

Choosing a Headstone – Lastingpost.com

Introduction

A headstone is a lasting and unique memorial to a person's life. A well chosen headstone can express in simple words and image the essence of the life being commemorated. A person's family can find much comfort in having an enduring symbol of remembrance on which to focus their grief and which over time becomes a permanent celebration of their loved one's life.

There is no need to rush to choose the headstone. A decision made in haste may well be regretted later. Much better to take time and ensure the right choice is made.

Rules and Regulations

You should be aware that all cemeteries and churchyards will have rules and regulations governing the size and type of headstones they allow. Usually, churchyards will be subject to Diocesan rules which will be more stringent than the regulations for cemeteries. For example, most churchyards only allow sandstone or limestone and not granite headstones. The Stonemason you appoint will be able to advise you what is allowed and more importantly what is not in the chosen location for the grave.

Choosing a Headstone

There are four aspects involved in the choice of gravestone. These are as follows:

1. You will need to choose the type, texture and colour of the stone. There is a wide range of choice. Granite is shiny and comes in a wide variety of colours including black, dark grey, blue, pink, red or green. The advantage of granite is that it requires little or no maintenance and will remain unaffected by the weather. The other popular choice is marble which is white in colour and is good for carving. Marble is however susceptible to weathering and particularly to acid rain. The other problem is that unless it is cleaned every 6-12 months it loses its original colour. Other types of stone that have traditionally been used include slate (grey), sandstone and York stone (light brown), limestone (cream or blue), Portland (cream) and hornstone (blue or grey).
2. You will need to consider the shape and dimensions of the headstone.
3. The inscription and lettering style will need to be chosen.
4. Finally, you may want an image carved on the headstone. Traditionally, religious motifs were used but increasingly images of animals, landscapes and even buildings are being chosen. Another trend is for a photo of the person to be set onto a plaque or set in plastic. The techniques involved in this process have developed considerably in recent years and previous problems of fading are now much diminished.

Choosing a Stonemason

The choice of Stonemason (sometimes called Memorial Mason or Monumental Mason) is extremely important. He will assist you in choosing the stone, the inscription and any images you want. He will be able to advise you on local authority requirements and liaise with the appropriate authorities to ensure that the chosen headstone meets all rules and regulations. He should also take responsibility for all the paperwork involved in this. Finally, when the stone is prepared he will be responsible for installation.

Before appointing a Stonemason, you should confirm that the total quoted price includes all the lettering, installation fees and VAT. You should check how long the whole process will take and what guarantees will be given. You might want to also check if the Stonemason is a member of the Trade Association (please see below) and also whether he will use a ground anchor system when installing the headstone (please see below).

Unusual Headstones

An increasing number of people want something more than a traditional memorial in a plain shape. The opportunity to import memorials made at much cheaper prices is encouraging this trend. For example, a three foot half tonne solid granite headstone in the shape of a Newcastle football shirt would have cost in the region of £5,000 if made in the UK. As most of the work was completed in China, the total cost of this headstone was just over £2,000.

The Trade Association

The trade association for memorial masonry is called the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM). The Association has a strict code of ethics and business practice. All members must adhere to the NAMM Code of Working Practice which is nationally recognised as the industry standard, with most Burial Authorities insisting that memorials are fixed in compliance with the Code.

In the unfortunate situation that a dispute arises, the association will provide free mediation by way of a conciliation and arbitration service.

For further information on NAMM or to find your local NAMM memorial mason, please got to www.namm.org.uk/

Health and Safety

Health and Safety regulations have now invaded cemeteries and graveyards. In recent years local councils, fearful that someone might be injured by an unstable headstone, have demanded safer fixing methods of headstones and new guidelines were recently published by the Ministry of Justice on Managing the Safety of Burial

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Ground Memorials. For further information visit
www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease160109a.htm

In response to this, NAMM have developed a ground anchor system as a way of securing headstones to their foundations. This system will ensure that these headstones cannot be pulled or pushed over. This system has been adopted by many local authorities as their recommended solution to this problem.

Furthermore, a new scheme was set up in 2004 by NAMM called the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM). The Register comprises of accredited businesses and registered fixers who have displayed a proven level of competence. Members of BRAMM, who do not need to be members of NAMM, must have a public liability insurance cover of £10m. An increasing number of Stonemasons that fix headstones are joining BRAMM.

For further information on BRAMM, please go to www.namm.org.uk/bramm/

Useful Links

Memorials of Distinction
For quality memorials designed and crafted by experts.
www.memorialsofdistinction.co.uk

Memorials by Artists
For fine individual memorials designed by artists and available nationwide.
www.memorialsbyartists.co.uk

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