

Michael Burial Authority

Changes to the Audit Regulations did away with the traditional Easter Vestry meetings where Churchwardens reported back to parishioners (mostly Ratepayers) on the state of the Churchyard and the Rate being levied for its maintenance. All of the 17 Ancient Parish Churches (of which Michael was one) had parish burial grounds either around the church or nearby.

In England and Wales under Canon F13/2 the Vicar and Wardens oversee parish burial grounds and their good repair is funded by the PCC, unless closed for burials in which case the graveyard is usually maintained by the Local Authority. In the Isle of Man the Churchwardens are responsible for both open or closed burial grounds in the Ancient parish under the Burials Act 1986 and report to the Local Government Unit of the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) and not the PCC. Along with the Vicar they form the Burial Authority. Churchwardens are appointed annually at a Meeting of Parishioners that precedes the Annual Parish Church Meeting (APCM) - and no later than 31st May (from 2021). They assume duties at the end of the meeting and are sworn in later by the Vicar General at Chapter Court.

The Ancient Parishes had at least four churchwardens to form the Burial Authority, but in multi-church parishes (which we are) changes since 2012 have reduced that number to no more than two – and in the last year here to just one sworn-in warden. Obviously, it needs more than that number to work and MBA have co-opted two former experienced wardens plus a Chartered Accountant as the honorary Responsible Finance Officer (RFO). The accounts are drawn up by the RFO, agreed by the MBA and then examined by a Tynwald approved Chartered Auditor – all at no cost to the Church or Ratepayer. The Chairman is the local ordained minister the Revd Jeanette Hamer. The DOI are very happy with this level of expertise and the stability of the team.

The burial grounds are consecrated and available for any Michael Ratepayer to use, of any faith or none - as are those of German and Patrick. The grave plot for either a coffin or cremated remains is sold at the time of need under a legal deed which conveys the ground to them in perpetuity. Maintenance is the deed-holder's responsibility (or their heirs) but has to conform to Churchyard Regulations. The ground may not be opened or a memorial added without authority.

The Rate for maintaining the parish burial grounds is set each year by MBA, agreed by the DOI and then by Tynwald. Michael's Rate is one of the lowest of the smaller rural authorities and is currently 11.5p/£ (2020). With only 659 households and a falling population, a penny Rate only brings in £1,009 – so we have to run 'lean'. As well as regular grass and tree cutting, Michael has a large curtilage boundary, fences and paths to keep in good repair. The grounds and Sexton's hut are subject to a Quinquennial (5 year) report by the Diocesan Surveyor and recommendations have to be followed.

Burial records go back to 1610 and there are about 5,000 souls sleeping peacefully in 'God's Acre'. Many older ones have no headstone. Today, records are kept of plot ownership, name, address and age of person buried, plot location, date and depth of burials, officiant, etc and liaison with the Civil Registrar. The records are the responsibility of the Churchwardens and are periodically inspected by the Archdeacon.

We have adequate land for future burials but MBA are having part of the 2005 extension plans redrawn to incorporate an area of smaller cremation plots as the current area in the 1960 extension is filling up. Michael Burial Authority values its relationship with the Church and the community. All its members are ratepayers and give their time and skills at no cost. Enquiries are dealt with quickly and sympathetically - speak with the Vicar or wardens.