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Mary J. Thornbush
Sylvia E. Thornbush

Heritage Stone
Conservation in Urban
Churchyards
Merging
Necrogeography,
Historical Archaeology,
and Geomorphology



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Mary J. Thornbush · Sylvia E. Thornbush

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Archaeology, and Geomorphology

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Mary J. Thornbush
Oriol College
University of Oxford
Oxford
UK

Sylvia E. Thornbush
School of History, Classics
and Archaeology
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh
UK

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Preface

World heritage monuments located in urban environments are susceptible to degradation and deterioration from exposure to pollution. There is much that can be gleaned from headstones as surviving heritage stone that contain historical information, and they have already been used to decipher trends in air pollution. This brief is based on field research since 2006 in urban churchyards located along a transect towards the British East Coast. It examines urban parish churchyards in a selection of cities to capture the remaining record, as well as record and investigate the existing contemporary record, based on inscriptions and motifs appearing on headstone panels. The work was performed by a cross-disciplinary team comprising a historical archaeologist and geomorphologist (physical geographer) interested in collaborating on a joint effort to examine not only what remains of the material record but also to assess the current state of this record and its likelihood of survival and sustainability as part of heritage stone for England and Scotland, UK. A long-term project spanning a decade (2006–2017) allowed for some cross-temporal comparisons of the condition of the headstones and the integrity of the overall record. The findings indicate that sites located in polluted parts of urban-scapes are more susceptible to damage, but a variety of environmental factors contribute to the current state of the headstones examined in this study. This is especially evident when coastal and interior (inland) sites are compared and when central locations are compared with more remote churchyards situated within city centres. Age, of course, plays a part in the breakdown of these rock monuments and is considered alongside evidence of soiling and weathering. In addition, lithology and stone type affect decay, with limestone markers apparent in England and Scotland mainly comprising sandstone headstones. The sustainability of these markers as part of cultural stone is questionable, with evidence of change at the annual scale that can easily be augmented at longer temporal scales.

Oxford, UK
Edinburgh, UK

Mary J. Thornbush
Sylvia E. Thornbush

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research Context	2
	Reference	3
2	Urban Sites	5
2.1	Introduction to the Sites	5
2.1.1	City Sampling	5
2.2	Methods Used in this Research	7
2.2.1	Data Analysis	7
2.3	Sites	8
2.3.1	Oxford, England	8
2.3.2	Scarborough, England	11
2.3.3	Inverness, Scotland	13
2.4	Conclusion	14
	References	14
3	Research Background	17
3.1	Necrogeography and Headstones Research	21
3.2	Lichens on Headstones	22
3.3	Other Research	24
	References	24
4	Assessing the Record	29
4.1	Site Selection	30
4.2	Field Methods	30
4.3	Analysis	31
	References	32
5	Stylistic Trends	33
5.1	Headstone Features: Motifs	34
5.2	Headstone Features: Shape	39

5.3 Conclusion	44
References	44
6 Current State	47
6.1 Oxford Churchyards	48
6.2 Old High Kirk, Inverness	51
6.3 St. Mary’s Churchyard, Scarborough	54
References	63
7 Conservation Issues	65
References	72
8 Conclusion	75
References	77
Index	79