

INDEX

General points; Dealing with undergrowth	Sheets 1 - 2
Filling in the Recording Form; What you will need	Sheets 3 - 4
Transcribing the Inscription onto the form;	Sheet 5
Likely wording and letter types; Difficult stones	Sheets 6 - 7

GENERAL INTRODUCTION This is a huge task. Thank you for offering to help with it. Despite the weather, the surveying team have worked hard and had a lot of fun as well.

You can work on your own, but a team of two or three allows second opinions over the difficult bits, and the possibility of choosing whether you like interpreting the lettering or acting as scribe. Each group will be working largely alone – this allows you to choose days and times to suit your own circumstances. If we are to complete the task, I am hoping each group will be able to tackle about 50 stones between now and the end of June, perhaps 8 or 10 at a time. In each set you are given, you may find it best to complete the easy ones, before tackling the more difficult ones, for satisfaction in achievement.

You will find the light conditions will make the task easy or difficult. An oblique sun is best, but sometimes the writing is clearest on a bright day with even light and no sun. The change in light really does make some apparently illegible stones readable, so you may have to revisit them several times. Trial and error is the only way.

The church has placed no restrictions on when we carry out the work, but I would be grateful if you would avoid working during funerals and weddings, and please avoid potential offence with dogs, noise etc. The flowers, neatly cut grass and general tidiness of the churchyard are also of concern. Please respect these by leaving things as you find them. There is more about dealing with undergrowth etc later in these notes.

Finally, churchyards can be dangerous places, especially when you are intent on studying a gravestone.

- DON'T GO TOO CLOSE TO LEANING STONES
- BE AWARE OF BROKEN AND LOOSE STONES
- BE AWARE OF UNEVEN GROUND, ESPECIALLY NEAR GRAVES
- IF UNDERGROWTH OBSCURES THE GROUND BE VERY CAREFUL WHERE YOU WALK
- WEAR STOUT SHOES AND HAVE GLOVES AVAILABLE

If you have problems or queries, contact me coordinator on Tel: xxx
Good luck, thank you – and enjoy!

DEALING WITH UNDERGROWTH

The churchwardens have suggested the following guidelines: -

IVY – strip off leaves. You may pull away small, easily removed young stems, but not large ones. Be aware that pulling off the ivy might permanently damage the stone.

MOSS - Sometimes moss will reveal a shallow inscription by growing in the sunken area, but this is not common. You may brush or lightly scrape the moss, but stop if you fear you are loosening the stone. Do not use harsh metal scrapers.

MONUMENTS PARTIALLY OBSCURED BY TURF – please cut away the overgrowth and remove it, so that the stone can be fully seen. Ideally this should be done with an edging iron, but if you prefer, leave it and let me know. A probe such as a knitting needle can help find the boundaries.

COMPLETELY BURIED MONUMENTS –use a probe such as an old knitting needle if you think there is a buried flat stone. If you find one, make sure you remember where it is, and let coordinator know. Once we have approval, we will organise a team who will remove turf, record and photograph the hidden stone, and replace the turf all in one day.

FILLING IN THE RECORDING FORM

A photograph will form part of the record, see separate procedure for photography and upload to database.

Use a new sheet for each grave you record. Some sheets may have virtually nothing on them but 'overgrown' 'illegible'

Complete the form with the pencils provided. The ability to rub out may prove invaluable when you have second thoughts. Don't worry if they get a bit messy – I would rather have a messy form than one that has been copied out in 'best', possibly with copying errors!

Please PRINT when filling in the form.

When your form is complete, please ask another member of the team to check the form carefully against the grave, especially that the memorial ref is correct, and that the inscription is the very best you can do. Then return it to me (3 Green Farm End).

THE VARIOUS SECTIONS OF THE FORM IN DETAIL

STONE MATERIAL/ GEOLOGY Parts with an * may need an 'expert' to complete, so leave blank if (like me) one type of stone to you looks much like another.

NUMBER OF COMPONENTS Headstone, kerb and urn would be 3 elements; a simple headstone, 1. I think there is scope for initiative here.

TYPE Headstone, footstone, cross, kerb, railings are all self-explanatory. A ledger is a flat slab, either on the ground, or on a low plinth. A chest tomb is a box with top and four sides. Quite when a ledger becomes a chest is arguable – certainly if the ledger plinth is more than 20cm it should be called a chest.

ORIENTATION State whether the direction of the likely grave plot is West-East or North-South. Orientation of the church is a good enough guide.

INSCRIPTION DETAILS 'Top' applies usually only to ledgers and chests

TECHNIQUE Some gravestones have carved or incised patterns such as flowers. If this is the case please tick whether they are central, round the edge or both. Many have no decoration, just lettering. In any case, the photograph will reveal all.

MASON Very few graves in Kineton churchyard have mason's names on them. If they do please record as much as you can. They are usually found near the ground (buried in grass?) often at the side or back.

PEOPLE MENTIONED. This will become a valuable search tool. Please record all names mentioned on the stone, with any given relationships and references to year of death and age. A full date of death (even if recorded on the inscription) is not needed here. Obviously not all the people mentioned will be buried in the tomb, and we will try to cross reference graves at a later date, unless, as often happens, they are adjacent, and you spot them. For example, Lucy Bicknell is recorded as daughter of John and Mary Woodfield. John and Mary are buried elsewhere. If you find their gravestone, record the reference in the table.

OTHER RECORDS Ignore this.

INSCRIPTION This is the most important section, and further details are on a separate sheet.

REMARKS For use if you feel additional information or comment is needed. Even though the record will be attached to a photograph, you may feel a sketch of a detail would be helpful.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Recording pack

Measuring tape, preferably a steel one

Rubber

Clipboard (a piece of stout card and a bulldog clip will do!)

Probe (e.g. old knitting needle or large nail)

Soft and stiff brushes, maybe toothbrush

Water sprayer (as for flower arrangements or laundry)

Possibly an edging iron or weeding fork (probably not on your first trip) Initiative, patience and a lot of luck

TRANSCRIBING THE INSCRIPTION ONTO THE FORM Please print clearly, and do not try to copy the styles of lettering. It takes too long and rarely captures the quality of workmanship. Use the form to display centring and relative size, though this will also be visible on the photograph. When there are any dividing lines or decoration between blocks of text, these should be indicated or sketched in the relevant places on the inscription box on the form.

The text should be transcribed line by line. If there is text on more than one face, the inscription box should be broken up into sections for each face, and additional forms or the back of the sheet used also. Use of compass points should allow a note to be made of which inscription belongs where. So, for example, a table tomb could have the top surface, and the long north and south faces inscribed, and even the smaller east and west ends; crosses often have inscriptions on more than one face of the base; and kerbs can be inscribed all round, inside and out!

MOST IMPORTANT Do not guess what it says – copy what you can see, with as much detail as you can. If necessary, try to identify the number of letters with a dot or star, perhaps within a block that can be read. If text can be inferred, put what you have inferred within brackets. You may find your record (even after several visits) looks like this: -

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN (B or P)ENN
LATE OF HUBY, FARMER
WHO DEPA(?RTED THIS) LIFE AUG (UST) ***
182* A(?GED) *** (?YEA)RS

The rest of the stone is eroded, maybe two more lines of text.

LIKELY WORDING AND LETTER FORMS

The following notes may be helpful:

1. Introductory terms such as 'Here lies', 'Beneath this stone', 'Sacred', 'Erected', 'In loving memory'. These can often have very elaborate first letters or words which can be confusing.
2. Letter forms can be unfamiliar, particularly 18th century examples, such as the f for s (or ff for ss). Some numerals can be difficult to read correctly, and on older monuments may be in Latin numerals. Often the way in which letters and numbers were cut with combinations of deep and shallow incised lines means that erosion and weathering often leave only the deeper strokes. 3, 5 and 8 are very difficult to differentiate.
3. Abbreviations occur in a range of forms, notably with dates and elisions at the end of lines, such as inter'd. Sometimes there are letters placed one above another, or may be as superscripts in abbreviations such as 10th and Decr^r. Sometimes omissions were corrected by adding text above or below the lines, again often in smaller script.
4. Words not now commonly in use, such as ye (the), relict (surviving spouse, normally widow). Phrases such as Anno Domini (AD) and Aet (the Latin Aetatis, meaning age) may also be found on the older memorials.

METHODS OF RECORDING DIFFICULT STONES

1. Careful brushing or cleaning can help reveal an inscription. Brushes must not be so hard that they damage the surface of the stone, and the Churchwardens have asked us not to use metal implements. It is only desirable to clean enough to be able to read the inscription. Soft hand or tooth brushes work well, as do shaving brushes.
2. Rubbing damp vegetation such as a handful of grass on the face of the stone can also produce excellent results, but should only be done where the surface is not breaking up from erosion.
3. Sponging the surface of the stone can be very effective. Besides sponging, spraying water onto memorials can make otherwise invisible fine lines appear; a small hand-pump action sprayer such as those used for house plants works well and can be used on delicate surfaces. Sometimes the text appears immediately after any form of wetting; on other occasions it is during the differential drying that it is possible to read it.

4. Horizontal parts of monuments such as the tops of table tombs can also be made easier to read by the use of water filling in the surviving parts of the inscription. The stone should then be viewed from various sides, including very oblique angles.
5. The application of oblique light emphasises the incised lines of text or decoration. A good quality torch can work very well, as can the use of a mirror or a board covered with tin foil on sunny days to deflect the sunlight onto the surface. Moving the deflected beam back and forth allows attention to concentrate on the problematic parts as their lighting changes.
6. When inscriptions are not visible, they can often still be felt with the tips of the fingers. This is often the case on eroded tops of table or chest tombs.

THE FOLLOWING METHODS CAN BE USED, BUT ARE **NOT RECOMMENDED**.

Please avoid this sort of thing; -

1. Chalk can bring out an inscription, but it is not very effective on the finer parts, and it is easy to highlight the obvious which makes the rest even more difficult to see. The use of chalk on monuments with a soft or unstable surface should always be avoided.
2. Shaving foam can be used to fill in the letters. The chemicals in the foam cannot be completely removed even with extensive washing immediately after, and in the long term may damage the stone permanently, so avoid this.

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