About the Church of England National Burial Grounds Survey

1 Project Overview

1.1 What is the National Burial Grounds Survey?

The National Burial Grounds Survey (NBGS) is a seven year project to survey and accurately map all Church of England (CoE) churchyards, in England, diocese by diocese, churchyard by churchyard.

1.2 Why do a National Burial Grounds Survey?

This is the first time a project such as this has been done anywhere in the world.

The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division of the Church of England has mapped the location of all their churchyards (including extensions and other burial grounds), which can be viewed on the Church Heritage Record. This detailed recording is the next phase of the NBGS and will record every square inch of every churchyard in England, photograph all the visible memorials and scan and transcribe all the parish registers. As well as then knowing the extent of all the churchyards, exactly where they are and where the features within them are located, valuable historic records will be preserved. Photographs of all the memorials (excepting very recent or sensitive examples), some of which may deteriorate over the next few years, fall down or be laid flat, will provide a comprehensive catalogue. All the information will be in one place and of a consistent standard and quality.

1.3 What are the Benefits of the NBGS?

- it will provide parishes with a highly efficient tool to help manage their churchyards and maintain their burial records;
- all records and information will be of a consistent standard
- it will provide a detailed, up-to-date and accurate on-screen churchyard map showing the location of each memorial, the footprint of the church building and other details such as trees, paths, buildings, benches etc.;
- it will help parishes manage future burials and provide complete confidence about the reservation of grave spaces;
- it will help visitors to find their relatives' graves
- it will provide information for faculty applications and churchyard management plans, enable measurements of distance and area and much more;
- it will mean parish registers are backed up safely and securely and protect the originals from loss and deterioration;
- it will help with management of the biodiversity of churchyards;
- it will become a tremendous asset to schools, education and research.

1.4 How much will it cost each church?

Nothing

1.5 What does each church have to do?

In preparation each church will be asked to:

- tidy the church grounds by cutting the grass or sweeping leaves. Anything hidden cannot be surveyed and mapped
- when contacted, give permission for registers to be scanned
- provide any current registers for scanning
- be available on survey day to provide access to the church interior

1.6 What else is included in the NBGS?

Every memorial in the churchyard will be photographed and all the parish records - baptism, marriage and burial records and any bishops transcripts - will be scanned and their content transcribed. The photographs, scanned images and transcribed records will be linked to the map of the churchyard.

1.7 When will the work be done?

The project will start in the Autumn of 2021. It is expected to take seven years to complete.

2 Who is doing the work?

The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England have signed an agreement with Atlantic Geomatics (AG), a survey and mapping company based in Cumbria. Atlantic Geomatics will manage the project and carry out the survey and mapping, the memorial photography and the scanning and indexing of the parish records. Atlantic Geomatics have already mapped more than 140 churchyards and cemeteries across England and developed an online, high quality and easy to use product, the Burial Ground Management System (BGMS) via which the results of the project will be displayed.

2.1 Who are Atlantic Geomatics?

Atlantic Geomatics is a Cumbrian survey and mapping company with more 20 years experience of general land, building and utility survey. The BGMS is a bespoke, comprehensive, innovative solution designed and created specifically for the mapping of churchyards and interaction with associated registers and records. More information can be found at atlanticgeomatics.co.uk/burial-ground-management-system.

2.2 Who is Paying for the NBGS?

AG have partnered with MyHeritage and FamilySearch. MyHeritage are providing the investment and FamilySearch will invest with skills and resources to scan and transcribe (index) the registers. AG will coordinate and manage the project and provide the people and equipment and be the point of contact for communications. AG will do all the surveying and mapping and photograph the memorials.

2.3 What else will AG be doing?

The map will be linked to the Church Heritage Record to form a national database for the Church of England thereby creating a common digital record throughout the church estate.

AG are also working with Caring for God's Acre (CfGA) and will be providing tools in the BGMS to record biodiversity in churchyards and enable volunteers to record memorial conditions and inscriptions.

2.4 How will churches be informed?

Initial contact will be via letter from the Diocese. AG will then be in touch with practical details. AG aims to give at least 8 weeks notice of the survey day. Please note AG will keep in touch with one nominated person per church.

2.5 Are churches without a burial ground included?

Yes. Churches without a burial ground may well have registers of baptisms or marriages. The interior of all churches will be scanned.

2.6 Are closed churches included?

Yes, the registers of all churches are included within the project. Where a church has closed, consent will be sort from the incumbent whose parish the church is within.

2.7 What if the churchyard is maintained by the local authority?

AG will be in contact with the relevant local authority to advise of the survey.

2.8 How long will it take?

It will take about 6 months to complete a whole diocese.

3 Surveying & Mapping

3.1 What happens on survey day?

AG will give at least two weeks notice of the intended survey date. Upon arrival the surveyor will walk the churchyard to assess the best survey route. The actual survey will take 1 or 2 hours depending on the area. Please note the surveyor must be able to move about uninterrupted during the survey.

3.2 What will be included in the survey and on the map?

A new survey will be done of each churchyard. The completed map will include visible features within the curtilage - memorials and headstones, vegetation (trees, hedges, bushes), paths and roads, buildings (church, lychgate), signs, benches. A 3D scan of the interior of the church will also be carried out.

3.3 Which memorials will be surveyed and mapped?

ALL visible memorials in each churchyard will be surveyed, mapped and photographed including plaques for cremated remains. Memorials will be categorised (e.g. cross, plaque, chest tomb). Where memorials have been moved, these will be mapped in situ. If the interior of the church is scanned any memorials on the walls inside will also be mapped.

3.4 What about unmarked graves?

Unmarked graves will not be mapped. Unmarked graves can be added by the church representatives at any time in the future should evidence of their location become available.

3.5 What is not included on the map?

Any moveable objects and small trees, bushes and shrubs will not be mapped. Sensitive memorials and data will not be publicly available online.

3.6 Why do a 3D scan of church interior?

A 3D scan of the interior will accurately record the size and shape of the church interior and the position of any furniture (pews for example). It is cost effective to do this at the same time. AG will store the scan data and if/when requested to do so will be able to provide drawings, plans and measurements of the interior. A fee will be charged for drawings and plans of the interior without the additional cost of a return to the site. The fee will depend on the size and detail in the church and what information is required on the drawing. AG will be pleased to discuss each case with the appropriate church or parish.

4 Memorial Photography

4.1 When will the memorials be photographed?

After the churchyard map has been created AG will return to the churchyard to take photographs of the mapped memorials. AG will advise of this date.

4.2 What happens to the memorial photographs?

Each photograph is saved in the BGMS and linked to the appropriate mapped memorial. Photographs of a sensitive nature or those AG have been requested to withhold will not be published.

5 Scanning and Indexing the Registers

5.1 Where will the parish records be scanned?

The parish records (baptisms, marriage and burial registers and bishop's transcripts) will be scanned

in the local archive centre or County Record Office (CRO). If some or all registers are held by the church AG will make arrangements for them to be collected. They will be transported to the local CRO where they will be scanned and then safely returned within a few days.

5.2 What is the advantage of scanning registers?

Records will be preserved and stored to a consistent standard. Information will be easily accessible. The risk of damage by fire, theft, flood etc. will be removed. Viewing records online will prevent the need to handle and possibly damage these valuable documents.

5.3 Why is consent required for the scanning of registers?

All registers are owned and the responsibility of each individual PCC, so consent from each is required.

5.4 What happens when the registers have been scanned?

Each record in each register will be transcribed (indexed) and input into the BGMS database. The names in the index will then be matched (or linked) to the photographed memorials where the inscription on the memorial is legible.

5.5 What if a memorial inscription is illegible or hard to read?

Unfortunately, the inscription of some memorials will have deteriorated making the linking impossible. Records of persons interred which cannot be matched will be associated to the church site and recorded as 'Unknown Location' within that churchyard. Each church may have other records to assist in making these links, for example paper grave plans. The tools to make these links will be available in the BGMS to those churches who subscribe.

6 What happens when a diocese has been completed?

When everything has been completed in a diocese AG will:

- Provide free, read only and secure access to the churchyard map to each parish of their churchyard(s).
- Provide read only public access to the churchyards in the diocese

6.1 What does each parish get for free?

As well as the complete survey, mapping, memorial photographs and registers being scanned each parish will have free read only access to the map of their own churchyard(s) on the BGMS where you will be able to click on a memorial to see who is interred and view a photograph of the memorial (if there is one). You will also be able to carry out a simple search by name. A basic user guide will be available.

6.2 Will the public have access?

Members of the public will be able to view a general map of the churchyard locations and select a church to view the detailed map. They will then be able to search by name and see where in the churchyard a person is interred. To conduct detailed searches, view photographs of memorials (unless permission to view has been withheld) or images of registers and get complete details the public will be required to pay a fee.

6.3 What happens to the scanned images of the parish registers?

A complete, catalogued set of the scanned parish register images will be given to the diocese for safe keeping and curated by the Archbishops Council, so they are completely safe in perpetuity. They are for internal reference only and cannot be used for commercial purposes.

6.4 Is a subscription payable?

Yes. **Payment of a subscription is optional** and will provide a secure password-protected environment

to enable a parish to manage and maintain the map and records of each of their churchyard(s) and carry out many additional activities including but not limited to:

- input new baptism, marriage and burial records – viewing and editing of these records will be restricted to only those with password access and will meet GDPR
- add new memorials
- add new photographs (e.g. of new memorials or when an inscription is changed)
- record memorial inscriptions
- store grave numbers
- access to advanced search facilities
- record bio-diversity - tree species, flora and fauna
- take measurements (distances and areas)
- carry out health & safety inspections of memorials
- record feature attributes e.g. memorial materials, tree preservation orders
- add grave plots and reservations
- link burials to plots e.g. where a memorial does not exist
- create and download customised drawings of the churchyard e.g. for a faculty application
- access to online training and tutorials
- access to BGMS updates and improvements
- access to an exclusive and secure web portal for customers with news, updates and much more

6.5 How much is a subscription?

Subscription fees will be £8.00 per month (plus VAT) for each individual church. Subscriptions will be fixed for five years from the start date. Any subsequent increase will be based upon the five year inflation figures.

6.6 How are subscriptions paid?

Local businesses or individuals may be keen to support the church and pay the subscription fee. The project benefits the whole community (schools for example). Sponsors will be credited on the public web site (subject to their permission) with the opportunity to have their name seen around the world by thousands of users of the BGMS, attracting visitors to the area who are likely to make use of local facilities (hotels, restaurants, bed and breakfast for example) and visit the church.

6.7 Why is a subscription necessary?

The entire cost of the project is being borne by Atlantic Geomatics and their partners. There are also ongoing costs to host and maintain the data and the digital records.

6.8 What if my church has already paid for the BGMS?

AG will visit ALL previously surveyed churchyards to complete any remaining activities including memorial photography, scanning and indexing all registers (baptism, marriage and burial registers and any bishop's transcripts) at no cost. AG will also re-survey the churchyard and update the map and carry out a 3D scan of the church interior. All subscriptions (access fees) paid to date will be re-imbursed and there will be no subscription payable for on-going editing rights and access to the BGMS. Checks will be put in place to ensure that all photos and transcribed records meet the overall standards of the project.

7 Other Information

7.1 Who will own the data?

Atlantic Geomatics will own the digital images and indexes of the parish records, the map of each churchyard and the photographs of the memorials. The Archbishops' Council recognise AG and their

partners will retain the right to market the data to the general public and recover their investment.

7.2 What about GDPR?

The NBGS will be carried out in accordance with UK GDPR. Baptism records less than 90 years and marriage records less than 70 years will NOT be added to the BGMS and will NOT be published.

A proportion of memorials may contain information which relates to identifiable living individuals. The processing of all memorial photographs will be subject to UK GDPR. Where requested to do so or where the inscription on a memorial is of a sensitive nature the photograph will NOT be published.

7.3 What if AG cease to exist?

Atlantic Geomatics will create a separate account on the BGMS in the name of the Archbishops' Council to which the Council will have access in the event of any form of insolvency process, Atlantic Geomatics is in material breach of any obligation to a church entity, or ceases to provide the services.

7.4 What about Training?

Subscribers to the BGMS will have access to a portfolio of online training tutorials, user guides and a dedicated helpline

7.5 Will there be any advertising on our BGMS page?

If for example a local business or individual chooses to sponsor the parish and pay the subscription fees we will display the name of the sponsor and a link to their website on the churchyard map page (subject to appropriate permissions).

7.6 Are memorial inscriptions recorded?

Memorial inscriptions will NOT be included in the project. The BGMS has the tools for the recording of memorial inscriptions (from the photographs of memorials). These can be added to the appropriate burial record at anytime later by authorised church representatives.

7.7 Maintenance of the BGMS

The BGMS will be hosted, managed and maintained by Atlantic Geomatics. Payment of the monthly subscription will entitle each PCC to all updates and improvements to the BGMS as well as being able to keep their own records up to date.

7.8 Opting Out

The project includes every church in England. Opting out will mean losing out on the benefits listed above and there will be no copies of records held anywhere.

7.9 Business Continuity

The Burial Grounds of England Mapping project is underwritten by the Archbishops' Council who will have a copy of the BGMS for safe keeping and, in the unlikely event Atlantic Geomatics ceases to trade, to provide continued access.

7.10 Data Security

The BGMS is hosted using a cloud computing model and is secured in three separate locations. AG arrange annual independent security checks.

8 Further Information?

More information about the NBGS progress will be published on the Church Heritage Record and the Atlantic Geomatics website.

Please direct any specific questions to the AG team via bgms@atlanticgeomatics.co.uk.