

**DRAFT**

**Memorial Safety Procedures**

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## **1.0 Background Information**

1.1 This policy is concerned with addressing safety issues in closed churchyards maintained by the District of Easington Council. The following churchyards are classed as closed and therefore apply to this policy:

Trimdon –	St. Pauls
Shotton -	St. Saviours
Dalton Le Dale -	St. Andrews
Seaham -	St. Johns
Murton -	Holy Trinity
Easington -	St. Marys
Monk Hesledon -	St. Marys
Thornley -	St. Bartholemews

1.2 A closed churchyard is classed as such when all burials in and around the church grounds cease. The only exception to this is where family graves are identified within the closure for future opening. The District of Easington is not a burial authority. However under an Act of Government, closed churchyards can be passed to a local authority. The local authority then becomes responsible for the maintenance and all health and safety aspects of the churchyard. This includes the safety and condition of all fences, walls, headstones, memorials etc. The duty on the local authority is not only to protect the public from injury but also its own or contracted staffs that maintain the churchyard.

1.3 This procedure is being implemented for a number of reasons. There have been no less than 6 deaths in 6 years (nationally) as a result of unstable memorials falling on members of the public. This coupled with a number of serious injuries has resulted in the testing of headstones and memorials to be more high profile in order that any future deaths or injuries may be avoided.

1.4 A special report was commissioned from the local government ombudsman into Memorial Safety in Local Authority Cemeteries. This document goes into detail with regard to complaints that the ombudsman has received and elements of good practice collated from several authorities combined with elements of poor practice as well.

1.5 Due to floods in the 1980's the majority of records that were held by The District of Easington have been lost. This makes tracing relatives very difficult.

## **2.0 General Information**

2.1 This policy is to be implemented in 2007 at which point the plan will be reviewed and revised as required

2.2 Grave owners are responsible for maintaining memorials in a safe condition. However, in practice it can be difficult to trace owners of older graves, either because the original purchaser has been buried in the grave, their address details have changed, or because the family can not be traced. Therefore and also due to the fact that numerous records were lost in floods in the 1980's, the District Councils policy will be to reinstate/repair where possible all headstones that fail the tests carried out. The headstones will have to be made safe initially, which could include laying flat, but the District Council will attempt to reinstate/repair the headstones within 1 month of it failing the required tests.

- 2.3 All headstones/memorials in the District of Easington closed churchyards will be inspected at least every five years. Due to the proximity of a local school the headstones/memorials at St. Saviours in Shotton will be inspected at least every 3 years.
- 2.4 Where memorials are identified as being unsafe the council will seek to notify the owners of graves in which the last burial has taken place within the last 75 years.
- 2.5 Where memorials are identified as being unsafe the council will NOT seek to notify the owners of graves in which the last burial took place over 75 years ago, unless there is clear evidence that the grave is still visited. Reliance will be placed upon good press coverage, website information and signage within the closed churchyards to ensure owners of such graves are made aware of the work being carried out.
- 2.6 The burial authorities within the District of Easington are either the local Town and Parish Councils or the Parochial Church Council of the Church concerned.

### **3.0 Training**

3.1 All staff inspecting headstones or memorials will be trained to standard with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management. This training will be refreshed at least every 5 years and a log kept of whom and to what standard they are trained and when they received the training.

3.2 Training will include:

#### 3.2.1 Risk Assessments

- Inspection of memorials
- Making safe of memorials and memorial remedial work
- Use of gantry and slings
- Erection of warning signage
- Erection and maintenance of barrier tapes and fencing
- Erection and maintenance of temporary make safe units
- General site working
- Visitors and memorial owners

#### 3.2.2 General Health, Welfare and Safety Assessments

- PPE Assessment
- First Aid
- Weekly, 6 monthly and annual inspections of lifting equipment
- Monitoring of systems of work

#### **4.0 Criteria for Identifying Unsafe Memorials Requiring Immediate Attention**

4.1 The purpose of the initial inspection is to identify memorials that are in immediate danger of falling and to make them safe as soon as possible. The Health and Safety Executive's guidance notes identify that burial authorities should determine the criteria for identifying unstable memorials in relation to local ground conditions, etc. There are no recommendations from the HSE, however the ICCM have been consulted on the actual force that should be applied for the initial inspection.

4.2 The advice obtained is quite clear. The council wish to protect the public against injury whilst in the pursuit of "normal" activities within the cemetery. Despite the warning notices this could include:

- leaning on a memorial whilst attending a funeral
- pulling oneself up on a memorial after tending a grave
- children climbing on a memorial
- Persons slipping or tripping and trying to use a memorial for support

4.3 All of the above have been known to cause injuries and sometimes fatalities. Scientific evidence indicates that a force of 350 Newtons (35kg) is exerted on a memorial by a person pulling or pushing themselves up against a memorial. To ensure the public are reasonably protected against falling memorials then the inspection will include a physical test that approximates 350 Newtons (35kg). This will be consistently applied and will help inspectors achieve a consistency in their inspection.

#### **4.4 Inspection Process**

##### **4.4.1 All Memorials**

All Memorials in the burial ground will be visually assessed as part of the overall risk assessment process. Memorials will be assessed bearing in mind the following:

- Are joints intact?
- Are kerbs etc breaking apart?
- Is the memorial leaning?
- Are the foundations (where evident) intact?
- What are the ground conditions like?
- Is it hard or soft stone?
- Intrusion of vegetation?
- Are faults or cracks present?

4.4.2 This visual risk assessment is carried out on the memorial prior to any physical inspection and can indicate potential dangers with the memorial. In addition to this memorials larger than 2.5 metres will be assessed to identify the urgency of a further inspection that would need to be undertaken by a structural engineer.

##### **4.4.3 Memorials up to 2.5m**

The physical hand test is the gradual build up of a force at the apex of the memorial or as high up the memorial as can comfortably be reached by the operative, to a force of approximately 350 Newtons (35kg). This will ensure that operatives achieve a reasonably consistent application of the physical hand test. Auditing arrangements will also be built into this process to ensure the inspectors' application of the test is properly monitored to further support the consistency of the process. The physical hand test will only take place **following** a visual inspection.

#### 4.4.4 Memorials up to 1.5m

In addition to the visual and the hand test, force measuring equipment will be used as a final test on memorials up to 1.5m tall. Such equipment will be used to provide a definitive force applied to the memorial and to further confirm the consistency of the inspector's initial tests on such memorials. This equipment will also be used to measure the failure force on memorials that have failed, thus providing evidence to any potential complainant.

4.4.5 Force measuring equipment will not be used on listed memorials or memorials considered to be of historic value without first contacting English Heritage. War graves memorials identified for testing will be referred to the War Graves Commission for their inspection and action.

4.4.6 Memorials below 500mm in height are difficult to inspect using force measuring equipment and are less likely to cause injury. A risk assessment will be carried out on such memorials to assess whether there would be any real benefit in applying a force of 350 Newtons (35kg) via force measuring equipment. (Force measuring equipment will always be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions).

4.4.7 All memorials found to be causing an immediate threat to public safety will be made safe within 1 working day using remedial action as described in section 6.0 of this policy.

### **5.0 Inspection Records**

5.1 The operatives will record the following information about each memorial into a database on a hand held computer:

- Plot/section number
- Grave number
- Name of first interment
- Date of last interment
- Height Category
- Details of visual inspection
- Image reference
- Force Measurement
- Priority of hazard
- Action Required
- Date and Signature

5.2 The inspection records will be downloaded on a regular basis onto a main database which intern will be backed up on a regular basis in order to avoid accidental loss of data.

5.3 A photographic record of each unsafe memorial (at least) will be taken, before and after making safe and again after any remedial works have taken place and the memorial is re-tested.

5.4 A record will also be kept of which remedial action was taken and also why none of the other methods were chosen.

## **6.0 Interim Remedial Action**

- 6.1 Any memorial found to be unsafe will be temporarily secured using one of the techniques outlined below, until such time that the stone mason can repair the memorial to NAMM Standards.
- 6.1.1 **Set memorial upright into the ground (Pocketing)** – Where practicable, memorials will be made safe by setting them into the ground by a minimum of 25% from the last joint. Care will be taken to avoid any possible disturbance of remains. This is the preferred option on older type headstones.
- 6.1.2 **Temporarily support the memorial** – Where it is practical to do so and when it is likely the family can be contacted, the memorial will be temporarily supported whilst awaiting a full repair.
- 6.1.3 **Cordon or barrier fence off the memorial or complete sections** – Where temporary support is not practical and the family is likely to be able to be contacted each memorial or, if numbers of failures are high, individual graves or the complete section may be cordoned or barrier fenced to restrict access. Fencing will be blue plastic barrier fencing or chestpale fencing. Access will only be available if accompanied by a trained member of the council's staff.
- 6.1.4 **Place a warning notice** – Whilst all memorials will have a warning notice placed upon the front and back of them if they fail the inspection, back to back memorials are unlikely to need any more than the notice unless the memorial behind is not present. Monitoring procedures will be put in place to maintain checks on movement of back to back memorials for new inscriptions etc.
- 6.1.5 **Lay memorial down** – Where a memorial poses an extreme hazard due to its size or its instability then it may have a notice attached and be laid flat to remove that hazard. Memorials with kerb sets may be routinely laid flat as this will not increase the trip hazard or pose additional maintenance problems. Laying flat is the quickest and most cost effective method in such instances.

## **7.0 Notices**

- 7.1 The memorials that are identified as unstable and made safe, other than by laying the memorial flat or setting in the ground, will be identified using 100m x 100m (approx) yellow plastic warning signs, affixed to the memorial with black nylon banding positioned on the front elevation of the memorial in the top half of the headstone. The wording of the sign to be as follows:

**WARNING!**  
THIS MEMORIAL IS UNSAFE  
DO NOT TOUCH  
PLEASE CONTACT DISTRICT OF EASINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
(TELEPHONE NUMBER) DURING OFFICE HOURS

- 7.2 A second notice shall be positioned centrally on the rear of the headstone, using the same band as for the sign on the front (where appropriate). This includes instances where memorials are positioned back to back to warn visitors and staff of the unsafe memorial in the event of a memorial at the rear being moved for additional inscriptions etc.
- 7.3 Where a memorial has to be laid flat then a notice will be attached on the front face of the memorial only. The wording will be as follows:

**IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTICE**  
THIS MEMORIAL HAS BEEN INSPECTED BY TRAINED STAFF AND WAS FOUND TO BE UNSAFE.  
PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO RE-ERECT THE MEMORIAL WITHOUT THE USE OF AN APPROVED  
MEMORIAL MASON.  
THIS IS FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY.  
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT DISTRICT OF EASINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL  
SERVICES ON (TELEPHONE NUMBER) DURING OFFICE HOURS

- 7.4 Where possible the sign and banding is to be placed so as not to obscure any inscription or photo, and in a position to cause least offence. The banding is to be fixed firmly to secure the sign into the chosen position.

## **8.0 Communication**

- 8.1 The Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977 places duties on burial authorities to notify grave owners and religious organisations of the intention to undertake work to memorials. Whilst this does not necessarily apply to the making safe of dangerous memorials the spirit of the legislation will be followed wherever possible, as follows:
- 8.2 **Formal Public Notice** - A public notice will be placed in the local press for two consecutive weeks in respect of each cemetery to notify grave owners relatives that inspections and remedial work will be taking place. The same notice will be posted on the council's web site.
- 8.3 **Notices within the Churchyard** – Notices will be placed advising churchyard visitors of those headstones identified for testing. Notices will be of good quality and will be visually obvious for visitors.
- 8.4 **Communication Via the Media** – A press release will be issued in advance of any work commencing with the aim of ensuring that the public are aware of the work that will be taking place and why it is necessary. Media enquiries will be dealt with by the Communications Unit, which will be briefed about the issue.
- 8.5 **Consultation with faith communities** – Religious organisations will be notified that we intend to carry out essential memorial safety work. If any specific permissions or faculties are required, these will be obtained.

- 8.6 **Communication with other parties** – Parish councils will be contacted if the relevant churchyard resides within their parish. This will enable the parish council to advertise the inspections / works on parish notice boards or magazines. The parochial church council of the churchyard concerned will be contacted in writing to advise of intended tests.
- 8.7 **Permanent Warning Notices** – These are installed within each churchyard to advise visitors of regular testing and hazards within the churchyards.