

INSTRUCTIONS

Ballast Hills Burial Ground (BHBG) Gravestone Recording

At a Glance:

1. volunteer sign-in
2. attend induction training (10-15 minutes)
3. assigned to a recording group (2 to 3 people) – need someone with a camera
4. gather supplies
5. identify your segment graves on the master map
6. clear vegetation and sweep
7. fill in forms
8. take photographs
9. turn in supplies and completed forms
10. volunteer sign-out
11. upload photos within 24 hrs

Supplies

- instructions
- forms
- clipboard
- pencil
- photo-reference cards
- tape measure
- whisk broom and trowel

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to record the gravestones at Ballast Hills Burial Ground. Your careful work will capture the hidden stories etched into these stones before time and weather erase them, adding to the site's permanent archive. Whether you're transcribing inscriptions, sketching fragmentary pieces, or photographing worn carvings, your efforts, typically taking twenty to thirty minutes per memorial category, are invaluable. It's not about how many forms you complete, but how accurately and thoughtfully you record each unit. Please take your time, ask questions whenever you have doubts, and remember that every detail you capture helps preserve this site for future generations.

In 1929, most of the burial ground's gravestones were laid flat to form the present pathways, and they have lain in these positions for 95 years. All date from before the site closed as a burial ground in September 1852. The oldest recorded headstone bears a death date of 1708, although it has not yet been identified among the pathway stones.

For recording purposes, we classify all memorials into three categories:

- **Pathway segments** (n = 274), which may consist of a single complete stone, multiple complete stones, or several fragments. Each subsegment is treated as a separate unit.
- **Standing headstones** (n = 11), each recorded individually, located east of old school building.
- **Wall-mounted gravestones** (n = 14), also each recorded individually.

Every unit (whether a pathway subsegment, a freestanding headstone, or a wall-mounted stone) is assigned its own unique BHBG reference number and recorded on a form comprising 19 fields (material, dimensions, inscription, condition, etc.). This approach ensures the dataset remains clear, consistent, and ready for analysis.

1. BHBG Category & Reference:

You must record the BHBG# on both the front and back of each recording form, in the sketch boxes, and, ideally, to identify photos. Every BHBG# is three digits, plus a letter only if a pathway segment has multiple subsegments (complete or incomplete gravestones).

You will need to tick the appropriate category box and provide the necessary information, e.g.

BHBG Number Range by Categories:

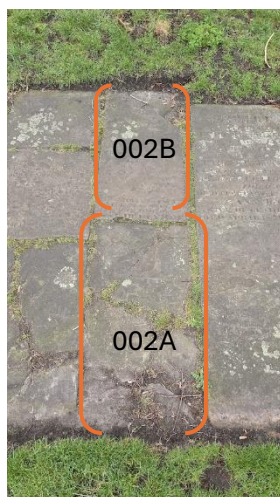
- ☐ Pathway Segment **001–274**: _____ and number of distinct gravestone subsegments: _____
- ☐ Standing Headstones **300–310**: _____
- ☐ Wall-mounted Gravestone **400–413**: _____

Subsegments letters:

- Add upper case letters A, B, C and so forth each subsegment gravestone; omit letters for single-stone segments. Assign A to the subsegment closest to the centre of the burial ground, as indicated by the X on the site view. Alternatively, use the arrow for reference: designate its non-pointed end as A.



segment 001



segment 002



site view



Standing Headstones

2. Recording Team Member's Names:

Record each team member's first name followed by their surname.

3. Recording Date:

Record the day, the full month name, and the year in the format dd Month yyyy (for example, 17 April 2025).

4. Gravestone Material Type:

When recording the material of each gravestone at BHBG, you'll almost always select sandstone. Sandstone is a sedimentary rock made up of sand-sized mineral grains, most often quartz, cemented together by silica, calcite or iron oxides. It typically has a gently gritty feel, visible individual grains, and varies in colour from pale yellow through pink to deep red depending on local iron content. Its relative durability and ease of carving made it the gravestone material of choice across Britain from the 17th century onward.

If you come across a gravestone that isn't sandstone (or not like the others), then tick the box for "other." If you have a plausible guess, then enter it, (e.g. granite, marble). It's perfectly acceptable to write "I don't know" or "Unknown material" here. We'll have a specialist confirm the rock type later.

Dimensions (in centimetres, cm):

All gravestones at BHBG have been moved from their original places and, in some case, cut into pieces to form the pathway. As a result, it is often difficult to tell which is the top or bottom. As a result, in the first instance, use the inscription orientation or the presence of a base to define top and bottom, i.e., the edge above the first line of text is the "**top**," and the edge below the last line is the "**bottom**." When no inscription or base is observed, then is present the use its longest dimension as **Height** and the shorter dimension as **Width**.

Always use a tape or rule with clear centimetres graduations, record in centimetres only, never inches. Take each measurement at least twice and average if there's any discrepancy.

5. Height (up-and-down measurement):

- Stones with inscription or base:
 - Place one end of your tape at the *bottom* edge (see above).
 - Pull it straight up to the *top* edge.
 - Record that number in cm.
- If a stone has no inscription or base:
 - Use its longest dimension as Height.
 - Record that number in cm.

6. Width (side-to-side measurement)

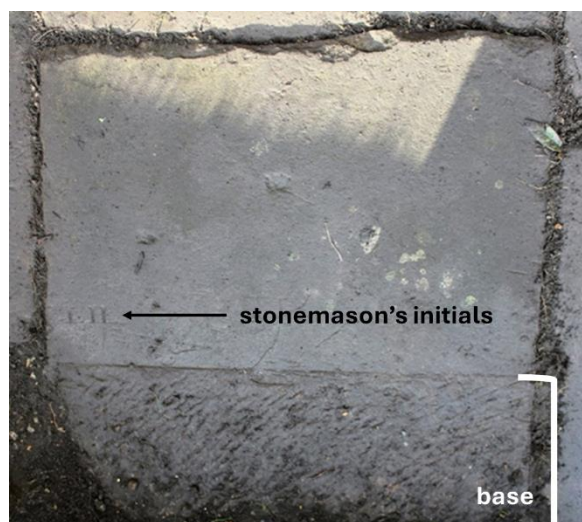
- Stones with inscription or base:
 - Place your tape horizontally across the stone's widest point, which should run at a right angle (perpendicular) to the line you used for Height.
 - Record that number in cm.
- If a stone has no inscription or base:

- Place your tape horizontally across the stone's widest point, which is a right angle to the line you used for Height.
- Record that number in cm.

7. Base Height:

The base is the block at the very bottom of a headstone, the part set into the ground. It looks and feels rougher than the smooth surface of the stone that is above the ground. If you're unsure about where base ends and main stone begins, default to "0" for the base measurements and explain in **Comments**.

- If a base is present, then record its height in mm.
- If no base is present, then enter "0."



8. Base Width

Sometimes the base width is greater than the width of the gravestone above ground.

- If a base is present, then record its width in mm.
- If no base is present, then enter "0."

9. Thickness (upright gravestones only)

- At about half the gravestone's height, measure from the back face straight through to the front face.
- Record thickness in mm.

10. Stonemason's Reference:

Record the stonemason's name, initials, or mark as it appears on the stone. This information normally is found on a lower or less prominent part of the memorial, often just above the base. Copy mason's details exactly; known examples include J. Horner, F. or P. Pringle, N Greive, I.H., and the single letter P. Keep an eye for others or possible unique maker symbols.

11. Inscription Transcription:

Transcribe the inscription line by line, preserving upper and lower case exactly as on the stone. Use the form to indicate centring and relative scale, these features also will appear on photographs or 3D scans. Carefully copy punctuation, abbreviations, and superscripts as they appear, annotating any corrections without "modernising" perceived spelling errors.

Background preparation helps inexperienced recorders to recognise common layouts, terminology, and letter forms. Reconnaissance of the target burial ground and nearby well-preserved sites provides useful practice, and novices should begin with clearly legible inscriptions before moving on to more weathered examples. Note introductory phrases such as 'Here lies,' recognise archaic letter forms like the long-s rendered as f, and transcribe all abbreviations and superscripts exactly as they appear.

When inscriptions prove partly or fully illegible, record the degree of loss by marking each missing letter with a short line or indicating inferred letters in square brackets prefixed by a question mark (e.g. [?T]). We will revisit difficult stones under optimal lighting at a later date. If you need more space, complete inscription in the space for Additional Notes.

12. Decorative Elements:

Describe any carvings or motifs, noting that original flat stones might have minimal decoration. Sketch dividing lines, decorations, and line-fillers within the inscription box, and mark any dots, shapes or incidental lines employed in the design. If you need more space, complete sketch in the space for Additional Notes.

13. Reference Segment Sketch:

Sketch the entire segment, standing gravestone or wall-mounted gravestone, ensuring that every subsegment appears in the drawing. Indicate orientation by adding a north arrow. Apply the agreed segment-and-subsegment codes (A, B, C and so forth), omitting letters for single-stone segments. If a segment comprises subsegments, prepare only a reference sketch for subsegment A and note for subsequent subsegments that the reference segment sketch is present for on subsegment A's form.

14. Subsegment Sketch:

Sketch only the subsegment being documents on the recording form, enlarging it from the reference segment sketch. You do not need to produce a separate subsegment sketch if the segment contains a single gravestone. If you are documenting a standing headstone, use this area to sketch its rear face. Describe any edge details that do not appear on the front or back faces of the gravestone.

15. Gravestone Condition:

Tick the single box that best describes overall condition of the specific segment or sub-segment recorded on this form.

- ☐ **complete** - all original elements present; no significant loss or alteration
- ☐ **mostly complete** - minor chips or losses, but overall form and major features remain intact
- ☐ **altered/cut down** - segment has been trimmed, shortened, or otherwise reshaped
- ☐ **cannot tell** - unable to assess

Use **Comments** to explain any uncertainties or detail the nature of any damage.

16. Breakage/Damage:

Tick the single box that best describes observed breakage of the specific segment or sub-segment recorded on this form.

- ☐ **none** - no visible cracks, chips, or detachments
- ☐ **minor chips/scratches** - small nicks or surface marks only
- ☐ **major breakage** - significant fractures or losses; e.g., large crack through it, parts missing but overall form still present
- ☐ **mostly missing** - only small fragments of it remains; the majority has broken away

Use **Comments** to note size, location, and probable cause of any damage.

17. Inscription Condition:

Tick the single box that best describes how much of the inscription is still readable the specific segment or sub-segment recorded on this form.

- ☐ **all legible** - every letter and word can be deciphered
- ☐ **mainly legible** - most text is clear, a few small gaps
- ☐ **both legible & illegible** - some sections fully readable, others completely worn
- ☐ **traces** - only fragments or individual letters remain
- ☐ **illegible** - no meaningful text visible; erased by erosion

- ☐ **no inscription present** - either stone was never inscribed or face-down position

Use **Comments** add details here, for example, barely visible phrases under lichen. Note condition that might need future attention or any visible biological growth like moss or lichen, or environmental marks such as water stains or dirt buildup. Note if you think it might be possible to read more under different lighting conditions. If you notice any previous repairs or unusual features, record those too.

18. Photographs:

Why photography matters

Photographing each gravestone or part thereof isn't just "nice to have," it's a critical part of your record. Weather, lichen, and human activity slowly are eroding every gravestone, and once details are lost, they cannot be recovered. Careful, systematic photos give us the best permanent record, allow side-by-side comparisons over years, and provide the raw material for future investigations.

Minimum shots per form

You must take **at least four** distinct photo types for every completed recording form; see a-d below mark with an asterisk. Other photos are required if the element identified is present. You need to tick all photo type taken on the recording form. Additionally, you will be asked to record the total number of photos taken per (sub)segment you are recording. The photo types are:

- a. **reference drawing*** - a top-down (overhead or bird's-eye) photo of your reference drawing, this make be on a different form.
- b. **subsegment drawing*** - a top-down photo of your subsegment drawing
- c. **top-down segment*** - a photo of the whole pathway segment
- d. **top-down subsegment*** - a photo of just the portion of the segment you're recording
- e. **stonemason's reference** - a close-up of stonemason's reference, e.g., name, initials, or mark
- f. **inscription** - a straight-on shot of the carved text face, filling the frame, ensuring every letter and punctuation mark is legible in good light. This should mirror your primary record of wording.
- g. **decorative element** - detail photo of decorative elements (e.g., hourglass, skull, cross) anywhere on the stone.
- h. **front of standing headstone** - full-height frontal shot of a vertical headstone from ground to top
- i. **back of standing headstone** - full-height shot of the gravestone's rear face (even if blank)
- j. **unique element(s)** - any singular feature (e.g. embedded metal grate, carved out block, likely place of adornment), capture it in context and detail in comments.
- k. **other** - any extra view that clarifies a feature not covered above (detail of weathering pattern, etc.).

Duplicate each shot

For every photo you take, shoot it **twice in immediate succession**:

1. **With** your photo-reference card in view – see card requirements below
2. **Without** the card

Teams will be issued photo cards when they're assigned their segments. Always start by placing the card in the frame, snap the shot, then remove it and repeat from the same position.

Photo-reference card

Each card will have the date and a number, for example ###Ll#; BHBG#: **136Bf4** – this refers to segment **136**; subsegment **B**; photo type **f**, which is for an inscription; and **4** means it is the fourth image of the inscription.


- Number range categories (###):
 - 001–274: pathway segments
 - 300–310: standing headstones
 - 400+: wall mounted gravestones
- Subsegments letter (L):
 - Upper case letters A, B, C and so forth for each subsegment gravestone; omit letters for single stone segments
- Photo Type (l):
 - Lower case letters a to k
- Sequence (#):
 - Include a number only if you take more than one photo of a photo type; start at 1

Pre-upload renaming (strongly recommended)

Before you upload, the best workflow is to rename each JPEG to its full BHBG code as it appears on the photo reference card or at a minimum the segment name for the batch of images. If this is not possible, simply drop the raw files (as they come off your camera) into the correct folders as described below. We will later batch-rename them.

Easy uploads

All gravestone recording photo uploads will live in Google Photo managed by Myra Giesen. Follow the following steps to upload your photos.

1. Click the following hyperlinks to view the album in your web browser. All the images in the album will be visible to you, even if you are not logged into Google.
 - 001-050: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/UkbfB9RyWMLuDfEh7>
 - 051-100: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/9jQU1gwdZsB98yoo7>
 - 101-150: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/geA3wrMtCXqfuLFq5>
 - 151-200: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/5Bb8MSbWRz9X5WbN6>
 - 201-250: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/3EqvwJTxBVE97ATA7>
 - 251-299: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/cJwXmYhTheU53RSdA>
 - 300-499: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/fG4QxHtQHJypafyZ9>
2. Click  (top-right) button to submit photos. Photos can be dropped or uploaded straight from your device into the album.
3. Please complete your upload **within 24 hours of taking them**.
4. If you run into any permissions or upload-errors, email Myra Giesen myra.giesen@newcastle.ac.uk right away so she can fix it.

19. Comments / Additional Notes

In this section, note of any aspects of the inscription or the person commemorated that seem unique or may require further investigation. This could include rare letter styles, unusual wording or design, or any details that hint at an interesting personal history or local significance. These details can help guide future research or conservation efforts by flagging areas that may need a closer look.

20. Help Record the Living Heritage of Ballast Hills

As you help care for and record the gravestones at Ballast Hills Burial Ground, we invite you to also notice the plants, birds, fungi, and insects that now call this historic site home. By sharing these observations through the *Wild Ouseburn* iNaturalist project, you help connect past lives with the site's continuing ecological story.

To join, simply download the **free iNaturalist app** by searching *iNaturalist* in your phone's App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android), then create an account and search for the *Wild Ouseburn* project under 'Projects'. Every sighting you contribute helps protect the biodiversity that is now part of Ballast Hills' ongoing legacy.