraffe and knitted hearts to be in blue. The Sheffield rules forbid colour images particularly multi coloured images and photographs. Neither a photograph nor a multicoloured image is now being proposed. As I understand it the lettering and the images are, on the Petitioners' proposal all to be in the same colour blue. Whilst my preference would firmly be for the lettering and the images to be engraved and etched in white or gold. I have concluded, exceptionally, given that this is a memorial for a baby boy that the lettering and the etched images can be in the blue proposed. This is on my understanding that the memorial will only have two colours; the black granite of the memorial stone and the blue of the engraved lettering and of the etched images. For the avoidance of doubt I do not approve any other colour being used and I do not approve any photographed image.
11. This decision should not be taken in any way as setting a precedent for other baby memorials either in this churchyard or elsewhere.
12. In all the circumstances a faculty may issue as sought by this petition.

Sarah L Singleton KC
Chancellor of the Diocese of Sheffield
21.04. 2025