

GENEALOGY FROM A GRAVESTONE

NAME: sometimes include alias names. Married women are memorialised using their married surname. In Scotland however, married women are memorialised using their maiden name.

AGE: may be the year or possible birthdate and date of death (so you have to work it out!). Ages may be inaccurate because of informant's lack of knowledge.

RELATIONSHIP: usually husband or wife of ... (or some similar notation).

MILITARY/NAVAL SERVICE: usually includes rank and sometimes the regiment (incl. battalion) or ship on which they served. Often include gallantry decorations/awards.

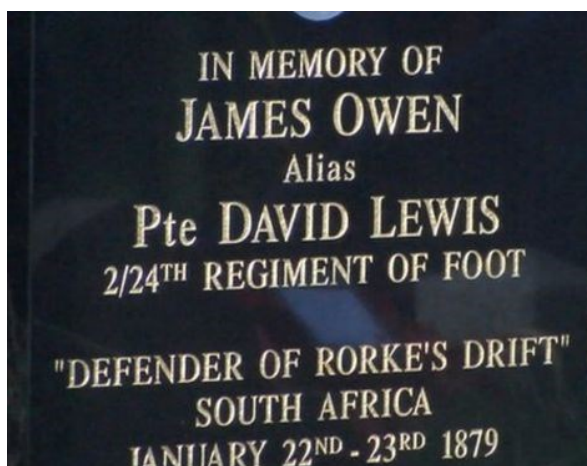
MEMBERSHIP OF FRATERNAL SOCIETIES: sometimes denoted by a symbol or the grave is in a special burial ground such as Quakers etc.

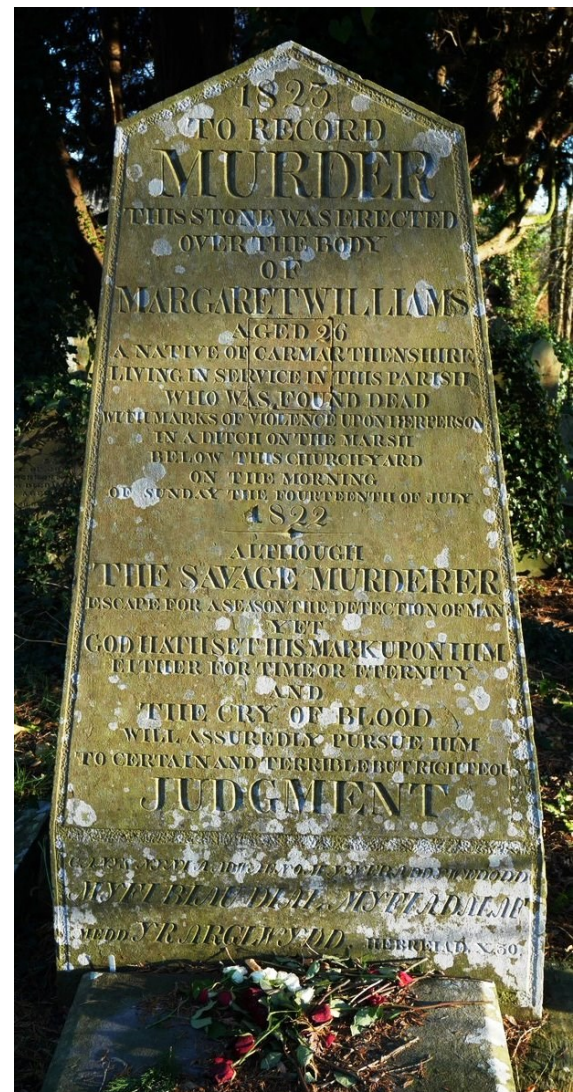
PLACE OF ORIGIN: not unusual where the deceased is an immigrant

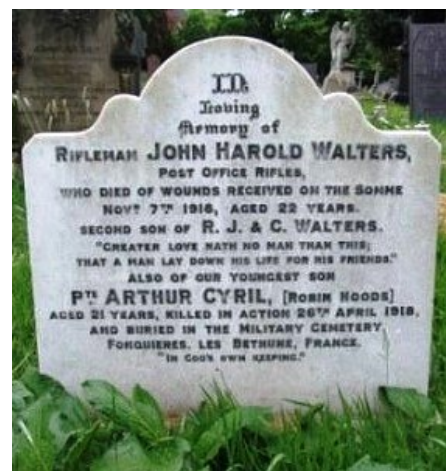
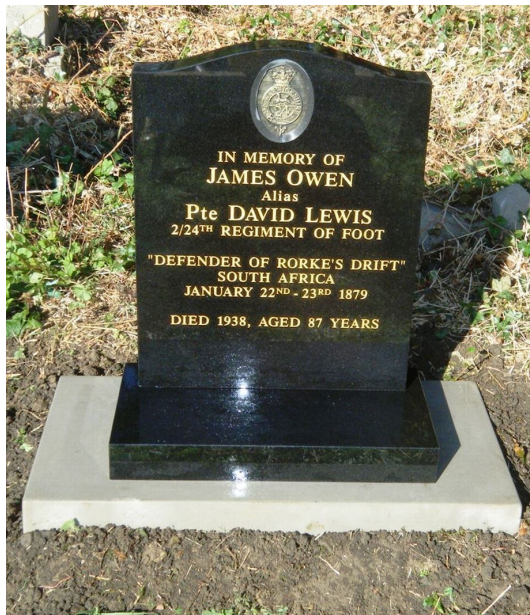
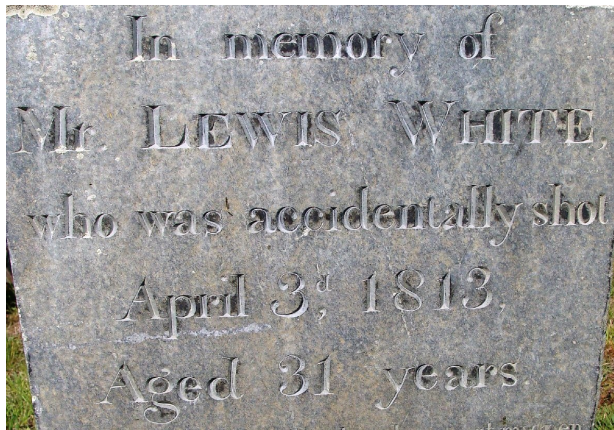
RELIGION: often denoted by the location of a grave in a churchyard or in a religious burial ground. May even include a symbol or be inscribed in another language e.g. Jews, French protestants etc.

May also contain a cause of death.

May be able to identify infant deaths of children you knew nothing about.







SYMBOLS FOUND ON GRAVESTONES

Angels on a gravestone represent guardianship of someone's soul and protection on their journey to 'heaven'. Weeping angels convey the sorrow of an untimely death.

Anchor symbolises hope and steadfastness to the Christian faith. It can also signify that the person was a sailor

Broken things symbolise a life cut short. A rose bud with a broken stem represents a girl who died before blossoming into womanhood. A broken link in a chain represents a death in the family.

Candle a broken candle symbolises a life that ended too soon.

Cherubs traditionally marked the grave of a child, guarding their soul on its journey to 'heaven'.

Circles represent hope of 'eternal life'. They are sometimes depicted in the form of a snake swallowing its own tail, or as a wheel. A broken wheel symbolises the end of someone's life on earth.

Cross Christian symbol of faith and the hope of 'resurrection' to 'eternal life' in 'heaven'. The Celtic cross is common in cemeteries across Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Dove represents love, peace and the freedom of someone's spirit. It's also a Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit and hope of 'resurrection' and 'eternal life'.

Skeletons are a depiction of 'Death' in human form, reminding visitors of their own mortality.

Skull is a reminder of our own mortality.

Clasped hands are a symbol of parting from a loved one who has died. They are also a promise of reunion when the bereaved person goes to 'heaven'.

Hand pointing up indicates gone to heaven

Hand pointing down "Hand of God", sometimes represent a sudden death

Star of David is a symbol of the Jewish faith. On some gravestones a Hebrew inscription is placed inside the star.

Sun is a symbol of life. A setting sun represents the end of life, and a rising sun indicates faith in 'resurrection'.

Urn a classical Greek symbol of mourning, symbolising bodies as a vessel for the soul. An urn covered in drapes on a Catholic gravestone represents death's 'final curtain'.

Snakes or Serpent usually indicate a Masonic follower



GRAVEYARD CEMETRY ETIQUETTE

Be respectful don't tread on graves, don't leave litter, respect those around who are mourning

Preserve the grave don't damage the grave as you investigate, rubbing a grave can damage the stone, only clean and clear in a recognised way (see later). Your goal is to retain the integrity of the gravestone for the future, not to damage it.

Contact the cemetery manager in active cemeteries always consult the cemetery superintendent. For churchyards contact the incumbent or the churchwarden. Their details are normally on the church notice board. They will often be able to help you locate the desired grave quickly or indicate the location where no stone exists or has been removed.

CLEANING AND GARDENING OF A GRAVESTONE

Cleaning gravestones has to be undertaken carefully so as not to damage either the base material or lettering. For the purpose of reading monumental inscriptions, the only areas which need attention are where the wording is, and then only to make the lettering sufficiently visible to record. Cleaning a whole monument is not necessary.

Depending upon the site of a grave, considerable work removing weeds, overgrown bushes and accumulated soil may be required. Because they are relatively heavy, stone memorials tend to sink over time, and some may have to be at least partially dug up.



TOOLS FOR “GARDENING”

Kneelers to protect knees & clothing from stones, mud, thistles etc.

Gardening gloves

Secateurs and small snips

Garden trowel and a hand hoe

Old wide blade

Large bags for removing green waste to a recycling centre.

Lawn edging spade for removing grass around edges, particularly kerbs. An edging spade can also dig out smaller sunken stones.

REVEALING AND READING INSCRIPTIONS

Holy Bible (and possibly a Latin Dictionary) to read epitaphs etc.

Water spray and container of water if there is no cemetery/churchyard tap

Used soft brushes such as an old washing up or toothbrush (new brushes are too coarse and may damage the stone/lettering).

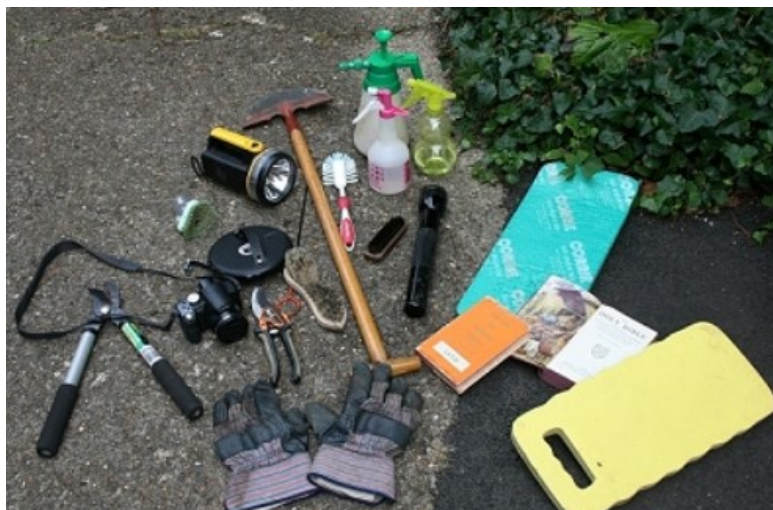
Mirror or home made foil reflector to angle the sun across the lettering when reading

Torch for use in shaded areas, under trees etc. to achieve same effect as a reflector

Tape measure to help in location of a grave position and recording the size of the headstone

Paper & pencil to record the information (don't use a pen they don't work in inclement weather)

Digital camera or smart phone with a good camera - to take pictures of the grave.



Headstone cleaning spray (Resurrect—available on Amazon). MUST be used in accordance with the instructions and not as a general cleaner. Simple technique—spray, agitate, leave a few seconds and rinse off.

TIP: Use Vaseline on any letters before cleaning with a proprietary cleaner this preserves them.

WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN GRAVESTONE CLEANING / GARDENING

Do not use:

Scrapers either metal or plastic.

Wire brushes.

Brute force ...!

Bleach or non-specialist soaps, chemicals, solvents etc - preferably use water only.

Pressure washers. Even on a 'low' or wide-spray setting they may loosen lettering, remove paint and damage the surface. Most old stonework is cleaned by soaking, not water-jets.

Granite and marble can be damaged by inappropriate cleaning more easily than other stonework.

Do not attempt to clean rusted iron memorials as this will damage them irreparably. Surface rust acts as a protective cover for good iron beneath so disturbing it causes the next layer to rust. The same applies to the Verdigris on copper

Do not stand on paving covering the central part of a kerbed plot. It may not be as solid as it looks, resulting in a sharp drop into the burial void beneath!

METHODOLOGY

1. Clear any vegetation which obscures a clear view of a monument, look for hidden kerbing and footstones, and examine fallen uprights and crosses.
2. Look for signs of lettering at the bottom of sunken and crooked uprights, and on kerbs.
3. Attempt to read as much of the inscription as possible without clearing or cleaning the grave. Some will be quite clear enough without further cleaning.
4. Starting from the top, spray the surface with water. Gently rub away surface debris and lichen with a soft brush. More water will need to be applied in most instances. The most effective method is to spray water onto the stone whilst brushing, as water helps clean both brush and surface and provides a lubricant, reducing the likelihood of damage. Clean from the top down, as it allows the water to soak the lower lines of lettering, and washes surface debris away as you progress downwards.
5. Dirty water, settling into incised lettering, helps to reveal the shapes of letters, particularly with horizontal memorials where mud or lichen-coloured outlines stand out better. Alternatively rub mud across the lettering. Leave the surface clean when finished.
6. Examine the wording from various angles. Worn lettering tends to become clearer when examined from one side rather than straight on.
7. Use a mirror to reflect sunlight onto the memorial. Shadows are helpful. If there is no sun, use a torch - the more powerful the better.
8. Obscure and worn lettering is often best read by two or more people together. Don't guess!
9. Carvings with lettering are frequently overlooked. They can be difficult to make out and liable to crumble unless cleaned very gently. Use a reflector and more than one person to read.
10. It is helpful to read initials and dates on footstones first because they might be clearer than what remains on a headstone.

11. Using a soft toothbrush between the letters is best. Where letters have already dropped off, they might be at the base of the monument, and thus provide clues, as can the small holes left where a letter has come away.

12. Use a Latin dictionary and bible to help decipher worn quotations. Or use an internet-enabled mobile phone or tablet to look them up (assuming you have a signal!)

13. Finally, write it down separating the lines, record location (section, plot etc.), and where practical photograph it. Pictures say more than words.

14. When examining kerbstones an edging spade is very useful as it can be taken down the edge without damaging the stone. The presence of a headstone does not mean there is no inscription on a kerb. Kerb inscriptions are normally on the inside edge of a kerb.

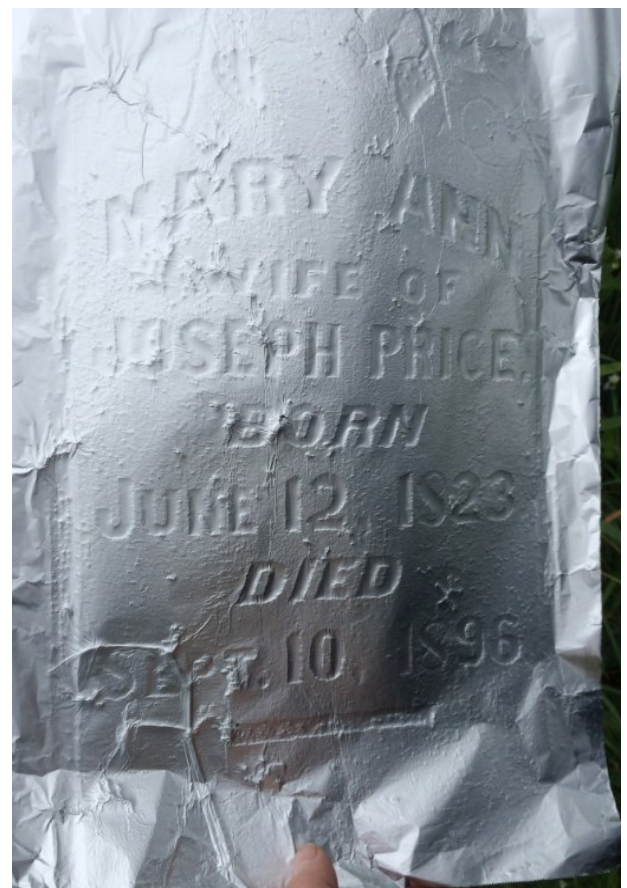
INTERPRETING THE “FAMILY” PLOT

The main purpose is to record what is on the gravestones but in many cases some interpretation is needed.

Some burial plots may include the graves of several family members with inscriptions on all sides. Inscriptions are usually invented by the relatives commissioning them. They may have had little grasp of grammar or spelling, and it is not a stonemason's job to correct it. The collected inscriptions are a part of someone's family history.

READING HARD TO READ GRAVESTONES

Cover them in foil and rub. Photograph the result for your records.



PHOTOGRAPH THE GRAVESTONE

Once you have prepared the gravestone and recorded the inscriptions then begin to photograph the grave. A good quality set of photographs is essential.

If you remove flowers or remembrance items to get the photograph make sure you replace them when finished.

Use quality photography equipment. A good digital camera that has auto-focus, flash, adjustable light settings, and zoom. Optical zoom is best because it allows you to get the most details in an image

Use a camera with an LCD monitor. This will allow you to check before going home that you have got all of the information you want captured taken clearly. If you can't read the inscription or it's out of focus, you'll know straight away.

Plan for the best lighting. This is the most important step as the fine details of the headstone are what you're keen to capture.

Orientate the grave. Morning light is recommended for headstones facing east. West facing gravestones are best photographed at the middle of the day and north facing stones are best photographed in later afternoon light. It is difficult to get a good photo if the stone is backlit.

Reflect light. You can redirect sunlight by the simple placement of a piece of white board with a foil covering. You can also use two mirrors to create light over a shadowed headstone.

Be aware that different surfaces photograph differently. Shiny surfaces reflect a lot of light and will require more positioning to avoid getting a blur of sunshine. Dull stone surfaces will often need dampening to help bring out the inscription clearly. Check your photos after taking them to see what adjustments need to be made for the headstone surface.

Take plenty of pictures. Digital cameras allow you to take many photographs, some of which won't work out as well as others and some of which simply serve as a record . Make use of this ability to take various shots of the headstone from differing angles and distances. Take photographs of the section of the cemetery so that you can document the location of the grave. Take a photograph of the cemetery sign or entrance to document the name and location of the cemetery.

You can also use an android or iPhone but these do not have all the features of a DSLR camera.

Photograph smooth and shiny granite gravestones at an angle to avoid getting a reflection of yourself. You can also wear dark clothing to minimize your reflection.

Be aware that many gravestones are not upright or straight due to settling. If you want your photograph to show it as straight account for this by slanting the camera, or fix it back home with a photo enhancing program on your computer.

If you know how to work with photographic filters, then use them; otherwise, don't over-complicate the experience.

MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS

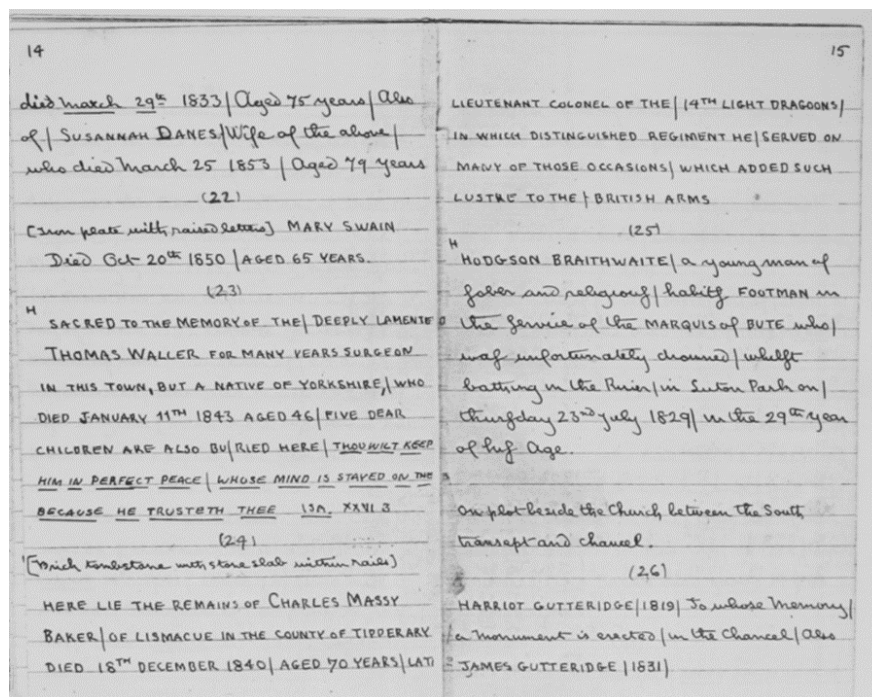
Most family history societies (and several private individuals) have recorded churchyard inscriptions which existed at the time of their survey. These are available as CDs, booklets and online datasets. Contact the local society where your ancestors lived to see if any MIs exist for the

the churchyard you ancestor was buried in. Some MIs date back to the early 20th century and some headstones/graves may well have now been destroyed, weathered or removed.

Some community societies and religious organisations have also transcribed information about their local municipal cemetery occupants.

USE THEM BEFORE EMBARKING ON YOUR VISIT TO QUICKLY IDENTIFY GRAVE LOCATIONS. Be aware of the date the inscription was taken.

Date	Year	Ashes	Surname	Forename	Initials	Age	Section	Plot
08 Feb	1901	-	WILLMOTT	Ada		3 w	A	847
06 Jul	1929	-	WILLMOTT	Ada	J	54	E	1279
10 Dec	1941	-	WILLMOTT	Agnes		71	E	1615
24 May	1907	-	WILLMOTT	Alfred		44	C	869
18 Mar	1932	-	WILLMOTT	Alfred		64	F	39
23 Sep	1931	-	WILLMOTT	Alice		45	E	1377
29 Apr	1941	-	WILLMOTT	Alice	M H	57	F	210
31 Jan	1894	-	WILLMOTT	Ann		78	B	68
26 Dec	1899	-	WILLMOTT	Ann	E	9 m	A	760
03 Feb	1890	-	WILLMOTT	Arthur	G	3	A	75
06 Aug	1893	-	WILLMOTT	Arthur	E	3	A	268



WHERE TO LOOK FOR GRAVES

Churchyard & nonconformist burial grounds

Municipal and private cemeteries (some with crematoria attached)

Prison burial grounds e.g. HMP Dartmoor

Workhouse and asylum burial grounds

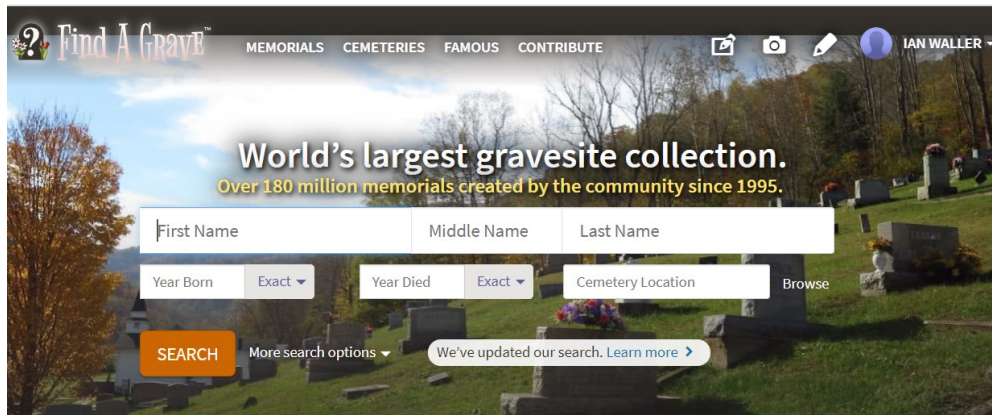
Royal Navy & military cemeteries

Disbanded cemeteries. e.g. Ardwick Cemetery Manchester, operative between 1830—1950. 80,000 graves. Now a community football ground and park with no gravestones remaining. Most disbanded cemetery records such as grave registers survive in record offices.

ADDING INFORMATION TO GRAVE FINDER WEB SITES

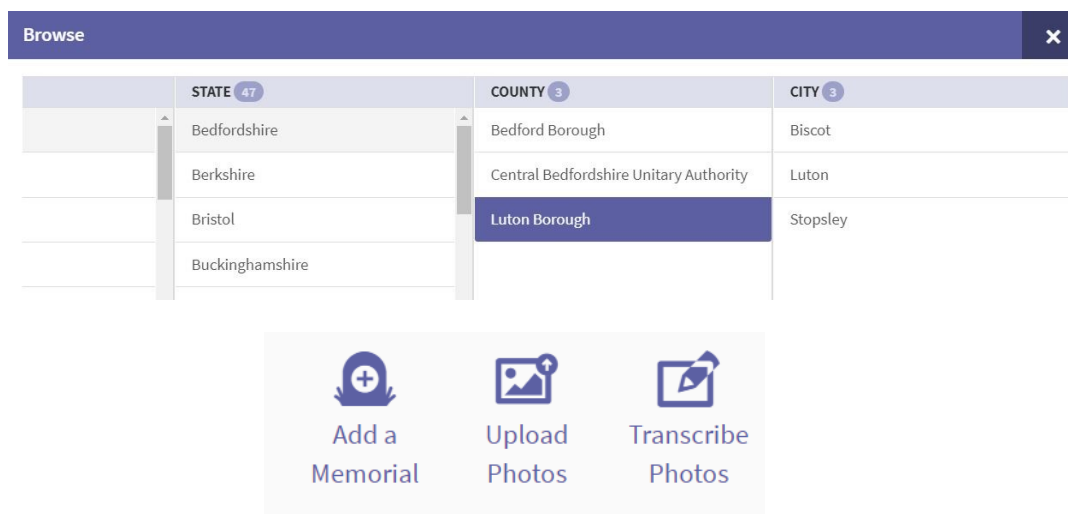
FIND A GRAVE www.findagrave.com

Find A Grave indexes are available on FamilySearch and Ancestry



The Find A Grave website features a search interface with the following elements:

- Navigation links: MEMORIALS, CEMETERIES, FAMOUS, CONTRIBUTE
- User profile: IAN WALLER
- Header text: "World's largest gravesite collection. Over 180 million memorials created by the community since 1995."
- Search fields: First Name, Middle Name, Last Name, Year Born (with Exact dropdown), Year Died (with Exact dropdown), Cemetery Location, and a Browse button.
- Buttons: A large orange SEARCH button and a link to "More search options".
- Footer: A message "We've updated our search. [Learn more](#)".



The Find A Grave browse interface includes a "Browse" header and a table for selecting location filters:

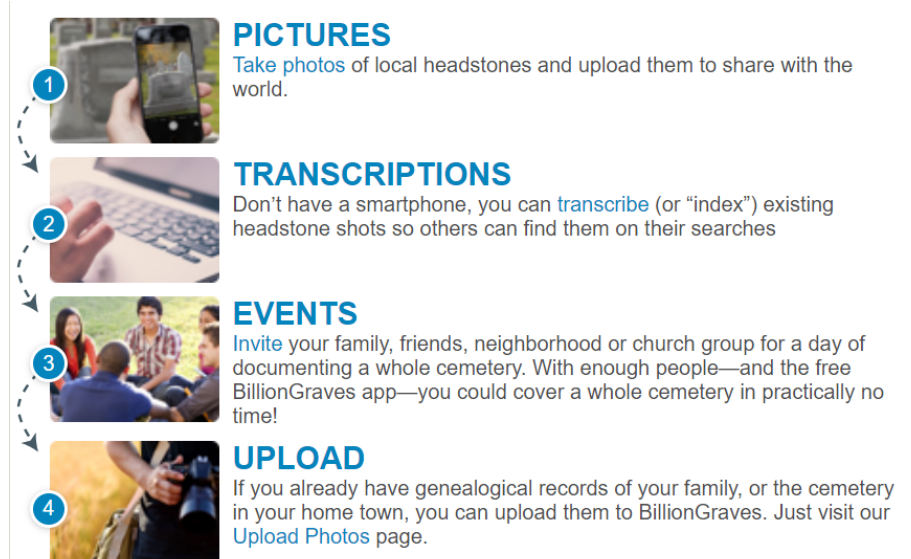
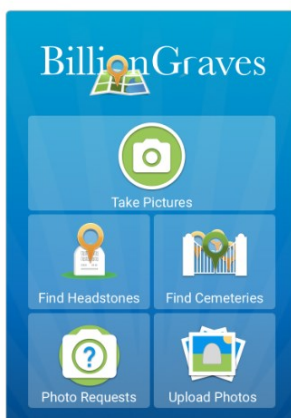
STATE ⁴⁷	COUNTY ³	CITY ³
Bedfordshire	Bedford Borough	Biscot
Berkshire	Central Bedfordshire Unitary Authority	Luton
Bristol	Luton Borough	Stopsley
Buckinghamshire		

Below the table are three icons with text: "Add a Memorial", "Upload Photos", and "Transcribe Photos".

BILLION GRAVES www.billiongraves.com

Billion Graves index is available on FamilySearch, My Heritage and FindMyPast

Ideal for smartphones—download the app, and follow the sequence. You can ignore step 3 (below) if you are just looking at one or two graves in a particular cemetery.



The Billion Graves app sequence diagram consists of four numbered steps:

- 1. PICTURES**
Take photos of local headstones and upload them to share with the world.
- 2. TRANSCRIPTIONS**
Don't have a smartphone, you can [transcribe](#) (or "index") existing headstone shots so others can find them on their searches.
- 3. EVENTS**
[Invite](#) your family, friends, neighborhood or church group for a day of documenting a whole cemetery. With enough people—and the free BillionGraves app—you could cover a whole cemetery in practically no time!
- 4. UPLOAD**
If you already have genealogical records of your family, or the cemetery in your home town, you can upload them to BillionGraves. Just visit our [Upload Photos](#) page.