

Neutral Citation Number: [2025] ECC She 5

DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

In the Consistory Court

Sarah Vanessa Spear, MA (Oxon), Barrister-at-Law

Deputy Chancellor

In the Matter of CATCLIFFE: ST MARY

Works: Memorial to Davina Marie Knight

Judgment

1. A private petition dated 27th May 2025 is brought by Patricia Knight, Vanessa Knight and Iain Knight, respectively the mother, sister and brother of the late Davina Knight, who sadly died suddenly in January 2021 at the age of forty-three in what the petitioners refer to in a letter accompanying their petition as ‘dramatic and shocking circumstances’.
2. The Knight family petition for permission to place a memorial headstone on Davina’s grave in Catcliffe St Mary churchyard. Permission is required as the proposed memorial contravenes the Diocesan Churchyard Rules in several respects, namely that a solid black granite slab is proposed, together with corner kerbs, and a book-shaped plinth.
3. The Diocese of Sheffield Churchyard Rules state that ‘all memorials should be made of natural stone’ and do not permit the use of black granite, though it may be authorised where it is ‘already common in the part of the churchyard in which the proposed memorial is to be placed’. Figure sculpture and other statuary can only be authorised by faculty. Kerbstones ‘are not normally allowed’ but ‘may exceptionally be permitted...where kerbstones are already common in that area and the introduction of the proposed kerbstones would have no adverse effect on the maintenance of the churchyard’ (Diocese of Sheffield Churchyard Rules 2024, paragraphs 10 & 11).
4. I am grateful for the letter drafted by the Knight family to accompany their petition. It is clear from the contents that the need to seek permission via the faculty process to place the memorial they have chosen on Davina’s grave has caused them additional distress. I hope they will understand that incumbents do not have the authority to permit anything outside the rules to be placed in a churchyard, which is consecrated ground, and that the rules exist to ensure that churchyards remain places that exude respect for those who have died and comfort to those whose loved ones are buried and commemorated in that place. It is therefore important that memorials, whilst being

individual and particular to the deceased, do not fundamentally change the character or appearance of the churchyard (or any area of the churchyard).

5. The details of the proposed memorial are clearly and helpfully set out in the petition together with illustrations. The accompanying letter explains that the family have chosen the proposed design to represent 'God, a stairway to heaven, and a prayer book'. I am entirely satisfied that nothing in the wording or the design is in any way inconsistent with the Christian faith or fundamentally inappropriate in a churchyard setting. The size of the proposed memorial appears to be within that which is permitted, so far as I can tell.
6. As stated above, black granite memorials may be authorised in parts of churchyards where they are already common, and kerbstones (exceptionally) where they are already common and would have no adverse effect on maintenance. I have been provided with photographs and a plan of the churchyard, which satisfy me that there are indeed a number of memorials of black granite with kerbstones and similar in style to what is proposed already in this churchyard, and that at least some of these are in close proximity to the Knight grave. They do not appear to be causing any major problems with maintenance. I am further satisfied that the book-shaped plinth is not obtrusive or otherwise out of keeping with other memorials in this churchyard so as to render it unacceptable.
7. Albeit that the rules seek in particular to restrict the use of black granite and the installation of kerbstones, I cannot conclude that their use here would have any overall impact on the appearance of the churchyard or any real impact upon its maintenance. A faculty will therefore be issued to allow the installation of the memorial as proposed in the petition.

S V Spear

Deputy Chancellor

4th July 2025