

## Hale Magna and Hale Parva Joint Burial Committee

### Grave Digging Policy and H&S requirements

#### 1. The Policy

It is the policy of the Hale Magna and Hale Parva Joint Burial Committee to ensure a high standard of grave digging whilst maintaining safety and dignity at all times through the process. 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.

#### 2. Grave Digging – General Requirements

**Training.** It is recommended that all grave digging staff should receive training in this operation. Any untrained staff involved in grave digging operations should be closely supervised at all times by a fully trained or otherwise suitably experienced person.

Appropriate safety footwear should be worn at all times. Consideration should be given as to whether additional safety equipment is required.

Any grave that is left unattended for whatever reason must be boarded over or protected in such a manner as to prevent any person falling into the grave.

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.

All tools and equipment required to complete each grave must be available nearby before digging commences.

When hand digging an assessment on the need for shoring should be made as digging proceeds and acted upon accordingly.

#### 3. Pre-Excavation Preparation

##### General

It is extremely important that grave diggers follow the advice contained within this Code to ensure a safe working environment for all Cemetery operatives/visitors when excavating a grave, including themselves. It is important that grave diggers are trained to be able to safely assess the working site, including memorials, assess the risk, record the assessment accurately, follow an approved reporting process and understand the range of options available for making the area safe for all who will use it.

##### Using Risk Assessment Techniques

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 in 1.4 of this Code. When assessing the hazards on a potential excavation site a number of decisions need to be made based on sound risk assessment principles:

- *What areas of the burial process need to be considered during site preparation –* 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:
  1. Safe and easy access for operatives and equipment

2. Safe access for persons attending and officiating at the burial service
3. The health and safety of operatives during the excavation process
4. The health and safety of Cemetery visitors

• *What range of hazards exist in the area surrounding the grave to be excavated?* – When considering the safety of the site before, after and during excavation work the following must be considered:

1. 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.
2. Memorials – memorials present specific hazards and all works should ensure their protection.
3. Correct positioning and marking out of grave – this is essential as reduced midfeathers in otherwise stable conditions can create a false impression of safe excavation conditions.
4. Protection of excavation – ensure techniques protect the integrity of the excavation.
5. Vegetation – proper consideration should be given to the effect of any evasive vegetation or work being carried out around trees that have low branches or unsafe branches.

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.

### **Locating Graves – Measuring and Marking**

All graves to be excavated should be located and identified in accordance with the information provided.

All graves must be dug centrally within their respective grave spaces for the following reasons:

1. If grave is not dug centrally within its respective grave space one of the walls separating the adjacent grave will be of a narrower width and will increase the risk of collapse of that particular side of the grave.
2. When reopening a grave that was previously dug out of centre the risk of collapse is increased.
3. 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**

Walkboards where required 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, i.e., placed before excavation commences and not removed until after backfilling is completed.

### **Work Platform**

A work platform can be provided by replacing the head and foot boards with boards of 6'6" in length. This will enable two more boards to be laid along the length of one side of the grave to create a platform 4' wide.

### **Soil Box**

A Soil Box (soil tidy) 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' from the edge of the grave 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.

It is advisable to estimate and remove excess soil from the grave (i.e., soil that would remain after backfilling is completed) before the soil box is used. This action will keep the amount of soil placed in the box to a minimum and will reduce pressure within the box and subsequently the risk of the box collapsing.

#### **4. Excavation and Ground Support**

##### **Preliminaries and Preparation**

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 and the depth of shoring timbers/hydraulic units.

##### **Machine Excavation**

Only authorised trained persons should be permitted to operate grave digging machines.

**Training and certification in the safe use of grave digging machines is provided by the ICCM under the Cemetery Operatives Training Scheme.**

The machine operator must ensure that no person stands within the area of the radius of the machine boom or bucket.

When not in use the machine operator must ensure the machine is left in a safe position with the boom lowered and the bucket resting on the ground.

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 to traffic or pedestrians. 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.

Care must be taken when excavating a grave whilst shoring is in place so as to avoid striking any part of the shoring equipment with the machine bucket.

##### **Hand Excavation**

Shoring, where required, must be incorporated as digging proceeds. Adequate shoring will be incorporated so as to prevent the collapse of the sides of the grave. Soil type and weather conditions will affect the requirements for each particular grave.

##### **Use of Machinery within the Cemetery Grounds**

Within the Cemetery Machinery Operators must exercise caution and treat the roads and grounds with respect.

Where the use of such machinery within the Cemetery grounds in periods of poor weather (or immediately thereafter) is likely to cause damage to the grounds then such machinery should not be used without the use of boards or other means of protecting the ground from damage.

## **5. Ground Support**

Prior to preparing/dressing the grave the surrounding area should be examined to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable a safe, unobstructed access for Funeral Directors staff, clergy and mourners. Any trip hazards that may be present 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 onto putlogs.

## **6. Backfilling**

### **General Requirements and Considerations**

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

Webbings and grass mats must be removed before backfilling commences.

Walkboards should be left in place during the whole of the backfilling procedure so as 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 turfs to leave a suitable and acceptable finish.**

### **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 a 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.

At a Meeting of the Hale Magna and Hale Parva Joint Burial Committee, held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022, the aforementioned procedures were approved.