

Tony James Memorials Ltd

Recommendation

The Clerk asks the Council to ban Tony James Memorials Ltd from ever working in the burial ground again after the company installed a headstone in the burial ground without first obtaining the Council's permission.

Background

1. The Council agreed some years ago to permit Tony James Memorials Ltd to work in the burial ground although the company failed, despite repeated requests, to provide any evidence that it held public liability insurance.
2. It did so on the basis of assurance from the City Council's Laura Harlock that the company is trusted by the City Council and paperwork might not be its strong point.
3. In 2017 the company applied for permission to install a headstone on the grave of Shaun Gustafson. The company asked for permission to install a headstone 2'6" high, the maximum permitted under the Council's Burial Ground Rules and Regulations, which the company agreed to abide by.
4. Instead, the company installed a headstone 3' high and ignored repeated requests from the Council to deal with the eyesore.
5. In 2021 Shaun Gustafson's mother died and the offending headstone was removed to enable her to be buried in the plot, for which she owned the Exclusive Right of Burial.
6. In October 2022 the company applied to reinstate the headstone with an additional inscription to Brenda Gustafson. The Clerk referred the application to the Council and at its November 2022 meeting the Council decided to invite the company to say how it would deal with the problem of the headstone's excessive height, of which no mention was made in the company's application [minute ref 22/105].
7. The company gave an assurance it would take six inches off the headstone. The Clerk also explained the application had to come from the new owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial, whoever that might be.
8. On Monday 30th January 2023 the Clerk visited the burial ground to check on a recent interment and noticed the Gustafson headstone had been re-instated without permission. The Clerk rang the company, who were unapologetic and said they went ahead because

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members of the deceased's family were coming from abroad. When asked if the company would dare to install a headstone in a City Council cemetery without permission, the company said no, they would not.

9. The Clerk consulted Laura Harlock at Oxford Direct Services, Oxford's leading cemetery professional. She said the company is not accredited with the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons and advised the Council to ban the company from ever working in the burial ground again.

Geoffrey Ferres

Parish Clerk

Tuesday 31st January 2023