

## Delusions of Grandeur? The Influence of Company Management, Civic Pride and Private Sentiment upon the Cemetery Landscape at York



Fig. 1 Gravestones in York Cemetery

“No city in the kingdom possesses a more beautiful cemetery than ours. There the dead may rest in peace...beneath the verdant hillocks of the *Père la Chaise* of York.”<sup>1</sup>

Stepping inside York Cemetery today (fig. 1), we may be surprised to learn that in 1847 a local pamphlet described this site as the “*Père la Chaise* of York” and the most beautiful cemetery in the Kingdom. Indeed it is tempting to dismiss these claims as mere delusions of grandeur on the part of the author, who was himself a local York man. Yet York Cemetery’s story provides a valuable balance to the wealth of research that has focussed on exceptional, high-status cemeteries, like *Père Lachaise* (fig. 2). York is not just a typical British cemetery. It also reflects the needs of a specific local community and the vision of one particular cemetery company. This paper will look at how cemetery management and public use influenced commemoration and the design and organisation of the cemetery’s landscape.

### Establishment of York Cemetery

York Cemetery opened in 1837. In common with most cemeteries established in the UK during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the site was founded by a joint-stock company.<sup>2</sup> Calls for a cemetery had initially been made five years earlier, shortly after a cholera outbreak. Prompted by the difficulties involved in disposing of the cholera victims, the York City Corporation completed a survey of the city’s burial grounds. This report found York’s parish churchyards were insufficient in number, inconvenient in location and unsanitary in condition and as a result a threat to both public health and sensibilities. York Minster, a significant historical and administrative centre of the Church of England, initially stepped forward with a plan to establish several new burial grounds across the city. The church however failed to implement their scheme. When the York City Corporation also failed to act, the matter was finally settled at a public



TOMB OF MARSHALL DEE PERMA  
1800. Long Hill, Rome.



TOMB OF LA FORTY AND MOLLERIE  
1800. Long Hill, Rome.



Fig. 2 Tombs in Père Lachaise, 1822

Fig. 3 Sarcophagus and sphinx gate piers, York Cemetery

meeting which resolved to establish a cemetery by creating a company whose capital would be raised by selling 600 shares at a cost of £10 each.<sup>3</sup> The York Public Cemetery Company was founded in 1836.

The Company's decision to locate the cemetery outside York's city walls adhered to widespread preferences for keeping burials away from areas of population. The cemetery's location, however, was also specifically selected to be at a convenient distance for York's poor, as well as more affluent, citizens to use.<sup>4</sup> This is the first of several examples of a civic ethos of the Company influencing the planning of their cemetery. Originally, the cemetery covered just over eight acres, although only five acres were set out as cemetery grounds. The site has been extended over time to its present extent of twenty-five acres.<sup>5</sup> At its opening, York's landscape and buildings followed the fashions of the day (fig. 4). The entrance and enclosures were distinctive aspects of cemeteries, offering not only security but reflecting the demarcation of space away from the living by adopting the iconography of death. The gateway and enclosing wall at York were embellished with stone carvings of a sphinx, sarcophagus, and urns (fig. 3). Once through the gateway, the visitor was met by a series of paths arranged as flowing, serpentine walks, whilst the eastern half of the cemetery sat on an elevated terrace with paths laid out in an interlinked concentric pattern (fig. 4).

In common with most early British cemeteries, the architecture at York was executed in the Greek neo-classical style. Buildings included a gatehouse and chapel, under which the cat-

acombs were placed. Originally, the Cemetery Company's stone yard was also based within the cemetery's walls but as the grounds developed this was soon relocated off-site. An 1838 guidebook to the city of York describes the chapel as a highly conspicuous feature within the surrounding landscape, whose general proportions were based on the temple of Erechtheus at Athens.<sup>6</sup> York's chapel was used by all religious denominations and lay on the dividing line between the consecrated ground for Anglican burials to the east, and the unconsecrated area for the burial of Nonconformists and Roman Catholics to the west (fig. 5).

Cemetery landscapes were defined not only by their plan and buildings but also by their planting. The 1838 guide book describes a cross formed by shrubs at the right of the cemetery's main entrance which was intended to cast a solemn shade in keeping with the site's funerary purpose, although this feature no longer exists. Other planting at the cemetery included lawns as well as flowerbeds, hedges, trees and shrubs. The Cemetery Company employed a resident gardener and in 1837 the Company instigated a gardening design competition, which offered a first prize of five guineas.<sup>7</sup>

Little is known of early cemetery landscapes within the UK, since most cemeteries established during the 1820s no longer survive, but it is thought that their layout followed a more functional, grid-style pattern.<sup>8</sup> York's design followed the general principles of a garden cemetery; a style exemplified three years earlier by London's Kensal Green, which had been established

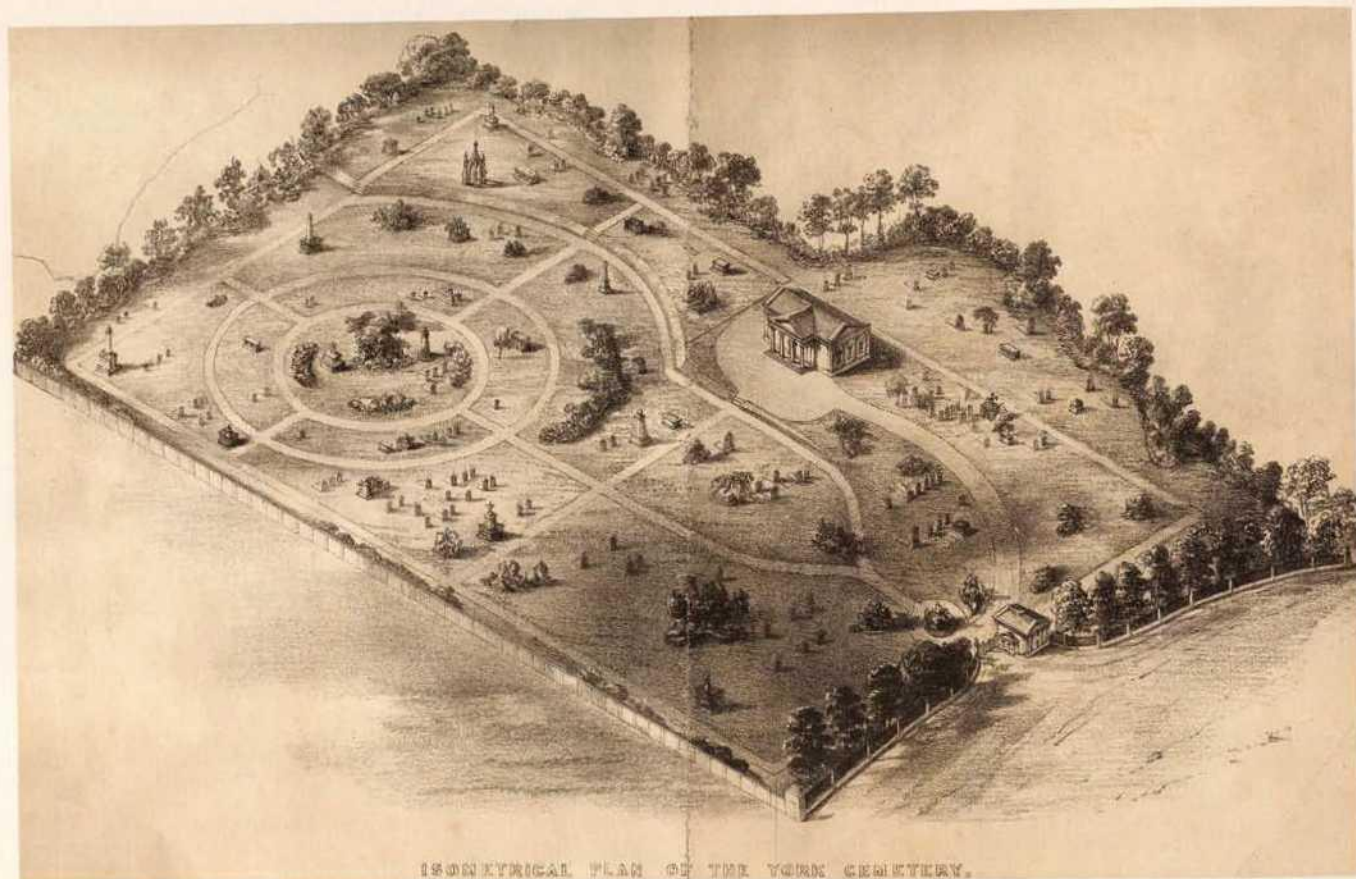


Fig. 4 York Cemetery, 1843

in 1834. The move from a functional burial area to a consciously designed landscape, in the manner of a pleasure garden or a public park, marked the beginning of the garden cemetery movement in the UK. The garden cemetery style was specially contrived for public recreation and education, but also to reflect new sensibilities towards death. The roles of cemeteries for both the living and the dead were stressed by leading designers and commentators of the day. To Strang, cemeteries should be "beneficial to public morals" and "the most convincing token of a nation's progress in civilisation and the arts".<sup>9</sup> Numerous depictions of cemeteries portray visitors admiring memorials or making their way along tree-lined walks (figs. 6 and 7). Indeed, the 1838 city guidebook described York Cemetery as one of the most interesting walks in the neighbourhood. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the gravesite held special importance as a place to commemorate personal relationships between the living and the dead and there was a general feeling that the grave should belong to the family of the deceased for perpetuity. The large, carefully designed grounds of cemeteries provided the bereaved with the opportunity to purchase such graves and afforded them with the space to erect gravestones permanently.<sup>10</sup> The garden cemetery stood in stark contrast therefore to the horrors of the overcrowded city churchyard where each new burial required disturbing those already laid to rest.

#### The public response to York Cemetery

The public's response to the opening and design of York Cemetery was positive. Newspapers reported that 2,000 local people attended the cemetery's opening consecration ceremony. Indeed, in his inaugural speech York's Lord Mayor described how the

cemetery would be greeted with pleasure by York residents in consequence of the crowded state of their churchyards. Newspapers reported that those attending the ceremony were "a gay and lively throng – which rather than recalling the solemn purpose of the site – were perfectly in keeping with the cheerful looking garden into which the site had been converted".<sup>11</sup> The first annual general meeting of the York Public Cemetery Company recorded that they had received repeated testimonials by citizens of York to the "beauty and excellence of the general arrangement of the buildings and grounds and the attention paid to keeping in order and planting the grounds, where their loved ones were buried".<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the public enjoyment of the cemetery and its grounds was not restricted to an audience of local residents. A letter written by a local citizen to the *Yorkshire Gazette* in 1850, described how:

"Amongst the attractions of York, the cemetery occupies a high rank. Whenever a pleasure train arrives I meet large parties on their road to explore it. Nor is it to be wondered at, considering the natural beauty of the situation and the taste with which it is laid out".<sup>13</sup>

Cemeteries were an important feature of urban landscape design and enveloped by notions of the civilising nature of cities, but cemeteries were not simply passive indicators of urban improvement; they could also actively enhance the reputations of individual cities and towns.<sup>14</sup> York residents felt strongly about the appearance of their cemetery. The above letter to the *Yorkshire Gazette* continues with suggestions for how the cemetery's layout and planting could be rendered yet more attractive if parts of the grounds were transformed into an arboretum to contain rare foreign trees.

On a business basis, however, the cemetery was less of an immediate success. At the first general meeting in 1838, eighty-



Fig. 5 York Cemetery chapel



Fig. 6 Glasgow Necropolis, c. 1840s

seven burials were reported for the cemetery's first year; whereas during the same period, around 1,000 burials had taken place elsewhere in York. By 1846, patronage of the cemetery had risen to around one-third of all the City's dead.<sup>15</sup> In 1854, when all of York's city-centre churchyards and Nonconformist burial grounds were closed, York Cemetery gained a virtual monopoly over burial provision. As well as bringing financial rewards for the Cemetery Company, this increased patronage also brought its own troubles. Cemetery staff frequently struggled with vandalism and theft. In 1869, in response to anti-social use of the site, the Cemetery Company chose to heavily curtail public access to the cemetery on Sundays. This action brought a public outcry as many people lost their main opportunity to visit the graves of loved ones. Local citizens waged a campaign through the press and petitioned for increased Sunday opening hours. However, it wasn't until nearly twenty years later, in 1885, when the Cemetery Company relented and granted public access to the cemetery on Sunday afternoons.<sup>16</sup> Letters to local newspapers show that during this time the public's perception of the cemetery landscape had also begun to change. A letter published in 1872 complained about burial overcrowding and the resulting offensive smells at the cemetery which "formerly used to be a beautiful and retired spot, where the mourner could frequent in pleasant walks and look with sweet consolation on the grave of a loved one".<sup>17</sup> A letter printed in 1876 noted how, away from the cemetery's entrance, both public and private graves alike were overgrown with grasses and weeds reaching knee height.<sup>18</sup> In 1872 another York resident's letter complained that the mean interior of the chapel was akin to a third-class railway station waiting room and was simply not in keeping with the fine architecture of the building's exterior nor the well maintained cemetery grounds.<sup>19</sup> The public held clearly defined expectations for cemetery access, maintenance, design and comfort that ultimately the company struggled to meet.

The lack of care over the cemetery's upkeep by the Company elicited strong public reproach, especially where shareholders appeared to continue to reap financial benefits from the cemetery:

"I have visited several cemeteries, and in no instance have I seen such a thorough disregard for decency as in the one in York... What must be the feelings of those ... visiting the resting place of their loved ones, [with] every surrounding [area] looking painfully desolate and altogether disregarded by the company. I cannot suppose that the Directors are influenced by a desire to have as much profit as

possible from the public (who in this matter cannot at present help themselves), but, surely 10 per cent with a bonus should serve to keep the grounds in better order, and every one interested in the cemetery has a right I think to so much consideration."

Letter signed by A LOVER OF DECENCY<sup>20</sup>

The letters, both complementary and critical, which appeared in the local press reveal that York citizens felt a sense of ownership towards the cemetery and held defined expectations for the standards of its design, appearance and management. These standards were based on notions both that the cemetery harnessed a collective civic identity for York and its population but also on its ability to provide individuals with a suitable space to mourn loved ones.

#### York Cemetery's design as a reflection of cemetery management

At York, the cemetery's buildings, planting and layout were all designed by one man, a local architect named JP Pritchett (fig. 4). Walker, the local foundry responsible for the cemetery's gates and railings, later went on to produce ironwork for the entranceway at the British Museum in London. After York, Pritchett designed at least eight more cemeteries across the UK and became a leading figure in 19th century British cemetery design.<sup>21</sup> Pritchett's career suggests that York's landscape was viewed positively enough by other cemetery companies for him to be able to successfully launch a family business specialising in cemetery design. Indeed, documentary evidence shows that York's design could be seen as a favourable model to imitate. In 1846, members of the Northampton Cemetery Company visited several cemeteries across Britain and one of these was York.<sup>22</sup> These visits aimed to obtain ideas, plans and estimates to help them build their own new cemetery and a report describing the Northampton group's findings survives. This, along with other documentary evidence,<sup>23</sup> reveals how individual cemetery companies might impose quite different regulations for burial and commemoration and that these rules might result in quite different cemetery landscapes.

In York Cemetery, burials took place either in the open cemetery ground or at the chapel (fig. 5), where facilities included vaults under the portico and catacombs. The Cemetery Company offered several classes of burial plot, known as private,



Fig. 7 Abney Park Cemetery, London 1869

public, second class and children's graves. Private and public graves were available from the time the cemetery opened, while second class and children's graves were later innovations. Private graves were owned and used by individual families. Public graves, also known as 'common graves', were analogous to churchyard pauper graves. These plots remained in the ownership of the cemetery company and held multiple interments. The deceased interred in public graves did not normally bear any relationship to one another, however, save the proximity of their death dates. In fact, those buried together in public graves in the unconsecrated half of the cemetery did not even necessarily share the same religious denomination as each other. A survey of the York Cemetery Company's burial registers shows that public graves could hold between five and forty-eight individuals, with figures ranging between seven and ten bodies being the most common.<sup>24</sup> It was York Cemetery Company policy that once a public grave had been closed it would be planted over and never reopened. In 1848, the York Cemetery Company introduced a third type of burial plot, known as second-class graves. These bore two essential distinctions from public graves. Firstly, these graves would contain a maximum of six persons and secondly, the deceased would be commemorated on a standard company-supplied gravestone that marked the grave. Other Cemetery Companies, including Rusholme Lane in Manchester, Saint Mary's in Liverpool, and Sheffield offered similar burial and commemoration packages.

Several cemetery companies distinguished between areas of private graves and the areas set aside for public or common burials. For nearly all the Victorian period, the York Cemetery Company elected to intermix the location of their public and private graves. York's strategy was sufficiently unusual for the Northampton delegation to remark most approvingly upon its practice. There were two reasons for the York Cemetery Company's decision. Firstly, they didn't wish to marginalise public graves by isolating them within the least valuable part of the cemetery, as for example happened at Abney Park where the common graves were placed at the site's furthest periphery.<sup>25</sup> And secondly, the York Cemetery Company was astute enough to realise that the mixing together of public and private graves would bring other benefits. Most public graves did not have gravestones placed upon them, whereas most private graves did. The York Cemetery Company realised that gravestones on private graves when surrounded by public graves were likely to have greater prominence within the cemetery landscape. York's system was therefore designed to keep all cemetery users happy but it also aimed to



Fig. 8 Area for infant burials, York Cemetery

achieve an ideal for how gravestones should look within the landscape (fig. 4), an aesthetic that bears little resemblance to the densely packed rows of gravestones which had evolved by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 1). It is perhaps no coincidence therefore, that by this point in time the York Cemetery Company also chose to change its policy on mixing graves and created a separate area solely for public burials in the 1899 eastern extension of the cemetery grounds.

When York opened in 1837, its public graves were among the most affordable of all the cemeteries in the North of England.<sup>26</sup> To ensure that York's public graves were within the means of even the most limited of incomes, the company calculated the cost of their public graves on a sliding scale, with prices linked to property rates. Indeed, the lowest price for burial in a public grave simply covered the basic costs incurred by the York Cemetery Company. In contrast, private graves could be more expensive at York than at other sites.<sup>27</sup> Final costs depended on the size of plot and if the grave was vaulted or brick-lined but York applied these prices across the site as a whole. Other cemetery companies, including those as Edinburgh and Guernsey, charged a range of prices for private plots depending upon the 'exclusivity' of a grave's location. At Glasgow Necropolis, for example, the most expensive and highest status graves surround the statue of John Knox at the top of the site. Indeed the increasing scale of monumentality shows that as one climbed the hill at the Necropolis, one also climbed Glasgow's social hierarchy (fig. 6).

York, unlike many other companies, chose to impose limited fixed social divisions upon their cemetery landscape. No burial sections were restricted for the sole use of different religious groups, although one half of the site was consecrated by the Church of England and the other half left un-consecrated. This arrangement meant that all denominations could be buried within York Cemetery. This might not be possible at other sites if their ground were entirely un-consecrated, as Abney Park,<sup>28</sup> or divided into fixed areas for the exclusive use of different denominations. The only example of an area of York cemetery set aside for use by a specific social group was created in the early twentieth century, when two small plots of land were established exclusively for infant burials (fig. 8).

Every British cemetery or churchyard required the bereaved to submit their gravestone design and inscription for approval to the site's owners before it could be erected. The rules dealing with gravestones appear to have been more flexible at York than at some other cemeteries. York's rules permitted any type of gravestone to be erected over any public or private grave. Indeed

at York, should they choose to, the bereaved had the right not to erect any gravestone at all. At other cemeteries a range of restrictions could apply. York did not enforce a time limit for the length of time within which a gravestone had to be erected over a grave. In contrast, if a memorial was not erected on a private grave within twelve months of purchase at Great Yarmouth, Rusholme Lane in Manchester, St Mary's in Liverpool and at Gravesend then, without special dispensation, the right to put up a gravestone was forfeited forever. London's Kensal Green enforced the same rule over an even shorter period of six months. Other cemetery companies, including Great Yarmouth and Rusholme Lane, operated a fine system after three months for each month a grave lay without a gravestone. If gravestones were not placed on private graves then some companies ruled that the rights to the grave would be forfeited and they would revert back into the ownership of the cemetery company, regardless of the fact that a grave may initially have been sold in perpetuity.<sup>29</sup>

At York, memorials could be erected over all graves and vaults in the open cemetery. Two types of burial, second class graves and interment in a catacomb vault, included a standard form of memorial supplied by the Cemetery Company in their price. In contrast, the Edinburgh Cemetery Company distinguished between private graves with, and private graves without, the right to erect a memorial, the latter being the cheaper option. Some cemetery companies insisted on specific types of gravestones being placed on private graves in particular areas. Owners of private graves next to paths at Candie Cemetery, for example, were required to erect large-scale tombs<sup>30</sup> (see also fig. 7). The working classes undoubtedly had less financial resources to invest in memorialisation. Commemoration was not automatically weighted against the poor at York, however, where it was possible to erect gravestones over public graves unlike at some sites, such as Gravesend, Kensal Green and Edinburgh.

Several authors have characterised cemeteries as inherently hierarchical landscapes, suggesting that the spatial divisions within cemeteries mimicked the social inequalities of the living.<sup>31</sup> Public mass graves of the poor are thus portrayed as "a sort of wholesaling of interment" within which "the right mix of bodies could create a tidy profit", and stand in stark contrast to the private plots of the middle classes which were "lined up to afford a view".<sup>32</sup> The rules and regulations at York, however, instead provided a framework whereby social distinctions were minimised within the layout of the cemetery grounds and its use for burials. The Company's rules concerning memorials also appear to grant greater freedom than at some other sites for the public to shape the cemetery's appearance through commemoration.

### Monumentality and the cemetery landscape at York

From its inception, the York Cemetery Company owned its own stone yard and the production of gravestones played a crucial part in the Cemetery Company's income. In contrast to some other companies, York also allowed external stonemasons to supply gravestones to the cemetery. However, over time, a number of regulations were imposed that weighted purchasers' choices towards the York Cemetery Company's own stone yard. The first of these regulations was introduced around 1846, when a fee (initially five shillings) was levied on all memorials brought into the cemetery which had been produced by external masons.<sup>33</sup> A second rule was imposed sometime before 1894 when the York Cemetery Company reserved the exclusive right to provide all of the stonework for public graves.<sup>34</sup>

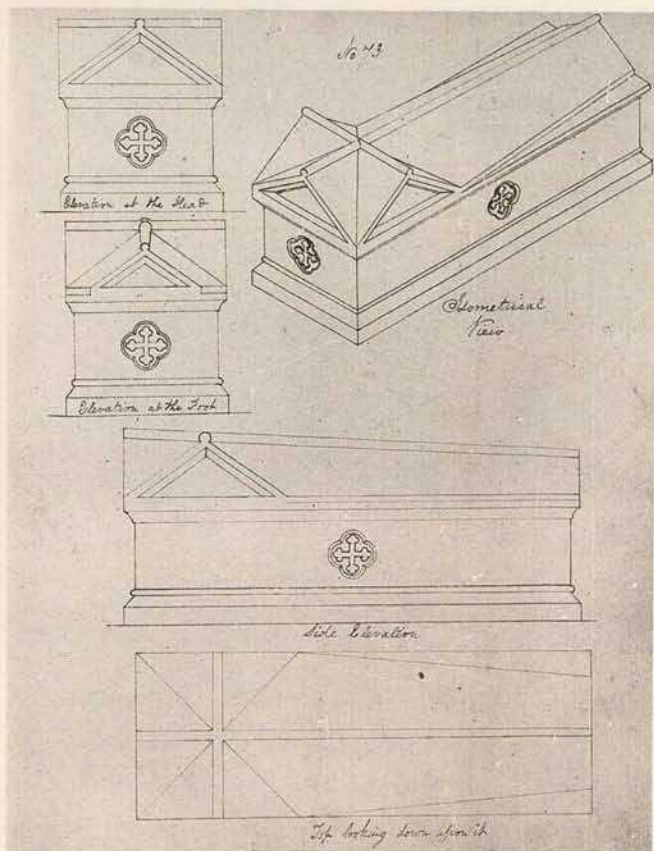
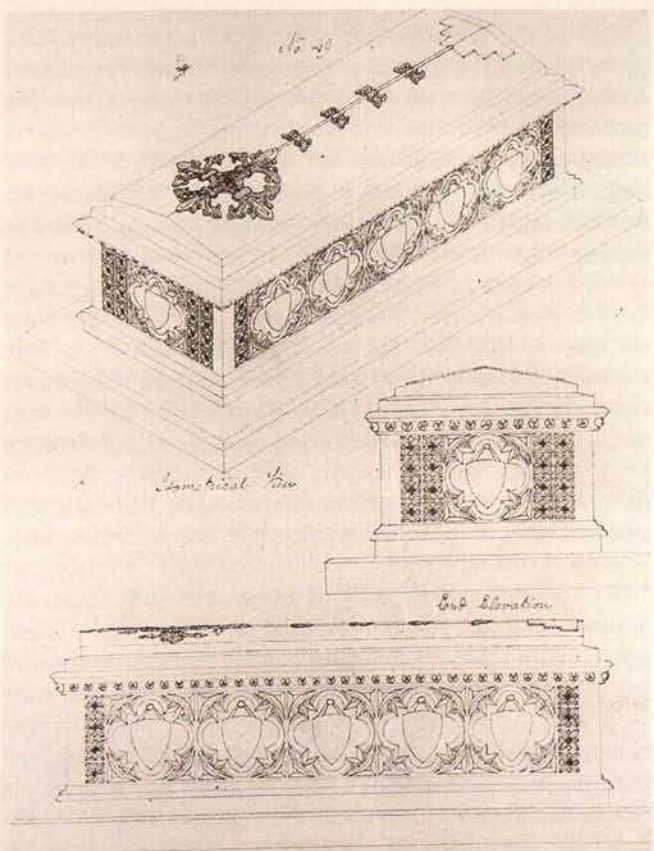


Fig. 9a Example design from the York Cemetery Company's gravestone pattern book

Fig. 9b Example design from the York Cemetery Company's gravestone pattern book



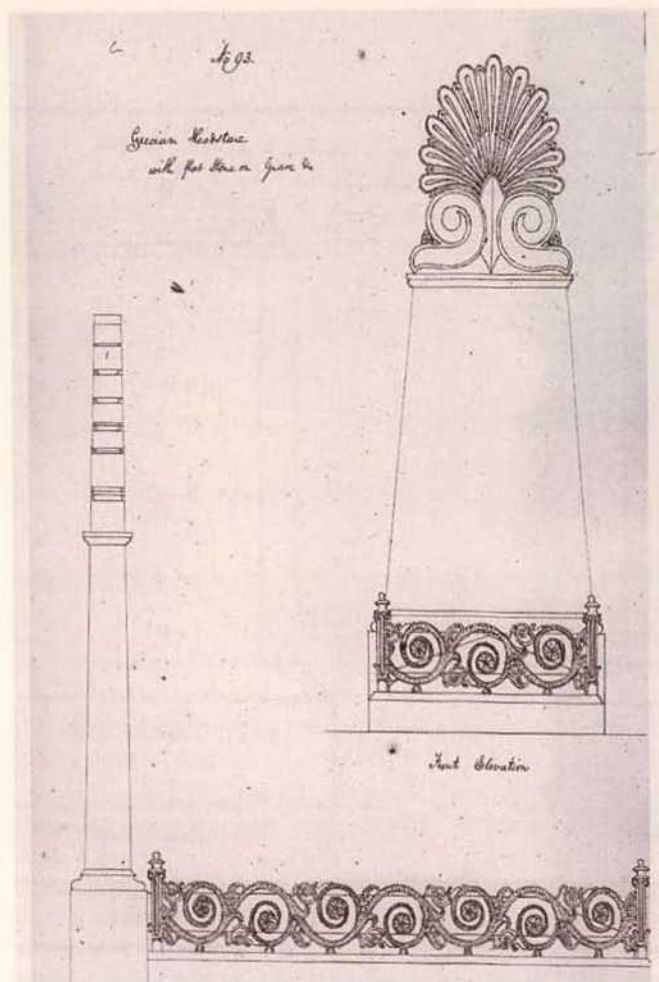


Fig. 9c Example design from the York Cemetery Company's gravestone pattern book

One of the York Cemetery Company's gravestone pattern books survives.<sup>35</sup> This was hand-drawn by William Powell Rud- dock, superintendent of the cemetery from 1846 to 1861. The book illustrates the types of gravestones the Cemetery Company wished to encourage at York and includes details of the wide range of sources from which Ruddock drew his inspiration. Ruddock copied designs from other pattern books published by leading architects and ecclesiastical groups but he also traveled to burial grounds across Britain to replicate and develop designs from existing gravestones. Cemeteries he visited included those at Glasgow, Hull and Highgate. Only a handful of the York Cemetery Company's pattern book designs appear to have been commissioned and placed in the cemetery.<sup>36</sup> The pattern book included over 200 designs for tombs, monuments and elaborate headstones (fig. 9). The range of designs offered by the Company, however, bears limited resemblance to the types of grave- stones actually found in York Cemetery, which are far less monu- mental in scale and style.

At York, the vast majority of 19<sup>th</sup>-century gravestones are headstones. Larger monuments, such as obelisks, crosses and tombs, occur relatively infrequently and make up less than ten percent of all gravestones studied.<sup>37</sup> At first glance, the head- stone designs preferred by York's citizens seem overwhelmingly homogeneous (fig. 1). Depending upon your point of view, their gravestones create a vision of material harmony – or mundane repetition – across the cemetery landscape. Yet a closer inspec- tion of the finer detail actually shows an extensive array of dif-

ferent headstone designs. Indeed, there was an average of almost one design for every three headstones sampled in the cemetery, although not all styles were reproduced in equal numbers. For example, one design was used for 166 headstones, whilst 288 designs were used only once. Design variation was structured through a fixed number of headstone shapes and decorative ele- ments which were used in an extensive array of combinations. Decorative elements included different styles of finishing edges, panels, mouldings, borders and motifs (fig. 10). Further varia- tion could be created between headstones which used the same design by employing different materials and sizes. When each separate design element was studied over time they were found to occur as a series of distinct fashions whereby one style regu- larly replaced another. At any point in time, however, several dif- ferent choices co-existed for gravestone material, and for shape and styles of the different decorative elements.

As the number of people using York Cemetery increased, the extent of design variation rose accordingly. A study of the distri- bution of designs showed remarkably few examples where two or more identical gravestones were found next to each other. In fact, less than ten percent of stones studied were found next to a stone of exactly the same appearance. In over half of all cases where adjacent memorials did share the same design, it was also found that these gravestones commemorated members of the same family. This suggests that the public were able to use the diversity of headstone designs to distinguish themselves from their immediate cemetery neighbours. Indeed, this convention was sufficiently established, that it could be inverted to allow the same design to denote a shared link between the deceased. The sense of material distinction was an important metaphor to the bereaved since it re-enforced the belief that their personal rela- tionship with those they had lost was also unique.<sup>38</sup> Previous studies of 19<sup>th</sup>-century gravestones have explained design varia- tion as the result of a downward pattern of emulation between social classes. In this scenario, the middle classes emulate the commemoration styles of the elite, whilst at the same time their own behaviour would be imitated by the lower classes.<sup>39</sup> Varia- tion in designs enabled social distinctions to be maintained since once a style became widely used by a lower order, new designs were adopted by the higher classes, until these in turn became copied in a downward spiral of emulation. But at York there is little evidence that professional families used memorial designs to denote a class affiliation. Evidence of occupation from the Cemetery Company's burial registers suggests that at York many 'elite' families simply purchased modest headstones in styles in common with the majority of the population.

In fact, from the hundreds of different designs and forms of decoration in the memorial data set, only two elements appeared to be used to denote membership of a specific social group. These two examples affect only a small fraction of the total popu- lation buried in the cemetery and in neither case represent exclu- sive practice but are merely one of the several ways in which Roman Catholics or infant deaths could potentially be com- memorated. Crosses occur as carved decorative emblems on only a very small number of stones. In fact, less than three per- cent of the total gravestone sample had these types of carvings, yet these predominate on stones commemorating Roman Catholics, with just under three-quarters of all the Roman Catholic families studied having carved crosses on their stones. The strong association of the cross with Roman Catholicism during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century has been widely documented,<sup>40</sup> however, at York, this association was specific only to the cross as a carved decorative motif. Other examples of cross iconogra-

phy in the cemetery, such as free-standing crosses, showed no particular association with Roman Catholics and were used by a number of other groups, including the Church of England and various Nonconformist denominations.

At York, headstones appear in the cemetery in a variety of standard sizes, however a select number were distinctive because they were executed in a miniature-form (fig. 8). Less than one per cent of adult deaths studied were marked by these small-sized memorials, yet fourteen per cent of all children were commemorated in this way. The proportion of children commemorated on miniature stones increased over time; from ten per cent of all children during the mid-1850s rising to thirty per cent of all childhood deaths by the turn of the century. Miniature stones were more likely than their full sided counterparts to be made from white marble, correlating to the use of white fabric and flowers at funerals during the Victorian period to signify childhood death.<sup>41</sup> When the cemetery first opened in 1837, no distinction was drawn between the type and location of graves for adults or children. A standard plot size was used throughout the cemetery. By 1880, the Cemetery Company introduced child-only sized graves and by 1903, two areas of land were set aside in the cemetery exclusively for children's burials, where graves were marked only by miniature-sized memorials.<sup>42</sup> Over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notions of York Cemetery changed as it became a landscape within which children had a defined and visible presence. At York, this association is particularly noteworthy because it represents the most visible affiliation to a particular social group within the cemetery landscape.

The York Cemetery Company's pattern book demonstrates an aspiration by the cemetery's owners for how the public might contribute to the appearance of the cemetery landscape. The types of monuments contained on its pages are in keeping with [many] widespread perceptions of the types of monuments found within many other cemeteries at the time, most notably at high status sites such as Père Lachaise Glasgow's Necropolis (fig. 6) and London's Highgate, Kensal Green and Abney Park (fig. 7). Yet as the case study of York shows, this ideal can often bear very little resemblance to actual widespread practice at a typical British or indeed European cemetery, where most commemoration took place at a far more modest scale. Analysis of the headstone designs at York Cemetery has revealed that although designs are of a mundane rather than monumental scale, they were no less capable of holding meanings for the people who erected them. These gravestones were not used as mere trophies by competing social groups but to signify kin status and personal relationships. At York, the public actively used headstone fashions to reinforce in a material form the individuality of the deceased and to signify the personal sense of loss experienced upon the death of a loved one.

### Concluding remarks

This case study has revealed how cemetery companies could exercise different levels of control over burial and commemoration, which could emphasise or minimise monumentality and social hierarchies within cemetery landscapes. In its own small way, York was able to contribute to, as well as draw upon, national trends for 19<sup>th</sup>-century cemetery design. For all its understated appearance, York Cemetery's own design and history is embedded within the wider movement to establish cemeteries in Britain during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. York drew directly upon the garden cemetery ideal and current architectural



Fig. 10 Examples of headstone design variation, York Cemetery

fashions and these have left their physical trace on the landscape. York also derived inspiration from wider influences, as shown by its billing as the "Père la Chaise of York". At the same time, however, it is clear that York Cemetery was affected by cultural influences which operated at a more localised level. The York public was actively involved in ensuring that the cemetery's appearance and design fulfilled their needs for recreation and commemoration. Knowledge about cemetery designs could also be disseminated at a local level. We have evidence of this from visits to cemeteries taken by the Northampton Cemetery Company, to gain ideas for the design of a cemetery landscape, and by the York Cemetery Company, to select designs for gravestones from other cemeteries that they wished to see at York.

The analogy between York Cemetery and Père Lachaise, arguably the most monumental and significant of all cemeteries, cannot be taken to reflect York's design in any literal physical sense. Indeed, during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the very same comparison was drawn by many British towns and cities in relation to their own modest cemeteries, all of whom claimed to possess the most beautiful cemetery in the land. Local enthusiasm at York was no different to elsewhere in the UK and this simply portrays the widespread sense of pride communities invested in their cemeteries. A relevant issue this case study raises is that if we are to fully understand cemeteries as a cultural phenomenon, perhaps we need to capture a similar enthusiasm for more mundane cemetery landscapes and appreciate the significance of typical cemeteries, like York, as well as exceptional sites, like Père Lachaise.

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