

Town of Gawler

Willaston Cemetery - Grave Cleaning and Maintenance



Due to age and exposure to the elements, graves and monuments will deteriorate over time. There are however, some basic tasks that can be done to minimise deterioration. It is important that when undertaking grave maintenance care is taken to ensure no damage to surrounding graves occurs.

Dirty water from cleaning activities cannot be allowed to flow over adjoining graves. It is never appropriate to step on a surrounding grave to gain access to the grave you may wish to maintain. Individuals who bring equipment into the cemetery are responsible for the safe operation of those items including ensuring that they do not become a hazard to other visitors or Council staff. If equipment is brought into the Cemetery, it is a requirement that individuals working within the Cemetery have Public Liability Insurance to protect themselves and members of the public. A copy of insurance must also be provided to the Town of Gawler.

Weeding

Weeds and invasive vegetation should be removed carefully by hand, poisoned with a herbicide which does not damage stonework, carefully trimmed or mowed or a combination of these methods.

Cleaning of non-significant headstones

Headstones particularly white marble stones can become discoloured by dust, soil and moss or mould over time. Mould, moss and lichen are naturally occurring and part of the ageing process. It is important when cleaning headstones not to try and recreate an 'as new' appearance. They should retain some evidence of their age and character. Decisions to clean should take into consideration the state of the headstone; brittle and fragile monuments should not be cleaned without appropriate professional advice.

The following approach is recommended:

- Carefully check the condition of the headstone or monument. If the stone is cracking, flaking or scaling, or has a grainy surface, do not attempt to clean it.
- If it is subject to rising damp and sounds hollow when tapped, it should not be cleaned and should be treated carefully and only cleaned or restored under the guidance of a heritage stonemason.
- Decide what the soiling is that you want to remove.

The usual causes of damage and discoloration are:

- dirt, dust and grime from urban pollution
- soot or smoke staining
- organic growth (algae, fungi, lichens, mosses)
- other stains from metals, oils or other materials
- efflorescence from soluble salts in the stone

Town of Gawler

Willaston Cemetery - Grave Cleaning and Maintenance

Start any cleaning by using the gentlest method, soaking the headstone with clean potable water to soften the dirt and grime. Continue rinsing with potable clean water and gently brush with a soft bristle brush (natural or nylon bristles) using a circular motion.

- Organic growth can be gently pried off with wooden skewers or an icy pole stick. Do not use metal scrapers.
- Always start at the bottom and clean upwards to avoid any streaking or staining downwards. Rinse regularly while cleaning and keep brushes clean.
- If after patient work this does not move the soiling sufficiently, seek professional heritage advice.

Do not use ordinary soap or detergent as they will leave a residue on stone. Do not use bleach as it will permanently damage the surface of the stone. Do not use acid. Do not use proprietary cleaning agents except under professional heritage advice. Do not use pressure cleaners as they will damage the stone.

- Finally rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove all residue which might cause blotches or further staining. Cleaning solutions must not dry on a monument.
- If you are unsure of the impact cleaning may have on a historic grave, do not undertake any cleaning without seeking professional heritage advice.

Ironwork grave surrounds

Ironwork in the Cemetery needs protection against corrosion, and in most cases a routine application of fish oil (Wattyl Killrust Fishoilene) or other metal preservative will inhibit further rust.

The railings should be gently brushed back with a bristle brush (not wire brush) to remove loose, flaking iron scales prior to the application of any preservative surface. This work should be undertaken in dry weather.

Grave surrounds that are currently unpainted should be treated with rust proofing and left unpainted. Grave surrounds which are currently painted black should remain black. Paint colour should be selected based on evidence of early colours established through paint scrapes or archival photos. Generally, ironwork would be black, silver or white.

Damaged headstones and monuments

There are multiple factors that cause damage to graves including naturally ageing, storm

damage, and vandalism. If you encounter damage, there are a few steps you may wish to undertake:

Location and collection of fragments: Pieces of any damaged headstone or part of a monument such as lettering, tiles and other fragments should be collected together and kept temporarily at the relevant gravesite until appropriate repairs can be done. If there is any risk of further damage on site, the fragments should be securely stored, clearly labelled and their location identified, for later reinstatement.

Temporary placement of broken monuments: Care should be taken when lifting broken pieces of monuments as they may be heavy. Broken pieces of headstones should be collected and laid on the grave with the inscription upwards. Ideally these pieces should be set on a sloping bed of coarse aggregate to allow water run-off, and allow the inscription to be read by visitors. More permanent conservation should be carried out as soon as possible.

Work to significant monuments or graves of significance

If you are considering work to an historically significant monument or a grave of significance; first seek advice from the Town of Gawler.

In general, work will be guided by professional heritage advice with reference to Section 3 of Appendix A in the adopted [Willaston Cemetery Conservation and Management Plan](#)

These cleaning and maintenance recommendations are drawn from the adopted Willaston Cemetery Conservation and Management Plan.

Further Information

For additional information, please contact Council's Cemetery Officer on 8522 9211 or via email on council@gawler.sa.gov.au.

Content for this fact sheet has been sourced from internal staff in collaboration with Heritage SA and is consistent with Policy 6 of the adopted [Willaston Cemetery Conservation and Management Plan](#).

Other available fact sheets include:

- Interments (Burials & Cremations)
- When is Development approval required?
- Renewals of Interment Rights and Re-Use of Sites
- General Questions