



South Tyneside Council

MEMORIAL SAFETY POLICY

Safety Inspection of Cemetery and Closed Churchyard

Memorial Stones and Subsequent Risk Management



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INTRODUCTION

South Tyneside Council have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to maintain a safe environment for employees, contractors and all other cemetery and churchyard visitors.

Unfortunately, there have been many instances over the years where people have died as a result of memorials falling on them, therefore a thorough testing and inspection regime is critical.

Whilst memorials on grave spaces are the responsibility of the individual owners, many owners are either deceased or untraceable. As such, the responsibility for the management of unsafe memorials falls upon the Council.

The Council is responsible for six cemeteries and many closed churchyards, which collectively contain approximately 30,000 memorial stones.

Harton Cemetery	14,000
Hebburn Cemetery	4,200
Jarrow Cemetery	4,700
Boldon Cemetery	2,300
Whitburn Cemetery	1,300
Westoe Cemetery	2,200
St Simon's Church	150
St Stephen's Church	30
St Peter's Church	850
Whitburn Parish Church	100
St Nicholas' Church (Rectory Bank)	75

Many of the memorials are in poor condition and as such there is a risk they may fall and cause injury.

OBJECTIVE

The Ministry of Justice document "Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials" states "Burial Authorities should have a sensible approach to all risks associated with the burial environment". With that in mind, we will adopt a risk-based and proportionate approach to the management of the memorials in our cemeteries and closed churchyards.

We will:

- Introduce a 5-year rolling programme of inspections, assessments, and subsequent risk management. The Health and Safety Executive regards this as reasonable. The aim is to inspect all cemeteries and closed churchyards within the first 2 years.
- Inspect all memorials that are in excess of 18 inches in height.
- Prioritise the inspection of memorials that have a greater potential to cause injury, based upon their height and location. Tall memorials in areas that are most frequently visited will be inspected first.

- Considered each memorial individually to determine the most appropriate method of inspection.
- If a memorial is found to be unsafe, take measures to remove the risk of it falling.
- Maintain an accurate recording process of the data collected
- Undertake visual inspections only of Commonwealth War Grave memorials and report any defects to The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
- Inspect memorials with Historic England listed status only after consultation with them

The initial inspection of all memorials will be undertaken by an external specialist contractor. Thereafter, trained staff from Bereavement Services will undertake the inspections. All individuals carrying out inspections will hold the City and Guilds Safety Inspection and Assessment of Memorials qualification.

We understand that a memorial is not just a grave marker, but rather a place to grieve, reflect and remember loved ones. We do not wish to cause upset to grave owners and visitors and so we will be communicative, considerate and transparent in our actions. If a memorial fails our inspection and the family wish to make a permanent repair, the grave owner must authorise that repair to be done by a professional stonemason. If the grave owner is deceased or untraceable, we will permit *anyone* to authorise the stonemason to make the repair. However, the applicant will be made aware that this does not entitle them to the ownership of the grave or memorial.

COMMUNICATION

We have informed and consulted with the following stakeholders:

- All ward members (councillors)
- The public via public notices in the cemeteries, The Shields Gazette and on our website
- Cemetery volunteer groups
- The Durham Diocese
- Our Corporate Health and Safety Team

THE INSPECTION PROCESS



Standing at the foot of the grave, record the following data:

- Cemetery, section and grave number
- Deceased's name and date of death
- Type of memorial (monolith, ledger, cross etc)

Do a 360-degree visual inspection and record details of any noticeable defects. Look for poor masonry practices, cracks, vents, spalling, loose components and pay particular attention to the joints.

Measure the height, width, depth and lean angles (front to back and side to side).

Stand to the side of the memorial and adopt a safe, strong stance.

Slightly bend the arm (enabling the test force to be applied through arm pressure only) and apply a firm but steady pressure. Apply the pressure in the direction of likely failure. If there is movement, note where the movement is (foundation / plinth / base / plate).

If the memorial starts to fall, let it fall.

Take a photo

Categorise the memorial:

- Level 1 – Fail** – At risk of collapse and should be made safe as soon as possible
- Level 2 – Monitor** – Currently safe but with concerns. Inspect again in 12 months
- Level 3 – Pass** – Safe. Inspect again in 5 years

Pass the inspections results to the Bereavement Services Office

MEMORIALS THAT FAIL THE INSPECTION

As soon as a memorial is categorised as a “fail”, a discreet sign will be placed in front of it to warn visitors.

It will then be *temporarily* made safe by the staff as soon as possible. Each memorial will be individually assessed to determine the most appropriate method to be used.

Where appropriate, the component parts of the memorial will be bonded together. Some memorials may be supported by steel bars and others may be banded to a steel stake. Larger memorials may be socketed into the ground. A memorial will only be laid flat if absolutely necessary i.e., there is no other suitable method of making it safe.

A letter will be sent to the grave owner if the contact details we hold for them is less than 30 years old (contact details any older than 30 years are likely to be unreliable).

The letters will give owners of memorials that have been temporarily made safe 6 months to have a permanent repair made. Such repairs must only be undertaken by a professional stonemason who is registered with:

- BRAMM (British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons - bramm-uk.org) or
- NAMM (National Association of Memorial Masons – namm.org.uk)

If no permanent repair is made within the timeframe, we will consider the final action in respect of those memorials that have been temporarily made safe.

Memorials that have been bonded together and those supported by steel bars will be left in situ and reinspected every 12 months. Unfortunately, memorials that have been banded to a steel stake will be laid flat. The measures can be reversed in the future if the grave owner or a relative wishes to have the memorial restored to its original position.

EXAMPLES OF OUR METHODS OF MAKING A MEMORIAL SAFE

Supported by steel bars:



Supported by a stake and banding (the banding will match the colour of the stone where possible, the name of the deceased will not be obscured from view and the stone will be protected by a rubber insert):





Socketed into the ground:



Laid flat:

