



Hartley Wintney Parish Council

Risk Assessment – Headstones at St Mary's Burial Ground

Burial authorities have a duty under Health and Safety legislation to control the dangers that exist in their burial grounds. We are currently rolling out an on-going programme of memorial safety checks at St Mary's to make sure it is a safe place for you to visit. Each memorial headstone will be tested to make sure it's not at risk of falling over and injuring someone.

What does the test involve?

- A member of staff will start by doing a visual inspection for obvious signs that a memorial is likely to be unstable. This will involve checking the following:
 - ~that joints are intact
 - ~does the memorial appear to be leaning,?
 - ~are there any cracks or faults ?
 - ~what are the ground conditions like?
 - ~does the headstone appear secure?
- Where a visual check suggests no stability defects, a hand test can help confirm that assessment or identify stability problems – this test involves no tools or equipment and is intended to provide support to the visual checks. This will involve pressure being applied to the memorial to check for movement. In most cases, there will be no movement and a record will be kept that the memorial has passed the test. If the memorial moves it will fail the test.
- In the event that the headstone fails the test a temporary support will be installed to stabilise the headstone

What will happen to memorials that fail the test?

- A metal support, or in some instances a wooden support will be applied to the memorial to secure it until it can be repaired. Wherever possible the support will be positioned to the rear of the headstone, it will only be fitted at the front if another memorial is immediately behind the headstone that needs to be supported meaning there is not sufficient room to fit it **OR** the base stone of the memorial is so large that the support cannot be positioned close enough **OR** the lean angle on the memorial is such that the strain on the memorial would be too great

It is the responsibility of the grave owner, applicant, or their next of kin, to make sure that the memorial headstone is kept in a safe condition, so for those that fail the owner will be asked to get it repaired.

Where we have contact details a letter will be sent to the registered owner. Unfortunately some of our records are very old and we are expecting that some address details will be out of date so we will also place a notice near the memorial asking the owner to call the Council.

What to do if your memorial has failed the test

If your memorial has failed the safety test, you will need to contact a qualified stonemason to have it repaired. Please do not try to move or make repairs to the memorial yourself.

Once the repairs have been made, you will then need to contact us to approve the repairs. We will do this free of charge.

It is recommended that temporary supports remain for 3 months which gives grave owners sufficient time to make arrangements for repair. If an owner cannot be contacted the Parish Council may lay such memorials flat or convert to monolith (where appropriate) after the expiration of the period.

NOTE: It is recommended that burial authorities concentrate on the initial inspection and making safe of memorials in such a way that they will be able to demonstrate a coordinated inspection and 'make-safe' programme that is not unduly delayed by re-inspection or repair works. An authority is not obliged to spend excessive amounts of public money on private property and is only obliged to make memorials safe. The authority is empowered to make safe dangerous memorials.

How often will the tests be done?

Memorials will be checked every five years. Memorials that have had repairs made will be re-inspected to check they have been made safe. Assuming that they pass, they will join the 5-year inspection cycle.

How you can help?

If you own a memorial headstone, please check that we have the correct contact details for you by calling 01252 845152.