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**Marazion Town Council Grave Digging**

**Policy and Procedures.**

**Introduction.**

It is the policy of Marazion Town Council (the Council) to ensure a high standard of

grave digging whilst maintaining safety and dignity. This extends beyond the day of

interment to the weeks and months afterwards when the soil is settling to ensure that

all graves are maintained to the highest standard.

**Procedures**

The following procedures are advisory and are not exhaustive.

Funeral Directors, grave diggers and contractors working in Marazion Town Council Cemetery are asked to comply with all legislative requirements (risk assessments, public liability, method statements etc) and will be required to sign an agreement to confirm that Health and Safety procedures are in place.

The Council may undertake spot checks without prior notice to ensure compliance with the policy and procedures and anyone found to be in contravention may be prohibited from working at the cemetery.

The affixing of headstones, cremation plot tablets can only be undertaken by the Council’s appointed Memorial Stonemason which is Longrock Memorials.

**General Requirements**

Dates for internment/burials must be authorised by the town council in advance of any funeral/burial/internment arrangements being made. This saves any embarrassment as there may be maintenance works taking place, another funeral/burial or internment.

No grave/cremation plot can be dug in Marazion Cemetery without the permission of Marazion Town Council.

Only the town council nominated grave digger may dig graves or cremations plots in Marazion Cemetery. Tidy Grounds have been appointed by the town council as their grave digger.

Families who choose not to use a Funeral Director must also employ the Council’s nominated grave digger.

No grave or cremation plot should be dug more than 48 hours before the burial or interment, except by prior arrangement with the Councils Town Clerk or in their absence the Chairman/Deputy Chairman of the Council

The Town Clerk/Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Council upon receiving a

request for a burial or interment will arrange to meet with the councils appointed grave digger and agree the location of the plot(s) and advise the Funeral Director or family member (if not using the services of a Funeral Director).

**Grave Digging**

Appropriate Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) must be always worn in accordance with Health and Safety legislative requirements.

Entry and egress from a grave must be by ladder. On no-account must a

gravedigger climb out of a grave by treading on any part of the shoring.

A ladder must remain in place whenever the Grave Digger is working in a grave to maintain an emergency exit.

All finished graves should be prepared using imitation grass matting. The

matting will be laid out neatly on staging leaving no folds or gaps which may

cause any person to trip. Walkboards are to be laid along the length of the grave and supported at each end and must be capable of carrying the weight of the pall bearers and coffin.

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

Shoring timbers and struts are to be inspected prior to use for any sign of deterioration. Defective timbers and struts must not be used and must be cut down to prevent use by any other person.

Shoring must be incorporated as digging proceeds. The amount of shoring

equipment required should be assessed according to the required depth of

excavation, soil type and weather conditions and the depth of shoring

timbers/hydraulic units.

Lowering webbings and putlogs must be inspected prior to each burial, to ensure

that no deterioration has occurred and that they can take the weight of the

coffin. Frayed webbings are not be used.

The interment area and surrounding graves and headstones are to be left clean

and tidy. All equipment to be removed and the paths cleared of any debris.

**Pre-excavation Preparation**

It is extremely important that anyone involved in pre-excavation preparation follow the advice contained within this policy and these procedures to ensure a safe working environment for all. It is important that grave diggers can safely assess the working site, including memorials, 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.**

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 as identified this policy. When assessing the hazards on a potential excavation site, a few decisions need to be made based, on sound risk assessment principles:

Consideration should be given to the range of hazards that may exist around the excavation area. Consideration should be given to activities that will subsequently take place:

* safe and easy access for grave digging operatives and equipment.
* safe access for persons attending and officiating at the burial service.
* the health and safety of operatives during the excavation process
* the health and safety of cemetery visitors

When considering the safety of the site before, during and after excavation work, the following must be considered:

* ground conditions – proper consideration of the ground conditions surrounding the grave and on the route to the graveside should be taken account of with particular care to be taken when areas contain multiple trip hazards. A safe route, proper footwear, and care in unstable or wet/slippery conditions should be emphasised in risk assessment for this work.
* memorials present specific hazards and must be dealt with according to the guidance produced by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM).
* correct positioning and marking out of grave.
* protection of excavation using proper techniques to protect the integrity of the excavation are dealt with later in this document.
* access and egress into the cemetery with machinery.
* use of machinery in accordance with Health and Safety legislative requirements and approved codes of practice.

The above risk assessment information is for guidance purposes only, lists are not to be considered all-inclusive but indicative of the types of risks that should be considered.

**Excavation and Ground Support**

Machine Excavation.

* the grave space set aside for each burial shall not exceed 2.44m x 0.91m (8 feet long by 3 feet wide).
* hte 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 require the grave digger to ensure that 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.
* shoring must be incorporated as digging proceeds. The amount of shoring equipment required should be assessed according to the required depth of excavation, soil type and weather conditions and the depth of shoring timbers/hydraulic units.
* 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 grave and fenced off using hazard tape and stakes.
* all cremation plots will measure 18” x 18” for a single casket 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 either placed in an area designated by the Council or removed from site.
* the grave digger must ensure that any machine used to dig a grave is operated by a person who has received appropriate training in the use of the machine.
* a machine may be used to dig the grave, but backfilling must be completed by hand.
* the machine operator must ensure that no person stands within the area of the radius of the machine boom or bucket and that the working area is clearly marked out.
* when moving a digging machine within the Cemetery, the driver must exercise caution and treat the 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 Grave Digger who will be 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 Marazion Town Council immediately and remedied by the grave digger within 14 days.
* should water collect in a grave it should be removed prior to the interment. The Council must be contacted immediately before any operation to remove water is commenced.

**Preparation for Interment**

* prior to preparing/dressing the grave the surrounding area should be examined to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, a safe, unobstructed access is available for Funeral Directors, Clergy, and mourners.
* any trip hazards that may be present must be removed.
* two putlogs should be placed across the grave onto which the coffin may be placed prior to the committal. Putlogs should 4’ 6” X 4” (1.37m x 102mm x 102mm) and of good quality knot free planed timber. The distance between the putlogs should no less than 3’6” (1.07mm). Care must be taken to ensure that sufficient webbing is placed on either side of the grave to enable each pallbearer to lower the coffin to the bottom of the grave.
* webbings should be checked for signs of deterioration or fraying before each burial service. Frayed or damaged webbings must not be used.
* in some instances, there may be insufficient space to the side of the grave for the pallbearers to safely carry the coffin and place it on putlogs directly over the grave. A safer method for this situation is to place a board at either the foot or head end of the grave covered with grass matting on which to place the coffin. Two putlogs are placed across the board so that the coffin can be rested down with no risk of pallbearers trapping fingers. The lowering webbings are also placed across the board. At the appropriate time during the committal service the pallbearers can lift the coffin using the webbings and walk along the walkboards and safely lower the coffin into the grave.

**Backfilling**

* backfilling should commence immediately after all mourners have left the cemetery and be completed fully on the same day and by hand.
* webbings and grass mats must be removed before backfilling commences.
* walkboards should be left in place during the whole of the backfilling procedure to prevent persons walking on any unprotected grave edge.
* 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) turfs 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 grave is to be carried 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 turves show signs of drought or die-back.
* the responsibility for monitoring and maintenance will rest with the town council who in turn will contact the grave digger and Funeral Director if remedial works are required any extra costs incurred by the town council will be sought from the Funeral Director.
* protection of the coffin 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 sides of the grave.

**Mourner Participation**

* some ethnic and religious groups require carrying out the backfilling of the grave themselves. There is a 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.
* should the Funeral Director give permission to the mourners to backfill the grave, ***IT SHALL BE AT THE MOURNERS OWN RISK***. The Funeral Director must take control of proceedings and stop backfilling at the relevant stages in order that grave digger can remove shoring equipment.
* it is vital to the health and safety of mourners that co-operation between the town council, mourners and the Funeral Director conducting the funeral is established prior to the funeral and notified by the Funeral Director to the Council not less than 5 days prior to the date of the funeral.

**Funeral Directors**

* only Funeral Directors who have signed and returned the agreement to adhere to this policy and these procedures will be allowed to work in Marazion Cemetery.

**Cremation Plots.**

As with a burial, the Town Clerk/Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Council upon

receiving a request for a burial or interment will arrange to meet with the councils

appointed Grave Digger and agree the location of the plot(s) and advise the Funeral

Director or family (if not using the services of a Funeral Director).

**Payment Grave Digger**

Funeral Directors/Families will pay the grave digger direct