



*Faculty application — Churchyard — Grade II\* listed church — Unopposed application for a faculty authorising the interment within the churchyard of ashes given into the church's custody by the police as lost property — No objections received — Whether faculty to be granted*

**Petition No: 11172**

**IN THE CONSISTORY COURT**  
**OF THE DIOCESE OF OXFORD**

Date: Sunday, 21 June 2026

**Before:**

**THE WORSHIPFUL DAVID HODGE KC,**  
**CHANCELLOR**

**In the matter of:**

**St Mary the Virgin, Greenham**

**THE PETITION OF THE REVEREND GAIL MINTER**

Unopposed faculty petition determined on the papers and without a hearing.

No objections were received to the application.

No cases are referred to in this judgment.

**JUDGMENT**

1. By a petition, dated 11 June 2026, the vicar of this Grade II\* listed church, which lies to the south-east of Newbury, in the Archdeaconry of Berkshire, applies for a faculty authorising the

interment within the churchyard of ashes given into the church's custody by the police as lost property. No objections have been received in response to the usual public notices, which described the proposal as follows:

*Carry out the burial of ashes described as those of Gary Bonsor, RIP in our graveyard in accordance with the rites of the Church of England.*

*These were mislaid, then given into our safekeeping by the Police and attempts to trace next of kin or other interested persons have been unsuccessful.*

2. The vicar explains the circumstances leading to this petition as follows:

*Prior to my collation as vicar the previous churchwarden took possession of what we believe to be cremated human remains with no identified owner/next of kin. We would like to bury these remains in our churchyard and create a record of burial.*

*The urn was left at Newbury Racecourse following a race meeting, specifically at a burger van. I am told that the racecourse wrote to all ticketholders to attempt to trace the owner but nobody responded. The urn was passed to the police.*

*The police attempted to trace the next of kin and although they thought they knew the family, said family denied any link to the urn.*

*The churchwarden heard of the situation and thought it would be 'good publicity' for the incoming vicar, imagining that I would contact the local press to trace the family and reunite them with the urn, or take a burial and publicise that.*

*In consultation with the Associate Archdeacon I felt this was not at all appropriate. The police declined to take the ashes.*

*The PCC discussed the matter and wish to bury the ashes so that they have a permanent resting place. The only alternatives would be to keep them in church in a safe place in the hope that the family try to trace them. However this seems unlikely given the attempts already made to get in touch.*

*The churchyard is well used, well-kept, and is full of the graves of local people, many of whom did not profess a Christian faith or come to church so we feel that although we cannot know the wishes of the deceased or the family, it would not be inappropriate to bury the remains in the parish churchyard.*

3. The papers submitted to the court include a photograph of the urn containing the ashes. This bears two printed labels, one above the other:

R.I.P GARY BONSOR

MY DAD MY HERO

4. Further detail is contained within an email sent to the vicar from the front counter of Newbury Police Station on 18 September 2025 and headed 'Re: Ashes in urn collected from Newbury Police Station 09/09/25'. This reads as follows:

*Thank you for your query. I cannot really provide you with much pertinent information and Newbury Racecourse have requested no negative publicity.*

*A member of staff from Newbury Racecourse attended Newbury Police Station last year and advised the urn and contents had been left on a burger van counter. The exact date is unknown, however they had checked all race tickets for the name of Bonsor.*

*We took possession of the ashes and conducted numerous checks to try to return them to a family member this returned a negative result. We requested assistance from local crematoriums who were unable to provide information. Our colleague Joanne Macdonald has then advised us that you may be able to assist and your churchwarden Chris Simons has collected the ashes from us on 09/09/25.*

5. The minutes of a meeting of the Parochial Church Council, held on 14 October 2025, and chaired by the vicar, record (under item 6, headed ‘*Irregular Burial of Ashes*’) as follows:

*GM [the vicar] reported that an urn containing ashes had been left on the counter of a burger van by someone attending a race day at Newbury Racecourse on 24 July. Despite a rigorous search for a record of the person named on it, no trace of them has been found and the police have handed it to Gail as vicar of the parish that is now responsible for it. We cannot legally bury without the right paperwork, which we do not have. GM has sought advice from the Diocese; we can either keep the urn somewhere in the church or apply to the Diocesan Chancellor for a faculty to bury in the churchyard. GM has ascertained that the Diocese would pay the faculty fee. PCC approved unanimously for GM to apply for the faculty. The grave would have to be unmarked, but noted on the graveyard plan.*

6. Since the churchyard does not appear to be closed to burials, I am not sure that a faculty is strictly required to authorise the interment of these ashes. In the unusual circumstances of this case, however, and with no registrar’s certificate or coroner’s order available, I well understand why the vicar should seek the authority of a faculty. It is clearly appropriate that the urn containing these ashes should be reverently laid to rest within the churchyard in accordance with the rites of the Church of England; and that the place and circumstances of the burial should be recorded on the churchyard plan. I grant a faculty for this purpose. The interment of the urn containing the ashes should take place within 28 days from the grant of this faculty.

7. In accordance with my usual practice, I charge no fee for this written judgment.

*David R. Hodge*

The Worshipful Chancellor Hodge KC

The Third Sunday after Trinity

21 June 2026