

MEMORIAL SAFETY TESTING

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires all burial authorities to ensure that memorials are safe so that the potential for injury to those visiting and working in the burial grounds is reduced. Safety testing of memorials (headstones) is carried out every five years (in line with guidance issued by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)).

The Town Council has an obligation to provide and maintain safe Burial Grounds. Tragically, there have been incidents in other areas of the country where children have been killed by falling memorials whilst playing in a cemetery. We therefore, need to make sure that memorials in our Burial Grounds and closed churchyard are not unsafe due to lack of maintenance or general deterioration.

Each 'Grave Manager' or their next of kin is responsible for keeping their memorial repaired and in a safe condition.

Safety tests involve giving each headstone a visual check to assess the condition of the memorial and a gentle 'push-test' to check that the stone is not in immediate danger of falling. The work is carried out carefully and with due respect. Each memorial tested is recorded to indicate that the safety check has been carried out. The record includes the type and condition of the memorial and any action taken.

If a headstone is found to be unsafe, the Town Council has a duty of care to make sure it is made safe as soon as possible because the Burial Grounds are a public place. Headstones that are in immediate danger of collapse may be laid down or supported with stakes to make stable pending repair. Those that require work to make them safe will display a warning notice. Please do not touch the memorial or stand it back up. If you have a memorial that has failed inspection, we will have written to you at your last known address to inform you. If you have moved and have not advised us of your new address since purchasing the memorial or the 'Grave Manager' has died since purchasing the memorial, please contact us.

On 15 June 2023, the Town Council displayed a notice on the public noticeboard to advise residents of the parish of the intention to complete memorial testing within the St Lawrence's Churchyard. This was based on the recommendation from the Diocesan Advisory Committee. At the same time, the notice was also displayed at St Lawrence's Church. We understand how upsetting it can be for families to see work being carried out on a memorial to a loved one. We want to help people rectify their unsafe memorials as quickly as possible.

For more information, please read through the council's 'Burial Ground Management Policy.'