

## TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE CEMETERIES AND GRAVE MARKERS

**altar tomb** - A solid, rectangular, raised tomb or gravemarker resembling ceremonial altars of classical antiquity and Judeo-Christian ritual.

**bevel marker** - A rectangular gravemarker, set low to the ground, having straight sides and uppermost, inscribed surface raked at a low angle.

**bolster** - a form of gravestone where a cylinder (usually at least 18 inches in diameter and 36 or more inches long) rests on its side on a footing. Bolsters were most common in the early twentieth century

**burial** – grave; the body within the grave; the act of burying a body.

**burial, primary** - a burial where the body is placed in its grave shortly after death, with no prior or temporary burial. Primary burial is the most common form of burial in most modern cemetery traditions

**burial, secondary** - a burial where the body has spent considerable time (often several years) in a temporary resting place before removal to its final resting place. Secondary burials have been fairly common in various death traditions around the world and persist mostly in traditions that have strong non-Western folk elements

**burial, urn** - the burial of an urn with cremated remains in it.

**burial axis**- the line that follows along the length of the body in a burial; the "length" of the grave

**burial ground** - Also "burying ground;" same as "graveyard"

**burial site** - A place for disposal of burial remains, including various forms of encasement and platform burials that are not excavated in the ground or enclosed by mounded earth.

**cairn** - a pile of rocks. Cairns can be erected over graves as markers, as bases to support crosses or other upright markers, or as protective devices from scavenging animals. comp. mound, rock.

**Cemetery** - any place where more than one body has been buried, especially (but not necessarily) with grave markers. Different governmental agencies have slightly different criteria for what legally constitutes a cemetery.

**Cenotaph** - a grave where the body is not present; a memorial erected as over a grave, but at a place where the body has not been interred. A cenotaph may look exactly like any other grave in terms of marker and inscription. Cenotaphs often commemorate the deaths of those lost at sea, in war, or by some other means where recovery or transportation of a body would be difficult.

**Centerpiece** - a sculpture or other monument, usually in the middle of a cemetery, commemorating no one in particular, but for the benefit of all buried there. Centerpieces usually are religious and are quite prominent in many Catholic traditions, as with the ornate crucifixion scenes of French-Canadian cemeteries and the large crosses of Mexican cemeteries.

**Coffin** - a box for holding a body at burial, made of wood, metal or concrete

**Columbarium** - a building for the housing of cremated remains. comp. mausoleum.

**Coped stone** - any stone with a coping, especially one with a peaked (roof-shaped) top. Coped stones were common in the British cemetery tradition from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries.

**Coping** - a narrow ornamental thickening and overhang of the margin of the top of a gravestone. The term comes from a sort of roof element, and a coping resembles a small, overhanging roof.

**Cremation** - the burning of human remains before their disposal. In the United States, some cremated remains are placed in cemeteries or columbaria, while others are strewn over the ocean or retained in survivors' homes.

**Crematorium** - A furnace for incineration of the dead; also crematory.

**crown** - the central hump in a crowned gravestone.

**crown, lateral** - on a crowned gravestone, one of the (usually lower) humps on the sides.

**Crowned** - referring to a gravestone shape where the top rises in several (usually three) humps, usually with the central one higher than the others. see crown; crown, lateral.

**Crypt** - An enclosure for a casket in a mausoleum or underground chamber, as beneath a church.

**dressed** - referring to stone whose surface has been completely smoothed or otherwise finished.

**emerging stone** - a type of gravestone where one portion of the stone has been fully carved, while another portion remains undressed or only partially dressed, giving the impression of a stone that has been incompletely carved. The emerging stone was most common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and symbolized a life partially completed but cut short. Emerging stones are nearly always of granite.

**epitaph** - a brief saying or literary note, inscribed in a grave marker. The name, places and dates of birth and death, and other such biographical information that may be part of the inscription are not considered part of the epitaph.

**Exedra** - A permanent open air masonry bench with high back, usually semicircular in plan, patterned after the porches or alcoves of classical antiquity where philosophical discussions were held; in cemeteries, used as an element of landscape design and as a type of tomb monument.

**Exhumation** - the removal of a body from a grave.

**family stone** - a gravestone that marks the entire family's plot, not a particular individual's grave. In the United States, such stones are most common in the European traditions. Sometimes a family stone also will have the names and dates of the individuals of the family carved on it, but there usually will be separate stones for the individuals.

**Finial** - an ornament atop a post or similar element in furniture or other craft. Finials can occur on the posts of grave fences or (less commonly) on grave markers themselves. Finials always have radial symmetry, as if formed on a lathe.

**footboard** - a flat, slab-like wooden grave marker placed at the foot end of a grave. Footboards are used only in conjunction with headboards and usually are considerably smaller and less ornate, often bearing only initials as inscriptions.

**footing** - a slab, usually of concrete, that is horizontal and flush with the surface of the ground, on which a grave marker is placed. The footing itself usually is unornamented and considered structural, not a part of the marker itself.

**footstone** - a flat, slab-like stone grave marker placed at the foot end of a grave. Footstones, are used only in conjunction with headstones and usually are considerably smaller and less ornate, often bearing only initials as inscriptions

**grave** - the individual feature where a body (rarely more than one body) is buried in a single pit or its equivalent, including any marker or monument associated with it.

**grave, mass** - a grave where many people are buried together. In most historic societies, mass graves have been expedients for emergencies when death was massive and rapid, as during an epidemic, war, or disaster.

**grave, multiple** - a grave where two or more bodies are buried together. A multiple grave may be a mass grave or simply a grave where members of a family or other social groups are placed upon death. Multiple graves are rather uncommon in recent historic societies.

**grave, outlying** - a grave that is located well away from others. Such graves often are given to members of society deemed unacceptable. In Catholic cemeteries, outlying graves may be for excommunicates, suicides, and the like.

**Grave curb** - a low border, usually of stone or concrete, surrounding a grave or plot, beginning slightly underground and extending no more than a few inches above the surface of the ground. A grave curb is open in the middle, although the central area may be filled with gravel, scraped earth, or lawn. comp. grave fence; paving.

**grave depression** - a hollow in the surface of the ground over a grave, brought about by the collapse of a disintegrating coffin. syn. grave, sunken.

**grave fence** - a fence surrounding a grave or plot completely, usually one or more feet high. A grave fence can be of the most homely materials or of elegant and expensive commercial fencing. e.g. cerquita. comp. grave curb; grave rail.

**gravehouse** - a ramada (roof with corner posts supporting it) over a grave, or a shed over a grave. The gravehouse is known especially from the American South. It probably developed there from local Indian usage, but it may have developed from a weaker tradition in England.

**grave lamp** - any type of lighting device placed on a grave, apparently symbolizing eternal light (in the Judeo-Christian tradition). It may be kept lighted or not; it may even be incapable of being lighted, as with a light bulb placed on the surface of a grave, a fairly common grave offering in various parts of the American South.

**grave landscaping** - any modification of the grave area in terms of plantings, gardens, fountains, or the like. Grave landscaping is most prominent with elite graves, such as that of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., the famous actor. His grave has fountains, reflecting pools, a shrine, and trees. Grave landscaping in America began essentially with the rural cemetery movement of the mid-nineteenth century, beginning in the Northeast.

**grave marker** - any above-ground device or monument to mark a grave. e.g. gravestone; grave rail.

**grave offering** - any item sacrificed or donated at a grave. A grave offering may be durable and visible (e.g., shells, jewelry), ephemeral (e.g., wine or beer poured into the ground), or anywhere in between (e.g., flowers). Grave offerings may be conceived as items of use to the deceased in the afterlife, as items to enhance or commemorate the status of the deceased (and his or her survivors), or as simple obligations. A grave offering may be made at the time of burial and included in the coffin or grave pit with the body, or it may be placed on the grave at any time after burial. e.g. libation. grave pit the actual hole into which a body is placed, including a filled-in hole. grave post a simple wooden post used as a grave marker.

**grave rail** - a wooden rail placed along the long side (burial axis) of a grave on the surface as a grave marker. Normally, grave rails form a pair, one on each side of the grave.

**gravestone** - a stone grave marker; more loosely, any grave marker. syn. tombstone. comp. memorial; monument.

**Graveyard** - An area set aside for burial of the dead; a common burying ground of a church or community.

**headboard** - a flat, slab-like wooden grave marker placed at the head end of a grave. Headboards may be used alone or in conjunction with footboards. see footboard. comp. headstone.

**Headstone** - a flat, slab-like stone grave marker placed at the head end of a grave. Headstones may be used alone or in conjunction with footstones. see footstone.

**Impressed** - decoration is made by pressing something against the surface of the concrete while it is wet, then removing it, leaving an impression. This is fairly common technique in various folk cemetery traditions, with leaves and crucifixes among the more commonly impressed items. incising the creating of a line by drawing a stylus or similar tool through the surface of a wet material before it hardens.

**Incising** - is a common method of making inscriptions or producing artwork on concrete markers, particularly in folk traditions. I

**inhumation** - the burial of a body in the ground

**initial stone** - a gravestone with initials carved at the base as a maker's mark

**inscription** - writing on a grave marker. By convention, this term is used regardless of the technique used to render the writing (e.g., carving, painting, etc.). The inscription usually includes biographical information and the epitaph, if any. -inscription, relict the traces of an inscription, otherwise destroyed, that may reveal that inscription.

**inset** - referring to the placing of objects in the concrete of a grave marker when it was wet

**interment** - the burial or other disposition of a dead body

**layout** - the spatial organization of a cemetery

**layout, chronological** - a cemetery layout where graves are arranged by death order, with no consideration of family or other alliances.

**layout, family-plot** - a cemetery layout where graves are arranged by family affiliation, not by death order.

**ledger stone** - a grave marker that is placed horizontally, flush with the surface of the earth. This style marker has become increasingly popular with cemetery maintenance workers because of the ease of mowing grass around and over them.

**lichgate** - an arching gate, usually of iron, at the entrance to a cemetery.

**lot** - an area of a cemetery owned or controlled by an individual or family.

**maker's mark** - a distinctive mark, usually initials or a name, placed on a gravestone as an indication of its maker.

**mausoleum** - a building for the housing of bodies in separate drawers, or compartments. A mausoleum differs from a tomb in that it is owned communally by the cemetery and patrons purchase rights to a section of it, while a tomb is built, owned, and used exclusively by a single family or similar group.

**memorial** - a grave marker, usually in ornate one

**Memorial park** - A cemetery of the 20th century cared for in perpetuity by a business or nonprofit corporation; generally characterized by open expanses of greensward with either flush or other regulated grave markers; in the last half of the 19th century, those with flush markers were called "lawn" cemeteries.

**Monolith** - A large, vertical stone grave marker having no base or cap.

**monument** - a grave marker, usually one with some fanciness and size.

**Motif** - any more or less standardized artistic theme or representation, such as a rose, cherub, or urn-and-willow.

**mound** - a pile of earth or similar material erected over a grave as a form of marker. Earthen mounds are common in many pre-modern societies around the world (e.g., Adena and Hopewell societies of North American prehistory, Neolithic and Bronze Age societies of prehistoric Europe, the Jomon Culture of prehistoric Japan, etc.), but earthen mounds are less common in recent burial traditions and tend to be small when they do occur.

**mound, rock** - a low pile of rock, often admixed with earth, erected over a grave.

**National cemetery** - One of 130 burial grounds established by the Congress of the United States since 1862 for interment of armed forces servicemen and women whose last service ended honorably. Presently, the Department of Veterans Affairs maintains 114, the National Park Service (Department of the Interior) administers 14, and the Department of the Army has responsibility for two.

**neoclassical** - referring to the art style of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where motifs and scenes drawn from classical Greece and were used in decoration. Urns, draperies, columns, and certain human poses typify this style.

**Niche** - in general, any recess in the surface of something; a compartment in a columbarium or other area for the placement of cremation remains.

**nimbus** - a halo-like representation in Christian art, especially the representation of such a glow at the intersection of the upright and arm of a cross. In such a position, the nimbus indicates that the cross was that on which Jesus was crucified. The nimbus can be circular, diamond-shaped, oval, jagged, or even square.

**obelisk** - a gravestone that is tall, slender, square in cross-section, and pointed at the top. Obelisks usually are quite large and imposing, indicating the wealth and stature of the deceased.

**openwork** - carving that cuts entirely through a stone, creating arches, loops, and openings.

**Orientation** - the direction of the burial axis of a grave. The direction to which the head points, (or at least where the main marker is) is usually considered the orientation.

**paving** - a surface of concrete, brick, or stone placed on the ground over a grave. Pavings often are used in conjunction with grave markers, although some traditions (e.g., Mennonites) typically simply incise the inscription into a concrete paving and provide no other marker.

**Peristyle** - A colonnade surrounding the exterior of a building, such as a mausoleum, or a range of columns supporting an entablature (a beam) that stands free to define an outdoor alcove or open space.

**Pillar** - a grave marker consisting of a tall, slender, ornate gravestone with a circular cross-section. Pillars give the appearance of being turned on a lathe and actually derive from the British tradition of Georgian furniture.

**Plot** - an area of a cemetery given over to an individual, family, or other social group. The term is more inclusive than "lot," since a lot can occur only in a cemetery with some institutional organization that assigns areas; in contrast, a plot can develop through usage in a customary cemetery

**rippling** - the undulating or ridged marks left on the back side of a hand-carved gravestone by the chisel, as it was used to thin the stone to its slab-like shape.

**rubbing** - means of obtaining a copy of the bas-relief carving on a gravestone or similar object. Rubbings are made by placing rice paper over the surface of the marker, then rubbing gently with oil, a soft pencil, a crayon, or a similar writing material. Rubbings are quite accurate in their copying of a design, but some cemeteries have had to forbid the making of rubbings, because the activity is slowly wearing away the surface of the stones.

**Sarcophagus** - A stone coffin or monumental chamber for a casket.

**sculpture** - any carving or other rendering of stone where all three dimensions (including depth) are used.

**Sepulcher** - A burial vault or crypt.

**sidepanel** - on a gravestone, a decorative strip along one vertical side.

**Slab** - any grave marker that is essentially a thin, flat piece. Slabs can be of any material but usually are of stone, concrete, or wood.

**slope** - on a gravestone with a convex upper surface, either of the upper surfaces that curve or angle downward from the stone's highest point.

**Stamping** - the placing of an inscription in concrete by pressing letter molds into it while wet.

**Tablet** - A rectangular grave marker set at a right angle to the ground, having inscriptions, raised lettering or carved decoration predominantly on vertical planes, and top surface finished in straight, pedimented, round, oval, or serpentine fashion.

**terrazzo** - a synthetic material sometimes used for grave markers. Terrazzo consists of chunks of stone, glass, or ceramics mixed into a fine cement.

**tomb** - a building-like burial receptacle, anywhere a body or bodies are stored above ground in drawers. A tomb may be grand, but it houses the remains of only a few people, usually family members

**tomb, false** - a type of grave marker where a slab of stone or concrete covers the area of a grave and extends above the ground anywhere from a few inches to a couple of feet. A false tomb most frequently is boxy, but it may be rounded or otherwise embellished. It may have an accompanying gravestone, or it may bear an inscription itself. It is not a true tomb, since the burial is underground.

**tomb, table** - a stone grave marker similar to a chest tomb but differing in that its top is supported by small columns at the corner only.

**undressed** - referring to a stone marker that has not had its surface completely smoothed or otherwise finished.

**Upright stone** - a grave marker that is placed upright, above the surface of the ground

**vault** - a tomb; a modern concrete shell placed over a coffin to prevent sinking of the ground surface in a cemetery

**wedgestone** - a style of grave marker, usually of stone but occasionally of concrete. A wedge stone, not surprisingly, is essentially wedge-shaped, so that the bottom surface lies flat on the ground, the back surface runs more or less vertically, and the top surface (with the inscription) slopes, from the top of the stone at its back to ground level at its front.