

In the matter of St Andrew's, Fairlight
And in the matter of a proposed headstone for the late Vicky Crammond

Judgment

1. By a petition dated 6 February 2014, the Petitioner, Lucy Crammond, seeks a faculty for the introduction of a headstone into the churchyard of St Andrew's, Fairlight at the grave of her mother, Vicky Crammond, who was buried on 25 November 2011. There was apparently some delay in lodging the petition which was occasioned, in part at least, by there being an interregnum in the benefice, and I note the distress to the Petitioner.
2. By email dated 23 June 2014, the Petitioner indicated her consent for the matter to be determined on written representations. These were not sent to the Registry until some months later under cover of a letter dated 24 September 2014.
3. The proposed memorial is in the form of a Celtic cross. It does not come within the classes of memorial permitted by authority of the incumbent under the delegated powers contained in the Churchyard regulations, hence the petition.
4. The PCC supports the petition as appears from its secretary's letter dated 21 June 2013. The information provided by the Reverend Richard Barron, Rector, in the second part of the petition indicates that the PCC like the design which it considers of high quality and suitable for the location. It states that there are four similar memorials in the vicinity. It is also noted that the inscription 'free spirit' generated some debate but was agreed by the PCC to be acceptable.
5. The proposal was considered by the DAC whose advice is contained in a letter from its secretary dated 18 March 2014, the salient section of which reads:

The Committee cannot support the proposed design which is felt to be fundamentally and spiritually inappropriate. The inscription lacks any Christian substance and the interpretation of the Celtic knot design is weak and below the standard expected in a rural churchyard.

6. The Churchyard Regulations provide as follows:

A headstone is a public statement about the person who is being commemorated. Making the right choice of stone, design and inscription is important not only to the relatives or friends who are going to provide the memorial, but also to the wider community because of the effect which the headstone may have upon the appearance of the churchyard. Attractive, well conceived designs by skilled and imaginative craftsmen should be encouraged. [...]

Also to be encouraged are fulsome inscriptions which give a flavour of the life of the person commemorated rather than blandly recording a name and dates. Epitaphs should honour the dead, comfort the living and

inform posterity. They will be read long after the bereaved have themselves passed away. A memorial stone is not the right place for a statement about how members of the family feel about the deceased nor how they would address him or her were they still alive. Passages of scripture, which have a timeless quality, are to be preferred.

7. The written representations from the Petitioner focus on two issues, namely the design of the proposed memorial and the suggested inscription. The sketch submitted with the petition is a May 2014 revision which shows some modest improvements over the original design as considered by the DAC. In particular the Celtic knot is shown in relief.
8. The paperwork includes brochures illustrative of other work by Martin Cook, Artist Letter Cutter. I am in no doubt as to his skill and experience as a craftsman. A note from Mr Cook explains how the May 2014 revision has introduced a border such that the knots can be carved in the relief making them more prominent. I am satisfied that this revised design would be of the quality expected for a bespoke memorial which will be a fitting tribute for the late Mrs Crammond. I am further satisfied that it would not look out of place in its setting, bringing some individuality to what is all too frequently bland and homogeneous.
9. Where, however, there is greater difficulty is in the simple inscription 'Free Spirit'. Although, as the Petitioner correctly states, those two words appear in combination in various places in the Bible, they do not convey anything of Christian belief nor the hope in the resurrection as is appropriate in a consecrated burial ground. It is not apparent from the papers what other inscriptions may have been considered by the Petitioner. I would commend a discussion with the Rector or, if he be willing, the Archdeacon, to explore what other inscription might be considered acceptable. It is noteworthy that there was a degree of unease on this point even with the PCC. It may be thought that no inscription at all would be appropriate since no words or phrase can ever be adequate to encapsulate the thoughts and memories of the bereaved.
10. It therefore follows, having considered all the evidence and representations before me that a faculty must be refused. However, in the light of my indication that I would approve the design and I would sanction the somewhat unorthodox inscribing of the deceased's dates of birth and death on the left and right tips respectively of the cross, were a more appropriate inscription to be proposed (or no inscription at all) then a faculty would in all likelihood issue.
11. In the circumstances I shall formally stay the order of the court for six weeks so that the Petitioner can give consideration to proposing a variation. If there is no application for a variation within that period, the petition will stand dismissed.