

GLOSSARY OF CEMETERY TERMS

barrow

A small mountain raised over a grave that ancient warlords hoped would give them a high profile in subsequent history. Few barrows have tombstones, however, so the names of the entombed are lost to us.

burial ground

A cemetery containing the remains of Native Americans.

catacomb

A Roman underground burial ground where Christians formerly indulged in symbolic cannibalism among the proscribed bodies of friends, relatives, and countrymen. Now used to name any underground burial ground with walking space including the basements of mausoleums and the sewers of Paris.

cemetery

A burial ground containing the remains of non-Native Americans. The term is derived from the Greek koimeterion, literally a "sleeping place" or "dormitory". Just like college housing directors, cemetery operators seek to cram as many bodies into as little space as they can. Cemetery decorations and upkeep, however, are usually much superior to those of dormitories and seldom subjected to damage by the residents.

Types of cemeteries are:

1. Church Burial Yard

Originated in Europe

Royal, rich & famous buried unde church floor. Closer to altar is closer to God.

Commoners buried outside. Closer to church, closer to God.

2. Family Burial Lot

Small, located on private property.

3. Country Cemetery

Roadside, rural cemeteries. Many have home made, or store bought monuments.

4. Elite Garden Cemetery

First was Mt. Auburn, Mass, in 1830. Victorians used cemeteries as parks for walks, and picnics.

5. Urban Cemeteries

Small, just rowsof headstones. No resemblance to a park.

6. Veterans Cemetery

Cemeteries for military personel. Are about 110 in US.

7. Memorial Parks.

All graves marked with ground plaques. No monuments above ground level. Easy matainance. No personality.

8. Potters Field
Unknown and unwanted buried here.

cenotaph

Literally "an empty tomb". A memorial in honor of a deceased person who is interred elsewhere.

columbarium

A columbarium was originally a dovecote. Modern morticians gave the name to a building with hundreds of little niches in the wall for urns holding cremated remains.

contumulation

The sharing of a grave or a tomb.

crematorium

A facility for the reduction of nonfunctional human bodies into carbon, steam, and assorted air pollutants. Cremationists are people who advocate the practice. A cremator is the individual who actually loads the body into the furnace and scoops out the residue; it can also refer to the furnace

cromlech

A Welsh dolmen. Literally and paradoxically "a curved flat-rock".

crypt

A concrete enclosure for interment. Mausoleum crypts are generally above ground and in buildings. Crypts in garden mausoleums also are usually above ground but are open to the outside rather than being in an enclosed building.

Types of crypts are:

1. Mausoleum Crypt - interior.
2. Garden Crypt - exterior.
3. Lawn Crypt - below ground.

dolmen

Any Neolithic monument consisting of a large, flat stone supported by two or more rocks (like a table). It used to be believed that such monuments were altars for human sacrifice or cannibal feasts. With the advent of modern day grave-robbing and archaeology, dolmen were discovered inside of burial mounds with the supposed meal underneath the table. Science concluded that they formed a vault and supposed that exposed versions were either incomplete tombs or windblown remains. Cromlechs and dolmen are the same thing, but since

French is considered more chic than Welsh, the latter term is preferred by the scientific community these days.

epitaph

Originally a funeral oration (in Latin, epitaphium) which, being a speech made by the living, was said "over the tomb".

footstone

A stone marking the foot of a grave

gravestone

A stone that marks a grave

headstone

A memorial stone set at the head of a grave

inter

To bury or put a dead body into a grave

lawn crypt

A pre-placed enclosed chamber, which is usually constructed of reinforced concrete, poured in place or precast unit installed in quantity, either side by side or multiple depth, and covered by earth or sod and also may be known as a garden crypt

lich

A quaint old term meaning "body", either living or dead. Lich is a fine Old English term which inspired many hyphenated constructions like: lich-bell (a bell rung before the corpse), lich-gate (the covered entrance to a cemetery where mourners waited for the arrival of the clergyman who was to conduct the graveside service), lich-house (a mortuary), lich-lay (a tax to provide for churchyards), lich-rest (a grave), and lich-stone (a stone upon which a body could be placed to give the pall-bearers a rest). Old English law held that whatever way a lich passed became a lich-way or a public thoroughfare. This undoubtedly was a reason for survivors living at the end of private roads on secluded estates to feel contempt towards the deceased. The practice has been discontinued.

mausoleum

Named for Mausolus, King of Caria, whose wife, Artemisia, built one of the Seven Wonders of the World. A chamber or structure used, or intended to be used, for entombment. A building that houses crypts for burial. A community mausoleum is for many families, and a private mausoleum is generally sold for the use of a single family.

megalith

A "big rock". Most famous megaliths are not sepulchral.

Memorial cenotaph.

The physical identification of an interment space. Generally has at least the name, date of birth, and date of death of the deceased and may include an epitaph or

commemoration of the life, deeds, or career of the deceased person.

memorial park

A cemetery which has adopted a park like style and abolished the use of upright memorials. As envisioned by Hubert Eaton who coined the term, a memorial-park has "sweeping lawns" and must also be inspirational. "

memorial service

A ceremony commemorating the deceased without the remains present

monument

An upright memorial, including what used to be called a tombstone, also includes large structures like obelisks, usually made from granite.

niche

A space within a columbarium used or intended to be used for inurnment of cremated remains.

obelisk

Though the name is derived from the Greek obeliskos, meaning "a small spit", obelisk are Egyptian. Physical representation the rays of the sun streaming to the earth.

ossuary

The elegant way to say "bone-pit" or "charnel house".

outer burial container

A container that is designed for placement in the grave space around the casket, including, but not limited to, containers commonly known as burial vaults, grave boxes, and grave liners.

Placophobia

Fear of tombstones. Other notable cemetery dreads include taphophobia (fear of being buried alive) and necrophobia (fear of dead things). See also taphophile.

plat/plot

A small piece of ground

polyandrium

A cemetery. Originally a cemetery for the victims of great battles.

potter's fields

A cemetery for paupers. The term comes from Matthew 27:7 when the chief priests determined what to do with the thirty pieces of silver returned by Judas: "So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in."

pyre

A ceremonial construction made of wood and fire, designed to reduce a corpse to ashes.

reliquary

A container for the preservation of relics of a saint.

sarcophagus

Early sarcophagi were made of limestone, a flesh-eating stone which when carved in the shape of a coffin quickly disposed of the corpse so that the monument could be used for another family member. Modern sarcophagi are made of granite or other fastening stone.

sepulchre

The Latin sepulcrum meant only "a burial place".

taphophile

One who loves cemeteries and funerals. Taphophiles show an interest in the trappings of death: See also placophobia.

tomb

The Greeks called the swollen ground or mound which marked gravesites a tumulus. Tombs take many forms and the word is now synonymous with grave.

vault

Cemetery vaults are underground tombs. The word comes from the Latin volvere, which suggests a turning, referring in the case of vaults to the curving roof of the structure.

viviseptulture

Burial alive. By implication, an enforced fast unto death.

wake

The Irish practice of watching over the body by candlelight the night before the funeral and the often wild feasting which follows. This may have developed simply because mistakes sometimes happened. The purpose of the wake, therefore, was to ensure that the deceased was truly dead.

will

A legal document which allows its creator a limited afterlife during which it may choose to placate, amuse, gratify, or anger the survivors.