

# Types of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Graves

(With thanks to The Friends of Beckett Street, Cemetery, Leeds)

Several names for different types of grave were used in the nineteenth century, some of which overlapped or were interchangeable.

## COMMON GRAVE

The general term for a grave belonging to the owners of the cemetery, in which no private burial rights existed. Common graves were filled over the course of a few days with the bodies of unrelated people who died during that period and who could afford no grave of their own.

No headstone was erected, so the occupants were uncommemorated. (See the LOCK-UP GRAVE and PUBLIC GRAVE sections below.)

### 'PAUPER'S GRAVE'

A pauper by definition was a penniless person buried by the Board of Guardians or other authority in the UK this could be the Poor House, the Local Authority, the Public Board of Health or even the Police (i.e., a burial at public expense).

Any common grave would probably contain some paupers as well as some people whose families had managed to pay for the burial, there is no such thing in statute as a 'pauper's grave', and the term is never used officially.

#### LOCK-UP GRAVE

(Probably the same thing as 'OPEN GRAVE') The cheapest category of common grave; there were usually three prices,

for stillborn babies,

for children under 7 years of age,

and for persons over 7.

It appears that these graves were not completely filled in after each burial. Instead, a wooden 'door' was locked in place on to some kind of framework around the grave. When the grave was full the contraption was removed so that the grave looked like any other.

The last mention of 'lock-up' graves in cemetery minutes is in 1891. During the nineteenth century 5 shillings was paid to bury a person over 7 years old in a lock-up grave.

A 1921 price list quotes this for what it calls simply 'common graves'.

#### PUBLIC GRAVE

Another type of common grave. The grave was filled up completely after each internment, so that the deepest burial involved most work and cost the largest amount (14 shillings during the nineteenth century).

This type was still known as a 'public grave' in 1921.

Headstones were sometimes added by families sometime after the internment.



The Common Burial Grounds of Flaybrick (Birkenhead) and Greenock Cemeteries (Note that Flaybrick's burials include two Commonwealth War Graves)

#### PRIVATE GRAVE

A plot of ground purchased by a person who then had the burial rights to the grave(s) dug in it, confirmed by a parchment certificate, a 'grave paper', or in Scotland a Lair Certificate. The Burial Grounds Authorities kept a duplicate.

Separate fees would be paid for the plot, for the making of the grave (sometimes as a brick-lined vault), for each burial in it, and for the right to erect a headstone or other monument.

Usually there is no time limit on the right of the owner or his family to the grave; they could expect to lie there for all time.

Some graves were well cared for, usually by the relatives of those buried in them. Other families paid a retainer to ensure that the cemetery authority would tend the grave for evermore; this was called a 'perpetuity', but these agreements are now, frequently, no longer honoured.



A private grave in Rutherglen Cemetery