

MEMORIAL SAFETY CHECKS SLEAFORD CEMETERY

Introduction.

Since the 1990's there has been growing concern over the safety of headstones and other memorials in cemeteries and a small number of deaths have been attributed to unsafe memorials in the past few years. This has led to a number of actions by local authorities in the interest of safety that have caused disproportionate headlines in the press. Owners of the memorials and other visitors to cemeteries have also been angered and upset by some of the actions taken. The most used method of 'making safe' unstable headstones is to lay them down and when row upon row are treated as such the effect can be most distressing for visitors to the cemetery.

The most widely used system for checking headstones is the 'Topple Tester'; this is a mechanical device that measures the force used to push a headstone to a limit usually of 35kg. Should the headstone move prior to this limit being reached the headstone is classed to have failed and will then have to have some form of action taken to make it safe.

How do we test headstones?

Since 2001 the method used has been to use a physical rocking test, but if legislation changes then some form of mechanical device might have to be introduced.

How often are they tested?

Usually each headstone will be tested every five years, although inspection intervals may be decreased if circumstances require it.

Who is responsible for the safety of a memorial?

Responsibility in the first instance rests with the purchaser of the memorial and when that person moves away or passes on it would then, possibly, be transferred to the remaining family members.

If there is no one to care for a memorial then the safety concerns of the memorial becomes the responsibility of Sleaford Town Council as the landowner.

What happens when a memorial is found to be unsafe?

Usually the memorial will be 'laid down'; this is done in such a manner as to prevent any further damage to the memorial. There are two reasons for carrying out this action,

- To ensure that the memorial is not a danger to staff or visitors.
- To prevent the memorial being damaged should it fall by accident.

Where our records allow us we would then contact the recorded owners and advise them of how to go about getting the memorial restored using a competent stonemason.

On no account must you carry out a repair yourself.

What can you do?

A qualified stonemason should inspect all memorials at least every five years, and many stonemasons offer insurance schemes to assist with any costs involved.

Ensure that the Town Council has your name and address if you are the owner of or nearest relative regarding a memorial or memorials.

The agreement allowing the placing of a memorial, signed when installing new memorials, is for a maximum period of 30 years, after that they can be removed if the Town Council does not receive an inspection certificate stating that the memorial is safe and this then has to be renewed every five years.

What if no owner can be found?

The Town Council will always try to maintain the cemetery in such a manner as to not cause offence to visitors. Naturally a large number of memorials lying on the ground can make it appear that the cemetery is uncared for. Therefore where possible any fallen headstones are reinstated and since 2001 approximately 30 of the older headstones have been restored to an upright position.

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT CEMETERIES ARE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS PLACES. VISITORS TO CEMETERIES SHOULD KEEP TO FOOTPATHS, AVOID TOUCHING ANY MEMORIALS AND ENSURE THAT CHILDREN ARE SUPERVISED AT ALL TIMES.