

Notice of Memorial Safety Check – St. Mary's, Edvin Loach, December 2017

There is a need to ensure that cemeteries/graveyards are places where anyone can visit in safety. The Health and Safety Executive and our Insurance notes the need to assess the risk from memorials in the church yard. The churchyard is vested in the incumbent, but memorials remain in the ownership of families

We fully appreciate that any work carried out to make safe memorials by laying them down is distressing which is why this advance notice of intention to check memorials is being distributed via the parish magazine, notices in all the Greater Whitbourne parish churches and the Greater Parish website. It is vital that owners make themselves aware of the risk that their memorial can cause injury or harm to someone should it prove to be unsafe.

The following are examples of the usual causes of instability in memorials:

Age, Poor workmanship, Inferior materials, Inadequate joints between the various sections of the memorial, Unstable foundations (off square or plumb, loose bricks, lack of foundations), Lack of maintenance, Damage by vehicles or grounds maintenance equipment, Removal of "kerbs" (originally designed to counterbalance the headstone component), Storm damage, Subsidence, Tree/shrub root activity, Vandalism.

Up until recently and the advent of the fixing methods used by NAMM (National Association of Memorial Masons) memorials used to be sandwiched together using only cement as a binding material on some joints, which when the temperature falls below freezing, may sometimes crack and weaken the joint and the stability of the memorial.

Larger memorials were erected in sections joined together with copper dowels between the upper sections but the weak point is that the whole memorial sat on a slab at ground level secured only by cement.

The possibility of toppling follows the degradation of the cement after frost and weathering. Memorials should now be fixed using the NAMM approved fixing methods which travel through the base into the plinth and then the headstone is fixed with dowels into the plinth.

In the event that a Memorial is found to be in dangerous condition, then the Memorial will be made safe straight away. This will be achieved by laying the memorial on the ground with the inscription uppermost. At all times great care will be taken to ensure that no further damage is caused to the Memorial

The laying down is to be recorded in the church log book. It is hoped that given the advance notice of a date for a graveyard memorial test being carried out owners can take action advance action.

Where families cannot be traced the PCC becomes responsible. So where possible, if remedial action is needed following inspection every effort will be made to trace descendants to inform them of the situation.