
Good practice in maintaining a historic graveyard

This leaflet provides information on best practice in maintaining a historic graveyard, from planning through to implementation.

The following *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflets* are free and can be downloaded from Historic Scotland's website: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

1. Working in a scheduled or listed graveyard or burial ground
2. Good practice in maintaining a historic graveyard
3. Looking after gravestones
4. Health and safety in historic graveyards: guidance for visitors and owners
5. Health and safety in historic graveyards: guidance for works teams and volunteer workers, including volunteer surveyors
6. Short guide for cemetery managers: emergency measures for historic memorials
7. Historic Scotland grants in relation to graveyards or burial grounds
8. Abandoned structures within graveyards

To obtain copies of all Historic Scotland publications referred to in this leaflet, including free leaflets, e-mail hs.conservation.bureau@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 0131 668 8638. Useful publications include *Conservation of Historic Graveyards: Guide for Practitioners 2* (£19.50) and *The Conservation of Architectural Ancient Monuments in Scotland: Guidance on Principles* (£5.50).

1. Checks to make in advance of any works

You need to know whether any part of the graveyard is protected by any form of designation (including natural heritage designations). To find out how to go about this, see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*. This also explains the formal permissions you will require before you can proceed with certain works.

2. Best practice in historic graveyard maintenance

You can find detailed information on this in Historic Scotland *Conservation of Historic Graveyards. Guide for Practitioners 2*. A summary of some of the issues you should consider when planning your maintenance of a graveyard and its contents is given below.

Although you may not require formal written consent for certain works, this does not mean that you can ignore best conservation practices.

Ensure that your staff and any contractors you are using are aware of this guidance.

3. Planning

We recommend that you prepare a Conservation Plan. This is a structured way of thinking about a site to assess why it is significant, and what should be done as a result of this significance. For advice on how to prepare a Conservation Plan see the free Historic Scotland booklet *A Guide to the Preparation of Conservation Plans* (available for download from Historic Scotland's website). A Conservation Plan can be particularly useful for graveyards where there may be many elements of significance – archaeological, architectural, natural and historical – all of which should be retained. *Conservation of Historic Graveyards: Guide for Practitioners 2*, Appendix B, contains a Conservation Plan template tailored for graveyards.

It may be important to conserve and manage the context of funerary monuments, i.e. the landscape of historic graveyards, not just the monuments themselves. This is vital in the case of cemeteries belonging to the 19th-century garden cemetery movement.

You should follow up your Conservation Plan with a Landscape Management Plan that specifies:

- a grounds maintenance regime
- a planned maintenance programme
- a programme for any major conservation work required

- a plan for maintenance and promotion of the natural heritage but which recognises the overarching need to preserve the significance of the site as a graveyard
- identification of the measures required to protect gravemarkers and other significant historical features most at risk
- a plan which balances the operational use of the graveyard (if appropriate) and access for visitors in a manner most suitable to retaining the significance of the site

Ideally, preparation of a Landscape Management Plan will help you to identify the management and ongoing maintenance tasks necessary for the conservation of a cemetery. By basing this plan on a thorough knowledge and appraisal of the history and design of a cemetery, we are more likely to be able to conserve these landscapes which offer many environmental benefits and are a valuable part of our heritage.

When preparing your plans and/or before undertaking any work within a graveyard, seek the appropriate professional advice (e.g. archaeologist, historian, landscape architect, conservation architect, conservator, ecologist, appropriate authorities for permissions).

4. Documentation

You will require to base your Conservation Plan on accurate records. The minimum recording necessary is as follows:

- **Make a graveyard site plan** to show the position of memorials and other features. Identify each gravestone with a number or other short code. You may already have an up-to-date plan of the graveyard. Even if you have a recently prepared plan, you should check it for accuracy. If you need to draw up a plan of the graveyard for the first time, you can obtain more information on the CSA Carved Stones Adviser's website at www.scottishgraveyards.org.uk
- **Make a photographic survey of the gravestones and graveyard.** This should include some general photographs showing the overall layout of the graveyard. If you have taken photographic prints, mark in soft pencil on the back of each one where the photograph was taken from and in which direction, for example, *graveyard gate looking north*. You should also take at least two photographs of each stone to show all sides. For example, for a simple headstone, an oblique view from the front-left and another from the rear-right would show all the elevations of the stone. For more complicated memorials, you may have to take more than two photographs. It is important that you mark each photograph with the number or code of the gravestone it depicts. If you have taken photographic prints, mark the number or code on the back of the print in a soft pencil.
- **Archiving** the site plan and photographs in an accessible location is important. They will provide valuable information when you are planning other work in the graveyard. You may also wish to make them accessible to the public by lodging copies of the information with the National Monuments Record of Scotland at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (more information is available at www.rcahms.gov.uk).

5. Grounds maintenance

- Turf provides the best protection around the base of stones so do not cut this back. Cutting back exposes foundations and destabilises the stone. Weed killer damages stone and causes ground erosion, so avoid using it around the bottom of stones.
- Grass-edging of paths can lead to impoverishment of soil and erosion of graveyard design.
- Do not strip turf from flat grave-slabs that lie near the surface as this exposes them to erosion and other forms of damage. There may be circumstances in which a local group wishes to temporarily deturf for recording purposes as part of a research project. Separate guidelines on this are available from the CSA Carved Stone Adviser's website at www.scottishgraveyards.org.uk
- Hand cut vegetation around the base of gravestones; when strimming, take care to avoid the masonry since damage can be inflicted by the strimmer.
- Do not use ride-on mowers and lawnmowers over exposed flat grave-slabs as this is potentially damaging.
- Remove grass clippings from the surface of flat grave-slabs to avoid damage caused by the rotting vegetation.
- Respect the historic layout and character of the graveyard. Do not move gravestones that are 'in the way' of grounds maintenance.

6. Vegetation, including trees

- Tree and shrub roots near gravestones and other structures will destabilise the masonry. You should therefore control existing growth by pruning.
- Falling branches and trees can damage gravestones and other structures. Monitor and consider removing overhanging limbs or dangerous trees, taking care not to damage the historic fabric when doing so.
- Cut back by hand and to ground level any shrubs that threaten structural stability. Poison the exposed stumps with an appropriate herbicide, taking care not to splash any of the adjacent masonry. You may have to reapply at a later date (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 8*).
- Ivy is a major concern as the roots of most species can penetrate between masonry joints and lead to major collapse in a relatively short time. Deal with young plants swiftly, before damage is caused, as part of a regular programme of maintenance and monitoring. Failing this, cut through the stems near to ground level, inject stumps with herbicide (reapply when necessary). Allow the ivy to die back and then assess the stability of the exposed masonry before making any decision to remove the ivy.
- If a cemetery is included in the *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*, you must not remove existing plantings for ease of maintenance and you must ensure that any new planting maintains the historic interest of the site and does not destroy significant ground features.
- A frequent problem is the effect of over-mature specimen trees on both the gravestones and the landscape design. It may not always be necessary to fell trees. Yew can be successfully regenerated, although it may not prove possible if yew trees have been planted too close to monuments.
- The planting around gate-houses and lodges may be important in highlighting particular architectural features or in providing a focus of the design. Frequently, lodges have become obscured behind over-mature conifers and evergreen screens and the planting should be replaced.
- You should avoid planting new trees in locations where they can cause damage to sensitive archaeological deposits.

7. Paths

- New or wider paths can cause disfigurement. You should aim to retain existing paths and use finishes sympathetic to the original design. You will find advice on the provision of access for people with disabilities to historic sites open to the public in Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note 7, *Access to the Built Heritage* (£5).
- Avoid grass edging of paths (see above).

8. Drains, services and floodlighting

- The ground-breaking works involved in laying new drains, run-offs and service trenches may have serious archaeological implications. Where you cannot avoid carrying out such works, you should seek advice from the local authority archaeologist for unscheduled sites, and from Historic Scotland for scheduled ancient monuments. Please note that you will normally require archaeological supervision when carrying out any ground-breaking works.
- The shape, number and locations of the units necessary to install a floodlighting scheme are often visually intrusive. If floodlighting must be installed, position the units with care in order to reduce their effect.

9. Boundary walls, gates and railings

- Carry out repairs such as repointing and replacement of capping stones (where required) using matching mortar and stone (see Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note 1, *Preparation and Use of Lime Mortars* (£15)). Cement repair accelerates stone decay. Take care to avoid splashing masonry when repainting any metalwork.
- Do not reduce high walls or gateways or remove original cast-iron gates. Watch houses, mort houses, hearse houses, session houses, offertory houses, lych gates, mausoleums and architectural or cast-iron burial enclosures, a particularly notable feature of many early 19th-century Scottish graveyards, are all important elements which should not be altered unsympathetically or removed. The restoration of railings, where these have been lost, should always be encouraged (see *Conservation of Historic Graveyards: Guide for Practitioners 2* for guidance on repairs to ironwork). All of these the features mentioned in this section are likely to be listed or scheduled.

10. Loose carved stones

Carved stones may become temporarily detached from buildings, memorials and other structures. You must record these (see section 4 of this leaflet), noting carefully where they came from, and you must store them safely in such a way that they cannot be harmed, removed from site or lost.

11. Treatment of human remains

You must report the accidental exposure of any human remains to the local police or Procurator Fiscal's office. You will require a warrant from the court if disturbance of known human remains is unavoidable. See also Historic Scotland Operational Policy 5, *The Treatment of Human Remains in Archaeology* (free).

12. New structures in graveyards

New structures must be designed sympathetically and must avoid damaging significant archaeology. Consult the appropriate authorities as early as possible, not least to check what permissions might be required.

13. Funerary monuments

See *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 3*.

14. Abandoned churches or chapels in graveyards or burial grounds

See *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 8*.

15. Looking after natural heritage interests

Adopt a policy of minimal change with regard to nature conservancy in the graveyard. Do not cut down trees, hedges and other shrubs unless they are diseased, in danger of toppling, recent plantings not in keeping with the historic layout, or causing damage to the built heritage.

16. Health and safety

See *Graveyard and Gravestones Electronic Leaflets 4–6* and visit the CSA Carved Stone Adviser's website at www.scottishgraveyards.org.uk

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