

## What can you learn from your results?

Whenever we carry out a graveyard survey we can use our results to begin to draw conclusions. By analysing gravestone types and styles we can begin to see patterns that tell us about our ancestors, the choices they made to represent their life and memorial in death. The first simple way to analyse the results is to simply look at the forms of memorial and their popularity over time, i.e. ledgers, headstones, low monuments, crosses, etc. all having their own periods of popularity.

Unfortunately very few memorials survive from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gravestones of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries are normally simple in design, usually consisting of nothing more than the initials of the deceased and a date of birth. There are two types of gravestone during this period, the headstone and flat slabs. The headstones of this date are very small, unlike the memorials of later or today. The fact that we have very few lasting monuments before this date may show a change from using wood to create memorials into stone or it may represent the first time using a permanent memorial to mark your resting place came into use.



*An example of a grave with nothing but initials of the deceased and the year*



*An example showing the whole name and year*

## **Headstones**

By far the most common form of memorial is the headstone. Headstones from the late 17<sup>th</sup> and earlier 18<sup>th</sup> centuries may have a simple flat top. But an early alternative is the 'bedstead' type, because their curved tops look like the chairs and bedsteads used at the time. The reason for this style may be due to the fact that local carpenters and joiners were often used to make the gravestones, transferring their furniture designs into stone.

In some cases the 'bedstead' comes in pairs, with the larger stone acting as the headstone and the smaller as the foot stone. This represents the image of the bed below which the deceased lies in eternal rest.



*An example of a 'bedstead' grave*

The 'bedstead' phase was followed by the neo-classical. This saw the use of scrollwork, pediments and sarcophagi carved into the older forms of monuments. Simple flat top gravestones continue to be popular. The time in which the neo-classical remains popular varies. Non-conformists, for example, continued to use the neo-classical design long after it was deemed unfashionable in Anglican graveyards.

Headstones generally increased in size during the later 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One reason could be that at this time there was a greater increase in marking graves with permanent markers; the size of your monument made it easier to see and attract attention, the larger the monument the easier it would be to see and the ability to afford a larger monument would highlight your wealth and status. Also the way in which graveyards were managed may provide an answer. Graveyards were often managed as a hay meadow, allowing the grass to grow before harvesting. The taller monuments would be clearly seen whilst the earlier, smaller monuments would be lost from view.

A design that lasted a long time was the round-top headstone. In some cases it can be linked to a Romanesque revival, where dog-tooth decoration is used around the top of the stone. Commonly they are found with columns down the side. This style remained popular, still being used into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Another major stylistic phase is the gothic revival. This is often represented by round sectioned columns carved on the side of the headstone; these may be in an exotic coloured stone, such as marble and granite to create a bichrome effect.



*A stone cross made to look like it's made out of wood*

Other memorial styles that were also popular with the gothic style in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the log design. This common style was normally made out of non-local stone such as granite or marble and made to look like wood. It may have been made to look as though it was on a rocky base.

From the 1920s monuments became smaller again. This may have been influenced by the great number of dead during World War I. These new smaller headstone were often made out of non-local material, often marble.



*An example of a kerbed memorial*

During this time you do see new fashions. Kerbs, previously used to define a plot and occasionally used to house cast iron railings, become a popular form of monument themselves. Some were inscribed whilst others incorporated a small headstone or other inscribed element.

Modern headstones are relatively small and unvaried. This may be due to the constraints placed on style, form and materials by churchyard regulations. It may also be a reflection, however, of today's society and the way in which we remember our dead.

### **Statuary and Crosses**

On a grander scale the two most common monument types found in the graveyard are figures and crosses. Figures become popular from the 1880s onwards and were often made from exotic materials, particularly marble, with many sculptures being imported from abroad. Angels were the most popular but the Virgin Mary, mourners and in some cases the deceased are portrayed. Statuary is often rare in churchyards but can be found in most cemeteries.

Crosses are seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Gothic revival. However, the style became most popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*A cross, note also the use of the IHS symbol*

The most prominent is the simple cross. Crosses, unlike statues, can found in churchyards.

### **Tombs**

Tombs can be found in two forms; those with a horizontal axis (chest and table tombs) and those with a vertical axis (pedestal tombs). Horizontal chest and table tombs are the most common type of tomb memorial, being most popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



*A chest tomb*

Chest tombs are box like structures with the sides of the monument closed in. Some chest tombs may be solid but the majority are hollow inside. The panels may be plain or decorated, normally with

a simple border within which an inscription can be set, but in a few regions complex designs and symbolic scenes are found.



*A chest tomb displaying decorated panel*

Table tombs are made up of a flat top supported on legs, hence their name. These usually occur with four legs, one at each corner, although some have six legs, three on each side. The shape of the leg varies and whilst normally made out of stone they can sometimes be made out of metal. Inscriptions occur on the top.

Another form of table tomb popular in some areas during the 18<sup>th</sup> century had solid ends, getting narrower at the top, with a central spinal panel joining these and supporting the top.



*A collapsing tomb*

It must be remembered that many tombs have become unsafe over the years and have collapsed or been dismantled for safety reasons. As a result it may be that the table tops have been placed on the ground and so now look like ledger slabs. In this case look at the edges as table slabs can be recognised by their moulded edge.



*A pedestal tomb*

Pedestal tombs are usually square or rectangular in shape but can be found in the round or even polygonal. Many are in some form of classical or Gothic style.

The broken column is said to represent life cut short but sometimes this design is chosen for the elderly. It is a design that is not found in great numbers within the burial ground but is widespread throughout the country.



*An obelisk*

Other designs which are found in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century graveyard are obelisks and columns surmounted with an urn, often draped. These are normally found in granite and although a range of colours were used, the most popular were grey, black, pink and red. Both these designs are particularly common in non-conformist graveyards.





The 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the development of the low monument. These were often inspired by the Gothic revival and had stylistic similarities with medieval grave covers. These were seen as a prestigious memorial. Low monuments could be placed directly on the ground but were often set on top of one or more steps.



*An example of a low monument*

Sources used:

Recording and Analysing Graveyards by H Mytum. 2000 (reprinted 2002) CBA Practical Handbook in Archaeology 15

<http://www.ejclark.force9.co.uk/index.htm>