

# Choosing a Memorial

## What makes a memorial?

A memorial is not merely a marker erected over a grave to remind us of the name of the deceased. It is a lasting symbol of remembrance: a tribute to a life now ended; perhaps a final gift to someone dearly loved. It is therefore extremely important that its design and the firm producing it should be carefully chosen.

**Hasty decisions made whilst still in a distraught condition are very often the cause of later regrets, so it is advisable to wait and perhaps spend some time looking around.**

Memorials may take many forms but this information sheet concerns those erected in cemeteries or churchyards. Such memorials need to be of a material which will withstand all kinds of weather, take a permanent carved inscription (and possibly additional ones later on), be suitable for shaping and ornamentation, and harmonise with the surroundings. It should also weather attractively. Centuries have shown that natural stone materials (i.e. stone, slate, marble and granite) have all these qualities.

## How to select a memorial mason

Your first choice may be a firm recommended by a friend or relative, but in any event it is obviously sensible to go to one genuinely specialising in memorial (or “monumental”) masonry. Since few people are really able to assess the quality of workmanship which should be expected, it is also advisable to look for one which is required to work on certain specified standards. This way regrets, additional distress and unnecessary expense should be avoided. Members of the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) or the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) are bound by strict Codes of Ethics and Practice and are therefore required to satisfy certain high standards of service. If a dispute should unfortunately arise, then they are also bound by the findings of a free and objective Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

## What you may choose

Cemetery and churchyard authorities nearly always have regulations regarding the types of memorials they will admit. These regulations vary from place to place and therefore need to be checked before any choice is made. In addition, certain varieties of stone may be more appropriate in some places than in others, not only for their appearance but also because of the effect of weather or local conditions. A reputable memorial mason will advise you on all this.

It is, of course, possible to choose a design from a mason’s brochure or display. However, if you would prefer something more individual, a reputable memorial mason will be pleased to design it for you.

## Cremation memorials

Some cemetery and churchyard authorities may not permit memorials to be erected over cremated remains, and those that do may only permit very small headstones or even just plaques. Sometimes there may just be a central memorial commemorating all those whose ashes are buried in that area. Again, a reputable memorial mason will be able to advise on all this.

All members are bound by strict Codes of Ethics and Practice and, should the need arise, by the findings of its free and objective Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

## **Initial enquiry**

It is quite normal to ask for prices and to obtain written estimates detailing all the costs involved. These will include the memorial itself with all the required lettering, ornamentation and finishes; its installation on proper foundations at the plot, cemetery or churchyard fees and value added tax. (Remember, some of these are set charges which the mason has to pay in advance on your behalf.)

If you compare prices given by different firms make sure you really are comparing like with like. E.g. Are the memorials the same size? Is the stone exactly the same and not just a look-alike? Is the lettering and ornamentation the same and worked by the same method? Have VAT and cemetery or churchyard fees been included? Etc.

## **Placing the order**

When you place the order, you may be asked to pay a deposit, with the balance of the agreed price payable on completion. The availability of the materials, the complexity of design and the condition of the ground affect the time a memorial will take to complete. Again, a reputable memorial mason will advise you on this. The mason will also help with the wording of the inscription, if you so wish.

Before signing an order make sure you have checked it thoroughly and be particularly careful that the wording and spelling of the inscription are shown correctly. Any alterations should be confirmed immediately and in writing. Also note that, unless you give definite instructions to the contrary, the layout of the inscription will be left to the discretion of the lettercarver.

## **Insurance**

It is always advisable to insure a memorial against accidental damage and vandalism, making sure the cover takes effect immediately the stone is erected. The cost is not great and any reputable memorial mason should have details of the schemes available. If they do not, the National Association of Memorial Masons will be able to assist. When choosing a memorial its always advisable to look for a company belonging to NAMM or BRAMM.