

Looking after gravestones

This leaflet describes best practice in looking after gravestones.

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: health and safety 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 be made in advance of any works

First check whether the gravestone is protected by any form of designation. For advice on how to find out if a gravestone is scheduled or listed see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*. This also explains the formal permissions you require before you can proceed with certain works. You must also check that you have the owner of the gravestone's permission to undertake these works.

2. Best practice in gravestone maintenance

Details can be found in Historic Scotland's *Conservation of Historic Graveyards: Guide for Practitioners 2* (see above). A summary of some of the issues to consider when planning your maintenance of a gravestone is given below. Ensure that your staff and any contractors you are using are aware of this guidance.

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

3. Grounds maintenance in the immediate vicinity of a gravestone

See *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 2*.

4. Works that might affect the surface of a gravestone

- Resist the urge to remove moss, algae, mould and lichen unless you have sought expert guidance because removing it may damage the surface of the stone. Some lichens are rare; moss may be protecting the stone; removal may cause damage. You should also note that some species of lichen and moss are protected by law. Cleaning of stones is only recommended when there are good conservation reasons to do so; this requires the assessment of a stone professional conservator.
- You must seek specialist conservation advice before applying water repellants and consolidants.
- Turf protects carved surfaces. If you reveal buried parts of a stone, you will expose it to the effects of weathering and other potential sources of damage.
- Do not be tempted to take rubbings or presses from carved stones, or emphasise carvings with chalk; such processes are more damaging than you might think.
- Do not encourage recarving of inscriptions. It weakens the stone and lessens historic character. Alternatives to consider include placing an ancillary plaque nearby.
- Biocides, including weedkiller, may harm stone therefore you should not apply them directly to the stone or use them where they might splash onto stone surfaces.

5. New discoveries

Report any new discoveries or previously lost carvings to your local authority archaeologist or local museum. Locate their position, record and assess their condition (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 2* for advice on recording). Return until a decision has been made as to their future.

Under Scots law new discoveries may come into the category of treasure trove (www.treasuretrove.org.uk), in which case they belong to the Crown. Your local authority archaeologist or local museum will be able to advise, or contact the Treasure Trove Advisory Panel for Scotland, c/o National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1VF (telephone 0131 225 7534).

6. Moving gravestones

- Re-erect stones which have fallen over, but before doing so seek specialist advice on how to do this without damaging the gravestone.
- Only reset tilting stones if the tilt is threatening their long-term conservation and safety.
- Do not be tempted to try to lift or remove a stone without first seeking expert advice and obtaining the necessary permission to carry out the work – the damage to both the stone and yourself could be irreparable.
- Respect the historic layout and character of the graveyard. Do not remove gravestones that are 'in the way' of grounds maintenance. The layout of the burial ground, which may reflect the haphazard accumulation of centuries or 19th-century picturesque or formal gardening practice, should be respected. If you are thinking of moving stones seek advice from the local authority or Historic Scotland, as appropriate.
- If you have to relocate a stone temporarily for health and safety reasons, please refer to *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 6*.
- In exceptional circumstances it may be desirable to move stones to a sheltered environment that can provide the necessary stable environmental conditions.

7. Uncovering gravestones

If you propose to carry out deturfing as part of a research exercise to locate gravestones, information on best practice is available on the CSA Carved Stone Adviser's website at www.scottishgraveyards.org.uk

8. In situ conservation measures

When repairing fractured gravestones, you must use non-ferrous dowels of suitable length and either polyester resin (clean breaks) or lime mortar (for wider joints). For repairs to stone, use lime mortar only and avoid hard cement mortars (see Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note 1, *Preparation and Use of Lime Mortars* (£15)).

Bird droppings encourage biological activity which can damage stone. Remove the solid build-up of bird droppings by regularly water washing using a soft brush.

Conservation of Historic Graveyards: Guide for Practitioners 2 contains detailed repair guidelines. These cover:

- documentation
- Conservation Plans
- Management Plans
- identification of gravestones at risk
- monitoring
- priority for repair
- planning the work
- temporary props and protection
- lifting stones
- resetting tilting gravestones
- exposed base stones
- repairing gravestones (repairing fractured stones, additional support, plastic repairs and stone indents, resetting base to slab, repairs to recumbent graveslabs, repairs to delaminating stone, use of resin in repairs)

- repairing wall monuments
- mortar types
- repairing burial enclosures and walls
- replacing missing elements
- adding new elements
- relettering of stones
- new foundations for memorials
- cleaning gravestones
- water repellants and consolidants
- relocating stones
- maintenance and repair of iron work

9. Graffiti removal

You will find advice on this in Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note 18, *The Treatment of Graffiti on Historic Surfaces* (£14.50).

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