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WSAQM also has a Quaker Burial Ground at Milverton.
Further information can be obtained from any of the above.



Spiceland's Quaker Burial Grounds



This pamphlet is for those considering a burial (or interment or scattering of ashes) in Spiceland's Quaker Burial Grounds which are part of West Somerset Area Quaker Meeting (WSAQM), and are situated a few miles from Uffculme.

Today Spiceland is a place of great serenity and beauty, somewhere for quiet reflection and retreat. Spiceland's origins, however, were in the turbulent time of religious persecution of dissenters in the latter part of the seventeenth century. It was probably near here that George Fox preached in 1663 on his first visit to Devon. In 1668 it is said that he preached in the orchard which is now the new burial ground. The travelling Quaker John Banks recorded in a letter to his children in 1691 that he had been to a meeting at Spiceland where 'near a thousand' were gathered, many of them presumably on the land of our current burial grounds.

The first burial at Spiceland is thought to have been that of George Russell of Burlescombe who died in Exeter jail in 1682 having been imprisoned for his Quaker beliefs. Since then over 500 people have been buried in this old burial ground which is now closed for interments. It remains open, however, for the scattering of ashes. A new 'green' burial ground was opened in 2011, on the site of the old orchard, south of the Meeting House.

WSAQM has discerned that the new burial ground will follow traditional Quaker burial practices which reflect our testimonies of simplicity, equality and respect for the earth. Anyone wanting a burial is asked to sign a commitment that they and their family will abide by the burial ground policies. This is because families of those buried may not be Quakers and may not be aware of, or understand the reasons behind our burial practices.

Planning for one's own death or those of people close to us may be emotional and difficult. We encourage you to consider arrangements early and to complete a Funeral Wishes Form; knowing your wishes is likely to help the bereaved. The Area Burials Officer and Area Funeral Advisors are there to give you support and advice in this—please use them (see back page).



Characteristics of Quaker burial grounds witness to our testimonies (Quaker Faith and Practice 15.17-20, 17.07-15). They reflect hundreds of years of Quaker discernment and have become places of great peace, as many experience in Spiceland's old burial ground.

Quakers consider use of their burial grounds to be a shared responsibility of their community. There is no charge for their use. We use our land sparingly and for this reason do not allow reservation of plots. However double depth plots may be prepared in advance so loved ones can end up buried together, while still taking up a single plot. We do not use consecrated ground as all ground is considered sacred. Quakers have not disturbed or re-cut burial grounds to provide extra graves; our custom is that once burial grounds are full they are closed.

Gravestones have only been allowed since 1850 and are viewed as marker stones. Spiceland's old burial ground is unusual in having some differences between gravestones. In the new burial ground gravestones for all burials from November 2011 will follow traditional Quaker practice and be of a uniform stone, shape and size with simple wording of names and dates of birth and death only. The reason behind this uniformity is to 'guard against any distinction being made in that place between the rich and the poor' (Quaker Faith and Practice 15.20).

Key Points about Spiceland's New Burial Ground (NBG):

1. It is for Quakers and those closely associated with them. It is not a public burial ground. It is for members or attenders of West Somerset Area Quaker Meeting and for others who have, or have had, a close connection with the Area Meeting or who have a special need.
2. A Meeting for Worship at the time of the burial can be arranged in consultation with elders from the Local or Area Meeting, Funeral Advisors and/or the Burials Officer. All interments, memorial services and the scattering of ashes will be conducted in the manner of Friends.
3. The NBG will be low maintenance and it will be a 'green' burial ground, throughout. Formal responsibility for the maintenance of the NBG rests with WSAQM, but will be overseen by Spiceland Meeting.
4. In pursuing our 'green burials' approach, we ask that bodies are buried so they recycle naturally, without being inhibited by chemicals (where possible with the use of non-toxic naturally derived embalming fluids and dressed in natural fibres) and without the introduction of plastics (e.g. coffin liners) or metal. Coffins or shrouds should be easily biodegradable, avoiding hardwood. 'Green' coffins do not need to be expensive.
5. Burials in the upper 'formal' section of the NBG, starting immediately beyond the new hedge,

may have gravestones (or not). The grass will be kept trimmed and look relatively formal, though not 'manicured'.

Burials starting at the far southern end will be for people who want no marker stone and who want to lie in an area where the ground will be managed as wild habitat. Over time, the exact location of these unmarked graves will be unidentifiable although a record of grave locations will be held by the Burials Officer. A few paths will be cut through the grass which will otherwise be developed as a wild flower meadow. Grass will be cut and removed in late summer; sheep may be grazed in autumn. Once there are a few burials, trees may be planted in this wild area, though not in relation to any particular person. They will be chosen for the development of the wild habitat and probably be native trees.

Over the years, these two areas will converge, upper area burials moving to the south and lower area ones to the north.

6. With regard to planting on individual graves, we ask that this is done in consultation with the Burials Officer so it is in harmony with the overall aim of making this a species rich wild habitat. We also ask that if cut flowers are laid on graves, they are left without wrappings. Once graves have been levelled (usually after about a year), any vases should be removed for safety when mowing or cutting the long grass (WSAQM minute 11/78).

7. Burial plots will be used systematically, working across in rows so that space is not wasted. There will be no reservation of plots, although the digging of a grave to a depth to allow a second burial above the first may be requested.

8. In accordance with Quaker Faith and Practice 15.20, and WSAQM (11/78) gravestones in the upper formal section should be of a uniform size and shape using Portland stone, with the simple wording of names and dates of birth and death only. No other details should be included. Full details for the preparation of gravestones, including type of lettering, is given in *'Spiceland Quaker Burial Ground: Guidance for Stonemasons 2012'*; only such gravestones may be placed in the NBG. To encourage lichens and mosses, we ask that gravestones are not treated with any chemicals or washed.

9. There is no charge for the use of the ground, though those using the burial grounds are often glad to make a donation towards their upkeep. Direct costs for preparing the grave or having a gravestone are the responsibility of the family of the deceased. However WSAQM would not wish any friend to be denied a gravestone due to the cost of Portland stone. Where this is an issue, it should be discussed with the Burials Officer and, where appropriate, WSAQM will help pay towards this (WSAQM minute 11/78).

10. The scattering or burial of ashes is also possible at Spiceland. A simple plaque can be set on the wall behind the 'Gingham Room', at the top end of the old burial ground. Plaques should be in grey slate following the existing style up to a maximum dimension of 40x30 cm. Wording should be simple and the same as for gravestones (see above).

11. A Book of Remembrance is kept at Spiceland recording simple details of those buried at Spiceland. In addition to name and dates of birth and death, this may include relationships such as 'wife of', 'partner of' and the person's Meeting. WSAQM minute 12/32 suggests that the preparation of more extensive written memorials should be left to the discernment of Local Meetings, whether as a Minute or as an entry in a Memorial Book for that Meeting.

