



Memorial Headstone Testing Procedure



Purpose

To inform people about our testing programme, why and how we carry out testing, and what happens if there is a problem with a headstone.

Background information

Broxtowe Borough council is responsible for five cemeteries and 11 closed church yards, containing in excess of 9000 headstones and memorials.

Due to many factors memorials deteriorate over time and can potentially become a risk to those who visit the cemetery.

The following parties have responsibility for memorial safety in Broxtowe Borough Council Cemeteries:

- Broxtowe Borough Council has health and safety responsibilities to its employees, contractors and visitors to cemeteries (Section 2 & 3: Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). It also places a legal duty on the council to assess the risks from cemetery structures and work activities and ensure that the risks are controlled. (The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999)
- A monumental mason has the responsibility to work in accordance with the council's conditions and specifications for memorials as laid down in the Cemeteries' Rules.
- An owner, the Deed Holder or successor in title of a memorial, has the responsibility to maintain it so as not to present a hazard. Members of the public who see an unsafe headstone/memorial may notify Cemetery staff or contact Bramcote Bereavement Services on 0115 9173630 so that an inspection, followed by appropriate action, can be carried out.

Historically, health and safety concerns in cemeteries have focused on the risks arising from grave digging. In recent years, there has been increasing attention on the stability of memorials and the risks they present to cemetery staff and visitors.

In July 2000, a six year old child died as a result of a collapsed headstone in a UK cemetery. This highlighted the risk and liability councils face in cemetery management. Duties Primary responsibility for health and safety in Broxtowe Cemeteries lie with Broxtowe Borough Council as the burial authority in control of the cemetery.

Whilst Broxtowe Borough Council has overall responsibility for the safety of the cemetery, including risks from unstable memorials, it does not own the memorials.

The owner of the memorial will be the grave owner. In some cases, there is no identifiable owner.

Frequency

An inspection programme has been drawn up and is in place at Broxtowe Borough Cemeteries. This is a '5 year rolling programme approach' which the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) describe as 'reasonable'.

Notification and signage

We will endeavour to help families understand when the testing will take place and how it will happen. This will be done in various ways including:

- Signage will be on display within the cemetery. It will provide details of what is happening and closer to the time, will detail when the testing will occur.
- Social media coverage.
- Bramcote Bereavement Services website will provide information about how testing is carried out.

Testing process

- We will apply a proportionate approach to testing in each cemetery which will mean that any book rest or footstone less, than 18 inches in height, will not be tested.
- Memorial inspections are recorded to identify surname of first burial and date. The memorial is measured for height, width and thickness; type of material; joints and cracks; lean per metre; foundations and physical test.
- A visual test will be carried out first to consider if there are signs that the memorial is showing evidence of damage or if the joints are giving way (cracks). It will also consider if the foundations are undermined/ unstable or have signs of recent movement. As well as assessing the presence of vegetation, that may cause structural damage to worsen.
- After the visual inspection, a gentle hand push test is used to identify any movement between components. A pressure up to 25kg may be applied; however, it is unlikely that the hand test will achieve this pressure. This test pressure of 25kg is advised in the latest version of BS8415.

- The process adopted is a 2 stage approach utilising specialist memorial safety management contractors. The first stage is to “test” the memorials in the nominated cemetery to identify any that fail and are therefore considered unsafe. All memorials up until 2005 are tested, after this date the headstones have to comply with new regulations and the method of fixing undertaken by the memorial masons is subject to specific safety guidelines.
- The testing will result in one of two categories:
 1. Category 1 ‘UNSAFE’ Action required.
 2. Category 2 ‘SAFE’ No action required (revisit in 5 years).

Headstone failures

Action

- Memorials found to be ‘in immediate danger of falling’ action will be taken and will be laid flat. All other memorials deemed as ‘unsafe’ will be clearly marked with a warning notice and who to contact for further information.

Notification

- Contact with the last known grave owner will be made, if the information held is less than 30 years old. We will not write to anyone where the information is older than this, because we have no way of knowing if the owner has since died themselves and would not wish to distress relatives in this respect.
- Central signage will be erected in the cemetery, as well as social media coverage warn of ‘unsafe’ memorials.
- Notification will give owners of ‘unsafe’ memorials 3 months, in which to carry out repairs. Should no repairs be made, the council will consider the final action in respect of those memorials.
- The records of many owners are extremely old and have not been updated by current relatives/family members. We are now actively campaigning for memorial owners to update current contact details so that we may keep you informed of future memorial inspections. You can contact the Cemetery Office at Bramcote Crematorium on 0115 9173630 between the hours of 8 am until 4 pm Monday to Friday to update your contact details. You can also email cemeteries@broxtowe.gov.uk.

What do you do if you are advised that your memorial is unsafe?

We understand that this may be upsetting for you, and are really sorry for any distress it may cause. If your memorial has to be laid flat to make it safe you can choose to either:

1. Leave the memorial lying down; and take no further action (we may need to 'dig in' the memorial to remove trip hazards); or
2. Have the memorial repaired by a Registered Memorial Stonemason.

If your Memorial has had a warning notice attached, you can choose to either:

1. Have the memorial repaired by a Registered Memorial Stonemason, or
2. You can give permission for the memorial to be laid down by contacting the Cemetery Office at Bramcote Crematorium on 0115 9173630

If you choose to have your memorial repaired then please, for your own safety, do not attempt to repair or remove memorials yourself. Only approved Memorial Stonemasons should carry out this kind of work to make sure safety standards are complied with. A list of Registered Memorial Stonemasons can be obtained from the Cemetery Office at Bramcote Crematorium on 0115 9173630 or email cemeteries@broxtowe.gov.uk.

If you are concerned about the safety of your memorial you can arrange for a Registered Memorial Stonemason to inspect your memorial for safety.

Alternatively, you can get in touch with: The National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) 27a Albert Street Rugby Warwickshire CV21 2SG Tel: 01788 542264 If you are concerned about your family memorial, or even just for peace of mind, we strongly recommend insurance cover.

A Registered Memorial Stonemason will know of a company that offers this. Keep your contact details up to date with the cemetery office at Bramcote Crematorium on 0115 9173630 by emailing cemeteries@broxtowe.gov.uk.

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.

For further information on headstone testing please contact: The Institute of Crematorium and Cemetery Management City of London Cemetery Aldersbrook Road Manor Park London E12 5DQ Tel: 020 8989 4661 Fax: 01753 770 984 E-mail: julie.callender@iccom-uk.com



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Bramcote Crematorium
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0115 917 3630

Cemeteries@broxtowe.gov.uk

<https://www.bramcotebereavement.org/facilities/cemeteries/>