

TAKING PHOTOS OF GRAVESTONES



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Planning to visit the graveyard? Most of us are not professional photographers but we all want to take a decent picture for our family tree. Here are some tips, that we have picked up while working on the Photo Project.

Many of the older stones have 'special messages' in the stone itself which are captured in the the form of

- the design of the stone
- symbols
- epitaph

For those interested in these 'special messages', it will be worth your while to take more than one photo of the particular stone. However, at eGGSA we are more interested in the inscriptions than the stone design.

A good photo will show a clear image and the information on the stone will be easy to read.



How to get those photos?

2. Take the photos close up.



If it is a special stone, rather take 2 or more pictures. One overview and one close up. You can always group the photos together in sub albums. Excess photos can be deleted afterwards. But it is not easy to get back to a cemetery to retake the photos.

3. The same goes for stones with complicated designs, or very big stones. Take more than one picture – that way you can ensure that you have captured all the details on the stone.



4. Watch out for the sun; it can cause havoc with your photos.



It will be easier to go back to the cemetery when the sun is in a better position. But for most of us it is not always possible and we have to improvise.

- Keep the flash of the camera off
 - Stand close to the stone try to cut the sky out of your picture
 - Zoom in on the name and dates,
 - Try standing to the left or the right of the stone when taking the picture
 - Somebody advised us to hold a big garden umbrella over the stone, while taking the photo
 - Flat stones on the ground:
 - take the photo from the side
 - stand at the top of the stone, with the sun behind you and take photo – the picture can always be rotated later
 - for smaller stones – use your body to block out the sun
 - If you are not sure about the quality of your picture – take more photos from various angles; remember you can always delete them later.
5. If you can see your own reflection in the stone, you are going to be in the photo. Move to the left or the right of the stone and zoom in. It is preferable to stand to the right – as the dates are easier to read then.



6. The flash also can reflect badly on shiny stones. We seldom use the flash; your batteries will last much longer.



Standing to the right of the stone when taking the picture

There are however certain stones that might require a flash. If you are not certain about your photo; take one picture with a flash and the other without a flash.

7. The effects of shadows, caused by surrounding plants and trees, can be minimized by using your body to block the light out or an umbrella, should you have one in hand. Smaller branches can simply be moved out of the way – which is also very effective.



8. Flower arrangements and weeds, often tend to block the dates and surname on a stone. Make sure that you can read all the inscriptions, before taking a photo.



9. A grave stone without a surname means nothing.

In the Cape there are a lot of graves with the surname at the bottom end of the stone and the names at the other end of the grave. Check to make sure that you have captured both. It might also be necessary to take 2 or more photos with these types of stones. In some instances the surname is on the back of the headstone.



10. Some headstones become buried in the ground over time. And very often the surname is obscured. You will have to take your spade and brooms with to clean the stones up.



Maitland cemetery – the stone was more than halfway buried under the ground

11. If the headstone is dirty clean it first with a cloth or a soft brush.



Stone covered with early morning dew



The same stone after a good brush, this inscription would have looked even better if we washed it down with water.

Beware of tree trunk type stones:

- Vertical tree trunks: Stand a bit to the right of the stone, so that you can see the dates clearly. A person can always guess the [J] of Jacobus, but you cannot guess the dates



- Horizontal tree trunks: You will have to get in under the bottom part of the stone to capture the dates properly



Zooming in onto the numbers

12. If you are not sure about the dates being captured, zoom in on them and take another photo.



These brown stones are always a challenge!! Watch out for them!

13. Unclear inscriptions can be brought back to life with chalk. We use ordinary black board chalk. Builders chalk tends to damage the headstones permanently.

- The letters can all be traced individually with the chalk



Individual letters traced on the stone – effective but time consuming

- or use the broadside of the chalk to highlight the inscriptions.



Using the broad side of the chalk is much quicker – but not always the answer

- A good brush over the stone can also enhance the results in some instances. The chalk dust settles into the engraved grooves and the letters becomes much clearer to distinguish.
- We have also experimented with water on the stones; and found that it works marvellously on some stones



Inscriptions recovered with water

- There are people who will advise you to use a mirror. By using a mirror to direct bright sunlight diagonally across the face of a grave stone, you can easily cast shadows in indentations which will makes inscriptions much more visible and easy to read. We have not tried this method yet!

14. Lichen can be removed with soap and water. Very often there is just one bit of a number or name that is covered with the lechin, and we just scrape the lichen off gently.

15. Photo size. For us 1 MB to 2 MB photo is adequate.

If you go smaller you will be able to take more pictures with your camera but you will sacrifice on the quality. When trying to enlarge the photo on your computer the image will break up like a broken mirror.

16. In addition to all the above:

- Wear comfortable shoes. Be prepared to sacrifice the shoes to all the thorns growing in the cemeteries. If you wear your Crocs you will suffer the consequences for months afterwards
- Use sun screen and wear a hat
- Take lots of energy boosters, like sweets, fruit and water to drink
- Take extra rechargeable batteries. They last much longer than ordinary batteries.
- Take extra memory cards
- Some headstones are very dirty; you might have to wash it down with water. Make provision for that.



Photo: Tobie de Villiers

17. Security is important, if you feel threatened in the cemetery about the mission.

Cameras are shiny objects and tend to draw a lot of attention. A person get so involved with taking photos that you do not realise that somebody is standing behind you asking for bread.



Members of our Maitland team – security armed with brooms and spades.

Submitting your photos to eGGSA

There are 3 options available to you:-

- Small volumes of photos can be e-mailed to us. But we do require the photos in LARGE FORMAT
- Larger volumes can be send to us on DVD
- The third alternative is for us to create a sub-album for you on the eGGSA website, where you can do your own uploads. Instructions are available to assist. We do have a couple of members who prefer this option.

Please group the photos according to the various cemeteries in sub-folders and mark the folders accordingly, prior to sending it to us. It does not help us, if you send us 100 photos with a list explaining what photo must go where – we never get it right on this side!

Doing the photo captions

Our team of volunteers will do the captions of the photos. It is easier for us to do the captions when the photos are kept in their original order, as you worked your way through the cemetery.

That way we get a 'picture' of your work method and we can easily create sub-albums where more than one photo was taken of a particular grave.

Should you prefer to label the photos on your side please give the please ensure that the photos belonging to one headstone has the same labels, eg

BLAAUW Sarah, SMITH John, WATSON Dean_1
BLAAUW Sarah, SMITH John, WATSON Dean_2
BLAAUW Sarah, SMITH John, WATSON Dean_3

Should the photos be marked:-

BLAAUW Sarah
SMITH John
WATSON Dean

Then the photos are not going to sit next to each other with the upload, and we will be unable to recognise the photos that can be grouped together.

If you have taken any photos side ways, DO NOT rotate the photos. The pixels are affected by the rotation; and the photo will loose the option to 'enlarge' on the web. We will do the required rotation once the photos are uploaded on the web

Good luck with your photos.

All the eGSA photos can be viewed on our website www.eggsa.org

For further queries about the Photo Project contact Alta Griffiths at cemphoto@ggsa.org

Compiled 10 February 2010
Revised 2 June 2011