

# Carrying out a graveyard survey

## Introduction

All burial grounds are owned by an organisation and although they are usually opened to the public it is still necessary to obtain permission to carry out a graveyard survey. Information on ownership and management of the site is usually found on a noticeboard or sign at the entrance which will often have an address and telephone number. Contact should be made ahead of the survey. Usually there are no problems and those responsible are delighted an interest is being taken.

You should ask if any of the survey would be of use to the authorities. They may appreciate a plan, a list of those commemorated, a copy of the final report or even a full set of everything. It is important to discover if any survey had already been done on the graveyard.

If the graveyard is thick with vegetation you must seek permission before cutting anything. The site may be managed as a wildlife haven, often graveyards are large areas where nature can thrive. It may be that if permission is given there may be restrictions on when it may be cut, i.e. during the autumn. It may be that come the autumn the vegetation has receded enough to be able to carry out the work without having to cut anything. If the site is highly overgrown it may be useful to talk to your local Biodiversity Officer who should be able to provide you with advice.

There is normally no restriction as to when a survey can take place, but it is best to avoid times when services are being conducted if the burial ground surrounds a church or chapel used for worship. It is not appropriate under any circumstances to carry out a survey during a funeral service. To ensure this does not happen leave a contact number so that fieldwork can be cancelled at short notice. It may also not be possible to do recording on a wedding day, however weddings tend to be planned well in advance so these days should be told to you by the authorities as being inappropriate.

It is important to remember that graveyards are sensitive and emotionally laden places and therefore behaviour should be in keeping with the setting. Care needs to be taken with walking over marked grave plots, and no recording should be undertaken near anyone visiting a grave. People may stop and ask what is going on, and are usually happy that the memorials are being recorded. Whilst it is not necessary to maintain a sombre mood when recording it is of course insensitive to be carrying out activities such as shouting within the burial ground. Simply ensure that you are sensitive to the site within which you are working and the thoughts and feelings of others to avoid upsetting local people or the authorities.



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## Numbering the memorials

For an ordered and effective record of a burial ground every memorial must be identified and given a number. Begin numbering at an obvious point and number along rows where possible.

Before any recording can start some sort of plan is necessary (see attached example), this can be a simple sketch plan. The plan must be annotated in a way which allows memorials to be easily identified, this can be done by indicating the name of the first person commemorated on some of the stones, and to use simple symbols to differentiate between different types of monuments.

It is essential that one person is responsible for allocating memorials to be recorded by each member of the team, if not some memorials may be missed out and others recorded twice. It is best if all allocated blocks can be finished by the end of the day, otherwise there will be a scatter of incomplete blocks in the burial ground which could be difficult to find again next time.

## Vegetation on monuments

Ivy is common and in most cases a wildlife haven. Do not pull off any living stems as this can cause the surface of the stone to come away and cause considerable long term damage. Remember permission from the authorities must be obtained before removing any vegetation as the site may be under management for wildlife. If everyone considers it to be of benefit to remove the ivy then it should be cut at the base and let to die before removing. Moss may also be an issue. However a covering of vegetation can work to protect not just destroy. It can help to protect from damage from rain and frost. Each case should be judged carefully on its merits, and decisions on such clearance need to be made within the longer term management of the site. Lichens should not be removed. It must be noted that the mosses and lichens found on the site may be rare examples and again talking to the local biodiversity officer before commencing work would be beneficial.

## Health and safety:

The most common accidents are caused by the uneven ground, and it is easy to sprain an ankle where a grave has subsided if care and thought is not taken. Care should also be taken with collapsing monuments, do not get too close or touch any monument that appears unsafe. Where there is undergrowth to clear, thick gloves and tools will be needed to deal with brambles and nettles. And care should be taken not to disturb a wasps or bees nest. It is advisable that a small first aid kit and a mobile phone and taken with you into the field. Their location should be known by all in the team and what to do if there is an emergency before any work on site begins.



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## Checklist of equipment

### Planning:

- Tapes (30m)
- Surveyor's arrows
- Grid pegs (e.g. heavy duty plastic tent pegs)
- Board covered with graph paper
- Plastic drafting film
- Masking tape
- Hard pencil (6H)
- Pencil sharpener
- Soft rubber
- Plastic ruler

### Photography:

- Camera
- Blackboard, chalk and cloth
- Notebook

### Health and Safety:

- First aid kit
- Mobile phone

### Basic recording:

- Recording forms
- Clip board
- HB pencil
- Pencil sharpener
- Soft rubber
- Hand tape (3m)
- Torch

### Additional recording:

- Wax crayons
- Rubbing paper (i.e. lining paper)



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Soft pencil (B)

Bucket containing water and a sponge



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