

Colburn Hipswell & Scotton Joint Burial Authority

GRAVE DIGGING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Adopted August 2021

CONTENTS

Grave Digging Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction
2. Procedures
3. General Requirements
4. Pre-Excavation
5. Excavation and Ground Support
6. Internment
7. Backfilling
8. Funeral Directors

1. INTRODUCTION

It is the policy of Colburn Hipswell Scotton Joint Burial Authority to ensure a high standard of grave digging whilst maintaining safety and dignity.

This will extend beyond the day of the internment when the soil has settled to ensure that all graves are maintained to the highest standard.

2. PROCEDURES

It is the responsibility of the Funeral Directors to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation and where these Procedures conflict with legislation then legislation will prevail.

All Funeral Directors, grave diggers and contractors working in Hipswell Cemetery must comply with all legislative requirements and provide to the Burial Board copies of paperwork, certificates, policies or any other document requested by the Burial Board prior to undertaking any work on site.

3. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

No grave to be dug in Hipswell Cemetery without permission of the Burial Board.

It is the responsibility of the Funeral Director to arrange the excavation of the grave and removal of any existing memorials and the replacement of same after burial.

Funeral Directors are to employ their own grave diggers. It is their responsibility to ensure that the grave diggers employed by them are familiar with the cemetery and abide by this policy and procedures.

No full grave or cremation plot should be dug more than 48 hours before the internment, except by prior arrangement with the Burial Board Clerk.

A hard hat must be worn when working in an excavation and appropriate footwear should be worn at all times.

Entry and egress from a grave must be by ladder. At no time must a gravedigger climb out of the grave by treading on any part of the shoring. The ladder must remain in place whenever an operative is working in a grave in order to maintain an emergency exit.

All finished graves should be prepared using imitation grass matting. Care must be taken to make sure it is left neatly and will not cause a trip hazard. Walkboards /staging must be laid along the length of the grave and supported at each end.

All graves must be dug centrally within the respective grave space. Graves that are not dug centrally will increase the risk of collapse, as the intervening wall of undug soil on one side will be of reduced thickness.

All full burials must be shored, if it is deemed necessary by the Gravedigger, and it must be incorporated as digging proceeds. Shoring timbers must be inspected prior to use for any sign of deterioration. The amount of shoring equipment required should be assessed according to the required depth of excavation, soil type and weather conditions.

Lowering webbing and putlogs must be inspected prior to each burial, to ensure that no deterioration has occurred and that they are fit for purpose.

The internment area and surrounding graves and headstones are to be left clean and tidy. All equipment to be removed and any debris cleared.

4. PRE – EXCAVATION PREPARATION

It is extremely important that Funeral Directors, their staff and in particular grave diggers follow the advice contained within this policy and these procedures to ensure a safe working environment for all cemetery operatives/ visitors when excavating a grave, including themselves. It is important that grave diggers can safely access the working site, assess the risk, record the assessment accurately, and understand the range of options available for making the area safe for all who will use it.

Risk assessment is central to ensuring a safe working environment. Grave digging within the burial ground should be covered by a suitable risk assessment and safe system of work.

When a memorial is erected centrally on a grave that was dug out of centre the risk of the memorial subsiding and tilting is increased which in turn increases the risk of the memorial becoming unstable and a danger in its own right.

Walkboards must be placed along each side of the grave to be dug that are supported on boards placed across the head and foot ends of the grave. This action will spread the weight of operatives and prevent falls due to crumbling surface edges. Walkboards should remain in place for the whole of the burial process, ie placed before excavation commences and not removed until after backfilling is completed.

A soil box should ideally be erected to contain the excavated material. This structure must be securely erected so that pressure from the soil inside does not cause it to collapse. The use of a soil box will assist with protection of nearby memorials and turf and is recommended best practice.

The soil box should be situated no closer than 2' (0.61m) from the edge of the excavation so as to reduce pressure near to the edges of the grave and therefore reduce the risk of collapse. Consideration should be given to increasing the distance of the box from the edge of the grave where unfavourable ground conditions exist.

The soil in the box should be sloped (battered) away from the grave so as to reduce the weight at the side nearest to the grave. A front board can be placed across the front of the box to stop soil, stones, etc from rolling off the soil stack and onto any operative who may be working in the grave.

5. EXCAVATION AND GROUND SUPPORT

The grave space set aside for each burial shall not exceed 2.44m x 0.91m (8 feet long by 3 feet wide)

The grave digger will ensure that double depth graves are excavated to a standard depth of 2m (6ft 6") for the first burial, to ensure that there is sufficient space for the second burial in the future.

The grave digger will ensure that all new graves are aligned so that memorial stones, when installed will be in a straight line along the row.

No part of the coffin shall be at a depth less than 1.0m (3 feet) below the level of the surface of the ground adjoining the grave.

Burial, in a grave in which an interment has already taken place, shall ensure the new coffin is effectively separated from any other coffin previously placed and remaining in the ground by means of a layer of earth not less than 150mm (6 inches) in depth.

Any grave that is left unattended for whatever reason must be completely boarded over in such a manner as to prevent any person falling into the graves and fenced off.

All cremation plots will measure 2 feet x 2 feet and the top of the casket should be a minimum of 2'6" below ground level.

No person shall disturb any interred human remains.

Spoil from the graves is to be placed in the area designated by the Burial Board.

All tools and equipment required to complete the excavation process must be available at close proximity to the grave to be excavated before digging commences.

The amount of shoring equipment required should be assessed according to the required depth of excavation, soil type and weather conditions.

Only authorised trained persons should be permitted to operate grave digging machines. The machine operator must ensure that no person stands within the area of the radius of the machine boom or bucket. When moving a digging machine within the Cemetery the driver must exercise caution and treat the roads and grounds with respect.

When a machine is not in use, it must be parked on hard ground in such a manner that it does not cause an obstruction. When parked, the boom must be lowered with the bucket resting on solid ground. The ignition key must be removed. The blade on tracked machines must be in the down position whenever the vehicle is parked.

The machine operator must ensure that the machine is safely manoeuvred into the digging position. The blade on a tracked machine must always be in the down position when digging is in progress.

The operator must ensure that the machine is level before digging commences, to ensure that the sides of the grave are vertical. An unlevelled machine will cause one side of the grave to be under dug, which will increase the risk of grave collapse.

Care must be taken when excavating a grave whilst shoring is in place, to avoid striking any part of the shoring equipment with the machine bucket. Striking or dislodging shoring will not only increase the risk of collapse of the grave but will also increase risk to the gravediggers who are required to rectify the situation.

Digging machines must be operated in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and should be regularly serviced by a qualified person. Any damage caused by grave digging machinery must be reported to the Clerk of the Burial Board immediately and remedied by the grave digger within 14 days.

Shoring must be incorporated with hand excavation as digging proceeds. On completion of each excavation the gravedigger must ensure that the sides and ends of the graves are vertical and that the bottom of the grave is level. Shoring units must be level.

Should water collect in a grave it should be removed prior to the interment. Ideally a motorised pump should be used, as this action will not require a gravedigger to enter the grave. The hose from the pump can be lowered into the grave from surface level.

When conditions indicate that water may collect in a grave a sump pit can be dug in the bottom of the grave towards the end. The hose from the pump can be placed in the sump pit and as water is pumped out of the pit, the remaining water in the grave will be drawn towards the pit, thus leaving the greater part of the bottom of the grave dry.

When hand digging a sump pit it can be kept open at one end with the gravedigger working away from it. This action will assist in reducing the amount of mud created on the bottom of the grave. Should water be removed from a grave using a petrol driven pump, no grave digger should be working in the grave while the pump is running, as exhaust fumes may enter the grave and collect at

the bottom. Ideally the pump should be positioned as far away from the grave as possible and positioned down wind.

Water removed from a grave should ideally be pumped into the nearest soakaway or sewer. Should foul odours be encountered Colburn Hipswell Scotton Joint Burial Authority should be informed immediately.

6. INTERNMENT

Prior to preparing / dressing the grave the surrounding area should be examined to ensure as far as practicable, a safe, unobstructed access is available for Funeral Director's staff, clergy and mourners. Any trip hazards must be removed.

Walkboards must be checked for stability with adjustments made as required. Unstable walkboards may cause a pall bearer (s) to fall whilst placing a coffin on to putlogs.

Grass matting can be draped into the grave to cover the internal walls and shoring equipment. The soil box, walkboards and immediate surrounding area can then be covered.

7. BACKFILLING

Backfilling should commence immediately after all mourners have left the cemetery and be completed fully on the same day.

Webbings and grass mats must be removed before backfilling commences. Walkboards should be left in place during the whole of the backfilling process to prevent persons walking on any unprotected grave edge.

In order to reduce later subsidence and settlement of the grave, all backfill materials (including the material placed between the liners or vaults and sides of opened graves), shall be tamped and compacted in layers not to exceed 150mm in depth so that a compacted density of 90 percent shall result, using soil free from large lumps.

The grave is to be finished with a tidy mound of soil, covered with saved (and if necessary, imported) turf to leave an immaculate finish. The importance of this action cannot be stressed highly enough as the reduction of instances where the bereaved may be confronted with sunken graves is imperative. It will also subsequently reduce the risk of the memorial tilting and thereby becoming unstable.

Monitoring of the condition of the backfilled graves is to be carried out at regular intervals (at least monthly). Remedial work must be undertaken immediately if there is soil settlement leading to an untidy, uneven or sunken surface and/or if the turf shows signs of drought or die-back.

The responsibility for monitoring and maintenance rests with the gravedigger.

When backfilling large flints, pieces of rock or lumps of clay may damage the coffin when they impact from height. To reduce the risk of coffin damage, an angled timber can be placed into the grave. Backfill material will strike the timber, break its speed of fall and deflect to the side of the grave.

Some ethnic and religious groups require carrying out the backfilling themselves. There is conflict between health and safety and customer care in this situation and it is for the Funeral Director to assess the risk involved and decide whether to permit mourners to backfill.

In the event the Funeral Director gives permission to the mourners to backfill the grave, IT SHALL BE AT THE MOURNERS OWN RISK. The Funeral Director must take control of the proceedings and stop backfilling at the relevant stages in order that the grave diggers can remove shoring equipment.

It is vital to health and safety of mourners that co-operation between cemetery staff, mourners and the Funeral Director conducting the funeral is established prior to the funeral and notified by the Funeral Directors to the Burial Board not less than 5 days prior to the date of the funeral.

8.FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Funeral Directors should be requested to provide their risk assessments, safe systems of work together with a copy of their public liability insurance certificate.

The Funeral Director is responsible for the contract of the gravedigger and as such the responsibility of the grave until it has settled; should subsidence occur the Funeral Director/Gravedigger will be notified by the Burial Board. If remedial work has not been completed by the Funeral Director/Gravedigger within 14 days, the Burial Board may engage its own contractor to remedy the defect and will be entitled to full reimbursement of the cost from the Funeral Director responsible.

COLBURN HIPSWELL SCOTTON JOINT BURIAL AUTHORITY'S
GRAVE DIGGING POLICY AND PROCEEDURES

DECLARATION

I (name)

On behalf of (Name of Funeral Director)

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Address:.....

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Acknowledge receipt Colburn Hipswell Scotton Joint Burial Authority's Grave Digging Policy and Procedures 2021 at Hipswell Cemetery and undertake to comply with it. I shall make the Policy and Procedures known to all concerned and accept that it is my responsibility to ensure they in turn comply with them.

Signed Date

