

GRAVEYARDS

CHECK LIST OF GOOD PRACTICE

The following points identify the key issues that need to be considered when undertaking conservation and maintenance of graveyards.

Conservation Strategy:

- Prepare appropriate documentation for the graveyard. This will include an inventory of each monument or memorial and the preparation of a conservation plan, a management plan and identification of gravestones at risk.
- All survey and recording work, including recording of inscriptions, should be carried out using appropriate methodologies
- The management plan should identify the priority for repair in the graveyard
- Within a graveyard, identify all the 'important' features; including gravemarkers, buildings, gates, enclosures and flora and fauna that contribute to the significance of the graveyard. Features may be classified as protected structures, recorded monuments, national monuments, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
- As far as possible, gravestones should be preserved in their original setting
- Before work is undertaken in a graveyard or a church within it, ownership and legal status should be checked carefully
- Ensure that all necessary consents are obtained before starting work i.e. under the National Monuments Acts, anyone wishing to carry out work on a site or monument listed in the Recorded Monuments and Places is obliged to notify the National Monuments Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and may not carry out works within two months of the date of notification, without approval from the National Monuments Service. Permission may also be required from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Local Authority.

Administration

- Before any work within a graveyard is undertaken seek appropriate professional advice. Professional advice may be required from:
 - An Archaeologist, historian or other appropriate person to prepare a conservation plan;
 - A conservation architect to survey and prepare conservation proposals for any buildings within the burial ground;
 - A conservator in connection with resiting, resetting or repair of gravestones;
 - An archaeologist where any ground disturbance is planned;
 - Specialists to advise on possible disruption to plant and animal life in the graveyard;
 - The Local Authority to check the requirements for necessary permissions on protected structures.

Care of Gravestones

- Particular attention should be paid to gravestones formed from sandstone as, of all the stone types, they are most susceptible to decay as a result of a number of decay processes, they are also particularly vulnerable to further damage due to inappropriate intervention:
- As a general rule, gravestones should not be cleaned. If, however, cleaning is thought to be essential this should be done only by an experienced conservator. Unless cleaning consists of gentle brushing with a soft bristle brush and rinsing with clean water, there is the potential to cause irreversible damage to porous stone:

- As a rule, no attempt should be made to realign tilting markers, unless they are in danger of collapse, as this may disrupt adjacent graves and detract from the character of the graveyard. Before any resetting is undertaken the monument should be monitored for a period of at least one year to establish whether or not the movement has stabilised;
- Seek specialist advice to deal with graffiti on gravestones, especially porous stones, and other stone features. Inappropriate treatment can be damaging to the stone
- Gravestones or gravestone inscriptions should not be painted as this may cause further damage to the stone. Where there is evidence that paint was applied to an original feature, seek professional advice before undertaking any remedial work.

Gravestone Repairs

- Lifting stones must be only carried out under specialist supervision and it should be recognised that friable stones are liable to break-up if lifting is attempted
- Repair of fractured gravestones will require the use of non-ferrous dowels of suitable length and either polyester resin (for clean breaks) or lime mortar (for wider joints)
- For repairs to stone, hard cement mortars should be avoided and lime mortar only used
- Where inscription has been lost from a stone, recutting the stone should not be undertaken. It is preferable to position a new plaque, with the text reproduced, in the ground at the base of the original tombstone.

Funding

- Ensure that sufficient funds are available to complete any work proposed. Do not start work which cannot be completed within the planned budget.

Safety

- Ensure that all volunteer workers are fully informed about the nature and dangers of the work and have received the nature and dangers of the work and have received appropriate training to enable them to undertake the task, including health and safety
- Temporary stabilisation of elements may be necessary to prevent collapse. Features that have been temporarily supported must become priority items for permanent repair or stabilisation. The design of temporary support should not be detrimental to the site as a whole.

Ground Maintenance

- Do not cut back turf from the bases of gravestones
- Where a gravestone that has been concealed below grass is uncovered, it should be recorded, assessed and then re-turfed, where appropriate, to prevent further deterioration
- Do not use ride-on mowers for grass cutting in close proximity to memorials, due to the risk of damage. Hand-held equipment only must be used
- Paths are part of the original design and, generally the alignment of existing paths should be retained. Avoid 'over-engineering' and the use of tarmac surfaces which are unsympathetic to the character of the graveyard.

Nature and Wildlife

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

Source:

Adapted from: Maxwell, I, Nanda, R and Urquhart, D. (2001). *Guidelines for Practitioners: Conservation of Historic Graveyards*. Historic Scotland