

RESPONSE TO AREA MEETING ON SPICELAND NEW BURIAL GROUND

The (NBG) was opened in 2009 following the closure of our Old Burial Ground which dates from 1690 and which is the last resting place of many early Friends. Planning consent was obtained from Mid Devon District Council in 2008 although we do not know if the Authority consulted the Environment Agency. The NBG was once an orchard where George Fox is believed to have preached to local gatherings in his visits to the West Country in times of persecution in the 1660's.

The NBG is 0.8 acres in extent and so far, January 2021, the intensity of burials has been low, five single depth, one double and one double with a single interment. An area has been reserved for the spreading and burial of ashes. In comparison, the old Burial Ground contains at least 550 burials and spreading of ashes in 0.3 acres.

The NBG is within the jurisdiction of **West Somerset Area Quaker Meeting** who appoint a Burials Officer, currently Anna Mullett (annamullett@btinternet.com) who works in association with Spiceland Friends on management of the site and on matters of upkeep. The local contact is John Bell (john.bell1912@gmail.com tel. 075809 58275)

POINTS OF GUIDANCE

1 Accessibility The NBG serves the needs of Friends and Attenders who belong to WSAQM and it is not open to the general public. However, our Burials Officer will bring requests to use the NBG to the WSAQM from those who believe they have a close association such as relatives of members of our community and those people who may advance some special reason to use our facility.

The NBG may be accessed by the public on foot at any time via the Drove Road. There is parking at the entrance but no public transport. There are toilets adjacent to the Meeting House and a rest room in the Old Burial Ground but it is advisable to contact John Bell on a first visit.

2 Management of Burials The NBG is managed according to long held Quaker principles which are described in Faith and Practice 15,17-20 and 17,07-15. We are happy to arrange for a Meeting for Worship associated with interments or the spreading of ashes at Spiceland.

3 Charges In keeping with long held practice no charges are made for the use of our NBG but costs for commercial Funeral Advisers should be paid directly to them. Quakers have a Hardship Fund for those who are in financial need. There are obviously ongoing costs associated with upkeep; donations may be made to the Local Treasurer at Spiceland or to the West Somerset Area Quaker Treasurer.

4 Our Green Ideals Spiceland has obtained an Eco Church award. We seek to avoid the use of toxic substances like those sometimes used in embalming fluids and non degradable metals and plastics in conventional coffins.

5 Layout of interments and spreading of ashes The NBG is arranged in three areas. In the upper western area, plots are arranged in rows with the next grave being cut alongside the previous one so that gravestones may be erected within the plot and the area kept tidy by regular mowing. On the upper eastern side we have made a space for the scattering or shallow burial of ashes. However, the Burials Officer needs a form from the crematorium for the release or spreading. A Member of Area Meeting should witness when ashes are spread. On the lower eastern side we are arranging a wilder space where graves are still arranged in rows but gravestones are not allowed. Here we are encouraging the spread of wildflowers by cutting more occasionally

6 Tending of Graves We respectfully ask that any planting or tending with cut flowers should recognise our green ideals for the encouragement of native species. We expect that wrappings should be removed and that any vases should be movable to facilitate mowing, see WSAQM minute 11/78

7 Recording of graves Proper long term record keeping is an essential part of our Quaker tradition. In Spiceland Meeting House we keep a large scale 1:100 plan on squared paper to accurately record grave locations in relation to permanent concrete markers. The plan was prepared by our Friend, Jeremy Austin in 2017 in association with other Spiceland Friends and it seeks to match best archaeological practice for accurate ground survey. Quaker custom does not favour reservation of individual plots, however we may allow the digging of a deeper grave initially so that a second burial can be placed on top.

8 Gravestones Practice has not always been consistent in the past, but we believe it is important to adhere to our Quaker testimony of equality in death as well as life. We, therefore, recommend in accordance with QF&P 15,20 and WSAQM 11/78, that gravestones should be of uniform size and be inscribed in plain lettering with the name of the person and dates of birth and death only. To match the surroundings and to encourage the growth of mosses and lichens we encourage the use of Portland Stone. More details may be sought from the Burials Officer.

9 Wall Plaques We allow the fixing of simple slate wall plaques similar to those existing on the north wall of the old Burial Ground to record dates of burials and spreading of ashes. Space is limited so we will consider erecting a board to affix plaques. Advice may be sought from the Burials Officer.

10 Memorial Book A book is kept in the Meeting House to allow relatives to enter the brief details of a person's life in the manner of existing entries. More extensive written memorials are a matter for discernment according to WSAQM minute 12/32.

RECENT REVIEW

MINUTE 39/20 of WSAQM Business Team Meeting on 2 July 2020 states

We discussed correspondence between members of Spiceland Meeting (and shared with us) following a recent interment at the New Burial Ground raising several concerns.

The concerns were:

*The placement of new burials in the 'unmarked' section of the New Burial Ground.
Ground water in the grave in the morning of the burial.*

The suggestion that professionals be engaged to hold Burial Ground records and provide security over future interments.

We ask Spiceland Friends to bring to Area Meeting proposals for mapping and marking present and future interment sites in the New Burial Ground.

SUBSEQUENT WORK BY SPICELAND FRIENDS

Our team of Jeremy Austin and John Bell assisted by Vic Ebdon have undertaken a thorough review in line with the above Minute and we report as follows.

Further to the above Points of Guidance we have again studied legislation, including the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order (1977), guidance produced by the Ministry of Justice and by the Environment Agency. It is clear that Spiceland is a 'private burial ground' and as such the Ministry of Justice regard it as 'largely unregulated'. The nearest we can get to a professional body of regulation to fill the void is The Natural Death Centre which was established in 1994 and which have since formed an Association of Natural Burial Grounds ANBG. We have looked at their Code of Conduct and consulted them by telephone. We have little doubt that we can comply. They believe that they are ahead of Quaker Social Action in the matter of 'do it yourself green burials'. ANBG maintain that QSA are more concerned with getting a good deal from some unscrupulous Funeral Directors according to conventional practices, important though that is. They tell us that some Directors are insisting that burials and cremations can only take place with all the medical gear attached in the event of a 'covid death'. ANBG also believe that some of the Environment Agency Guidance is excessive for a small natural burial ground such as ours.

The ANBG offer up to date advice, complaints procedure and training. Their joining fee is £110 with a further £66 per year for a small installation such as ours with less than five interments per year.

To thoroughly investigate the ground water concern we carried out a series of trial holes in October 2020 after a period of wet weather and we established that in the higher part of the site that the water table was at least 6 feet below ground level (1.8 metres, but it was only about 3 foot at the lower end (0.9 metres). The question of depth of burial is not a matter of universal agreement. Whereas the ANBG say 2 foot

6 inches to 3 foot for a grave depth to allow aerobic decomposition to take place and to discourage release of methane, the Ministry of Justice would like ‘a minimum of 2 feet between the coffin lid and ground level’, while the Environment Agency would like at least 1 metre between the ground level and the top of the coffin. All are opposed to water standing in an excavated grave.

Additional markers and plans

We have have recently added four more concrete markers and produced two A4 size plans for the areas of existing graves and a general sketch plan for ease of reference in addition to the table-size 1: 100 scale key plan held in the Meeting House. We will arrange an on site explanation for interested Friends of proposed arrangements when circumstances permit.

Suggested rearrangement

While there is room for further discernment, the working team believe that we should restrict burials to the upper 30 metres of the NBG to avoid water problems. However, we could allow a space for ashes below this line, and, which has recently been suggested, the shallow burial of disinterred remains from the abandoned Quaker Burial Ground in Cullompton. We could also allow the planting of suitable trees and shrubs in this lower area. Restricting to the upper area would still allow us up to 100 more burials, some in marked graves and others in unmarked graves in rows but with markers at the end of the row to avoid damage to cutting machines.

JB 27 January 2021