

**NEWSLETTER TO ALL VOLUNTEERS**  
**From Jean Gitsham, FOTC Committee**

Hi everyone. For those who haven't been following the story on Facebook, here's an update on the emergency we have had to deal with about dangerous headstones.

About a week ago a couple of wobbly headstones were noticed in the cemetery. We informed Teignbridge about these in accordance with our agreement with them and we agreed to do a fuller review. Unfortunately that showed up a lot more potentially dangerous headstones. The majority of those were in the area surrounding the ruined chapel but there were also a few south of the buildings. So we cordoned those off with hazard tape.

Teignbridge responded very quickly and as a result made about half a dozen safe by laying them flat and attaching an advisory notice to them. They have also advised us that although the remaining headstones are still wobbly they are currently within the bounds of the safety guidelines. That's good news because it's been so sad to see the headstones having to be laid flat which takes away from some of the quirky charm of the cemetery. We'll have to keep an eye on them for any further movement and let Teignbridge know if necessary. Fingers crossed that they will stabilise.

It seems odd that this has happened. Going back to the very first days of the cemetery there were reports of subsidence. The result is that there are plenty of graves in the cemetery where there are headstones and larger monuments at strange angles. But they are stable - they don't move if you give them a nudge. So natural processes have caused them to subside over time and settle into different stable positions, which is part of the charm of our cemetery. Also other graves in those areas are fine and the vast majority of graves we have been clearing have been cleared sympathetically and the headstones are still perfectly stable.

One possibility is that the land in the cordoned areas had become more susceptible to subsidence. Another is that attempts had been made to straighten up headstones. We hope this is not the case but, just as a reminder to everyone, our policy from day 1 has always been that we wouldn't attempt to move or repair headstones for a number of reasons:

1. It's a dangerous activity for amateur volunteers
2. We're not insured
3. We are not professional and would not know how to secure headstones properly and safely to protect the public
4. Teignbridge wouldn't allow it - it's against their own policy
5. It potentially damages the grave itself and is therefore disrespectful to those buried there

Whilst doing the review of the headstones we also discovered a number of graves where repairs have been attempted using what looks like a grip-fill adhesive. Those repairs are totally bodged and again potentially dangerous. Two crosses have fallen

after these repairs and one has broken. We have lain those crosses flat and a third has been marked up by Teignbridge.

After all the good work we have achieved over the last four years it is so unfortunate that this has happened. We will be meeting with Teignbridge next week to discuss what this means for how we might approach future work.

FOTC is all about trying to preserve the wonder of our cemetery and remembering and respecting those buried there. We're all hoping that once COVID is over we'll be able to return to our regular routine and continue the good work.

For those who don't do Facebook there's a gallery of photographs of this event on our web-site as an historical record. You can link to it here:

<https://teignmouthcemetery.wordpress.com/galleries/the-wobbly-headstone-saga/>

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