

Checking and Making Memorials Safe



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Bereavement and Registration

London Borough of Havering



Professional Role

Manages **four cemeteries** in the London Borough of Havering

Oversees the **burial function** and **manages a team made up of x Bereavement Service Operatives, 2 team leaders and x gardeners**



Experience

20 years in **Bereavement and Registration Services**

Cemeteries have a responsibility to carry out regular memorial safety inspections

These checks are essential for:



Protecting Public Safety

Memorials can become unstable over time due to:

- **Weathering**
- **Ground movement**
- **Poor installation**
- **Vandalism**

Unstable memorials pose serious risks to visitors—especially children—and to cemetery staff.



Meeting Legal Obligations

- Under the **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**, cemetery operators and local authorities have a legal duty of care.
- Failure to inspect memorials could result in legal liability if someone is injured due to neglect.



Preserving the Cemetery Environment

- Memorials are part of the historical and visual character of a cemetery.
- Regular checks help maintain both the appearance and structural integrity of the grounds.



Ensuring Accountability

All safety checks are documented to show proactive risk management. These records are vital in the event of:

- **Complaints**
- **Inspections**
- **Legal claims**

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Cemetery operators (including local authorities) must ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that:

- Employees
- Contractors
- Visitors

are not exposed to safety risks.

 *MoJ Guidance: [Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials](#)*

Occupiers Liability Act 1957

Burial authorities are considered occupiers and must:

- Take reasonable care
- Ensure visitor safety

while on cemetery grounds.

 *Parliament briefing paper: [Unsafe memorials in cemeteries](#)*



Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO)

Provides burial authorities with powers to:

- Manage cemeteries
- Remove dangers from unsafe memorials



Reference: [The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 \(LACO\)](#)



Consumer Protection & Product Safety Laws

Memorial masons are legally responsible for safe installation under:

- Consumer Protection Act 1987
- Sale of Goods Act 1979
- General Product Safety Regulations 2005



Reference: [ICCM Management of Memorials](#)



Ministry of Justice Guidance (2009)

Encourages a:

- Sensible
- Proportionate
- Sensitive

approach to memorial safety checks.

- While the risk of injury is low, operators must still manage it responsibly.



Reference: [MoJ: Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials](#)



British Standard BS8415

Sets the technical standard for:

- Design
- Installation
- Inspection of memorials

Memorials over **625mm (2ft)** must be inspected at least every **5 years**, guided by a **risk-based assessment**.



References: [ICCM Management of Memorials](#) and [BRAMM: Report on the standard to the British Standard BS8415](#)



Fully Trained Staff

Most grounds staff are trained in memorial safety, enabling them to:

- Identify unsafe memorials
- Respond promptly and correctly

Office staff are also trained to handle public enquiries confidently and guide customers through the process.



Programme of Works

We proactively identify high-risk areas in the cemetery, including:

- Larger memorials
- Highly visited zones
- Areas without concrete beams for fixing memorials

Additionally:




Surrounding graves are checked before imminent burials




These checks are recorded in the gravediggers' burial instructions

Memorials are inspected manually by standing in front of the stone, placing a hand at the top centre, and gently pushing backwards. Based on the response, memorials are categorised as follows:

No Movement

- Memorial is stable.
 - Recorded as **safe**.
-  Re-inspect in **5 years**.

Slight Movement

- Do **not** continue pushing—this may worsen stability.
- If the memorial moves but is **not at risk of falling**, it is:
- Recorded as **safe with some risk**.
-  Re-inspect in **2 years**.

If a memorial is unsafe, the action depends on how loose it is:

Very Loose and likely to fall

- Place a **warning triangle**.
- Lay the memorial **sideways onto the grave** with a **wooden block** under the top.
- Recorded as **unsafe**.

 Re-inspect in **6 months**.

- Letter sent to owner advising repair by a registered stonemason.

Loose but Stands Firm

- Place a **warning triangle**.
- Recorded as **unsafe**.

 Re-inspect in **6 months**.

- Letter sent to owner advising repair by a registered stonemason.

Leaning but Safe

- Recorded as **safe with some risk** and direction and angle of lean noted

 Re-inspect in **2 years**.



Safe Handling Reminder



- Lowering a memorial must be done **safely**.
- **!** Never by one person.
- Use **appropriate equipment** and follow **manual handling training**.

Warning triangle



If a memorial remains unsafe and has not been repaired by the family after the six-month notice period, Havering Cemetery staff may take one of the following actions depending on cost, time, and site conditions:

Lay the Memorial Down

- Cost-effective and quick
- May affect cemetery appearance
- Can interfere with grounds maintenance
- Risk of further damage to the memorial

Stake the Memorial

- Stake placed behind the memorial to prevent it falling
- More expensive due to stake cost
- Potential trip hazard
- Requires rechecking every 6 months to ensure stability



Dig and Deepen the Memorial

- Remove and bury the bottom third of the headstone
- Photograph any wording that will be buried and record
- Wrap buried section for protection

Time-consuming but:

- Keeps cemetery aesthetically pleasing
- Avoids maintenance issues
- Provides long-term stability



Grave Marking

Each method includes placing a **marker** on the grave to indicate the action taken and is recorded.



Memorial safety is an ongoing responsibility. However, Havering takes several proactive steps to ensure memorials are installed correctly, reducing future risks:

Checking Stonemasons' Work

- All masons must be registered and qualified.
- New masons are subject to initial checks.
- Spot checks are carried out regularly.
- Permit applications are required for all work, detailing the fixing method.
- Memorials are inspected two weeks after installation to confirm safety.

Installation of Concrete Beams

- Havering installs concrete beams in burial plots.
- Masons are required to secure memorials directly to the beam using methods outlined in the [NAMM code of Working Practice](#).



Unsafe Memorials at the time of burial

Prior to a burial, staff:

- Inspect the grave and surrounding memorials.
- If a memorial is unsafe, the funeral director is instructed to remove it.
- This ensures the memorial is reinstalled safely.
- Safety and damage notes are recorded on the burial instructions list.

Gravediggers Feedback					
Location Checked					
Is the Memorial:		Removed		Where is it now?	Safe /Unsafe
Condition of the memorials in surrounding area				Reinspect (years)	Comments
Left	Grave No		S / U / D		
Right	Grave No		S / U / D		
Behind	Grave No		S / U / D		
In Front	Grave No		S / U / D		
Grave prepared to digging instruction					
Actual width of grave (feet and inches)					
Actual length of grave (feet and inches)					
Actual depth dug (feet and inches)					
Grave and surrounding area dressed acceptably?					
Did any part of memorial need to be removed due to safety reasons? Inform FD and clarify if headstone should be covered. Who did you inform and date?					
Remaining depth after burial in feet and inches					
Backfilling commenced after family left OR with permission from family					
Grave left in tidy condition – flowers neat /memorial and neighbouring grave clean					
Staff name and signature					Date
Staff name and signature					Date
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY					
Form completed correctly					Yes/No
Surrounding grave records updated in Sequel					Yes/No
Surrounding grave records updated in Erasmus					Yes/No



Havering takes a proactive and transparent approach to public engagement around memorial safety. Here's how we do it:



Advance Communication

- We write to memorial owners in advance to explain upcoming safety checks and the reasons behind them.
- If letters are returned as “not at that address,” we update our records to improve future contact.



On-Site Notices and Posters

- Notices are displayed before work begins, explaining what we're doing and why.
- Posters in the cemetery highlight:
 - The presence of unsafe memorials
 - That cemeteries are not playgrounds



Record Updates

- We update inspection records so office staff can handle enquiries efficiently and accurately.



Direct Public Engagement

- If we receive contact, we offer to meet the person on-site, even if they are not the owner of the grave.
- We show how the memorial failed inspection and what a safe memorial looks like.
- Most people understand once the process is explained.



Community Open Days

- We've hosted open days for families with unsafe memorials.
- Visitors meet with cemetery staff and a local stonemason to discuss the issue and how to fix it.

It's not uncommon for members of the public to question the outcome of a memorial safety inspection. Common concerns include:

- “You made the memorial unsafe”
- “You’re using machines to push them over”
- “It was safe when we checked it”
- “It’s not as unsafe as the other graves”



Staff Training and Consistency

- All staff are trained in memorial safety procedures.
- Staff vary in height, build, and strength, but all follow the same approved method.
- Example: “I’m 6ft 3 and slightly overweight. Some assume I cause instability—but we explain that all staff are trained and follow the same process.”



Engaging with the Public

- Many visitors test memorials incorrectly—by pulling them forward instead of pushing back.
- We offer to meet visitors on-site, demonstrate the correct testing method, and explain our approach.



Standing Firm

- Do not back down from necessary safety actions.
- If you say a memorial must be laid down—do it.
- This ensures legal and health & safety compliance and avoids further complications.



Any questions?