

THE FRIENDS of HEENE CEMETERY

Risk-management Guidelines for Volunteers

Latest revision: 9th June 2023

This document explains a variety of risks that volunteers doing maintenance work may be exposed to when working in Heene Cemetery, and how to respond to them.

Please read it carefully before signing that you have understood these risks.

Working in Heene Cemetery is different from working in a typical garden, and the risks you may be exposed to can also be different. Volunteers need to watch out for what fellow volunteers might encounter. The ideal is that we each 'have each other's backs'.

0. Numbers present:

- A. Only volunteers who are full members of the Friends of Heene Cemetery are allowed to do maintenance work in the cemetery. [See appendix B for clarification on the term 'maintenance work'.]
- B. No full member volunteer is permitted to be in the cemetery alone while doing maintenance work. The minimum number of full members who are doing maintenance work must always be two.

1. Work clothes and weather:

These guidelines probably reflect what you'd be doing if you worked in a private garden, and therefore reflect general common sense.

- A. Wear thick clothing and protective gloves which offer protection against **scratches** and **cuts** from **thorns** and **brambles**.
- B. Wear solid footwear that is suitable for working on **uneven ground**.
- C. Cover any **open wounds** with plasters and/or bandages, and wear protective gloves, reducing the risk of transferring **micro-organisms** to the wound.
- D. In hot weather take drinking water/fluids to help avoid dehydration, a hat or sunscreen to help avoid heatstroke or sunburn. In cold or wet weather, wear suitable clothing. Take sufficient breaks to help avoid fatigue.

2. Working with tools:

Working with communal tools in a place that we share with other volunteers requires us to adopt different habits:

- A. When handling tools, **observe where other workers are** in order to reduce any risk to them.
- B. Understand that **cutting tools require extra care** in their handling, so as to not harm yourself or those near you.
- C. As you work with cutting tools such as **loppers and secateurs**, when laying them down ensure that their **blades are in the closed position** AND not lain down on pathways where others could walk onto them.
- D. When you have finished with any tool that belongs to the cemetery, after you have cleaned it, put it away in the tool store.
- E. Notify a committee member or other volunteer if you think a cemetery **tool is in need of maintenance**.

3. Using the pathways to reach the graves where you plan to work:

- A. Keep an eye out for **trees or branches** near where you walk **which you suspect may fall**. Point these out to a committee member or other volunteer. Only continue if you are certain the branch/tree poses no risk to yourself or others.
- B. Pay attention to the **pathways** that you plan to use as they **can be very slippery when wet**, even if you wear solid footwear.
- C. As you work on a grave, **keep adjacent pathways** clear. Other volunteers will be using these pathways. Always **avoid blocking pathways with tools or cuttings**.

4. Getting to your grave from the pathways:

Some of the cemetery's graves and monuments present special, potential risk. Some of these could kill you and/or fellow volunteers, or cause life-changing injury. Moving about needs special vigilance. Although the most dangerous stones will probably have been made safe by the Council, this is a collective responsibility, and you have an active part to play. Remember too that the condition of monuments can change over time; what you thought to be safe last week may not be true today. Check first. This applies to stone masonry above ground and to the surface of graves at ground level.

- A. When crossing a grave, you need to be sure that tall **monuments** will not topple when you put a hand on them. If you need to touch them, very gently test their stability. You need to be as sure as you can that any stone that you stumble against by accident will not topple. Until you have done this, **do not lean or stand on headstones, kerbstones or monuments**.
- B. As you cross ground to reach a grave, be especially attentive to **stumble-holes**. These are areas where surface concrete has cracked, leaving a hole into which you could lose your footing. They may be completely or partially hidden by vegetation.
- C. Watch out for **kerb stones** that mark a grave's margin. They can be tripped on. They may also move if you step on them. Test the ground under your feet before you commit.
- D. Falling in the cemetery, where ground-level stone is abundant, poses an additional hazard to you of head injury.

5. Working on a grave:

- A. If you are uncertain about the **stability of a grave's stone/masonry**, stay away or choose to work elsewhere.
- B. If you think the **condition of a stone/masonry has changed** since you were last there, report this to a committee member or fellow volunteer.
- C. Keep an eye on where you are and what's immediately above your head. Avoid standing up and **hitting your head on a monument**. Wearing hats can sometimes conceal dangers such as these.

6. The ground that you work on:

Whether you are working on a grave, between graves or on a pathway, there are potential risks that you may encounter in this public space, ones that you won't normally encounter in a private space.

- A. **Glass and broken glass** (from discarded bottles and glasses) needs clearing up. Wear thick gloves to avoid injury to yourself. If you aren't happy picking the glass up, ask a fellow volunteer. Such glass **MUST** be removed as it could also present a **fire hazard**. It needs to be wrapped in suitable material (paper and a bag) and put in the dustbin near the gate.

- B. **Hypodermics and other drug paraphernalia** need to be removed with care. Thick gloves must be worn. There is a 'sharps box' stored in the bench into which these items can be put. If you aren't happy picking this up, ask a fellow volunteer.
- C. **Pieces of metal** (which are not part of a monument) need careful removal, however small they may be. These present a potentially serious risk to health if they break skin. If you aren't happy picking this up, ask a fellow volunteer.
- D. **Dog, cat or fox faeces** needs to be cleared up. Wear thick gloves and wrap the faeces in paper and a bag and put it in the dustbin by the gate. If you aren't happy picking this up, ask a fellow volunteer.
- E. There are also **invisible hazards** that you might encounter. These are **micro-organisms** such as **E. coli** (found in animal and human faeces), **Weil's disease** (contracted from rat urine) and **Toxicariasis** (worms found in dog faeces). You can keep yourself safe from these hazards if you:
 - a. Wear protective gloves.
 - b. Avoid making hand contact with your mouth.
 - c. Use the hand wipes that are available before eating or drinking.
- F. It is unlikely that you will encounter **ticks**, but you should check your hands and ankles at the end of a session in case these small creatures have found a way onto your skin from long grass.

7. Avian-flu:

Pathogenic avian influenza is highly infectious to other birds. Even dead birds can be a source of this pathogen. It may also be infectious to people, so minimising all contact with dead birds is essential.

- A. If you find a **dead bird**, do NOT touch it. Call for assistance from a committee member or a fellow volunteer.
- B. We **MUST** wear disposable protective gloves when **picking up dead birds**. They must then be placed in a plastic bag. Use a bag to pick the bird up, turn the bag in on itself, and then place the bag inside a second bag. Remove the gloves and place these too in the second bag. Dead birds can then be disposed of in the dustbin near the gate.
- C. If **five or more dead birds** of any species are found, ask a committee member to call the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77. Defra will advise what action to take.
- D. If you find a live but obviously sick bird, do NOT touch it. If the bird is sick with avian-flu, it will be highly contagious. (If it were to be taken to an animal sanctuary, it is likely that the contagion would be passed to all other birds and even perhaps to animals there.) The RSPB advise people to NOT touch sick birds or their droppings.

8. Homeless people/rough sleepers/campers:

- A. It is NOT your responsibility to challenge homeless people/rough sleepers/campers whom you may encounter in the cemetery. Instead, a committee member is advised to review the situation and contact the Parks Department on 01903 239999 or, if appropriate, notify the Police.
- B. On no account should the possessions of such people be handled, let alone removed from the cemetery.

9. Insects:

- A. Stay away from wasp nests or bee swarms:
 - a. **Wasps build their nests** in disused animal burrows or in cavities in trees and walls. They may swarm towards the end of summer. Notify everyone and keep your distance.

- b. **Honeybees may swarm** on warm sunny days throughout summer. If you find such a swarm (in a tree or shrub), notify everyone and keep your distance. We will contact a bee keeper for advice and help.

10. Fungi:

- A. As a general rule, the difference between an edible fungi and **poisonous fungi** is best left to a specialist. It is therefore best not to touch fungi. If you do, make sure you wash or clean your fingers before you touch your face.
- B. If you spot fungi that you know to be poisonous, share this information with others.

Appendix B: index of possible hazards and risks

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Appendix B: maintenance and non-maintenance work

For the purposes of these guidelines maintenance work and non-maintenance can be defined as follows:

Maintenance work: any action in the cemetery that requires hand, mechanical or electrical tools or equipment for cleaning, clearing, gardening, mowing, strimming, sawing, pruning, planting, tidying, maintaining or repair or any action that requires climbing, ladder work or heavy-lifting or any action that uses chemicals or any disposal of waste. **Note that under no circumstances should chemical weed killers or pesticides be used in the cemetery.**

Non-maintenance work: any activity not listed above as a maintenance activity. These activities will primarily involve animal welfare, providing food and water for wildlife, species surveys, bird and butterfly counts, heritage research and photography.

I have read these risk-management guidelines for volunteers.
I understand that any time I may spend in Heene Cemetery is at my own risk.

Name:

Date:

Signature:
