

The position at February 2002

Lewes District Council will change its testing programme to allow time for people to make memorials safe. Over the next few weeks the programme will concentrate on older memorials in closed churchyards with visual checks to single out any unstable structures in other cemeteries. The majority of memorials that have been found to be unstable have been modern. Older memorials have mostly been found to be safe, despite the passage of years. War graves memorials, in particular, are in a sound condition because of the way they were constructed. The Council is contacting the Guild of Stonemasons to express its concerns about the problems found with modern memorials and the remedial work that will be needed. Qualified stone masons must carry out remedial work to memorials. To be classed as safe, a memorial must be capable of withstanding a sideways pressure test.

Why is the Council testing memorials in burial grounds for safety?

- The Association of Burial Authorities has recommended that councils should test memorial stones to make sure they are safe. The Council decided in summer 2001 to have a Code of Practice to carry out the checks to make sure the memorials were safe.

How does the Council inform people about the safety checks?

- Signs explaining that the Council was to begin checking memorials for safety were put up in cemeteries three weeks ago.
- A press release was sent out last week to inform the press how and why the safety checks were being carried out.
- Once a memorial has been tested and is considered unsafe, it is laid down. In some cases, it may be difficult to identify who is responsible for maintenance of the memorial, as the relatives and friends may have moved address. Many people do not live in the same locality as that of the graveyard that they are responsible for.
- Once a headstone has been found to be unsafe, the council has a "duty of care" to ensure that the hazard is made safe immediately, as the cemetery is open to the general public.

How are the memorials tested?

- First a visual check is undertaken to see if any cracks or splits are evident in the memorial.
- Second, the memorial is given gentle hand pressure in one direction to see if the memorial is obviously unstable.
- The third test involves a device called a topple tester, which is used to ensure that an even force of 500 Newtons (50kg) is applied to the memorial. This ensures that all memorials are tested to the same force. The force of 500 Newtons is in accordance with German directive UVV 4.7, as there are currently no British Standards for this test.

How many memorials have been laid down?

- 431 memorials have been laid down in Seaford cemetery out of 4359 that have been checked.
- 27 memorials have been laid down in Lewes cemetery. About 600 of the 5,000 memorials in Lewes have so far been checked.

How much force can a child exert?

Tests at the University of Newcastle have shown that:

- A man can exert 700-750 Newtons
- A child of 12 years can exert a force of 200 - 300 Newtons
- Wind gusts can result in a force of 500 Newtons.

What happens if a memorial is found to be unsafe?

- If a memorial is found to be unsafe, it must be made safe immediately.

- This is usually achieved by very carefully laying down the memorials onto the grave. The stones are rested on wooden battens to ensure that the stone does not become dirty or soiled.
- Once laid down, a marker is placed by the stone giving brief details of why the stone has been laid down, and who to contact for information.
- The relatives will be notified that their memorial has been found to be unsafe and that it has been made safe, as soon as possible.

Who is responsible for the upkeep and repair of the memorial?

- All memorials are owned by and are the responsibility of the person who has the right to bury in that particular plot.
- The Council has the obligation of making a memorial safe if it is found to be unstable, although no memorials will be removed from the grave space.

How many Burial Grounds are in the programme?

Seaford Cemetery
Lewes Cemetery
St Michael's Churchyard, Lewes
St Johns sub Castro Churchyard, Lewes
St Leonard Churchyard, Newhaven
St Michael's, Newhaven
Denton Burial Ground, Newhaven
St Peters Churchyard, Blatchington
St Leonard's Churchyard, Seaford
All Saints Churchyard, Lewes

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