

Alcohol Consumption in Churchyards

A number of parishes have contacted us with regard to alcohol consumption in churchyards and resultant anti-social behaviour.

A PCC can make rules about alcohol consumption in a churchyard, and publish them, but enforcement is another matter. If the police are involved, one point that you might draw to their attention is the effect of the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act 1860. Section 2 creates a specific offence of 'riotous, violent or *indecent* behaviour...in any churchyard or burial ground'. The word 'indecent' is not confined to sexual connotations, but is very broadly defined to include causing any offence.

I have found that the police are often unaware of these provisions and it may be helpful to draw them to their attention. The legislation, though little known, would give them powers to intervene well beyond those that apply to any other kind of antisocial behaviour.

Canon John Rees
Registrar of the Diocese of Oxford
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