

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



# Guidance for the Care, Conservation and Recording of Historic Graveyards





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Text prepared by Caimin O'Brien on behalf of The Heritage Council of Ireland with contributions from Mieke Muylaert, Ecologist.

Edited by Bernadette Guest, Heritage Officer and Rosemary Ryall, Conservation Officer, Waterford County Council and Ian Doyle for the Heritage Council.

Images by Caimin O'Brien.

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An Chomhairle Oldhreschta  
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# Foreword from the Heritage Council

Our historic graveyards are places of intense human activity. Along with providing a resting place for our departed and a place of remembrance, graveyards are of immense heritage value as sites of archaeological and architectural interest, as wildlife habitats and as repositories of local genealogy, sculpture and art. Across the Irish landscape countless generations erected churches for worship, round towers, enclosure walls, crypts and gravestones. Together all of these elements provide a huge source of information on worship, sorrow and loss, memory and identity. A visit to a historic cemetery and a cursory look at the many graveyard inscriptions brings us very close to earlier families and communities that confronted challenges such as famine, epidemics and conflict. In short, there is a lot we can learn from our historic cemeteries and this book will help unlock much of that information by assisting communities and researchers.

Local communities are traditionally very involved in the care of their local graveyards, whether through routine maintenance, active use or the keeping alive of tradition and memory. It is hoped that this publication will be of great use to anyone with an interest in local history and historic graveyards, as well as to graveyard maintenance committees, clergy, community groups, Tidy Towns groups, schools and local authorities.

On behalf of the Heritage Council, it is a pleasure to thank Caimin O'Brien for the text and illustrations, and the other contributors Mieke Muyllaert (ecology), as well as Bernadette Guest and Rose Ryall of Waterford County Council.

Conor Newman  
Chairperson

Michael Starrett  
Chief Executive

# Réamhrá

Is áiteanna iad ár reiligi stairiúla ina fheictear dian-ghníomhaíocht an duine daonna. Chomh maith le láthair scéthe don té atá imithe agus áit cuimhneacháin a chur ar fáil, tá luach oidhreachta ollmhór ag baint leo mar shuíomhanna de leas seandálaíochta agus ailtireachta, mar ghnáthóga fiadhúlra agus mar áiteanna stórais do ghinealas, dealbhóireacht agus ealaín áitiúil. Ar fud thírdhreach na hÉireann, thóg glúin i ndiaidh glúine séipéil adhartha, cloigthishe, ballaí imfhálaithe, másailéim agus clocha cinn. Cuireann na míreanna seo ar fad mórfhoinsí eolais ar fáil dúinn faoi adhradh, brón agus bás, cuimhní cinn agus féiniúlacht. Trí chuairt a thabhairt ar reilig stairiúil agus sracfhéachaint a thabhairt ar na scríbhinní reilige a bhfuil go leor acu ann, tugtar an-ghar sinn do theaghlaigh agus do phobail a bhí ann romhainn agus a raibh orthu déileáil le dúshlán mar gorta, eipidéimí, agus coimhlint. Go bunúsach, is mór an méid gur féidir linn a fhoghlaim ónár gcuid reiligi stairiúla agus cuideoidh an leabhar seo teacht ar go leor den eolas sin trí chúnamh a thabhairt do phobail agus do thaighdeoirí.

Go traidisiúnta, bronn baint mhór ag pobail áitiúla le aire a thabhairt dá gcuid reiligi áitiúla, bíodh sin trí ghnáthchothabháil, úsáid ghníomhach nó trí thraidisiún agus cuimhní cinn a choinneáil beo. Tá siúl againn go mbeidh an foilseachán seo an-úsáideach do dhuine ar bith a bhfuil suim acu i stair áitiúil agus reiligi stairiúla, chomh maith le coistí cothabhála reilige, an chléir, grúpaí pobail, coistí na mBailte Slachtmhara, scoileanna agus údaráis áitiúla.

Thar cheann na Comhairle Oidhreachta, is mór an pléisiúr é buíochas a ghabháil le Caimin O'Brien as ucht an téacs agus na léaráidí, agus leis na rannpháirtithe eile Mieke Muyllaert (éiceolaíocht), chomh maith le Bernadette Guest agus Rose Ryall ó Chomhairle Contae Phort Láirge.

## Conor Newman

Cathaoirleach

## Michael Starrett

Príomhfheidhmeannach

# Chapter I

## Looking after your historic graveyard

### I.1 Introduction

The historic graveyard plays an important role in the cultural life of Irish people and represents the focal point in the historical life of a parish. It is a place where the ancestors of the parish have been interred, a place where, in some instances, burial practices may be traced back to the origins of Christianity and in other graveyards to the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of the parish church and its adjoining graveyard. The graveyard is often seen as the symbol of the parish and offers important clues to the historical development of that parish. Keeping the graveyard *in good condition* is important to local people as it reflects pride in their parish and is an acknowledgement of the contribution our ancestors made to its development. This publication aims to provide local communities with guidance and suggestions about the best way of keeping your graveyard in accordance with international best practice as outlined in the Burra Charter<sup>1</sup>.

### I.2 What is an Historic Graveyard?

The term *Historic Graveyard* is used to describe all graveyards and burial grounds prior to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This includes graveyards and burial grounds dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and graveyards and burial grounds pre-1700 A.D.

A distinction is made between the terms “burial grounds” and “graveyard” where burial grounds are areas of land used for burials while graveyards are burial grounds associated with churches.

Graveyards dating from pre-1700 A.D. are given statutory protection under the National Monuments Act 1930-2004. A full list of archaeological sites and monuments including graveyards recorded by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland can be downloaded from the National Monuments Service website at [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie). There are currently 2,000 pre-1700 A.D. graveyards and 1,403 burial grounds listed by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland.

### I.3 What is a Lawn Cemetery?

A *lawn cemetery* is a term used to describe a modern cemetery that may be only 100–200 years old. These are usually well maintained and have well-manicured flat lawn-style grass with sanitary services, car parking and regular burial plots, accessed by a rectilinear system of modern pathways leading to all sectors of the graveyard. As these graveyards are of recent origin and as family burial plots are well managed, the graveyard lacks the undulating surface or the *humps and bumps* of the historic graveyard. This flat lawn type surface and network of pathways facilitates the maintenance of a cemetery with the use of modern grass cutting machinery.

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<sup>1</sup> The Burra Charter is an International Charter outlining best practice for the Care and Conservation of Cultural Places. [www.icomos.org/australia/burracharter.html](http://www.icomos.org/australia/burracharter.html)

### Best practice:

The management principles behind the maintenance of a lawn cemetery should never be applied to an historic graveyard. The character or appearance of the historic graveyard will be destroyed by implementing such management practices and no attempt should be made to convert this type of graveyard into a lawn cemetery. Very often the character of an historic graveyard is irretrievably lost because people want their old graveyard to look like the modern lawn cemetery.

## 1.4 The Character of an Historic Graveyard

The character of a graveyard refers to the visual appearance and geographical setting that is unique to each historic graveyard. All of the features that contribute to the cultural significance of a graveyard represent the character of the place. It is a mixture of both the built heritage and the natural heritage which, when combined, is unique to every graveyard. This term also refers to the condition that these features have achieved over time, the leaning memorials with their lichen covered surfaces, the low protruding unmarked stones that identify burial plots, the undulating grassy surface often referred to as *the humps and bumps of the graveyard*, the ivy clad ruins, the old yew trees, the native flowers, the roosting bats, the old hedgerow, the stone built boundary wall, the rust covered ironwork etc. The combination of these features and their decaying state over time represents the character of the historic graveyard.



A modern lawn cemetery in Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath

### Best practice:

Any work undertaken within the graveyard should not destroy or have a negative impact but rather should enhance the character and setting of the graveyard. A balance needs to be achieved between too much *tidying up* work that may destroy the character and neglecting a graveyard that makes the place inaccessible to parishioner and visitor. Understanding the character of a graveyard before undertaking maintenance works is crucial so as not to inadvertently destroy the features that make your graveyard the unique place that is worth conserving and presenting to the public.

## 1.5 Features of an Historic Graveyard

The features of a typical historic graveyard are the undulating grassy surface that often rises above the surrounding land as a result of continual burial within a confined space over a long period of time. This successive deposition of burials often on top of each other results in raising the ground level of the historic graveyard, sometimes giving the interior a domed appearance. The late 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of the middle class who wanted to commemorate their final resting place with an inscribed memorial that often took the form of the headstone. Over time these memorials have sunk down into the graveyard surface and in many instances have started to tilt at various angles giving the historic graveyard its unique appearance. The presence of these leaning memorials is one of the biggest contributors to the historic character of a graveyard. Over time these memorials have been colonised by various types of lichens contributing to the historic character of the memorial. Graveyard boundary walls were mainly constructed during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These walls were constructed with lime mortar and were often accompanied by a stile and coffin rest located close to the graveyard gateway. Over time these walls have become nesting places for small animals and shallow rooting ferns that offer no threat to the structural stability of the wall.



Seir Kieran, Co. Offaly - unmarked gravestones, leaning memorials and the undulating surface contribute to the character of the historic graveyard

### Best practice:

Before commencing any work it is best to consult with the Conservation Officer/Heritage Officer who will provide guidance on best practise. Metal memorials, metal graveyard gateways, and metal railings around burial plots should be maintained in order to prevent these materials from disappearing from the graveyard due to corrosion from the natural elements of weathering. Old yew trees and other species of mature trees that have been in the graveyard for a long period of time should be maintained and advice should be sought on their ecological importance. Where such trees are causing structural problems to a monument within the graveyard expert advice should be sought from both the built and natural heritage perspectives as to finding out which is the best way forward. The disused church ruin located inside an historic graveyard is very often the focal point of the graveyard. There is a requirement under the National Monuments Act, that notification be submitted to the National Monuments Service two months prior to commencement of works on a graveyard. Where a graveyard is in the care/ownership of a local authority Ministerial consent along with notification is required under Section 14 of the Act (as amended) where the graveyard is a national monument.



The inscription on this memorial in Churchtown, Co. Laois, is enhanced by its lichen covering



This well preserved inscription is protected from weathering due to its leaning position. This memorial should not be re-erected into an upright position as this would lead to the weathering of the inscription and also detract from the character of the graveyard.

# Chapter 2

## Legislative Protection of Historic Graveyards

### 2.1 National Monuments Act 1930 to 2004

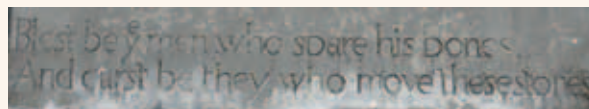
The National Monuments Act 1930-2004 is the primary legislation that provides legal protection to monuments that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places. These are known as Recorded Monuments and their protection is provided for in Section 12 (3) of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994. This provides that where the occupier or owner of a monument or place included in the Record, or any person proposes, to carry out, or to cause or permit the carrying out of, any work at or in relation to such a monument or place, he or she shall give notice in writing to the Minister of the proposal to carry out work and shall not, except in the case of urgent necessity and with the consent of the Minister, commence the work until two months after the giving of notice. A person contravening this requirement shall be guilty of an offence and be liable on summary conviction to a maximum penalty of a €1200 fine and 12 months imprisonment and on conviction on indictment to a maximum penalty of a £5,000 fine and 5 years imprisonment.

### 2.2 Role of the Record of Monuments and Places for each county

The Record of Monuments and Places consists of a manual which is a listing of monuments and a set of maps. Both the manual and the maps are arranged numerically by six-inch Ordnance Survey sheets. The manual contains the monument number, a 10-figure Irish Grid Reference, the

townland(s) in which the monument is located, followed by its classification. The first two digits of the monument number refer to the county code (for example WA for Waterford) followed by the six-inch Ordnance Survey sheet number, followed by its unique monument number that appears on the RMP map. The monument number for Kilmolash graveyard is WA029-027002, which means that the graveyard is monument number 027002 on six-inch sheet number 29. A copy of the manual and the maps can be accessed in your county library. A full listing of historic graveyards and all other archaeological monuments in each county can be accessed online at [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie).

The records maintained by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (National Monuments Service, DEHLG) contain 2000 entries for graveyards and 1403 for burial grounds in Ireland.



This inscription from Oughaval, Co. Laois, gives a strong warning about moving memorials

## 2.3 Ownership of Historic Graveyards

The permission of the owners of the historic graveyard should be sought before carrying out any work within a graveyard. The majority of historic graveyards in Ireland are in the ownership or care of the local authority. In other instances the Church of Ireland may be the legal owners. Contact your local Conservation/Heritage Officer if you are unsure about the ownership of your local historic graveyard.

## 2.4 Role of the Church Authorities

Where the Church are the legal owners or guardians of the historic graveyard they should ensure that all works carried out in the graveyard are undertaken with best practise for the care and conservation of historic graveyards. Graveyards in Ireland are generally under the denomination of Roman Catholic or Church of Ireland. Where a Church of Ireland building has been converted to residential or other use the graveyard continues to remain in the ownership of the Church of Ireland Representative Church Body.

## 2.5 Role of the National Monuments Service

The National Monuments Service are the statutory body responsible for the protection of historic graveyards under the National Monuments Act 1930-2004. Local graveyard committees should contact the National Monuments Service and the Local Authority prior to undertaking any works inside or anywhere in the vicinity of a historic graveyard. There is a requirement under the National Monuments Act, that notification be submitted to the National Monuments Service two months prior to

W429-024	029/04/2	21213/	9332	BEALY	CHURCH SITE
W429-023	029/04/1	21201/	9481	CORRAGHROCHE	EARTHWORK SITE
				CORRAGHROCHE	
W429-026	029/04/3	21277/	9446	BEALY	KINGFORT (DATH) CANNEL
W429-027	029/04/6	21311/	9449	KILMOLASH	CHURCH
W429-028	029/04/3	21304/	9450	BALLYMARRA	CASTLE SITE
W429-029	029/10/3	20762/	9328	DEILE	GRAVEYARD SITE

Extract from the RMP manual showing (from left to right) the monument record number; the OS 6-inch sheet/plan/trace, Irish Grid reference easting/northing, townland and classification



Extract from the RMP map (Sheet 29) showing Kilmolash church & graveyard (No. 27) in Co. Waterford

commencement of works on a graveyard. Where a graveyard is in the care/ownership of a local authority, ministerial consent along with notification is required under Section 14 of the Act (as amended) where the graveyard is a national monument.

## 2.6 Role of the National Museum of Ireland

It is a legal requirement for any person who finds any object or portable artefact inside an historic graveyard to report this find within 4 days of their discovery to the Director of the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin 2. It is illegal for any unlicensed person to use or possess any metal detecting device in or around the vicinity of an historic graveyard.

## 2.7 Role of the Local Authority

Some historic graveyards are under the management or ownership of the Local Authority. Where local authorities are planning to carry out works in or around the vicinity of historic graveyards in their care they are legally obliged to give 2 months written notification to the National Monuments Service in advance of these works. They should seek to implement best practise for the care and conservation of these historic places and consult the professional advice of the local authority Conservation Officer/Heritage Officer.

## 2.8 Role of the Conservation Officer/Heritage Officer

The Conservation/Heritage Officer can ensure that best practice is carried out in works undertaken by local graveyard committees and by the local authority in relation to the care and conservation of such places. The Conservation/Heritage Officer can provide information to local people and to the local authority about best practice for their graveyards, and can raise a greater awareness about how to look after historic graveyards and how to implement projects encouraging the recording and promotion of historic graveyards.

## 2.9 Role of the Heritage Council

The Heritage Council provides grant assistance to community groups for a range of heritage projects, including graveyard projects. Such works must follow good heritage practice as set out in this booklet.

# Chapter 3

## Guidelines for the Care and Conservation of Historic Graveyards

### 3.1 Best practice for the care of an historic graveyard

The care and conservation of historic graveyards should be guided by general principles of conservation that are often referred to as 'best practice'. These international guidelines have been formulated and adopted by conservation agencies and are used as a guiding philosophy when carrying out work on places of cultural significance. The conservation principles most suitable for a historic graveyard are outlined in a document known as the 'The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS<sup>2</sup> Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 1999'. This document explains terms such as place, cultural significance, conservation, preservation, maintenance, fabric, etc., all of which are used by conservation agencies when formulating policy on how to look after places of cultural significance such as historic graveyards. The charter goes on to outline the principles behind conserving and maintaining a place of cultural significance without inadvertently destroying its cultural significance. The list of works below, outlining what tasks should and should not be carried out in a graveyard follow international best practice for the care and conservation of historic graveyards.

It is important that communities carrying out maintenance works inside an historic graveyard are aware of the best practice for the care and conservation of such a place.

Before commencing any works, consult with the Local Authority Conservation Officer/Heritage Officer who will provide advice on best practise. If the site is within a zone of archaeological potential any works that cause ground disturbance or works to the built fabric (including walls, buildings or boundaries) will require two months written notification to be submitted to the National Monuments Service. Where a graveyard is in the care/ownership of a local authority, ministerial consent along with notification is required under Section 14 of the Act (as amended) where the graveyard is a national monument.

Regular monitoring of your graveyard along with routine small-scale annual maintenance work will prevent minor problems in a graveyard from growing into major problems that are expensive and time consuming to remedy.



The varying angles of the memorials and the surrounding vegetation create a historic character at Lismore, Co. Waterford.

<sup>2</sup> ICOMOS stands for International Council on Monuments and Sites

### 3.2 List of works that should be carried out in your graveyard

- Do contact your local Conservation Officer/Heritage Officer before starting any work in a graveyard
- Do check the ownership & legal status of the graveyard – seek owners permission
- Do contact both the National Monuments Service and National Parks & Wildlife Service of the DoEHLG
- Do plan out the programme of works carefully, beginning with the least difficult tasks

*(From the National Monuments booklet the Care & Conservation of Graveyards, this booklet can be downloaded free from [www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Heritage/NationalMonuments/](http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Heritage/NationalMonuments/))*

- Do clear the site using only hand trimmers or other hand tools
- Designate dump sites away from monuments/memorials
- Survey the site, marking in the church, any other buildings, and all gravestones
- Retain healthy trees – choose native species
- Leave all hummocks in the ground, they may mark structural and archaeological features
- Maintain existing pathways
- Keep boundary walls, banks and hedges
- Wait until the site is cleared to decide on conservation of structural remains
- Keep all architectural and sculptural fragments, record their position and report their finding to the National Monuments Service and National Museum of Ireland

### 3.3 List of works that should not be carried out in your graveyard

*(From the National Monuments booklet the Care & Conservation of Graveyards)*

- Do not start without professional advice and a clear work plan
- Do not try to demolish or remove anything from the site without the approval of the National Monuments Service
- Do not dig graves near walls; they can cause structural damage
- Do not attempt unlicensed excavation, it is illegal (this includes removal of rubble from collapsed walls)
- Do not use any machinery to clear or level the site or gain access to graves
- Do not burn off vegetation, or use total spectrum weedkillers
- Do not plant wild plants without expert advice
- Do not uproot ivy, trees or gravestones
- Do not pull ivy off fragile memorials
- Do not use wire brushes or sandblasters
- Do not apply paint to gravestone inscriptions
- Do not re-point any masonry without professional advice
- Do not use ribbon pointing on old boundary walls or buildings
- Do not level off pathways
- Do not use graveslabs for paving
- Do not lay new pathways without consulting an archaeologist
- Do not move gravestones unnecessarily or without archaeological advice & supervision
- Do not burn rubbish on site, close to buildings or memorials. Under the Waste Management Act 1996 (as amended), it is an offence to dispose of waste in a manner which causes or is likely to cause environmental pollution. Contact the Environment Section of your local authority for further advice.

### 3.4 Looking after your graveyard boundary

During the 18th and 19th centuries the majority of historic graveyards were enclosed by a stone wall built with lime mortar and local rubble stone. This new boundary wall sometimes enclosed an area smaller than the original graveyard resulting in burials outside the graveyard wall in

the surrounding field. It is important that no ground works are undertaken in the field immediately surrounding the graveyard wall as this may disturb burials.

- Repairs to boundary walls should be undertaken with care and the general principle of *repair like with like* should be applied.
- Repairs should be carried out with lime mortar and new stone should be similar to the original stonework.
- No ribbon pointing should be applied to the graveyard wall, repointing should be recessed and should follow the style of the original pointing visible in the wall.
- Re-use of original stones should be used if repairing collapsed portions of a graveyard wall in order to maintain the historic character of the wall.
- Voids or small holes should be left in the faces of the wall as this will encourage the growth of shallow rooting vegetation and nesting animals.
- Deep rooting trees such as sycamores should be kept away from the boundary wall as their roots can often cause serious undermining of the graveyard wall. Small sycamore saplings should be removed from the vicinity of graveyard boundary walls.
- For other species of trees seek expert advice from your Heritage Officer before undertaking any work on trees.
- Features within the graveyard wall such as coffin stands and stiles should be retained.
- Where the boundary of a graveyard consists of an earthen bank surmounted by a hedgerow this feature should be maintained and should not be replaced by a modern fence such as post and wire or by a modern concrete wall.
- It is important that no digging for the foundations of a new boundary wall or rebuilding of an existing wall be undertaken. This type of work requires 2 months written notification and then permission from the National Monuments Service and will not be permitted without the supervision of an archaeologist.
- Free advice leaflets for the conservation of stone walls and other architectural structures can be downloaded from the DoEHLG website at [www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Heritage/ArchitecturalPolicy](http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Heritage/ArchitecturalPolicy)

### 3.5 Looking after historic ironwork

Entrances to graveyards, graveyard boundaries, memorial surrounds and memorials are often made from wrought or cast iron. This historic ironwork needs to be maintained in order to prevent corrosion. Original railings and iron entrance gateways contribute greatly to the historic character of a graveyard and should be maintained. Originally this ironwork would have been painted which provided a protective coating against corrosion. The loss of the protective paint from the ironwork is the main cause of corrosion or rusting to historic ironwork in a graveyard. Wrought iron is more susceptible to rust than cast iron, the latter being more brittle and thin and is more likely to be damaged by grass cutting or by hitting machinery off it than by rust. It is essential therefore, that the ironwork remains painted. The railing surrounds of the Curran family memorial erected in 1879 in St Augustine's graveyard in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford is an excellent example of wrought iron railings imported from the Saracen foundry in Glasgow. This foundry was Scotland's most important manufacturer of ornamental ironwork. Graveyards close to an iron foundry usually contain a large proportion of metal memorials as can be seen in the two graveyards at Clonenagh, Co. Laois. This graveyard is 4km west of the village of Mountrath which contained the iron foundry of the McCarthy family.



McCarthy's foundry in Mountrath, Co. Laois, produced memorials such as this one from Clonenagh, Co. Laois



Clonenagh, Co. Laois, decorative cast iron railing enclosing a grave

## The following steps should be undertaken to take care of your historic ironwork:

- Ironwork should be repainted approximately every five to 10 years, or at the first signs of rust. Rust occurs when you have iron mixing with water (or moisture), and oxygen. Painted surfaces prevent such mixing and therefore inhibit corrosion of ironwork.
- If the iron displays signs of corrosion it is normal practice to remove this corrosion (rust) before applying a new coat of protective paint.
- Sometimes it is unnecessary to remove the rust from the iron as it may in some instances provide a layer on top of the metal. In most instances it may only be necessary to remove loose paint and corrosion in addition to any grease and dirt before applying a new coat of paint.
- Corrosion may be removed by using scrapers, wire brushes or chemical stripping products. Before undertaking any conservation work the ironwork should be photographed for archival purposes and any original colour scheme should be noted.
- When the corrosion has been removed the ironwork should be painted with one or two coats of a zinc based primer coat or rust inhibitor, followed by an undercoat, followed by two coats of thinly applied paint of suitable colour (usually a flat black).
- Thick coatings of paint should never be applied as this obscures detail and can chip easier than a thinner coat. Gloss enamel paints should be avoided.

- Where possible the original colour scheme of the ironwork should be re-applied. Boundary ironwork was usually painted with a single colour and the use of gold paint to railing heads should be avoided.
- An alternative method, is the use of a rust converter, which is a paint-like product applied directly to corroded or rusting metal after light scraping and degreasing to remove light surface corrosion. This product stabilises the corrosion by converting the rust into a more stable chemical.

A guidance booklet on the conservation of historic iron work published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government is available for download from [www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Heritage/ArchitecturalPolicy](http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Heritage/ArchitecturalPolicy)



This cast iron cherub on the railing of a burial plot at Tulsk, Co. Roscommon, is in need of basic conservation work



Cast iron memorial railings in Whitechurch, Co. Waterford



St Augustines graveyard, Co. Waterford, iron railings (1879 AD)



Stamp of Walter MacFarlane's Saracen Foundry, Glasgow



Kill graveyard, Co. Waterford – a well maintained wrought iron memorial

### 3.6 Looking after your memorials

One of the most dominant and important features in a historic graveyard are the memorials indicating the location of family burial plots. The upstanding headstone is the most common form of memorial within a graveyard and this type of memorial first makes its appearance around the second half of the seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century with the rise of the middle class in urban and rural areas the use of low unmarked stones as a grave-marker was replaced by the upright headstone or some other form of memorial. The position of the memorial along with its design and inscription reflected the social status of the deceased. The location of headstones in relation to the church within your graveyard is often a reflection of the hierarchy of that community at the time when the memorial was being erected. It is vital therefore that memorials should never be moved from their original position within the graveyard. Memorials within historic graveyards are often leaning forward where the ground has subsided due to the less compact soil of the burial plot. The presence of these leaning memorials contributes greatly to the historic character of the graveyard and their presence in this manner sets the historic graveyard apart from the modern lawn cemetery where all the memorials are set in an upright position arranged in regimented rows. Only where there is an urgent health and safety issue, such as the fear of collapse should the memorial be reset in upright position. Tilting memorials should be monitored over a period of time in order to ascertain if there is a health and safety issue or if the memorial is in imminent danger of collapse. Before undertaking re-setting of a memorial, expert advice should be sought

from the local Conservation Officer/Heritage Officer or from the National Monuments Service about the best method to use. The inscriptions and symbols on memorials offer the local historian, the genealogist, the art historian and the archaeologist a unique insight into the life of the deceased and the type of society in which they lived. Very often memorial inscriptions are covered in lichen, dirt or pollution making the inscription difficult to decipher; or the process of natural erosion has resulted in the weathering away of the lettering on the memorial. Memorials with dirty or faint inscriptions are often *cleaned* with an abrasive substance, an abrasive method or a high impact technique that in the short term enhances the visibility of the inscription but in the long term speeds up the process of erosion.



Leaning memorials enhance the character of this graveyard at Clonmore, Co. Carlow

**Memorials should never be cleaned** with power washers, sand blasters or with chemical cleaners as these methods enhance the process of decay and will in the long term speed up the loss of the inscription carved onto the *cleaned memorial*. The only safe way to clean a memorial is to wash the stone with water by using a damp cloth and followed by gentle brushing that will result in the removal of bird droppings and other biological growths that may be obscuring the inscription on the memorial.

Try and avoid the removal of lichens and mosses from the surface of a memorial as these organisms can help preserve the surface of a memorial from further deterioration. Do try and maintain the original patina or surface appearance of a memorial as this helps prevent weathering. Advice leaflets on the removal of graffiti from memorials can be downloaded from the Historic Scotland website at [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk).



The sandblasting of memorials speeds up the process of decay of stone and should be avoided



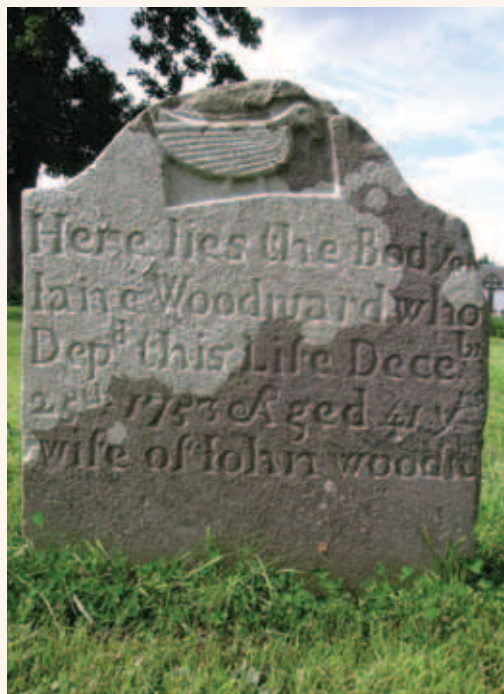
At this graveyard, memorials have been removed from their original location and placed against a graveyard wall. The heavy ribbon pointing of the graveyard wall should also be avoided



An empty lawn type surface after the removal of memorials



An overly heavy chalk rubbing of a memorial inscription can cause damage



The appearance of this memorial at Ballinakill, Co. Laois, is enhanced and protected by the partial covering of white lichen

Do not take rubbings of carved stones, or use chalk to outline the carvings on a memorial as these impact methods can cause damage to memorials. Leaning memorials that are tilting forward have better preserved inscriptions than upright memorials because the angle at which they are tilted means that they are sheltered from the natural agents of weathering such as the wind and rain. This is another reason why memorials should be left in their leaning position as re-erecting them into an upright position may speed up the process of decay. Memorials that are re-erected should never be set into a concrete base as this hard material will place stress on the softer memorial and will eventually cause severe damage. Weathering of the stone is inevitable, therefore it is important that proper memorial recording be undertaken as this will ensure preservation of the information that will eventually be lost due to the natural process of weathering. Removing the turf around the base of a memorial should

never be undertaken for several reasons as (a) this will undermine the stability of the memorial, (b) you may disturb human remains that are resting just beneath the surface of the soil and (c) the bare exposed soil is now a perfect breeding ground for briars, tree saplings and ivy that will grow up from the base and eventually envelop and in some cases pull apart the memorial. Professional advice should be sought from specialist conservation people about the repairs of broken stone memorials. These memorials should never be repaired with hard cement-based mortars as this material will cause severe damage.



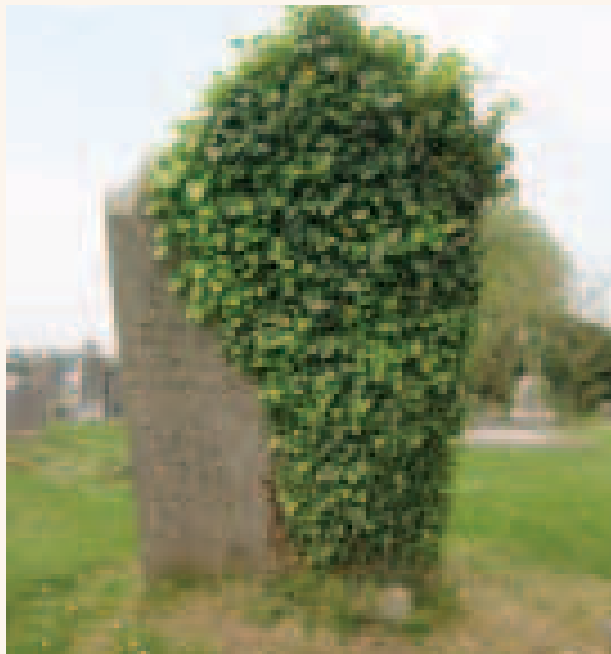
Cement deterioration is visible in this memorial surround



This headstone has been covered in black paint, which obscures the carved detail



Sod has been removed from the base of this memorial which will allow weeds and ivy to become established



Weedkiller has been sprayed around the base of this headstone allowing the ivy to thrive



This vandalised chest tomb is in need of basic conservation work



The painting of memorials, such as these examples, should not be encouraged

### 3.7 Nature in your graveyard

The normally low levels of human activity in historic graveyards makes them ideal refuges for flora and fauna. This is particularly important where much of the land is intensively farmed. Graveyard grasslands can support a high number of native grasses and wildflowers compared to improved agricultural land as well as providing food and nesting areas for some birds and mammals. The botanical diversity of graveyards has been extolled by Botanical Recorder Paul R. Green in a visit he made to Knockanore Churchyard, Co. Waterford, in 2006<sup>3</sup>, where he found a variety of orchid species amongst the grass areas and interesting fern species on the stone walls.

Historic graveyards are typically bounded by dry stone walls or walls bound with lime mortar and these walls allow plants to gain a foothold resulting in an interesting flora in cracks and crevices. Stone walls may also be used by lizards and birds for nesting feeding and roosting. Bats and Owls may use Church Towers or rooves. Old boundary banks and hedgerows provide habitat for animals such as badgers and hedgehogs.

Historic Graveyards should be seen as an oasis of nature a place where flora and fauna should be encouraged by undertaking a maintenance regime that welcomes nature into the graveyard. In many instances such maintenance regimes will be cheaper and will require less time than implementing a maintenance programme that is labour intensive and expensive.

#### The wildlife value of graveyards can be damaged by:

- Intensive mowing and application of fertiliser and herbicides can cause loss of native grassland flora.
- Application of herbicide can cause loss of insect life and reduce available food for bats, birds and other animals.
- Cutting back ivy, scrub, hedges and trees at the wrong time of year can disturb nesting birds.
- Works on Church Towers, or roofs or crypts can cause disturbance to roosting birds or bats.

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<sup>3</sup> Irish Botanical News Number 16 March 2006

- Consult your local Heritage Officer on the ecological value of the site before carrying out any works on the natural heritage of the graveyard. Drawing up a sketch map showing the range of habitats in the graveyard such as grassy areas, stone walls and buildings, mature trees, hedges and scrubby or wild areas can be useful to plan works.
- Hedges and trees should only be trimmed between September and March to avoid disturbance during the Bird Nesting season.
- Old church buildings, towers, mature trees and crypts or other underground areas may be used by bats. A bat survey may need to be carried out before starting any works on these areas.
- A felling licence may be required to knock mature trees where these are dangerous and at risk to human safety. The advice of a professionally qualified tree-surgeon should be sought on such trees.
- Spraying of herbicides to control weeds or grass is very undesirable as it kills native plants and the insects that live on them and may poison birds and animals that either come in contact with the chemicals or eat seeds and insects that have been sprayed. These chemicals can also cause pollution of streams by being washed into nearby drains.
- As most historic graveyards are relatively small in area it is usually feasible to use more environmentally-friendly plant control methods such as hoeing or digging or pouring on boiling water. Boiling water should not be used on or very close to graves or headstones.
- Application of fertiliser to graveyard grasslands is not necessary or desirable. Fertiliser causes certain grass and weed species such as docks and nettles to grow very strongly. Other native grasses and wildflowers cannot compete and eventually die out. This reduces the value of the graveyard grassland for wildlife.
- Unless vegetation is causing structural damage to buildings or walls it is better to trim it back than to cut it down altogether. This helps maintain its value for birds and insects.
- The introduction of new plants into a graveyard should be given careful consideration. Only shallow rooting plants preferably of native origin should be considered. The planting of deep rooting species should be avoided as these roots can cause considerable structural problems to memorials, graveyard boundary walls, church walls and any other masonry structures within the graveyard.
- Floodlighting within the graveyard should be discouraged because of the negative impact it causes to nesting birds and bats within the graveyard and has a negative visual impact on the monument.
- The digging of drains, services and cables for floodlighting requires 2 months written notice and should be avoided as this type of work has a negative impact on the sub-surface archaeology and on the flora and fauna of your graveyard.
- The existing grassy undulating surface of the graveyard should be maintained.
- Pruning should only be done to remove dead or diseased branches, or to ensure the safety of monuments and visitors.



The planting of trees near graveyard walls should be avoided as their root system will eventually cause collapse, as shown here at Antrim, Co. Laois. There is a need to monitor self seeding trees in a graveyard and remove saplings near walls to avoid future long term damage and costs



Ballinroad Graveyard, Co. Waterford, with wildflower meadow



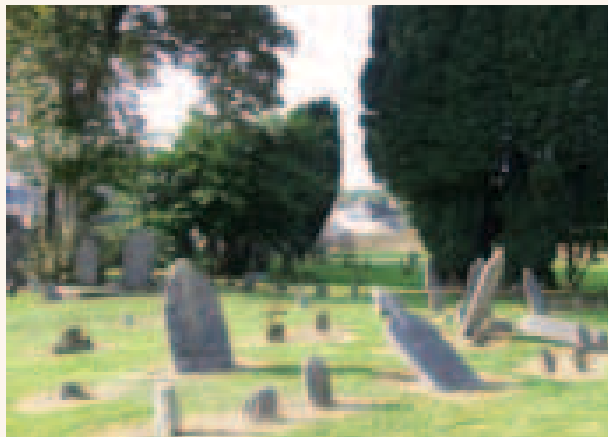
Stone walls with small crevices or lime mortar can support wall plants including certain ferns that only grow on exposed rock



Try to remove sycamore saplings and ivy when young and before they get well-established



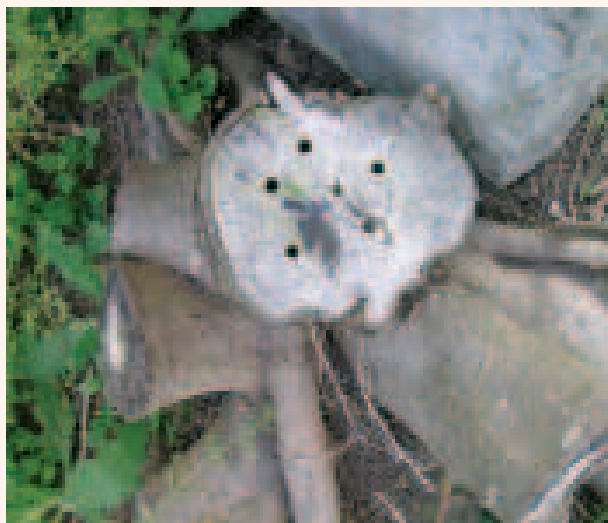
Burning in a graveyard should be avoided at all costs as it can cause severe damage to memorials



The inappropriate use of weedkiller around the base of headstones encourages growth of ivy on memorials



The damage caused by a Sycamore tree can be clearly seen in this graveyard



Holes drilled into stump of Sycamore tree and treated with protim brushwood – never pull up the stump of a tree – let it die and rot in situ

### 3.8 Looking after grass in your graveyard

The undulating surface or the '*humps and bumps*' of a graveyard should be maintained as this feature is part of the character of an historic graveyard. Very often the surface of the graveyard is levelled flat so as the grass can be cut easily with a mowing machine. It is not acceptable to fill in these hollows with topsoil as it destroys the character and appearance of a historic graveyard. One of the main areas of concern in graveyards is the uncontrolled growth of vegetation that often leads to graveyards being inaccessible during the summer months. In some graveyards this growth has been tackled with weedkiller that has only exacerbated the issue by replacing overgrown grass and ivy with thorns and briars that are harder to control and eradicate. In certain counties local farmers have helped to control the growth of grass by using their sheep to periodically graze in the graveyard for a short period of time. This is the ideal way of maintaining grass within an historic graveyard as the sheep will keep the grass under control and will also prevent the growth of ivy and briars on masonry structures. The sheep will graze up to the base of a wall and memorials preventing ivy or briars from getting established on masonry structures that are free of such vegetation cover. Sheep cause no ground disturbance within the graveyard, and there is no public liability issue with using such animals to maintain a graveyard. Consider placing a sign up at the entrance informing the public about the grazing sheep and ask visitors to place a metal guard over the flowers which

they bring to the grave. The use of strimmers in graveyards is preferable to the use of mowing machines as these are easier to operate in graveyards with undulating surfaces. However the operator of such strimmers needs to be careful when working in close proximity to upright memorials in order to avoid cutting the surface of the headstones. The old grass should be kept and re-seeding of new grass should be avoided along with the digging of new flowerbeds within the graveyard. If possible consider the option of allowing the grass to grow into a meadow and mow pathways through the long grass as access routes to various parts of the graveyard. This method will encourage the growth of various flowers and will encourage the nesting of wildlife within the graveyard. Do not dispose of grass-cuttings and hedge-trimmings at the base of hedges, in ditches or in wildlife areas, as they suppress the natural flora. Neat and unobtrusive composting areas can be kept in the graveyard. Fresh or composted grass cuttings can be used to keep down weeds e.g. around the base of single trees.



This graveyard at Ardmore, Co. Waterford is full of character with its 'humps and bumps'



In this graveyard, bricks have flourished after the use of weedkiller



Sheep grazing in Kilmacow graveyard, Co. Kilkenny - an effective way of controlling vegetation



Anatrim, Co. Laois, goats grazing in the graveyard are a natural and very effective way of clearing woody scrub. Unlike sheep it is important to keep goats securely tethered as they will escape otherwise

### 3.9 Pathways in your graveyard

Where possible, old pathways should be maintained and kept clear of vegetation. New pathways should never be constructed without consultation with the local Conservation/Heritage Officer and the National Monuments Service. The use of tarmacadam and concrete as a material for pathways should be avoided. When the grass is allowed to grow into a meadow it can be very easy to mow narrow pathways through the meadow creating a natural and visually attractive pathway. This has the added benefit of not causing any ground disturbance and therefore requires no notification to the local authority or the National Monuments Service.

If a new pathway has to be constructed careful consideration should be given to the design and type of pathway of the graveyard and 2 months written notification of such works must be submitted to the National Monuments Service. The digging of foundations for a new pathway should be avoided and where possible the pathway should be laid on top of the existing ground surface. Another possibility is to bring in topsoil and raise up the surface as a base for the new pathway. The type of pathway should be visually sensitive to the character of the graveyard and ideally should be constructed with materials that form a natural appearance in the graveyard. Tarmacadam and concrete pathways have a serious negative visual impact on the character of a graveyard. It is most important that these forms of work are avoided. These two types of pathways require high maintenance and need to be maintained on an annual basis as once they start to deteriorate they can pose a serious risk to the health and safety of a visitor. Flagstone paths using local natural stone from the area and which are laid on the surface of the graveyard offers

a visually attractive alternative and is an example of a maintenance-free path. Over time the flags settle and start to sink down into the graveyard and become flush with the surface of the graveyard, making it easy to run a lawn mower or strimmer over the pathway.



Clooncallow graveyard, Co. Longford – mown pathway



Tarmac pathways can become dangerous as they deteriorate over time