

Abandoned structures within graveyards

In addition to funerary monuments, many historic graveyards contain the remains of churches or chapels that have fallen out of use, been superseded, or been converted to other uses and other architectural structures such as burial enclosures or vaults, mausolea, morthouses, watch houses and gateways. This leaflet provides guidance on how to look after such structures within graveyards.

The following *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflets* are free and can be downloaded from Historic Scotland's website: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

1. Working in a scheduled or listed graveyard or burial ground
2. Good practice in maintaining a historic graveyard
3. Looking after gravestones
4. Health and safety in historic graveyards: guidance for visitors and owners
5. Health and safety in historic graveyards: guidance for works teams and volunteer workers, including volunteer surveyors
6. Short guide for cemetery managers: emergency measures for historic memorials
7. Historic Scotland grants in relation to graveyards or burial grounds
8. Abandoned structures within graveyards

To obtain copies of all Historic Scotland publications referred to in this leaflet, including free leaflets, e-mail hs.conservation.bureau@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 0131 668 8638. Useful publications include *Conservation of Historic Graveyards: Guide for Practitioners 2* (£19.50) and *The Conservation of Architectural Ancient Monuments in Scotland: Guidance on Principles* (£5.50).

1. Ownership and responsibility

It is often difficult to establish ownership of abandoned structures within graveyards. The upkeep of Church of Scotland burial grounds was transferred to local authorities under the Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Act 1925, and many disused structures lie within these churchyards. Where structures have been converted for a family's burial, ownership may lie with the descendants. This is particularly the case where burials are still continuing, or when a claim to those structures was made under the terms of clause 33 of the Church of Scotland Act. In other cases, historic structures that are no longer in use may be deemed to be part of the churchyard, and thus, presumably, in the ownership of the local authority. Under the Cemeteries Clauses Act 1847, responsibility for keeping buildings within private cemeteries established in repair and good order lies with their owners.

2. Recording and archaeology

The above-ground remains of structures, which can range from turf-covered footings to complex buildings standing to full height, can reveal a great deal of their history through the process of non-invasive recording using 'Standing Building' archaeological techniques (a Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note on recording of standing buildings is in preparation). This process can range from simple photographic surveys, through measured plans and elevations, to large-scale stone-by-stone drawings.

In many cases the visible remains may have been built on the site of earlier structures and burials and some buildings may have burial vaults beneath ground level. As a result, the below-ground remains associated with abandoned buildings and in their immediate vicinity may be of great archaeological significance. Any excavation, therefore, has considerable implications for the structural evidence and for the disturbance of human remains (see Historic Scotland Operational Policy 5 *The Treatment of Human Remains in Archaeology* (free)). Active burial rights may exist within abandoned structures. Also, if the graveyard is either scheduled or listed, you require permission for any form of ground disturbance (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*).

3. Minimal intervention, health and safety and vegetation control

Regular monitoring of the condition of abandoned structures within graveyards combined with routine maintenance is often the best way to tackle minor problems and to prevent them from developing into major structural problems (a Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note on the principles and practice of minimum intervention is in preparation). Small-scale works such as clearing out any gutters and drainpipes, removing seedlings and controlling invasive vegetation such as ivy and overhanging branches can prevent destabilisation in the future. You should carry out such works carefully and by hand to prevent damaging any of the masonry. You should not carry out major works such as removal of saplings and particularly invasive vegetation except for the purposes of assessing the stability of a structure and addressing any problems (see below).

In some instances the stability of a structure could be perceived to pose a threat to the health and safety of the public; in public graveyards this may be assessed by the local authority's Building Control Officer under the terms of Section 13 of the Building (Scotland) Act 1959. Minimal measures to address this problem might include fencing off all or part of the structure (see section 8 of *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 6*). Fencing should preferably be free-standing so that damage to the above- and below-ground remains is prevented. You can also consider temporary measures such as timber shoring; you should avoid making fixings into the masonry or into the ground surface. Where the structure is listed or scheduled, other procedures may also apply (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*).

4. Long-term planning and consolidation

The continued survival of structures within graveyards often depends upon the assessment of their long-term needs. One way in which to improve our understanding of the graveyard, determine its significance and propose a range of appropriate conservation measures is to prepare a Conservation Plan to review the needs of the graveyard as a whole. A parallel option is to prepare a Management Plan that considers the long-term maintenance needs of the graveyard (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 2*; see also the CSA Carved Stone Adviser's website at www.scottishgraveyards.org.uk).

Abandoned structures of high architectural or historic importance are probably best preserved in the form in which they have come down to us, i.e. through consolidating the masonry fabric. Firstly, the condition of the structure should be assessed through 'Standing Building' archaeological recording (see section 2 above). You may have to remedy inappropriate earlier repairs that might accelerate deterioration, such as the use of hard cement mortar, and carry out selective repointing of open masonry joints (see Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note 1 *Preparation and Use of Lime Mortars* (£15)). In some instances you may have to rebuild missing sections to provide support for the historic fabric as a whole. The integrity and continued authenticity of the historic structure is paramount and the professionals you employ to plan and carry out the work should be experienced in such work and sympathetic to the needs of the individual structure (see *The Conservation of Architectural Ancient Monuments in Scotland: Guidance on Principles*, above). If a building is statutorily protected, you will require appropriate permissions in advance (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*). Information on Historic Scotland grant-assistance is provided in *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 7*.

5. Security and shelter

Where vandalism is affecting the historic fabric of a structure, you may have to consider limiting access by fixing gates or grilles to doorways and window openings of near-complete structures. If the structure is scheduled or listed, you may require permission before you can do this (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*).

Structures that have been reused for burials are likely to contain memorials within or attached to them. You should record and conserve these in the same way as gravestones (see section 4 of *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 2* and *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 3*). You may also have to provide vulnerable examples with some form of protection from the elements (see section 9 of *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 6*). Other structures may be in use as repositories for important stones or architectural fragments in an attempt to offer them some form of shelter. In such cases, you may have to address the conservation needs of those stones by erecting a stone shelter or platform. However, you must assess carefully the visual impact of such structures upon the building (see *The Conservation of Architectural Ancient Monuments in Scotland: Guidance on Principles*, above). Some structures and stones may be statutorily protected (see *Graveyards and Gravestones Electronic Leaflet 1*).

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