**Materialising Modern Cemeteries**

Archaeological narratives of Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen

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2016

*Document Version:*
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication

*Citation for published version (APA):*
ANTHONY, S. (2016). *Materialising Modern Cemeteries: Archaeological narratives of Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen*. MediaTryck Lund.

*Total number of authors:*
1

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*Sian Anthony*

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## Archaeological narratives of Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen

Sian Anthony



LUND
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
by due permission of the Faculty Of Humanities and Theology,
Lund University, Sweden.
To be defended in room C126 at LUX, Lund University.
Friday 11th November 2016, at 13:15.

*Faculty opponent*
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Saxo Institute, Copenhagen University

| Organization. LUND UNIVERSITY Department of Archaeology and Ancient History Box 192, SE 221 00, Lund, Sweden | Document name. DOCTORAL DISSERTATION |
|---|---|
| | Date of issue: 11 November 2016 |
| Author: Sian Anthony | Sponsoring organization: |

| Title and subtitle: Materialising Modern Cemeteries. Archaeological narratives of Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen |
|---|

**Abstract.**

This doctoral thesis examines the encounter between the dead and the living within 19th and 20th century landscape cemeteries. It shows how the relationship unfolds through the materiality and practices occurring within them.

Landscape cemeteries were established from the late 18th century and with their garden-inspired design, location outside of the city and increasing secular administration were intended to be a contrast to overcrowded urban churchyards. They formed a part of the processes of modernity, founded in Enlightenment ideals. They were, and still are, largely presented as unchanging places of calm reflection and regulated grief. But how does this narrative relate to the physical evidence of the bodies and funeral practices on and underneath the surface? How do the above- and below-ground worlds connect and how does this change over time with the accumulation of materiality?

The foundation for this research was the rare opportunity to excavate a part of Assistens cemetery in Copenhagen. This thesis explores the above-ground features such as the design of the grave plots and their gravestones which form the visible and public dimension of the cemetery's material culture. It also examines the archaeology below-ground for the preparation of the body, coffin furnishings and grave goods for the c. 1000 burials and cremations which were excavated, dating from the 1810s to 1980s. Evidence was also found for cemetery maintenance practices by the gravediggers, including the post-depositional handling of bones and bodies. Assistens works as a case study for a comparative approach to cemeteries within a wider European perspective. The research also considers the ethical questions of working with the recent and identified dead and the methodology of connecting archaeological and documentary source materials.

This thesis addresses some fundamental questions surrounding the handling of death in the modern world including the evolving role of cemeteries, the visibility of death and the changes in funeral practices and actors involved in the arrangements. Inspired by the theoretical approaches to materiality and modernity connected to the body, landscape and death, it is argued that the physical presence of bodies, coffins, gravestones and the cemetery itself contribute towards the creation and alteration of the modern world as well as perspectives upon death. Furthermore that the discourse between modernity, the cemetery and its materiality creates parallel narratives where the cemetery is presented as a stable, unchanging place despite the reality being a very modern place of continual change.

| Key words: Burial, cemeteries, charnel, cremation, Copenhagen, Denmark, death, Europe, excavation, grave goods, gravediggers, grave-robbery, materiality, modernity, 19th century, 20th century |
|---|

| Classification system and/or index terms (if any): |
|---|

| Supplementary bibliographical information: | Language: English, Swedish sum. |
|---|---|

| ISSN and key title: 1653-1183 Lund Studies in Historical Archaeology | ISBN: 978-89578-68-5 |
|---|---|

| Recipient's notes: | Number of pages: 390 | Price: |
|---|---|---|
| | Security classification: | |

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# Materialising Modern Cemeteries

## Archaeological narratives of Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen

Sian Anthony

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*Materialising Modern Cemeteries*

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# Contents

# *Acknowledgements*

Apparently gravedigging runs in my family. A distant ancestor, Esther Hammerton had an unusual job, inherited from her father, as a gravedigger in Kingston upon Thames just outside London in the mid-18th century. Whether part of this instinct is handed down I do not know but I do identify and have a fascination for her work. Yet I do not completely follow work like hers, rather I undo it by emptying out graves. I've never felt this work to be morbid or ghoulish but instead fascinating. Happily it coincides for me with interesting research which has benefited from many other people's hard work and assistance.

My principal supervisor Jes Weinberg has endured many drafts of this text with great patience – thank you. We have worked out many English/Danish/Swedish conventions of writing and research – both of us made compromises. Grateful thanks also to Sarah Tarlow for her incisive comments and advice as my additional supervisor. Göran Tagesson provided much constructive critique on the manuscript for my *slutseminar* and also deserves a thank you for revisiting his data on arm positions at Linköping. Many people have provided constructive and thought-provoking questions and comments that have contributed to the development of this project. Howard Williams particularly in his response to the ethical dimension of the project. Jenny Nyberg for reading the (almost) final draft of some chapters and having the energy to create inspiring discussion in the final weeks of writing. Steven Preston for general good humour in the face of reading the entire work. I would also highlight the many colleagues I've met through the Nordic Graduate Research School whose courses have been particularly helpful for creating stimulating environments for debate and allowing early ideas to be tested.

I am grateful to all of my colleagues and fellow *doktorands* at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History in Lund University. Particularly for discussion from colleagues in the Historical Archaeology section – Jes Wienberg, Mats Roslund, Martin Hansson, Jan Kockum, Kent Hansson, Johanna Bergqvist and Barbro Sundnér. Magdalena Naum also for discussions on modernity. Thanks to both Adam Boethius and Johan Vekselius for sharing an office with me and the recent dead.

Many thanks to the Museum of Copenhagen for starting an intriguing project and then allowing me continued access to the Assistens material during the research. Special thanks go particularly to Hanna Dahlström, Anna Dunphy, Stine Damsbo Winther, Marie Louise S. Jørkov, Sam Keenan and Jens Winther Johannsen. And for the hard work put in by all the archaeologists who worked on the excavation: Brendan Fagan, Fredrik Grehn, Terje Stafseth, Michael Alrø Jensen, Signe Føg Morgensen, Karen Green Therkelsen, Kirstine Haase, Lars Haugesten, Lise Harvig, John Howorth, Mette Kjelstrup, Jacob Mosekilde, Rachel Morgan, Charlotte

# Chapter 1.

# Archaeological narratives of modern cemeteries

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, new cemeteries were established for many European cities. These modern cemeteries can be recognised by their landscaped garden features and increased regulation of burial behaviour. They were an extremely popular and successful solution for the increase in demand of burial space and are still in use today. Yet they are largely viewed as passive places of reflection with little consideration of them as active places which help to shape their contemporary society. The physical mass of bodies and funeral material culture within the cemetery, the place itself and the material traces of the people who use it, create societal and modern approaches to death. Modern cemeteries both structure society and are structured by it. Over 250 years of human activity can be traced in the materiality present both above and below the ground surfaces. Furthermore changes within the cemetery and in burial and funeral behaviour can be connected with events and processes happening in society over the 19th and 20th centuries. The stories within the cemetery therefore encompass the accumulation of physical material over its chronological use. The more the cemetery is used, the more narratives are incorporated into the overall idea of what a cemetery is, or should be.

Any narrative contains specific events which are meaningfully connected through temporal sequences (Herman 2009: 1). The multiple small events over time taking place within cemeteries all alter it by adding to, or removing the materiality. This changes what is physically present and how people see the idea of the cemetery. It is also clear that there are multiple perspectives that make up the idea of a cemetery, not just those of the standard, 'romanticised' view. The cemetery is both a place in the landscape, a single entity and also is simultaneously composed of multiple, repetitive events of burial and visits. If we understand cemeteries as a place within our social and physical landscape that deal with an important stage in people's lives, then we must understand the materiality of them as taking an active part in the construction of how we deal with the dead. This covers not only the immediate period after death

and burial and the lingering period of grief and remembrance that follows but also the longer duration. A biographical approach uses a narrative starting point from the creation of an object and follows through successive stages or processes in its use and decay (Kopytoff 1986). The idea of the biography of objects or places can be closely allied to narrative, as both use a chronological framework which takes account of the accumulation of events. Cemeteries are principally places where there is deliberate transformation of the physical bodies and intangible remembrance. Things and the values and meanings ascribed to them change over time. This perspective creates narratives that have to include temporality, change and duration. This is where the dead become transformed into a memory that is slowly forgotten as the corresponding physical traces of them decay and eventually disappear. In a cemetery there is the potential for a 'long afterlife' where the collective remains of the dead continue to shape the world around them despite the individual being long forgotten.

There is a complex dynamic between cemeteries and society, it is a dialectical relationship that continues to evolve and is never stable. How and why cemeteries are created and what happens in them is a product of their time and contexts. The above-ground design and material culture of our cemeteries is the dominant influence in creating general views of death, mourning and remembrance. Modern visions of romantic and artificially natural landscapes are tied in with control over the 'natural' land and physicality which can be easily employed against the challenging underground world of the dead. How do the above- and below-ground worlds connect and how does this compare with the understanding of what should happen? A modern cemetery directs the people within them who have to act according to its regulations. There is some freedom of expression but it is dominated by the overall context of the cemetery. Some rules are clear, written down as instructions; others are encoded in the landscape or within the working practices of the staff, creating behaviours that is attuned with the rest of the location. Other behaviours are formed of social structures that come into play before the death of the person and last long after the burial; these are connected with mourning, grief, and ideas about what constitutes respectable death and burial. However there is also the interplay between imposed structural ideals and the individual activity of people using and working within the cemetery, rules were not always obeyed but were challenged implicitly and explicitly. Other narratives are displayed within the gravestones, funeral furnishings and working practices and all of them contribute towards a more nuanced idea of what a modern cemetery is.

What started this research was an unusual archaeological project, the excavation of a section of the modern cemetery of the Assistens in Copenhagen, Denmark (Fig. 1). The purpose of the project was to remove burials to enable the development of a new Metro station. Yet even amongst the mud, snow and controlled chaos of an archaeological excavation amid a construction site, the aim from the beginning was broader: to try to make sense of a type of site that is not normally excavated.

Excavation allowed a connection to be made between different understandings of the materiality that makes it work and different experiences – personal and professional, above-, and below-ground. Individual personal experience of cemeteries as mourners and visitors are contrasted with the professional understanding of an archaeologist, an undertaker or a gravedigger. This research examines cemeteries as a material representation of the 19th and 20th century societies that created them and brings out the physical three-dimensional and active practices within them using the evidence at Assistens and other comparable places.



**Fig. 1.**
Aerial photograph of the excavation at Assistens in summer 2010, looking south. Source: Dragør Luftfoto by permission of Metroselskabet.

# Introducing modern burial solutions

The mid-18th century was the start of a period of conspicuous change in burial customs and the provision of new places for burial within European towns and cities. The churchyards within urban areas which had become over-used and increasingly distasteful to their communities were gradually phased out of use. Churchyards were physically too small for the increasing number of burials which led to concerns over the practices used to accommodate them. At first burial within the church was gradually prohibited and eventually burial around the church was discontinued with

the area landscaped or built over. Additional land was purchased in the city to expand capacity but this was rarely more than a temporary easing of the problem. Some churchyards even had existing burials transferred elsewhere but the need for space was an urgent problem. The solution to burial demand was the innovations of the new modern cemeteries, often described as garden or landscape cemeteries that were situated outside the historic boundaries of major towns and cities in Europe (Tarlow 2000b; Fjord Jensen 2002; Sommer 2003). Several aspects of the modern cemeteries were remarkably similar, such as the date they were established, their design and administration. This conformity can be attributed to influence from earlier designed landscapes such as aristocratic estates and gardens but also derive from a similarity in contemporary society values and ideals including a relatively homogenous Christian religious outlook. The transition from churchyard to cemetery was completed in most European countries by the mid-19th century when modern cemeteries often became the only option for urban burial. By the late 19th century due to the encroachment of urban areas, many cemeteries are now firmly situated back within the urban core.

Landscape cemeteries like Assistens were linked together because they were perceived as a new form of burial environment, one that was chosen as a solution all over Europe. In Europe although national policy was often encouraging, rather than any coherent country-wide initiative there was a remarkable concurrence of local-level authority decisions to create cemeteries that were located outside of the core of urban life but also within a short enough distance to allow access from the city. But this idea was not new; it had direct precedents in Roman Europe where cemeteries were located outside of towns (Erasmo 2012: 84). Other precedents are found in the need to cater for minority religions which practiced different burial liturgies encouraging the separation of the church and burial ground. Cemeteries such as the Protestant cemetery in Rome from the 1730s or the Jewish cemetery in Copenhagen from 1694 may have encouraged the possibility for change in burial traditions simply by their presence. Early examples of planned new cemeteries were Assistens (1760) or Säter (1770s) and Uppsala (1794) in Sweden (Schönbäck 2008). Many of these examples can be considered as being influenced by garden design and estate landscapes that emphasise a fluid and natural environment in opposition to earlier geometric and regular garden styles. The Romantic style was influenced by literary and artistic movements emphasising the natural environment with a rather artificial ideal of the past (Sommer 2003: 79-82). However there are variations in design such as some of the French cemeteries, like Père Lachaise in Paris which opened in 1804 which emulates city-like features including mausoleums and street lighting. Yet all of the examples cited above are united by a need to provide a new setting and locale for the burial of the dead. These new cemeteries are found throughout Europe, North America and countries that were connected or colonised by them. During the middle of the 19th century there is a peak in their creation and it is often these cemeteries that generate the classic view of a landscape cemetery. Several large cemeteries based

on the edges of suburban London like Highgate or Kensal Green which opened between 1832 and 1841 or Mount Auburn in Boston, Massachusetts opened in 1831. However smaller or less well-known cemeteries of this period contribute to a more consistent and popular style covering cities in European colonies such as India, Australia, Sri Lanka and South Africa. Demand for burial sites led to new sites being opened through the 19th century. Cemeteries such as Vestre (1870) and Bispebjerg (1903) in Copenhagen illustrate the direct continuations of the cemetery ideals active in the Danish capital. The idea of the idyllic romanticised landscape cemetery layout culminates in the woodland designs of the early 20th centuries. The prime example is the World Heritage site of Skogskyrkogården in Stockholm which provides compelling new design characteristics that have influenced many subsequent cemeteries. Over this period there is clear evolution in design features but the core features are still evident.

In investigating new cemeteries as a trend, researchers have discussed the principal features that identify them; the most commonly discussed are the motivations behind their creation, their location, date of establishment and design features. For example, Julie Rugg (2000) highlighted the similarity of physical characteristics, exploring ownership and intention, the ability to highlight individual identities and the formation of a common concept of sacredness. Many of these categories overlap, particularly when the physical consequences of these characteristics are examined. The most frequent motivation cited for their creation is a concern for hygiene and urban sanitation combined with a growing fear of the dead body (e.g. Fjord Jensen 2002; Schönbäck 2008). This idea aligns with other urban cleansing schemes of improvement by removing slums or providing clean water. Improving public health was surely an important motivation but multiple factors have been identified which strongly contribute to the creation and continuation of cemeteries. Other reasons suggested link to the control and regulation of the living (Foucault 1986; Johnson, P. 2008). Private enterprise and the opportunity for profit is also cited as a motivating factor (Rugg 2000: 263). The additional influence of emotional motivations have also been explored and cited as a strong influence (Tarlow 2000b).

For location, the placement of cemeteries outside of urban boundaries is a commonly cited characteristic. As the place of the active churchyard becomes undesirable within the core of the urban environment so cemeteries can be moved out of this sphere. This idea hints that the influence of the city is restricted to within its walls, that it is for the modern living and that the dead should be placed in the traditional rural landscape (Ariès 1981 [1977]: 491). Yet the urban community was reliant on its surrounding countryside and the two more integrated than suggested by this idea even if removal of the dead is purely a symbolic ideal. Cemeteries are considered to have similar dates of establishment but the major period of establishment of the new cemeteries took place over approximately a century starting from the 1760s (Kragh 2003: 143-4). This century covers a period of enormous change in European society

which results in varied influences upon each cemetery. However as a feature the date of the establishment varies, cemeteries established today can still be regarded as falling within the category of the modern cemetery. The last principal feature is the designs and how these were imagined and achieved. Many modern cemeteries were designed by professional architects and town planners often through competitions. The function and aesthetics were considered together according to architectural values. Many new designs break from traditional churchyard practices such as the East-West alignment of burials, the social prestige of burial near the altar or church building and even some gender divisions. Yet many of these ideas continue in some modified form. Designs have also evolved over time. The focus on the common characteristics of motivation, location, date and design have contributed to an idea of a homogenous and unchanging type of cemetery which in turn creates an image that there is a standardised European burial community which creates, maintains and uses them.

Taken as a coherent set of characteristics, we can present a broad view upon the new cemeteries and gain an understanding of them on a principle level. However we should pay attention to the range and variability that these cemeteries encompass and understand that these broad characterisations interact with local and regional burial traditions which will result in different consequences for each city or country. How each community dealt with the rapid demand for burial space before the instigation of the new cemeteries creates a strong regional influence and there is no clean break in attitudes or practice which inspires the ideals of the modern cemetery. Variation is also driven by changes in religious attitudes or influences from Enlightenment and scientific thinking, the development of capitalist society and changes to attitudes to death. The effect and success of other modern cemeteries, particularly Père Lachaise in Paris also played a part as advertising catalysts which influenced new cemeteries in each modern community (Dungavell 2015). As pointed out by Sarah Tarlow (2000b) it is not just the establishment of cemeteries that should be examined but how to explain their continued success over 250 years of intense physical and social change. Further although the majority of the landscape cemeteries are still functioning illustrating that the socially accepted requirements for burial fashions have varied little, change has still occurred. Change within specific cemeteries include the incorporation of cremation burial areas or ash scattering zones and the rise of memory gardens (Williams 2011). While they can be usefully analysed and compared together, there is no standard, homogenous type of modern cemetery. This image can be challenged on many different levels and this will specifically be explored in detail through one cemetery.

# Assistens cemetery

The foundation for the research is in the material from Assistens Kirkegård[1] in the Nørrebro area of Copenhagen, and the only known European landscape cemetery that has been subject to large-scale archaeological excavation. During the late 18th century in Copenhagen, as in other urban centres throughout Europe, churchyards and vaults were becoming increasingly congested. In 1760 the Copenhagen municipality created a new cemetery for the city's use located within lightly settled open farmland approximately 2km north of the city core (Fig. 2).
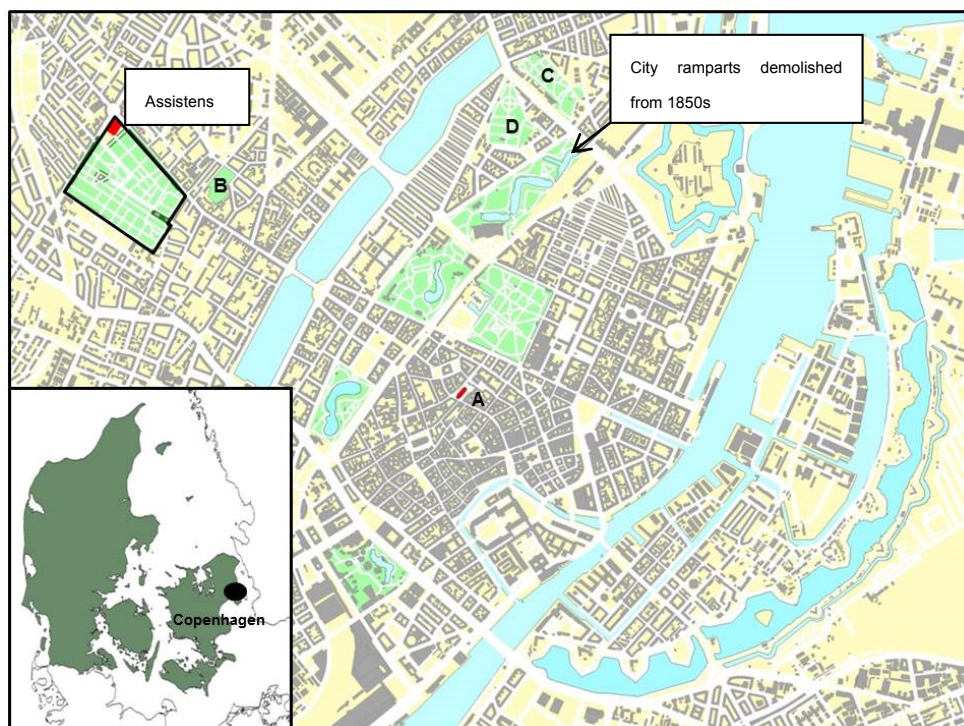


**Fig. 2.**
The location of Assistens cemetery in Copenhagen illustrating the relationship to the historic city centre and defensive ramparts. A: the location of Trinity (*Trinitatis*) church. Trinity is the parish which administered the excavated area. B: Jewish cemetery, C: Garnison cemetery, D: Holmens cemetery. Source: Drawn by author[2].

Assistens is therefore a very early example of a landscape cemetery. It was significantly enlarged in 1805, with burials taking place from 1806 and it is a small section of this

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[1] The name *Assistens Kirkegård* translates from the Danish as an Assistance or additional cemetery and will be referred to as Assistens throughout the text.

[2] All drawings, photographs and graphs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

extension in the north-east corner, Division G, where the excavation took place. This particular area was reserved for burials from a single parish, Trinity (*Trinitatis*) which lies within the medieval city core. Trinity was not a medieval foundation but established in 1656 in the town centre originally for the university but then used as a parish church (Wiene 2006: 9). Assistens would eventually replace burial space within all urban parishes. The area around the cemetery became densely settled neighbourhood after the 1860s. Division G is slightly unusual compared to the rest of the cemetery as it is within a visually significant corner which faced onto the intersection of two major streets, Nørrebrogade and Jagtvej. The decorative metal gates onto this intersection, Nørrebros Runddel provides a visual interface with the surrounding neighbourhood. The rest of the cemetery is surrounded by a high brick wall. Division G also contains what is now the oldest building in Nørrebro, the Sexton's House (known as the *graverbolig*) which was an administrative building surrounded by workshops and a garden nursery. Calls for its closure for burials started in the 19th century. Division G was used until the 1980s for the burial of cremation urns and coffins. The cemetery is still in limited use today although it is now divided into a designated Museum area, active cemetery and parkland.

The creation of a new Metro line within Copenhagen resulted in the decision to place a Metro station within Assistens. As this section of Assistens had long been prepared to be legally designated as parkland rather than an active cemetery, burials had decreased since the 1950s. Any burials still remaining in the area would have completed the legally designated grave peace (*fredningstid*) in which a coffin cannot be disturbed for 20 years and an urn for 10 (2009: §13, Stk.2). Therefore there was no legal objection to removal of burials. The work was funded by the Metro Company (*Metroselskabet*) and undertaken as part of a larger archaeological project by the Museum of Copenhagen. The work started in December 2009 and by March 2011 had resulted in the excavation, analysis and reburial of 950 burials. Single context methodology and recording was used in fieldwork and the unusually clear stratigraphy of grave cuts and fills allowed interpretation of gravedigger's actions to be recorded, and connected to sources documenting cemetery practices. A technical excavation report was completed which concentrates upon descriptive presentation of the results and is available for download from the Museum of Copenhagen (Anthony, Keenan *et al.* 2016).

In common with most modern cemeteries Assistens also has abundant primary documentary evidence which consists of administrative records and maps covering all of the excavated area from the opening of the cemetery. These include overall Danish burial law and specific cemetery protocols which are the codified regulations and guidelines controlling physical work such as burial depth, spacing, and regulation of gravestone decoration and landscaping. An important source are the burial registers which served two purposes, one for administration of the cemetery to enable payment and management, the second is for the completion of state legislation requirements,

responding to the increasing demand for statistical recording of the population. The registers contain a variable range of personal information about the dead person and their family including payment details. Cemetery plot plans show the organisation of specific grave areas, pathways and buildings and also chronological alterations to the original design. This thesis establishes the contextual and theoretical background through the documentary and ethnographic sources. It builds upon the fieldwork with new analysis and makes links to the documentary sources to extend interpretations.

A comparative approach with other cemeteries is important to place the material from Assistens in a wider context. Scandinavian archaeological research upon burial and cemetery practice provides background material and interpretation relating to the post-Reformation period and modernity (e.g. Kragh 2003; Hviid Jacobsen & Haakonsen 2008; Jonsson 2009; Flohr Sørensen 2011). Medieval, Reformation and pre-modern churchyards and burial grounds provide important legacies for the modern cemetery and what makes the landscape cemetery different is considered in the light of these earlier periods. Direct comparative excavations of modern cemeteries are scarce, only limited exhumations or small removals of individual burials are known and these are usually carried out by cemetery staff without archaeological attendance. Some examples are the result of smaller discrete cemetery removals such as at Roehampton in the United Kingdom (Melikian 2004). Relocation of earlier churchyards which also contain modern burials in the Lausitz region of eastern Germany have also been completed (Kenzler 2002). The geographic range concentrates on Europe, primarily countries of Reformed Christian, Lutheran or Protestant religion. In general this restricts the study to countries in northern Europe and Scandinavia where detailed information is available. Occasional use of comparative examples will be used from North America or from former European colonised countries. Larger excavations of historic or modern cemeteries in North America are more common (Heilen & Gray 2010; Goldstein 2012; Carvajal & Grzybowski 2014). Inevitably such an overview will lead to omissions but it aims to capture some of the main elements of the new form of cemeteries and also some of the differences. The time period is delineated by the emergence of landscape cemeteries with the earliest examples established in the late 18th century but the creation of them peaking in the second half of the 19th century. Landscape cemeteries are still used today which explains the continuation of this investigation into the contemporary world.

# Understanding what happens in modern cemeteries

Assistens, in common with many cemeteries, is described as a natural oasis of calm and a "welcome respite from the confined streets of Nørrebro" (Mouritsen & Osborne 2007: 115). It is a contrast to the busy and congested neighbourhood outside of the cemetery walls. This vision of a defined heritage place is shaped by an idea that cemeteries do not change, they are seen as peaceful and unchanging. Where does this image derive? Assistens was created before the dense settlement of the Nørrebro neighbourhood but it too has changed. The cemetery has been altered and extended over the 250 years of its existence and within this period has been closely connected with its surrounding community. The cemetery has been remade with every new burial, gravestone, tree or new building, and adapted to new forms of memorial and disposal. It has changed in tandem with the surrounding area and remains a product of the relations of the people who live close by and use it (Graeber 2001) This means that the cemetery is valued in symbolic and emotional terms and as a part of the identity of the neighbourhood, similar to values identified by the public in the UK relating to knowledge, identity, bequest and distinctiveness (Clark, K. 2010: 95). There is also an active community programme led by the on-site Cultural Centre which aims to educate and connect tourists and local inhabitants to the cemetery. Although burials still take place in general the cemetery is no longer understood as a place for contemporary burial but has transformed into a new category of heritage.

The concept of an 'authorised heritage discourse' (Smith 2006) describes the idea that there is an official view created and enforced of heritage by formal authorities which define the significance, management and use of heritage. The emphasis is focused on aesthetic and scientific values, monumentality and physicality, which also has the effect of removing any hint of dark or dissonant aspects of the past (Smith & Waterton 2012: 166). Through this discourse the management and preservation of heritage is understood as the conservation of material remains in order to guard their authenticity. Although heritage itself can be considered intangible because it is ascribed through present practices, heritage must also still be linked to the tangible (Carman 2009: 193). Material culture objects are given meanings and values and form part of the identity of communities and individuals.

In my view, the official view on the heritage status of Assistens is dominated by the oldest part of the cemetery, Division A, which is the area with most elaborate monuments and the most famous graves. This is where much of the public view is informed both through the municipal designation of this section as a Museum area but also within the guidebooks, leaflets and websites which emphasise the older sections of monuments combined with the beauty and environmental aspects of the cemetery. This narrative is focused towards aesthetic and monumental values of

classically influenced symbols and improving sentiments on epitaphs of the long-dead. It is close to the cemetery ideal which was instrumental in the formation of cemeteries but is not necessarily reflected in reality (Murray 2003). These values are important parts of the cemetery heritage but remain restrictive in their approach. Heritage from the 20th century, the influence of different religions and ethnicities, of new technologies or alternative ways of remembering and using the cemetery is occasionally included, particularly by the Cultural Centre based in the cemetery but overall are minimised. The effect emphasises the cemetery as a tourist resource rather than a local amenity and the encouragement of tourist activity helps to regenerate and gentrify the local neighbourhood, bringing in economic benefits. Although its continued use as a burial ground is stated on public noticeboards and maps, Assistens is now largely re-branded as a cemetery park rather than a burial area. I contend that this usage neglects an integrated view of the cemetery and the sense of time passing which serves to deny any connection with the contemporary Nørrebro neighbourhood. It also results in simultaneously held views in the official, dominant discourse that it was possible to change the cemetery yet at the same time it was a place frozen in time that should be retained in a pure authentic form.

The title of this thesis '*Materialising modern cemeteries*' references the importance and active nature of the physical qualities and properties of the cemetery and material culture within it. Many physical properties are considerably repressed because they represent things which might be considered uncomfortable or difficult. Research also moves beyond examining the physical properties to examine what these things do and how they are embedded within the social world. It also challenges ideas that death and the body are necessarily always uncomfortable concepts. The subtitle '*Archaeological narratives of Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen*' references the idea that there are multiple and parallel stories to be told of the cemetery each with their own references to the effects of time passing. The use of the word narrative is used as a close synonym to the word story, both are used to describe how the interpretation of the cemetery and all that takes place within it are created and categorised through the different perspectives.

In this research certain recurring theoretical concepts are used which can be traced throughout the text. Cemeteries and the activities that take place within them will be studied as social phenomena where the place acts as a hub within a network of actions related to death. Some actions take place within the community and city but all eventually are present in the cemetery. Cemeteries can only be understood within the dialogue between wider social structures, individual actions and the material culture produced as a result of these actions. Materialising these narratives is not directly responding to critiques of de-materialising but rather to the idea of cemeteries being largely viewed as two-dimensional. Previous research has taken on aspects of the materiality of cemeteries, particularly gravestones and of the sense of absence attributed towards contemporary burial behaviour. They also tend to overlook the

three-dimensional aspect of cemeteries connecting above and below-ground and physical practices of people working within it. The function of the cemetery is to dissolve both tangible bodies and intangible complex emotions of grief as a stage in the life cycle of individuals and the community. I contend that the physical acts and things below-ground within the cemetery create and continue to be an extremely affective part of the cemetery.

Several theories or concepts persist throughout this research such as practice theory and tacit knowledge, social structuration and individual agency, materiality and the theoretical concepts concerning time and biographies. All deserve a brief review here to allow the scene to be set for modern cemetery research. One of the main influences is derived from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) where the emphasis is on the accumulation of unconscious social knowledge which is picked up through the practices enacted within daily life. The theory explains how seemingly insignificant acts or everyday practices embody and reproduce social systems, ideas and morals which are learnt through daily actions. This system of *habitus* may be transmitted unconsciously and is governed by the existing structures but is equally a part of the production of structures. It therefore produces repetitive acts but equally what it produces is not completely devoid of free agency either. Two other important concepts are set out by Bourdieu, the first is *doxa* – described as the non-verbalised and seemingly natural background to the regulated and dominant orthodox world (Bourdieu 1977: 168-9). Doxa is created through habitus but is rarely questioned and often not overtly recognised in the practices. Often it is only in the deviations of new practices from doxa that it can be recognised. Practices in the cemetery are viewed through the interplay of habitus and doxa. The second important concept is that of *field* which refers to the system of relationships that develop between interested groups or institutions (Broady 1991: 187). These groups each take a position and can overlap but always relate to each other and in this structure they shape what happens in the cemetery. In cemeteries social fields can be the church, secular authorities, undertakers, gravediggers or mourners. From this perspective the documented regulations and norms set within the cemetery by different fields can be examined against the differentiated practices and behaviour occurring within it. Some aspects of Bourdieu's *doxa* are within Martin Hall's use of *transcripts* which are defined as "a web of relations that entwine both objects and words" (2000: 16). Hall describes two types - public and hidden transcripts which describe the difference between dominant official worlds that can be verbalised and presented and the concealed realities of everyday resistance against this domination.

This research is also influenced by the theory of social structuration which deals with explaining the social world through the relationship between people and social structures. It argues that these structures are both produced by humans and also the means by which the actions takes place (Giddens 1984). The theory also examines how changes happen within social structures and also includes connections between

materiality, time and space within social systems. Cemeteries can be seen as active places within contemporary society, they both structure society and are structured by it. Changes in funeral behaviour and within the cemetery can be connected with events and processes happening in modern society over the 19th and 20th centuries. Cemeteries can be examined as to how they helped shape modernity as much as how they are influenced by modern ideas. In this way connections between the living and the dead throughout this period can be interpreted. Anthony Giddens' ideas on modernity are also relevant because they cover a period where there is a transition from medieval and Reformation society with dominant social practices to an increasingly reflexive modern world where individual agency is emphasised (1991).

All perspectives used in this research incorporate ideas of agency within the social world, where there is an active discourse between people who have some ability, within powerful social constraints, to shape their societal systems. Agency is found within the relationship between the active and also unintentional decisions that humans take in their lives and the structured background. Actions create the material world but there is a dynamic relationship between the individual and the community of which they are part. Active choice can be restricted or promoted by the community rules, the rules can be explicit and codified or implicit and upheld through more ill-defined unwritten social mores. Material constraints are also a factor which can enable or constrain agency where choice in for example coffin decorations depends on economic means. Agency also includes the ability to choose the traditional and conservative; it is not always a reaction against common social mores. The power of agency as a concept is useful for archaeologists in that it reminds us that people in the past thought carefully about their actions and were not just following traditions or social rules (Cowgill 2000: 51). Furthermore that material objects and physical features are also agents which play an active part in the creation of the social world and we should be examining what these things do and how they are embedded within the social world. It is the combination or interaction of people, things and structures where agency is found. The concept of agency brings into sharp relief Giddens ideas of structuration which relates a more passive outlook where there are many forces beyond an individual's control and people are constrained by social structures even when they are implicated in their creation (Dobres & Robb 2000: 5). It is the meeting between community and individual, between structure and individual practices that creates the cemetery.

As the modern cemetery developed more codified rules emerged but deviations show non-conformity in some situations. Within the cemetery are different social fields of people carrying out practices, from staff such as administrators to gravediggers, to the mourners and community who visit and the dead themselves who lie within the cemetery. These are interlocked and overlapping spheres where some practices were part of a codified, regulated social structure and others individual agency. By themselves practices are not explanatory concepts because they are concerned with

how actions are done but combined with study of the structured codes and regulations they can contribute to understanding why actions are undertaken. Interpreting these acts is to investigate how the cemetery functions. For example, gravediggers together as a group may develop habitus connected to dealing with the remains of the dead in the daily course of their work. It is likely that many practices were transferred from churchyard to cemetery through generations of gravediggers as part of a system of tacit knowledge. This can be described as informal understandings, often unspoken and undertaken through embodied acts (Polyani 1983 (1966)). An enhanced use of tacit knowledge has been conducted which examines the nature of medical treatment over the medieval and Renaissance period in Sweden which can be compared with the practice of gravedigging (Bergqvist 2013). Medieval medical knowledge was demonstrated to have been passed down through the sense of *knowing how* to do the work rather than formalised study. This idea applies particularly to the work undertaken by gravediggers who were the carriers of individual knowledge similar to medical learning, where training is through informal apprenticeship and doing the work (Bergqvist 2013: 172-3). However the sense of *knowing how* can also apply to mourners knowing how they want to present and decorate the body or gravestone of their deceased.

Mourners may not attend funerals or visit graves frequently enough to constitute these acts as everyday practices but they still form a social field that relates to other groups involved in the cemetery. Mourning and arranging funerals are practices that are picked up off the shelf and dusted down for occasional use. Therefore the concept of habitus does not fully apply to mourners. However the concept of doxa can apply to both gravediggers and mourners through the long-lasting material remembrance of funeral customs and formation of 'correct' behaviour. The difference between cemetery staff and mourners are highlighted in contemporary practices performed surrounding the body. Understanding of the actual body depends on the situation of the people involved and has changed with the transferral of preparation of the body from the local community to professionals. Here ideas of consumer choice and the commodification of the funeral and committal can be regarded as a new means where material culture changes and structures behaviour of the people involved (Spencer-Wood 1987; Dant 1999). For the mourners of the deceased the last viewing of the body before burial is the one that seems to continue in the mind and has a strong mediating effect upon the relationship between the living and the dead (Harper 2010). It is this association and final meeting that retains a strong hold over people's ideas about the dead body and after the coffin is sealed the body is no longer the focus of attention (Harper 2000). The dead body of the person that the mourner loved becomes a fixed and eternal symbol (Hallam & Hockey 2001: 52) which is in direct contrast to the what actually happens to the material remains.

Knowledge about the physical transformations of the decaying processes tends to be discouraged. Despite the popularity of forensic investigations in detective fiction, this

knowledge is rarely applied in normalised and peaceful death. The dead body in the immediate proximity of death is attested through death masks and photographs. For those who work within a cemetery and have direct experience of the decaying processes when handling the physical remains, the understanding of a long-dead dead body will be vitally different. Over the passing of time when the decaying processes have gradually altered the recognisable human body to a skeleton, there can be renegotiation of what those physical remains symbolise and therefore how they can be handled. People working at the cemetery generally have no personal connection to the identity of the individuals involved. An individual body can more easily be categorised simply as part of a collective of human bodies. Practices involved in handling long-dead remains within the grave are easier to manage.

The passing of time is deeply connected with memory, cemeteries and forgetting. Time may not always be considered a linear process but instead contain multiple temporal concepts dependant on individual experience (Lucas 2005: 94). The effect of time can be seen in the decay and transformation of bodies and coffins underground and in the erosion of grave markers and growth of trees and plants above-ground. Time is generally represented in archaeological records by the stratigraphical matrix which tends to emphasise archaeological contexts at their stage of construction rather than stressing duration, as in the length of time that feature existed (Lucas 2005: 39). This essentially marks out the original use and creation of the burial to be the most important act and downplaying any subsequent transformations or change of meaning and use. Part of this problem can be solved by the use of narratives which are based on the stratigraphic sequences created. In many ways it is not the cemetery that is investigated here but the archaeological reconstruction of the cemetery. An archaeological site cannot represent a direct systematic behaviour of a certain society or individual from the past nor is it a fossilised moment in time. It is formed of material remnants of the decisions and actions and the events that caused them, such as the choice to build a house or dig a grave and furnish a burial in a certain way. This is further complicated by preservation conditions which impact upon the material that the archaeologist will find, interpret and in this dialectical process create the archaeological information. It can be referred to as a palimpsest[3] of structured deposition or intentional actions (Jones 2002: 99). An archaeological site is therefore made up of a mix of times and layers and the practice of excavation has been to cleanse, sort and categorise these different time periods (Olsen 2010: 108). A site is composed of fragments of the events that actually took place there, which within the encounter of archaeological excavation create an interpretative discourse.

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[3] A palimpsest is a manuscript or writing surface that has been reused, erased, or altered while retaining traces of its earlier form—and, by extension this can be suggested of an object, place, or area that retains only small remnants of its past within the archaeological record.

Archaeological contexts are grouped into meaningful actions that replace earlier contexts or exist together spatially creating a biography of the site. The practice of archaeology creates a narrative through a biographical approach. The two concepts are similar, they are both actively created and involve different temporalities, materiality and intangible concepts but narratives are recounted, and contain more of an explanatory function. The idea of biography can be extended beyond objects and into buildings, landscapes and contextual units of information such as the grave and the grave plot which is an area purchased for multiple burials from one family. The biography of a body and the funeral material culture does not end with the burial which is only another stage of a cycle of activity that can involve additional burials, disturbance and removal. It also involves a potentially long duration period, focusing on an unforeseen time span that goes beyond the immediate events of death and committal. A combination of burials creates a grave plot biography which represents the different phases and layering of remnants observed during excavation. The biography of a grave plot is a more complex sequence comprising several burials, transforming bodies and bones which results from many interventions over perhaps a long period of time. Exploration of the duration of materialities used by Laurent Olivier (1999) to explore the different temporalities within one (Iron Age) burial is instrumental in inspiring ideas upon the lengthening active life of funerary material and practices. Within this biography there are many possible actors following different structured rules and practices. All of these actors have a different relationship to the material remains than do the family[4] or mourners of the dead individuals within the plot. Ideas about memory are bound up with different concepts of time and the duration of material goods used in funeral traditions and rituals. These ideas are used to create narratives about repetitive actions and practices concerning the burial plots within a modern cemetery. The approach taken is to consider the practices and events occurring in Assistens in relation to the original and continued narrative of the modern landscape cemeteries. What cemeteries mean to us today is mediated through formal understandings of heritage, death and burial. All of which create an image of modern cemeteries as peaceful, ideal, unchanging and somewhat apart from society. On the contrary this work picks out what happens in the cemetery, what is active and what material characteristics do to create a place of evolving spheres and alternative narratives. This is the start of knowing how to understand modern cemeteries. How Assistens and other similar places in Europe compare with this assessment is one of the questions considered in this research.

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[4] Throughout this research the word 'family' is sometimes used as a shorthand term for the people mourning the dead and arranging the funeral. The term is used to encompass both biological and extended family and others within the close circle of people around the dead person which may include the formal executor of the will. Using the term in this way acknowledges that the concept and ideals of family have altered over the centuries under focus. Mourner is the preferred term used in the text but occasionally using family is appropriate. The use of the term 'Family plots' derives from the categorisation in the Assistens archive records and is similarly not used as a limiting concept.

# Aims, objectives and significance of the research

The aim of this work is to analyse the phenomenon of modern cemeteries using the evidence at Assistens and other comparable cemeteries. Modern cemeteries are now a long-established and successful idea; they are even partially superseded in the 21st century. By looking at them through their materiality and the practices that maintain them we can discuss debates such as ideas of modernity, concepts of time and the practices that are undertaken to maintain them. Three principal objectives are applied throughout the work to achieve this aim. The objectives create a framework for the research and are used as a foundation for interpretation. Following from these questions a number of associated minor questions can be formulated from which detailed data analysis can be derived from.

The first objective is to present an outline of how the modern cemeteries were initially understood and created but also to move beyond the debate over their creation and to focus on how they were successfully maintained and adapted over their biography. The materiality of, and within, the cemetery is discussed through the powerful modern concept of the body (or bodies collectively) as materiality and the cemetery that contains them. What are the principal characteristics of the new cemeteries? What is the connection between the cemetery as a place and the bodies within it, how does this relationship adjust with the changing world around it? The idea is to compare and contrast the practices and material culture within the new and older types of cemeteries. It also sets a broad context for the thesis, examining the initiation of cemeteries and the background that they were derived from through to how they have been used. The examination creates an established and described context where results can be discussed in the light of societal events in the late 18th to mid-19th centuries.

The second objective is to examine both the practices that the living carries out for the dead but also practices that are carried out for the living. Practices involve both visible and public engagement with materiality but also more private expressions of grief. The changing interfaces between families and different professionals are important to chart throughout the 19th and 20th century. All of these practices discussed are present in the above-ground world, visible to anybody in the cemetery but they are also present below-ground. What characterises the use of cemeteries in the 19th and 20th centuries both above- and below-ground and how does this express the relationship between the living and the dead?

There is an opportunity to examine the data for funeral customs in material culture and cemetery practices within the 19th and 20th century cemeteries. This analysis focuses on the material culture of the coffin and the body within it, and the marking and elaboration of the grave plot. Preparing for the funeral (the ritual or ceremony often held away from the cemetery) and the committal (the act of placing the coffin

in the ground or vault) are part of creating new memories and a new identity relating to the dead person. The rituals and use of particular material culture through this process express the relationship and memories between participants, living and dead. What happens within the cemetery over the study period of approximately 200 years is analysed through the use of case studies.

Another aim of the analysis is to connect what happens above-ground with what happens below-ground. This can be linked to a comparison between what is visible to everybody and what could potentially be concealed. The second objective is aimed to build upon the first and draws out a wider theme which connects cemeteries to the living society. This evidence focuses on a more individual or small-scale level where empirical detail and interpretation is needed to form a foundation for wider analysis. The focus is upon the immediate time frame around death and burial.

The final objective is to examine how the dead body is treated within the cemetery long after the act of burial. This is achieved by investigating the staff that controls their affective presence within the cemetery. How is the understanding of the dead body created and structured through the use of material culture and cemetery and funerary practices? How is the transformation of long-dead bodies dealt with in cemetery practices? Most funeral practices and choices take place within a short defined time period - the time between death and burial. Yet grieving continues and includes activities above-ground such as visiting and maintaining the grave site. Over time the memories may fade, patterns of mourning activity change and eventually the grave plot may fall into disrepair and become abandoned. This deterioration is mirrored underground with the decay of the below-ground material remains. A grave plot may become a place which is less actively used.

In many European countries there is also a time limit for use of burial space, after a defined time period the grave space can be reused and there is a continued cycle of renewal where surviving remains have to be dealt with. From the gravediggers' perspective the material remains: the body, coffin wood and grave gifts represent something very different to those of the memories of people who knew the dead. Yet the people carrying out the grave clearance also have an understanding of the dead body and other surviving material culture. This understanding can be interpreted through the treatment of the material remains held within the soil of the grave plots. This objective is intimately associated with the explorations concerning the relationship between living and dead in the second objective. However it builds upon this understanding and focuses upon activities and practices long after each individual burial. The intention is to investigate the perspectives of the people who use, and work in, the cemetery through the observable actions in the archaeological record.

The significance of the research is bound up with the expansion of historical archaeological research both chronologically and geographically but also in examining cemeteries with a different perspective and methodology. This research starts at the

very point in the early 19th century where the majority of historical archaeological research into burial (with the notable exception of gravestone research) stops. It provides the ability to expand research into the 20th century which saw significant change in perceptions, ideals and expectations surrounding burial and death. Another factor marking out the significance of this research is that modern cemeteries are rarely excavated; the common justification for much of the archaeological work within Europe is large-scale development which is not often carried out within active cemeteries. The archaeological excavation of Assistens was an exceptional opportunity to investigate a type of site rarely excavated. The majority of the work which has been undertaken on cemeteries has been concentrated upon the UK and North America, therefore the exploration of a Danish example provides a broader geographical view. This wider level of analysis gives the opportunity to compare European cemeteries and contributes to the opening up of historical burial archaeology into a broader perspective. It is vital to create a narrative that can be worked upon, corrected and contested to improve wider ideas of how societies reacted to each other within a time where influences from other countries could be crucial.

This is also a rare opportunity to investigate and interpret the relationship between cemeteries and the people who used them in the 19th and 20th centuries from an archaeological perspective. Previous research in Europe has had little opportunity to examine modern cemeteries from a material culture perspective that encapsulates the life and activities above and below the ground within a working cemetery. Assistens has a unique interface between the archaeological and documentary evidence allowing the cemetery to be treated as a three-dimensional entity. New aspects presented in this research includes applying a biographical approach to produce narratives which acknowledge the continuity and continual processes within the cemetery but also recognises the developments that have occurred with them more clearly. Studying the people who made this happen, the cemetery staff and managers, administrators and politicians, professional undertakers, families and individuals, show the significance of those who were continually negotiating between social rules and individual wishes.


## Outline of thesis

The book is structured to present different physical aspects or perspectives upon modern cemeteries through seven chapters. The first two chapters create a framework for analysis by introducing the subject, material and wider disciplinary context. Chapter 1 introduces some thesis-wide themes, aims and objectives and also introduces the principal case study, of Assistens. Chapter 2 considers the place of this research within the wider disciplinary framework including the interface with studies of modernity. The ethical responsibilities of working with modern burials are

discussed to present a strong case for the investigation. Chapters 3 and 4 together present the visible and public face of cemeteries including their creation and use. Chapter 3 presents a broader perspective on the category of the new cemeteries. It shows how they have evolved from earlier burial grounds and where the mix between traditional and new ultimately creates an innovative but still largely recognisable traditional form. Chapter 4 investigates the visible and public practices associated with the cemetery landscape. Gravestones, plot decoration and visitor behaviours evolve over time in response both to changing attitudes and the pre-existing environment. The existing material culture can affect and create desired values above-ground, but are also shown to be intimately connected to the physical world below. The material culture used materialises the relationship between the living and dead in a visible way. It is for public consumption as well as private interpretation.

The materialised private world below-ground is discussed through different themes within Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 examines the material culture involved in the trajectory of the body as it is prepared and placed in the coffin for the funeral. The interface between private provision of grave furnishings and the impact of professionalism in the funeral industry is also examined. One of the consequences of this conflict is that decisions made about the funeral are perceived to be traditional and unchanging but in reality are in constant flux. Chapter 6 examines how a cemetery is enabled, renewed and continued through the active practices of cemetery staff. Gravediggers are viewed as mediators who control and guard a process of mitigation between dead and living bodies which enables death to be dealt with. The practices involved in using and making more space within grave plots are regulated and formalised but often stretched to their limits. The insight that dead bodies and burials are actors that take up both physical and social space in cemeteries is a new perspective. Despite most of the work taking place underground it has repercussions on how the cemetery is perceived of above-ground. The cemetery is shown to be much more than a beautiful landscape.

The conclusions presented in Chapter 7 summarise the recurring aspects of the phenomenon of modern cemeteries. The characteristics of the cemetery are discussed through the consequence of the relationship between tradition and modernity where established practices combine with the effects of innovations in attitudes, practices and materials. The relationship and integration of life and death is illustrated where the cemetery is never static and is much more than a simple binary statement of life versus death. The three-dimensional nature of cemeteries is presented where above and below-ground material should be considered as a continually evolving entity. Finally that the modern cemetery is a place formed through ideals of beauty and calmness which assist its functions of being a place for people to grieve and renegotiate their relationships with the dead. Modern attitudes to death and cemeteries are shown to be integrally tied to the affective material presence existing within the cemetery.

# Chapter 2.

# Perspectives on modern burial and cemetery research

At the end of the excavation in Assistens, I was standing in the middle of the central trench, 25m by 92m and over 3m deep, having played a part in the removal of a total of over 15,000m³ of earth, coffins and bodies. I was struck by the sense of absence within the trench. Everything within it had been removed, temporarily stored above-ground while being studied but then reburied. There was only a large hole in the ground and the excavation records to mark the project. The dead had been removed from their resting places and re-contextualised as archaeological objects of study. This was an uncomfortable feeling, that there was a sudden absence of the physical cemetery. As archaeologists we had disturbed the heart of what a cemetery is by removing its materiality. The relationship between the living and the dead would have to be re-written with a new perspective.

Within research into cemeteries and death it is the loss of the dead person from social networks that dominates the relationship between the living and the dead. New narratives are created by the mourners which can be influenced by the cemetery environment. In cemeteries, the body, memories and relationships are re-materialised in the gravestones and plot. Each burial is a single event and perspectives on cemeteries are derived from this individual and personal approach. But cemeteries are the accumulation of many burials which require perspectives capable of dealing with these collective physical consequences over long-time periods. This is where the archaeological perspectives can contribute.

This chapter describes how some of the different perspectives and approaches have contributed to the interpretation of cemeteries and burial. First a synthesis of the general development of cemetery research is presented with special reference to the Scandinavian region. However it is not the intention to include extensive interpretation of the traditions and rituals of medieval and post-Reformation burials or the more general theoretical background towards ritual theory, death and burial although some aspects are covered. To do this would require several theses. The

research background is followed by exploring the connections between the processes of modernity through the context of the cemetery. The interface within historical archaeology and materiality is then discussed through the material sources used in this research. Aspects of data collection and analysis are presented and consideration given to the process of connecting different types of sources. The chapter concludes by considering the ethical challenges of studying modern cemeteries.

# The development of cemetery research

From the earliest development of archaeology burials have provided crucial material for forming interpretations about past societies. As the discipline has developed so the different methods, perspectives and theories used in researching burial behaviour have altered and expanded. Antiquarian and early archaeological interest was rooted in a cultural-historical perspective influenced by nationalist thinking (Olsen 2003: 26; Trigger 2006: 248-9). It was often aimed at examining the relationship between ethnicity or social status and how this might be conveyed by artefacts or elaborated and identifiable burial rituals. Burial evidence could also form the lynchpin to the description of some prehistoric European cultures of which some were originally based on interpretations of funerary culture (Chapman & Randsborg 1981: 4). It would be fair to say that until the mid-20th century research was focused more on prehistoric and non-Christian cemeteries rather than upon Christian burials. Investigating pre-Christian burial behaviour meant that sensitive questions over exhumation or self-examination could be side-stepped or possibly were never considered at all. The emphasis was able to rest on the investigation of others rather than the world of the investigators.

The transition phase between Pagan and Christian societies was studied through large excavations because they shed light on the emergence of Christian society. Questions focused upon creating typologies and chronologies of artefacts from societies that could be framed as different. Moreover in this transitional phase there were grave goods to be collected for both monetary and aesthetic reasons (Effros 2003: 6). There was little perceived value in the study of medieval burials and they were routinely removed to access earlier archaeology (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005: 1). There was also an attitude that the existence of documentary evidence describing burial customs rendered investigation of the material evidence unnecessary (Andrén 1998: 3). Ordinary Christian burials were regarded as homogenous, with few grave goods and unvaried burial treatment which therefore did not warrant investigation. The exception lay in the investigation of elite or royal burials which did have grave goods and often highly elaborate coffins and memorials (Olsson 1918; Kryger 2014). In Sweden recent investigations of the 12th century Erik the Holy and the 13th century

Magnus Ladulås have been complemented with new scientific analysis (Medeltidsmuseum 2012; Zuiderveld & Gazett 2014). In Denmark numerous Royals have been investigated, one example is Knud the Holy, an 11th century King buried in Odense (Vellev 2014). The remains of the 16th century Tyche Brahe, a Danish noble and scientist have also been repeatedly investigated (Aarhus University 2012). The Viking ship burial of Oseberg, Norway is a prime example where the remains of one of the women found in the elaborate grave were repeatedly associated with the 9th century Queen Åsa (Nordström 2007). Although the females were likely to have been high-ranking, there is no direct evidence of this identification. These examples were used to illuminate knowledge of specific individuals involved in grand narrative histories or prehistoric burials which were often linked to famous figures from nationalistic views of the past.

So prior to the mid-20th century, interest was generally focused on individual graves and the descriptive information that could be gained from each isolated burial, focusing on the bodily remains. Opening a grave was to look on the faces of the dead - a very human contact. Yet this was employed with an uncritical assessment of the burial as something that was socially stable and culturally in context with society. The funeral trappings were often seen as directly representing the person and society with any variation considered as evidence of influence from external sources (Binford 1971: 9). For the more recent past post-Reformation society, ethnographic and text sources supplied sufficient information on any changes in the more modern world. Burials of the general populace have only recently been studied. Although there was increasing interest in medieval and later historic period material culture and archaeology during the 20th century, there has been a significant advance in research on cemeteries from approximately the 1970s (see below). This has developed through the assertion that the scope of archaeology should not be limited by time and recognition that there is considerable variation within Christian burial practices. The inclusion of typical medieval churchyards, then modern cemeteries into archaeological research is a direct result of the expansion of contract archaeology which involves the investigation into different periods and understanding of the value that can be gained from their study.


# Medieval burial research and excavations


Churchyards and burials are an obvious starting point to interpret the Christianisation process in Europe. Burials were a large sample that could be statistically analysed and organised. As Kristina Jonsson states, churchyards were largely ignored except when used for dating or occasionally for osteological research, the focus being the church until the 1960s (Jonsson 2009: 29). There have been

numerous medieval churchyard excavations, so the focus here is to introduce relevant European and particularly Scandinavian sites to discuss changes in methodology and perspective and to provide background for following chapters.

The long history of antiquarian investigations started with occasional finds of burials in the 18th and 19th centuries. As an example of this, small-scale 19th century investigations on the Danish island of Bornholm were primarily focused upon settlements. However burials were recorded and they could be re-investigated by later researchers (Naum 2008). Systematic excavation only started formally in the 20th century. Early studies on Norse burials in Greenland from 1903 instigated more extensive excavation from the 1920-30s (Lynnerup 1998). The 'otherness' of Greenland may have contributed towards the excavations being acceptable compared to investigating Danish sites. Within Denmark a key site in the development of churchyard interpretation is Æbleholt Kloster which was excavated from the 1930s-50s, largely by medical students. An Augustinian monastery in Sealand, north of Copenhagen, it was established in 1175 and dissolved after the Reformation. Hundreds of burials were excavated in and around the buildings. Establishing the plan of the site was a priority but it is very clear that the skeletons were considered a significant part of the work and that osteological analysis would be integrated with the context of buildings and history of the site (Møller-Christensen 1958: 270). A similar project is Västerhus, in Jämtland, Sweden, where the first excavations took place in 1947 of an early medieval church and churchyard (Gejvall 1960). Both Æbleholt and Västerhus are good examples of research-led projects that were significant because they established a more methodical approach to burial investigations. Data collection and description were important elements in these projects and integration of different materials were emphasised. Methodology was discussed and the dissemination of results in clear formats was also encouraged, unusually Västerhus was also published in English to encourage greater access to the material. Recent re-examination of the Västerhus material has updated perspectives on spatial analysis, focused on contextual relations and re-examined phasing or stratigraphy (Iregren, Alexandersen *et al.* 2009). Projects like these tended to focus on open sites in the countryside which were easier to excavate than urban churchyards. Osteological data was a vital and sometimes dominant element in these reports and issues of segregation of burial according to gender, age or status were prominent. Overall a strong foundation was created for the development of medieval burial archaeology.

From the 1960s the concept of rescue archaeology associated with construction development became more common and led to a number of projects combining ideals of research and rescue. Two rural sites in southern Sweden that have provided data and interpretative perspectives were Lagmanshedan and Löddeköpinge. In the 1960s in Lagmanshedan 1250 burials were excavated around a small wooden church building (Redin 1976). This innovative study can be tied into the move towards

applying more scientific theory and techniques to archaeological data. In Lagmanshedan, Redin created a chronology based upon the arm position of the body which has been successfully applied in sites over Scandinavia. Over 1390 burials were investigated in the church, churchyard and settlement site of Löddeköpinge which was excavated during the 1970s and provides good comparative material (Svanberg, Söderberg *et al.* 2000). During this period there were also considerable advances in fieldwork techniques which were important in the creation of stratigraphic excavation with single context recording principally in Norway and UK (Lucas 2001: 55-8). Single context allows a clearer step-by-step reconstruction of the acts involved in burial and was the basis for methodology and interpretation at Assistens. An influential site for the development of the single context method was Winchester Cathedral, UK where excavations between 1962-6 were explicitly performed within a theoretical context. Crucially reports from this period began to include detailed methods and the reasoning behind the priorities taken in the project design. For the burial evidence, all phases of the churchyard were beginning to be seen as vital for understanding the development of the Minster area but the priority was taken by the early medieval churchyard (c 675 to 12th century) compared to the medieval churchyard (late 12th to early 13th century). The later churchyard "would have to be dug at regrettable speed" so compromises still had to be made (Kjølbye-Biddle 1975: 87). Necessities of making priorities in rescue archaeology meant that medieval and later burials often suffered compared to earlier archaeological remains as they were still not fully accepted as appropriate for archaeological study.

The opportunity to methodically investigate historic urban burial grounds was improved by the increased access and ability to excavate before construction work from the late 1970s-1980s. However it was changes in attitude towards them as worthy of investigation that made the difference. Many deconsecrated churchyards were known to exist either from chance finds during construction work or from documentary records. One example is the dissolved monastic churchyards at Svendborg, Funen, Denmark (Tkocz & Brøndum 1985) which was partially excavated through construction mitigation. Many sites were excavated as small separate trenches over decades however gradual accumulation of data led to important syntheses. Data from different churchyards were used by Jakob Kieffer-Olesen (1993) to examine burial customs within medieval Denmark in an integrated manner. The sites used illustrate the impact of rescue archaeology which although not always primarily directed to examine burial behaviour could be combined with research aims. For example, of the two sites used by Kieffer-Olsen at Schleswig in Germany, excavations at the Black Friars monastery were aimed to examine the building while the Town Hall market site was primarily to examine central town development. An extensive series of excavations also took place on medieval churchyards in Lund, Sweden (e.g. Mårtensson 1981). By integrating different types of archaeological and osteological data their results were later used to examine changes in medieval social

structures and burial customs (Arcini 1999; Cinthio 2002). These later studies started with a new post-processual approach recognising the symbolic, integrated and more humanistic approach of studying human societies (Trigger 2006: 450). However as many of these urban burial sites had been dissolved after the Reformation it meant there was little potential for studying post-Reformation practices.

The number of large-scale research excavations has lessened in recent decades. Instead researchers have turned towards re-interpretation of older material and what can be achieved with smaller excavations, such as Skælskør monastery in Sealand, Denmark (Dahlerup Koch & Lynnerup 2003). There have also been advances in creating research frameworks which build upon earlier work and provide a strategy to guide research. Research looking within the churchyard has examined the changing spatial structuring of burials (Andrén 2000) and contextualised the social meanings of grave goods such as rosaries, hazel rods or charcoal burials (Dahlerup Koch 2000; Jonsson 2009). The direct and uncontentious link between burial provision and the parish community has also been questioned (Brendalsmo 2000). Most recently the excavation of the medieval churchyard at St Clemens in Copenhagen used explicit theoretical and research aims to guide the fieldwork and produce interpretations of research objectives (Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009). Churchyards are no longer seen as storage for the dead but as more active places within a community that continued to be affective. Wider narratives for the period or region or type of site are formed rather than one focused purely on each individual site. Methodological and technological innovations such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems) have made these approaches feasible yet it is largely the innovation in thinking about burial places that is most significant.

## Extending beyond the medieval churchyard

Not all medieval churchyards were deconsecrated after the Reformation and urban churchyards could remain in use long into the 19th century. In rural areas many continue in use today. The advantage of investigating these sites is that they provide a long sequence of burial practices in one community. Limitations of space in urban sites required exhumation and reuse of earlier space. To find space for later phases of burials the more shallow medieval burials were often destroyed, yet there is often some evidence remaining from the medieval periods. Later burials are often better preserved than earlier medieval burials not only because they have had less time to decay but also because they were buried deeper and in more robust wooden coffins. Often there is no reason to disinter churchyards except for development; therefore there is a bias towards research on urban rather than rural churchyards when examining later periods with one notable exception on historical development in North Yorkshire (Rugg 2015). Development or clearance work on urban churchyards

is common over Europe including Birmingham, UK (Brickley, Buteux *et al.* 2006) or in Denmark, Holstebro and Horsens, both in Jutland which investigate all periods of burial use (Thomsen 2008; Grønfeldt Petersen 2012). Work on the churchyard of Linköping Cathedral in Sweden extended the time period examined by identifying new styles of burial connected to changes in thinking about the body from the 18th century (Tagesson 2007).

Clearance of churchyards for development is not a new practice but rarely is it as large-scale as that of the frequently cited example in Les Innocents in Paris. Thousands of human remains were removed from an inner city churchyard between 1785-6 and placed in catacombs (Etlin 1984). A second conspicuous example is the first clearance of part of St Pancras Old Churchyard in London in 1866-7 for the redevelopment of the adjacent train station (Emery & Wooldridge 2011). Clearance of burials in urban churchyards also happened in Copenhagen such as at St Nicholas in 1798 where 500 wagons of soil and 165 coffins were removed to reduce the ground level of the defunct churchyard (Steenberg 1945: 472). These projects removed burials that were of comparatively contemporary dates; however they were not regarded as being of academic or cultural interest at the time. Other deconsecrated churchyards like St Clemens in Copenhagen were simply built over.

Scholarly interest in historic, post-medieval burial practices was developed primarily in the UK by social historians (Gittings 1988; Litten 1991; Harding 2002) but it was the key investigation of Christ Church, Spitalfields in London, prompted by clearance of the church vault which stimulated archaeological interest (Mollesen & Cox 1993; Reeve & Adams 1993). Excavated between 1985-6 this innovative project combined three major aims: methodology, human biology and historical archaeology for an integrated perspective (Reeve & Adams 1993: 16-17). The Christ Church project became the model for archaeological practices expanding into 18th and 19th century. The project coincided with increasing interest in archaeological studies of the modern world. While there were earlier projects which included some aspects of historic cemeteries, few have had the same level of impact in creating the research principles of the subject which are still active today. Taking inspiration from this project are the Danish investigations undertaken during conservation work at the church vault of Helsingør Cathedral and Ribe Cathedral (Hvass 2002; Agerskov Madsen & Søvsø 2010). Smaller investigations of church vaults in Sweden include the Soldan vault in Sura Old church, Västmanland (Jonsson 2003) or Klara church in Stockholm (Bergman 2003). Creation of specific burial grounds for institutions such as workhouses and hospitals in urban areas in Europe has resulted in investigation of burial behaviour outside of traditional churchyards (Flohr Sørensen 2005; Fowler & Powers 2014; Geber 2015). There have also been investigations into burial grounds connected with hospitals and workhouses in Copenhagen (Winther Damsbo 2009; Mosekilde 2010). However modern cemeteries are rarely disturbed, exceptions are the large-scale cemetery removals in North America (Goldstein 2012; Carvajal &

Grzybowski 2014). Other small-scale investigations have been undertaken such as the cemetery removal at Manresa House, London or Holmens in Copenhagen (Melikian 2004; Nationalmuseet 2014).

Research interests associated with cemeteries have expanded, for example osteology has developed from a medical anatomical background to being an independent scientific discipline (Bennike, Holck *et al.* 2008). Human bones were not always considered archaeological material and human remains were often regarded as contributing little to archaeological questions. Berit Sellevold (1997: 19-20) describes changing museum practice in Norway from the 19th century where only skulls were collected to a slow acceptance of collecting all bones by the 1980s. Wider scientific applications including DNA analysis , trace element or isotope analysis amongst others have increased opportunities for gaining new types of information (Lynnerup, Bennike *et al.* 2008). Exploring a person's place of origin illustrates migration patterns and geographical networks, investigating nutrition can suggest social stratification or consumption patterns with access to meat or fish (Bäckström & Price 2016). Even stature can be explored as potentially revealing information on living conditions or nutrition levels (Jørkov 2015). There is also an increasing interest in perspectives which encompass the body and the individual rather than just the skeleton (Sofaer 2006; Harris, Robb *et al.* 2013). Archaeological perspectives have increasingly valued spatial distribution or burial stratigraphy as something that can be quantified and interpreted. The spatial relations and decorations on burials and coffins can be analysed to create the sequence of burial (Boston, Boyle *et al.* 2009; Kjellberg 2015) although there can be difficulties in identifying intact stratigraphic sequences due to crowded burial grounds or the likelihood of secondary movement of the coffins in vaults. Similarly horizontal spatial distribution can reveal clusters of burials according to age, gender, family relations or even economic regulations (Emery & Wooldridge 2011: 59; Kenzler 2015: 151; Tagesson 2015: 23-4).

Burial research in Europe is biased towards majority Christian beliefs in each community but there are notable exceptions such as the Quaker burial ground or Irish Catholic burial grounds in London (Start & Kirk 1998; Henderson, Miles *et al.* 2013). Comparison of Protestant and Catholic burial traditions in Germany also provide a good counterpoint (Kenzler 2015). Excavation of the burial ground of rescued slaves on the island of St Helena also stands as an example of different religious practice (Pearson, Jeffs *et al.* 2011). Ethnologists, sociologists and historians have been active in examining the material culture of death (Troels-Lund 1908; Bøgh 1981; Åkesson 1997; González 2015; Hagberg 2015 [1937]). Archaeologists have contributed towards this by analysing grave goods and funeral furnishings. One further aspect of cemetery research is the response of the archaeologists who work with them. Not simply questioning the ethics of excavating and storing the medieval and modern dead for future research (Redin 1994; Jonsson 2003; Sayer 2010a; Williams & Giles 2016) but also for the emotional consequences and how it affects

the work that is completed. This represents a strong tendency within post-processual archaeology in general to explore the experience and role of archaeology in current society, and what effect undertaking the work of archaeology has on interpretation. The staff at Christ Church were affected physically by the effects of working in a dark vault and by lead levels but also emotionally in working with corpses (Reeve & Adams 1993). Similarly there is the example of osteologists being affected by their workspace of an old mortuary room within a working undertakers business (Kirk & Start 1999).

Long before these new perspectives in below-ground research there was the interest in above-ground memorials and gravestones. In 1977, the classic study of American gravestone design and symbols by James Deetz illustrated a typology of 18th-19th century gravestones and linked it to changes in attitudes to death (revised in 1996: 97). His work has inspired explorations of gravestone styles and language, making gravestones the most common material culture to be analysed in modern cemeteries. Gravestone analogies have inspired comparisons between ancient Athens and 19th century Pennsylvania, USA (Small 1999) or to investigate the strong link between cause of death and the elaboration of gravestones in Tucson, USA (Rathje 1979). Style and language used have been connected with new expressions of memory and the body (Mytum 2006) or the agency of females in directing the text (Cannon, A 2005). Emotional response as a prime driving factor in text also moves interpretations beyond stylistic features (Tarlow 2000a). An ethnographic approach to modern cemeteries was taken by Mike Parker Pearson (1982) who compared records of funeral directors to gravestones and was able to highlight problems when interpreting material culture of cemeteries and applying them to society. Overall the study of Scandinavian gravestones and memorials are dominated by runestones and standing cross monuments which often focus on questions surrounding the conversion to Christianity. A large corpus of Danish medieval burials and gravestones (Hinrichsen 1988) was started in the 1970s and published in 1988. Changes in style, images and an increase in text have been suggested as representing the slow transition of new Reformation practices (Staecker 2003). Gravestones within modern cemeteries have also been studied illustrating changes over the years or with respect to different groups in society such as children's graves (De La Fuente Pedersen & Linnée Nielsen 2000; Flohr Sørensen 2011).

It took new theoretical and methodological perspectives and the development of archaeology as a discipline to broaden the material, research objectives and the time period studied of burial archaeology. The widening of chronological perspectives allowed the development of interest into the more recent past. The start of historical archaeology lay in multiple strands which combines interest in colonial-era American archaeology with the rise in interest of the material evidence from the post-Reformation period in Europe. Strong themes developed which encompass looking at

the processes of capitalism and colonialism and the making of the modern world and these required a new perspective into modern cemeteries and burial behaviour.

# Exploring modernity through funerary practices and cemeteries

Modernity is an ambiguous concept. Debates about it are full of contradictions and academic arguments over its nature, timing and consequences. Researchers use the same term but usually not the same definition and the framework through which to view modernity depends upon perspective and material. The flexibility of modernity as a concept creates the ability to intersect with and absorb varied understandings. This ability can be seen as one of its strengths, but it also creates a sense of ambiguity. Three ways to situate modernity is to view it as a concept of time, a phenomenon or a series of practices. As a time period, defining the start of modernity is easier than defining its end; processes associated with modernity can be traced to after the Reformation from the 16th century in Europe. The end point of modernity is debated with some researchers believing that it ended sometime in the 19th century, for example at 1850 (Burström 2007: 14). While other researchers contest that it has not yet finished and any attempts at defining stages of 'post, or after modernity' are simply elaborations on the same theme (Giddens 1991; Andrén 1998). Many of these positions depend on precisely what is being studied through the lens of modernity. For this research the material examined falls firmly within the 19th and 20th centuries which is seen as a high point of visible modernity. Attempts to establish continuity or a specific transition into post-modernity after this point are not examined in detail. However on principle that given the inevitable continuities of ideals, concepts and customs it is likely that the legacy of modernity continues far beyond the 20th century regardless of the imposition of any firm categorical labels.

As a phenomenon modernity is harder to grasp but it relates to the definition of the word from its Latin root meaning new or newer (Wienberg 2010: 18). It is defined in relation to something else, rather than being something of itself. Modernity is interpreted as a break from the past where society experiences the new. Although as archaeologists we can trace many such moments or transitions, not just those of the last few hundred years. The last few hundred years should not stand out as something too different from the past though; change would have been noted and mattered to prehistoric societies too.  So modernity has to include something more specific. According to Anthony Giddens (1991: 6) the unique aspects of modernity are characterised by the rapid speed and great scale of the changes, the nature of institutionalised life combined with increasing global connections. For others the vital aspect of modernity is the process of change in philosophical thought undertaken

after the medieval period in the West (Thomas 2004: 2-4). It is also clear that many of the defining processes or features of modernity such as increasing urbanisation have been present in human society long before the 16th century however it is how they converge together at a specific time with other factors and become driving factors in changes to the urban society that makes them stand out. What stands out is the idea that modernity is not an explanatory framework but describes a consequence of the conjunction of different processes and ideas.

Modernity as an ideology or set of practices ties together abstract ideas with more tangible concrete notions such as the processes of industrialisation, capitalism, nationalism, professionalisation and rapidly increasing urbanisation. Entwined with these processes are ideological concepts vital to the modern framework of belief such as scientific rationalism, individualism, linear progress and secularisation of authorities. Allied to this discussion is the question of how much these ideological changes are evidenced in practice? There is the suggestion that society or people could never reach the point of modernity in practice although it was desired because it was simply unlikely to be fully realised in practice (Latour 1993). Regardless of precise definitions of modernity, it is how people have understood and used these processes and ideas to create what could be called an imperfect modernity. Particularly for this research it is about how cemetery and funeral practices or habitus have created modern changes in the world through their materiality and presence in the world.

Within the umbrella term of modernity are several further issues which require clarification. Analysis and research surrounding modernity is full of binary structures, or oppositional pairs, much of which are emphasised or at least solidified within modernity. Above/ below, living/ dying, city/ country, public/ private, open/ concealed, professionals/ mourners are all common oppositions discussed throughout this research and although not restricted to modern periods they are key parts of the systems that are used to define and regulate actions with society. Cornelius Holtorf discusses how the up/ down orientation metaphor which is central to society and specifically relevant to archaeology affects perceptions of what is positive or negative (2004: 16). The concept of tradition is commonly placed as the opposite pair to modernity which should be overcome (Vernon 2014: 1). However oppositions impose universal values, supposedly implicitly understood by all people (*doxa*) and further that they are used as stable categories which does not acknowledge the constant change which is occurring. There is perhaps more emphasis on binary structures in academic research than there is within the societies that are being studied. Oppositions can be usefully employed as analytical concepts because they are an aspect of the social reality upon which modern Western society is understood (Stig Sørensen, Marie Louise 2000: 47-8). However there may be an over-reliance upon Cartesian dualisms as they provide over-simplified guides towards easily understood interpretations. As long as they are not understood as being prescriptive or binding they can uphold more inclusive and nuanced interpretations.

However the label of modernity is used, some of the dynamic power that it holds is because it is full of contradictions and it is this ability which can be usefully expanded (Thomas 2004: 46). One of the many contradictions within modernity is that it borrows heavily from 'the old' and is filled with multiple temporal concepts (Lucas 2005: 94; Kofod 2008: 222-4). Modernity re-invents, adapts and conceals the traditions and successfully pretends that it doesn't. Often there is not that much that is immediately 'new', because there are long transitional periods where the new and old are fused and there is more innovation rather than invention. However easy it is to label a time period it is not easy to instantly change people's habits, use of material objects or ways of thinking. Rarely is there a clean break between the two, but instead a transition where new elements are introduced, become fused with the existing elements and innovation and hybridity occurs. The actual realities of living within a newly modern society may be more characterised by Marshall Berman's peak stage of modernity where the concept of inner dichotomy describes a point where things are both simultaneously traditional and modern (1988: 17). Anthony Giddens (1991) acknowledges that traditional practices continue and even underpin the modern world but suggests that modern people build up new ways of understanding it. How people express themselves and their emotions through the use of material culture and funeral practices may instead fall within this more complex range. Acknowledging the complexities of these practices also guards against creating a homogenous periodisation where the pre-modern or modern is required to be the same everywhere in the world. Modern funerary behaviour in Copenhagen can be connected to other European countries but is also likely to contain unique aspects.

Another contradiction lies in the strong connection between a rapidly increasing urbanised population and modernity. In the mid-19th century Copenhagen was one of the fastest growing cities (Sommer 2006a: 51) attracting international and domestic migrants who would lose their former social networks. Modernity is related to the rise of urban individualism over community social life, yet simultaneously it is also connected to the rise of unions and workers movements. The emphasis on individualism was developed further by Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) who described the move from a rural dominated society (*Gemeinschaft*) to one where individuals were less bound to mutual aid (*Gesellschaft*). This was suggested as leading to uncertainty in how to live and behave in these new situations. Modern towns and cities were viewed as places of self-sufficiency. However this idea denies a sense of agency for rural communities in desiring and practicing change which is demonstrably untrue in churchyards (Kragh 2003) and also suggests that there is little sense of community within urban societies. However any urban society tends to be a place of new and fluid social networks. Research into modern urban communities in Denmark, demonstrates that collective units are formed through migrants creating new social ties, corresponding to guilds or unions. However these collective ties are often created

through common interests rather than family or geographically-tied customs and can go unrecognised by traditional frameworks (Kofod 2008: 67).

## Expanding archaeological research into the near-past

The idea that archaeologists study the distant past and therefore other cultures is still common in public imagination. Archaeologists studying the more recent past regularly surprise people when communicating how and what they research. There are also some self-imposed limitations on archaeological subjects within the discipline. Until recently the historic period was defined by the UK's Society for Post Medieval Archaeology as stopping at 1750. Within the 40 years of the society's life it enlarged subject boundaries to include colonisation, industrialisation and to extend chronological boundaries to the present day (Dixon 2011: 313). Publications such as the Journal of Contemporary Archaeology and books focusing specifically upon the modern past (Ersgård 2007; Lihammer & Nordin 2010) or the contemporary past (Burström 2007; Harrison & Schofield 2010) have also become increasingly common. Natascha Mehler provides an overview of central European countries approaches to the study of historic or modern archaeology. The majority of most countries state no official limit on what is considered archaeology although there is less research into the 19th and 20th centuries in eastern central European countries (Mehler 2013: Table 1, 14-5). In practice however archaeological remains can be excavated and recorded even if not formally recognised as such. Although the research boundaries for these countries have been shifted to reflect changes in professional archaeological opinion they have not always resulted in an increase in archaeological studies of modernity. In Denmark Museum law from 2003 does include below-ground archaeological features of medieval and historic periods but a reluctance to engage with the most recent past is reported (Høst-Madsen & Harnow 2012: 44). Instead Danish ethnologists and historians have conducted most research into the modern past (Kragh 2003; Kofod 2008; Schmidt 2015). Overall in Europe the practical impact of archaeological legislation has had an influence with archaeological research minimal in comparison with researchers from other disciplines who are not restricted in their subject matter. Historians and ethnologists are not bound to defined chronologies and have been free to investigate the intersection between cemeteries, funeral practices and modernity in multi-disciplinary ways such as Hviid Jacobsen & Haakonsen (2008).

The consequence is that research into attitudes to modern death, funerary customs and cemeteries has been dominated by disciplines other than archaeology. The anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer (1965) suggested a taboo or reluctance to confront death influenced by the major wars of the 20th century. Phillippe Ariès (1981 [1977]) argued that modern people had become alienated by their loss of traditional responses

and practices when dealing with death, funeral preparations and grieving. No longer was there a network of people to assist in the matter and in contrast to the 19th century extravagant funeral, 20th century death was a muted and concealed affair. These ideas have been frequently repeated but have since been challenged by several researchers, particularly Tony Walter (1991) who instead suggests that a death taboo was a stereotype imposed upon all responses to death by a dominant part of society and that there were actually varied responses to death according to different contexts. The practices of making post mortem photographs, of open coffin viewings and wakes continuing through to the 20th century does not suggest a strong taboo around viewing the body. David Cannadine (1981) also showed that 20th century attitudes were not wholly negative, so a taboo of death may have been over-estimated or even not present.

Research into people who work professionally with the dead such as priests, undertakers and pathologists shows that there is a sense of authenticity created and that instead of a binary position between modern and traditional practices there are instead new rituals which have emerged (Åkesson 1997: 182-3). From these different perspectives came overlapping dialogues into modern death, one which concentrates upon general theoretical social responses between death and modernity (Giddens 1991; Bauman 1992; Latour 1993; Mellor 1993) and the other based on more targeted contextual studies. For the latter thread there was an increase into research which integrated anthropology, architecture, sociology and the study of material culture. Cross-disciplinary research makes frequent use of material culture but with limited input from archaeological excavation sources, see for example Åhrén Snickare (2009). There are also compendiums from Hallam and Hockey (2001), or Hockey, Komaromy *et al.* (2010) which reflect the current interest in materiality in humanities research.

Historical archaeology is well-placed to take advantage of recent research, as it is by nature cross-disciplinary and focuses on the material and physical aspects of death and burial. There are three main areas where modernity is explored. The cemetery as an institution or idealised place; the idea of improvement in relation to the practices surrounding the dead and finally studying the new or marginalised communities that are present in modern society and how they create responses to the dead within larger structured frameworks. All of which express the relations between living and dead as part of the reflexive dialogue between tangible and more abstract modern phenomenon.

Although rarely explicitly referring to theoretical views discussed above, research into cemeteries as conceptual places realised in the landscape focus on how they were created, organised and used to advertise successful solutions to common modern problems. Historians and ethnologists have enthusiastically studied cemeteries and particularly the place of death in society, providing detailed national overviews (Litten

1991; Kragh 2003). For example Richard Etlin (1984) studied the rise of Père Lachaise in Paris analysing its forerunners and its international influence upon later cemeteries, particularly those in North America. There are also examples of Scandinavian research into perspectives on the creation, organisation and above-ground spatial aspects of cemeteries that focus on documentary records and images and material culture but rarely use fieldwork as a source (Fjord Jensen 2002; Rosengren & Striner 2013). The influence of German modern aesthetics and municipal design ideals in Scandinavia are emphasised (Sommer 2003; Schönbäck 2008). Balancing more theoretical views with spatial analysis are studies upon the cemetery as a place (Laqueur 2002; Petersson, A. 2004) and the intersection of place and modernity is explicitly explored (Genet May & Lunding 2008; Sommer 2008).

The idea of improvement can be used as a framework to view many of the social changes occurring over the last centuries which includes using technological advances and administrative acts to encourage progressive ways of dealing with the dead. This includes the improvement of hygiene in dealing with the dead by removing them from homes, placing them into hospitals, mortuaries and then a cemetery outside of the local area. Undoubtedly health and hygiene were important reasons behind cemetery reform but were not the only factors involved, improvement was a moral code too (Tarlow 2007). Some research moves beyond sanitation as one of the causes for new cemeteries and instead focusing upon them as agents in organising patterns of order and how to control death within bodies, official records, buildings and communications (Foucault 1986; Prior, L. 1989; Johnson, P. 2008). Although increasing regulations are not necessarily a controlling measure solely imposed by authorities but something that is actively created and is participated in by all sections in society. There are also advances in looking towards the consumption patterns within funeral customs and the developing medical and funerary professions working within this demand (Davidsson Bremborg 2006; Åhrén Snickare 2009). New actors are introduced into the fields or networks of groups that deal with death and cemeteries. Changing practices from the 19th century made use of modern technologies such as cremation or post mortem photography. Post mortem photography is revealing as it asks questions of both the intent behind the acts but also the practices that were actively displayed within the image (Jensen, J. 1994; Åhrén Snickare 2009). Cremation technology receives much attention as it was often promoted as the modern replacement for unhygienic burial underground but in contradiction was also specifically associated to ancient cremation. Cremation would also go on to have an effect upon the modern cemetery landscape in the creation of ash disposal places (Williams 2011), in relation to the changing use of landscape in the cemetery or as an analogy to removing the physical body from society (Flohr Sørensen & Bille 2008). Improvement directly relates to the emotional care of the dead too through understanding new reactions to memorials (Genet May & Lunding

2008) or the expansion into exploring the world of the senses in relation to early modern death practices (Nyberg 2010).

Modernity and death are also explored within the new communities which were created through increasing immigration both internal and external, bringing people of different nationalities, ethnicities and religions together and fusing different cultures. Investigation of 'the middling classes' buried within Christ Church, London was able to highlight effects of immigration and ethnicity of Huguenot weavers in an urban setting (Mollesen & Cox 1993). Communities that are not new but were marginalised such as the working class in the UK are also explored (Laqueur 1983; Strange 2003). These studies have had the effect of opening up different ways of understanding funerary practices and experiences which are not restricted to majority religions and the literate middle classes. There was a discursive struggle within different sections of society: between working and middle classes, individuals and the church, minority and majority religions, and other cross-sections involving identities connected with age or gender. Ideals and individual identities were being expressed in funerals and memorials either combining with or clashing against family group identities and authorities as an important element in the response to death. Specifically archaeological responses are providing challenges to architectural or historical perspectives on death (Ersgård 2007; Lihammer & Nordin 2010). The emphasis is now multi-disciplinary where archaeology and historical sources are used together with questions that challenge disciplines.

In review of this brief synthesis, modernity should not to be used as an explanatory framework but seen as practices and acts that are a consequence of many different perspectives and processes. Some of these are ideological abstract concepts and others are tightly allied to physical consequences. Even if modernity, as defined by academics, was never reached it is clear that modernity was used and reacted to by people in material ways. Caution is advised because the study of death has been pressed to explain modernity but these grand narratives may not fit with the average day-to-day community response to death (Rugg 2015: 216). In this research modernity is situated within Europe with visible consequences by the 19th and 20th centuries which acknowledge long transitional forms of continuity. Modernity is associated with capitalism which is a driving force for the related processes of urbanity, industrialisation and the formation of the nation-state. It also is formed of abstract concepts like rationalism, scientific objectivity and individualism. All of these processes contain abstract ideas with concrete realities and consequences. They also combine top-down authoritarian structuralism with individual agency but it is the interaction between these concepts where modernity is most useful in interpreting societal change and expressions. Cemeteries, death and burial practices contribute towards the creation and success of the phenomenon of modernity but are studied within a close context to examine how this plays out in one specific community. Archaeology as a discipline and a profession is also seen as being synonymous with the

modern era so that archaeologists also study ourselves in this process (Thomas 2004: 53-4).

# The materiality of cemeteries

Within the following chapters are interpretations of what a cemetery consists of which include the ideas, experiences and the acts undertaken within them but the central focus is upon the physical elements. These are the things which a cemetery comprises - the place, its limits and internal divisions, pathways, trees and plants, the gravestones and plot features combined with everything buried below-ground. The contextual relations between these material things are fundamentally part of the cemetery as a place and these relations will change over time through natural decay or deliberate preservation. Each plot is created through grouped objects of disparate contexts which extend both above and below-ground and combines with the practices and ideals that make up the activities within the cemetery. The solid, physical material culture of the bodies, coffins and urns which are added (or removed) in the cemetery are now defined through their relationship with each other. This continues in the relationships within each individual grave cut interface and grave fill, within each burial plot and within the cemetery as a single entity. This is the collective materiality or traces of actions which are integrally entwined with the experiences and acts undertaken within it, which create the entity of a cemetery.

Objects are integral to historical archaeological research, the precise properties of objects are described before being analysed and interpreted, but we must also understand what objects contribute to the making of the cemetery. The aim is to describe the material used in this research and how theoretical perspectives contribute towards the relations between the different types of sources. Material culture is active in communicating social identities and other information (Appadurai 1986). Not only do objects communicate symbolism but they also make a difference in the world, they have agency. Objects are connected and intertwined with humans (Dant 1999). The physical things in the cemetery resist and obstruct humans in their activity in the cemetery but also enable and create new ideas and relationships through the specific qualities of being a physical thing (Witmore & Olsen 2015: 188). A pathway leads us in the desired direction, a railing around a grave plot prevents our entry and a sign states 'Keep off the grass!' The actions required to dig a grave are influenced by existing trees or gravestones, underground the earlier coffins prevent access or provoke decisions on handling their presence. The rules of the cemetery are enforced by the physical things.

One of the core elements of historical archaeology is the interconnected perspectives which are gained from the intersection between material remains and documentary

sources. Following Anders Andrén (1998: 155) it is the dialogue between the sources, whether documentary or physical that produces encounters. These interactions combine attempts to correlate the different sources to find similarities but also to seek out contrasts or gaps in the interpretations. There is the intriguing possibility of exploring a narrative that might not have been retrieved from one source alone. The integration of sources creates a unique opportunity to engage with the differences between them. The dialogue between the two sources is a methodological problem when considering how they are produced and how to deal with the qualities of each source (Johnson, M. 1999). How the relations between objects and texts were created may be connected with the separation of culture and nature. Bruno Latour (1993) suggests that modern thinking created a hierarchy dividing humans from other things in the world. The relationships and reliance people have on things were reduced or de-emphasised and replaced with text. Although it is clear that people are still dependant on objects in society, from the earliest archaeological investigations hierarchies of value made the physical things in the world inferior both to humans and the written word (Moreland 2001: 11). This relationship had the consequence of attempting to reduce material culture to inert objects in archaeological interpretation. While it would be incorrect to apply a common ideal over all societies, it is quite possible that in everyday situations there was little separation between people and objects, that instead they were entangled and connected but unrecognised as important. The perspective taken in this research is to treat them as equal sources to prevent the creation of hierarchies between sources or types of material (Sofaer 2006: 86-8; Olsen 2010: 149) and to treat them as if they were created by similar social large-scale processes. This work is used to restructure the dialogue between archaeological data and documentary sources.

Historical archaeology seeks to overcome these different source values theoretically and methodologically by examining how they are constructed. The questions considered encompass how to study the material attributes through the different types of sources including physical qualities from the tangible objects or images. Cemeteries bind together the physical and the experiences surrounding death, linking the human with other things in a way that transgressed any binary divisions associated with modernity. By describing the source material used throughout this research and acknowledging some of the bias in the material it provides a foundation for the ideas and evidence discussed. It also illuminates the different hierarchical levels of analysis from discussing individual burials to the collective group of burials, the cemetery and the wider connections with society.

Three types of archaeological and historical data sources form the empirical basis for this research: the recording and excavation of the cemetery; primary documentary evidence such as cemetery protocols, burial registers, cemetery plans and images, and secondary literature including historical, sociological and ethnographic sources. The chronological relationships between the principal primary sources are presented to

show how they can be comprehended as dependant on each other to make the cemetery function (Fig. 3). The archaeological and primary documentary data derived from Assistens used throughout this research are presented here. Secondary sources are discussed throughout the text.
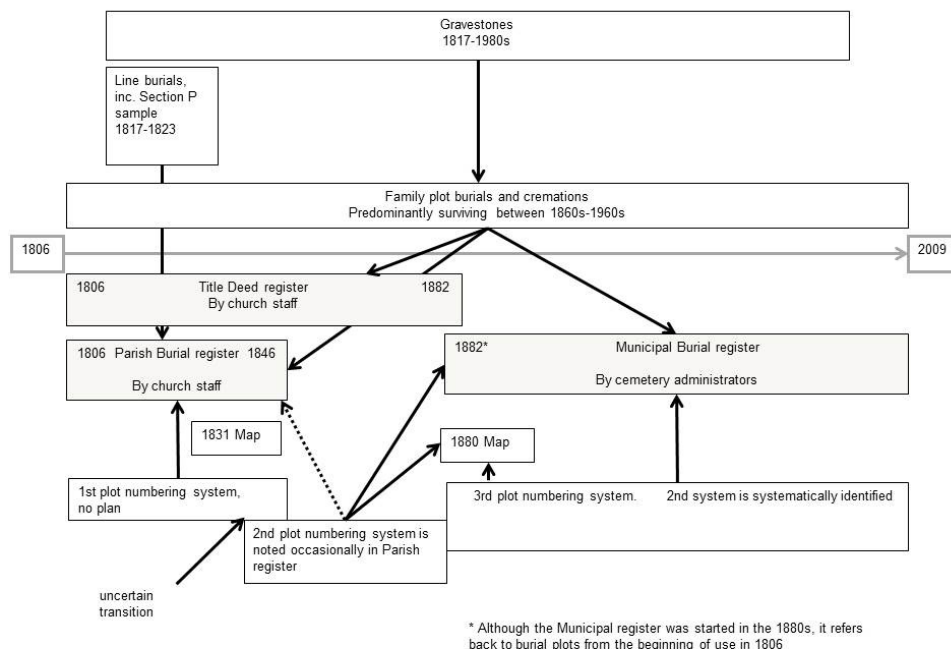


**Fig. 3.**
Timeline illustrating the chronology and relationships of principal sources from Assistens.

## Assistens excavation data

The direct tangible data is from the excavation where over 1000 inhumations were observed and recorded however not all were excavated. It is the 935 *in situ* excavated burials of which 854 were inhumations (coffin burials) and 81 burials of cremation urns, 198 identified charnel deposits combined with the stratigraphic sequences which detail the relationships between these archaeological features which comprise the assemblage. Most burials were of adults, particularly in the older age categories and there was an equal representation of males to females (Table 1). For further details and descriptions of individual contexts and finds the excavation technical report should be referred to (Anthony, Keenan *et al.* 2016). The data is from direct observation and measurements during excavation which become textual when

recorded into context sheets and computer data. Throughout this research the Group number which represents all elements of the burial (coffin, skeleton and grave goods, grave cut and fill together is used to identify some of the most relevant burials and allowing interpretations to be connected to the original excavation data. Group numbers are used to identify other features such as burial vaults or pits, an example would be (G1565).

**Table 1.**
Details of age and sex analysis of the skeletons from Assistens (n = 854 individuals). Some individuals could only be assigned as an adult (over 18 years old) or subadult (under 18 years old). Few adolescent individuals and not all adults could be osteologically determined as male or female.

| Category | Subadults | | | | Adults | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 119 | | | | 735 | | | | |
| | Infant | Child | Adolescent | Subadult | Young | Middle | Mature | Older | Adult |
| Years | <1 | 1-11 | 12-17 | <18 | 18-25 | 26-45 | 46-55 | 56> | 18> |
| Total | 51 | 52 | 13 | 3 | 25 | 161 | 133 | 192 | 224 |

| | Sexed | Unsexed | Sexed | Unsexed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 6 | 116 | 642 | 93 |
| | 2 males: 4 females | | 321 males: 321 females | |

The entire assemblage is not always used; selections of data were made to accommodate the research questions. Dividing the overall assemblage is itself a form of interpretation which has been reliant on the combination of all types of sources. When analysing the data for this research, four samples extracted from the assemblage are used: the Identified sample, the Runddel sample and the Section P sample (Table 2).

**Table 2.**
Details of the total burial assemblage and specific samples used in the research.

| | Inhumations | Cremations | Total burials |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total excavated *in situ* burials | 854 | 81 | 935 |
| Identified sample | 545 | 57 | 602 |
| Runddel sample | 471 | 24 | 495 |
| Section P sample | 84 | 0 | 84 |
| High value sample | 38 | 0 | 38 |

Identifying the person buried and therefore the year of burial was necessary to analyse chronological trends. In total out of 935 burials, 602 individuals (64%) have been identified and therefore accurately dated. Unlike many 19th century cemeteries, there were very few nameplates on the coffins; identification relied on a complex process of combining and assessing archaeological and documentary sources. This number has

increased from the technical report and also in some cases has been corrected for this research. Although some cremation burials have been identified, the questions sought from the material tend to focus upon identified traditions such as coffin styles or body position which cannot be answered from the cremation data. Where used the *Identified sample* refers to the 545 identified inhumation burials (this figure does not include six inhumations where the coffin was not recorded). These burials derive from all areas of the excavation, all time periods and all types of burials category.
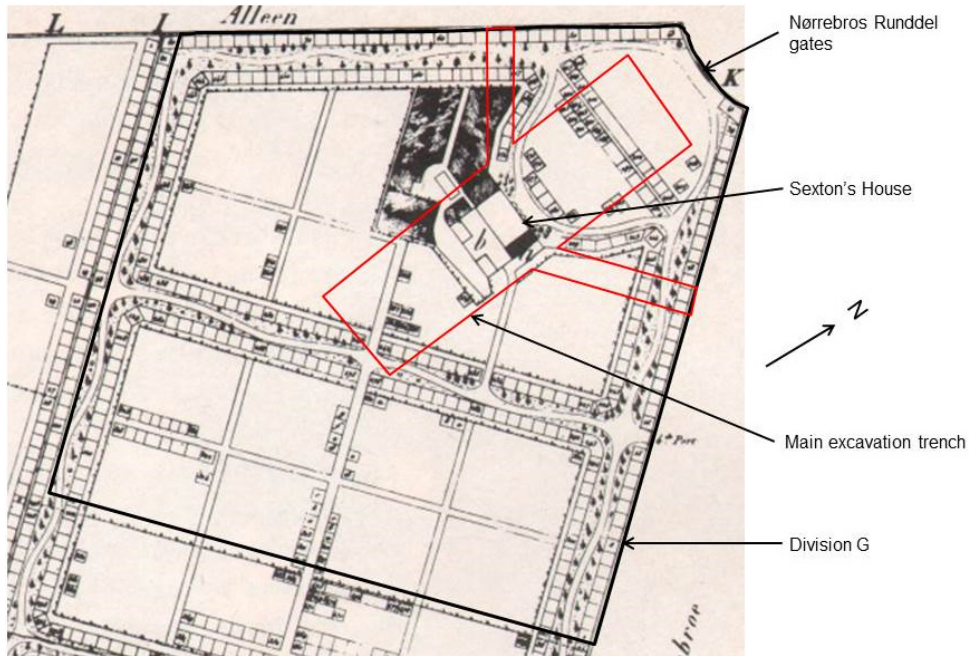


**Fig. 4.**
The earliest detailed plan of Assistens, focused on Division G which shows some of the burial plots, 1831. Source: Archive, Københavns Kirkegårde, Grundplan over Assistenskirkegaardene. Published anonymously, 1831.

The *Runddel sample* is spatially defined, comprising burials located within one specific area (Fig. 4), lying between the Sexton's House and the Nørrebros Runddel gates[5]. Not all of these burials were identified however using this sample allows sequences within a physical area to be explored in terms of cemetery maintenance practices. This sample of 495 burials includes all coffins and cremations from family plots and line burials in this area. The final and smallest, the *Section P sample*, is used to focus attention on the earliest known burials in the same physical area as the Runddel sample, the line burials which provided low-cost grave space during the very first years of Assistens (see plot definitions in Primary documentation). Hundreds of these line

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[5] In the Museum of Copenhagen's technical report and raw data this area corresponds to excavation Areas 3 and 4.

burials are documented in registers but most were removed by later burials. This sample consists of 84 identified line burials, dating to the years 1817-23. These early burials escaped truncation and removal by later family plot burials because spatial re-organisation of grave plots added pathways over them instead of re-using the space for new burials. Although line burials were excavated elsewhere in the excavation, none were identified or accurately dated. The fourth sample, the *High value sample* is the smallest consisting of just 38 inhumations from the most expensive category of family plots. They are dated to between 1813 and 1924. These burials are identified through their location and through identification with the burial registers and deed register.

To summarise the four samples, the Identified sample is used for detailed chronological questions relevant to all areas of burial, regardless of burial type. The Runddel sample is used to investigate questions of cemetery maintenance over time. The Section P sample is used to emphasise the line burials and questions on the earliest frequent burial type in a very restricted time frame. The High value sample is used to investigate the interface between the cost of the grave plot and funeral material culture. The samples overlap with some burials present in all four samples (Fig. 5).
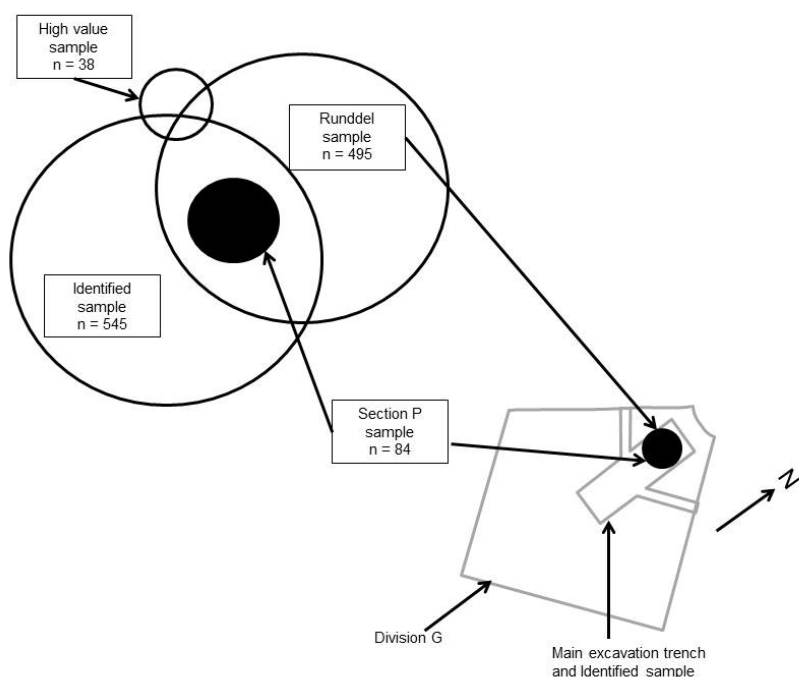


**Fig. 5**
Illustrating how the four burial samples overlap and where they are located spatially within the excavation. The High value sample plots were located over the entire excavation area.

## Documentation and recording of above-ground material culture

No above-ground survey was performed by the Museum of Copenhagen prior to excavation. The landscape of the excavated area was reconstructed using earlier surveys, particularly photographs and documentation of the gravestones. As part of a wider initiative to document cultural heritage within cemeteries, an inventory of all surviving gravestones in Assistens was undertaken between 1985-7 (Assistens Kulturcentret 1985-7). Issues of conservation and preservation appear to be primary objectives and the survey had a distinctly sculptural and artistic perspective which set decorative elements of the gravestones into a wider aesthetic context. A secondary focus was on notable individuals and the more ornate gravestones. This inventory is held in the Assistens archive and consists of paper records and black and white photographs. Most of the data and interpretation of the architectural elements of the monuments has been published (Kryger 1985; Helweg & Linnée Nielsen 2010). Although the survey was undertaken c. 20 years before the excavation it is the most complete data available for reconstructing the cemetery landscape and although changes must have occurred during this period, it remains a valuable data set. The data used for this research is restricted to Division G gravestones – the area used by the inner city Trinity parish which were surveyed in 1986 (Table 3). Field survey of gravestones still *in situ* outside of the construction site was undertaken in the summer of 2013 by the author for this study and compared with the survey images, few differences were found between the two. Additional data on gravestones and plot decoration is derived from the excavation because complete or fragments of gravestones were found reused in structures, deposited in pits and out of context within the upper levels of the cemetery top soil. These finds illustrate some of the disposal routines of the cemetery. Some limited information on plot decoration and above-ground features were also retrieved from the excavated remains of structural elements of monuments, tree roots and occasional redeposited finds. Combined together the different physical and documentary sources allow the general environment to be recreated of Division G and comparison to be made with other areas in Assistens and cemeteries of other cities and countries.

**Table 3.**
Total plots of gravestones surveyed in 1986 and those which were excavated.

|  | Plots | Gravestones | Individuals represented |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1986 Survey of Division G which had extant above-ground features | 181 | 274 | 251[6] |
| Gravestones from plots in Division G which were excavated (fully or partially) | 50 | 61 | 112 |

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[6] Not all gravestones were legible and many stated only the surname rather than specific individuals

## Primary documentation

The primary documentary evidence consists of cemetery administrative documents and maps. These include cemetery legislation and guidelines for practices that control physical aspects of the cemetery such as burial depth, spacing, and regulation of gravestone decoration and landscaping. The protocols also set out required visitor and employee behaviour and were also updated regularly to reflect new ideals within the cemetery authorities (15 February 1805a).

The central sources are the cemetery burial registers. The expectations associated with modern cemeteries might suggest highly accurate recording systems of each burial and other associated rights or details of plots. However the documentation of burials changed with the development of the cemetery and was adapted to suit understandings of what information was important to record. For example there are multiple sets of burial registers containing disparate information. Re-organisation of burial plots also led to several maps being created which do not always correspond with each other or the registers. The description that follows gives a foundational understanding of the documents used. The burial registers were created to enable administration of the cemetery concerning payment and cemetery management. They were also for the upkeep of state legislation requirements and to fulfil the increasing demand for statistical recording of the population. Due to the overlapping information in the different sets of registers, documentary information is primarily taken from two sets of burial registers. The earliest was written by church vergers of Trinity parish (Andersen, A. 1991: 5) and were maintained separately by each parish for their areas of the cemetery. These will be referred to throughout the text as the *Parish register*, (Copenhagen City Archive, Trinitatis Kirke Begravelsesprotokol 1806-1846) and they start with the opening of the cemetery extension with records ordered according to date of burial rather than by the spatial location of the plot. They include all types of burial category from expensive family plots to the cheaper single line burials. The Parish register provides more detailed biographical information than later registers and includes occupation, date of death and of burial, cause and place of death. Relationships are also noted indirectly with people being described frequently as 'the wife or child of'. The Parish register was used in tandem with the deed register which recorded the contract and rights of ownership of the large multiple burial plots. The deed register consisted of date of purchase and expiry, and additional rights of erecting a railing or boundary around the plot and extended tenure (Copenhagen City Archive, *Trinitatis Assistens Kirkegårde Skødeprotokol Nr. 1-6, 1799-1882*).

Over the 19th century the church's responsibility was slowly reduced and eventually the cemetery was taken over by the city municipality in 1880 and administration centralised (Helweg 2010: 125). New types of burial registers were created which use a new system of plot numbering. They started from 1882 and continue up to the present day. These registers are referred to throughout the text as the *Municipal*

*register*. (*Begravelsesprotokollen for afdeling G, Bd. 1+2, 1880-1990s*, Centre for Copenhagen Churchyards, Bispebjerg Churchyard Office). They are ordered spatially by plot and combine title deed details such as the dates of purchase and expiry and the individual burials. Information on individuals includes date of burial but not date of death or personal details. No line burials are included on this register because they had largely ceased by this period with some occasional exceptions. The Municipal register can also contain references to burials earlier than 1880 if a family plot was still active at that date although these entries are incomplete and vary in quality. The initial archive research and databases of the Parish and Municipal registers were created as part of the preparation for the Museum of Copenhagen's excavation project (Zander 2009a; 2009b; Wiene 2010). Data collection for this research has involved extended archive research to expand the year's covered and correct entries to enable the integration and comparison of information on the two registers.

It is clear that the information required in Assistens and how it was organised changes through the 250 years of operation. Further archive research has involved examining the separate cremation register (Copenhagen City Archive, *Protokol for Krematoriet paa Nodre Fasanvej, Bispebjerg Krematoriet 1893-1987*). The cremation registers are a good example of rapid change as the first entries are given a lot of space (three entries spread over two pages) and contain immense detail of all the required nine documents including police attestation, medical confirmation of death and attestation that cremation was desired. However requirements are curtailed quite quickly and by 1916 cremations are now six entries over two pages with no documentation required and therefore became normalised. The design of the physical books reveals much of the surrounding attitudes to changes in death management.

The burial registers provide data on the different classes of plot within Assistens. The design of the cemetery comprises different categories of grave plot set according to perceived prominence of plot and priced accordingly (Helweg 2010: 125). There were no pauper burial plots or communal graves within Division G. Line burials (*linjebegravelse* in the burial registers) are the cheapest level of burial excavated within Division G. They were for one individual only and bought for 20 years and were non-renewable, unless converted into a family plot later. There was no choice in location meaning that for example children could not be buried next to parents. There were no formal rights to a monument or plot border and after the grass had grown back over the grave it is unlikely that there was any sign above-ground of their presence. Line burials are therefore a cheap form of burial providing limited but low-cost grave space. There were some lines specifically designated for children but there were treated as family plots. Some child lines were active into the 20th century (Andersen, A. 1991: 7). They were ordered according to separate areas within each Division denoted by a letter. A complete section (P) was excavated north of the Sexton's House and parts of two sections were excavated south of the Sexton's House (N and K). Line burials were some of the earliest in the Division and quickly filled

available burial space but the use of them was reduced after the mid-19th century. The majority of line burials were removed by later family plots but some survived particularly under pathways. In contrast to the identification of archaeological data which uses Group numbers, burial plot identification derives from documentary sources, an example would be (P555) for a family burial plot or (burial 101) for a line burial.

The most expensive plots are placed along the cemetery walls; these are a standard size of 9.8m², suitable for sometimes six burials or more and are referred to in the burial registers as BL (*blandingslinjebetegnelse*, Mixed Line designations). Slightly cheaper are the lines of prominent plots generally suitable for four burials or more burials. They are set alongside large pathways, often directly opposite the Wall Line but also situated close to the Sexton's House or other structures; these are referred to as ML (*monumentlinjebetegnelse*, Monument Line designations). In this thesis they are referred to as Wall Line or Monument Line plots, together they are referred to as high value plots. These are categorised by the cemetery authorities as having a higher value and status which is denoted economically in terms of the higher payment required due to their more prominent spatial location, larger size and potential to erect a vault or boundary wall around the plot. Deeds recording their rights could be purchased from the Church verger (Nielsen, A. 1939: 133). They could be purchased for very long periods of time and the tenure renewed. Many plots were bought in the first decades that Division G was open. Very few of these plots were affected by the Metro construction and therefore the majority lie undisturbed in the cemetery.

The vast majority of burials in Division G belong to the middle category of cost; the typical family plot. These plots provided space for two or four graves and were located within large blocks of plots. Family plots could be purchased when Division G opened but uptake was relatively low in comparison to line burials or high value plots. They could be situated within the line burial areas and if people wished to extend tenure of line burials they could be converted into family plots (Andersen, A. 1991: 10). In Division G family plots were most popular from the mid-19th century and became the most commonly sold type of plot. Rights to have railings or other borders, gravestones and decorations could be purchased. Family plots could also be renewed although unlike the high value plots there was more frequent turnover in ownership. Most of the excavated burials belong to this category.

Plans of the cemetery also combine physical attributes with textual information. The earliest plans show Assistens from its establishment in 1760 but are limited in detail of spatial organisation of specific areas and grave plots. They are more schematic depictions showing the limits of the cemetery. The earliest with internal details is from 1831 and shows the intentions behind the organisation of specific grave areas, pathways and buildings and also chronological alterations to the original design. Three systems of identifying plots within Division G are known. The Parish register

uses the first system to refer to plots which has no surviving plan. This was reconstructed using archaeological evidence and notes contained within the registers on the layout and organisation of burial. Division G was originally divided into alphabetical sections and lines, the sections affected by excavation were sections P, N and a small corner of K. The lines were more expensive categories of plots placed alongside pathways and the outer cemetery wall. However within the sections each individual burial was not surveyed or mapped and were understood through correlation with the later systems from evidence within the registers and by spatially linking excavated evidence.

Scattered throughout both registers are rare links to the second system when a plot has been continued in use. An original plan of the second system does not survive but it is systematically linked to the third systems on later maps and in registers and therefore the layout can be reconstructed. The first detailed plans of the area showing plot numbering of the second and third system dates from the 1880s. The transition between the first and second plot system is unknown, certainly prior to the 1860s and possibly before the 1840s. The third and current system of plot identification dates from the 1880s cemetery re-organisation and in Division G consists of plots numbered 1 to 810 (Fig. 6). This system of plot numbering is used to refer to family plots within this research. Gaps in spatial data resulted in the need for additional information from other sources to make sense of the management of recording burials in books and in the ground.



**Fig. 6**
Detail of grave plots surveyed in the 1880s in Division G, Assistens. Plot numbers for the third, post-1880s system are in the centre of each plot in red, numbers from the previous (second) system are in the corner in black. Source: Centre for Churchyards, Copenhagen.

- *Preservation and representivity in the sources*

The unequal preservation and representation of data are challenges present within all types of sources. Within above- and below-ground material remains the processes of natural decay affects the quantity and quality of the data. The underground geology

of Assistens of damp, clayey soil with some sand resulted in the rapid decay of more fragile materials such as textiles but a good level of preservation of coffin wood and skeletons. Therefore it was likely that earlier burials would have less information preserved on grave goods and clothing compared to later burials. However it was deliberate human action in the form of truncation by later burials that facilitated most of the break-up and decay of the burials. As Assistens is a cemetery that reuses graves, both above-ground features and below-ground remains should have been removed when a new owner purchased the plot. The removal of gravestones and plot features skews the data used to recreate the landscape. Even if the plot was not reused, railings, fences or hedges could be removed and gravel or stone surfaces changed to grass to enable easier maintenance. In some cases memorials considered to be more aesthetically outstanding or dedicated to prominent people may have been preferentially preserved biasing the data towards certain sections of society. Further consideration of the bias in the gravestone data are discussed in Chapter 4. Concerning the below-ground remains it was likely that no action to remove burials was taken until the plot had been resold and was to be used again. If a plot was bought by new owners no previous burials should remain underground. According to the regulations the numbers of people noted in the registers should be far greater than the numbers of those excavated. Therefore there are not just issues of preservation of material resulting from natural decay but also from deliberate human actions which may not always have been undertaken according to regulations.

As an example of the preservation issues affecting the below-ground archaeological data, the survival of coffins and their decorative features are used to examine preservation quality in the assemblage as a whole. Where coffins and their fittings are well preserved there is a greater accuracy in determining genuine patterns in fashions or style choices. With the greatest percentage of coffins being poorly preserved this will skew the data (Table 4).

**Table 4.**
The preservation of coffins (n=848 out of 854 in situ inhumations because six individuals were placed in another's coffin and are omitted from the analysis).

| Level of coffin preservation | Total | % |
|---|---|---|
| Good | 70 | 8.3 |
| Medium | 232 | 27.3 |
| Poor | 546 | 64.4 |
| **Total** | **848** | **100** |

Further if the earliest coffins were predominantly poorly preserved then the accuracy of data on coffins styles of the early to middle 19th century would be less compared with better preserved coffins from later phases. Although the burial conditions are relatively stable over the whole excavated area, preservation of the coffin is affected by decay over time plus a range of factors from differing levels of disturbance and truncation to the quality of the wood used. Only 8% of the coffins were well

preserved, defined as being near-complete and still securely containing the skeleton. Most were poorly preserved (64%), defined as only a stain in the soil with fragments of wood. The most recent 20th century coffins were more likely to be well preserved but even some of these coffins were poorly preserved with the latest example of a poorly preserved burial from 1952. Therefore although environmental conditions and natural decay are important factors when analysing burial traditions, it is not a definitive statement that all poorly preserved burials can immediately be identified as 19th century and all well preserved burials as 20th century.

Greater complexity arises in the Assistens material between factors of preservation and representivity where coffins may originally have been very plain, so even if they had been well preserved they would have contained few elaborations. The two earliest excavated burials are both from vaulted family plots which underwent little later disturbance; however the earliest evidence is dominated by the line burials. The coffins were generally poorly preserved rectangular constructions with few added details although there were occasional variations. These plain burials with little or no elaboration set a baseline for establishing the common traditions of the period. Of the Section P sample, 76 line coffins were poorly preserved (90%, of 84) partially due to the poorer quality wood which would decay rapidly and also because they were buried in locations frequently subject to truncation and disturbance. The earliest coffins may have also been the plainest but were also those that were buried in the cheapest available plot suggesting economic motives for plain coffins. Despite this knowledge we must be cautious in assigning a simple correlation of poverty and plain burial. This may equally be the consequence of an active choice for a simple burial. Conversely highly elaborate burials in the late 19th and 20th century can also be associated with certain ethnic groups or the working class regardless of economic means where the prestige of 'a good send-off' is considered more important than the individuals and the community's economic status (Laqueur 1983: 116-8).

Analysing the amount of decorative features on coffins that were preserved and recorded at Assistens allows us to quantify the potential loss through decay and how this affects the archaeological interpretation. Burials were categorised as either having no external features, one feature or multiple features (Fig. 7). Coffins from all types of burials could have more than one feature recorded, both inside the coffin including upholstery or flowers placed on the body and external features such as decorative symbols or more practical elements such as handles. The external features are focused upon here. Overall within the Identified sample, 56% (304 of 545) of coffins had no features, 26% had only one feature (142 of 545) and 18% (99 of 545) had multiple features recorded showing that most of the identified coffins were plain with little surviving funeral fashions. However comparing the proportions of each type of burial in each decade gives an insight into the likely frequency of funeral decoration and features but also preservation rates. Burials with no features recorded were present in all decades and until the 1890s represent over 50% of burials in each decade.
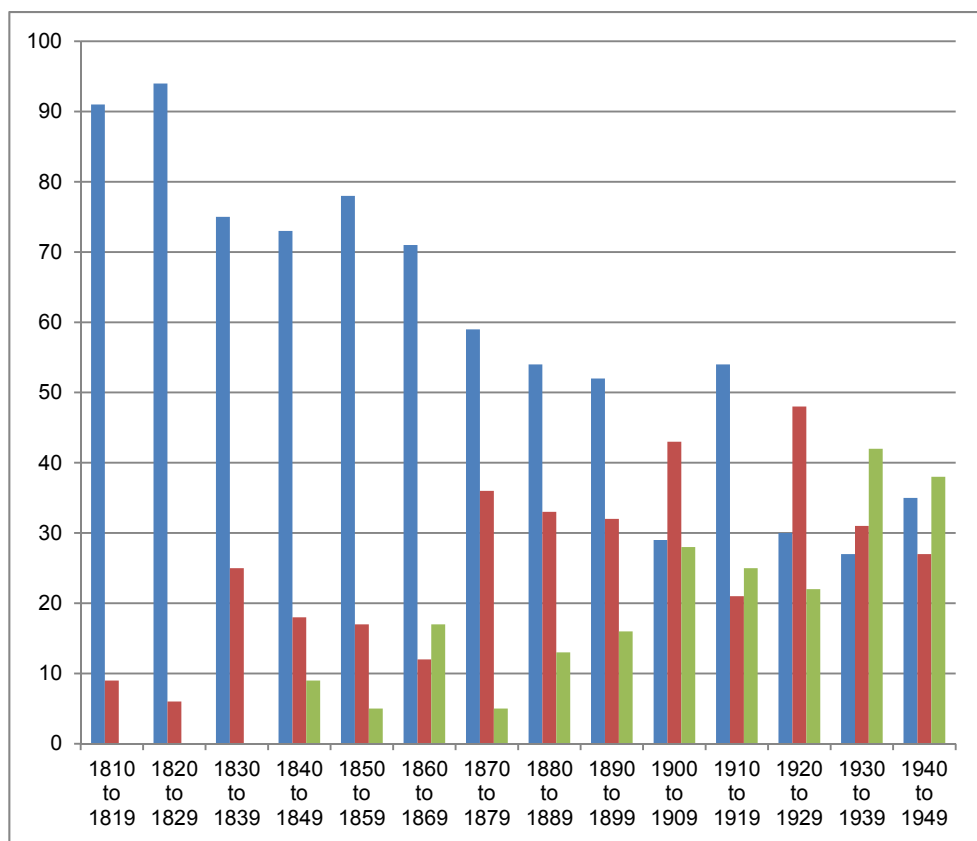
**Fig. 7.**
Identified burials (n=545) classified according to their amount of external decorative coffin features and presented as proportional percentages for each decade from 1810 to 1949. Blue = burials with no external features; Red = burials with one external feature ; Green = burials with multiple external features.

Although the first decades (1810s to 1820s) are comprised largely of the cheaper line burials, plain burial fashions are still dominant until the 1860s and continue to be popular. Burials with only one feature recorded were also present throughout the use of the cemetery and suggests that other features had decayed before excavation. However burials with multiple features are only present from the 1840s onwards, making up between 5% and 16% of the proportion of burials from each decade until the 1900s. After this date there is a steady increase in burials with multiple features. Are the excavated burials lacking features because of poor preservation conditions or because they were originally plain? Poor preservation and rapid decay is certainly responsible for some of this pattern and some loss of data is clear. However both simple and elaborate burials are present through all but the earliest use of Assistens indicating preservation conditions do not skew the data strongly. Yet it is also clear

that there are genuine chronological patterns identified, one being that burials were increasingly elaborate in the 20th century.

Concerning representivity in the documentary sources, the different registers and the maps record different kinds of details and it is a challenge to attempt to connect the pieces of data. The burial registers at Assistens are well preserved and partially digitised but there is bias in what type of information is recorded. Having different sets of registers over the use of the cemetery meant that different data were prioritised leaving gaps in other records. There are discrepancies between the two main registers used, for example the Parish register records each burial singularly even if they are placed within a family plot, and therefore it is difficult to connect burials within them. The Municipal register records only plots within tenure, not those which have been abandoned. Burials earlier than 1880 were thus only copied into the Municipal register if they were part of an earlier, but still legally owned tenure. Even so, burials within these active plots were not always copied across. The Municipal register did not always include burials which were older than the 20 year limit of grave peace which also includes all non-renewable line burials. For administrative purposes, ground containing a burial that was eligible for removal was therefore treated as empty space. Some plots were transferred twice or even three times to new owners therefore many burials could potentially be under-recorded.

Burial registers contain the organisational principles of how to display a burial record and which information to record and present but also the regulation and use of physical space in the visible landscape and extending three-dimensionally below it. The Parish register is similar to church records including detailed information such as cause of death and address of the deceased. Cemetery sextons had instructions from 1805 to provide detailed data on the cause of death (15 February 1805a: §7-9). However later registers are more concerned with finance and the practical management of each grave plot recording only name, age, ownership of the plot and when it can be sold again. By the later 19th century cause of death was tracked through medical and population statistics. The arrangement of the registers also differs: the Parish register is written in order of date of burial creating no link to the actual geographical space, the Municipal register is ordered by grave plot allowing a clear system of tracking burials and creating spatial control of each plot. The motives and intentions behind the information recorded changed over time.

The Parish register is a mix of different categories of information associated with their life and relations. Everybody is represented equally regardless of payment. The records are not updated by removing references to older burials. Over time the recording of burials changes from a social record of individuals to a financial review of cemetery management noting only the sparse details of the person's dead state. The need to record intimate detail surrounding the individual person in the first register has been shifted to other forms of authority such as health records and death notices, limiting

the cemetery records to relate purely to matters directly concerning the cemetery. The complex information about a person and their death has been divided up into different forms of state or municipal administration. The Municipal register is a more open source because it can be edited to make it more practical and relevant for the staff using it, it represents the burial event only for a defined period of time. The people represented are only present for a limited time and those who had more means to pay could be represented for a longer duration. I would suggest that the organisation of the Municipal register is clearly more efficient as an administration tool but it is also primarily aimed at controlling the purchasable space of the cemetery yet the primary aim of the Parish register is to deal with the need for burial.

These registers were originally administrative tools which were not intended for public display but are now increasingly public and visible in city archives and the internet. Certainly these sources are more open and permanent than the underground burials which they describe but they are also more concealed than the above-ground gravestones which can be seen and interpreted by any visitor to the cemetery. However the gravestones can be poorly maintained, leading to collapse, destruction or obscuring of the text, and they may also be removed when a grave plot becomes free. It is difficult to state which is the more permanent or long-lasting reminder of the people buried in the cemetery, especially when there is a great deal of change and renewal. There are documents stating who was buried in the early years but no physical trace of the gravestone or body beneath the soil. There are gravestones to people never buried in Assistens and also excavated bodies with no trace of gravestone or documentation. Another discrepancy between representivity in the sources is highlighted because registers refer only to complete burials. Where burials are disturbed and the remains are redeposited as charnel the connection to the burial registers is lost because there is no documentation of these acts (discussed further in Chapter 6). The charnel evidence still provides some information on the individual burial transformed both by natural decay and by human intervention. However they are no longer formally acknowledged within the cemetery documentary evidence. The archaeological evidence no longer links to the individual known burial but provides information instead upon the cemetery management practices which re not recorded in the burial registers.

From the start of the excavation documentary and physical evidence was integrated. Within the fieldwork there was no possibility to retain separate domains with the exception of the osteological analysis. The link between records and physicality underground was present and generally unquestioned. There was an underlying assumption made that there would be precise identification between the two with the documentary sources guiding the work. This indicates a higher trust in the documentary records than the physical evidence of the burials. Both types of sources have their challenges and potentials but they should not be treated hierarchically, as one more valued than the other. There is no definitive way to link all of these

elements together to provide a single narrative of events within the cemetery. Combining the sources illustrate the differences in interpretations of the early use of Assistens but also the commonalities in later decades where archaeology and texts depict the decline in burial. Multiple available sources provide a broader framework and data set and integration provides a stronger and more nuanced interpretation. A final example serves to describe some of the challenges when using different types of data. 81 cremation urns were excavated in Assistens. 52 have been identified to an individual in the registers but other urns have not proved so easy to identify. Only one urn had a paper tag with a name upon it as a direct identifier. Others could be dated by their ceramic cremation tag which has a stamped identification number and a year. Identifying the urns required comparison with the burial registers. Cremations were only legal from 1892 in Denmark (Kragh 2003: 223), so should have been recorded within the Municipal register. Some plots contain only one urn and these were easier to confirm especially when the inhumation burials were all accounted for. Plots with multiple closely dated urns were difficult to identify although an approximate decade could sometimes be assigned. However not all burials of urns were recorded as such. There are several entries which were not identified as cremations yet the date of the cremation tag fits perfectly both to the documentary records and conforms to the overall number of individuals in the plot.

**Table 5.**
Discrepancies between archaeological data and documentary data from the Municipal register on cremation urns in the Runddel sample.

| Context ID | Excavated? | Registered as | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| G252 | Yes | Inhumation | Missing in register |
| G182 | Yes | Inhumation | Missing in register |
| G180 | Yes | Inhumation | Missing in register, or incorrectly recorded in fieldwork |
| No group | No | Cremation | 1951, wood urn which may have been excavated but not identified because it was located far out of the correct plot |
| No group | No | Cremation | 1953, wood urn possibly completely decayed |

A good comparison can be made where there is complete data from both sources which excludes partly excavated plots. Focusing on the Runddel sample shows 22 cremations were excavated from 16 plots that were fully excavated. In the register 21 cremation urns were documented. Not all of these names correspond so combining sources result in 24 potential cremation burials. 19 correspond perfectly in their details being excavated and placed in the correct plot and shown on the register. However there are five discrepancies (Table 5), three urns were excavated and could be identified by tags or by stratigraphy but were not recorded as a cremation in the register. There could be discrepancies in recording the original entry or in later digitisation. However one example could also be explained as a disturbed urn recorded incorrectly during fieldwork as two urns instead of one. Not all urns

recorded in the register were found; two were missing, possibly because they were made of degradable materials leaving only a small scatter of ash which was unobserved during excavation. They could also have been moved without being noted in the register. Further inconsistencies were found on the placement of urns, for example suggesting that they were placed at the back and right side of a plot yet the urn was found in the front and middle. Two urns of people dying in different years were buried together in the same cut and on the same day which indicates the potential for long-term storage. Danish law is strict in comparison with many other European countries regarded disposal and does not allow urns to be stored in the home (Flohr Sørensen 2009: 113). Due to their late dates and shallow burial, cremation urns should rarely be disturbed or moved by later burials. What should have been a simple comparison of written and archaeological data is proved to be a more complex issue requiring investigation of all sources.

- *The process of identifying burials at Assistens*

Throughout this research in the discussions of how the data can be interpreted is an underlying uncertainty in how representative this data is of the whole assemblage. This concerns aspects such as gender and age representation or examining fashions of coffin furnishings or grave goods within the coffin. One common question when considering representation of the data in cemeteries is asked about the number of people who were originally buried in comparison with how many were excavated and how many can be identified. This could appear simple: count the number of people in the registers and compare them with the number of burials found. Yet for multiple reasons this simplicity is deceiving. Even if a plot was fully excavated, burials from the earliest phases in the biography of the grave plot could have been removed and others perhaps not identified. Although there are extensive written records, the physical situation did not always correspond to this data. The close proximity and sometimes intensive use of plots with multiple burials in a small area meant that burials were not clustered in neat groups according to the above-ground cemetery plans. Most burials were part of larger overlapping clusters covering several adjoining plots. An archaeologist could not identify the grave cut (which is the pit dug by the gravediggers for the coffin) and dig vertically down to establish the identities of burials according to the written records, particularly where there was evidence of the order of older burials being altered. Identification required the integration of data from different sources, primarily comparing the burial registers to the physical evidence of the skeleton, grave goods and stratigraphic sequence of burials in the clusters of plots.

Despite these obstacles successful identification was possible of 602 individuals (64%, of 935 burials). It is also possible to undertake further research to identify more people in the future. Specifically identifying individuals opens up the possibility for chronological research rather than having to treat the whole assemblage as a collective.

A secure chronology for funeral behaviour and burial management was achieved through identifying individuals. There are also extensive advantages which would enable future work in for example connecting osteological analysis of disease to autopsy reports.

It is vital to explicitly set out and define the methodology for working within different sets of data because working through exactly how answers were created can reveal the challenges and possibilities of analysis. The method of identification started with any clear material evidence of identity. Some identification information was found on physical objects although very few nameplates were found on coffins which are the most usual method of identification of burials (Table 6).

**Table 6.**
Archaeological evidence which can potentially identify individual people with specific names or identifying information from the total excavated assemblage. Standing gravestones include only those from excavated plots rather than all of Division G or the whole construction site.

| | Total objects | Number of names | Number of dates | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Nameplates** | 5 | 2 | 2 | One female and male identified |
| **Cremation tags** | 26 | 1 | 20 | One male identified |
| **Wedding rings** | 38 | 37 | 29 | 1 illegible, many initials only |
| **Gravestone fragments (excavated)** | 43 | 50 | 24 | 3 references to mother or father |
| **Gravestones from plots in Division G which were excavated (fully or partially)** | 61 | 112 | 83 | From 1986 above-ground survey |
| **Total** | 173 | 202 | 158 | |

Only five were found and only two had decipherable names. However the data is not fully compatible, as for example the ceramic cremation tags give a year of cremation and identifying number rather than an individual's name. Only one full name was recovered from a paper cremation label. The wedding rings often contain only initials and even then initials of the spouse rather than the buried individual. Importantly the year commemorates the wedding not the date of death. Nameplates, cremation tags and wedding rings were the only objects that could specifically be associated with a particular coffin or body; gravestones infer a burial but are not necessarily connected in the same physical or stratigraphical context. Some gravestones were moved onto Assistens commemorating burials too early to have been placed within the cemetery. Gravestones do not always contain the date of death and some only commemorate ownership by the referring to a surname rather than a specific person. The other area of archaeological evidence is that derived from spatial data both horizontal and vertical. The stratigraphic sequence of the burials cannot identify individuals but it

can identify the sequence of burials identifying the first to the latest burials situated within a cluster of burials. Horizontally the clustering of burials within Assistens was clear enough to identify some plot boundaries. Many clusters comprised multiple plots or rows of burials but some discrete clusters were possible to identify. Combining details on the depth of burials with the spatial arrangement and the identification of a burial being stratigraphically the first within a cluster formed some of the criteria for identifying the earliest line burials.

The next stage in the process was to create the matrix of burials and compare the known archaeological information with the burial registers. For example the latest burial may have been of a cremation urn and the first burial in the matrix had an initial and date on a wedding ring. How does the information compare? If the clear evidence from both sources connects then the rest of the sequence may be easier to interpret. The osteological information is also helpful in the process. Osteological interpretation cannot provide an identity but can provide a relatively secure interpretation of biological sex and age range for adults and ages for children. Adding this information into the matrix allows an interpretation of previously unidentified individuals. According to the logic and evidence of the matrix combined with the physical evidence and the date on the burial registers there was often only one potential identity for the burial. Through this process all sources are treated critically with the potential for revision of ideas and weighing up of facts. There were many obstacles in this process. The stratigraphy was not always clear; coffins could be moved around within the grave plot so they no longer fitted into the original chronological sequence of deposition. Osteological determination of age may be too broad in comparison to the precise ages of the documentary information. Dates and initials on wedding rings may not conform to the likely dates for burial registers and simply many not have been originally belonging to the dead person, being an heirloom for example. In the registers data was sometimes missing or incorrectly entered. One specific problem at Assistens was that they were high numbers of older individuals which could not be clearly identified with certainty. Occasionally there were cases where very little of the evidence fitted together at all.

The process used was focused on the association of objects and texts, looking for as many connections as possible while acknowledging that they can be presenting negative or contrasting information as well as agreement. Identifying the precise cause of disagreements between the sources can be difficult as they may be alerting us to genuine differences but which also could be discrepancies based on their source value or bias (Andrén 1998: 172). All interpretation involves decision-making, to omit or emphasise certain pieces of information which makes the process flexible. The process also depends on the preservation of the different sources. All the sources used are in some sense tangible, books of registers or context sheets stained with mud but also intangible text, images or electronic data. Overall the survival of information from both types of sources increase the possibility of a more-rounded and nuanced

interpretation. This makes the situation at Assistens unique for its preservation conditions of all sources and potential for investigation of modern cemetery and funeral practices. This discussion has set out the physical aspects and consequences of the functions and uses of the cemetery. But for all the discussion of burials, the people involved, the dead, mourners and the cemetery staff who dealt with them were people with families and connections. In agreement with John Moreland (2001: 111) the burials and the acts recorded in Assistens and other cemeteries can be seen not simply as evidence about the past but were part of their daily lives. What the archaeological evidence also presented was clearly also present and affecting the excavation too. Research in modern cemeteries is a challenge to existing ideas regarding cemeteries. It opens up debate and involves demands that contentious subjects be raised. So we must turn to the final perspective considered of the ethical issues involved in researching modern cemeteries.

# Ethical considerations

Investigating human remains creates a unique response in living humans. Debate on the ethics of research into human remains of all periods connects to issues ranging from indigenous rights to the reburial of remains but modern human remains cross many under-explored boundaries. To discuss funeral behaviours or attitudes to death and the dead body within a society that is 2000 years away from our own may seem more acceptable. In Gavin Lucas's words it becomes more of an encounter rather than an observation (2001: 16). The focus of this research is on the very near-past and for some people the burials discussed are individuals who are from their or their parent's generation and they can recollect memories about them. For other people the recent date is simply too close a reminder of their own mortality. Alternatively, many people are simply not concerned with human remains after death. If a cemetery needed to be disturbed for the benefit of the living then it can be seen as an advantage to gain some evidence about the past. The negotiations between these positions result in different conceptions of what is termed respect for the dead. Where modern cemeteries or funeral behaviours are studied the feelings of those involved must be included and the researcher held to account. One good example of research of the contemporary dead is illustrated by a case study into a modern cremation in Estonia where an opportunity to observe the event and rituals was allowed but with limitations (Konsa 2012). For example, at the scene of the pyre, the widow asked that no photographs should be taken during the cremation; another request was that publication or dissemination of the results would not be released in Estonia but only in other countries in English. However the researcher also reports the widow's attitude changing after the event, in wishing that there had been more of a record of the event and is also reconsidering decisions concerning dissemination in her own country

(Konsa 2012 pers. comm.). Therefore there are opportunities, where, in consultation with relatives and communities, sensitive research can take place. It is however necessary to form a coherent approach to deal with these competing ideas and acknowledge that this research is based upon a potentially awkward or sensitive subject where it is vital to engage in dialogue with the participants (Nilsson Stutz 2013). There are theoretical issues to understand as well as specific examples that have contributed towards the debate.

In the materiality of the dead, there are two central points to consider, the first is the potential for separation between humans and other objects, the second is qualities of the material themselves, the bodily remains. Modern thinking may have suggested a divide between humans and the rest of the material world, regarding humans as superior. It is likely that this sentiment has applied at least throughout the timespan of Christian Europe and it is not solely related to modernity however it has been brought into more obvious debate in modernity. As a consequence of this thinking, working with burials becomes more contentious than other archaeological contexts; it is rare for a community to protest against the excavation of a medieval housing complex or flint-working site. The focus of ethical debates is towards human remains but there are also ethical questions about disseminating intimate information of disease or publishing images of personal possessions such as jewellery, grave gifts or even visible gravestones. This divide was clearly illustrated in the investigation of a mass war grave in Fromelles, France where information on the identified remains was not published yet many intimate personal possessions were displayed (Loe, Barker *et al.* 2014). Death and burial cover a shift in categorisation from a living human subject to an object. Here theories of abjection play a role in the understanding of the materiality of death. The dead body challenges categorisation because it is neither a subject or an object and therefore needs to be contained (Kristeva 1982). The bodily remains are secured safely within the ground but bringing them up from the below-ground context rematerializes them which forces a re-engagement. This is a moment filled with uncertainty, are these remains still human? Does anybody own them? Who speaks for them? Can they be researched and published?

The second point is the actual physical presence of the body. How we use archaeological information is related to how we categorise the dead according to three principal factors of the surviving materiality or preservation, date and identity of the remains. These factors will vary between individual contexts, countries, religions, cultures and types of site and are discussed in detail elsewhere (Anthony 2016). The body we inhabit is a mixture of flesh, liquids and harder skeletal material; barring a cut finger or similar accident, the experience of this is restricted to a small number of professionals (Sofaer 2006: 45-6). It is becoming rarer in our societies to experience the softer body of the recent dead and even rarer to know what the long-dead decayed body may be like. Prior to the mid-20th century it would have been common for people in the local community to help in the preparation and storage of the dead

body (Kragh 2003: 51). Burial or burning of the body effectively removes this materiality from our presence (Flohr Sørensen 2009). The remains excavated at Assistens ranged from cremation ash to abundant soft tissue remains and it was the human-like materiality that was most challenging.  It is far harder to relate a disarticulated bone or cremated ash to a person and therefore easier to categorise this material as lacking a human identity. The nature of each body excavated was labelled according to its preservation and completeness which affected its treatment through the process of excavation and analysis. For some bodies with soft tissue, this categorisation and identity provided by archaeologists will continue to dominate interpretation in comparison to skeletal remains. For disarticulated bodies the primary identity consists firmly of a low-priority and unidentified collectively researched material, so the material preservation of each body is used as the foundation to create divergent identities. There appears to be a conscious effort to de-couple the physical body from the identity of the person, which is after all, a major function of cemeteries.

The recent date of human remains is also a vital factor in ethical debate. Why do people differentiate between burials thousands of years old and those fifty years old? The link between the material state of the body and the problems of excavating the more recent dead are clear. They are more likely to be better preserved, the gravestone to be remembered as a place to visit and they potentially have living relatives. Their excavation and disturbance may appear a more personal experience although this connection may be seen as symbolic (Swain 2006: 99). They can be seen as more recognizable in belonging to our own society whereas ancient bodies may be easier to investigate as they are perceived of as outside of the community (Crossland 2009). Amongst the multitude of perspectives towards contemporary archaeology, how do communities understand the ability to disturb and remove burial grounds? Partly there are factors of visibility, disturbance of a currently active burial ground provokes more ire than one which was disused centuries ago and built over. The example of three medieval child burials being excavated and removed during building work on Bonderup church in southern Sweden in 1988 caused much debate on the connection between rights of the parish to control the fate of those buried within the church (Petersson, B. 1995). Although these burials were medieval, for the Bonderup parish, the burials still formed part of the Christian community regardless of age.

Disturbance of any burials can be an issue; the idea of eternal burial, where the body is never disturbed, is a remnant from medieval Christian attitudes which is still current in society. In some European countries where there are legal time limits on burial rights this is one aspect that can be obscured by society to avoid the issue. Public thinking on excavation and research of older burials and cemeteries was tested in the UK in 2006 when the Council of British Druid Orders called for the reburial of human remains from Avebury, a prominent prehistoric monument. A survey into attitudes towards display and research of the dead was commissioned by English

Heritage (now Historic England) which showed that the majority of respondents agreed with research, retention and display of human remains. Attitudes to archaeological use of remains was overall positive but dipped slightly if remains were less than 100 years old or if they were of identified people (B.D.R.C. 2009). A period of 100 years is a much referenced date that places acceptable research into a period three or four generations before the present. However using a shifting arbitrary cut-off point means that the date of acceptability will always move and it will also be subject to different contexts. At the time of writing 100 years ago is within the commemorations of the First World War and it is unlikely that churchyard burials of participants would suddenly be commonly acceptable for archaeological work. Within parishes in Sweden there is a common perception that grave peace should last for 100 years and that even after this date, disturbance is unacceptable because there is an active church community and churchyard (Blomstrand 1995: 36).

How archaeologists deal with the public is a key concern. In the example of Bonderup the biggest contention was between the contemporary local community in opposition to the perceived state authorities of the National Heritage Board and the state in general (Iregren & Redin 1995). Here we also address the ethical problems inherent in the excavation of the more recent dead, where there are claims by a community that excavation and research are not respectful treatment. The example of the New York African American Burial Ground in New York shows what can happen in the midst of the pressures of a commercial environment where African American opinions were unheard for much of the project (Cantwell & Dizerega Wall 2001). Eventually the wishes of the living did play a greater part in the control of the site and prompted a re-think of how to encourage the shifting of power between academic circles and local communities. The controversy over excavation of cemeteries at New York and also Prestwich Place, South Africa (Shepherd 2007) may also have as much to do with contemporary problems in society as much of those of the past. It is clearly correct to listen and act with communities involved within the framework of our response or archaeologists risk alienating ourselves as a profession from the communities we work within. Yet we must also have a clear response when questioned of the aims and benefits of proposed work. When the site at Assistens was proposed there was some negative reaction against the proposals (Mathiasen 2009) which took some careful correction to halt misinformation being spread about both legal requirements and the construction project (Møller Madsen 2009). There was clearly disconnection and a lack of communication between the Metro Company and the community about the scale of the project and the carefully-considered reasons for locating it in the cemetery. The archaeological work was presented instead as a positive act to remove the burials carefully and responsibly.

There are also ethical issues to consider in the management of cemeteries and strategies in dealing with the modern dead. In many European countries burial space is limited. One solution is to reuse existing grave plots by removing old coffins,

digging deeper and then replacing them. Attitudes to this have been surveyed in the UK and 55% of those asked seem to approve, particularly if the grave is older than 100 years (Davies & Shaw 1995). There are also controversies surrounding practices within cemeteries. One such was the negative public response in Sweden in 2008 to the filming of cemetery staff using a machine to deliberately break the top of a newly placed coffin lid (Brändström 2008). This practice may once have been a common part of the tacit knowledge of burial management which enabled the faster decomposition of the burial but was shocking to the public. Other problems are highlighted by the cost of maintaining old and disused cemeteries. Large gravestones and buildings fall into ruin and become potential hazards. In some cemeteries maintenance is simplified by removing gravestones and creating lawns, this also removes the spatial connection between the place of burial and the memorial. Further there is a steady stream of news stories focusing upon the differing opinions on acceptable forms of gravestones or memorials and academic discussion surrounding the appropriateness of items placed on the grave plots (Flohr Sørensen 2011).

Living communities establish connections and responsibilities towards the dead in their local cemeteries identity but also the personal identity of the individual. In modern cemeteries burials can be accurately identified, this is rarely a problem for earlier periods where bodies can be treated as an anonymous collective identity. Adding a name to the material gives back an identity thought lost but creates a problem. The interface of the written records and the bodies demand more consideration of ethics. Yet there are also inconsistencies in approach where it is acceptable to show images of known mummified bodies or skeletons in exhibitions or books. The mummified body of 17th century Archbishop Peder Winstrup was displayed at Lund University Historical Museum in 2016. The exhibition included intimate details of his health and burial signifying the idea that a celebrity or elite body is acceptable to study but ordinary people are not. Nonetheless there is a discrepancy between preserving the anonymity of an individual's information and the academic responsibility to explicitly reference that information to allow readers the opportunity to verify or use interpretations of the data. Instead the foundation for research on Assistens has been to start by asking what the benefits of revealing names, dates or potentially intimate information? Is it necessary to detail this information to respond to the requirements of the research aims and objectives?


# Framing the contexts for modern cemeteries

The ethical issues raised create a different context for understanding this research. Many of the controversies described could have been avoided or mitigated with

greater communications between the actants. Disseminating more information on archaeological but also cemetery practices would help to re-balance the understandings of how cemeteries really function. Instead of concealment an open attitude would increase dialogue and help to create acceptable ethical practice tailored to each individual case. In dealing with cemeteries an open policy can help to demystify what happens around and long after death, death is after all a natural process. The position I have taken is enacted implicitly within the research design and explicitly within practical decisions concerning the presentation and interpretation of data. The primary position taken is that the study of modern cemeteries can reveal how past and present societies deal with their dead. Although it is the ethics surrounding modern burials that is the focus here, the principle stands that there should be a common approach to human remains from all time periods and all geographical areas. Without research into modern burials there is a gap in the examination of how people deal with the dead over a long term perspective. The work undertaken can inform and benefit the community through the scientific knowledge that is gained. This can have the benefit of enabling people in gaining knowledge to challenge contemporary ideals and create new solutions.

The ethical foundation was established by using the research questions to define the information which would be needed to complete the work. Analysis did require identification of the date of burial and as far as possible the identification of the person but interpreting the research did not require explicit details to be published. In general there is no real advantage to revealing names for the objectives of the research in this thesis. The exceptions where names, generally only surnames, are used are in the analysis of public and visible gravestones and here it has been necessary to discuss social status or other historical research. On balance gravestones are intended as public representation and information on them is treated as publically visible data. However the below-ground data of coffins or cremations were also used to connect the materiality above and below the ground. Here the idea was that the information discussed was of valuable research interest and therefore worthy of presentation. In practice, the common archaeological terms of reference are used, where burials can be referred to by their identification as burial groups (G1001). Using Group numbers allows reference to the original data and also acknowledges the holistic entity of each burial rather than referring to an individual coffin, skeleton or find. Plot numbers are also used to discuss the connections between associated burials. Where required specific dates are used and so are ages. Dates are important for establishing chronological patterns; the objectives of this research require their explicit presentation, likewise the use of age at death. Intimate details of diseases are rarely used as they do not form part of the research objectives although occasionally details of cause of death have been considered relevant information. However other details that can also be considered intimate are used such as grave goods where this answers the research questions. This compromise allows a measure of the person yet is not

general enough to deny the individual agency. It is with these principles in mind that this limited information is used where available to enhance interpretation of the ownership of grave plots. At all times the standard is to remember that this research is based upon people who may have living descendants.

With the responsibility of working with recent archaeological material comes also the acknowledgement that not everybody will agree with this ethical position. Any archaeological project must justify its intervention because excavation by its nature destroys much of the contextual physical evidence and replaces it with text, images and objects. This applies to projects with no human remains as much as burial grounds. However much research now originates from redevelopment and there can be clear reasons why the project would materially improve the life of the contemporary community. Certainly the new metro station at Assistens can be argued as falling within this category. Equally the burials could have been excavated but not used for research but this would have missed a rare opportunity to investigate the people of Copenhagen. Justification of research relies on the knowledge gained from the work and from assessing the treatment of the remains and the decision to rapidly rebury all remains on the cemetery. There must also be consideration of the associated contemporary communities from which they are being removed. Each case should be considered on its own merits as well as its part in the wider scheme of research. Ultimately archaeologists are not the only members of society who have an opinion in this complex situation. If there is disagreement over removal or study of these burials then it is the responsibility of archaeologists to debate and convince of the justification of their work. The principle stands that recent burials can be investigated but it would be impossible or unethical to impose a universal standard to all sites, instead the importance should lie within the relationships between different actors and interested fields in each case.

The reason the project was initiated was because it was a part of the construction of a new metro around the city of Copenhagen of which archaeology would be an integral part. What could be more modern than a system of mass transport designed to be an environmentally friendly improvement to the city environment? The station set within a defunct cemetery cleared away the visible remnants of the old functions of the site. It also set about improving the neighbourhood around it while at the same time attempting to fit in within the existing functions of the place, blend in and mixing new and old. Ethical perspectives demanded archaeological participation but also reduced media attention and the opportunity for discussion (Anthony 2016). Assistens stands as a project which explored the edges of respectability and tested the borders of archaeological principles which in turn can strengthen or alter them. The project also enabled the cemetery to continue in an evolved form. The cemetery is physically re-materialised in the new graves where the bodies and material culture were buried and the commemorative forms of site report and this research, yet the emptiness of the excavation trench remains as the entrance hall to the underground.

# Chapter 3.

# Contextualising the landscape



**Fig. 8.**
The cold journey of the hearse from the city, across the lakes and north up towards Assistens in Nørrebro. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, C.D. Ottesen 1852.

The experience of going to the cemetery is traditionally presented as a sombre and grim event as illustrated in the painting by C.D. Ottesen from 1852 (Fig. 8). From the late 18th century the removal of cemeteries outside of the established urban community added a new dimension into funeral rituals of an extended journey both for the body and the grieving mourners. In practical terms it added extra time and the need for transport of the coffin but while the funeral journey may have been sad but it was perhaps not always as bleak as represented. This new dimension extended mourning acts into a new social setting. The concept of using the cemetery not just for mourning but as a dedicated place to visit for pleasure and moral improvement was a new aspect. Far from being quiet reflective places cemetery workers and visitors created a mixture of living and dead bodies within an active landscape. Further we

should critically assess the idea that that the cemeteries were considered as outside of society at all. The narratives and influence of cities spreads beyond their boundaries into their hinterlands, the new cemeteries are a part of this extension.



**Fig. 9.**
Fragments of some of the glass bottles found in rubbish pits behind the Sexton's House in Assistens. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 2010.

Archaeological evidence from Assistens presents a new perspective on the activity within cemeteries. A few small pits (G1244) were excavated behind the Sexton's House; they were filled with ordinary domestic rubbish of serving ware ceramics and glass bottles. There were large serving dishes (plates and bowls), wine and beer glass bottles although there was little evidence of food remains such as animal bones (Fig. 9). All were made of mass-produced local materials with only one imported ceramic fragment from England. The Sexton's House was originally intended for storage of coffins before burial but was also used as a residence for the gravediggers who acted as informal security. The archaeological evidence suggests that they were not just living in the building but providing refreshments to supplement their low income. The rubbish found may represent both activities. The building, despite being located in the furthest corner of the cemetery away from the city, acted as a social hub for visitors. Similar activity had led to complaints in the previous Sexton's House suggesting that it encouraged inappropriate behaviour for a cemetery (Politivennen 24 July 1802: 3552). This evidence combined with other nearby documented taverns confirms that the cemetery was not removed from social or working life but rather a distinct place within the community. It is likely that it continued as there were further regulations complaining against the sale of victuals to visitors and enforcement against unsuitable behaviour in 1814 and 1815 (Valeur Larsen 1960: 39-40) which show that people continued eating and socialising in the cemetery. The evidence of the rubbish pits, building and the documentary information all combine to show the

early years of the cemetery as a place where people lived and social activities took place rather than being isolated. Other finds from the cemetery soil such as toy tea saucers show that the cemetery was a place regularly used by people, not just a place to be briefly visited but to live and play within. The physical evidence helps to re-shape the idea of what a cemetery is and what it does for people.

This chapter investigates the position of the new cemeteries in the modern world, how cemeteries were created, used and understood and what part they played in shaping the new situation. Investigating the materiality of the cemetery helps to contextualise the modern world. Modernity is not purely concerned with economic or political change but a part of the social, emotional and material engagements that people make within their worlds. There is a sense created of a break or separation from the old and the traditional – in values, thinking, materials, in the use of new spaces and also a new sense of linear progress. How this break is represented within cemeteries and attitudes to death is examined through the materiality of the cemetery, the bodies living and dead and the physical place in the landscape. However continuity of practice is also highlighted with people negotiating their social practices within a world which is filled with entangled relations between traditional and modern ideas. The theoretical understanding of the materiality of cemeteries is discussed through the context of landscape and place in the modern urban period. The background behind the changes in burial behaviour and locations are explored, examining the characteristics of earlier burial places in Europe and the causes behind the reforms of the late 18th century. The narrative of the Romantic, peaceful and stable cemetery is established here. The development of the cemeteries is then considered through the activities and materiality that is placed within it, re-worked, removed and continually in a state of flux that contribute to the new perception of an modern embodied experience of cemeteries. Finally the chapter examines the increasing regulation and order that creates a more coherent control over cemeteries and death. Throughout the text, Assistens and the city of Copenhagen is used as a framework to analyse the broader discussion.

# The relationship between the body and the place

Bodies and places in the landscape are two primary narrative ingredients which are combined together in the burial place. Living bodies create the place of the cemetery through their social, ritual and working practices but there is also a mass of individual dead bodies that create the cemetery through their deposition and continued presence. The sheer physical reality of the collection of bodies below the ground demands a reconsideration of attitudes to what is physically present within modern cemeteries. The collective concept of bodies should be contextualised through their

relationship with cemeteries as a place. There are also a number of similarities between the concepts of body and landscape. There are parallels in how each has been conceptualised with common theoretical frameworks often derived from a sociological, geographical or historical perspective rather than an archaeological foundation. Both are perceived as being culturally shaped by their society which results in multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings. Thus there is no single approach or universal understanding of either concept. Both are understood as being increasingly exploited, regulated or tamed for the good of society and from the Renaissance period onward, both are investigated more thoroughly using scientific methodology and understood through a new paradigm (Harris, Robb *et al.* 2013). How humans relate to themselves and to their surroundings become a scientific rather than a theological issue. Common threads are present where approaches to both tend to be dominated by modern concepts of polarised divisions, mostly between culture and nature. Both are also frequently subject to interpretations surrounding power and top-down imposed control.

What the archaeological perspective can bring to these debates is the understanding of the physicality of the cemetery and the materiality within it. Archaeology produces evidence of the active practices of what people do with the physical matter of death. The archaeological perspective places interactive behaviour between space, humans and objects at the heart of interpreting what a cemetery is, how it continues to function and why it continues to inform our ideas of how death is handled in the modern world. The relationship between these concepts has been underemphasised within modern cemetery research. Instead archaeological research into concepts of bodies and places in the prehistoric and early historical period landscapes have been at the forefront of debate (Effros 2002; Devlin 2007; Stig Sørensen, M.L. & Rebay-Salisbury 2008). Notable exceptions extend this analysis from the late medieval period and into the early 19th century (Tagesson & Westerlund 2004; Gilchrist & Sloane 2005) with fewer studies extending up to the First World War (Tarlow 1999a; Loe, Barker *et al.* 2014). What happens to these concepts and their relations is charted through the different perspectives over time in Assistens. Firstly, research and understanding of each concept is briefly introduced.

The foundation of the modern view on landscape rests on the aesthetic and design revolutions from landscape design, art and literature which created the ideology for landscape. The influence of Romantic philosophy has been traced by Matthew Johnson (2007: 173) as forming the principal intellectual framework for concepts of landscape, elevating the aesthetic to a superior aspect beyond critique and creating an image of it as natural, obvious and fixed. It also emphasises the divide between earlier and modern landscapes as well as rural and urban landscapes. Landscapes are understood as socially constructed by individuals and communities; they are interpreted through the social knowledge and practices which become habits. It requires a constant exposure to the landscape which, in turn, feeds back a reflexive

interpretation of the particular place. Landscapes should be seen as "a set of relationships between people and places which provide the context for everyday life" (Thomas 2001: 181). Somewhere between abstract understandings and the essential material qualities of the landscape are the practices and context of the society creating cemeteries. Modern landscapes tend to be treated by the observer as a cultural achievement with less reference to the natural qualities of the land (Whatmore & Hinchcliffe 2010: 442). Indeed what is often perceived as natural landscape is usually highly modified. A strong influence on cemeteries were the park landscapes created for the wealthy which emulated natural environments but took considerable effort to achieve (Sommer 2003: 78-82). This modification of the landscape is not new to the modern period; there have been cultural modified landscapes from prehistory topographies to medieval and Renaissance towns, deer parks and castles (e.g. Hansson 2006). The work that goes into the active creation of the ideological landscape and the affective material presence it consists of is often concealed. Professional architects were given a landscape to fill and brought with them a set of pre-existing ideas combined with innovations to try, and in the example of modern cemeteries to create an acceptable place for funerals. Modern cemeteries can be seen as staged landscapes which uses the design to discretely manage visitors in how to behave.

Modern landscapes also tend to be associated with discipline and control of the physical by regulatory powers. Cemeteries have been explored through this idea (Petersson, A. 2004; Johnson, P. 2008), particularly focusing on their establishment and early years. Cemeteries have been categorised as heterotopias by Foucault (1986: 24) which are described as realised utopias where reality is represented but also contested. They are different to the society that they are linked to. However the concept of heterotopia is useful as it is the strength of the place in challenging temporal boundaries which is of more interest as cemeteries can be simultaneous places of stability and flux (Foucault 1986: 26). The common metaphor of the city of the dead can be seen as an extension of this idea. Cemeteries are not truly cities but borrow some elements. However when a deeper understanding of the strong links between the cemetery and living society are taken into account the strength of the idea is reduced. Cemeteries do not simply reflect society but through their existence and active usage is part of creating it. If they appear different it is because of the actions and practices that people undertake in it.

Prehistoric and medieval burial landscapes have been extensively studied in relation to settlement patterns, in relation to the church or ritual centre and in rights to burial. There is also research connecting them to natural topographical features, territorial boundaries, and earlier evidence of societies. In comparison historical churchyard and 19th and 20th century burial landscapes have received less theoretical consideration from archaeologists although there are notable exceptions. Conceptions of space and human hierarchies have been investigated in and outside of the church. For example seating arrangements inside a church in the UK in the early 17th century were found

to be ordered according to complex construction of social status and wealth levels (Johnson, M. 1996: 102). In a similar study the 19th century landscape of Stora Skedvi in southern Sweden shows class and status hierarchies in seating arrangements and outside in gravestones correlating high status individuals with a consciously idealised churchyard landscape (Welinder 1992: 35-8). 20th century cemetery landscapes in rural Denmark are investigated through the idea that cremation and more anonymous burial design assists to remove the material presence of the dead (Flohr Sørensen 2009). While Swedish memorial groves are presented as encouraging the continuing relationship between living and dead by explicitly using archaeological references such as cairns or grave mounds to create a new commemoration (Williams 2011: 121).

There is a connection between body and places within the experiential perspective of how people understand their landscape through their bodily practices (Sofaer 2006: 21). A perspective that unites body and landscape are phenomenological approaches which emphasise the embodiment of understanding the landscape through the experience of interaction with their environment. With this approach we cannot reconstruct the physical experience of the relationship to landscape of past individuals any more than we can reconstruct their own individual memories. But it does try to unite the physical and ideal moving beyond binary and sometimes abstract constructions. Here the approach of seeing landscapes as a technology that allows memories of the past to be constructed through the experience of the funeral and the location of the burial within the cemetery is useful (Devlin 2007: 43). It takes into account emotions of an event and the consequences that derive which form to create a narrative of what a burial place does for people. However there are still genuine physical qualities of the landscape which cannot be reduced purely to an experience (Olsen 2010: 156). The direct evidence of people's actions is present in cemeteries. The composite materiality within a burial ground or cemetery is formed of diverse elements of soil, plants, trees, birds and animals, gravel pathways, fences and buildings, not just gravestones which all mediate the framework and experience of the cemetery whilst all being subject to continual modification and transformation.

In contrast to burial landscapes archaeological research on bodies has extended from the prehistoric into the modern period. Archaeological research on the body tends to follow two main strands of thought, either a more static biological model or social concepts that are created or constructed and are more fluid and mutable (Nilsson Stutz 2003: 83). These disciplinary boundaries hinder the connections between the two areas of research (Sofaer 2006: 9). Individual bodies as studied by osteologists are combined into communities and data sets on the dead body which are rarely used by social theorists. Medieval bodies were largely understood in one dominant perspective as representing microcosms of the world which were given by God and where mind and body were combined (Harris, Robb *et al.* 2013: 176). A transformation from this state through the early modern period has been mapped as a slow development to

multiple understandings, or multimodalities where contradictory understandings could be held. Although the overall view is that bodies are now treated as a machine, and death an abnormal process which should be prevented, this view never fully dominates (Harris, Robb *et al.* 2013: 180). Bodies were to be controlled and separated intellectually and also at an everyday level improved (Foucault 1991 [1975]; Tarlow 2007). Bodies, alive and dead, become more firmly linked to self-identity and the body at a funeral becomes an increasing focus of social display for the living mourners. The evidence for what happens at Assistens when the modern world is established is examined through this chapter. Shilling (2003: 157-8) argues that self-identity has been focused on the physical modern body so that it is treated as an evolving project although the possibility that others can also work on the body after death is suggested also (Tarlow 2002: 94). That the body will inevitably fail medically and socially at the point of death is considered as creating a problem in modernity. Treating the body as something to be worked upon is not necessarily solely a modern concern. For this research, bodies are understood as physical entities which are also socially constructed, requiring constant interpretation as they change. They encompass a sophisticated and fluid framework which acknowledges the integrated and embodied experience of the body with the social world. There is space for multiple understandings of bodies, both alive and dead which can be accommodated within this world view.

Four interconnected categories are involved in unpicking the understanding of bodies associated with cemeteries: the living and the dead body and the individual body of one burial contrasted with the collective mass of multiple bodies within a cemetery. There are transitions to be made between each of these categories, all of which are relevant to this research. Each category has agency, an effect upon their environment. The living identities of bodies can extend long after death, beyond the funeral and burial often transferred to their gravestones but the physical remains also continue as an active element in the cemetery landscape. The materiality of the dead body is a composite object retaining part of an identity. Even if lying undisturbed underground, its presence can be affective, even more so when added to the assemblage of bodies already present in the ground. Whilst individual bodies are unique they are still structured through society. The individual bodies are placed within the ground and join a collective of other bodies, added to by each new burial while also potentially being transformed by that burial. They are transformed through practices of management and regulation of the cemetery as much as by gravediggers manipulating the burials, all of which create the communal identity of bodies within the cemetery.

The consequences of the new cemeteries are discussed in relation to theories on how landscapes are continually created and reformed through an intricate network of the physical elements combined with the human experience of moving within it. The bodies that create and experience cemeteries are both alive and dead and the

continued use of the cemetery only adds more layers of physical remains and memories associated with them. The bodies create the place of the cemetery as much as go to be placed within it. The dialectical relationship between the two is there to be examined in a broader perspective. "Like organism and environment, body and landscape are complementary terms; each implies the other, alternately as figure and ground." (Ingold 1993: 156).

The connections between modernity and the new cemeteries from the late 19th century are understood here to be integral (Sommer 2006b) which builds on the foundation of the slightly earlier cemeteries like Assistens. This idea stands even if some consider that many contemporary Western societies segregate spiritual matters in space and time (Thomas 2001: 175). The modern cemetery is a defined place within the landscape which is understood through the activity that occurs within it and which is not separated in that perspective from the community life. This has much in common with the preceding churchyards and burial grounds but the cemetery is often presented in contradictory terms both as integral to living society but also somehow apart from it. Each cemetery is created as a new place in the landscape, not attached to the church building, or within the parish or even physically within the heart of the city. Each foundation creates a different kind of place from the churchyard which can be traced materially and in written records but it is the different narrative attached to the cemeteries that is the significant break. Places are socially defined and created, as much as by the materiality of what is within them as the activities that occur in them. Consideration in later chapters is given to the materiality of the cemetery beyond the body or the overall landscape; the materiality of the coffins, funerary equipment, gravestones, trees and planting designs. These insights into the cemetery as places and containers for the dead body are now considered in a chronological framework examining first the establishment of cemeteries and then their evolution as they successfully provide burial space. The scale of reference used moves between analysing the treatment of a single burial to analysis of the collective dead and from analysing in detail one cemetery to considering comparable cemeteries across Europe.

# Establishing new places for the dead

Modern cemeteries do not just appear as a new class of architecture and landscaping which was combined with the function of storing the dead body. There is a long background of interim solutions and the move from what can be called the traditional churchyard to the multiple ways of burial in the 21st century is not a linear progression. The similarity of the movement to create new burial places over different countries in Europe and North America raises questions about the driving forces

behind this movement. What prompted the change from churchyards to cemeteries? Can it be traced to changes in attitudes or practices towards death itself, the body or churchyards? How was this achieved and by whom? What is the interface between this overall narrative and the development of Assistens?

The image of the medieval European parish churchyard is dominated by later Romanticised views of rural churchyards with few memorials, low individual earth mounds and grazing sheep. Early churchyards tended not to specifically include trees or plantings, possibly to emphasise the difference from the ideas of Pagan worship within sacred groves (Lundquist 1992: 12). It was only later perhaps with some influence from medieval monastic churchyards that trees of ash, elm, later linden and horse chestnut, were planted by the pathways or boundary wall (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005: 44). Although there are similarities between rural and urban churchyards, the focus instead is on the urban communities which had to deal with large numbers of the dead. There is a difference in scale when dealing with large numbers of burials every year in an urban environment rather than a few in a rural churchyard. There are few images of urban medieval churchyards, they are often more stylised than realistic but documentation of churchyards can be useful to establish how they were used. There was no proscription or reservation in keeping the churchyard sacred and separate from the rhythms of daily life. There was little objection to additional activities within churchyards by priests although they symbolised a partial loss of control over church property. While the idyllic view of the churchyard continues in illustrations and poetry, the increasing reality from the late medieval period onwards was concerned with fitting in the increasing numbers of dead within confined spaces. Despite complex theological discussions concerning the necessity for the whole body to be present for the Resurrection, evidence of burials in churchyards show careful but extensive manipulation of existing bodies. High numbers of disturbed bodies are found in excavated churchyards in Copenhagen and Lund, southern Sweden (Mårtensson 1981; Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009). Caroline Bynum (1995: 205) shows the importance of the connection between body and identity has changed by the 12th century in Europe which enables the breaking up of the body for relics or for the more practical reasons of space. The physical constriction of space, in three-dimensional terms imposes restraints and a certain practicality within cemetery maintenance that often appears to affect churchyard practice.

However pragmatism is not the only factor to affect burial placement. The ideals of burial were constituted through the social community and physically arrayed around the church building. Each generation of dead added to the contextual understanding of social and religious life within that specific community. Any activity or experience in the churchyard was a reminder of living and mortality, a connection with past generations and an assumption of this continuity for future burial. This was the ideal situation although there was not necessarily a linear and automatic connection between the living parish community and the population within the churchyard. The

burial place may not correspond to the individual's place of worship or parish in life, people could choose to be buried elsewhere, such as monasteries and others simply died elsewhere and could not be transported for burial. Some churches in urban areas may not have contained capacity adequate for their own parishioners. It was the appropriate rites and masses held for the dead during and long after the funeral that were deemed to be vital to ease their stay in Purgatory (Daniell 1997: 61-4; O' Sullivan 2013: 260). Furthermore burial right generally belonged only to Christians from the parish but burial of law-abiding strangers, within the community churchyard was possible (Brendalsmo 2000). Those perceived to have died immoral deaths such as suicide, excommunicates or certain criminals could be prevented from being buried within the churchyard (Riisøy 2015). Examples have been excavated outside of the churchyard walls in Lund (Carelli 2000). All of which indicates that there was a certain flexibility between burial rights and living identities. The burial population in a churchyard may not represent all of society. Archaeological evidence has shown that medieval burial practice was more varied than suggested by documentation. Grave goods have been found, the position of the arms can change and the different types of graves such as cist, brick or stone-lined with space for the head are all present.

Spatially within the Scandinavian churchyard, burial could be ordered according to different readings of laws. Norwegian law, such as Eidsivatingsloven or Borgartingsloven written down in the 13th century but based on earlier oral traditions appear to have influenced burial practices throughout the medieval period (Nilsson 1989). They set out spatial hierarchies prioritising areas close to the church for elites and placing lower social levels further outward with the unbaptised on the very perimeters of the churchyard. (Keyser & Munch 1846: 391, Eidsivating: 50). The Eidsivatingsloven text also regulates gender division with females to be buried in the north and males in the south of the churchyard (Jonsson 2009). Burial inside the church was restricted to elites or priests until the 1200s when this right could be purchased (Andrén 2000: 8). Extensive excavation of medieval burials in Scandinavia has shown burial patterns that generally conform to these ideals but with the potential for deviation and flexible interpretations of these written rules. Social groups may have been more binding in determining burial practices with family or even guild associations taking precedent over social hierarchies (Bisgaard 2001; Haugland 2015). It would be tempting to state that burial in popular urban churchyards abandoned any principle of burial order due to space constraints but there is evidence to the contrary.

Excavation of the medieval churchyard of St. Clemens in Copenhagen showed spatial regulation and clustering of adults and children in the churchyard although there was also reuse of burial space and brick graves (Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009). Burial within constrained urban situations such as at Holstebro in Jutland (Thomsen 2008) and Linköping in Sweden (Tagesson & Westerlund 2004) showed care in placement

relating to older burials although new orientations of burials could reflect a change in practices seen at Holstebro. If the principles guiding medieval burial contain a sense of biding time, of storage of the body until Resurrection, this was always set within overcrowded churchyards and challenged by the common public knowledge of movement and eventual fragmentation of the physical remains. A churchyard could be defined as a community storage space where bodies in medieval and historic Europe were socially and culturally constructed as meaningful long after death but also capable of being manipulated.

Challenges to the church's control over death and burial came with the Reformation. This had spread quickly throughout Northern Europe and the Lutheran religion was officially adopted in Denmark in 1536. The influence of religious change started in towns and cities a decade before this date but rural areas were more slowly transformed. It is suggested that Copenhagen with its mercantile character rather than for example a biscopal city such as Lund were able to adapt faster due to its acceptance of new ideas (Staecker 2003: 432). Certainly it was in 1530, four years prior to the adoption of Lutheranism that the Cathedral of Our Lady (*Vor Frue*) in Copenhagen was raided and iconic objects removed (Karlsson 2015: 288). In academic research in marked contrast to the transition to Christianity there is far less research on the changes wrought by the Reformation (Staecker 2003). It is also noted that in common with other European countries, historic burials in Denmark were often removed by archaeologists without recording to gain access to earlier medieval burials although the situation has now changed (Grønfeldt Petersen 2012: 290). There is also difficulty in precisely dating burials within churchyards which were in use throughout many centuries (Gilchrist 2003).

Major differences in theological ideas specifically concerning death and burial involved the rejection of the ideas of limbo and Purgatory and that the fate of the dead could no longer be affected through prayers or masses said by the living. In the medieval period, living a good life was important but it was through intercession after death which was vital and required good relations with the living left behind. This created a strong relationship between the living and the dead which continued to be active long after the individual's death. The Reformation slowly removed these beliefs and practices. The most obvious and rapid physical change was the break-up of the monasteries which often closed the associated churchyard, although some were converted into parish churches. Many urban parish churches were also closed like St Clemens in Copenhagen (Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009) especially in towns with multiple churches. But was there truly a rupture in everyday practices, particularly involving death and burial? In many ways the clear differences are those imposed from a top-down perspective, involving new laws and regulations such as ending the payment of masses for the dead. However there was also a great continuity or rather an endurance of practices (Gaimster & Gilchrist 2003) which were enacted and understood by the general population and therefore there was not always an

immediate effect. For example, worship of saints and relics and the use of rosaries and holy water continued in some places into the 17th century (Grell 1995). As commented by Axel Bolvig (2003: 85), "The Reformation was not a revolution but more of an evolution.".

In the post-Reformation period to die decently required only the acceptance of faith which should have drastically altered the relationship between living and dead as the living could no longer influence the spiritual fate of the dead. However the relationship continued because the focus of the bond was transferred to other matters, principally to the provision of an acceptable funeral and commemoration. This would sanctify the memory of the dead through detailing their moral Christian lives (Marshall 2002: 272). This new focus is exemplified by the study of a Danish poem which was originally written in 1514 but then adapted in 1571 by Anders Sørensen Vedel, a Danish humanist scholar who adjusted the medieval themes of the poem to fit within the new ideologies (Oftestad 2015). The new emphasis lay upon a binary world view of people saved by their knowledge of faith and remembered through their memorials which depict a good life. Within the church the destruction of altars (Karlsson 2015: 286-7) can be interpreted as the stronger emphasis on ordinary people rather than saints and there was an increase in *memento mori* epitaphs placed on the walls. The important point is made by Axel Bolvig that the practices of the community may be continued because their understandings of religion were based more upon oral and visual sources and these would be little affected by the move towards a text-based knowledge. Within Denmark studies into grave slabs show that changes are more apparent one generation after the Reformation, that alterations in position of figures represented on the slab, the increase in text or language and style were only slowly adopted (Staecker 2003: 433). There is little evidence that wall paintings on churches were whitewashed and removed after the Reformation, although the number of new paintings did decrease slowly (Bolvig 2003: 90). While the presence of images on churches may seem contrary to Lutheran ideology, there appears to be more sympathy towards images and wooden statues as forms of education for those who were illiterate (Karlsson 2015: 287). This slow evolution should not necessarily be related to a sense that burial rituals were conservative, simply that alteration does take time and one or two generations is a relatively short period to transform practices across large populations.

Within the churchyard, there should have been less emphasis on the importance of spatial positioning of burials, as the idea that sacredness was physically connecting to the church and altar was less relevant (Andrén 2000). However the location of graves grew increasingly important and this continuity shows that reminds us that burial practices are not only related to religious expression but encompass a vast range of meanings which now come to the fore. Location of burial was always also connected to status and social hierarchy, the ability to pay higher fees and the desire to be buried close to other family members. The organisation of churchyards themselves, if they

were not completely closed, continued in use. In Lund, southern Sweden (officially part of Denmark until 1658) later burial customs become more uniform but there is a difference maintained between burials inside and outside of the church building (Andrén 2000). Andrén also confirms that access to the holy was successfully expanded after the Reformation although hierarchies were maintained through to the ability to pay. This is illustrated by the grading of payment for burial in Ribe Cathedral in Jutland where accounts from 1582 show the most expensive burials are still within the church (Agerskov Madsen & Søvsø 2010: 57). An increase in the creation of crypts within the church and churchyard enhanced new ideas of the separation from the rest of the community and burial space property for richer families. Coffins now became essential, dated from the 16th century in Linköping Cathedral in Sweden as part of an increase in commemorating the individual through the body (Tagesson 2015). Burials from Ribe also highlight the increase in coffins and later the increased use of elaborate iron decorations (Agerskov Madsen & Søvsø 2010).

Overall in Europe change was present, very obviously within the elite burial practices and overall regulations but it took time for these to be taken up by the community. This is not a system of ideas filtering down to a passive population but of active adoption of some new elements within flexible practices. What is important to remember is that pre-Reformation burial practices were already heterogeneous, flexible and capable of absorbing differences in choice and style of furnishings or rituals (Harding 2003: 386). This flexibility is a key to the understanding that post-Reformation/early modern continuity was strong because practices could absorb the new changes which had to work within physical and practical constraints imposed by medieval frameworks.

Churchyards in urban parishes frequently had only a limited amount of space. Natural processes of decomposition, the clearance of older burials for new burials and the reuse of old tombs were employed as spatial management techniques to improve the functional longevity of the churchyard through recycling burial space. However the physical three-dimensional mass of the churchyard increased with every burial added and new earth could be brought in to increase space through raised ground levels. This situation was a consistent feature of medieval urban landscapes but changes from the late 18th century with the increased urban population, from migration and increased life expectancy would only intensify the problems. Many churchyards today are characterised by their higher ground levels than the surrounding street level topography. Within the increasingly congested towns and cities in Europe there was little room for the living and even less room for the dead. What happens to change the situation was not inevitable and arose from a number of different factors. The new pragmatic solutions were a consequence of the change in attitudes, viewing the situation as a social or public health problem became an important argument in debates on urban conditions.

The state of the churchyards and the living conditions in cities was considered to be unhealthy due to the prevailing theory that miasma (vapour or smells) caused disease. This idea is common throughout Europe within the discussions upon burial reform (Schönbäck 2008: 187-9; Laqueur 2015: 215). In London the most cited campaigner is George Walker (1839) who worked within poor working-class areas and documented his findings in an influential report. There is a great deal of propaganda surrounding the hygiene argument against the churchyards and there is no doubt that bodies in churchyards did contaminate water supplies and were unpleasant places when over-crowded. But although the strong smells of decay were unpleasant it was common knowledge amongst medical professions that dead bodies did not necessarily spread disease. As for example many doctors acknowledged that carrying out autopsies had not caused disease (Laqueur 2002: 25). A congested churchyard overfull with the dead may hinder the natural processes of decay but the dead body is not inherently a health risk. Overall research on current cemetery soils indicate minimal danger to the surrounding public from decomposition of the body but still recommend care in the location of nearby drinking water sources (Morgan 2004: 310). Various lurid accounts of gravediggers being affected by miasmas in deep graves or within crypts instead owe more to the lack of air and build-up of ground gases instead.

The campaigns of burial reformers are strongly reminiscent of arguments to clear out urban slum housing, which held that slums were dangerous, unhealthy and society would be improved just by clearing away the poor. The two campaigns to clear slums and churchyards are linked and both tend to minimise the opinions of the people actually living in these areas and burying their loved ones in the churchyards. Cleansing of the environment was an uncomplicated message to communicate and understand and the argument provides a simple solution. It is easy to see why it has become the prevailing explanation of changes in this period. Hygiene alone is not an adequate answer to the removal of bodies and churchyards outside of the urban environment; importantly they were deemed to be immoral and unseemly too (Tarlow 2007: 114). Instead it was changes in social and cultural values associated with death (Laqueur 2015: 214) that labelled churchyards as matter out of place (Douglas 1966: 35). They were disorderly places which were not fit to inter the body and coffin, nor for people to continue the relationship between the living and the dead through visiting the grave. They were no longer catering to the emotional demands of a modern society. Moving burials from the living sphere could be both ideological and practical. The over-used churchyard itself was now regarded as a problem of regulation and ordering of both bodies and emotional reactions within the social world.

Calls for the development of burial places away from the living in the city were prominent from the Reformation with Martin Luther advocating moving cemeteries away from the living in order to restore them as places of serenity and for the contemplation of God (Luther 1527/ 1968). This implies a desire for a change in

attitude, reordering religious principles away from profane activities and towards creation of a religious sphere to surround the landscape of the dead body. This idea did not gain much overall traction although for example Joseph II banned burial within Vienna from 1774 (Kragh 2003: 151). New types of cemeteries particularly in Germany, Austria and France began to influence how cemeteries should be perceived in the rest of Europe (Schönbäck 2008: 64-5). There were a range of interim solutions which are described in this research as transitional burial grounds. They are defined as examples of burial solutions that are not directly associated with parish churchyards but are not yet the grand landscape or garden cemeteries dating from the late 18th century.

Early churchyard reform was often initiated from a religious perspective rather than being derived from a municipal intention to improve hygiene or social interest. Some of the earliest transitional burial grounds cite influences including that of Herrnhut in present-day Germany where a group of Moravian Christians fleeing persecution in 1722 settled and founded a new community. Their burial ground was based on egalitarian principles with plain burial markers placed flat on the ground in equally spaced rows (Schönbäck 2008: 43-6). Christiansfeld was another Moravian community in Denmark (established 1773) and Dessau, a Lutheran foundation in Germany (established 1787) are other examples of burial places based on these more egalitarian principles that influenced later cemeteries (Kragh 2003: 148; Flohr Sørensen 2005). This physical expression of values helps to create a distinctly different attitude towards burial from the average churchyard surrounding a parish church. The work by Schönbäck (2008: 58-9) also traced back and clarified the influence of earlier cemeteries such as the medieval Campo di Santo in Pisa. Its rectangular plan and open arcade was copied by other Catholic countries as a model of how the dead should be displayed and commemorated. Although noting that some of these solutions have little direct influence upon churchyards and modern cemeteries their establishment inspired innovative ideas on how to deal with the dead in the 18th century.

Challenges to state sanctioned religions from different faiths led to calls for the provision of burial places or at least the possibility of being buried in land not sanctified by another faith. In the UK new urban transitional burial grounds were often created by dissenting Christian groups hoping to move away from the normative religions but who still retained much of the traditional churchyard structure and practices (Worpole 2003: 12). Bunhill Fields, London was one of the earliest Non-Conformist burial grounds and was in use from the mid-17th century (Curl 2002: 136). Whilst they were supposedly reserved solely for the founding religious group there is evidence that others could be buried there too, such as the Quaker burial ground in Kingston-upon-Thames (Bashford & Sibun 2007). Sometimes new burial grounds were used only for plague victims such as Pestbacken in Sweden (Arcini, Jacobsson *et al.* 2006) or paupers (burial paid for by the parish not

the mourners). A virulent outbreak of plague in 1711 initiated the purchase of new transitional burial grounds for each parish in Copenhagen, aimed for plague victims and later for the poor of the parish. Other transitional burial grounds were reserved for the military or navy as at the burial ground for the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, London (Boston, Witkin *et al.* 2008) or the two early transitional burial grounds of Holmens and Garnisons in Copenhagen. These sites are clearly influenced by contemporary churchyards and conformed by following similar burial practices. Today these burial grounds are often presented as new modern cemeteries but their origins and reasons for creation were vastly different. Traditional attitudes to burial of strangers, modes of burial and memorial customs and administration were still predominant. Many of these which are still in existence have since been modified in landscape design and procedures so that they appear similar to modern cemeteries but they originally only represent a solution that continues the established customs. Nonetheless they are the forerunners of modern cemeteries and without their success in combining new ideas with existing traditions the modern cemetery might never have been created.

During the 18th century the defined transitional burial grounds represent the process of breaking away from religious authority in a series of hesitant steps rather than a fluid process. Clearances such as Les Innocents, Paris were essentially an early municipal removal into charnels and ossuaries. The new form of cemetery was not fully articulated until the end of the 18th century and tended to derive from more secular influences. There were significant objections to the establishment of new cemeteries in part due to the loss of substantial burial fees to the church and overall loss of control over people's decisions (Laqueur 2015: 163). The transitional burial grounds established were at least one attempt to retain burial rights within the control of the church. Another set of influences is from a more global perspective. Europeans in colonised countries also needed new cemeteries which were not connected to a traditional parish churchyard. Some of the earliest which can be truly described as modern cemeteries are South Park Street Cemetery in Kolkata, India founded in 1767 for European colonists (Curl 2002: 141). Closely connected to Denmark were the earlier cemeteries at the Danish colony of Tranquebar in India for European settlers established in the 17th century although these lay inside the town walls (Kryger & Gasparski 2002). Australia changed from established churchyards to ad hoc arrangements of transitional burial grounds in the first half of the 19th century which also quickly became full (Murray 2003: 133). In all of these cemeteries the design and memorials were influenced by the local cultures creating stylistically hybrid memorials made from local and imported materials. They developed their own aesthetic and showed that new situations did not necessarily require a firm devotion to European tradition to be successful, in large measure the architects were free to break out of the physical constraints of the old world. Increased connectivity in the

world contributed towards a breakthrough for separation of churchyard and cemetery joining practical needs for burial space with new cultural and religious influences.

It is clear that there are varied timelines for the establishment of new cemeteries in Europe which are dependent on many factors including the different responses of each city's officials, the size of the community, projected burial needs and the efficiency or desire of the municipality to be seen as reformist. Hedvig Schönbäck (2008: 190) advocates that the plague epidemic of 1710-1713 in Scandinavia and Europe was a catalysing factor in changing attitudes to the dead body, specifically the dead poor because they could be regarded as dangerous and therefore not to be disposed of in the ordinary way. However there was continuing concern over the treatment of the dead through the 18th century so the plague may have only had a temporary effect. The UK was affected less by this particular epidemic than mainland Europe and it is possible that this is a small factor in the slower adoption of cemeteries although other epidemics could easily have inspired similar actions. A new framework of thinking about different groups in society is suggested by these actions, where location can denote the difference of that group from the rest of society.

A more important factor in stimulating change is the availability of forerunners to show the different potential options and show their feasibility. Smaller German burial grounds and the opening of Père Lachaise in Paris were used as inspiration which encouraged innovation. There are rare early examples of a new burial ground such as Edinburgh's Old Calton Hill established in 1718 which anticipates many principles of the modern cemetery. It was established by the local community and had no parish church (Dickson 1985). It was a community initiative rather than municipal. It is also possible that the Church authorities in the UK retained a firmer control over the disposal of the dead body than in mainland Europe which was not relinquished until private companies and in some cases profit motives were applied to the business of death. The Napoleonic code which influenced many European countries banned burial in cities in 1804 and inspired many of the new cemeteries which opened some 20 years later including the Parisian cemeteries such as Montparnasse and Montmartre or Frankfurt, Germany and Vienna in Austria (Kselman 1993: 169).

However it would be a fair generalisation to state that most major cities in Europe had some form of new cemetery by the 1820s or 1830s (Tarlow 2000b: 217). There seems to be a peak of innovation from the 1830s and 1840s in the UK and North America, and this is the period when the most renowned cemeteries such as Glasgow Necropolis, Southampton Old Cemetery, several in London (Highgate, Kensal Green, Abney Park) or Mount Auburn, Boston or Green-wood cemetery in Brooklyn are established. Many cemeteries were established as joint-stock commercial operations to improve the burial situation for Non-conformist religious groups rather than being motivated purely for profit (Rugg 1997; 2015: 38-9). However there was also acknowledgement that cemeteries could be financially successful which might

also have been bolstered by the acceptance of undertaking as a profitable trade. Most European countries however viewed the provision of cemeteries as municipal responsibility and undertaking was more strictly controlled (Kselman 1993). Only by the mid-19th century was a modern cemetery considered to be a required feature for the modern municipality. A broad narrative can be created of the dating of European cemeteries but it is interspersed with local variations which give each circumstance an individual character. In a similar manner the character of modern cemeteries is informed by the previous burial solutions – the churchyards and transitional burial grounds.

It has been suggested that Scandinavian cemeteries were inspired by the Lutheran Protestant desire to remove older Catholic traditions in burial (Kjær 1996: 13-4). However predominantly Catholic countries like France were responsible for some of the largest and earliest schemes for new cemeteries. Père Lachaise, established in 1803 in Paris is often cited as the most influential modern cemetery however it is slightly later than many other pioneering cemeteries. It is possible that the popularity of French fashions and ideas in this period shapes this pre-eminence when discussing significant cemeteries as initial proposals to re-create a similar cemetery in the UK was not successful (Rugg 1997: 109). It is perhaps the earliest years of Père Lachaise before 1825 that creates this influence before the green spaces of the cemetery was filled with grand monumental tombs (Etlin 1984: 340). Further inspiration came from Enlightenment ideas, where the urn memorial of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau can be combined with the Romanticised visions of landscape paintings as vital influences for many new cemeteries (Fjord Jensen 2002: 40-6). Although ideals enacted at Père Lachaise were significant in its influence on design, it is less important in Scandinavia where the earlier German transitional burial grounds were of greater architectural influence (Schönbäck 2008: 74-5). The search for inspiration in improving nature and the management of the cemetery as a large open space drew people towards garden design. Theories of garden design in the late 18th century were shared over Europe such as C.C.L. Hirschfeldt's influential works which also contained a small section on cemetery design (1779-1785). Hirschfeldt suggested that cemeteries should be inspired by those in the Classical world which were placed outside of urban areas and referenced symbolic colours of brown and green and certain types of trees like cypresses. These ideas and colours were supposed to encourage the correct emotional response within cemeteries (Lundquist 1992: 25). Later cemetery design in the UK was championed by John C. Loudon (1843) as a reformer of cemeteries from a garden design and architectural perspective. There are two main strands of cemetery design between the late 18th and 20th centuries. One based on a mixture of the garden landscape design and traditional churchyards which appears to be the primary influence on the design of Assistens. The second is woodland design which really only originates in the late 19th century and becomes more wide spread in the early 20th century. Within the first strand of cemetery design

there is also a strong sense of replicating successful designs by regional municipality architects reproducing a strictly functional and expected vision of what a modern burial place should look like (Schönbäck 2008: 180-2). Examples of this replication can be seen in the design of other early new cemeteries in Sweden such as Uppsala from 1801, Lund Norra Kyrkogård in 1809 and Helsingborg in 1815.

## Copenhagen and Denmark - from churchyards to cemeteries

Within this broader narrative examining the change for churchyards to cemeteries the situation in Copenhagen and Denmark is used to examine one local perspective. The context within which Assistens was created needs to be described in order to understand the specifics of how it was created and evolved and also where it can be compared with the wider scale of research into Europe. First the terms used to label burial places are clarified, then the development of burial places in Copenhagen is set into context with events in Danish society.

In English there is a distinction between the words churchyard and cemetery but the difference is not clearly separated in Danish with the word *kirkegård* (churchyard) often used for both.  Burial grounds without churches can also be titled as kirkegård. *Begravelsesplads* (burial place) has no religious connotations but is rare and tends to be associated with burials for non-Lutheran faiths. Archaeological pre-Christian burial places are generally recorded as *gravplads*. Although by no means an exhaustive list, Danish burial places associated with the Society of Danish Cemetery Directors show that almost all, 366, use kirkegård (Foreningen Af Danske Kirkegårdsledere n.d.). The only two exceptions on this list are the Fovrfeld Gravlund in Esbjerg, Jutland and the Mindelunden in Ryvangen, Hellerup, on the periphery of Copenhagen (translated respectively as burial grove and memorial grove). Both of these are connected to military burials from the Second World War. The Fovrfeld Gravlund was set up by the occupying German authorities to bury Allied pilots but also includes memorials to Danes and Germans. The Mindelunden in Hellerup is a memorial park and cemetery dedicated to Second World War Danish resistance fighters. Gravlund or mindelund are occasionally used in burial places not on this list. One example in Denmark includes the Svino Mindelund, Jutland which is another of the German-created Central Cemeteries for enemy airmen and the First World War memory park (*Mindeparken)* at Marselisborg, Aarhus (Adriansen 2007). In Copenhagen and its associated city of Frederiksberg there are currently eleven actively used churchyards. Only one, Frederiksberg Older churchyard established in 1734, is associated with a specific parish church. In comparison across the Øresund in Sweden, Malmö has 17 churchyards (kyrkogård – the word is used in a similar way to the Danish term), one Jewish burial ground and one animal memorial site (Rosengren & Striner 2013). Since its inauguration, on maps and in written records Assistens has always been

referred to as kirkegård, although the connotation of its name, Assistens associates it as a 'relief' or additional cemetery even when it became the central cemetery for the city.

It is striking that the exceptions to the churchyards are related to traumatic war years and although it may be a modern phenomenon to use other terms for cemeteries it reflects more of a connection to unusual events and burial of strangers or exceptional individuals rather than the normative Danish population. In contrast the labels given to modern burial places, usually by the relevant municipal authorities, such as garden, lawn or woodland are dominated by architectural and aesthetic perspectives. These designations are based upon above-ground environments built to mimic natural environments; they cite architectural influences rather than functions. It is only from the 21st century that the labels of memorial or ash scattering grove express the precise function or customs occurring within the place and where the intangible acts of mourning take precedence in its definition.

Despite this mixture of labels in Denmark the English labels are used in this research as they create a useful framework to examine changes in burial provision. Traditional parish churchyards are defined as those directly situated within the community, attached to a church and often used for other purposes such as market places and social activities. Often they originate from medieval foundations and were a central part of the society. The word cemetery is specifically used to highlight the differences from these established churchyards because despite sharing many features the new cemeteries can be regarded as expressing a distinctive break in both custom and practices.

The transition from churchyard to modern cemetery in Denmark happened gradually. Partly they are made in step with changes in society but also because the changing burial places were active in constructing the new situation. Tracing the origin of the Danish cemetery from the 16th century there is the emergence of transitional burial grounds which were support, or back-up burial grounds for the main parish churchyard. In Scandinavia these transitional places are often called 'Assistance' as they literally helped to extend burial space for the main churchyard. There are at least 12 specifically labelled as such in Denmark (Foreningen Af Danske Kirkegårdsledere n.d.). These early examples were often started in times of crisis like epidemics or war but could continue to be used for general burial. Transitional burial grounds are forerunners of the modern cemetery proper but crucially are not originally intended for ordinary burial in all of the population.

In Copenhagen the first recorded transitional burial ground was from 1546, located outside the north gate (in present-day Linnèsgade) between the defensive rampart and the lake, Sortedamssø (Jørgensen, C. 2010: 16). It acted as a combined overflow plague burial ground for the Cathedral parish of Our Lady (*Vor Frue*), the church of the Holy Ghost (*Helliggeist,* now *Helligånds,*) and St Nicholas church and became

synonymous with use only for paupers and plague victims (Westerbeek Dahl 2010: 30). It was bordered by a wooden fence and had some trees inside it, it continued in use until 1842 (Bøggild Johannsen & Rask 1987: 40). Many burial grounds were established in the city to deal with the 1711 epidemic such as Koppekirkegård on the east side of the north gate (Christensen 1912: 100). This was used until 1841 and then replaced by a burial area at Farimagsgade, a little further north which was used from 1842-58. Another was purchased for Trinity parish which lay between the streets of Gothersgade and Åbenrå behind some houses and was used until 1760 (Steenberg 1960: 240). Some of these burial grounds were located on the peripheries of, or outside of the city between the defensive ramparts and the lakes.



**Fig. 10.**
Holmens cemetery, Copenhagen, 7 May 2016.

Two major transitional burial grounds opened outside of the ramparts to the north east of the city. The Søetatens or Skibskirkegård, later re-named as Holmens cemetery was opened in 1666 for Naval burials (Fig. 10) and the Soldaterkirkegård, later Garnison cemetery opened in 1671 which was intended primarily for military burials (Westerbeek Dahl 2010: 30). Further away from the city and beyond the lakes a Jewish burial ground was established in 1694; prior to its establishment bodies had to be transported to the Jewish burial ground in Altona, Germany (Margolinsky 1958: 42). The location is just to the south-east of where Assistens would later be established and it shares similar characteristics with other transitional burial grounds. It was fenced off by 1704 and provided with a house and caretaker/ gravedigger (Det

Mosiaske Troessamfund n.d.), the burial ground is still present today. Another transitional burial ground but one which is inside the city is Vartov which lies close to the western gate of Copenhagen. The cemetery was created for the Vartov Hospital and the Royal Orphanage (*Det Kongelige Vajsenhus*) and was used from 1666 to 1760 (De Fine Licht & Møller 1973-5: 18).

The transitional burial grounds have many similarities that reveal the thinking behind disposal of the dead in Copenhagen. While pragmatic reasons are an significant factor in this transformation of burial provision, other factors play an important part through defining different groups in society. They were intended for specific groups of people – Jewish, military, naval and poor or those dying of infectious disease. Their foundation reserved the parish churchyards primarily for what could be categorised as normative or uncontentious deaths in the average Lutheran parish community. The consequence is a policy of identifying certain groups of people as having a different status and isolating them from the general burial community. Another similarity for these transitional grounds is that they were located on the peripheries of the community; even Vartov within the city was close to the ramparts and the western city gate (Vesterport). The rest were outside of the city with the Jewish cemetery furthest away. The original borders of these burial grounds were often ill-defined or even non-existent allowing animals to graze on the site. Most were provided with a small building for services but not a parish church emphasising the breaking of social and community links. The organising principle is for a basic minimum of burial including a religious service. The idea that they could also attract visitors or double as a place of enjoyment or moral education was not considered. In these earliest years there is little evidence of gravestones or other markers, sometimes they were forbidden entirely as at Holmens (Wassard 1990: 283). Burials could take place in large communal pits which were left open until full but individual graves were more common.

Each of these transitional burial grounds retains strong influences of the traditional churchyard but is also definable as part of the evolution into a different type of cemetery. From the above analysis the burial grounds of the 18th century appear not to be conceived of as different by contemporaries but simply as a continuation of existing practices, merely slightly modified. There is a slow change in attitudes which encouraged the movement of the cemetery – the physical place of death from the symbolic heart of the living community but still within the bounds of society as understood by contemporaries. Different identities are selected within the city to create a burial community which can be viewed as different and therefore needs to be treated separately from the homogenous community. This is a clear expression of breaking up the living community and can be connected with the increase in different identities being allowed to be present such as different religions or nationalities (Sörensen 2006). There is also a clearer separation and creation of an identity defining the poor. Common burial rights are reduced or have to be legitimised

through societal judgements on value or worth of the individual. This creates divisions in the community where it is acceptable practice to separate death from life.

Although the transition starts from the 16th century onwards in Copenhagen the attitude towards death is not fundamentally altered until burial in city churches was forbidden (15 February 1805b) and later within urban areas in 1851 (Nielsen, A. 1919). There is considerable overlap and contradiction between formal regulations and reality as by the 1850s Nørrebro was becoming increasingly built up and inhabited. The modern cemetery was long established and clearly definable within this new populated space.


## The creation and earliest years of Assistens

The establishment of Assistens was proposed by city magistrates to the Royal Council on 2nd May 1757 (Helweg 2010: 121) and given Royal assent on the 26th May. It formed part of an overall movement in the city administration to create holistic solutions to urban problems. Assistens was originally intended for the poor of the city as cheaper burial space was overfilled (Helweg 2010: 121). There was an increased recognition that a full churchyard in one parish may concern inhabitants of the whole city and therefore was a communal problem. The original patrons of Assistens were the City magistrates and university but from expansion in 1805 the King became nominally responsible with the municipality in overall charge (Helweg 2010: 125). But the creation of the new cemeteries derived from a collective municipal effort in contrast to previous 'assistance' transitional burial grounds. The earlier transitional burial grounds in Copenhagen as the forerunner of the modern cemeteries were created under the instigation of parishes, sometimes in cooperation but not by secular authorities. There appears to be no single individual who advocated for change in Copenhagen it was instead initiated by Copenhagen city magistrates (Valeur Larsen 1960: 10). Nonetheless the new cemeteries were part of a wave of urban improvements in the city seen as necessary and inspiring municipal cooperation at the same time as delineating differences with that same urban community.

The original plot of land was adjacent to Nørrebrogade, the road out from the north gate with a new road, Kapelvej defining its southern border. The cemetery was inaugurated on 6th November 1760. The original area forms what is now known as Division A and was approximately 0.8 hectares (Fig. 11). Originally Division A was shared between five city parishes – St Nicholas, Holy Ghost, Our Lady, Trinity and St Peter but also included small areas for the Vartov Hospital and the Royal Orphanage. The area was divided into sections according to each parish along an approximate northwest-southeast alignment; St Nicholas owned the northernmost section which had an entrance from Nørrebrogade.  There were four further gates giving access from Kapelvej, the first was shared by St Nicholas and Holy Ghost, the

second shared by Our Lady and Trinity. St Peter had its own gate and finally the hospital and the orphanage shared the last gate. The separate gates enabled a distinction between communities for the funeral procession marking out status and belonging. While distinctions between parish areas were maintained, what marks out Assistens is the combined agreement of the five parishes and two institutions with City magistrates to establish a single cemetery. Although a lack of unified management by each parish is suggested by complaints of behaviour and scandals occurring in the cemetery.



**Fig. 11.**
Division A, the original section of Assistens inaugurated in 1760, looking towards Nørrebrogade, 7 May 2016.

Within the cemetery there were some early alterations in land management, the city fire of 1795 destroyed both the orphanage and the St Nicholas church which resulted in the break-up of the parish. The layout of the cemetery was restructured with the St Nicholas burial area taken over by Holy Ghost, whose southern area had been transferred to Our Lady. Shifting of the boundaries to create coherent blocks of land above-ground would have resulted in considerable mixing of material remains below the ground. This would leave former parishioners now within the purview of other parish churches jurisdiction. Thus the spatial link between above and below is clearly broken up by these administrative alterations and mirrors the spatial break between parishioner's bodies and their parish community. Although grave peace was fixed as a period of 20 years and it is likely that many older burials were removed, it is also probable that other burials were left *in situ*. It is unknown why this length of time was

chosen but was possibly derived from the experiences of gravediggers and sextons in the parish churchyards.

It was clear that the burial space was soon inadequate for the city's needs even before burial within the city was banned. Small extensions to the west of the original cemetery were purchased in 1802 that are now within Divisions B and C (Fig. 12). However the largest single extension of the cemetery, on land north of Division A, was purchased and a wall built around it in 1804-5. This enlarged the cemetery from 0.8 to 4.45 hectares and was taken into use for burial in 1806. This comprises Divisions labelled today as B to G, of which it was only a section of Division G that was excavated. It is at this point that existing class distinctions were emphasised within Assistens where paupers were to be more formally separated from the rest of the community. Divisions L and N were formally added in 1804 but brought into use much earlier, as they formed the first clearly labelled pauper's cemetery area (Helweg & Linnée Nielsen 2010: 739). Thereafter control of the cemetery extensions were shared in joint ownership by the four surviving central city parishes of Holy Ghost, Our Lady, Trinity and St Peter.
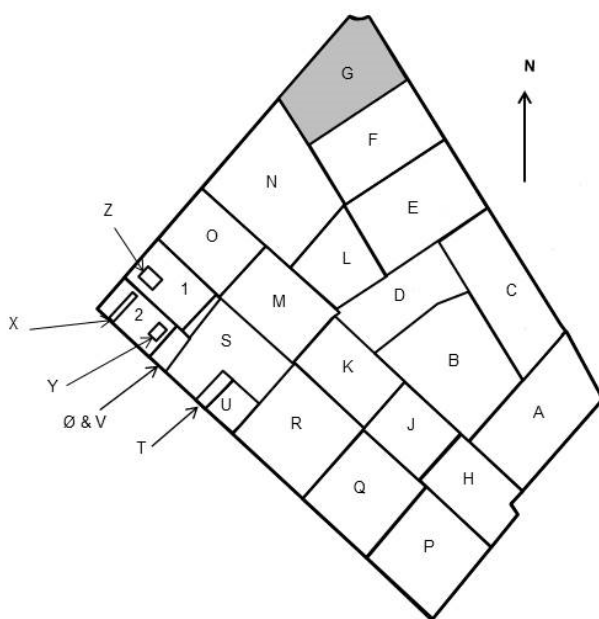


**Fig. 12**
Schematic map of the separate divisions within Assistens.

Assistens can be at first grouped together with the transitional burial grounds because it fits many of the criteria discussed in terms of location and a specific targeted group

in society. There is no clear break between religious and secular control over burial, it is instead a slow transition. It only truly transformed into a modern cemetery with the extension of 1805 where the scale of ambition in its creation and landscaping designs make it stand out. Originally because it was envisaged as a place predominantly for the poor it appears not to have been used for other sections of society until prominent citizens started to express a wish, inspired by more Romantic ideology of being buried in 'fresh air', away from the churchyards (Valeur Larsen 1960: 30). Attitudes towards the cemetery were also affected by scandals due to poor management including those of grave-robbery. A family story about a woman who may have been buried alive in 1798 was investigated in 1953 by exhuming the body. The grave was in Division A and the story suggested that she was disturbed and woken up, then murdered by graverobbers as they attempted to remove jewellery (Chapter 6, Starcke 1954). Another case which was public knowledge and caused a scandal at the time was the robbery of the coffin of a two-day old boy in 1804 with the body being found underneath some nearby bushes (Bidstrup 1973). Grave-robbery of bodies was not recorded as common in Denmark possibly because the unclaimed bodies of poor were legally provided for anatomical education but clothes, grave goods and coffins were all potentially valuable (Valeur Larsen 1960: 41) . In general poor management and control of activities within the cemetery were exacerbated by the different parish organisations controlling their sections.

Although Assistens was originally intended for the poor and working class of the city rather than aimed at the whole community, there is a lack of evidence about the attitudes of those for whom the new cemetery was intended. Late 19th to early 20th century attitudes towards working class burial have been researched in the UK which highlight the diversification of grief responses amongst the poor and emphasise that poverty was not a barrier to strong emotions about their dead (Strange 2003). It is possible that in Copenhagen the arguments for a new cemetery were recognised by poor or working-class communities as more important than a burial space near to the community. The promise of 20 years of undisturbed grave peace for their dead and also the location in the countryside could have been seen as a distinct improvement on the existing churchyards. Despite the early problems, general public opinion about Assistens improved as more of the wealthier citizens of Copenhagen chose to be buried there leading to an increase in its social acceptability (Valeur Larsen 1960: 14-7). By the expansion of 1805 the accumulated materiality of the cemetery of over 40 years of burials and their monuments with additional buildings strengthened the establishment of the place in Copenhagen. Further expansion of the city into the countryside had been tested and approved.

The modern nature of Assistens is strongly established through the expansion. Like many other contemporary cemeteries a competition was held for its design. This encouraged architects keen to practice new ideals in Denmark, although similar to the experience of Swedish cemeteries, ideals and reality seldom coincided (Schönbäck

2008: 287). Several entries were considered and although prominent citizen and amateur architect Jens Bang's design was admired by the city magistrates in charge of the cemetery for its curving pathways and decorative planting, it was also a less efficient use of space. Instead a design by Ole Jørgen Rawert of rectilinear blocks of land divided by tree-lined avenues was adopted (Valeur Larsen 1960: 68). The design of the main building of the Sexton's House within the excavated Division G was however designed by Jens Bang although it has not lasted well, being unfit for its primary intended use as storage of coffins and generally being poorly constructed and permanently damp (Valeur Larsen 1960: 124).

The realisation that cemeteries needed to be aesthetically pleasing to encourage more people to be buried there instead of within the urban churchyards was apparent in the design. It provided for new aesthetical responses to death and grieving which places Assistens firmly within modern ideology. Cemeteries should be ordered and provide regulated space for each burial in a pleasant environment. This set the standard that the cemetery should not only be concerned with disposal of the dead body but was also an important place that people would prefer to use. Assistens becomes transformed into a new cemetery, attempting to create a clearer demarcation between existing traditions and new sensibilities surrounding disposal of the dead. It combines ideas of rational hygienic disposal with an aesthetically beautiful landscape as part of the improved contemporary urban environment. It is a holistic effort which enhances the community and becomes a place to visit socially, providing inspiring environments in which to acceptably place the body. The overall style of the cemetery has varied little since the 19th century although there have been more extensions and introduction of areas for scattering ashes and burial of urns. However the park environment of the cemetery has matured and been carefully maintained leading to its reputation as a rare and treasured green space within the community (Kulturcentret Assistens 2010).


# Changing landscapes and the accumulation of materiality

The identity of the modern cemetery is established within its conceptualisation and the initial design from 1805 but its narrative only becomes fully developed and re-created through the repetitive activities that take place within it. Once a cemetery is established what happens within it that reinforces the modern nature of it. The physical presence of previous burials affect the cemetery as it becomes more used. The focus now turns to the evolution and materiality of cemeteries and how they are connected to the social landscape. It is here where the connections between the cemetery and its living community need to be explored as a fluid and unstable relationship.

As new cemeteries were used they fulfilled their purpose and established their own function and narrative. The addition of certain specific bodies was often a catalyst and marker of social acceptance for a cemetery. As in the burial of two children of King George III,  in the 1840s in Kensal Green Cemetery, London (Litten 1991: 134) which encouraged the acceptance of burial there. How the narrative of modern cemeteries is established is through creating the perception that it was an opposite place to the traditional churchyards. The landscaping and environment is designed to create and enhance new attitudes towards death as a sleep or a journey, something which is peaceful, beautiful and can be used as a moral lesson to those left behind (Sommer 2003: 93-4). These are enhanced by the memorial and plot designs allowed and which become popular. The dead body becomes static, an image of almost living not the horrifying reality of a corpse. In contrast to the churchyard, positive aspects of living close to a cemetery are highlighted, they are not seen as dirty, unhygienic and filled with horror towards death. Cemeteries are relabelled as places for nature, walking and peaceful understanding of parkland within the urban setting and by extension for moral improvement (Tarlow 2007: 99-101). The reality is not a binary division between the two, that view has been demonstrated as too simplistic (Rugg 2015). So it is attitudes towards the place and the body that have changed enabling a renaissance in understanding of the place in the landscape (Rugg 2000: 272). What is being celebrated in this golden age of cemeteries in the 19th century is perhaps a sanitised death, rather than the actual realities (Murray 2003). The idea that cemeteries were to be places of quiet contemplation was a framework reinforced within this period which tries to counterpoint their increasing physical presence with this pleasant and extremely closely defined acceptable narrative.

Further additions to the myth of the cemetery is within the connection to the common idea of the importance in the 19th century to keep the dead body regulated, beautiful and uncorrupted by death within the cemetery and long after death (Tarlow 2002). The individual bodies can be imagined by mourners as eternally lying within a neat family plot, filled only by ordered stacks of pristine coffins. The dead body should not be allowed to be chaotic and messy, as flexible and individual as a live body. The idea of eternal burial rights in the UK and some American cemeteries is an anomaly compared to many countries in Europe where bodies are frequently moved into charnel houses or ossuaries. However this view of cemeteries as disposal and ordering stresses a static view of cemeteries taking no account of change either in landscape design or deliberate actions. The experiences of gravediggers and archaeologists argues against a static image view seeing instead the assemblage of partially decayed bodies and coffins manipulated and handled within the orbital time-geography of the three-dimensional grave place. Chapter 6 goes on to analyse the realities of body manipulation in Assistens that was more associated with traditional churchyards than modern cemeteries.

The accumulated mass of bodies within the cemetery creates an effect of both the individual and collective dead which can both be commemorated. Each individual burial is a specific and known addition to the place by a small group of people but collectively they add up to a reflective and affective presence underground. In cemeteries with eternal rights of burial, space is limited and the cemetery function is eventually called into question but in cemeteries with time-limited burial rights this process of adaptation and renewal of burial could be continued indefinitely. Cemeteries need not be closed, at least not on the grounds of them being full, another reason must be sought. Perhaps it is the unconscious understanding that the collective mass of bodies within has created such a presence so that they should be left untouched. There is a fundamental alteration in the constitution of the modern cemetery as the place endures and the accumulation of burials and memories associated with the place shows its presence as an active force in the long-term development of the cemetery.

However their new location outside of the defined urban environment does not preclude the idea that cemeteries were still intimately connected with the human world. Some new cemeteries established in France were adjacent to the boundaries of the city, being only 35 or 40m away (Kselman 1993: 170). Towns and cities do not live in a self-sufficient vacuum; they are defined by and through their relationship to the surrounding landscape where new cemeteries were dispersed to. Urban communities are often viewed as a bounded entity but are still heavily dependent on the *sub-urban* activities and facilities. Most historic towns can show evidence of significant communities existing outside the official boundaries and those suburban communities regard themselves as part of the city. These areas were often used for less desirable activities such as polluting crafts and industries, dwellings for the poor and hospitals but can also conversely be used for elite houses and estates, for hunting and pleasure. Boundaries and walls are created to mark out the town but sometimes the border becomes only a symbolic reality.

There is a much repeated metaphor that compares cities to cemeteries particularly referring to the Parisian cemeteries. Their designs are often described as the cities of the dead because they are organised like a town with main roads and smaller paths, houses, drainage, rubbish disposal and street lighting with a clear hierarchy of desirable plots with a dense population (Etlin 1984). This metaphor is successful on a superficial level when discussing some of the physical organisation but does not apply to all cemeteries partly because there is so much variation between them. This design is not present or not so obvious in landscaped or wooded cemeteries as for example Mount Auburn, Boston. The strength of the metaphor lies more in the desire to understand cemeteries as places we can participate in and feel free and unafraid to enter. The meaning and clarity of the metaphor dissolves when the cemetery is approached for its material and active affective presence, on what they do for people. The difference hinges on the function of these physical features; street lighting and

pathways are not created for benefit of the dead inhabitants but for the living who visit. The living claim a stake or foothold into places aimed at the dead. It is another link to the previous generation that continue the relationship. A more accurate metaphor could be of museum storage or a warehouse where the dead are stored, stacked and curated by a small dedicated group of specialists. The living can access part of this archive of which only a small percentage can ever be displayed.

Travelling out through the town walls implies not just long-distance journeys to other cities but also a regular local-level commute between urban and countryside inhabitants which are essential for both communities. The journey to the cemetery also evokes the metaphor that death is merely a journey which is common from the 18th century onwards. The countryside should not be considered as outside of the social world; it is not a binary opposite to the town and is a mutually dependent part of social life with people travelling through, working in the fields and tending animals. Like a city, cemeteries are physically defined by hedgerows, ditches, fences or walls. These features allow them to be separated from the rest of the landscape yet at the same time the boundaries are fundamentally part of that landscape (Ingold 1993: 156). Boundaries were not always a vital feature of the early cemetery as for example it was only by 1769 that ditches were dug around Holmens in Copenhagen to stop complaints about grazing animals (Wassard 1990: 283). Having defined boundaries does not stop interaction. The point of a boundary is often to test if one can pass through it. The interaction between cemetery and surroundings is significant.

Change in the landscape occurs both inside the cemetery and in its surroundings. Physical connections between the places of the dead and the living are most clearly visible in the medieval churchyards which form the heart of the community. The removal of the medieval churchyards and burial grounds within Paris that took place over the 1770s and 1780s can be seen as a defining moment for the physical removal of the dead from the urban space. This movement is often interpreted principally through the grounds of hygiene (Ariès 1981 [1977]: 479-83). Removal was not just part of the improvement of urban life but also an expression of a shift in attitudes towards the dead as no longer contributing towards the social world of the living. The fundamental alteration of this relationship has been linked to ideas of controlling humans in both states, where the churchyard had been a model for society, the cemetery was unconstrained (Laqueur 2015: 310) and bodies within it needed to be organised.

This has also been connected to the tendency in modernity to control both bodies and urban space (Mellor 1993). The new cemeteries are predominantly established in the height of the changes of modernity in the 19th century. Yet they are also established within the context of the pre-existing situation. Bruno Latour (1993: 75-6) argues that early modern societies tend to retain a great amount of traditional values and can be considered in a state of flux and transition. There is continuity in

traditions towards the body and in attitudes to the place of the cemetery but these are subtly adapted by being undertaken within the new modern environment being developed around it. There is a balance between old and new practices which combine with changes for the increasing accumulation of burials and the changes in the city. The growth of Nørrebro was directly influenced by the establishment of Assistens which became a focus around which the emerging suburb was built. This is connected with the idea that cemeteries respond to and create their community. Even before the city defences were demolished in the mid-19th century, Nørrebro was increasingly a part of the city. What happened inside the cemetery were affected by physically being part of a community once more.

In 1760 when Assistens, like many other modern cemeteries was established it was far outside of the formal city boundaries and the business of burial would have taken people time and effort to attend, far more than a burial within a city churchyard would do. The visit becomes a significant ritual and specific journey to a place rather than a part of daily routine (Kselman 1993: 203). This emphasises a new attitude towards the cemetery as a place in the landscape to go to rather than one that was integrated into other daily activities. Having a cemetery located outside of the city core also represents an increased accessibility of the immediate countryside for its citizens. As funerals were pre-eminently a social activity this contributed towards a new attitude surrounding visiting cemeteries. Change also occurred within the designs of monuments and buildings within them as fashions for Classical, Egyptian or naturalistic designs altered the character of each cemetery whilst other designs particularly those of the naked body were sharply criticised but do materialise the alteration in taste concerning funeral representation (Worpole 2003: 121). As the cemetery is used, the physical presence of more bodies, coffins and memorials also affects the landscape. Some early cemeteries were designed as gardens and often pre-date other state-owned parklands or forests. The cemetery became a green space which can be seen as representing a fundamental opening up of the immediate landscape for poorer people to use and actively extending the idea of what constituted urban life.

The cemetery being seen to be placed outside of the city becomes more attractive. Its difference is emphasised and it becomes possible to close churchyards if the situation is one that is perceived as improved. The fact that cemeteries were directly related to churchyards and continued many of their practices could be downplayed. Cemeteries never truly separated from their city and as cities expanded the cemetery narrative was challenged and caused change by becoming more diverse. This is part of a re-emerging narrative that cemeteries can be used for purposes other than burial or mourning. Increasing population in the 19th century led to urban spread. Modern cemeteries become part of a busy suburb and eventually in the city again. As early as the 1850s buildings were being constructed adjacent to Montparnasse cemetery in Paris (Kselman 1993: 180). Due to this alteration of the neighbourhood a new

relationship to the living community is formed which alters practices within the cemetery such as burial, visiting or memorial regulations.


## Assistens - from countryside to the beginnings of a suburb

In order to understand the changes occurring in and around Assistens it is necessary to describe the development of the suburb of Nørrebro and its relation to the city. Until the mid-19th century the city of Copenhagen was confined to its Renaissance boundaries surrounded by defensive ramparts and water-filled moats. Entrance to the city was either by water or the three central city gates of Østerport, Vesterport and Nørreport with a fourth gate leading out to the island of Amager in the south. The physical boundary of the city was principally for defence but also helped to define and reinforce the city's symbolic character compared to the surrounding countryside. The physical limit on growth led the city to be heavily congested by the late 18th century but the city walls were kept despite being militarily outmoded. Marsh land and lakes surrounded the ramparts and formed an official demarcation zone to leave a clear defensive area in case of attack. Permanent large-scale settlement was forbidden with only single storey timber-framed buildings permitted to prevent giving cover to enemy troops although the efficacy of this was much debated (Christensen 1912: 502). Although this rule inhibited large-scale suburban settlement, particularly the type that existed just outside of many European city walls, it did not mean that the hinterland of the city was completely empty. These areas were used for a variety of craft, farming and exercise activities that required a little more space than the city could provide. The space was also used for burial grounds such as Holmens and Garnisons. Further beyond the lakes were small hamlets and windmills which were often placed by the major roads leading out of the city to the towns of Roskilde, Helsingør and Køge. Nørrebrogade was the road used to reach Assistens and formed the eastern boundary of the cemetery. There were also small farms or estates used for hunting and for agriculture to supply food to the city, most were privately owned rather than belonging to the Crown. From the 17th century fields around Nørrebro are noted as being used to grow tobacco (Fonnesbech-Wulff 2006).

The demarcation zone was expanded three years after the siege in 1810 up to the present day streets of Falconer Allé and Jagtvej and was enforced up to the mid-19th century in response to technological innovations in military cannon power (Westerbeek Dahl 1996: 75). By this period the countryside surrounding the city including the district of Nørrebro was settled with estates, farms, pleasure gardens and small domestic dwellings with many of these buildings contravening the demarcation rules. There were also taverns such as one on Møllegade which was active in the mid-18th century and catered for the Jewish cemetery (Margolinsky 1958: 53). Another was Lille Ravnsborg near the Kapelvej corner of Assistens (Christensen 1912: 112).

The early map of 1770 (Fig. 13) illustrates some of the settlements just after the establishment of the cemetery. The settlement of Ravnsborg on the northern edge of the lake Sortedamssø was where many poorer people lived. The house and estate of Solitude which lay just to the south of Assistens was later converted into a pleasure garden until being sold for the mass development of Nørrebro (Jørgensen, C. 2010: 12). Between the lake of Peblingesø and Solitude lay another large estate, Blågården was a baroque garden estate with a house with blue roof tiles, from which it derives its name. It was owned by both private and royal landlords until it was largely destroyed by the British in 1807 (Jørgensen, C. 2010: 15-16). Nørrebro was therefore a landscape actively used by all classes for varied uses from agriculture to light industry and hunting.
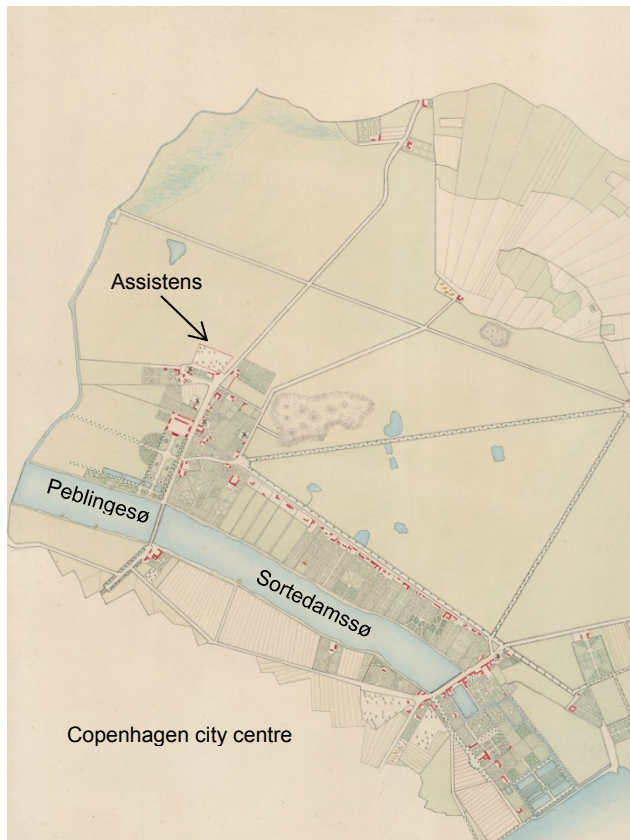


**Fig. 13.**
1770 map of Nørrebro area and the site of the original cemetery, Division A. The city ramparts and lakes mark out the formal limits of the city. Source: Map IIA 1770 ca. /1, Copenhagen City Archive, Creative Commons Public Domain Media.

In 1760 Assistens was placed within the midst of this activity. It was located in cheaper ground slightly further north than most settlement described but it was not

completely isolated as it was placed within the sphere of daily activities necessary for the functioning of the city. There had been suggestions to locate the new cemetery closer to the city but higher land prices and the marshy nature of the ground made this impractical (Valeur Larsen 1960: 11). However symbolic reasons may have played a part as there were already transitional burial grounds adjacent to the city and these could have been viewed as lying too close to the city. Although the ramparts remained in place for another 90 years until the mid-19th century, long-term expansion of the city may also have been a factor in the more distant placement of Assistens. At this time European cities were starting to look beyond their earlier defined boundaries and outdated defence systems. Increasing population meant that expansion of the urban environment became a necessity and this potential may have been a material factor in the choice of location for Assistens. Ultimately the precise location and continued expansion of Assistens was due to the fact that space closer to the city was already largely built up. The city had already expanded long before the ramparts were torn down. Assistens was a strong pull factor in the acceptance of city life spilling beyond the walls and through the landscape to bury the dead and to visit them afterwards.

The increasingly connected nature of the city and its environs is highlighted when Copenhagen was surrounded by British troops during the summer of 1807 leading to the catastrophic bombardment of the city in early September. Nørrebro was used to quarter the troops and set up cannon emplacement, including one very close to Assistens. The expansion of Assistens was very new and few burials had taken place in the extension area. Burial in Assistens ceased entirely by the 22nd August, with the dead instead temporarily stored in the city churchyards (Wiene 2006: 12). The diary of Captain Browne, a British soldier, describes hiding in a tomb in Assistens on a dark and rainy night during the siege (Brown 2007: 86) and it is incidents like these that link Assistens to national events. Some British soldiers were even buried in the nearby Jewish cemetery although the exact grave spot is now lost (Margolinsky 1958: 53-4).

After burial resumed in the autumn of 1807, the cemetery was used intensively. The continual visits by city inhabitants created a new relationship with it, firmly establishing it within the mentality of the city. Within the cemetery there is a sense that the earliest areas, particularly Division A, of the cemetery were now full with a critical mass of material culture that was slowly decaying. This led to significant renovations by 1823-4 although the map by C.F. Schlegel dated to 1820-22 (Copenhagen City Archive) shows that some changes in land management had already taken place. The 1823 renovation is cited as the reason why so few very early memorials survive because those which were not claimed were sold at auction (Valeur Larsen 1960: 19). It is also possible that few memorials were originally erected or that they were of wood and therefore more likely to decay naturally. The popularity of Assistens continued with later extensions close to the chapel building. Divisions J, K, M and O were all bought in 1828 to form the second pauper's cemetery in a narrow

strip of land continuing all the way north up to Jagtvej. Not all of these areas were put into use. A smaller section of land further south bought in 1836 creates divisions H, P, Q and R which together formed the third pauper's cemetery. Despite the expansion of Assistens the overall design character was reinforced with only subtle modifications, the narrative of the cemetery became more stable and enduring. In contrast cemeteries in France are noted as having changed from Romanticised curvilinear pathways to resembling the urban environment that now surrounded the cemeteries (Kselman 1993: 186).

Additional evidence of changes to the cemetery can now be examined from the excavated area within Division G which illustrates how cemeteries were used and regulations adapted. The data used derives from the Municipal register where the first identified burials were from family plots from 1813 and 1814. Although the Municipal register which records plot owners is not reliable for this early period, the first expensive and prestigiously located (Monument) plots were bought from 1806 (P173, unexcavated) and occasionally up to 1815 plots were bought along these Monument Lines, pathways and even within the central areas prior to the insertion of single burials. Family plots were bought for long periods of time – many for 100 years or more bringing some physical stability to the materiality. Burials within them were often more ornate with robust coffins sometimes with metal linings (Chapter 5). Records show only sporadic use but also the construction of grave plot walls and occasionally crypts would have taken place then. In these plots above-ground memorials, plot railings, trees and plants in contrast to the line burials were permitted. Identification work on the burials completed for this thesis shows that the central area also start rapidly filled with line burials in a grid pattern. Most of the earliest burials excavated were from 1817 in the Section P sample of line burials. There was no right to choose the precise location and little chance of renewal, or to set up a gravestone (Wiene 2010). According to the registers burials took place almost every day, possibly only leaving only a small mound of fresh earth as memorial. Calculating the addition of 20 years of grave peace takes the legal limit of these burials up to 1837—40 when they could be removed. Within the central areas of burial occasional plots had been bought earlier particularly in the years 1819 and 1820. These include plots (for example P733) which although not designated as a Monument Line can be identified as located in prominent positions. This shows that several burial options were available which mixed different payment classes in the same area, regulated according to value.

The earliest gravestone recorded in Division G in the survey undertaken by researchers is dated to 1809 but overall only 39 were retained dating from 1809-58 (Assistens Kulturcentret 1985-7). A watercolour painting by Ole Jørgen Rawert from 1823 (in the collection of the Danish Royal Library) displays the inside of the cemetery through the gates of Nørrebro into Division G. It shows a developed green lawn with matured trees lining the wall and the Sexton's House in the background

but little or no gravestones. Records show that graves were still regularly added in this time, so this is a Romanticised image of the cemetery showing that it was a stable and fixed landscape. By this period most space was already purchased and the regulation of grave peace ensures that there is a hiatus in major activity until the 20 years are completed. There was potential for reuse which could have been undertaken from the late 1830s following the original burial order to add new line burials. Instead of an immediate period of reuse there was a change in land management which re-ordered burial priorities to focus upon family plots. Previously line burials had followed a tight grid pattern with limited space for pathways at foot or head end. Now space was re-organised above-ground to create pathways to facilitate visitors and define the new plots. This spatial reorganisation may be recognition that people did come to visit graves regularly but it also removed any visual sign of the line burials which erased their presence above-ground. The cheaper burials were removed from visibility in the landscape leaving a one-sided narrative of burials devoted to more elaborate plots with gravestones. From the mid-19th century there is also an increased frequency and turnover of family plots resulting in some removal of earlier material – this second stage of burial activity was sporadic and not on a large-scale.

The final expansion of Assistens in the south-western corner brought a more regular shape to the cemetery, these were the final divisions S to Z and areas 1 and 2, bought either in 1853 (S, T and U) or 1864 (Fig. 12). Assistens at its largest extent is complete by 1864 with no new additions after this date. This may be a result of the establishment of other new cemeteries for Copenhagen which would have eased demand for burial space but also to an acknowledgement that the land around Assistens was largely built up and required for other purposes. The living population moving out to Nørrebro imposed limits on the cemetery.

As Assistens became surrounded by a densely-settled urban community, carrying out burial within it now threatened the narrative that burial should take place outside of habitation. If it was to survive, burial needed to be moved elsewhere or a new narrative created. Assistens was affected by changes in attitude to the treatment of bodies. The treatment of paupers bodies altered, three large acquisitions of land were undertaken for burials in 1804, 1828 and finally in 1836 but some of these areas were barely used and were free to be transferred to other parishes. The lack of need for pauper burial space is not due to a reduction of poverty but it might point to a change in attitudes that considered there was no longer a reason to bury them separately from the rest of the community. Transitional burial grounds had started by creating divisions within the community now these differences were being broken down again when the modern cemetery accepted a role of burial provision for all groups in society even if they were within separated zones. Change does happen in Assistens but it is handled discretely rather than challenging the overall nature of the place.

Although there was not an increase in demand for burial space in Assistens there was an increased demand for diversification and acceptance of other faiths other than Lutheran. Early moves towards this began as early as 1816 or 1817 when the parish of the Holy Ghost sold part of Division D to create a Catholic area. Later the French and German Reformed churches bought space. Just after intramural burial was forbidden in Copenhagen the two Christianshavn parishes of Our Saviour (*Vor Frelser*) and Frederik's German Church (*Frederiks Tyske Kirke*) bought Division P in normally excavated. Excavation allowed a connection to be made between different irst new church created outside of the old city core located in St Hans Torv, Nørrebro. Part of the Catholic areas were also sold to create a Russian Orthodox section in 1913 which is still present today (Jørgensen, C.A. 2010: 142). So while originally space was controlled by the Lutheran parishes, diversification reflected both the acceptance of other religious communities in the city and the fragmentation of control by the Church to the municipality. Separate burial was no longer seen as appropriate for other religions or other social groups of people.



**Fig. 14.**
The conspicuous yellow boundary wall enclosing Assistens along Nørrebrogade, 11 January 2013.

The boundaries of Assistens weren't secured in the early period of its use and there is evidence of complaints against animals within the cemetery but also against unsuitable human behaviour (Valeur Larsen 1960: 143-4). Today it is surrounded by a high brick wall which both connects to and creates a physical and symbolic barrier marking it out compared to Nørrebro; especially after closing hours. Along the busiest street facades it is painted ochre yellow which is a highly contrasting colour in relation to its current surroundings where only a few buildings are the same colour. The wall

marks out Assistens as a special place although this colour is not continued throughout the entire boundary wall (Fig. 14.). Notably red brick is visible on the less visited sections of wall although the contrast is clear when examining the corner of Nørrebros Runddel with the eastern wall towards Nørrebrogade yellow but the western wall to Jagtvej plain redbrick. This creates an unsynchronised vision of the outer perspective of the cemetery. Both of these roads are heavily used and viewed by local inhabitants but the yellow walls are focused on the south and eastern limits of the cemetery which is the main tourist entrance and most obviously a cemetery because of its visible monuments. Nørrebros Runddel is not marked out so clearly and the red brick and trees alongside the wall instead indicate the more significant and latest role to the community as a park. The current cemetery wall also does not contain all of the areas that have been used over time for burial; some sections for burial lay outside of the original and are now a park. The wall includes only the obvious and currently active burial ground.

A coherent and stable narrative of the cemetery was firmly established but the reality was constantly and subtly adapting to changing situations. Whilst established or traditional ideals were prominent in the earlier decades, these were gradually adapted to reinforce the inclusive and more flexible modern nature of the cemetery. Simultaneously there was also the glorification of 'the golden age' of burial with its narrow focus on middle class death represented through selective and specifically conserved memorials of successful inhabitants. This helped to anchor the cemetery through past symbolic references and also contemporary realities to create a homogenous, stable and timeless perspective. It was perhaps partly created to counteract the changing environment surrounding the cemetery in the growth of Nørrebro. There is an obvious link between cemetery and suburb as they both have an increase in materiality, filling the space with bodies, alive and dead. Even if by the later 19th century burials of Nørrebro inhabitants may not have taken place in Assistens but instead in other newer cemeteries there is still a strong link to the place although its function is changed. The increasing materiality affects the function of the cemetery and pushes the narrative even further towards a comfortable conclusion of preservation and heritage rather than an active burial place.


# From burial to heritage


By the mid-19th century the new cemeteries are an established and accepted part of modern life. Practices and funeral customs which were relatively new in the early days of Assistens can now be interpreted as absorbed into traditional. I suggest that the perception of a static cemetery environment becomes consolidated when there is a complete transition to state control with increased regulations. At the same time

within this golden age, the purpose, functions and ideas surrounding the cemetery is challenged. The challenge comes from the new situations related to the processes of modernity and new designs, regulations and disposal methods which all relates to changing urban environs around the cemetery. What happens in this heyday of Assistens up to the mid-20th century when it is in the midst of a busy Nørrebro? Were new attitudes to death developed and how did this connect to ideas about modernity? This is the period of the world wars and where a debate over the public status of religion and death in the modern world is established. What happens in the coherent cemetery when new authorities are established? Many cemeteries find that their primary function changes and their importance or status in community life may decline especially if a cemetery is considered to have no available space or to be too close to the living community. Cemeteries as burial places undergo a form of managed decline, or are re-invented into museums, culture and leisure facilities.

The previous section described how the narrative of the modern cemetery began to be developed into a unified and coherent category which became to be perceived as a settled entity. Cemeteries become accepted after a period of use and I suggest that they become more imbedded, for example complaints about a cemetery in Lund, Sweden were received for 50 years after its inauguration in 1816 but then stopped (Åkesson 1997: 136). It was about the relations between the cemetery and the city but now the perspective turns to the function and purpose of the modern cemetery and how this relates to changes in society. At first the coherent cemetery is reinforced by a clearer sense of regulatory control and by professionalization of the acts concerned with death and burial. This static image becomes falsified by continual adaptations that take place including the influence of the processes of modernity, large scale 20th century events and also perhaps a desire to clarify a break between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Europe underwent a period of rapidly increasing urbanisation and industrialisation from the mid to late 19th century, although Scandinavia developed later compared to countries such as the UK or Germany (Jespersen 2011: 9). This, combined with increasing life expectancy had an impact on demography within towns and cities which needed to cope with the influx of people and deal with the consequences when they died. The urbanisation in Denmark follows a similar pattern to the rest of Europe. In 1800 Copenhagen contained approximately 10% of the total population, with other minor towns totalling another 10% and the vast majority of the population residing in the countryside.  The population grew rapidly but Copenhagen itself had nearly doubled in relative size by 1900 to 19% of the total population (Andersen, H.T. & Engelstoft 2004: 56). This is just under 500,000 inhabitants (cited for the population in 1901 from Bitsch Christensen & Ladegaard Thøgersen 2006: 33). Industrialisation which remained relatively low in comparison to the European countries was focused in Copenhagen and the period between 1870 and 1914 is identified as one where there was a mass immigration from countryside to

town life in Denmark (Kofod 2008: 39). Modern urban life became a new experience and new social networks and customs were created from a mix of backgrounds. This is often described as creating a distancing of social relations replaced with an emphasis upon individuals rather than the tight society suggested from the land (Lützen 1998: 56). However other researchers (Bitsch Christensen & Ladegaard Thøgersen 2006) maintain instead that lasting and intimate social relations were created in these new situations. Densely populated areas and multi-occupancy buildings created new different social networks which simply may not have been recognised.

This is also an era of social welfare and democracy part of which is expressed by authorities expanding their remit by creating more regulations and taking control of human health. The new cemeteries were already part of a system of regulation but control over more aspects of communal life was extended in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The efficacy of communal social efforts are attested by the events of the cholera outbreak of 1892 which was largely contained in European cities which had instituted city-wide sewerage, clean water, medical and burial systems for its population. Hamburg was the exception because it retained privatised and devolved public infrastructure leaving the city unable to deal with the epidemic (Evans 1987). Cemeteries were only one part of this modernisation where re-organisation of society had the consequences of creating new material expressions. They helped to solidify this vision and by their presence also create it. The new physical situation of cemeteries can be tied in with a need to firmly control the dead body, the funeral and continued mourning rituals and the subsequent commemoration of the population. It is a top-down perspective where authorities are dictating the forms of public behaviour and shares little regard for actualities on the ground where the people affected by this change may not agree.

Even by the early 20th century when new communities had developed and surrounded the cemeteries there was no move to make a re-connection between the cemetery place and a new parish church. New communities and churches were formed around cemeteries but their direct physical link to the place of burial was never reinstated. The Church was no longer associated with the dead body despite there being continued evidence of strong religious feeling and symbolism. There was separation between worship by the living from the memory and material presence of past generations. People no longer prayed for all of the past community, but for immediate concerns. By this period urban communities were more fluid, coming from rural parishes as immigrants to the city, moving around the city and emigrating. Inhabitants may feel no connection to the past community commemorated in the cemetery. There is a greater ability to choose which past to consider, commemorate and regard as valuable. There are also changes in the requirements for memorialisation, because if descendants migrate and move to another place there is nobody to look after gravesite, the physical place becomes a less important element of mourning and remembering the dead person (Sommer 2008: 326). These changes

could lead to the abandonment of modern cemeteries when they become full, or alternatively an alteration in the narrative of modern cemeteries.

Similarly other transitional burial grounds in Copenhagen that survived and continued in use were under pressure to be re-defined and organised according to new principles. Although the landscape of Holmens was regulated for the first time earlier in 1798 by creating paths and tree-lined avenues (and eventually allowing gravestones) there was a set of aesthetic principles enacted which would transform them into a modern cemetery (Wassard 1990: 284). Through the 19th century some of the transitional burial grounds were also expanded and their borders better defined and contained. There was little change in the Jewish cemetery apart from minor re-organisation of internal divisions (Margolinsky 1958). Both Holmens and Garnisons became associated with Danish nationalism in burying and commemorating soldiers and sailors of the later 19th century wars (Wassard 1990: 286-7). However other burial grounds which were associated with the poor or hospital burials were removed or simply built over. There was no above-ground evidence for the remaining bodies underneath which would only be investigated later by archaeologists. The promotion of certain valued groups associated with the nation state of Denmark was prioritised. Specific events such as the First World War had only a minimal effect upon Assistens with a small area reserved for the burial of French prisoners of war who died on their way to being transferred home. There is also little overt reference to the Second World War in Assistens. Instead Vestre cemetery, another of Copenhagen's cemeteries was used from the 1970s as a central cemetery to gather together the remains almost 10,000 German refugees and soldiers fleeing in advance of the Soviet army (Sommer 2003: 254).

Although the management of cemeteries was increasingly secular, the Danish church still controls most churchyards and cemeteries (Kjøller 2012: 340). Assistens is one of the exceptions being managed by the Municipality. Overall religious identities remained an important factor within burial customs in Scandinavia. Religious symbolism and beliefs still continued in burial and funeral rituals but the increase in personal objects in the grave and elaboration of the coffins (Jonsson 2009: 196) suggests a loosening of ties and the allowance of new ideas. A stronger interpretation of the change in relationship between the modern body and identity is derived from Bourdieu (1977) and further developed by Shilling (2003) that the body bears economic, social and cultural capital and this has been commodified through its treatment by modern professionals including the medical world and funeral directors. The body as an entity that is ever more seen as a resource to be altered and enhanced appears to be a clear trend in modernity. These interactions set new frameworks which extend into developing new public and professional systems to deal with the body as an object for medical research and commercialisation by funeral directors. Dissection for medical research had been practiced earlier in southern Europe from the late 13th century but was seen as less acceptable in northern Europe. Here it was

the body had become the primary focus of the relationship between living and dead rather than the Catholic idea of purgatory (Park 1995: 115). From the 19th century bodies could now be dissected and autopsied with a focus on trying to prevent death rather than accept it as a natural process (Nipper Nielsen 2013). The body also retained a central importance within the undertakers business, as the focus of treatment and in some cases overly expensive commercialisation. Preparing and clothing the body, then placing it in the coffin became a professional task, unsuitable for the families.

Bodies are considered to be of central importance to modern ideas of self-identity but this concept is true of bodies in earlier periods. In the medieval period the physicality of the body was integrally bound within the concept of self, combined with sensation, emotion, reasoning and identity (Bynum 1995: 11). The connection of body and the individual identity which is often cited as central to modern ideals are not necessarily connected with the decline of religion (Shilling 2003: 2) but instead with emerging capitalism as the link between body and identity were clearly established and strong within western medieval Europe (Bynum 1995: 225).

Another vital challenge related to the body came in the impact of cremation which was activated through an international intellectual movement promoting it for hygienic and aesthetic reasons (Åhrén Snickare 2009: 146-9). It also provides a neat response to the changing demographics of urban areas requiring more burial space. From the cremation reformist perspective the decomposing body was presented as abject and horrifying which needed to be removed from society. This view is contradictory compared with the ideas of beautifying the dead body for the funeral but the focus was redirected towards the decomposing body, not the living or recently deceased and still beautiful body. Cremation was seen as the cleanest way to deal with its materiality, both spiritually and hygienically, which allows distance between the decomposing body underground and society (Flohr Sørensen 2009: 127). It was also remarkable for being able to combine new technologies and artistic nostalgia for the past in its references to Classical and Viking rituals. However materially and above-ground the practical impact of cremation on cemeteries, particularly rural ones in Denmark appears to be limited until the mid-20th century (Flohr Sørensen 2009: 117). While the living body was increasingly important the dead body was increasingly a burden and an unnatural problem while also being an opportunity for display and commercialisation.

The international cremation movement was influential in Denmark from an early period and it became legal in 1892. The first crematorium was built in Nyelandsvej in Frederiksberg in 1886 (Bøgh 1981: 29). A larger crematorium was built at Bispebjerg in 1906, designed by an architect to contain a purpose-built ceremony room, similar to ones used today (Kragh 2003: 224). Despite being available since the late 19th century cremation was slow in being accepted, as a tradition it took time to establish

itself which was not necessarily concerned with the practical issues of building enough crematoriums. Uptake was slow in Denmark until the 1930s (Flohr Sørensen 2009: Figure 1) but was faster in urban areas like Copenhagen where it is estimated that cremation was as much as 95% by 1980 (Bøgh 1981: 10). Disposal of the remains in Denmark was (and still is) heavily regulated (Flohr Sørensen 2009) and the period of grave peace for burying an urn was set at 10 years. Urns were buried within existing grave plots in shallow pits and standard gravestones were used to mark their location so that in these early decades there appears to be little difference in memorialising a cremation or an inhumation burial (Chapter 4).

The contrast between an individual death and the mass death of the 20th century wars and pre-meditated genocides inspired some of the research and debates into new attitudes to death. The idea of the denial of death was suggested by Geoffrey Gorer (1965), studying death from a sociological and very personal perspective, who concluded that attitudes towards death had been severely affected by the grand narrative events of the two World Wars. Combined with more structural changes in society this encouraged not just the removal of the handling of death away from the mourners but also the denial of emotions and eventually the pretence that death is not present in society. The denial of death was emphasised by Ariès (1981 [1977]) who in creating models of attitudes to death in Western Europe suggests that death had become shameful and invisible in 20th century funeral traditions. Criticisms of Ariès highlight his static view of traditional death as a fixed idea that doesn't conform to the great range of changes that occurred over the medieval and early modern period (Vovelle 1983). However the idea persists, Tony Walter (1994; 1999) argues that the medicalisation of death limits the experiences of people to death, rendering grief a purely private matter but there is also a confusion of frameworks that deal with death on a private individual scale and on a public institutional scale. This question of scale is vital to untangle because some of these confusions arise from attitudes being imposed as a structural outcome of modernity rather than strictly of medical institutions (Mellor 1993). Simultaneously it is also important to see that death in modern society is far more complex than can be reduced to a simple sweeping phrase. There are many contexts where death is not denied but consumed in numerous ways in public and private life (Sayer 2010b: 484).

The argument that the expensive and ornate public death rituals and traditions of the mid to late 19th century are completely given up and morphed into a simple, plain and private death is a reversion to a binary position. Recent research has discredited this simplistic view and expanded investigation into the vast range of experiences of death in the 19th century to include female or working class perspectives (Strange 2003) and at the same time highlighting the continuation of elaborated rituals and traditions far into the 20th century. The theme of denial of death is therefore criticised and modified to include a wider interpretations (Cannadine 1981). Eva Åhrén Snickare (2009: 2) and Lynn Åkesson (1997: 12) have found little to indicate

an increase in the fear of death in contemporary Sweden compared to earlier periods. There is clear evidence that certain frameworks dealing with death have been largely exaggerated, focused on one section of society – the middle classes with exaggerations of the flamboyance and celebration of death. It refers back to and contrasts unfavourably with earlier periods; however multiple interpretations of death in earlier periods do show the same tendencies of a simplified death throughout the last century. Alternatively it is that the relationship between living and dead has always been more flexible and manifold than suggested and that the frameworks for interactions between them have been altered. The lack of coherent and firm certainties in how to deal with death individually may be a problem but as Walter (1991) pointed out modern society deals very well with death, it is each individual death which is a problematic to the mourners.

The design of cemeteries also adapt to changing ideas of burial, the clearest change is the establishment of woodland cemeteries. These twist the normative concept of design by introducing burial into the natural landscape rather than carefully putting elements of nature into a burial ground. Early examples are Ohlsdorfer in Hamburg from 1877 and the opening of Skogskyrkogården in Stockholm in 1920 which inspired the natural or green burial grounds of the 21st century (Fjord Jensen 2002: 150). Closer to Copenhagen was Mariebjerg in Lyngby opened in 1930-6  and designed by the Danish architect G.N. Brandt (Lundquist 1992: 34). Brandt (1922) advocated up-to-date types of cemeteries and influenced the transition to park and lawn cemeteries as suitable for the masses rather than individuals or families (Fjord Jensen 2002: 147-9; Sommer 2006b). Egalitarian ideas begun to be more forcefully presented encompassing environmental concerns and seeing death as part of nature. The increasing popularity of cremation, particularly marked in urban areas also started to make its impact; cremation too can be seen as a more equal treatment of people. The effect below-ground was mixed as urns were buried individually within shallow graves within family plots and had little potential to impact upon previously interred burials. Their small size did permit continued use of family plots. The physical problems of dead bodies accumulating beneath the surface was also removed or at least heavily reduced and sanitised. Above-ground the new cemetery designs are also seen as a direct response to the popularity of cremation within the 20th century (Rugg 2006). More sections of society were visible in simple memorial plaques, not just those who could afford more expensive gravestones. It may also have been the increasingly affordability of simple forms of memorial that enabled more people to order them. Beyond the aim of this study is investigation into the increase in late 20th century and early 21st century solutions to burial and grief such as memorial groves or natural, or green burial grounds (Williams 2011; Rumble, Troyer *et al.* 2014).

As burial space became used up in the 20th century some cemeteries declined, this was particularly evident in the UK where some which were managed by private companies began to be neglected. Examples like the Sheffield General Cemetery had

declined to an average of 12 burials a year by the 1950s and 60s (Sheffield General Cemetery Trust 2015). York Cemetery went into voluntary liquidation in 1966 after a period of decline leading to wholesale selling of valuables and neglect of the land (York Cemetery Trust n.d.). Highgate in London declined after the Second World War, eventually closing in 1975 after many decades of neglect (Bickersteth 2016). Examples like these led to one of the common images of them as over-grown and neglected places. Cemeteries that were directly managed by municipalities tended to escape this decline although there was also a similar sense of managed decline. Many of these over-grown cemeteries were saved by the formation of charities and trusts dedicated to their heritage with a new purpose to mix ecology, heritage and in some renewed burial rights. They can be seen as a direct influence on cemeteries such as Assistens in championing a new way to manage them by the end the 20th century.

The idea that cemeteries could change function was already established in the 19th century, John Loudon suggested that they might not retain permanent status as a cemetery but revert to public gardens (Curl 2002: 253). The place would undergo another stage in its biography with the function of burial ceased or reduced but another beginning, a different cultural landscape while burials below-ground were still present. The collective sense of place of cemetery would become solidified replacing a specific respect for individuals with commemoration for a community of the dead instead. This subtle change in function, away from death and towards memorialisation is enacted in cemeteries in the 20th century. It may also be associated with the increasing popularity of memorialisation in society which is connected to the strengthening of common nationalistic myths and an emphasis on the power of memory (Adriansen 2010: 429). The design of ash scattering groves makes this transition easier because they remove the material sense of the body and of the gravestone. War memorials and areas set aside for victims of war such as at Vestre cemetery in Copenhagen also contributed to shift the focus of the physical remains of death towards commemoration of more abstract ideals of sacrifice but mostly to the personal relationships of the dead and their families (Tarlow 1999a: 163). There is also a sense of detachment of cemeteries from social events which helps to reduce the link between the living world and the dead. In some sense the dead have become more 'othered' which helps with the alteration of function and purpose. Cemeteries are part of cultural and ecological heritage, creating a new and positive vision of what they could represent.

The earlier stage of the cemetery was characterised in part by the move to visiting the cemetery as a special act rather than part of daily life. This movement continues even when the area around cemeteries becomes densely populated, except that the reason for the visit may change. This visit can focus on those who are buried in the cemetery such as the Protestant cemetery lying outside the city walls of Rome which became notable place for burials and visits of artists and poets in the early 19th century (Worpole 2003: 119-20). Burials of famous or notorious people have been known to

create shrines, one example being Karl Marx's grave in Highgate, London which was moved in 1956 from its original position to accommodate the large number of visitors and political sympathisers who wanted to be buried nearby (Friends of Highgate Cemetery 2016). This sense of heritage can also encompass events within the cemetery such as the Mur des Féders in Père Lachaise which was used as an execution ground in 1871 for the failed Communards (Worpole 2003: 118), this has now become part of a shrine to political movements. Assistens too is famous as the burial place of Hans Christian Andersen, Niels Bohr and Søren Kierkegaard among other Danish personalities. Journeys to cemeteries now involve more organised tourism, education and entertainment experiences which have helped to reaffirm its new role in society. This encourages visitors, creates new narratives of the past and can also be linked to creative events such as live theatre, nature trails or art exhibitions (Gormley, Hansen *et al.* 2002; Kulturcentret Assistens 2010).

## Assistens - from a suburb to within the city



**Fig. 15.**
The growth of suburban Nørrebro by 1897. Source: Map IA 1897 /2, Copenhagen City Archive, Creative Commons Public Domain Media.

External changes in Nørrebro showed how the cemetery was affected by the surrounding area. It is striking that access to the cemetery became more regulated as the adjacent environs filled up with housing and an expanded community began

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living adjacent to it (Fig. 15). The cemetery was now physically overlooked by housing and used by a larger number of people and this affected perspectives on how it was seen and experienced. Access to Assistens had altered over the years; some of the first gates out onto Nørrebrogade were bricked up in 1823 to control unwanted visitors and reduce vandalism. This was a simple measure to control the area within a more open and less populated landscape. However similar attempts in the early 20th century to close more gates generated a strong reaction from the local community against having their right of use restricted. Overall these actions highlight a change from occasional use of the cemetery to one requiring daily access for leisure and for travelling through the cemetery (Valeur Larsen 1960: 63-4). It could also reflect attempts by mourners of those buried on the cemetery to restrict the casual visitor. The use of the cemetery was more strongly claimed by the surrounding community although not necessarily for burial purposes.

The demarcation zone was finally proved to be an unsuccessful defence strategy and that the idea that Copenhagen was a secure city was an illusion (Wassard 1990: 22) which led to the more formal distinction between city and surroundings being thoroughly erased. This decision brings to mind Paul Connerton's statement that "The mark of modernity is the dismantling of the city frontier, the effacement of the self-evident and uncontested city form for which the gestalt of the fortified city had provided the model." (2009: 103). In reality modern influences were clear long before the city walls came down, instead removing the city walls can be seen as a firm commitment to attitudes already established. Just prior to the formal decision to allow expansion beyond the city, the area outside the city and Nørrebro had increasingly been used for housing and light industry such as the Deichmann's chocolate factory (Wassard 1990: 30). The ramparts started to be demolished with the north gate removed first in July 1856 (Westerbeek Dahl 1996: 103). The new expansion in Nørrebro was predominantly for large-scale cheap housing indicating a clear change in function for the area. It can easily be described as well-inhabited from the 1860s and the suburb fully established by the 1880s (Schmidt 2015: 46). Nørrebrogade became less of a country road and developed into a significant mercantile street with corresponding elaborate architecture. This was the material setting for the funeral processions out to Assistens which became a characteristic mark of the area (Schmidt 2015: 54). With this new situation the character of Assistens could not fail to be affected by the more intense daily activity and denser settlement now known as the worker's quarter. An example of the complex and competing interests surrounding burial practices and the cemetery were the conflicts between workers movements, authorities and the church over the processions and use of the socialist red flag from the late 19th century onwards. One burial procession to Assistens in 1887 consisted of 10,000 people and 21 red flags (Borgvardt 2007: 1).

However similar to the early years of the cemetery there was no cessation of vandalism despite the close proximity of inhabitants. Vandalism was reported on Assistens

'outside of the walls' in 1880 but suggestions to put up more railings to protect this area were not acted upon. Instead this unbounded area of the cemetery was legally changed to parkland which is now Hans Tavsens Park on the west of the cemetery (Valeur Larsen 1960: 133).

With only a brief exception in the early 19th century (Helweg 2010: 122) overall control in Assistens was relatively light until there were significant changes with the administration of death and cemeteries being brought into municipal control. Responsibility for the cemetery and the staff was contested through the 19th century, for example church and city authorities argued over responsibility for paying an inspector for the cemetery (Valeur Larsen 1960: 70). Parish churches still retained control over different sections of the cemetery. Trinity parish had control of the northern-most section, with Our Lady taking the central divisions and Holy Ghost large areas of the central and eastern divisions. St Peter controlled an area to the southwest. All parishes still held rights of ownership within the original Division A. That the four main parishes had largely consolidated their burial properties is logical and emphasises some of the sense of the parish being physically linked to burial space. Initial moves towards communal responsibility were made in 1861 when a common burial office was created (Helweg 2010: 125). However the idea of Assistens as a single place was still absent and it continued to be considered as an 'assistance' or relief cemetery long into the 19th century. The connection between parish and burial place was finally removed when the city authorities took control of the cemetery, although a lingering sense of parish rights is retained as people from Trinity continue to be associated with Division G. Combined control of the cemetery was formally created in 1880 when the city authorities formally took over and unified management of the entire area (Helweg 2010: 125-6). From this date, salaried Inspectors of the cemetery were able to coordinate the work inside the cemetery and started to regulate all burial practices within Assistens. The work was professionalised and became part of the municipality services. By 1882 the new administration had made its mark by reforming the system of burials, surveying the grave plots and rationalising the physical space by creating a new system of divisions and plot numbers (Helweg 2010: 125) which is still used today and referred to in this research. The power in determining how Assistens was managed had shifted over the last 250 years; it originally lay with middle class professionals, city magistrates and the church and even university but has gradually shifted to the municipality. Running the cemetery was now emphasised as a secular task and it retains parallels with the development of other professionalization processes like the funeral industry in Copenhagen during this period (see Chapter 5).

The first urn garden was created in Assistens in 1938 (Helweg 2010: 126). Overall there was less pressure on Assistens for burial space as there were new cemeteries located even further away from the city centre such as Vestre which was inaugurated in 1870 and Bispebjerg in 1903. While the clear emergence of an active community

living around Assistens changed the activities within it, the start of the 20th century is the beginning of an attitude change. Burial in Assistens becomes relegated to a lesser function and heritage becomes more dominant. In 1898 there was a debate over demolishing the decayed Sexton's House, instead it was restored and additional smaller buildings added to create an office and working complex for staff (Valeur Larsen 1960: 124). Its retention is a physical result of this new attitude to Assistens and cemeteries in general as museum or gallery spaces. This building is now the oldest surviving in Nørrebro resulting in its protection during the Metro works.

By the 20th century Nørrebro was no longer simply a suburb of Copenhagen but fully integrated into the city and this alteration can be traced through the changing role of the cemetery. Nørrebro had become a working class community which was unfairly maligned and used as a symbol of chaotic unregulated city but described by residents as an open active community (Schmidt 2015: 64-5). With the exception of the long-term family plots in Assistens which still had tenure, new burials were discouraged and frequency decreased. Burial was instead shifted elsewhere to the newer cemeteries. Assistens became a different resource for the local community while still retaining a burial and memorial function for other parts of the city. Discussions over the future of Assistens started as far back as 1879 when a Royal Resolution was issued with the intention of closing it for burial in 1960 (Valeur Larsen 1960: 162). The debate continued and burial extended to 1980, and later 2020 (Stadsingeniørens Direktorat 1988). Building upon the earlier recommendations, Municipality plans suggested cessation of burial in most of the cemetery and re-designation as cemetery parkland. The oldest Division A became a museum area and burial restricted to a central section of the cemetery. Famous Danes are still sometimes buried in the cemetery and in 2013 a specific area was set aside for burial and commemoration of homeless people (Halkjær Jensen 2013). A programme of managed decay was activated with redundant gravestones removed to enable easier maintenance of the grassed areas. However vibrant the surrounding community was, Assistens had developed a new narrative of stability. The burial of the dead, which was the original reason for its existence, became marginalised with other cemeteries taking over that function.

Archaeological evidence from Division G is used to interpret these challenges and the movement in function away from an active burial site. The bulk of burials which were excavated survive from this period, with 67% identified from 1880-1980s (407 individuals of 610). Only 36 are dated to after 1950, of which half are cremation burials which reflects the general decrease overall in burial function. The last excavated inhumation burial took place in 1984, the last cremation burial in 1986. The survival rate of the minimal amount of late 20th century burials is increased due to the cycles of grave peace and renewal not being completed. By this period the lease period runs out on of the larger Monument Line plots and although most are not renewed by the owners the plots are no longer offered for re-sale. Burials underground

are not removed but left *in situ*; many gravestones are removed but some are considered worthy of preservation and retained (Chapter 4). More gravestones from this period survive leaving an image of a stable and coherent but narrow sense of the cemetery burial population. The plots that are still active are smaller plots which are used to bury married couples: the last few burials are those generally of husband and wife. The landscaping of the cemetery was well-matured but also showing the changes in disposal practice with areas for urn gardens and ash scattering areas, although none were located in Division G. Instead plots which been given up had their boundaries of railings and hedges removed and became part of an expanding lawn, much in demand for summer picnics and sunbathing.

Changes in attitude towards the cemetery can be exemplified by describing Division G in the 1980s. A survey undertaken in 1986 recorded 181 grave plots with memorials *in situ* in Division G and provides additional background details of the area (Assistens Kulturcentret 1985-7). The area had always been dominated by the presence of the Sexton's House and surrounding buildings arranged around the rear courtyard. In the 1980s the buildings formed a coherent focus for the area with driveways leading up to it and a large garden lying to the west of the Sexton's House for cultivation of plants for the cemetery. A fence around the garden created a background for plots along the northern-most Monument Line. Mature trees lined the walls with smaller trees and bushes scattered around the extant gravestones, but few plots were marked out by railings or hedges. Particularly prominent were decorative grave plots by the most frequented pathway which leads out onto Nørrebrogade. Some of these are bounded by hedges most however are only marked out by the cut edges of the lawn around each plot. Pre-excavation photographs taken just prior to the initial clearance of the area in 2009 also revealed features that had been concealed by grass of large fieldstones which were plot surfaces or boundaries. When construction started the excavation site which formed approximately half of Division G was fenced off. The buildings were demolished with the exception of the Sexton's House. The threat of development had hung over Division G for many years. Burial function had been vastly reduced and the consequence of this was that burial becomes severely curtailed within the expanded city again. The potential disruption of the Metro development was only one impending change: in reality the change of use envisaged in the 1980s meant that the entire area had already become primarily a place of administration work and leisure rather than an actively used cemetery. In 1994 a Cultural Centre (*Kulturcentret ASSISTENS*) was opened on the cemetery which combines some of the cemetery and park management functions with cultural and educational research and activities based on the cemetery (Kulturcentret Assistens n.d.). The lifetime of the cemetery within the city was limited but was re-imagined for locals as leisure and for tourists as heritage and for both a new transport hub.

# Contextualising change in modern cemeteries

The formation of the new cemeteries is a consequence of changes in attitudes to the dead body and the place of burial. The relationship was never simple. In a broad perspective in pre-modern understandings churchyards were treated as a social context, held and formed by community relations and expressing the medieval view as a microcosm of the world (Harris, Robb *et al.* 2013). In general bodies tended to be treated as standard or ideal types rather than representing a specific individual. Despite this, people understood churchyards as active places which belonged to all the community rather than any one individual (Laqueur 2015: 138). Churchyards and bodies were acceptably contained within urban areas. Complex theological debates focused on the indissolubility of the body and its relation to Christian doctrine. In practice the dead body was treated as a physical entity where although the soul resided elsewhere it was still an important part of the process of Resurrection. Yet in the churchyard it was also possible to carefully disturb graves and manipulate bodies. Medieval churchyards held the process of reduction and recycling of bodies. They completed this function efficiently and discretely with some help from the gravediggers. Although the Reformation did bring changes in to these attitudes, it was not in the form of a rapid and clean break as might have been expected. Many burial and commemoration practices of the dead continued and some can still be traced today. Assistens is used as a case study to examine modern cemeteries in Europe; it is a micro perspective on the specifics of how and why they originated and their evolution.

The evidence discussed in this chapter shows that the interface or meeting point between modernity and existing burial customs was enacted in the new modern cemeteries. Creating and organising the new cemeteries were informed by the pre-existing concept of churchyards and what they did for the community. This explains the similarities between the churchyard and the cemetery. There are no hard borders between these worlds and ideas. It is not a simple matter of change and replacement but a holding together of contradictory and competing ideas about what was happening within the communities like Copenhagen and Europe in general. The result allowed new cemeteries to be places which as a group present a homogenous narrative but in practice contain a great deal of variation. This new ideal narrative appears to be strong and extremely coherent because it has lasted almost 200 years and still dominates today. I argue that there is often a sense that cemeteries once established are frozen in time where little change occurs whether in management, design or function (Kjøller 2012: 346), which creates a synchronic perspective. Its modern aspect is that is strong enough to have successfully concealed both its antecedents and how it has been flexible enough to absorb change.

What happened in cemeteries actively created new ideals and practices with a sense of tolerance and acceptance for dealing with the myriad changes in society over the 19th and 20th century. The modern world was formed from a combination of the old and the new, of which the practices of burial and mourning within the cemetery are a contributing factor. This conforms with the idea that the modern framework of burial is something that is built firmly upon existing models, where modernity is identified as something that is not all new, as discussed by Latour (1993). Modernity is a more idealistic concept that is at its peak unattainable but something that was aimed for. It is the aim of progress towards an ideal that creates these mixed features of the façade of the modern cemetery sitting firmly upon an existing framework. The neutralisation of a very active place is made possible but it has to be continually maintained.

Concurrently as urban burial grounds become isolated from their community, outside of the formal town boundaries of defensive ramparts and city walls, the surrounding hinterland is becoming more defined. It is more capable of containing these disorderly bodies, particularly those of marginal groups in society but then all of society. The modern cemeteries were placed in the country to create distance from the city yet still they were created and supplied with bodies by that city, removing any doubt as to the strength of the continuing relationship. The dead represent the extension of the city and this is the role of the original Assistens cemetery. Due to this connection, as described by Sommer (2003: 263-4) cemeteries can have the status of a test laboratory for urban experiments. Not as cities for the dead because they are really integrated places for the living and the dead. Instead they take over the role of recycling, again discretely but add the functions of storage for the community and memorial exhibitions of past inhabitants. Concerns over how to enact the interaction between living and dead could now be secured. The social contract between them is now expressed and strengthened due to the ability to commemorate them over the long-term.

Landscapes also now had the potential to be perceived as beautiful and new cemeteries could be designed to contain the Romanticised ideals of beautifying death. This helped to neutralise the dead body by aligning the idea of the fluid beautiful body with a newly strengthened place in a new narrative. A passive image of a very active place was physically created through the thick layer of well-tended lawn, weighted down with gravestones. The extension of Assistens in 1805 plays a primary function in building this image. The narrative was also built upon the dense layers of documentary administration, rules and regulations which provide the foundation for comportment in the cemetery, for living and dead. Disorderly dead bodies were now deactivated by the regulated and ordered modern cemetery perceived as static and timeless.

There are consequences as cities expand into the surrounding areas. Cemeteries become spatially absorbed again into the urban world and may run out of burial

space. The mass of bodies in the place have to be held together and new narratives begin to emerge of heritage, tourism and the environment. Cemeteries are recast into positive community resources. Exploration of this transformation in later chapters of this research will show that this image took work to maintain, where active manipulation of materiality had an affective presence on the recasting of the cemetery. The discrete recycling function of the cemetery is a little weaker through the use of long-term family plots. However the narrative of the stable cemetery continues and they are often regarded as still and static (Kaliff 2007: 79), even when new functions emerge. It is a powerfully flexible and complementary image of the cemetery that continues into the 21st century.

Processes of modernity bring a gradual transformation and expansion of multiple ideas concerning both the body and the churchyard. At all times there continues an embodied sense of relating to the physical place and the body but the main focus shifts away from these as unified and stable concepts. The late 18th century has been suggested as a point where bodies become matter out of place within the living community (Laqueur 2001: 7), however a closer reading suggests that it is the now bodies that are perceived as more flexible entities that are dangerous rather than death itself. Bodies that were previously relatively stable entities now become more malleable and abstracted. The position of these more contextualised entities needed to be safely contained within the urban environment and the social churchyard. However the existing churchyards are unable to contain these multiple understandings and more personalised dead bodies. It was also not simply the sheer quantity of bodies present in the new urban environment but also the active nature of them. Bodies became harder to grasp, in life and in death. The mass of disorderly bodies inside the increasingly regulated urban landscape becomes unacceptable. New perspectives and new places were needed to deal with these new modern bodies at a time when the power of the church was challenged by the state. A dominant perspective becomes focused on the hygiene aspect of bodies and churchyards which ties in with the rise of the scientific medical discourse and also the increasing regulation of communities and people. Hygiene is a strong argument for advocating change; perhaps it is too strong as it obscures other interpretations of changes in attitudes and practices.

In interpreting the narratives on modern cemeteries and their place in society a good analogy is within the interpretative stratigraphic categories which are used to understand archaeological evidence. This follows three stages, that of construction, use and then disuse to which contextual evidence is categorised. Construction applies to the establishment of cemeteries, the ideals related to the place in the beginning. This is designing the cemetery, trying to create a new place for the dead. The use phase applies to the reality, the *doxa* and *habitus*, practices which form the cemetery place in a continual reflexive process which absorbs changes within and around the place. This is the materiality of dead bodies and funerary equipment but there is a

blurring of lines with the next phase of disuse which is traditionally where the cycle is complete. Disuse categorises a cemetery which has been forgotten, built over, partially removed or it transformed into parkland or a place of heritage. The original function of the cemetery may have become discarded and a new stage in the biography of the cemetery place constructed but the materiality of the place and of the bodies within it is can still be activated. The cemetery is shown to be a continued work in progress from its construction (creation) phase where ideals clash with pragmatic solutions and dominance of old traditions to the use and even disuse phases.

The physical mass collective of burials create a perception of the place that lasted over 200 years but have evolved into something else because of the interaction between the place and practices within it and the body. This development of understanding is affected by the changing of the place around the cemetery as much as the increased collective mass of burials inside it. It creates an empathetic approach to the cemetery which is broken down a little into acceptable components – heritage, parkland or perhaps convenient forgetting; this comprises the discard phase of cemeteries but also a transformational phase into new use phases. The strong narrative serves a purpose of making death and its physical consequences palatable, where emotions towards death, the body and the cemetery can be understood and processed.


## Continuity and Assistens after the Metro

This research was made possible due to the decision by Copenhagen Municipality to build a Metro station in the corner of Assistens. It was possible also due to the attitudes of the Copenhageners towards the changing function of cemeteries, even one which has become a tourist destination like Assistens. Despite the change in attitudes, even the Metro Company present some slight dissimulation in the name of the new station, far from being called Assistens Cemetery, it refers only to the road junction it faces: Nørrebros Runddel. The design of the station area refers more to idealised working class characteristics of Nørrebro with a hint to the surrounding cemetery in the colour scheme, although few gravestones are the pale yellow colour chosen by designers (Metroselskabet n.d.). The function of the area is now legally parkland and its previous function as repository of the dead bodies and memories although not entirely forgotten is reduced by these actions. Visitors using Nørrebros Runddel will travel up through the cemetery soil without any clear indication of the presence of the surrounding dead, again a way of negating the physicality that challenges the narrative of a cemetery.

This chapter starts, and ends, with evidence that illustrated the embedded social activities that take place in the cemetery with people travelling to, visiting, and working within the cemetery. People lived on Assistens and socialised, buying food and drink from the Sexton's House. These activities connected to the world of the

living would only have increased after the settlement of Nørrebro became denser in the mid-19th century and changed from being formally outside of the city to a suburb of the city and finally inside the city again. Throughout these changes the living world was always present in the area but how the cemetery is made to work for people in different ways creates these changes. During the 20th century because the cemetery was a rare green space and a culturally and socially visible location in Nørrebro it may have been more desirable to live close to it. So the cemetery as a place actively shapes the nature of the surroundings. The cemetery became more visible as a place again when dealing with death is no longer the prime function and it was reintegrated with the living community who did not have their dead buried in Assistens. This is encapsulated in many European cemeteries where there are other new functions attributed to cemeteries. Compare the 1770 map (Fig. 13) with the aerial photo taken during excavation in 2010 (Fig. 1). When Assistens was established in 1760 it lay within open tobacco fields. You can see the cemetery as part of the city being transplanted outside but it renegotiates and creates a strong network which links back to the urban centre. The dead are not exiled or denied but have a material effect upon the community and are considered in balance with the living population of the city; the relationship changes. Modern cemeteries may originally have been physically separated but now are no longer ex-urban cemeteries but within the contemporary city. The dead underneath are still present and are not necessarily forgotten but absorbed into the living community again.

# Chapter 4.

# Public practices and commemoration

> A small girl is taken by her mother to visit the grave of her sister and father every Sunday. Many years later the same lady describes the 'silent game' she played, using all the gravestones in the surrounding area to create an apartment with many rooms. One gravestone represented the dining room, another was a bedroom. The inscription on one particular gravestone inspired a connection because she liked the name of the deceased lady who had died the same year the child was born in. The placement of the gravestones and their text, the trees and pathways were all incorporated within the child's story.
>
> Skogskyrkogården, Sveriges Television (Von Strauss 2008)

This is a tale told by a visitor to Skogskyrkogården in Stockholm about visiting her father's grave in the 1940s. As a girl she had used the spatial setting of the surrounding gravestones and trees to construct her playhouse. Many years later she was able to recreate this game, connect with her memories and note the changes that had occurred since she was young. She had created a new experience in the cemetery and by integrating new emotions and activities she was able to remember not just her family but also the names of the individuals nearby. It's an intimate and individual story which shows how people relate to gravestones in ways that are not necessarily the same as other cemetery visitors or even the owners of grave plots. This narrative emphasises the relationship created between cemetery material culture and people and how this is intimately connected to practices of commemoration. These are public practices that are being examined, material expressions that are set out on display for long periods of time. The act of setting up a gravestone or other decorations can be seen as setting a standard, an aesthetic value and a demand or future burden which in later years may be maintained by the descendants, or perhaps altered or taken away. It is necessary not only to continue payment for the plot but also to maintain it and perhaps even socially to be seen to visit the plot, placing flowers or wreaths. It is an act that requires not just financial means but a vision of a longer memorialisation and commitment to the dead individual or family group. It also creates and continues to

shape not only their vision of themselves but also how they are represented to their community and future unknown visitors. Therefore it can be both a re-affirmation of the family group and also be seen potentially as a burden which not everybody may be content with.

All elements of the grave plot and the cemetery combined to create a harmonious vision of where the family and the dead individual would fit into society, specifying not only the status of living but also the place of the dead. A grave plot itself, as the spatially defined area which can be purchased for the placement of multiple burials, allows the owners to control who is buried there marking out a special status for those buried there. However this is only one part of the narrative because the grave plot and its features materialises this relationship by creating a focus for the stages of grief and commemoration. It creates a safe repository for emotions and eventually mitigates the emotional response. The creation of a socially appropriate grave plot and gravestone discharges a social duty to the dead which can also help to create new narratives regarding the family or community.

Not only does the experience of a cemetery change according to the visitor but the cemetery has to be viewed as containing multiple moments in time simultaneously. The cemetery changes with each season but also with each passing year - new additions, maintenance or removal. No grave plot remains in a static preserved condition as new burials are dug, gravestones set up, new inscriptions and symbols are carved upon old gravestones, trees and plants mature. Other objects are removed or will be affected by weathering and erosion. These actions and processes alter the overall appearance of the grave plot through time and it would be difficult to present the cemetery in only one narrative. Change in the cemetery is represented in the clearance of old graves to reuse the space. Diachronic change and transformation within the cemetery also involves maintenance of the grave plot and the continuing stimulus of an obvious and frequent visitor who clears away old flowers and adds new objects compared with the slow decay of an untended grave. This perspective reveals the evolving attitudes to the dead and the material remains of death. The narrative of a small child in Skogskyrkogården only starts in the 1940s but it is continually elaborated with new names added to gravestones and new bodies placed below them.

Cemeteries and their gravestones provide multiple perspectives on attitudes to death and how death is dealt with in society. The majority of archaeological research focuses on the gravestones as historical documents, expanding towards examination of the styles and aesthetics of the materialised symbols and inscriptions to interpret the meanings that drive the choices (Clark, L. 1987; Mytum 1989; Tarlow 1999a). They can be also used to interpret historical demography (Sattenspiel & Stoops 2010) and to validate osteological methods (See for an example Rissech, Turbón *et al.* 2012). There is also research on the stylistic changes in medieval and Reformation period gravestones including aspects of archaeological research (e.g. Gardell 1945-6; Jensen,

C.A. 1951; Andersen, T. 2013). Gravestones of the early 19th century are discussed as highly decorative and expensive ways of displaying identity and family unity (Høilund Nielsen 1997). This is continued and developed as a stable sense of location and of family identity which is suggested by Anne-Louise Sommer (2008) as representing the patriarchal family unit taking responsibility for the group and using gravestones to express status in life. Sommer also suggests a response in the mid-20th century as part of the breaking up of that traditional world and creation of a flexible burial space.

There is also a movement from the 1920s to create a more uniform response in gravestones in the European war cemeteries which was to emphasise the equal sacrifice of all who died. This had an impact on modern cemeteries from around the mid-20th century which set aside areas for specific groups such as Greenlanders or the German refugee burials in Vestre cemetery, Copenhagen. With the intervention of public money to pay for these burials came identical gravestones which may have influenced private burials too. Yet despite attempts at regulation this uniformity can often be conspicuously absent in ordinary urban cemeteries (Kichner 2013). Interpretations of gravestone design in Denmark emphasise a change from elaborate to plain design which is interpreted by some authors (notably Kryger 1985; Kragh 2003) as a sign of less emotion being expended and publically displayed, perhaps even less care towards the deceased. A more ambivalent attitude to death may be expressed in more abstract memorials as expressions of grief. However this change may not be an ambivalence towards death as suggested for Denmark by Sommer (2006a: 63) but a reaction against previously ostentatious means of expression. However caution is advisable when interpreting past societies ideas of what is acceptable and appropriate. Simple designs can also be described as elegant and uncluttered rather than plain or cheap; they can satisfy the living community's requirements for burial.

Recent work on gravestones has focused on the modern landscape and decoration of the plot as a whole entity (Flohr Sørensen 2011) or as part of a broader connection to memorial practices (Williams 2011). More rarely is there a perspective on what lies underneath the cemetery surface (Scott, R. 2013), or how to connect the material culture which is present above on the grave plot and below in the funeral furnishings.

This chapter investigates the public and visible use of cemeteries and how this use relates to the relationship between living and dead; it also examines the role of commemoration and the continuing active role of the physical material culture in the cemetery. The modern cemetery as an entity has been examined in the previous chapter (Chapter 3), now there is a focus on the features inside the cemeteries and specifically within the walls of Assistens. Visible public practises and social expressions of grief shape the overall framework but the individual connections to the below-ground world are also explored. These are used to connect above-ground practices of specific grave plots to practices seen below in the coffin. Above and below-ground

practices can be very different, they may be active on different time frames. Practices that are seen in the coffin are decided quickly around the time of death but above-ground practices of decorating and visiting the grave may continue for decades. However looking at the potential for connections between groups of family plots and burials over decades, the question is asked of if there are differences in treatment, why and how does this connect to the relationship between the living and the dead. The perspective taken in this thesis is that the grave plot should be treated as a three-dimensional entity which reveals the changing interconnections between public and private practices.

## Shaping choices and decision-making in above-ground practices

The decision-making surrounding death involves some element of choice. This includes how the body is treated and made ready for burial (or prior to cremation) but also the location and marking of the grave site. There are also factors that limit choices including cemetery and legal regulations or economic and social pressures but the interaction between choice and restriction is where we see the relationship expressed between the living and the dead. The material culture used inhabits different realms between a visible above-ground world where the choices are on public display and (often) permanent and the below-ground world where the burial and everything associated are hidden after the funeral. The patterns shown in the data concerning gravestones and plot decoration are explored through the regulations concerning the plot when it has been purchased with what happens when a plot is no longer owned or used.

Throughout the use of modern cemeteries, there have been many changes in style of decoration and memorialisation. The aspects which are presented and discussed here all show the embedded nature of the cemetery landscape within societal changes of this period but also the limitations of practice. Although care must be taken in extrapolating these results in exploring wider social narratives often because the reality of practices are dynamic and untidy (Rugg 2013: 355). Change in grave commemoration from the late 18th century onwards has been described not as change in attitudes to death but instead as different expressions of emotion. The overall framework of death and commemoration are still present but it is in the practices of how to commemorate and what to do with the material culture that alters (Tarlow 1999a: 150). The following discussions chart these practices and the intersections between different groups of people involved in the purchase and maintenance of plots and gravestones. This involves the individual, the mourners,

professional stonemasons, the cemetery authorities and general social attitudes. What choices can be made, how restricted are they and by whom?

Purchasing a plot and gravestone may be influenced by the individual's wishes. Some people leave specific instructions for the design and text on the gravestone. However it is often the executors of the will or mourners that decides and they need to collectively agree on what they consider a suitable gravestone. In this choice pragmatic restrictions on cost and the range of gravestone designs available are important. Mourners may feel restricted in their choice to common designs provided in catalogues by the stonemason or undertaker. Equally they may be influenced by gravestones on surrounding plots or gravestones that are already present within the plot. The side-by-side nature of existing memorials can influence the design and decoration of later memorials (Jones 2007: 194). The cemetery experience derives from the embodied experience of moving through the landscape (Ingold 1993). It is strongly affected by what material culture is already present, admiration or judgement on the suitability of certain forms for the choice to be made is common. After all gravestones are meant to be seen, the text read and the whole idea is to express messages about the dead or their family. Different elements which were created, in the mid-20th century, relate to and coexist with monuments dating from the mid-19th century. Choices in form, material, colour and text can be used to represent the identity of the person and family in relation to the environment. This may either conform to the surroundings by choosing a similar style or contrast by choosing a design that stands out. These decisions are wrapped up in the limitations of consumer choice of what is available to purchase.

The choices surrounding plots and gravestones are unlikely to be fully under the control of the mourners. Other primary interested groups or fields involved are the churchyards and cemeteries which are both bounded by tradition and by regulations. There is an interface with the regulations set by cemetery authorities and although most of these concern general terms of maintenance, they can still be a strong influence upon individual choice in decoration and display. For example, Assistens always had gardeners working on the cemetery, at some points with a monopoly on services in the cemetery which in the late 19th century caused controversy (Valeur Larsen 1960: 72-3). Guidance for plot design in limited styles were also used at Assistens in the 20th century which would have influenced the cemetery to look more homogenous (Helweg & Linnée Nielsen 2010: 123). Much of the following discussion will consider the initial point of decision and purchase of the plot and other elements within it. However the intersection of what happens within the cemetery involves longer term perspectives too as the cemetery plot is used again, maintained and visited. Finally there is also an end point where the plot is no longer paid for and decisions are made concerning preservation or removal and reuse of the plot. The balance of power in decision-making over this cycle varies. The dead person's and their mourners wishes may be dominant in the initial decisions

surrounding the grave plot but eventually it will be the cemetery authority that holds sway. Decision-making concerning above-ground material culture will take place over a longer time period than below-ground decisions over coffins or clothing for the dead. Therefore it can be more subject to changing ideas of several generations of descendants and cemetery staff.

After the first burial, decisions for the plot owner involve additions to the plot in decorative design and possibly also new burials. Visiting the grave plot will include carrying out certain rituals or practices that may significantly alter the plot. There are a host of tangible and intangible practices associated with visiting of which there is some evidence in Assistens. They will differ over the years and for each grave plot will often decrease over time. These include decoration and maintenance where the mourners, cemetery visitors and staff all play an active role in formulating the function of cemeteries. Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory (2010) has described the role of women in modern Greek cemeteries as maintaining both the physical gravesite but also the oral history of the people buried there. Likewise visitors to Assistens, male and female, create the cemetery. They may also be additional burials to the plot causing the need for further decisions over the space used, perhaps prompting cremation instead of coffin burial, or the re-arrangement of gravestones and decorations. As the gravesite can be seen as the interface between private grief and the public expression of that grief it can be a contested place where change is seen as a loss of contact with dead (Woodthorpe 2010). All of this is undertaken within the contract for the burial plot depending on the space available and guidelines on decorations and maintenance. Even if in the earliest years the plot may appear similar to others the decoration and display of the plot chosen and then altered over the years can each result in something unique in comparison to surrounding grave plots and gravestones.

Eventually there are also decisions to be made over the removal or preservation of the grave plot and its material culture. The plot owner has to decide to renew the plot and extend their tenure even if no more burials can be added. The alternative is to let the plot revert back to the ownership of the cemetery allowing it to be reused or preserved. At this point the agency of the plot owner ceases. It is now the cemetery's responsibility. The cemetery policy on removal creates the current vision of the cemetery landscape, it directly affects the data set used to study the decisions made on commemoration. There were perhaps hundreds of grave plot decorations, features and gravestones present in Division G over its 200 years of use of which there is now no physical trace left. What is visible in the cemetery now is the result of decades of policy decisions intersecting with consequences of numerous decisions made by mourners, plot owners and cemetery authorities.

# The initial decisions - grave plots, decoration and display

It is clear that the motivation to choose and purchase a plot is a marker of the social networks that entangle people and materiality. The term index used by Andrew Jones (2007: 80-81) is useful here in describing how material cultures are situated in networks which continually refer to each other, spatially and temporally. It is also related to Alfred Gells' idea (1992) where things contain traces or references to the social relations between individuals or social groups. Jones describes these networks as providing a situational context which allows for material culture to continue over the extension of time and provide the links and influences in which to place our interpretations. This section is structured first by describing how the entity of the grave plot is defined and then what objects are placed within it including designed features and gifts, followed by detailed data on the gravestones. All of this materiality refers to each other within the context of the grave plot.

What is a grave plot and how is it defined? All graves can, whether for one person or many, also be defined as a plot. However here the term is reserved for a burial space for multiple individuals which is bought for a contracted length of time for the use of the owner. In plots the space is defined above-ground and priced according to size and other factors such as the right to build a vault or erect a railing around the grave. In buying a plot the purchaser must immediately make a decision on how many people they intend it for. Was it to include only one generation – parents or multiple future generations? Was there space for four burials or more? This decision is both immediate and has long-term implications based upon the existing family identity and desire to be buried together as a unit. The relevant regulations for Division G are issued in 1805  (15 February 1805b: §3-5) and stipulate the cost of burial to the relevant church according to the expense of the hearse used. The most expensive burials with the very best hearse being over four times the cost (8 Rdlr - Rigsdaler) of the 'most inferior' hearse used (2 Rdlr). Additional payment is required for monuments or for creation of a vault. There are also clear statements concerning the reversion of the plot to the church if it is not extended after the initial period of 20 years. Further clarifications on pricing are regulated in the 1860 regulations for burial issued by the Burial Office for cemeteries in Copenhagen (22 December 1860: §3c). These continue the pricing for each burial based upon the cost of the hearse, plus also defining the cost of graves according to size and location. Monuments are charged at the same price and payment must be renewed every 20 years but there was no charge for a wooden cross or other similar decorations. After the plot is bought, each burial must also be paid for through services such as coffin bearing, use of the hearse and gravedigging. These payments go through the church or after 1860 through the Burial Office and then dispersed to the respective workers.

The categories of graves in Assistens were defined in Chapter 2 (Primary documentation). The most expensive plots, Monument and Wall Lines were located along the cemetery walls or on prominent rows. The cheapest category was the individual line burials located in the central blocks of burials and accorded few rights. The majority were family plots for multiple burials within the central blocks of burials where rights for above-ground display could be bought. The principles that the hierarchy is arranged upon begin with spatial and observable exclusivity. Plots on the edges of the area and by the wall are less likely to be walked over for access. They can be kept distinctly separate. These plots besides major pathways also receive more visitors and draw the visitor's eye with their ability to put up epitaphs on walls, use railings to fence off the plot and provide an uncluttered backdrop for the gravestones to be viewed against. They are separated from the majority of burials and are visible from distant perspectives through the cemetery landscape where large elaborate gravestones can be used as landmarks. The placement of these prominent plots is specifically to separate out those people wishing to buy a more prominent and visible plot, rather than a plot which may be within a regulated but long row of grouped burials where access and visibility is restricted.

An alternative perspective is that a certain level of privacy can be ensured by purchasing a plot away from the main crowds and busiest parts of the cemetery. It is possible that Division G contains an element of this idea because it is located away from the oldest and more celebrated plots in the south of the cemetery. When Division G opened the most prominent and expensive plots were quickly bought up and often for long periods of time. Yet the purchaser would know they would be surrounded by burials quickly. The long-term purchase suggests a sense of securing the burial plot for future generations. Elaborate, decorative gravestones were still erected for display. Exclusivity was secured not in total isolation but from other burials by creating boundaries and an emphasis on elaborate grave plot design. The material features combine with location to enhance the hierarchy whose first expression was within its cost. The rest of the plots are priced according to size rather than location, plots with space for two or four burials. They could also be purchased for long periods and ownership of these multiple burial plots could be renewed. They could be decorated to compete with the most expensive plots but may be obscured within the general mass of plots.

As the cheapest level of burial available within Division G, line burials could still be presented as a respectable burial place but commemoration of the person may have to take place elsewhere. In the early years they were the most numerous type of burial and they may have subsidised the more expensive plots and underpinned the financial status of the cemetery despite their lack of rights, as has been proven in other cemeteries (Laqueur 2015: 311). Price may have been a major factor in choosing this type of burial but it is not necessarily the most important factor. Line burials hold the

status of having paid for the funeral without municipal or church help and burial was in a separate not communal grave where the location was known to the mourners.

The representation of personal relationships was present in churchyards particularly within crypts or vaults within the church. They were reserved for elite families, possibly even guilds or other social organisations and formed part of their claims to lineage in a hierarchical system. From the medieval period location of burial place next to a spouse, parent or child was often stated in wills and testaments but it was not a right to be able to do so and may not have been carried out (Harding 2002: 131). The opportunity to purchase a family plot was not a new feature of cemeteries but it was new to many sections of society who were previously unable to make that choice in their urban churchyards. What is visible in Assistens appears to be a common attribute of how other cemeteries were organised with levels of burial according to location, cost and additional rights allowed for the more expensive plots which created a social topography within the cemetery (Schönbäck 2008: 235-8). There is a shift in attitude exposed by this new burial system, from paying for the right to be buried within consecrated ground to owning a specifically defined location. Within the modern cemetery, family and other important emotional connections could be assured.

The above-ground element of the grave plot is now discussed in terms of how they are defined and the elements inside the plot with gravestones forming a large set of data. Although the discussion separates the elements they are emphasised as more coherent units of expression of commemoration and bereavement practices. The data used throughout this chapter is restricted to one section of Assistens, Division G – the area used by the inner city Trinity parish. Within the excavation area gravestones and plot remains were removed by cemetery staff before the start of the project. There was no archaeological recording of above-ground features of gravestones which entails a reliance on earlier data for a systematic description of the landscape of the area. The 1986 survey of gravestones is therefore the main source of evidence, research based upon this has been published (Kryger 1985) and a catalogue produced (Helweg & Linnée Nielsen 2010). According to the currently used system and cemetery plan there were a total of 810 grave plots within Division G and most were not affected by the excavation. By 1986, 181 of these plots contained 274 gravestones (Table 7). There are rare anomalies of missing gravestones when compared to the published data but these are included in the analysis for this research.

**Table 7.**
The total number of plots and gravestones investigated which were investigated. Overall the entire area of Division G contained 810 plots of which only 181 plots had any gravestones standing in 1986.

|  | Plots | Gravestones |
|---|---|---|
| Division G (1986 survey) | 181 | 274 |
| Runddel sample | 25 | 36 |

Attributes on form, material, colour and texts plus the precise inscriptions are taken from the survey photographs and records. In addition to these details, other attributes on the plot itself, including boundary, surface, plants, general appearance and miscellaneous details were compiled from the photographs. Where specific plots are referred to in the text they are written as (P777). Data from the gravestone survey is combined with archaeological excavation results. Where a more detailed focus is necessary, the Runddel sample (see Chapter 2 for definition) is also used to focus attention, particularly on the connection between above- and below-ground evidence. This sample is restricted to excavated plots only.

Overall the data used is biased towards later gravestones or those that were from plots purchased for extremely long periods of time. Furthermore because the survey was completed in 1986 and excavation starting in 2009, there is a gap of 23 years so some of these plots may have been abandoned[7] and stones and plot decorations removed or altered during this period. By 2009 only the relatively small number of 47 plots had any material evidence above-ground. The vast majority of plots in Division G had already had their above-ground remains removed while their below-ground materiality was undisturbed. A small section in the west of Division G, outside of the excavation area was left *in situ* with no change or alteration. I undertook a survey in 2011 of this area as a control measure to investigate any differences between 1986 and 2011. 35 plots with gravestones and plot decoration were recorded and there was little to no difference in the observed features compared to the original survey. In general the cemetery photographed in 1986 is observed to be similar to today with largely open grassed areas with groups of mature trees and shrubs surrounding extant memorials. In the background of the survey images can be seen some of the former buildings and wooden fence surrounding the cemetery greenhouse and garden, occasionally also parked cars or the occasional sunbather which gives a sense of how the area was used.

The Sexton's House with its additional buildings and yard with greenhouses was the dominant feature in the centre of Division G. However the burials and gravestones are closely representative of other divisions within Assistens that were created at the same time from 1805. However there were no major alterations in Division G such as creation of ash scattering areas, so later 20th century innovations are not represented. It can therefore be used in general to represent the cemetery as a whole, with some caveats. The results are also compared to modern cemeteries in general; Assistens provides one narrative of how cemeteries were used over the 19th and 20th centuries.

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[7] Hjemfald is the Danish term used in the records and directly translates as *homefallen* indicating the date when the tenure on the plot is completed and not renewed. Everything within the plot can be removed and the plot legally sold again. I use the term abandoned to describe this, despite it being a poor substitute for the real meaning of the Danish term because although a plot may be officially abandoned it may continue to be maintained and visited and sometimes was even re-bought after a short hiatus by the previous plot owners.

## Marking out the boundaries

Family grave plots at Assistens are clearly marked out upon the cemetery plan, drawn with neat and precise lines but it can be more difficult to see these boundaries in the cemetery. Physical limits are not always created, sometimes a flower bed in the lawn marks out the grave rather than a wall, railing or hedge. Line burials would have had no spatial definition once grass had grown over and especially if any mound had been levelled. Plots tend to be more strongly defined. As the family group is marked out by certain boundaries in social life this can be replicated in the cemetery, how and why were plots defined in Assistens? There is also the complex issue of removal of any boundaries or plot elements which is discussed later in the text. Plots can be defined with robust physical markings or boundaries that hinder entry to the grave plot. These could be brick or stone walls, iron railings or hedges. Entrances can be controlled by a locked gate or a chain over the entrance. Alternatively the boundary may be symbolic, of a low hedge or plants forming a border, even small rows of boulders. Occasionally flat stones can cover the entire grave plot creating a strong relationship between the ownership of the grave plot above and below the ground.

When examining the photographs of plots from 1986, a distinction was made in comparing plots that were officially no longer in tenure and those that were still owned. This factor has a direct bearing on the preservation of features as the plot owner intended them to appear compared to plots which had clear intervention by the cemetery. Most of the 181 grave plots in Division G with gravestones are abandoned before 1986 with only 44 of them confirmed as still within tenure. Plots were graded according to their condition, if they appeared to be maintained i.e. borders still present, weeded plots, painted rails, clean gravestones or small gifts or evidence of visiting. Only 51 plots had signs of visiting or maintenance (28%, of 181), with 77 appearing to be clearly neglected or having any sign of border removed (42%, of 181). No information could be recorded for 53 plots (29%, of 181). There are more hedges and railings intact in the plots bought in the 20th century than the earlier 19th century plots. Plots which had a gravel surface instead of grass generally had some form of border preserved, either in the shape of a curb and railing or a hedge to contain the gravel. It might be assumed that more recent burials would be more actively maintained but this pattern did not occur. Plots which were only used for the regulatory 20 years were evenly split between being maintained and neglected. There also seems to be no correlation between the prominence of the plot and having defined borders in 1986, many plots lying in the midst of long linear rows of family plots are marked out with borders.

There appears to be a limited number of choices in plot boundaries. 63 plots (of 181 plots, 35%) had some form of intact border and only 36 could be confirmed as having all borders removed although for most plots the information was lacking. Although a few grass covered plots (nine plots) were not yet abandoned which suggest

that there never was any fixed boundary created. The earliest intact hedge border is from a plot which was abandoned in 1958 (P636) the hedge had been maintained for 28 years. Of the 63 plots which had some intact border, 33 had a low hedge, tree or plant border, 23 had combinations of iron railings or stone curbs and only seven a more superficial border marked by small fieldstones. Many of the plant borders had an open entrance way but even if they were more symbolic than physical the entrance still marked a defining act of trespass if crossed. A tree or row of trees was also used to provide an aesthetically pleasing backdrop, rather than a more formal border for the intended gravestone in the grave plot. In certain plots they could be used to emphasise the impression that the plot owners wished to present. Most of the hedges appeared well maintained and it is likely that cemetery staff attended to their general care. Here there is an intersection between the duties of the cemetery as an organisation to maintain the landscape and actions or decisions undertaken by plot owners. Much maintenance would be completed by staff which may result in extra costs for the upkeep of plots. In this context decisions may be taken to make maintenance cheaper and more efficient. Low hedges of clipped Box (*Buxus sempervirens*) are commonly seen in both churchyards and cemeteries today. They can be maintained easily and have a long association with churchyard planting.

More solid materials were used to define grave plots. Some vaults were constructed in Assistens on the Monument and Wall Lines. Two vaults were excavated within Division G. There was no visible sign of their presence above-ground. Their construction is the ultimate in enforcement of solid boundaries that extend below the ground. Above-ground plots with railings tend to be situated on prominent lines bought for longer periods therefore they will be preserved for longer than hedge bordered plots. The plots with railings were all abandoned but not neglected. Iron railings often had a gate with the name of the plot owner and dates of purchase which reinforces the sense of long-term ownership. An example of a more discrete boundary was documented in the excavation, rows of natural round fieldstones had been set into the soil to delineate the boundary but these had become overgrown and were only revealed during clearance of the topsoil prior to excavation. The spatial limitations of a plot are also discernible in the surface covering. The most common had grass (53), gravel or a soil surface (43 each). Grass covered plots were most associated with plots that had no fixed boundary and were part of the general lawn. A few with soil surfaces are due to the presence of larger trees and bushes in the plot alongside the Wall Line, or considerable amounts of small plants and trees. Seven plots were entirely covered in vegetation of overgrown plants.

The survey photographs from Assistens shows that there are few remaining boundaries and of those that are preserved, the preference is towards hedges or trees with fewer examples of iron railings or low boundaries. This implies that the boundaries referencing the natural world rather than human-made materials were preferred. This choice accords with the overall design character of the cemetery to be

a landscape inspired by nature although it does also create features in the landscape which were shaped to suit the rectangular space of the plot and cut in straight lines rather than natural curves. Additionally these natural borders may be cheaper, easier to maintain but are also less permanent than iron railings. A gateway can still be created which provides a firmer barrier to entry. One feature not observed in Assistens is the low kerbstone to identify the plot area. In the UK, kerbstones as boundaries for the plot or a specific burial are noted as becoming more elaborate and included as part of the memorial from the early to mid-20th century (Mytum 1996: 364). Instead in Assistens it is the whole plot that is marked out. There are also no flat stones covering the entire plot in the survey. Despite the initial popularity of boundaries, there is also a distinct decrease in the creation of plot boundaries into the 20th century. Plots start to have grass as a surface and lack a formal border, emphasising their integration with the rest of the cemetery. Plots that were bought for long periods of time retain their more prominent boundary markings, particularly those placed by the cemetery walls thus security of the plot is enhanced on a level of consumer power. Plots, generally cheaper to buy, in the centre of lawns are more likely to have smaller, lower boundaries which are more porous. After their tenure is complete the cemetery authorities are more likely to choose to remove these boundaries for easier maintenance and to restore a communal feel to the area.

Within the Runddel sample, there were 25 grave plots in 1986that had traces of some design elements present, including 36 gravestones. All Runddel sample plots were within a central block of graves and therefore none of these plots are from the more expensive categories. Six grave plots directly opposite the Sexton's House or the entrance gates to the cemetery were more visually prominent yet they are not comparable in scale with the grander memorials or elaborate plots. These six plots have no specific extra elaboration that marks them out in 1986; however they were abandoned and quite likely that they have been heavily altered over time, with decorations or borders removed. Only eight plots in total have visible borders of low hedges surrounding the plot and a single plot has a border marked out by granite columns. However plots visible in the cemetery today which are abandoned in the 1990s or later, tend to still retain gravel surfaces which suggest that upon abandonment the borders are removed and the surface only gradually changed to grass. The effect of this is to continue a smoothing out of the landscape of visible borders, creating a park atmosphere. These actions help to remove the visible traces of the knowledge that this is a cemetery where human remains are buried and a place associated with emotional loss and death.

Until the mid-19th century the close and crowded nature of urban churchyards coupled with intensive use for other activities such as markets, meetings and social events resulted in little compunction in walking amongst or over the dead. Although evidence at some churchyards like Horsens, Jutland (Grønfeldt Petersen 2012) where the existence of a pathway with no burials underneath demonstrates the desire to

separate the movement of the living from the surrounding dead. Horsens may be an unusual case as churchyards tended to use all available space for burial. Prohibition or avoidance of walking over the surface of burials may not have been fully regulated until grave plots became seen as property, albeit for the limited period of time which it was paid for. This could stem from fear of the dead which is a strong theme in folklore, but also the idea of ensuring peace and lack of disturbance for the buried lying below. Tarlow (2011: 202) is very clear in concluding that different types of beliefs could be practised whilst being inconsistent with each other. The plot boundaries seen in Assistens can be connected to those found all over Scandinavia which create a physical and symbolic limitation and are comparable to the use of coffins which protect the body and prevent it from being destroyed in the ground. Access is denied or hindered to the interior of the plot and there is a subtle emphasis on prevention of trespassing on the graves of those buried below.

Burial plots can resemble the domestic household surrounded by defining borders with neighbours. A physical boundary on the surface marks out property much like a wall around a house or garden, it mirrors the wall around the cemetery too and creates another division between the owners of the plot and the visitors to the cemetery. Grave plots become enclosed in the same manner as land becomes enclosed or even pews inside churches as part of the capitalistic processes (Johnson, M. 1996: 101-8). The boundaries are a physical and symbolic barrier creating a small private space in a large publicly accessible area. It enhances the feeling or protection of the burials and also the commemoration of the individuals and the family unit. It is an emotional expression too because it physically expresses the desire to protect and enclose those buried there emphasising their close relations. The earlier line burials, which are not bounded or marked above-ground, show that choice to express protection was limited. The metaphor here of owning a space is weaker because many poor urban inhabitants would have rented property on short-term lets but it can still represent their family and household. Taken as a landscape the standard rows of plots also refer to the community and the acceptance of space being regulated by the cemetery rules in concordance with social hierarchies. The mass of bodies could be separated but were still linked together in rows and subject to a set of common rules. There is a delicate balance between individuals, social hierarchies and the mass of bodies in the cemetery which is present in how people were allowed to mark out the plot according to their ability to pay.

Today these standard rows of defined plots are also found in churchyards not just in modern cemeteries. Churchyards which may not always have been so precisely regulated and measured also undergo transformations through the 20th century with the removal of grave mounds or clearance of gravestones (Rugg 2015: 317). Therefore what was once a feature of the modern cemetery becomes borrowed by churchyards illustrating a dynamic relationship between the two types of burial grounds. Churchyards which are used into the present-day are subject to increasing regulation

and ordering of their landscape (Fig. 16). This leads to the suggestion that marking out a boundary in the 19th century becomes part of a process of regularising life which helped to create the physical materialisation of how all modern burial places should be designed. These were plots bought in the 20th century which could suggest the increasing influence of lawn design in cemeteries which decreases the cost of maintenance and eases the use of machine grass cutters or also an alteration in attitude towards the plot as property. Yet from the mid-20th century a decrease in very strongly defined borders is also clear in burial places. These created a new sense of the churchyard and cemetery as emphasising nature and parkland suitable for the dispersal of ashes and natural burial (Rumble, Troyer *et al.* 2014). This is also evident in Assistens and other Scandinavian cemeteries with the increase in memory groves (Williams 2011).



**Fig. 16.**
Ribe, Jutland. A typical Danish churchyard with defined plot boundaries. Illustrations of earlier churchyards suggest it was not always such a bounded and controlled space, 31 May 2011.

## Design features inside the plot

The previous chapter (Chapter 3) discussed the intentions and factors involved in creating the design and atmosphere of the new cemeteries. The detail of the planting

and arrangements of material culture placed on graves can reveal a little more about the attempts to individualise plots and physically express the living's feelings for the dead. The overall design of a grave includes features such as the precise location of the gravestone, allowance of space for future burials, decorative features and gifts, pathways and planting design. Some plots are designed to appear as mini-gardens; others deliberately deter access and are to be viewed from the outside. Where plots contain multiple identical gravestones was this a planned feature or a result of later aesthetic judgement to continue the overall impression? The initial design intentions are likely to have been heavily adapted over time and the situation in 1986 shows the final design, an accumulation of multiple small decisions rather than the first ideals. What is seen today forms an archive which can be seen as both a long term investment in the trees which will live for many decades and short-term in the gravestones, temporary decorations and small plants.

The trends for different types of natural decoration have changed over the years. They have incorporated trends for horticulture and globalised networks of exchanging species in the 18th century through to more pragmatic designs of the 20th century where species of trees are chosen for their durability and ease of maintenance (Lundquist 1992). Certain types of trees and plants can also be traditionally associated with values of grief and faith (Hvass 2002; Kragh 2003). Most are evergreen types linked to ideas of eternal life. Overall there are clear patterns of symmetry and regulation in the design of plots at Assistens. However a few garden plots do mimic the sense of fluidity of nature in curved pathways but these are overall rare.

Visitors bring gifts and objects to decorate the plot. Small chairs or benches can be seen in many cemeteries in Scandinavia and some are clearly part of the original design of the plot as they are made from similar materials as the gravestone. Small plant pots and vessels for flowers can be free-standing or sometimes incorporated into gravestones. Commemoration may comprise actions that are intangible, that cannot be recovered archaeologically or simply do not survive in the archaeological record. Activities include singing, hymns, prayers and talking to the dead. In Denmark the laying of fresh wreaths on the grave is seen in illustrations in the 18th and 19th centuries (Kragh 2003: 199-200). There is no evidence of this in the survey images in 1986 but occasional gifts of fresh flowers can be seen on a visit to Assistens today. The current trend for providing temporary gifts to the deceased in the grave plot: toys, photographs, lanterns hanging from trees, balloons, and teddy bears (Flohr Sørensen 2011) are not present or visible in the 1986 survey which perhaps documents a turning point in appropriate commemoration of people. However the longer-held Scandinavian tradition of leaving small candles or lanterns on graves was seen in occasional photographs. This tradition is suggested as becoming prominent from the 1940s and is in use today, particularly associated with All Saints Day (Rehnberg 1965).

In Assistens when examining decoration inside the plot, 91 plots (of 181, 50%) had some decorative features present. Many had multiple forms of decoration, the most common being small bushes, shrubs or flowers (65) and a further 36 plots which had trees. In 16 plots small arrangements of stones were set in a circle to frame one or more gravestones or stones used as pathways amongst the plants and gravestones. One plot (P739) contained a stone block set in the centre of the plot with carved roses on it, this was not a gravestone but some form of centrepiece decoration for the plot. This plot mimicked the style of a domestic garden.

Overall it is the gravestone that is the focal point of the design. The principles that shaped the placement of the gravestones were that they faced outward so that they should clearly be seen from the pathway. The position of the gravestone is commonly associated with the position of the head end of the coffin however the archaeological evidence shows that in large plots it is the aesthetic image that is more important. A further aspect of the design principles is the overwhelming design for vertical gravestones rather than flat stones laid into the ground. Flat gravestones are present in the survey and in Assistens in general but they are few. Vertically-set gravestones leave space for further burials without having to keep moving the gravestone. However it may not just be a pragmatic decision. Flat stones can be seen as replicating the position of the coffin or the body in the ground which can acts as a reminder of the physicality of the dead body and the underground world (Staecker 2003: 416). This is something which declines after the Reformation and in modern cemeteries. Vertical stones are also more visible marking out the memorial from a greater distance. So the position of a gravestone neither marks the precise location of the coffin, nor the placement of the head of the person.

Most gravestones were placed at the rear of the plot, single gravestones were placed centrally and multiple gravestones were placed to create a balanced and even design. The development of the design is marked in one specific plot (P60) which contains three gravestones commemorating six people (Fig. 17). The plot was bought in 1858 for 100 years and later extended until 1997. Nine people are recorded as being buried there in the Municipal register. The central gravestone is clearly dominant and more elaborate with a cross and is flanked by two smaller and identical tablet gravestones. The central gravestone is for the first burial in 1909 but the second burial in 1912 is recorded on a separate tablet stone. The third tablet stone records a burial in 1929. The order of recording the burials is not chronological but according to ideals and wishes set by the purchasers. The married couples present their relationship by selecting a gravestone for themselves. The death of a young male is left on a separate gravestone. The first two burials in the plot from 1858 and 1866 are unrecorded on gravestones, it is probable that they did have gravestones but there is no evidence of this. The original design of the plot is unknown; there is only evidence for the final display as it was in the 1980s. Another burial is also absent, a female buried in 1920. This absence is harder to explain, the individual perhaps requested no gravestone. The

absence of these individuals from the narrative of the family represented by this grave plot is unexplained and certainly creates a discrepancy between the material record above-ground and the burial registers. Above-ground the overall design is balanced as seen in the photograph and the time gap between burials recorded suggest that somebody in later years altered the design and specifically chose to retain a sense of harmony in the group for the later burials.



**Fig. 17.**
The Hassager plot (P60) in 1986. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, photograph from catalogue cards, 1986.

Excavation provided good evidence of a custom which I have seen recently in Scandinavian churchyards and cemeteries. A deposit of over 80 conch shells (*Eustrombus gigas*) were found discarded within a drainage sump (G501) in the southern limit of the trench, close to the main path delimiting Division G. Originally the shells derive from the Caribbean and the east coast of the Americas. Denmark did have small colonies from the early 18th century until 1917 and on one of them, St John (now the US Virgin Islands), there was evidence of queen conch shells marking out the graves of 19th century African-American slaves (Armstrong 2003: 120). They were used as a form of gravestone and it is possible that a person buried at Assistens had seen this tradition and brought the idea back to Denmark. At least one person buried on Assistens is known to have been born in St Croix, which is another of the Danish Caribbean colonies. A similar-looking sea snail shell (*Cypraecassis testiculus*) was also found at the pauper cemetery in Copenhagen dated to the mid-19th century (Winther Damsbo 2009: 35). Conch shells can be seen used as decorations for graves

in Scania and Denmark today, and also for Swedish immigrant graves in the US. The shells act as reminders of Scandinavian colonialism in this period which although minor in comparison to other European countries still had a distinct effect on the practices back in the home country (Nordin 2012).

A limited glimpse into visitor behaviour was suggested by two (unexcavated) plots containing garden furniture. One plot (P405) contained a table and although the plot became abandoned in 1985, the last burial was in the late 1960s which suggests visits took place for over 20 years. The second plot (P178) which contained a chair became abandoned in 2001 with the final burial taking place in the early 1960s. There is no certainty that these pieces of furniture have been used, they could have been abandoned. If they were used then the presence of the chair suggests a longer range of visiting of at least 40 years and possibly more if visits continued up to the present day. Surveys of visitor frequency do suggest that graves can be visited for decades after the burial, even if the visits are infrequent (Francis, Kellaher *et al.* 2000). These suggest that the material and design of the plot specifically emphasised a comfortable and accessible place that people would spend a lot of time within.

The smaller design features and gifts express the love and on-going relationships between the dead and living. They can help to personalise what could be seen as a standardised gravestone and be maintained by actions that can be renewed and modified over the years of visiting. The original intention of decoration in plots is difficult to reconstruct as they are cleared or modified over time. The conch shells illustrated a practice that may have continued for a long period of time. The long-term actions of visitors are discussed later in the text. Clearly some plots were thought of as long-term acquisitions and the principles behind designs would be largely continued. Overall some of the decorations in the plots are evoking obvious or symbolic notions concerned with death but these are rare in Assistens.


## Durable public memorials – gravestones

After discussing the overall context of the plot we now turn to introducing the most frequently researched aspect of cemeteries – the gravestones. Their definition and the importance of having them to mark the grave are discussed. This is followed by the empirical material divided into descriptions of the form and type of material used. Then the decoration and inscriptions are described. Gravestones marking out cremations are also discussed.

What is the purpose of a gravestone? Gravestones are convincingly summarised as expressing the emotional relationship between mourners and the deceased (Tarlow 1999a: 131). That it is not solely concerned with the economic circumstances, status, peer pressure but that emotional connections are wished to be continued after death. Gravestones also function on a range of levels beyond commemoration of the dead, as

they are connected with the marking of a physical place and as an extension of a form of recording. Prior to the extensive and obligatory record-keeping of the modern cemeteries, they create a way of marking out the exact place of burial. A gravestone should confirm the knowledge of exactly where the body was, if it might be necessary to recover it. It was also defined by the above-ground plot, even the exact position is stated in burial registers as 'to the right or left, single or double depth'. This sense of trust in the cemetery regulations and documentary records reaching deep under the ground made the placement of the burials safe with less need for a nameplate to identify them on the coffin or detailed gravestone above-ground. Gravestones are also often treated as a social symbol, expressing the identity of the deceased or the identity of the people responsible for the placement of the gravestone. It is likely that gravestones operate on all of these connections and more. In this way gravestones which are erected with the intention of lasting for long periods of time also refer to the past forms of commemoration. They mark out past times, most obviously by using Classical styles. They also extend the potential for commemoration into future generations. Spatially they refer to the cemetery but often also place of birth or death referring to social and geographical networks.

What does not having a gravestone mean? Erecting a gravestone over a grave is a pervasive custom in Christian Europe so not having one can be seen as subversive or disrespectful. The purpose of a grave place is not only encompassed within the commemorative functions of the gravestone. However if mourners did not erect a gravestone over a burial it does not imply that the dead person was not cared for or missed. As Julie-Marie Strange (2003) has pointed out, the failure to place a gravestone over the burial may not imply a sense of pure neglect or lack of grief but similarly mark out a change in locus of grief, away from the cemetery and back into the domestic realm. The Assistens burials which did not have gravestones, principally the early 19th century line burials may well have been commemorated in the home instead.

This is part of what is referred to as *locus fluxus* by Anne-Louise Sommer (2008) and suggested as a mark of the post-modern period. This idea is commonly referred to in the 21st century where trends for anonymous burial show instead a move away from physical locations to more ephemeral expressions of commemoration in internet websites such as *www.mindet.dk*. In some sense this recalls medieval expressions of ritual and masses instead of a focus on the physical burial place. From the late 20th century a gravestone may no longer be regarded as a necessity which may tie into awareness, however unconsciously, of the short-lived existence and survivability of the gravestone itself on a modern cemetery. If a plot is bought for the minimum of 20 years and unlikely to be renewed a gravestone may seem extravagant or unnecessary. Gravestones record the person for public and private consumption and sometimes this relationship is not desired. Despite the material solidity of gravestones they are not as durable as people imagine. They are demonstrably not permanent markers. As

they literally hold the name of individuals, they are very personal and can appear to be permanently bounded to the plot but gravestones can also be transferred to a new place in the cemetery. The name might remain but the connection to the individual is lost in this process. The material stone does imply a sense of eternity and duration but they can erode but also be removed. A gravestone is acknowledged as encompassing a wide range of memorial types which include other materials, of wood and iron, not just stone but should generally include some text. They are meant to identify a person who is usually buried below that position, so there should be a physical link between above and below materiality. Here it is the initial decisions regarding the design, choice of material, colour and text details which are investigated.



**Fig. 18.**
The Rørup family plot (P727) in 1986. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, photograph from catalogue cards, 1986.

The typology used by the survey (Assistens Kulturcentret 1985-7) and Kryger (1985) for Assistens is broadly compatible with common typologies used in the UK (Mytum 2000). The data from Assistens has not been compared with other Danish cemeteries; such work would reveal much detail on the different use and development of gravestones in modern Danish cemeteries. From observations other multiple Danish cemeteries and churchyards there is are great similarities in material, shapes and forms used. There are obvious regional differences and some forms missing or of low frequency in Division G Assistens such as iron crosses (Faye 1988). The snapshot nature of the evidence must also be acknowledged, it records the situation only at one

point in time. The data is dependent on the accumulation of decades of decisions on maintenance and removal of earlier gravestones. The vast majority of the gravestones are in a good state of preservation and are complete, very few are in poor condition or are fragmented (Fig. 18 shows a typical example of the survey photographs). It is likely that rapid turnover of plots and subsequent removal of older gravestones results in fewer poorly preserved gravestones remaining on the cemetery. Most plots contain only a single stone (126 of 181, 70%), only 23 plots have two stones and 21 plots have 3 stones. Where the date of death is present this is used as to date the creation of the stone. Despite this being a slightly inaccurate dating method because the stones can be set up a few months or one year after the death, it provides a reasonable estimate.

The overall data from Division G is discussed for each category, followed by data from the plots within the Runddel sample for comparative purposes when discussing below-ground archaeology. This is an area which will be returned to as a case for analysis for funeral material culture and cemetery management in general. Here there were 19 plots fully excavated and 6 plots partially excavated which had surviving gravestones in 1986. These 19 plots in the Runddel sample contain 36 gravestones representing the 113 burials that are recorded in the latest ownership tenure in these plots. This number undoubtedly omits many earlier burials only registered in the Parish register. Comparable with the general sample the vast majority of plots contain only one surviving stone (18), with seven plots having either two or three stones. One particular plot has three stones (Plot 611, Fig. 27), of which one stone does not belong to the plot in question but to an adjacent plot. Overall the dates when the plot tenure runs out range from 1943 to 2020, one memorial abandoned in 1946 was removed and stored by the cemetery because it commemorated a socially prominent person. Only one plot tenure (P611) extended beyond the excavation date to 2020 and was not legally available for excavation until June 2010 which left a small area of existing cemetery landscape surrounded by a construction site. Therefore the vast majority of plots were abandoned and available for official removal of the stones and the material below-ground.

- *Material and form*

Within all of the gravestones the most popular overall primary material used is granite, followed by marble (Table 8) and combining all the materials, the colours used are evenly represented: white, followed by grey, red and black (respectively 65, 60, 59 and 57).

Sandstone gravestones are a mix of natural colours of reddish brown and grey, they tend to have white marble insets for the inscriptions. The dates on sandstone gravestones range between the years 1820-1918 representing a reasonably early distribution. Marble gravestones are fairly homogenous designs of plain rectangular tablets with no decoration. The earliest is an extremely large flat tablet from 1819 but

most are ranged between the years 1844-1971 which represents a consistent popularity over the whole cemetery period. Granite has a later starting point than the other materials from 1880-1972. The few metal memorials are elaborate crosses and contain a wide range of dates. The size of the gravestones has not been analysed in detail but the overall impression is of a distinct tendency of decreasing size and form. Earlier gravestones are conspicuously large and intended as a single large feature stone to decorate family plots which would serve for the later burials. This trend changes from the 1880s towards a smaller memorial generally reserved for a married couple only.

**Table 8.**
The primary materials used within Division G and their dominant colours. A secondary material is sometimes used in the gravestone, most often an inset white marble tablet (n=241). Source: Assistens Cemetery Archive Centre.

| Material | Number | Colours |
|---|---|---|
| Granite | 133 | 52 black, 46 red, 31 grey |
| Marble | 62 | All white |
| Sandstone | 37 | Mostly grey, 26 have white marble inset tablets |
| Iron | 9 | Mostly wrought iron |



**Fig. 19.**
Some of the typical gravestone types in Assistens, these gravestones were moved from Division G and set up over the new burial place location. Top, left: Hochbrandt *grotte* undated stone (P552), 11 January 2013. Top, centre: Rosenstand 1915 *grotte* block and cross with butterfly (P614) and the back of the Hagen cippus stone (P555), 3 June 2014. Right: Bonnesen 1820 cross (P723), 3 June 2014. Lower, left: iron railing from Distillator N. Jensen's plot (P755), 1882-1980, 1 September 2015. Inside are the gravestones from P60 owned by the Hassager and Winther families dating from 1909-52.

Within all gravestones in Division G, there is only small variation in form and these are grouped together into major categories using the 184 gravestones which have available information on shape or form of gravestone and are dated. The major forms are presented to illustrate the similarity for all forms in (Fig. 19) chronological distribution showing a peak in numbers in the 1810s and two peaks in the 1910s-20s and the 1950s (Table 9). It is likely that this represents both the periods of intense use within the cemetery and preservation choices made by cemetery authorities. The majority derive from the 60 year period from 1900s to 1950s (61%, 113 of 184 dated gravestones).

**Table 9.**
Chronological distribution of the main forms of gravestones within Division G (n=193).

| | Block | Block and cross | Cippus | Epitaph | Field-stone | Flat stone | Monolith | Tablet | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1800s** | | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |
| **1810s** | 2 | | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | | 3 | | 18 |
| **1820s** | | | 4 | | | | | | | 4 |
| **1830s** | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | 4 |
| **1840s** | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 3 | | 5 |
| **1850s** | 2 | 1 | | | | | | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| **1860s** | 1 | | | | 1 | | 2 | 4 | | 8 |
| **1870s** | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | 3 | | 7 |
| **1880s** | | 3 | | | | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 9 |
| **1890s** | | 2 | | | | | | 4 | | 6 |
| **1900s** | 1 | 3 | | | | | 1 | 7 | 1 | 13 |
| **1910s** | 2 | 1 | | 2 | 2 | | 1 | 13 | 1 | 22 |
| **1920s** | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 19 |
| **1930s** | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 16 |
| **1940s** | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | | | 13 | | 19 |
| **1950s** | | 1 | | 2 | 6 | 1 | | 14 | | 24 |
| **1960s** | | | | | 3 | 1 | | 1 | | 5 |
| **1970s** | 1 | | | | 4 | | | 1 | | 6 |
| **1980s** | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| **Total** | 13 | 15 | 10 | 12 | 24 | 9 | 10 | 92 | 8 | 193 |

The largest category is tablet (92 of 184, 50%) which are flat rectangular upright stones embedded in the ground. Very few of these are decorated and only a small number have a rounded top *(himmelport,* lit. heavenly gate, a rectangular tablet with a curved top). They peak between the early to mid-19th century although are present in most decades. Naturally shaped fieldstones are next (24), followed by a form described as a low block pedestal topped with a cross (15). Other variations are rare, such as the cippus form (10) which describes a rectangular block with a gabled top and usually containing ornate decorations, often Classical in symbolism (Kryger 1985: 61). All but one were dated to 1800s-30s, the latest dated to the 1930s seems to be an anomaly and is noticeably simpler with no symbolic decoration but

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references the style of the earlier monuments. Epitaphs are flat plates fixed to the wall and a monolith describes large upright stones with an unfinished back and polished face. They refer to Scandinavian runestones. Another unique example is of a large iron anchor with no inscription, although this memorial cannot be securely associated with a specific plot.

**Table 10.**
The chronological distribution of the principal types of material used in gravestones (n= 191).

|        | Sandstone | Marble | Granite | Iron | Other | Total |
|--------|-----------|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|
| 1810s  | 7         | 4      | 3       | 2    | 2     | 18    |
| 1820s  | 4         |        |         |      |       | 4     |
| 1830s  | 2         | 1      | 2       |      |       | 5     |
| 1840s  | 1         | 2      | 1       |      |       | 4     |
| 1850s  | 3         | 3      |         | 1    |       | 7     |
| 1860s  | 1         | 3      | 4       |      |       | 8     |
| 1870s  | 1         | 1      | 4       | 1    |       | 7     |
| 1880s  | 2         | 3      | 4       |      |       | 9     |
| 1890s  | 1         | 3      | 1       | 1    |       | 6     |
| 1900s  | 1         | 4      | 7       |      | 1     | 13    |
| 1910s  | 1         | 4      | 15      |      | 2     | 22    |
| 1920s  | 1         | 5      | 13      |      |       | 19    |
| 1930s  | 1         | 3      | 12      |      |       | 16    |
| 1940s  | 2         | 6      | 11      |      |       | 19    |
| 1950s  |           | 9      | 13      |      | 1     | 23    |
| 1960s  | 1         |        | 4       |      |       | 5     |
| 1970s  |           |        | 5       |      | 1     | 6     |
| 1980s  |           |        | 1       |      |       | 1     |
| Total  | 29        | 51     | 100     | 5    | 7     | 191   |

When examining the main material used in the gravestones chronologically (Table 10), it is clear that in the first decades all materials were used. Instead of a greater variation over the coming decades instead there is a tendency to choose marble or increasingly granite from the 1900s. The use of sandstone and iron as the principal material reduces considerably after the first decade, although iron plot railings do continue to be used. Sandstone however still continues to be used more as a decorative or secondary material instead in combination with marble. There is greater conformity shown in this data with people choosing similar materials. A slightly different pattern is shown in the choice of colour (Table 11) where all colours are present in the earliest decade, followed by a few decades of predominantly white and black. By the 1870s all colours are well represented, white has a strong increase throughout the entire period and black also becomes more popular from the 1910s. There is a slight tendency from the 1910s towards choosing darker colours, as even the gravestones recorded as grey are of darker shades. The choice of white provides a contrast to this choice illustrating a cemetery landscape of contrasting shades and greater variety of colours even if the material becomes more homogenous.

**Table 11.**
The chronological distribution of the colour chosen in gravestones (n=192).

| | Grey | Black | White | Red | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1810s** | 6 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 18 |
| **1820s** | 1 | | | 3 | | 4 |
| **1830s** | 2 | | 1 | 2 | | 5 |
| **1840s** | 2 | | 2 | | | 4 |
| **1850s** | 3 | | 3 | | 1 | 7 |
| **1860s** | 4 | 1 | 3 | | | 8 |
| **1870s** | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | 7 |
| **1880s** | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | | 9 |
| **1890s** | 3 | 1 | 2 | | | 6 |
| **1900s** | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | | 13 |
| **1910s** | 5 | 10 | 4 | 3 | | 22 |
| **1920s** | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 | | 19 |
| **1930s** | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 16 |
| **1940s** | 4 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 19 |
| **1950s** | 3 | 5 | 9 | 6 | | 23 |
| **1960s** | 1 | | | 4 | | 5 |
| **1970s** | 3 | 3 | | | | 6 |
| **1980s** | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| **Total** | 50 | 46 | 53 | 39 | 4 | 192 |

Within Division G the gravestones are largely personalised through their form, or with a surface elaboration, polished dark granite surface or an artificially rustic style. Over one third of all gravestones in Division G (101 out of 274, 37%) have no decoration recorded at all and largest category of decoration is of a simple engraved cross (67 out of 274, 24%). Gravestones consisting of a squared block with an externally sculpted cross are present throughout the use of the cemetery but are clustered around the decades of the 1860s to 1940s. An artificially Romantic rustic style of carving with natural stone surfaces and ivy foliage is called *grotte* (lit. cave, representing a natural shaping of the stone) is present on marble and sandstone gravestones and these are clustered in the 19th century. Relatively few gravestones have detailed engravings or applied decorative motifs. The exceptions generally are clustered on the earlier memorials dated up to the 1880s (11%, 31 of 274) where Classical symbols are present, such as a sarcophagus, burning oil lamps, urns and wreaths of oak leaves. The use of metal, either as applied lettering for inscriptions or in decorative flowers tend to be associated with fieldstones between the 1940s and 1960s, this represents a combination of cultural and natural references. In the 1986 survey there was a lack of statues or human figures in the memorials with only one grave plot featuring a statue of a female with roses in her arms twinned with a monolith gravestone (P10). This plot was also enclosed by fence of granite pillars with a bronze chain sealing the entrance to the plot (Fig. 20).

**Fig. 20.**
Division G with the statue from Plot 10 in the foreground. In the background is the temporary fence for the Metro construction site, 1 September 2013.

Within the 36 recorded gravestones of the Runddel sample, one is unusual. The Bonnesen wooden and metal cross from 1820 (P723, Fig. 19) represents an unusual survival of this form of memorial but the others conform to the rest of the cemetery consisting of three materials: granite, marble and sandstone. Most gravestones are granite (20 out of 36, 56%), most are reddish/brown, five are black and five are grey. All are natural colours for granite with the reddish granite being a very striking colour when set against the green landscape. The other materials represented are white marble (8 out of 36, 22%) and sandstone (7 out of 36, 19%).

Within the smaller Runddel sample, the most popular material, granite has a range of decoration with many using the *grotte* style for the whole form. Most of the granite stones are polished representing the need to create a smooth face for the inscription but also created a shining surface which contrasts especially on monoliths. Two have crosses inscribed and three have some form of foliage including an oak wreath and one example with a metal rose welded onto the stone (P637A). Marble stones are relatively plain apart from two with small engraved crosses; all have traces of black colour in the engraved text. Three *grotte* sandstone gravestones are formed of crosses placed on blocks of sandstone and overall they contain a larger proportion of decoration with entwined ivy or oak leaves carved into the sandstone. Occasional engravings of butterflies are on the *grotte* style stones, often used to represent the Resurrection or life after death in Christianity (P614).

- *Inscriptions*

There is a clear tendency for gravestones to have only one or two names inscribed. 439 people were mentioned on the 223 gravestones which had inscribed names, an average of 1.6 names per stone. A small number of gravestones are counted as having no name, either they were illegible, contained only a title such as 'Father' or 'Mother' or were marking family graves with only the surname present so were not related to a specific individual (Table 12). There were a relatively equal number of gravestones dedicated to males and females within the general sample.

**Table 12.**
How many people were commemorated on each gravestone? The total number of named individuals on each gravestone covering the entire assemblage (n=251 gravestones identified 439 named individuals).

| Number of names | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 28 | 88 | 89 | 25 | 15 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

From the 274 stones in Division G, 71% (194) have some form of date inscribed; using the earliest date of death on the inscription shows the date range of surviving gravestones (Fig. 21). It is clear that the majority of dated gravestones (113 of 194, 57%) are from 1900s to the 1950s, although small amounts of surviving stones are present from most decades when the cemetery was in operation. The earliest date of death recorded is 1786 but this is a gravestone made later, after the cemetery opened which commemorates the move of a coffin from the disused church of St Nicholas. The latest dated gravestone is from 1983. There were only a small amount of gravestones which had a date order not corresponding to the order of burial; the vast majority of named individuals were recorded in order of their date of death, regardless of gender. Of the 11 gravestones which mixed dates, five of these placed a male first on the inscription despite having died sometime after the next female, only one gravestone had a female name placed before a male name. In three examples with multiple names on the gravestone it appears that the dates do not correspond to the order of burial because this is due to leaving a small space for the name of the wife of the first deceased male. One last example of mixed dates regards a husband and wife inscribed in the order they died but with another name, possibly their son who died seven years before the husband, it seems likely that this was set up to commemorate a son only after one of the parents died. There appears to be some small sense of gender inequality within the order of the stones but this is minimal in comparison with the overall sample size. Instead the chronological order of death was generally adhered to.

The inscriptions are carved into the stone with little preserved trace of colouring left. Where there is colour the most frequent is black paint (30%, 75 of 254) with some examples with gold (35). There were few examples of high relief carving or of metal applied to stones. In the Runddel sample three examples of gold were found on granite stones of a dark colour. All were dated to the 20th century from 1911-57 and most had other decorations of oak leaves, a dove figurine and crosses, so the use of

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gold is linked to a desire to elaborate. Only two red granite stones had a white colour for the text, both were also from the 20th century between the years 1939-72 which indicated a slightly later desire for different colouring to mark out the inscription. Only two rather fragmented stones had no text decipherable. The font style used on all gravestones is unvaried, using capital letters of a Roman style with no evidence of other fonts such as Gothic or Italic style. The overall effect of the text styles chosen is homogenous with only a few examples where the darker colour of the stone requires a brighter finish. Other fonts are present in other areas of Assistens; it is uncertain why there is a lack of variation in Division G but possibly connects with the area being semi-closed for burial from the mid-20th century where different fonts may have become more common.
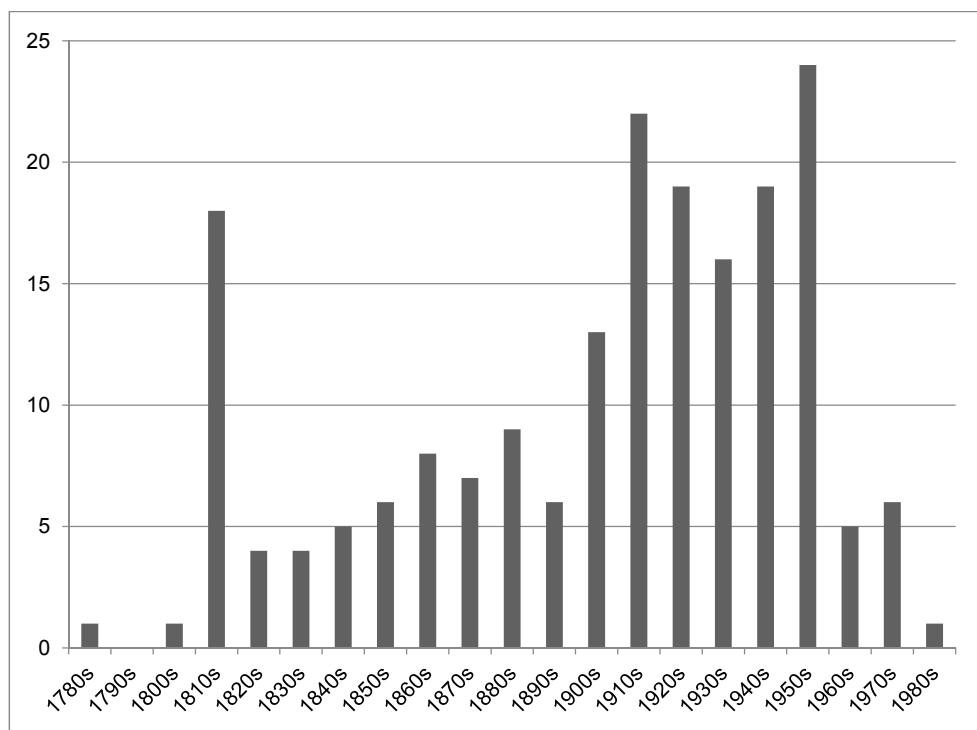


**Fig. 21.**
The date of surviving gravestones within Division G recorded in 1986, using the earliest date of death in the inscriptions (n=194).

Examining all of the gravestones documented in Division G shows that the inscriptions tend to be very homogeneous and brief; they have been divided into categories to understand the type of message desired. Most contain names, date of birth and death and only occasional gravestones stated the age of the person in years. These categories were the most dominant and continue an overall sense of simplicity

which were seen in the form and decoration of the stones (Table 13). Profession is stated on many gravestones (41%, 97 of 235) however only three gravestones presented a female profession (beyond references to mother or wife, which here are treated as a statement of relationship) these consisted of an artist who died in 1916, a nurse in 1940 and an architect in 1960. Only the nurse had an individual gravestone. The male professions stated cover the general range of middle class professions, from business owner to ship's captain. There are a small number of other categories such as official honours or educational degrees and even trade union affiliation. One gravestone is clearly stating that it was erected by colleagues in 1930 (P131), most however mention the surviving spouse or children. There are a relatively small range of phrases used and many gravestones contain a mix of categories including an emotional message regarding the relationship of the living to the dead. Religious phrasings or passages from the Bible are also common (14%, 33 of 235) and when there are emotional and religious texts these tend to be elaborated lengthy texts suggesting personal input.

Overall however there is a distinct emphasis on brevity in the inscriptions with the most frequent categories used being the name of the person and their date of death (94%, 220 of 235 and 83%, 194 of 235). Only 11 gravestones had the name and no other data. Inscriptions stating 'Here lies the dust…' or 'Here rests…' are relatively rare with only 30 clear references in the general sample. Of these inscriptions 73% (22 of 30) are dated to the 1840s or earlier. Only one gravestone makes a direct reference to the memory of a child (P80) dated to 1892. Expressions of emotional loss are present throughout the use of the cemetery but also are slightly more common from the mid-19th century onwards. Secular phrases are predominant in the 20th century. All of which illustrates a move from lengthy inscriptions of the 18th century towards a more personal and reduced texts of the 20th century.

**Table 13.**
The different inscriptions categorised by text, most gravestones contain multiple categories. Gravestones without any text are those which were missing inscriptions or had fallen over and were unreadable in the survey image (n=235).

| Category | Total | % | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Name | 220 | 94 | |
| Date of birth | 183 | 78 | |
| Date of death | 194 | 83 | |
| Profession | 97 | 41 | |
| Stated relationship | 63 | 27 | |
| Emotional phrase | 37 | 16 | Deeply missed, Beloved |
| Religious phrase | 33 | 14 | Biblical quotations, Rest in heaven |
| General phrase (more secular) | 22 | 9 | Tak for alt! Peace |

In the Runddel sample a total of 58 people are mentioned on the 36 stones. This compares with the 113 burials that are recorded in the latest ownership tenure for these plots in the Municipal register. Most stones have one or two people named on

them (8 and 14 of 36 respectively), only six stones have three names and one stone has four people named. This creates an average of 1.6 names per stone. There is no pattern in the dating for how many people were named on the stones. There is one clear exception of a large flat stone which was not on an excavated plot but has 10 people inscribed containing a date range of 81 years from 1819 to 1900 (P663). The dates on the gravestones are always of the date of birth and date of death. Within the Runddel Sample there appears to be very little change to the number of people named on gravestones over time, nine stones have no dates on them or are unreadable so are omitted from the analysis and graph (Fig. 22). Where there is more than one name the earliest and latest date are used to show the range covered. The earliest dates of death are 1819 up to 1958 and the latest dates of death are from 1847-1971. The oldest gravestone records three people who died between the years 1844-47; the youngest stone is from 1958-71. Most stones have a small range of years, the smallest being a gravestone represented two people who died in the same year 1872; in average most stones show a range of between 10-20 years. The dated stones also show that no gravestones were retained in the Runddel sample after a change of ownership in the plot. Use of the plots, or at least use recorded by plot owners, therefore tends to be within a short period of time. The dating tends to suggest a rapid turnover of plot tenure, where after a grave plot has been abandoned there is no physical place to grieve for the dead.
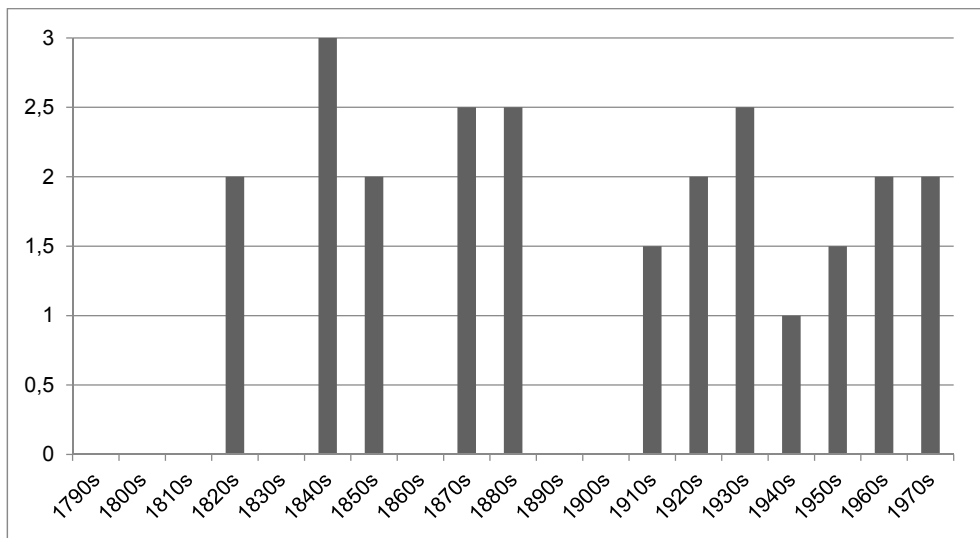


**Fig. 22.**
The average number of people named on the surviving gravestones from the Runddel sample, grouped by decade (n= 27 gravestones with 53 names), showing little variation over the course of nearly 200 years.

Occasionally stones only record the surname of the owner rather than a specific individual. These mark ownership not burial although they can double as temporary

markers. It is possible that these plots once contained more gravestones that have since been removed. In the Runddel Sample the most common category of text present is the name (30 out of 36, 83%), date of birth and date of death (25 out of 36, 69%). Occasionally the maiden names of women are present but women again are understood as the wife of the male when present on a gravestone together with little further elaboration needed. There are also fewer children present on the gravestones although there are examples of earlier gravestones with young children there are none surviving which record infants.

Profession (39%, 14 out of 36 excluding mentions of housewife) is reasonably common, and there are also mentions of honours (for e.g. *Ridder af 1. grad DBG*) in two stones and educational achievements such as master level degree (*Cand.Mag*) in others. Examples of profession are a tax assistant, a professor, an ambassador and several types of merchants but there is only one professional female specifically commemorated, a nurse. Occasionally the place of birth is present but this tends to be in examples where the person was born outside of Denmark such as the couple from Iceland (P796). There is also only one example where the names of the people on the stone are placed in a different order to the actual date of death. This happens where a husband and wife are inscribed on a large monolith, underscored by a thin line before the name of the third person, a male of unknown relationship but with the same surname who died before them both (Plot 683). It is possible that he was a son, a younger brother or nephew who died relatively young and had received no gravestone up to that point.

Descriptions of relationships such as husband, wife, son or even friend are present on a few gravestones, yet only nine gravestones have a form of personal inscription relating to emotion, loss or grieving (9 out of 36, 25%). There are few formulae or epitaphs on the gravestones and religious sentiments tend to be subtle references to earthly remains or the deceased being loved and saved. There are no overt religious phrases present in the Runddel sample but there are two examples of other phrases – a Latin quote of *Cor.cordium,* (meaning Heart of hearts taken from a poem by Algernon Swinburne written c. 1869-70, the same phrase is written on the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's grave, P695). A more common secular phrase 'Tak for alt' literally translates into English as 'Thanks for everything' but has a more nuanced meaning of love and appreciation to the deceased (P621A) it is uncertain if the commemoration refers to the person or to God. Emotional content of phrases, such as much missed and dearly loved are with one exception present only on 20th century gravestones.

- *The impact of cremation upon gravestones*

The impact of the modern technology of cremation is much discussed in terms of response to the destruction of the body but was it marked on gravestones – was there any discernible difference visible in how people were represented when they were cremated compared to people who were buried within a coffin? This could be more

influenced by the mourner's perspectives on cremation and the need to dispose of the urn. One response by the Church of England was to suggest only small flat stones or perhaps even no gravestone at all, just a Book of Remembrance would be adequate (Rugg 2015: 346). This was a period of transition where techniques of body disposal change but the final remains of the ashes had to be dealt with in the established cemetery and plot. In comparison in Copenhagen, the first years of the documentation surrounding cremating the body and disposal of the ashes was separated from burial registration and required far more detailed requests for certification (see Chapter 2). The formal municipality response was thus very different and related to the uncertainty surrounding cremation as a modern disposal technique. There are no columbaria on Assistens and before the creation of a specific urn area in 1940 (Valeur Larsen 1960: 150), urns were buried within plots.

The Municipal register was used to first identify burials recorded as cremations which were within the area of Division G affected by Metro development. There were a total of 119 recorded cremations, the earliest dated from May 1905 and the latest to July 1988. The rate of cremations increase steadily from the 1920s and it is only with the overall decrease in use of Division G that the numbers reduce in the 1970s. Errors in the register mean that some excavated cremations for example from P395A and P715A are not recorded as such, so the data is not complete. Of these cremations only 24 individuals were recorded on gravestones. These numbers are small and therefore are not representative so can only give a general impression but the gravestones themselves reveal little significant difference from gravestones of people buried in coffins. Married couples, despite one being cremated and the other buried in a coffin, still share a gravestone. There is no visible sign that there is a difference between them. Cremation gravestones appear to be more affected by a desire to conform to a group identity or unity within the design regardless of how the body was disposed. One (unexcavated, P177) plot provides a good example of a unified feel. Nine people are buried within the plot, six are cremated. The first two are coffin burials; the last coffin burial was late in the 1960s, so there is an element of personal decision about cremation despite it being a preferred choice within this plot. The five gravestones commemorate four couples and one individual. The overall impression is of three identical marble simple tablets arranged at the rear of the plot with two flat tablets placed in the ground. The inscriptions are simple but all have their profession as the only additional detail. There is no further indication of relationship, phrasing or symbolism present. The above-ground impression is unified and uncomplicated.

Overall three cremated individuals have their own stone and the rest share a stone with another person, the designs tend to be very plain with few decorations and brief texts. There are also examples where three people who were cremated and their urns were excavated are conspicuously absent in the gravestones. One plot (P633) has only a stone recording the surname and another large red granite block monument with only one name, of a male cremated aged 55 years in 1950. In contrast two older

females from this plot who were cremated in 1940 and 1986 received no gravestone. In another plot (P60, Fig. 17) there were seven individuals excavated of which five are cremations. Three stones are present, one records three cremations, another records only a single inhumation and another records a married couple where the husband died earlier in 1912 and was buried in a coffin, the wife died in 1952 but was cremated. Her name was added onto the gravestone. One cremation from 1920 of an older female but with a different surname was not commemorated at all. These examples may highlight a slight tendency to exclude older females who were cremated from commemoration but overall there are people who were buried but were not recorded on gravestones. The early years of cremation therefore appear to have little effect on above-ground commemoration. It is only with the advent of new areas for dispersal when this changes.

## Gravestone and plot narratives in Assistens

Owning a grave plot creates a fundamentally different attitude to the burial place compared to an individual or line burial. Line burials are used only once and the space intended for reuse but they are not connected to other family burials. Multiple burial family plots are used over a long period of time, so there is already a distinction between the two in terms of immediate social expectations to be buried as a group. There is also the longer term perspective of the ownership of property combined with an expression of the group identity. The link between the ownership of grave plots as being part of the family identity is similar to other expressions of the property-owning classes such as the tenure of a house, business and land (Mytum 2006: 106). Grave plots are clearly marked out, in some cases penetrating beyond the above-ground sphere by creating vaults below-ground. The family group is protected through these decisions on borders and on decorative elements within the plot. The grave plot becomes a part of a common identity and also some reassurance of future identity and remembrance of the past, a place where multiple times and meanings are captured within one entity. Although in reality, repeated use of a plot can also increase the chances of removing and destroying the buried, below-ground remains. This has the consequence which illustrates a surface appearance of respectability rather than any principled concern for past individuals.

The commodity value of a grave plot is also marked out by the ability to share grave space, perhaps with extended family or even temporarily transferring the right for burial to friends (Strange 2003: 150). For poorer people a burial space might be their only form of property, allowing a perceived ownership of the space that a pauper burial or communal burial place would not provide. The ability to share burial space with others could have been highly socially desirable. There is also the potential for sharing or a sense of obligation in wanting to include servants or staff to be buried

within the family plot which is noted in the Assistens burial registers. Records of individuals with different surnames to the owners may represent unmarried males or females being buried within extended family spaces and exemplify broader concepts of what close family entailed. Another plot (P683) contained child burials that were moved between family plots when their mother was finally buried. This sense of sharing shows that display and status are not the sole factors involved in having a large plot, it is an opportunity to assist others and include them into the broader sense of the family.

Purchasing a family grave plot is a significant break in burial behaviour in the modern cemetery. The private defined space of a large plot was a feature of earlier churchyards and transitional burial grounds but was accessible only to a relatively small percentage of people. In churchyards most families could not necessarily be buried together. It is quite likely that some effort was made to do this but this may not represent the norm for the general population. Burial together with loved ones may have been described as an ideal but was not the most common form. In modern cemeteries burial as a family became a reality for many and it is this increased ability to group together burials that is really the significant break. Burial together was idealised but despite the above-ground elaboration of grave plots being such a positive spur towards their adoption it did not become the overwhelming norm for most people. Line burials continued, although not in Division G, to be common. As modern cemeteries changed in the 20th century the popularity of burying multiple generations together decreased, instead burials for one generation became more common, particularly a married couple. The move away from the family grave can be interpreted as reverting back to more traditional forms of burial representing a couple.

What patterns have been identified in the gravestones? The extensive variation of forms seen in other countries (Mytum 2000) is not present in the sample of gravestones in Assistens. However this pattern is likely to be affected by the closure for burial of this section of the cemetery therefore fewer gravestones were erected after this date affecting the data for after the mid-20th century. Variation is present throughout all decades and there is most variation of forms during the 1900s to 1950s. A small increase in different forms is important to illustrate the broader range available for people to choose from. There is little difference between the total assemblage of gravestones in Division G and the Runddel sample, which is a sub-sample of the whole. Summary of the data from gravestones in the Runddel sample has been created to form links to the below-ground material which is heavily relied upon in Chapter 5. More detail has been described from the Runddel sample to give greater context and present some examples to confirm interpretations.

Material of gravestones becomes a little more homogenous but at the same time the range of colours increase, particularly in the 20th century. The source of the marble and other materials for the Assistens gravestones has not been researched for this

thesis; Norwegian or Italian marble, Gotlandic stone and sandstone from Bornholm are all mentioned as materials (Valeur Larsen 1960: 77). Marble is easy to carve therefore can be used for intricate decorations but is susceptible to erosion. Granite is a more durable material but not generally used for gravestones until the early 1830s in the UK when steam power was first used to polish the granite. Thereafter the stone became popular and was exported from Aberdeen all over the world (Knee 2012: 5). There is a material limit on decorations which can be achieved; granite gravestones would be more commonly polished and decorated with rough, less delicate Classical scenes. From the late 20th century machinery could be used to carve more delicate designs on granite and therefore expanded the styles available (Clark, L. 1987: 389). Although earlier granite gravestones could have been removed, the much later dating of granite use in Assistens suggests that the popularity in the UK did not immediately affect choice in Copenhagen. In Assistens few types of material are used perhaps based on availability and also for durability which helps to explain the high levels of preservation.



**Fig. 23.**
The Dyresen gravestone (P318) outside of the excavation area, 24 October 2013. An example of a naturalised romantic style of memorial with no other surviving plot features present leaving an open expanse of lawn.

Increasingly the material, shape and colour of the gravestones are used to express ideas and a feeling of the gravestones rather than text. Both the granite and sandstone shapes imitate nature and a desire to evoke a more romanticised memorial. Some of the larger stones are in the forms of monoliths or boulders evoking Scandinavian rune stones and supposedly a more natural time (Kryger 1985: 74). The use of rune stones or hints of earlier prehistoric heritage on gravestones and throughout cemeteries has been noted by Williams (2012) in contemporary times. Other smaller structures have

the same sense of natural romantic feelings with blocks of granite shaped into natural boulder styles with crosses inscribed. An obvious example of this desired association with nature, which was not within the excavated area of Division G, is the Dyresen gravestone (P318) shaped like a tree trunk which blends into the environment (Fig. 23). However the white marble tablets or red granite with gold lettering would have had the opposite effect of a shining contrast to the greys, greens and browns of the landscape and other memorials. So contrast was also sought within the cemetery as a way of making some gravestones stand out.

Overall there are few references to the body in gravestone inscriptions or in the gravestone forms and decorations. Change in formulae upon inscriptions was noted in the study of Kellington churchyard, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, UK. Gravestones from the 18th century up to the 1980s showed clear dominance in phrasing with references to the body peaking in the 18th century (Here lies…), moving to expressions concerning memory in the 19th century (In loving memory…) and from the mid-19th century an increase in variability of inscription (Mytum 1996: 365-6). The movement from referencing the body is slightly later in Assistens than gravestone inscriptions in the UK where mentions of the body or the physical place of the grave reduce considerably by the early 19th century (Tarlow 1999a: 66). Although in Assistens they tend not to be replaced by an emotional reference to memory which marks out a difference in the Danish data. The material consequences of death and the place of burial is not such an important referent but rather than something to conceal it may have been too obvious a statement for the people of Assistens to even need to refer to. Instead the lack of references to the body may not present concealment but simply that it was not considered as an issue. The place of the cemetery deals with the body in a way that is seen as satisfactory. The above-ground material is a strong replacement for the emotions relating to the physical remains they are meant to represent below-ground. The lack of direct references to memory is unusual; it is possible that memory is referred to discretely or that the data from Division G in Assistens is biased. However it could also be that the preferred expressions of the relationships were directed towards lifetime achievements. Expressions of profession seem to be important to many families where it was the norm to have it stated.

There is an overall decrease in length and detail of inscriptions on gravestones. Where there is text there is an increase in personal reflections rather than poetry, citations or emotional epitaphs. Gravestones are about relationships, despite these not being explicitly stated, encompassing large families to married couples. Although other phrases or references are not described here, such as occupation, status in society or even hobbies and interests are being recorded more frequently. This change in use of formulae is also noted in the UK by Tarlow (1999a: 75) where she describes epitaphs of sorrow and sleep and a small increase in more individualised secular epitaphs from the 20th century. There is evidence in Assistens that relates to a sleep metaphor as an

attitude to death but it is low in relation to evidence from the UK or perhaps the US (Tarlow 1999a; Laderman 2003). Modern responses to death start to include elements of the individual character of the living person often through emotional messages but sometimes through occupation and later into the 20th century through hobbies and interests. So instead it is the connections that the deceased had and contributed to in the living world that was important. It is the family unit that is being represented in the gravestones and the relationships between members which is highlighted. A similar alteration in obituaries and death announcements has been researched in Denmark where texts in the early 1900s were short, standardised and impersonal acting as a measure of information on funeral details rather than as a dedication to the person, more personal details start to be included from the mid-20th century (Hviid Jacobsen & Holst 2008).

Overall the patterns seen at Assistens show a mixture of change and continuity. Similarity of expression in commemoration or material type seems to be a way of relating all deaths to a normative experience that is part of the grief process. Within the early years of Assistens the influence can be seen from 18th century monuments with Classical and Romantic styles of grave elaboration and commemoration practices and some of these features have continued discretely into the 20th century. The elaborate gravestones are from the 1800s to 1840s, and can be identified as descendants of the allegorical symbols that would have adorned churchyard monuments and epitaphs inside a church (Andersen, T. 2013). Yet other features have been left behind, use of elaborate vault structures decline and there is less emphasis on robust defining borders of grave plots. The frequency of highly decorative friezes, human figures and allegories to Pagan myths also decline. Christian themes and symbolism continue and there is less perceived need to connect death with Classical myths. By the shift into the 20th century there is a mix of imposing large stones dedicated to families intended to continue for several generations with a movement towards gravestones dedicated only to couples. Yet throughout the c. 200 years under examination some forms continue to be popular, these include monoliths (*bautasten*) and plain tablet epitaphs. A new rustic style (*grotte*) is identified as being introduced and becomes more prevalent from the early 20th century.

The gravestones that survive in Assistens which are predominantly from the 19th and 20th centuries show the trend towards slowly reducing elaborate decoration. Elaborate expressions of emotion instead are found within different materials, colours or forms of gravestone. Assistens suggests a homogenisation of forms and material from a slightly earlier period, from the mid-19th century where longer epitaphs give way to factual statements on the gravestone. By the 20th century this clear trend towards simplicity is enhanced. Flohr Sørensen (2011: 162) suggests that Denmark had a relatively uniform and standardised repertoire of grave forms by the 20th century and this pattern is visible in Assistens but they are also varied in more subtle ways. The preference for 'fast forgetting' as suggested by Kryger (1985) where the

material culture of grief is being abandoned to less ostentatious forms is one of these reactions but this is not necessarily the whole picture. It is important to remember that the grief and emotional loss is not necessarily diminished but the expression of it has transferred away from lengthy biographical or morality tales represented on earlier gravestones. This point is affirmed by Flohr Sørensen (2011) who is clear in showing that there is not a simple relationship between the elaboration of graves and deeper emotional grief. There is a new societal imperative to commemorate in other ways beyond using a family plot in the traditional cemetery.

The brief examination of the impact of cremation suggests that there are further possibilities to explore how people responded to the change in disposal from inhumation to cremation. The first cremations were placed in ceramic urns and into a columbarium on the cemetery. By 1921, 39% of urns were placed in a columbarium but most urns were placed into burial plots (Helweg 2013: 10). Certainly in Assistens the few examples show that there was little effect on commemoration in the first decades. This was a new situation to react to and it took time for new practices to be constructed. Furthermore cremation itself did not create a simpler design in gravestones; this simplicity was already starting to be present. The mid-20th century represents a period where cremation is becoming more common yet the mix of responses to how people should be cremated vary and it is the relationship – family unity and the marriage bond that continues to remain the vital element to represent. There are no variations in text inscriptions which mark out a cremation urn compared with a coffin burial. No designs on gravestones where people were cremated referenced Classical urns which might have referenced that cremation had been used. The overall image is that cremation burials were unobtrusive and fitted in to the rest of the cemetery rather than being made distinct. In this early period of transition cremation is potentially not a prime factor when people consider how to commemorate. Changes in response to how to deal with cremation comes much later in the 20th century with the creation of lawn cemeteries and ash scattering areas (Flohr Sørensen 2009).

The increasing similarity of gravestones became a subject of concern within the Danish Association for Cemetery Culture who discussed the trend in the 1990s for homogenous gravestones in Denmark and launched a competition for designers and stonemasons to create new forms of memorials (Nielsen, D. 2000). Some of the more recent adaptations include more abstract styles and designs on gravestones including an increase in the use of personal symbols related to hobbies and interests of the deceased. Some of these new styles are seen within other Divisions of Assistens. Photographs and engravings of the deceased also increased which may have been influenced by increasing immigration from regions or cultures where this is more common. There is also a trend towards the use of engraving memorial website addresses into gravestones to allow people to access more intangible information about the deceased (Hviid Jacobsen & Holst 2008). The increasing changes in design,

style, inscription and symbolism in late 20th and early 21st century is not registered here in this data as it extends only to 1986. Styles of Division G gravestones are affected by its closure for burial.

It is possible that the influence of professionalisation of stonemasons providing catalogues and limiting the choice available is the prime factor in the small range of gravestone designs. However the choice to create a commemoration which is similar but subtly different may also suit the mourners of Assistens. This could act as a reminder of individuals and their place in the community of the dead. It is only with the gravestones of the mid to late 20th century that more familiar expressions and varied decoration are more prominent in the social space of the cemetery. The changes in style which start to be recorded in Division G in Assistens therefore conform to other studies of gravestones in the UK and other European countries. It is possible that the existing design of the landscape cemetery and the authority guidelines heavily influence the style of new memorials (Rugg 2013). It is also likely that close connections in societal changes towards death and commemoration between European countries from the 19th century onwards are also a factor in these trends. There is no doubt that grief and mourning have not diminished over the centuries but that it is expressed in forms other than the gravestone. Here the people involved in the decision-making are using the modern way of indexing and recording the world and the people in it which is recognisable over Europe.

## Long-term actions - the different temporalities surrounding plots and gravestones

The discussion so far has focusing upon the original purchase of the grave plot, burial and setting up of the gravestone. The duration of these activities are quite short, often within a year. However there is the longer duration of these entities involving the continued visiting, additional plot decoration, visiting and small acts of maintenance and commemoration. In family plots there may be more burials and new gravestones, plants and decorations added, or the gravestone erodes, the hedges and plants mature or die or are removed. There is also the longer term fate of plots, especially after tenure is complete and a new narrative or cycle of reuse of the plot, gravestones and decorations is created. This is what creates the general impression of cemetery landscape and function for the casual visitor. This is also linked to the biography of the grave plot below the ground. Finally there is a brief section regarding the connections to heritage and preservation perspectives which are a significant factor in cemetery management.

The overall care and maintenance of Assistens is carried out by cemetery staff. There is a balance between overall cemetery planning, the general care given to grave plots and any specific actions carried out by visitors to the plot. The following discussion illustrates this balance to evaluate the agency of mourners which can include material evidence of frequent visiting but also a plot could be visited regularly but have no visible tangible evidence of this visit. Visitor behaviour in cemeteries has been studied through ethnographic interviews and most visitors state a need to do something such as lay flowers or tidy up the plants or gravestones that would be visible but some do not (Francis, Kellaher *et al.* 2000: 43). Visiting a burial place combines these activities with commemorating the people buried there; it is part of how people maintain an enduring relationship with the dead (Woodthorpe 2010: 128-30). This is recreated and kept alive through cleaning the grave, gardening, talking or ritual activities and even playing around it, as described at the start of this chapter. Materiality that defines this period of grieving may be ephemeral, cleared relatively quickly in a matter of months. Conducting these acts creates a more acceptable reason to visit, the required tangible excuse and can be a 'proxy act of physical contact' (Francis, Kellaher *et al.* 2000: 43). According to individual and the societally determined acceptable ideas concerning periods of grief and mourning, visiting a plot is usually more intense immediately following burial, decreasing to special days over the years (Francis, Kellaher *et al.* 2000: 39).

Although a temporary marker can be set up over the grave, it may take some time before the plot is decorated and commemoration can be seen physically in the landscape. Elaboration within the plot can also include small bushes and plants, or plants and flowers in pots which do not require a high level of care. These can be seen as more practical and more long-term decoration of the plot than cut flowers. Maintenance of these smaller plants may allow an easy excuse to visit the plot by mourners, to attend the plot and help their grieving by tending to their dead. Yet if planting is laid down to an elaborate design then they would have to be disturbed for any new graves. Covering the ground in this way with obstacles could be an emotional reaction not only to conceal what lies below but also to avert thoughts of visitors about themselves also being buried there. Visiting the dead can be seen as extending the relationship between the living and the dead; it is not completed with death. This could be a positive connection in terms of fond memories or relating stories to the new generations but could also be more negative relating to the need to keep the dead firmly in their place underground.

There continues to be conflict in modern cemeteries between authorities and mourners regarding suitability of stones, symbolism and provision of gifts (Rugg 2013). There is however an opportunity to create personal responses within these rules of dominant behaviours (or transcripts according to Scott 1991). In these activities visitors and mourners shape a gentle form of resistance, sometimes bending the rules by paying a little extra for different decorations or planting, perhaps by

adding gifts and decorations that lie on the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Resistance and agency may also be found in the act of *not* maintaining a grave site despite continuing ownership and responsibility for it. Allowing a grave plot to become overgrown can be viewed as a contrary response to the orderliness of the rest of the cemetery that may suit the personality of the buried individuals and the mourners. The reason behind neglected or abandoned graves may be caused by a series of complex interconnected problems, for example an inability to pay for a gravestone or perhaps it expresses a choice to invest in the traditions around the funeral or another form of long-term commemoration such as charitable donations rather than a gravestone.

In Assistens the effective closure particularly of Division G for burial from the 1960s onwards results in limited data on these new trends and evidence for visitor behaviour. Certainly other parts of the cemetery may give a more accurate view on practices from this period onwards. The evidence that is present, of continued maintenance and deposition of gifts, illustrates long-term visitor behaviour patterns of those who visit and tend the grave over a longer period than the initial year of mourning. Material evidence of the duration of visits is in the plots with chairs or benches set within it for a visitor to sit upon. Common features for the maintenance of the plots is provided by cemeteries with small areas set aside for tools, brushes and watering cans for general use, personal gardening tools can often be found tucked behind gravestones too. The provision of gardening tools helps to structure visits by encouraging visitors to clean and tidy the plot they visit. In 1986, 50% of grave plots (91 of 181 plots) have some extant signs of decoration on the plot area; it is probable that many more had a form of decoration that had been removed or that they simply are not shown on the survey images. Yet only 24% (44 of 181 plots) were still within tenure, therefore the decision to continue maintenance must have been taken by the cemetery. Almost all of these plots contained small plants, either shrubs or flowers and smaller trees often of a conifer type planted within the plot.

From the later 19th and 20th centuries in Denmark population movement also affected burial choice as people moved more frequently to different towns or even emigrated abroad leaving nobody to arrange, pay for or maintain a plot. Once purchased the right to be buried within the plot continued even if that person was no longer living within or associated with one parish in Copenhagen. It is this social pattern of spatially flexible families and communities that leads Anne-Louise Sommer (2008) to suggest a change in late modernity (suggested as from the mid-20th century) in burial practice and memorial shifting to more intangible or more portable practices away from cemeteries. The evidence shows that long-abandoned plots can be visited and cared for. There was not necessarily a swift clearance or renewal of gravestones. To some extent this may be an anomaly but it is problematic to make conclusions from the data at Assistens as most of the plots were abandoned by the mid-20th century where these trends are suggested as having a real impact. However

the shift from large sections of Assistens from a cemetery to a cemetery park conforms to the general shift away from the locus of burial being of primary importance. It could also illustrate working practices that recognise continuing visiting behaviour. The evidence does point to the failure of some owners to maintain their plots; the statement of group identity that they represented is not always continued. 21st century ideas of appropriate commemoration have altered. The initial sense of property is not strong enough to be continued beyond the immediate generations. Perhaps it is personal contact with the people who were buried there that counts and enforces the responsibility of visiting. However a large part of this idea is that people no longer live in the same area or city as their older relatives. Like most large capital cities in the 19th century Copenhagen is generally where people move to, rather than from. More flexible social and personal relationships may contribute towards the patterns seen in Assistens but it is also possible that other factors such as the perception that visiting the dead is no longer necessary wherever they are.

## Care or abandonment of grave plots

Family plots were a financial investment bought for the future, they were bought with a long term perspective and an understanding that it was socially acceptable to plan ahead for death and desirable for family members to be placed together. The tenure of a grave plot can potentially be extended beyond the original length of time but it is still essentially a rental of space rather than a permanent ownership of land. Today in most European cemeteries, including Assistens, small metal signs can be seen set into the ground asking the owner to contact the cemetery because either the plot is becoming neglected or that the tenure needs renewal. Several of these notices were found in the topsoil of the excavation, presumably relating to the notification of excavation. In a time where records of tenure of a grave plot may not be updated, this is a potential way to monitor the amount of visits to that specific grave plot. Other signs are used to discretely advertise the availability of the grave plot for purchase. In these examples the existing memorial and plot decoration can still be present, so when buying the new plot the purchaser can still see physical evidence of the previous owners. Other plots may be chosen to be preserved dependent upon cemetery heritage preservation criteria; the upkeep of these plots can be taken on by the cemetery or passed to a local history society as seen in various town cemeteries in Denmark and Sweden.

In 1986 out of the 181 plots, 148 (82%) have some data on the official year of abandonment. 104 plots were abandoned officially and only 21 (20%) of these plots still showed some potential evidence of maintenance. Of the 44 still within tenure, 27 plots (61%) had signs of maintenance or decoration. So even long-abandoned plots can potentially be maintained but plots still owned and paid for can also appear

abandoned. There can be a large gap between the last burial and the official abandonment of the plot but on average the difference is 48 years (from 109 plots using date of death from gravestones). There are 10 grave plots which have gaps of over 100 years between the date of the last burial and the official abandonment of the plot. Of these plots three are maintained by the cemetery in keeping plot borders and grass neat but there are no signs of active commemoration. Care of the plot passes to the cemetery authorities in these cases. Examples like these encouraged cemeteries to sell grave space with a shorter span of tenure to prevent the cost of neglected plots becoming an issue for the cemetery rather than the plot owner.

Some plots were bought in the first years that the cemetery area was open, with the earliest bought in 1807. The five earliest purchased plots still retained were all within Wall and Monument Lines; this highlights the divide in use in the first years of the cemetery between expensive plots bought for long periods and the use of line burials for the cheapest price. 26 of the earliest purchased plots, mostly situated within the Monument Line were eventually used for burials for over 100 years with only two exceptions of 89 and 79 years. Of the plots that still had gravestones present the vast majority can be seen as long term decisions on how to commemorate a family group. However plots could be purchased more than once, having therefore at least one earlier owner. 12 plots changed owners, the first new purchase was of a plot which had originally been purchased from 1806-85 and it was transferred to the new owners in 1888. After 1888, 12 out of 15 plots were purchased by new owners and it is these gravestones from the new ownership tenure that survive. As might be expected gravestones from the previous ownership were removed. Many of the older large plots were subdivided into two smaller plots and these were commonly reused in the 1930s and 1940s. The pattern of use shows an immediate uptake of expensive prominent plots in the early years of the cemetery. The early plots are bought with a legacy in mind for the extended family lineage and are provided with strong borders, sometimes underground walls and often provided with gravestone with just the surname upon it to emphasise unity.

Within the Runddel sample of 25 grave plots, the final dates of abandonment are known for all of the plots. The three earliest plots were all bought in 1820 and all can be described as on prominent positions, either facing or on a corner of a line very close to the Sexton's House. The majority of the plots were abandoned between the 1960s and 1980s (18 out of 25, 72%). However we must also take into account when the plots were bought, the earliest seven plots bought up to the 1840s are those that are bought for long periods and are also extended further, for between 100 and 160 years. Plots bought up to the 1890s are also purchased for long periods of time, of between 75 and 150 years. However in the 20th century plots are bought for a far shorter length of time, between 58 and 20 years. Older and larger plots are also divided for reuse and bought for short periods. This certainly reflects some of the administrative decisions to reduce burial and use smaller tenure periods on Assistens

in the 20th century. Some plots could potentially have been bought for longer than 20 years but this option was rarely taken up.
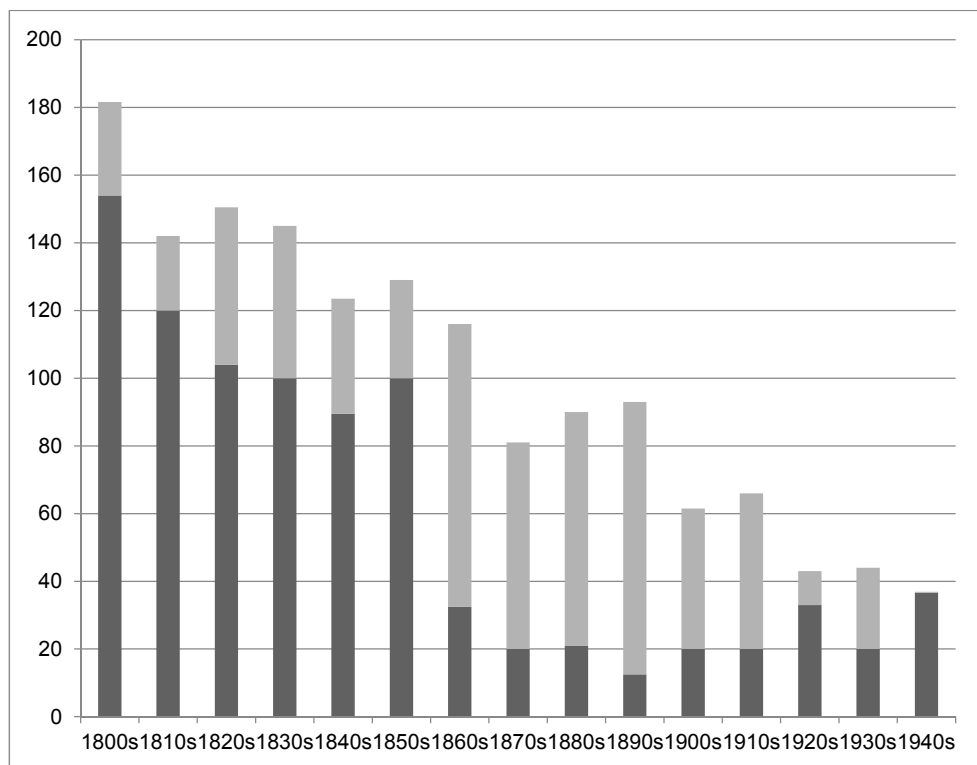


**Fig. 24.**
Excavated plots which had gravestones present in 1986 and data on ownership (n=43 plots). Grouped by decade of purchase, showing the original length of tenure (dark grey), followed by the amount of time the plot was extended, or prolonged (light grey).

The early use of the cemetery can be split into the expensive plots and cheaper line burials. Line burials may have had only small earthen mounds and temporary wooden crosses but there is no secure record of them. These leave no archaeological trace in 20th century landscape as they are later either converted to pathways or reused for family plots. It appears that the early decades of use from 1810s to 1830s are characterised by a polarisation of memorials between the very rich and the working classes. Although many of the more expensive plots continue to be in use for hundreds of years, the smaller plots in-between the prominent areas are gradually bought from the 1840s and 1850s. This can be explained as the period when the line burials from c. 1817-19 are abandoned after the legal requirement of 20 years; more family plots are now bought and any earlier features are removed and replaced with new plot stones and borders. There is another small peak in use in the 1880s which may also derive from short term recycling of plots but then overall use declines which

likely represent the opening up of other cemeteries within the city. However plots could be, and were renewed after their initial purchase. 43 plots were excavated that had gravestones still present in 1986 and data on tenure and extension (Fig. 24). The period up to the 1850s illustrates the purchase of grave plots for considerable lengths of time. 23 plots were initially bought on average for 111 years but were extended for only very short periods after this, on average only 34 years. The descendants of the original purchaser extend the use of the plots. However after the 1850s the initial purchase is more cautious, 24 plots were bought for an average of 24 years. However they are extended for much longer periods, an average of 46 years, declining to no extensions by the 1940s. For this short period of time the plot is invested in. The decline of long-term purchase of grave plots shows the influence of plans to close the cemetery for burial but also a general decline in the choice to buy a larger family plot for long-term use. In general this pattern also agrees with evidence in the burial registers which record a pattern of people purchasing smaller new plots for a shorter length of time from the mid-20th century.

The long-term use of cemetery land is subject to the changing needs of society, with the construction of the Metro station in Assistens being a rare example of radical change. However it is in the eventual neglect of maintenance and abandonment of a grave plot that the effect of time and changes in commemoration can be seen. Although the process of decay in the grave plot may be delayed by cemetery maintenance and care of the surrounding environment (cutting the grass, picking up decayed flowers or making safe tilting gravestones) it may also not be considered a community problem to deal with an individual grave plot. Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory (2010) has examined the process of abandonment in 19th and 20th century cemeteries in Greece. She has shown that maintenance is the responsibility of the individual family, particularly for the women. Abandonment of plots can take only 40-50 years and is more visible in rural cemeteries where internal migration of Greeks towards the cities allows neglect to occur. Greek cemeteries are very different to the landscape cemeteries like Assistens but the example is useful to pinpoint the agency of the people who maintain burial spaces. Conversely the lack of pressure on space in rural cemeteries meant that there were more abandoned older grave plots still present compared with urban cemeteries where the grave space was quickly reused. From this example it can be suggested that in Greece the cemetery may no longer hold the same kind of locational status and importance to the processes of mourning and memory as it does in other parts of Europe and North America.

Neglect or abandonment in urban cemeteries is much harder to observe due to the rapid reuse of space but is linked to social changes outside of the cemetery. Nørrebro starts to become more densely settled from the 1850s (Schmidt 2015: 56) as there is the potential for people to move away from the crowded inner city. Assistens was also in the process of being expanded and therefore line burials could be diverted into new areas and eventually they would be placed in other cemeteries (Chapter 3). Line

burials were replaced with more expensive family plots in a form of social engineering or gentrification. Until the mid-19th century, Division G was a very active place with most grave space being recycled and plot ownership encouraged with long tenures sold. This did have the consequence of changing the social topography of the area. Burials which did not contribute towards the financial success of the cemetery were removed from sight or from the formal records and were now re-usable space. There was an expansion of different classes of people that were now enabled to purchase family plots.

After this period of intense activity the use of Division G stabilised although change in how it was used still occurred. Towards the end of the 19th century the evidence of the length of ownership at Assistens shows that plots were bought for smaller lengths of time; longevity in the plot was no longer prized. Perhaps it was even seen as a burden upon the remaining family. A sense of place was not as important in the long term. Instead a shorter period was required to fulfil the obligations of the older generation but was not extended into the following generation. Abandonment did happen but this often was not firmly correlated with the legal closure of tenancy. Plots were neglected even within tenure; much of this is affected by the responsibility of the cemetery in carrying out maintenance and making decisions in the absence of engagement by plot owners.

## What was above can be concealed below

Cemetery maintenance takes many forms. Material culture created, collected and used for public display can be moved around the cemetery or also redeposited below-ground, in an afterlife or disuse phase of objects. The common practice of moving gravestones from their original context to line the walls of the cemetery severs the link between visible landscapes and below-ground material cultures but also the memory and identity which connects the two places. Reuse of memorials is noted throughout Denmark despite some sober warnings contained within their inscriptions (Kragh 2003: 142-3). Gravestones can be used as building material such as in Køge, Denmark in the reconstruction of sewers in the town (Andersen, T. 2013). In Assistens gravestones were also reused as structural materials for drain repairs in the garden and around the foundations of the Sexton's House, an act mirrored in the gravestones used as a floor for a similar building in St Pancras churchyard, London in 1792 (Emery & Wooldridge 2011: 41-2). Gravestones were also found within the topsoil or disuse phases of grave backfill. Although most pieces were highly fragmented there were also complete gravestones found in the topsoil. However the largest single deposit was from a drain in the south of the site (G501). Over 73 pieces with inscriptions were recorded, 19 of which were found either complete or able to be re-assembled. How or why they were deposited is unknown. Very few were originally

from grave plots from this part of the cemetery. None of the gravestones were associated with any of the plots excavated illustrating the movement of objects over the entire cemetery. Also in the drain was the large deposit of conch shells however the sheer quantity suggests a deliberate collection policy from many different abandoned plots. This was a managed disposal of objects which was the result perhaps of many years of collection and represents a complete change and transformation of their use and meaning within the cemetery context.

The text on these redeposited gravestones show dates of death ranging from 1821-1947, most commemorate several people. Most gravestones are marble and have little or no decoration, containing simple phrases such as 'Rest in peace' rather than longer inscriptions. This fits the pattern seen in gravestones still *in situ* in the cemetery. Only one highly decorative inset for a gravestone was found in topsoil which is a copy of Bertel Thorvaldsen's 'Natten med sine børn: søvn og død' (The night with her children: sleep and death) from 1815. This is a commonly replicated motif found in Scandinavian cemeteries which echo a popular metaphor of death as sleep; it is a rare example in Assistens of an overt association of sleep and death. It is likely that the Sexton's House formed a collection point for materials that could be reused and stored before most were sent away to be crushed and turned into gravel. Materials to decorate the grave plot are then transformed into another useful purpose and hidden below-ground. Some of this reuse may not be in line with regulations and show the force of agency of individual cemetery workers. One example is of a gravestone which is documented in 1986, shown in the photograph as stacked with a group of other gravestones on an abandoned plot. This plot was not excavated in 2009 but that specific gravestone was found buried within the topsoil, complete but with no obvious explanation of why it was placed there.

The link here is the continuation of material culture in referential networks, not only of physical objects but of people's social relations and working actions. Even when things are removed from sight, their materiality is often still present and reused within the cemetery. A good example of how material is moved around from an above-ground plot display to a structured deposit are the over 80 conch shells found within a disused drainage sump during excavation. At some point a decision was made to remove them from their grave plots and collect them together to later deposit them with broken pieces of gravestone to act as a filter within the sump. They were fulfilled a useful purpose but still present in a material sense.

In examining these material referents there is a clear link between above-ground behaviour and the below-ground world. There does not seem to be a binary opposition but a porous boundary that can be crossed repeatedly. The consequences of these acts can be made visible and public, when reusing gravestones but can also be a concealment of maintenance activities such as clearing away the conch shells. The physical objects are still present in the ground and still have a consequence upon the

work within the cemetery. The archaeological excavation is a good example of this crossing of borders and fusion of the two worlds which continues to affect life within the cemetery.


## Presenting and preserving the cemetery landscape

Where a plot was still legally owned then the memorials or decoration including railings, curbs or planting would be maintained. After this point there comes a decision to either maintain or remove them. The cemetery authorities can decide to keep a gravestone *in situ*, or perhaps remove it and set it up elsewhere in the cemetery. This intersection is where the cemetery authorities will override the agency of the plot owner. When the plot tenure is ended, the choices have to be made by the cemetery. The selection of memorials to be preserved within the cemetery relates firstly to legal time periods of tenure and secondly to specific criteria set according to the cemetery. The preservation criteria for the retention of gravestones in Assistens is as follows (my interpretation and translation) (Helweg & Linnée Nielsen 2010: 136):

a) 100 years old or more with a general preservation value

b) Typical of the period, preserved as an example for the future

c) Containing special decoration or interest

d) A memorial to a local person of historical interest

e) Specially rich/robust and interesting inscription

f) By a known artist or with special art historical interest

g) For special meritorious/worthy men or women

Preservation is seen as a cultural concern; natural decorative elements, temporary gifts or even the context of the plot in general are not explicitly referred to. It is also worth noting that it is individual gravestones that were the focus, rather than the grave plot as a whole entity. A plot which contained gravestones that were not considered worth preserving could potentially be removed leaving only the more valued example. Only category b allows for a general preservation group which has the potential to include all periods and gravestones and may also be expanded to include important elements of social representivity such as class or gender. This system places little emphasis on the landscape context and surroundings of the gravestone rather placing it on art historical or local historical appreciation. The emotional wishes of the people purchasing the gravestone to be placed together on the plot are also lost. Accessory features including iron railings, curbs, and border hedges may all be removed affecting the nature of the grave plot even if they used to be important features for the owners of the plot and which indicated fixed spatial limits on the piece of land that

they owned. In many cases management of cemetery landscapes is essential – mature or diseased trees and hedges may need to be removed. High maintenance costs may force cemetery authorities to remove curb stones or railings to allow for machine grass mowing or for dangerous gravestones to be laid flat. The economic situation of a contemporary cemetery is an important perspective which needs to be accounted for. Changes do need to be made while being sensitive to a preservation plan. However from a point of view which is trying to understand the motives behind the creation of the cemetery landscape, the group context of these individual elements in a memorial space is just as important as a single stone.

Division G did not contain any monuments that were classified as having a legal heritage protection that ensured they must be maintained and preserved by the cemetery authorities. The vast majority of those legally protected monuments lie further south in the cemetery within Division A, the oldest section. A brief examination of the types of memorials that remain on the cemetery suggests that it is the larger, more conspicuous and highly decorated memorials that are retained. 80 of the plots with recorded features were in prominent positions on more expensive plots, either within the Wall or Monument Line or on prominent row corners leaving a bias in the preservation values and data concerning the plots with more expensive purchase prices. Few plots were excavated on these lines but many gravestones were removed. Few signs of special elaboration on these plots survive, with only occasional preservation of iron railings and curbs to define the plot. However there were more elaborate gravestones, some of which had been removed long before 2009 and stored. There was no suggestion in the plot decorations that there was anything unusual below-ground such as the two vaults. Here there was something which goes beyond the above-ground display for the family who owned these plots. It was a continuation of difference and marking out property. Here there were more flamboyant memorials using different materials and lengthy inscriptions. Most survived simply because the plots had been bought for 100 years or more, therefore the memorials survived and were more likely to be counted as worthy of preservation.

Preserving specific features of the cemetery landscape, the more ostentatious, expensive and decorative gravestones, has the consequence of creating a bias in the impression of the cemetery. This bias favours the people who were using gravestones as conspicuous display objects for their family's emotional relationships, identity and status. It favours those who could afford or were allowed to put up gravestones and particularly those that could afford long leases on grave plots. The exception in the categories of preserving gravestone that was typical of the period leaves some opportunity for ordinary people to be represented but is outweighed by the other values. Many hundreds of gravestones and the lives that were commemorated have been removed from the landscape; many others had no gravestone at all. So the visible public landscape is predominantly composed of the most unusual elements in the cemetery.

# The porous boundary between above-, and below-ground practices

The excavation in Assistens allows the unusual opportunity to make a comparison between the material culture visible above-ground with what is deposited below the ground. By linking the two it can remove or at least soften the structural opposition of the two concepts as played out in so many discussions featuring public/private, social/individual and life/death interpretations (Holtorf 2004). Further connections are discussed between funerary material culture in the concealed world in the ground and the visible social practices within the cemetery landscape. People involved in arranging the funeral and plot will be making decisions regarding both at the time of the death and examination will show if there are any interpretations that can be drawn from this perspective. Specific plots have been chosen to show the dynamic and nuanced relationship.

Resurrection was a principal issue in the medieval world but it had to be at the correct time and with the correct conditions. Many of the traditions and rituals surrounding churchyards and later modern cemeteries can be traced back towards preventing the dead rising before their time. From preparation of the body to the correct funeral and burial rites, if they were not correct then there was a greater fear of the unquiet dead rising. Scandinavian folklore includes soul-ringing bells, rituals during the procession and the committal process as strongly influenced by the desire to neutralise the dead's power (Kragh 2003: 108-9; Bringéus 2007: 248). However it is not just the dead that have the potential to penetrate the boundary between above and below but the materiality of the cemetery transcends divisions too. What is placed below is supposed to stay there. That there is an active interaction between above and below which is integral to the running of the modern cemetery is supposed to stay concealed. There is a porous nature to the above/below-ground dichotomy in Assistens as in other cemeteries which extends into natural boundaries too. There is the evidence of tree roots and plants and bushes and surface coverings of stones. One of the largest tree root systems was also associated with burials of young children (see Chapter 6) but others were mostly recorded within shallow topsoil particularly in areas that were excavated to only one metre below the ground level. It is this in-between sense of horizons that gravediggers are more familiar with than visitors to a cemetery. This is true for the medieval churchyard as it is the modern cemetery and there is great continuity in ideas and practices although the precise details may have changed. A good example of the porous nature of the cemetery soil is the burial (G1287) which had a thin layer of concrete covering the sides and base of the coffin from pouring of concrete for a gravestone above-ground. This illustrates the loose soil conditions long after burial and before the ground settles.

Marking out the boundary of a grave plot penetrates the division in the cemetery landscape between above and below because the iron railings, kerbs and hedges need foundations and shallow pits below-ground. Several examples of these were found, most of them related to the foundations of railings or walls. These were generally roughly constructed yellow brick walls around the plot (only one used limestone blocks), some were six to seven courses high. Most foundations were not visible from the surface and some were buried quite deeply indicating either that they acted purely as plot boundaries or that when above-ground features were removed this removal extended far down into the ground. All of the 22 grave plot walls that were investigated in Division G were within Monument or Wall Line plots indicating the high status through the restriction of this kind of plot elaboration to more expensive plots. Isolated objects found within the topsoil also highlight the porous border between above and below – there were examples of surface gravel in some redeposited grave fills and particularly around shallow urn burials showing the mixing of imported gravel surfaces with soil underneath. Within the topsoil there were also occasional iron objects identified as pieces of iron railings or fences. There were also occasional remnants of footings for gravestones, some of them simply pits filled with construction rubble. Others were of small brick or concrete structures which were left when the gravestone was removed. Only one of the brick footings (G128) had evidence of the actual removal process as it had been tipped over to one side but not pulled out entirely. Lastly a concrete marker (G800) could also have been a more modern equivalent support for a gravestone. During the excavation in the Runddel sample some plot boundaries marked out by small fieldstones had become overgrown and partially buried. This boundary, in contrast to plot boundaries in the Monument Lines did not purposely extend underground. Apart from rare burial vaults, in general there seems to be little consideration for the spatial arrangements below-ground of large numbers of burials in close physical proximity.

Many modern cemeteries contain vaults and small mausoleums that can be both above-ground and extend below-ground. In some cemeteries there are issues of practicality due to hard bedrock or even a high water table prohibiting below-ground burial although it could be as much a custom as pragmatic choice. Much depends on the cemetery authorities' ideas on respectability and the social desire to emulate other famous cemeteries or create a more romanticised garden vision. It is in this practice that the modern cemetery can be distinguished and the style set, ranging from urban appearance of Père Lachaise, Paris to the woodland environment of Skogskyrkogården, Stockholm. Each cemetery set different regulations for the erection of mausoleums and within Assistens structures are present in the earliest Division and within the Monument Lines. Division G thus may be a fair representation of the cemetery overall except for Division A which allowed more vaults to be constructed in the early years. Within the excavation area none were visible above-ground and it was excavation that revealed the presence of a small row

of underground vaults on the Monument Line in the north-eastern pathway. No documentary evidence has been seen for their visible presence above-ground suggesting fully concealed structures yet the sheer scale of work and the long-term planning required for building a vault shows a sense of long-term planning and preparation for the secure burial of loved ones. The quality of the construction suggests specialised craftsmen were used to construct the vaults rather than cemetery staff but no research has been completed on this topic for this thesis.

Two vaults were investigated in Division G, there are more that are not visible above-ground. Both were outside of the main excavation trench but were still affected by the development works. One vault (G47) had a herringbone pattern brick floor and arched roof support and was of exceptional building quality. Although the roof did not survive and the vault was filled with soil there was evidence of some form of shelving in the form of two thick iron loops set within each wall. Integral to the structure was a small brick plinth at ground level which was probably used as a foundation for a large gravestone. Documentary records show the plot (P551) was bought by the Groth family in 1815 with two recorded burials, the first nine years later in 1826 (Fig. 25). The vault must have been constructed prior to this burial. The plot is abandoned in 1931 and the stele on the plot was kept by the cemetery because of its special decoration and inscription. Considering the size and investment of the vault there are few burials within it, which could either suggest removal of earlier burials or simply that any descendants did not retain the same view of the family plot and wished to be buried elsewhere.



**Fig. 25.**
The Groth vault (Plot 551) under excavation, 29 January 2010. The surrounding topsoil has been stripped by just over one metre to reveal the vault.

The second vault, belonging to the Hagen family (G186, P555) was of a similar quality of construction but markedly different in design. It had a central entrance to two deep vaults but only a shallow plot wall surrounding the rest of the double grave plot. The vault was nearly two metres deep at the central entrance with brick piers supporting an arched roof. Unfortunately this vault was not fully excavated as it was only partially within a deep excavation trench, only the central entrance and the western vault were examined. Presumably more coffins lay *in situ* in the unexcavated eastern vault. At an unknown date, upon removal of the roof the vault had been filled with earth but the coffins had not been removed leaving four which were excavated. The Municipal register shows the Hagan family purchased the plot in 1868 but there was an earlier purchase from the Parish register showing tenure from 1821 when the first burial is recorded. The plot is abandoned in 1980 but there is no record of the destruction or removal of any of the memorials in this year, they have since been re-erected on the cemetery. This plot is further described later in the text.

Another plot belonging to the Meyer family (P549, G97) had an unusually deep grave plot wall but no defined floor which suggests a hybrid between a fully enclosed vault and a simple boundary wall. There was some evidence of a small plinth foundation within the southern wall in the centre which may imply a foundation for a memorial similar to the Groth vault. Within this plot only two coffins were found in the western end of the plot with the eastern end being completely unused.

These rare examples mark out unusual efforts to separate each family from surrounding graves in vertical three-dimensional space not just in the above-ground horizontal axis. They also represent conspicuous consumption even if the vaults are not visible on a day-to-day basis; their presence would have been known in the community and visible upon the committal of the coffin. All are from the early years of the cemetery and intended for repeated use over many years. Overall construction of vaults was not common. Their concealment below-ground and efforts to create a bounded space suggest property but also, an emotional connection and feeling of care for the dead, wanting to provide a safe place that would be undisturbed long after death. The desire to create a physical boundary both above-, and below-ground is reminiscent of the need to protect domestic property with fences to keep people inside and to stop people coming in; in essence it is a control on moving between the boundaries which is mirrored in the control of visitor movement within the cemetery. Perhaps also the fear of incursion from other burials may have been ameliorated by the small walls which could act as a warning to gravediggers in case they trespassed into the owned soil. The sanctity of the grave plot was ensured and the bodies could be assumed to be lying in peace, protected by fixed boundaries. Soil did not general cover these coffins and there would be little opportunity for gravediggers to intervene and create charnel deposits or disturb the coffin. The plot is a three-dimensional entity with the gravestone as a centrepiece but it is the additions to the plot over time which are really expanded in the modern cemetery. The gravestone stems from a

longer tradition in the churchyard. It is the ability to continue and strengthen the family ties through physical representations in the plot that is clarified. Yet the gravestone too alters with time.

One idea that this chapter aims to present evidence for is that the grave plot should be treated as a complete entity from above to below. Four plots were chosen to interpret and discuss any connections (Fig. 26). Each example highlights particular issues and provokes new discussions on how material culture is used in modern cemeteries. The questions posed are to investigate if there is any difference between the two sets of evidence and then what these differences might mean. When the mourners are making decisions about the funeral and treatment of the body they may also be purchasing the plot and deciding how the above-ground should be decorated.
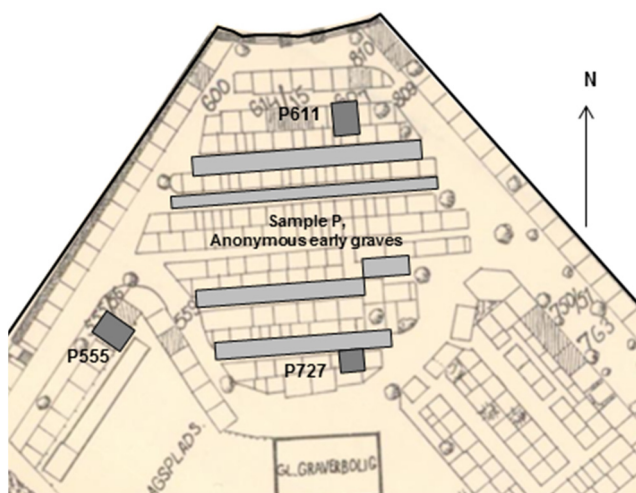


**Fig. 26.**
The location of the four cases used for discussion. The Hagan vault (P555), anonymous early graves, the Sass plot (P611) and the Rørup plot (P727).

## Case 1: an elaborate grave plot - the Hagan vault

The Hagan vault (P555, which also extended to cover P556) and family plot was one of the most highly elaborate and furnished and this extends both above- and below-ground. From early 20th century photographs of the plot the vault underneath cannot be observed. It is possible that there was an earlier roof structure which did extend above-ground but no archaeological evidence was found. The vault below-ground has already been described and although it was not fully excavated four burials were removed from within one section. This is in comparison to the only other burial vault examined which had been partially cleared of coffins although partial remains

were still present (P551, Groth family). The records of the total number of people buried within this plot may be incomplete as there could be more recorded only on the earlier Parish register and not in the Municipal register. However records suggest that at least nine people were buried there although the later burials which were placed on the other side of the vault were not excavated. The examined burials were extremely well-furnished, three (out of four) nameplates from the whole excavation were recovered from this vault and all were remarkably similar: lead scroll shapes with rosette decorations and extensive italic script. Unfortunately two were poorly preserved and only one was deciphered for Caroline Hagan who died in 1834 (G99). She was described as a mother of eleven children whose life was devoted to God, virtue and love. The coffins in the vault were well-built, with one having a raised roof and a false base in the coffin with the lead scrolls placed on the coffin lid (G167). Surviving personal items from the coffins were limited but included one wedding ring and a set of gold and amber-coloured glass earrings. This remarkable similarity of form and choice in coffin styles over a period of several decades from 1819 to 1834 shows a designed and controlled approach to the material expression of death which is connected to the initial intention of building the vault. Although not all of the burials recovered are securely identified, it seems likely that the date range is consistently early in the use of the cemetery.

Above-ground the gravestone is correspondingly elaborate, with one main memorial on the plot consisting of a tall squared block complete with urn-and-frieze decoration (Fig. 19) and an inset tablet dedicated to Haagan Hagan and his wife Caroline who died in 1821 and 1834. An early photograph from c. 1900 (Kryger 1985: 282, Fig 123) shows that the plot itself is more decorated earlier in the 19th century, with a decorated iron railing demarcating the plot, plant decoration and a second smaller marble tablet stone leaning against the main memorial. Unfortunately this second memorial is unreadable in the photograph. The railing and ground vegetation had been removed leaving only the main memorial, this may have occurred in 1980 when the plot was legally abandoned.

## Case 2: anonymous early graves

From examining one of the most ostentatious burial plots we turn towards some of the earliest but more anonymous burials, in this case line burials rather than a multiple plot. Analysis of the Parish register has identified the first large-scale use of the area north of the Sexton's House, Section P, between 1817 and 1820. During this period burials took place nearly every day. A total of 374 individual burials in this section are recorded in the Parish register. Only the 84 burials of Section P were excavated and identified. The rows were in limited space surrounded by pathways and dug to a regulated shallow depth. Sometimes two children or infants were buried

head-to-toe in separate graves using the space for one adult; otherwise the burials were placed in order according to the date of burial. Thus the location was not specifically chosen by the deceased or their mourners and there was no possibility to place family members close to each other. For a short period of time these burials may have been visible in the landscape as it is possible that the upturned soil and wooden crosses were originally present in the late 18th century. However there is no definitive evidence that the graves were marked; an illustration from 1823 by O.J. Rawerts (Jørgensen 2007: 9) suggests a relatively smooth lawn with little sign of these burials above-ground but it is likely that this drawing may not be completely accurate. Certainly leaving the mounds rather than levelling off the ground is possible and would have been consistent with illustrations of countryside churchyards. Where these small grave mounds were present they were considered to relate to pre-Christian traditions of burial mounds in Scandinavia and were associated with the prevention of the dead rising from their graves as revenants (Kragh 2003: 192). It is however impossible to state exactly how these early graves were commemorated and also possible that there was a great deal more elaboration of the grave plot. Of these graves, many have been truncated or completely removed by later burials but in places where the cemetery layout was altered, the landscape above became grass pathways between other family plots and therefore unmarked. The early line burials became anonymous but were also not necessarily forgotten by mourners who may still have visited. Staff at the cemetery was always aware of their presence.

The archaeological evidence demonstrates that these early burials were dug in a consistent manner, relatively close to the surface but not at the regulation depth (see Chapter 6). The burials themselves were also remarkably consistent, very few had any form of decoration on the coffin, only one is identified as showing a form of wooden raised platform (for flowers?) on a coffin which was for a 50 year old male who worked in the printing trade and died in 1819 (G821). However the other coffins were made of relatively poorly preserved wood, with flat lids and no surviving sign of interior textiles. Only one notable object was recovered, from a burial of a 25 year old female (osteologically determined) which has an inscription on the inside of the ring of '*19 Januari 1816 KH*' (G847). This burial has been identified as that of a 28 year old female buried in 1819 and this would  be a positive identity except that she is titled in the burial register as if she were unmarried (Jomfrue, Wiene 2011).  There are several possibilities to explain this difference, including that the ring is not a wedding ring but an engagement ring, that it does not actually belong to her, or that it is a mistake in the register. It is also possible that the archaeological identification is incorrect despite the contextual evidence being convincing. Apart from these two exceptions the vast majority of these early burials are remarkably homogenous, consisting of plain and poor quality wooden coffins with the person laid out on their back with arms generally along their sides and no surviving evidence of grave gifts.

## Case 3: extended families and long tenure - the Sass plot

The Sass grave plot (P611) was the only plot which was archaeologically surveyed *in situ* in 2010. It is an obvious example with which to examine connections between above and below in the material evidence. The plot would not be legally abandoned until 2020 but partway through the excavation it became legally possible to remove and reinter the burials elsewhere in the cemetery. It therefore had to be kept intact until this date and whilst construction work continued around the plot it was fenced off and left untouched (Fig. 27). In June 2010 cemetery staff removed the gravestones and the three registered burials in the current tenure could be removed. The plot was typical of this area of the cemetery with a low hedge surrounding the plot and a small entrance gap and small bushes, the surface was gravel with a stone circle in the centre of the plot. Three gravestones were present although they had been laid flat and in most respects the plot is identical to how it is shown in the 1986 survey, except that the gravestones were upright and the background showed a dense thick hedge with no clear view to the Sexton's House behind the plot to the south. The plot was relatively well-maintained in 1986.

There were three gravestones present, two which commemorate members of the Sass family and one for the Petersen family. The Petersen gravestone belonged to the plot adjacent to the west (P612) and the gravestone has been moved onto the Sass family plot. The people commemorated are recorded as being buried within the Petersen plot. Despite this, there is a similarity in shape and form of the white marble tablets and the Petersen gravestone has been deliberately set up together on the Sass plot, so it is unlikely to be a mistake. The Petersen tablet records the burial of three people between 1848 and 1879 and has a simple cross on the top of the stone. An early map of this part of the cemetery shows the two plots as joined and there is a family connection with two females having the same surname of Berg. The Petersen plot was bought in 1845 and the first recorded burials from the Sass family on gravestone evidence is from 1844 showing that the plots were likely bought around the same time. There may also be a professional connection between the families as two of the men were involved in shipping. The oldest Sass gravestone records four individuals, a husband and wife with two children, buried between 1844 and 1847. Although one young infant is only recorded as being buried before the man with no specific date and it is uncertain if the child was actually buried within this plot. The gravestone has a cross on the tablet, corresponding to the gravestone of the Petersen's which is dated to only one year later. The final gravestone records three people buried from 1917 to 1970 which represents the next generation of the Sass family, this stone is a little larger and more elaborate with an obelisk head but no cross. The two males also have more personal description noting that both are honoured as a Knight of the Dannebrog and the son as a Royal-approved ship broker. Through its decoration and gravestones this grave plot marks out a form of social positioning and status but also

understandings of family love and affection with a need for adjacent burial plots and the deliberate preservation and move of the Petersen gravestone.



**Fig. 27.**
The Sass plot (P611) which is undisturbed prior to excavation and showing the gravestones and plot decoration in situ with the Sexton's House in the background, 15 June 2010. The profile of the plot from the side illustrates the depth of the graves and the space around the plot.

Only the Sass plot was fully excavated and there can be some comparison of burial customs between the plot and the coffins below. The two latest coffins were metal lined and well-preserved (G1007); these were reburied directly without being opened. On the exterior was elaborate decoration of the coffin with beading and moulding on the sides. Fragments of textiles could be seen both inside and outside of the coffin, particularly in the strong black hessian straps to lower the coffin into the grave. However the father who had died in 1917 was buried within a plain and simple wooden coffin with no elaboration observed (G960); this is in sharp contrast to the two later burials. This may reflect personal taste but there was a distinct increase in decoration by the widow's burial in 1945 just after the Second World War. As a highly decorated coffin of Copenhagen citizens, it is a direct contrast to what was happening in Denmark which was coping with a large amount of German refugees. Many German refugees who died in Copenhagen would be buried in Vestre cemetery and were treated in quite a different way, buried in cardboard boxes in long trenches with shared gravestones (Jensen, J.V. 2011). The distinct elaboration of the Sass burial may be a social statement of the family's position in the 1940s in direct contrast to the wider situation at the time as a well as a statement of love and affection.

Although it is clear that the same owners used the plot, the first tenure was completed in 1887 and not renewed for three years. The second tenure was started in 1890 and renewed without gaps until 2020. Only the three latest burials recorded as having been undertaken during the most current unbroken tenure of the plots needed to be reburied. The four earlier burials recorded on the gravestones were not legally associated with the second tenure. Although it was paid for until 2020 they did not have to be reburied in a new plot despite the strong evidence that identified them as the same family, the parents and siblings of the last burials. There was also archaeological evidence of two other adult coffins within the plot, both were truncated and disturbed by the later burials with some major bones missing (G948, G961). These burials were simple wooden coffins, poorly preserved and with no surviving clothing or gifts. There was no evidence for the two children recorded on the gravestone, it is likely that they were removed by later burials and no charnel or loose bones were found in these grave fills. Identifying the father required osteological examination and scrutiny of the stratigraphic sequence to securely identify this specific burial separately from the other legally abandoned burials. Even before the family plot was bought it seems likely that there could have been a line burial in that space from approximately 1817 but no evidence has been found. This potential line burial which has not been identified in the records would have become abandoned in 1837 thus leaving the space free to be reused from that period. Therefore there are three missing burials within this plot, two of which are recorded on gravestones. The continuity of this family plot can be seen in the gravestones which have been kept despite technically being able to be removed. The early Sass gravestone could have

been removed from 1867 and the neighbouring Petersen gravestone in 1937 when the plot was abandoned. Instead it seems as if the plot was renewed and the stones moved to continue a sense of group identity, despite the stones not representing the actual placement of the bodies or in some cases continuing the presence of the bodies below-ground.

## Case 4: combining coffin and cremation burials- the Rørup plot

This example is an opportunity to describe changes in funeral traditions in a typical family plot (P727) which also has good evidence for cremation burials (Fig. 18). It was bought in May 1896 by the Rørup family, one month before the first burial. The plot continued in use with several extensions until 1988, a gap of 12 years between renewals shows that there wasn't an immediate need for space in Assistens as the plot was not sold within this period. Of the seven people recorded in the burial registers, two coffins and four cremations were excavated and identified. The last cremation is unaccounted for. Three entries are recorded as being buried in urns with a further two urn burials suspected but not recorded as such. Firstly because the plot was not purchased for the required length of grave peace for a coffin burial and secondly that in a small plot of 4.5m² there would have been little space left for an extra coffin. However the Rørup's purchase was not the first use of this space, the registers show that the first use of the space was a line burial in 1820 of an eight-day old boy. Between 1840 when the plot would have become legally available again and 1896 there is, as yet, no record of other burials but it is probable that space was used within this period. No trace of them remains above-ground but below-ground there were some charnel remains of an adult – skull, femur and other long bones that were present suggesting incomplete removal of at least one adult burial but no trace of a child.

In 1986 the plot appeared relatively well-maintained with a grass surface and low hedge border, with small trees, conifers and flowers. The three white marble tablet gravestones are set up in a curve and are relatively similar in size and form which makes an aesthetically aligned display. The three gravestones record the seven people buried in the tenure. One gravestone has no date but records four names and their relationship to each other – a married couple and two adult daughters and from comparison with burial registers confirms that it details people buried from 1896 to 1968. This gravestone represents the first burial in 1896 but also of the widow, some 32 years later when the grave plot had officially been abandoned but was then rebought. The second gravestone records one person who died in 1929 and is recorded as a faithful friend. The similarity of the weathering of the marble gravestones suggest that these two gravestones could have been set up at a similar time possibly when the plot was rebought in 1928 indicating that no previous gravestone

had been placed over the first burial. The last gravestone records two burials from 1958 and 1971 of a husband and mother where the text suggests that there was another surviving family member, a child perhaps who is not buried within this plot. This gravestone indicates that two different people are responsible for the inscription at two different times. The first with the death of the husband in 1958 being ordered by the widow and with the death of the mother in 1971, the inscription is added to the gravestone by a surviving child. Therefore this single stone shows evidence of a new engraving being added to the stone with two different actors. Inscriptions detailing emotional loss are also present in the phrases for 'my dear husband' and 'my faithful friend'.

The two earliest burials are both coffins with unusual features, the earliest from 1896 of an older male (G1565) with a coffin of unusual form with the base boards running transverse across the base rather than along the length. There were also traces of a woollen cardigan held together with ribbon and a small ceramic copy of the Jesus statue by Bertel Thorvaldsen placed by the upper arms. It is one of the few overtly religious symbols found within the excavated grave goods. The next coffin burial of an older female from 1926 (G1472) also contained distinctive elaboration with a coffin made with zinc sheets, layered with wood and a raised lid, a small amount of wood shavings found in the base. There were fragments of a cardigan, a gold ring and a broad silk cloth tied around the head. Both burials showed care and consideration of the individual in both public observation of the coffin and gifts within the coffin including everyday clothing. All the later burials were of cremation urns, distributed within the plot, which reflects the mid-20th century increase in cremation over inhumation. All were round iron urns, some in poor condition and only two could be securely identified by a cremation tag to 1929 (G198) and 1958 (G193). There were no other signs of care for these burials although it is possible that two urns were carefully placed together in the same cut. Here is a distinct alteration in burial form from coffins to cremation which however allowed all of the family to be buried together without much disturbance in a small plot.

## Comparing practices above-, and below-ground

There is a complex intersection between private emotions and public display in both the grave plot and decorations and the display aspects of the person in the coffin. Some of this complexity appears to be present in the plots studied. The first two examples are both rare survivors from the early periods of burials within Division G although the social status marked out through plot features and material culture differs considerably. From the Hagan plot there are efforts to create a group identity that could be experienced both above-ground and below, the bodies and memories of the individuals were grouped together, safely enclosed by the vault and the iron

railing. The original purchasers of the plot encouraged a clear material identity to extend beyond each individual life. The Hagan plot is a very clear example showing a distinct connection between the two spheres, of private and public mourning; it also highlights a characteristic of burials within vaults which could potentially be observed over for a longer period than most coffins albeit to a limited number of people. Therefore this required a nameplate and elaboration of the coffin, similar to burials which were seen in small family vaults such as Chelsea, London (Cowie, Kausmally *et al.* 2008) and Birmingham (Brickley, Buteux *et al.* 2006). Identifying the coffins is a pragmatic record of the individual but also a confirmation of the family business, status, identity and a continuation of remembrance. The elaboration shows a mixture of both public and private expressions of emotional loss and family display and identity. Far from being a place of equality the modern cemetery continued to present significant class differences in design and presence of material culture. Furthermore in the denial or rapid removal of gravestones from cheaper plots it enforced the idea that display in the modern cemetery was the preserve of a small minority (Francis, Kellaher *et al.* 2000: 48). This was enacted until the mid-20th century when smaller and more equal memorials could be afforded by all sections of society.

The sparse evidence from the early individual plots emphasises that little material has survived to mark the potential range of behaviours and sense of grieving and loss on the part of their surviving families. Above-ground these burials may potentially have been marked out for around 20 years until the 1840s when the legal limit of abandonment meant the space could be reused or not represented above-ground at all. The landscape of this burial area potentially changed from rows of temporary wooden crosses surrounded by young trees, with an occasional large monument such as the Hagan's to a more complex environment with now mature trees and vegetation, levelling off any mounds and the laying out of new pathways. The anonymous early graves where above-ground features may have existed but have been erased were likely to have been plain and this is continued below the surface in the material culture of the relatively unfurnished burials. The early line burials differed because they contained relatively few grave goods in comparison to most other burials, the arm position was also remarkably homogenous and coffins of very poor quality likely made from an ordinary carpenter rather than a specialist. The complexities of intangible rituals or practices involved in both contexts remain unknown. Whilst the landscape above has altered, much of what lies beneath is intact. For those people whose burials survived until the archaeological excavation in 2009-11, their remains survived longer in the ground than many other more expensive and prestigious burials in the family plots. The continuing presence of these burials, although they are unmarked above-ground, is seen in the archives and memory of the cemetery administration and now in archaeological records. So both types of early burial, regardless of price paid, are now commemorated by an alternative archaeological record as well as individual or family memory.

The Rørup grave plot provides an example of a typical usage of a 20th century plot with different burial types and later the sharing of space with friends. There are also at least two examples where servants are noted as also being buried within a family plot (P51, P614) and it is equally likely that other people who were not biologically related are included within family plots. The Sass grave plot also has a connection with a likely extended family in the adjacent plot; both indicate close personal and emotional ties in terms of similarity of gravestone, sharing of burial space and some similarity in burial fashions below-ground. Both plots exemplify the idea of very broad and encompassing ideas of family in Copenhagen. However the connections between burial fashions below-ground and commemorations above-ground are different when comparing these two plots. The early burials of the Sass family are simple but become increasingly embellished with use of more complex and expensive materials yet these are not visible above-ground in the relatively plain gravestones which create a homogenous perspective on the family as a unit. The Rørup grave plot is from the turn of the 20th century and also has a relatively homogenous above-ground decoration style but below-ground there is a sense of equal treatment of people with two earlier burials with good quality coffins and care in burial gifts. As cremation becomes more popular the practice changes for the rest of the people buried in the plot but equal treatment continues with the ashes buried in similar style urns. Whilst the Sass funeral traditions become more elaborate, the Rørups make use of a new style of disposal in the cremation urns. This change in below-ground deposition is not visible in either of the above-ground memorials which are overwhelmingly displaying an effort towards equality within the plot.

# The public relationship between the living and the dead

This chapter emphasises the visible and above-ground use of the cemetery through the choice of expression represented in material culture in the grave plot decoration and gravestones. It sought to provide some evidence with which to interpret changes in how the relationship between the living and the dead in the 19th and 20th century were handled.

The concept of a 'decent burial' which is closely tied with socially controlled ideals of what is appropriate is connected to what the cemetery management has defined as correct burial procedure. The cemetery regulations and guidance for which design features were appropriate were used by the cemetery gardeners to provide a framework within which mourners can make decisions. At this point the idea of transcripts, as the interaction between tangible and intangible actions and practises can reveal both concealed and dominant societal ideals (Scott, J. 1991). This can be applied to this practice of elaborating death traditions and it is clear that all sections

of society are tightly connected with dominant ways of acting when faced with the necessary arrangements around a death. However people do drive the changes in burial choice and commemoration and cemeteries respond to the changes, although sometimes slowly. The material world shows that the act of ordering and desiring certain types of plot or gravestone designs are active, even if the person is not physically making the items themselves. Commemoration is an active word; it implies an embodiment of actions, rituals and behaviours that will take place as opposed to a passive sense of grieving and loss. These acts include purchase of a plot, arranging the funeral, visiting and tending the grave but also the static gravestone and what part it plays. It is a more active sense of memory making, not just remembering a thought but is a reminder that both remembering and forgetting can be dynamic acts.

What was identified in Assistens was that grave plots help to materialise the relations between living and dead members of the family. They were designed to provide a contextual index, or network within which can be situated connections between mourners and the dead. They also represent grief and emotional loss and need to continue a relationship between themselves and the dead which has been fundamentally changed but not ended. All decisions contain the idea that the gravestones represent private and personal reactions that will be present in public so there are lines which may not be crossed. This could consist of expressions or symbols that would be considered unacceptable by society in general or by the cemetery. The physical remains in the landscape may also involve the sense of personal loss and the commemoration of individuals and families but is essentially not a private signal but is about how people choose to be presented and remembered. The strong social forces within the living society create a new role for the mourners of the dead, similar to what is described as a Cambridge change by philosopher Geoffrey Scarre (2007: 106-10). A wife becomes a widow or parents die and their children become the head of the family. Although the mourners themselves do not change, the death transforms their position into a new situation of having to deal with the death and commemorate in socially appropriate forms. Gravestones and plots remind the living of their position in society and reinforce the relationships that hold them in that position. I suggest that they also create and enforce boundaries between the family and the rest of the community creating a sense of exclusivity and privacy.

The survey images from 1986 show only the end point of an accumulation of decisions. However we need to extrapolate from this moment in time to create a diachronic perspective over the 200 years of active life of the cemetery area. It is appropriate to look with different temporalities because the landscape of the cemetery is continually and actively influenced by the existing memorials and decorations. Like any physical entity, a cemetery is never inert but continually changing, decaying and having more material added (Hodder 2012: 4-5). Clearly there are changes but there was continuity and retention of practices which show the enduring connections between the churchyard and cemetery practices. There was a continuity of practices

from the 18th century and earlier in styles of gravestone symbols and texts. The transition from Classical and Romantic allegories to plainer styles or styles referencing the natural world took time but is evident in the mid-19th century. The *grotte* memorials which combine roughly carved granite with inset white marble tablets express the contradictory sense of the cemetery. It is presented as a natural world but is a carefully designed garden environment while the easily carved marble references the older styles of gravestone. Mourners also took advantage of the increase in range of available materials, colours and decorations such as the use of polished granite in the early 20th century. The real change here is the expansion of access to a greater proportion of the population. By this period people using the modern cemetery have developed new ways to deal with the materiality of death and burial. This is the change in removing references to the place of the body, but not so much replacing them with references to sleeping but instead a sense of place in the world and a closer relation to the natural environment. Changes are clear in how professions are increasingly inscribed on gravestones or how women are also presented as individuals rather than attachment to a husband.

However there is no drastic shift in gravestone style in the mid-20th century to reflect a change in attitudes to burial and death, this date is frequently referred to as a shift in perception and feelings towards death (Kryger 1985; Fjord Jensen 2002; Kragh 2003; Sommer 2008). There is no strong evidence of this shift occurring in the Division G gravestones but there are examples in the rest of the cemetery where there are minor examples of new materials or designs introduced but a sharp change in the type or form of gravestones is absent. For example there is an increase in the use of cremation by the middle of the 20th century yet there is no corresponding shift in style or commemoration when erecting a gravestone which marks the burial of a cremation urn rather than a coffin.

Micronarratives of specific plots have been used to provide a deeper description and understanding of the choices that were faced by people over a long-term perspective for their dead. These detailed views presenting both above-ground plot elements and below-ground funerary material culture shows up the different temporalities that are held within each spatial plot. There is the long-term view covering the entire plot of ownership and tenure rights combined with each individual burial added to it. Private and public acts and decisions intersect here with rules and regulations but also tangible and intangible acts at the funeral. The below-ground material caters more closely to a private and short-term time scale, focused on the individual while trying to relate that to the burial plot. Connections between above and below-ground acts and material culture were also sought but there appear to be little clear linear relationship between the two. There is the contradiction of the earliest burials described in the expensive Hagen plot compared with the early line burials where mourners had little or no agency to direct the display. There is also the creation of family identities in the two later more typical plots where the impact of new

technologies appeared to have only minimal effect in the 20th century but new ideas and use of materials were present. Overwhelmingly the importance of the above-ground public practices dominates the perceptions surrounding the general public and the also the family's response to death. Yet the private identity below-ground did not always express the same ideas.

The practicalities of burial demand also motivated changes in urban cemeteries; the need to reuse space helped to create the regulated practices of the modern cemetery in a way that was not so deliberately transformative for rural or small town churchyards. The comprehensive study by Kragh (2003) of rural death and burial practices in Denmark emphasises the data outside of the capital city but there are different factors that need to be considered in the capital city. The need for burial space in the cities created a more formal response for more controlled burial registers, based upon the standards created for parish registers but then developed into a new system of recording. The data formed part of institutional knowledge which created the opportunity for faster renewal and reuse of plots so eventually new ways would be sought to continue to commemorate individuals beyond a fixed, long-term plot. The rise and fall of family burial plots is a strong feature of the modern cemetery. They were not new inventions of cemeteries but their increased access for larger sections of the population is a defining feature. Yet they are also time limited both in legal contract and in social acceptance. They are a response to the period where the larger, multi-generational family would be expressed through cemeteries and funeral commemoration and be an important part of identity. This fades in the 20th century, reduced to one generation, often a couple with their children buried elsewhere. This appears to be structured by the cemetery regulations creating a time limited space which fits into a single generation rather than multiple generations. Yet it also fits in with mourner's requirements to create a smaller and more defined grave space. Commemoration and treatment of burials in churchyards focused on how the individual fitted into the parish community, modern cemeteries allow more people the opportunity to emphasise the family and the individual by themselves.

In recognising the strength of the materiality of the gravestones and their active relationship to what lies beneath we can turn to the reburial of all of the excavated material from Assistens. One of the principles driving the acceptance of archaeological investigation in Assistens was that all remains would be reburied on the cemetery. Just a few metres south of the excavation many different individuals were buried together in new coffins in new individual graves. Small hollows in the grass marks the new graves but many of the original abandoned gravestones from Division G have been set up again. However there is no longer any connection to the below-ground physical remains. The gravestones are not set up over the exact position of the individuals they identify, they are no longer placed in the same relationship to each other and all contextual relations have been lost both above and below. Everybody excavated, regardless of historical payment or legal contract, regardless of class, gender or wealth

have one single new memorial provided by the Metro Company (Fig. 28). The new gravestone is very simple, with no names, dates, relationships or status; it treats all the individuals in the same way and simply records the date and cause of the removal and reburial in the cemetery. It is a commemorative memorial rather than an authentic gravestones (Munk 2010: 232).The action of setting up the new commemorative gravestone was undertaken with good intentions and inspired by the disturbance of the remains which could legally have been removed without archaeological investigation or any commemoration. Division G in Assistens has undergone a transformation from a cemetery to an area acceptable for the comprehensive removal of everything to make it into a Metro station. The cemetery landscape has been reshaped according to the requirements of society in the early 21st century. It can be re-interpreted again for a new narrative which has no place for a porous and moveable boundary between above and below but is reserved instead for a neutralised, softened cemetery environment.



**Fig. 28.**
The communal and anonymous gravestone set up over the new burial space in Division E, it appears to commemorate the excavation and reburial rather than the individuals or families. Set up behind it are some of the gravestones moved from Division G, although there is no longer any relationship between the memorials and the people they commemorate with the below-ground burials, 11 September 2013.

Looking at the relationship between the living and the dead, it is more useful to move away from simplified and separated living/dead dichotomies towards a network of material culture that includes the living and dead bodies. There is a transformation from living to death but this is a personal and psychological (and very individual) experience. That transformation inevitably affects the mourners too.  But a body doesn't necessarily disappear immediately and all relations to or with the person are

not severed at death but continue through intangible ways in memory or though the materiality of the grave plot. Tim Flohr Sørensen discusses how memorials influence people as 'affective agents for continual re-negotiation' (2011: 172). This is similar to the small girl visiting her father's grave at the start of this chapter who used her imagination and the physical memorials to create a new narrative of life and death which may have been very different to the intentions of those who set them up. If we live in an entangled physical and intangible world it follows that there is a constant re-adaptation of responses to the material culture, the body and emotion. This process happens to gravediggers and casual visitors, reading a name on a memorial and responding to it, creating a relationship with that material experience which is used in multiple ways. That integral world also continues in the choices made for the funeral material which would be placed underground.

# Chapter 5.

# Private and professional funerary practices

The Copenhagen artist Folmer Bendtsen (1907-1993) specialised in portrayals of working class life in and around the city particularly in the Vesterbro and Nørrebro neighbourhoods. His 1944 painting shown on the front cover depicts a funeral procession in Assistens with the white coffin followed by mourners and undertakers. The yellow cemetery wall and the houses of Nørrebro dominate the background. The painting illustrates the different groups who intersect at the funeral – the mourners, the undertaker, wider community and the dead person themselves who were involved in choosing and arranging the material culture of the burials. What did they choose, what restrictions limited their choice and what was decided for them? Investigating the surviving burial traditions archaeologically can provide some insights.

It is very unlikely that anybody involved in a funeral as depicted in 1944 would imagine that 65 years later burials like this would have been excavated as an archaeological project which revealed some of these personal choices. Within Assistens five individuals were identified from 1944, all of them adults; at least three were buried in white coffins similar to the painting. Inside the coffins was evidence of the choices made in furnishing each individual with traces of clothing and buttons, straw packing around the bodies and in one (G1393) a wedding ring and the unique find of a metal Kings Emblem badge (*Kongemærket*). In 1944 Denmark was still under German rule and from 1940 badges with the monogram of King Christian X had been worn to symbolise a patriotic statement against the occupation. The use of this badge exemplifies how an object can be situated within a network of references to the political and social situation and also be a personal statement important enough to be used as funeral material culture. Whether it expresses the individual's or mourner's opinions the physical object displayed a message which it retains today. The badge may have been on display only for a short period of time before the coffin was closed but it illustrates the ideas that putting objects in burials still held power for those living.

The above-ground choices surrounding cemeteries, plots and gravestones have been discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. This chapter examines the more private and personal function of cemeteries, looking at what was chosen to be placed below-ground as coffins and urns and also what was put inside them. This is developed through a narrative on choice: by whom and how the choices are made, by what parameters are these choices constrained, and how choice might enable greater freedom to express personal ideals. The focus and most of the activity can start far outside of the cemetery, long before the funeral with decisions often made within the life of the deceased. This process highlights the decision-making of the person, the people who mourn them and arrange their funeral and increasingly the influence of professionals through the development of the undertaking business. The dead may have stipulated their wishes either through a will or perhaps dictated to a priest before their death. Here there is an interface with modernity in regulating and commercialising the world of dealing with the dead body. This is between a slow-growing professionalisation of the trades providing services for funeral such as the carpenters and undertakers and a continued demand of personal and private expressions of love, relationships and grief. As with the gravestones, there is no simple separation of private expressions made public and the commercial services which fulfil them but a compromise between commercial industrially produced materials with specific personal choices of elaboration. It is within these frameworks that changes in funeral material culture are examined in this chapter. This is worked through within a narrative of following the trajectory of the body from death to the placement of the coffin in the grave. It examines the new or changing materials, colours, ideas and designs, and also the continuation of pre-existing funeral culture.

The central questions focus on the distinctive features that are present below-ground in the cemetery and how they structure the relationship between the living and the dead. How is the treatment of the body developed through the material culture and funeral traditions? Analysis comprises three strands: firstly the person inside, how they were positioned and presented, the clothing and adornment of the body. Secondly looking at the physical container – the coffin and urns, how they was constructed and decorated, the materials, colours, internal furnishings. Thirdly, the grave goods outside the coffin, whether handcrafted or commercially made, items used in life or newly bought. The term grave good is used here to specifically refer to more common uses of the term within older periods of archaeological studies, to link back to archaeological studies of material culture.

There are also objects specifically purchased for the funeral and objects already owned and used in life directly placed as an extra gift or to represent a relationship. Some objects contain elements of both. A blanket may be a newly-bought commercially made object but it wraps the body and serves as part coffin furnishing and part personal grave good. A highly decorated coffin may serve as a physical container but also a personal gift if decorated in a way that specifically represents the deceased and

thus serve as a grave good too. Working within these categories the questions asked serve as interfaces between different types of grave goods or furnishings and construct a narrative to interpret the wider social questions concerning how the living respond to, and deal with the dead body in the 19th and 20th century.

Research into post-Reformation burial is dominated by interpretations of the transition from the seemingly unvarying medieval Christian customs to the invention of new funeral traditions. However the broad continuity of death practices within Western Europe since the medieval period has been traced by Philippe Ariès (1981 [1977]). For him the great change in modern society is marked from the early 19th century where death is removed from visible society. This is held to be the opposite of the visible and public traditions and ideals held in the earlier Christian world. The idea of death being denied was extended and elaborated further in the 20th century with the impact of the two European wars (Gorer 1965; Ariès 1981 [1977]: 560). However other researchers stress the importance of earlier periods of change from the 17th or 18th century (Tarlow 1999a; Tagesson 2015). The relationship between class and social expectation of a respectable burial are also considered (Strange 2003). This ties in also with the immediate memory and emotional responses of loss of the dead around the event of the funeral. Comparisons between above-, and below-ground material culture are continued in this chapter. Does poor quality or a lack of grave material culture below-ground also mean above-ground was represented in similar form? Where were the differences?

Funeral furnishings and grave goods are a common entry point for researchers when examining traditions surrounding death. Themes that highlight societal change and power hierarchies are common (Tarlow 1999a: 23) but there has been a notable change towards recognising the multiplicity of meanings within the complex rituals and materiality surrounding death. Principally that the elaboration of burials is not necessarily always linked to social hierarchies but is also connected to diverse factors such as individual personality and emotional response. Interpretation of excavated groups of people has also stressed immigrant, ethnic or religious identities (Mollesen & Cox 1993; Henderson, Miles *et al.* 2013) but there are also broad ideals emerging from the late 18th century which link death with metaphors of sleep and the creation of the beautiful body in death (Tarlow 1999b: 189; Hallam & Hockey 2001: 144). These metaphors appear to have a wide ranging but variable influence upon burial customs and grave goods. By the 20th century in Europe a broad set of commonly understood burial practices can be described as being increasingly altered and disordered with multiple meanings derived from a single practice or object. This chapter starts by presenting the information found from Assistens and setting it into a wider context of funeral practices from other European cemeteries. Discussion then leads into analysis of how social, economic and personal factors may affect funerary arrangements as represented in Assistens.

# Shaping choices and decision-making in creating a funeral

In a similar manner to grave plots and gravestones, the people planning the funeral are likely to be influenced in their choice by what they have experienced before. Pre-existing gravestones set a standard for what should be present above-ground, so previous experience of funerals set the standards for what might be chosen for coffins or clothing. The contemporary Copenhagen undertaker Naja Genet May (pers. comm, 2013) describes this as a crisis point in funeral arrangements and those parameters are certain to have been present in earlier periods too. The dead person's and their mourner's wishes and emotions are expressed within the boundaries of social acceptance and also authoritarian rules about the choices which are allowed. Yet people can also react against the standard use of material culture. Deliberately choosing unusual coffin styles or alternative clothing can specifically mark out the funeral. There is a flexible power relationship between the agents creating the funeral and burial consisting of the mourners, undertakers, religious and secular authorities.

When considering the decision-making process surrounding the funeral the influence of the social institutions that have controlled and regulated rituals around death and the funeral are vital. In medieval and Reformation Europe it was the community, family, and neighbours, allied with the Church who primarily shaped how death was managed. After the 16th century there is increasing regulation by the state authorities and this secular response was part of a wider movement into the regulation of daily life which slowly reduces the power of the Church. New regulations were supposed to increase order within society which was needed to run the emerging modern nation-state. Death was no longer a local problem but a social and secular problem to be managed (Schönbäck 2008: 16). From the late 18th century in Europe when people were increasingly on the move from the country to urban communities, the population was rising rapidly, religious belief was diversifying and the nature of economic production was shifting from agricultural labour to industry and services, death was another aspect of life that could be harnessed into the secular municipal realm. This regulatory response need not always be represented as a class struggle or of imposing dominance but equally the response was often precisely that. The primary way to respond and control death was medicalization of the process from being a natural part of the life cycle to attempts to prevent death, controlling circumstances around where it happened and how it should be dealt with (Porter 2001). The new regulations were positive intentions to improve people's situation and environment but also create a more ordered way of life. The recording systems implemented borrow from improved existing systems of recording people's life events. Individual parish churches have long kept burial registers which are often extremely detailed but new registers were overseen by the state and had subtly different intentions. They were part of a need to have accurate population statistics as well as details including the recording of burial location, payment and length of grave right to enable the

forecast of future cemetery needs. The new burial registers used in Assistens by the 1880s were now part of the wider secular authority which was able to use the information gathered for multiple purposes in society. They were concerned with managing the current population and planning for the future.

Parallel with the increasing state efforts of restricting burial location in Denmark in the 19th century (Helweg 2010: 122) there are also limitations surrounding treatment of the body or methods of disposal including how to dispose of cremation ashes. While earlier sumptuary laws restricting the use of silk or costly furs from the 17th and 18th century (Aagaard 2002: 101) may no longer apply, the state continues to influence the overall framework of managing the dead body. Although hospitals and poorhouses were often charity foundations they too had to interact with the secular management of death. Despite the growth of secular legislation the Danish church still retains influence over burial rituals mostly in the rituals of the funeral which have changed little since the 19th century (Kragh 2003: 103), rather than specifying precise materials of the coffin, burial clothes and grave gifts. The influence of religious practices is more subtle and originates within long-running understandings of how a funeral should be organised and how a plot should be decorated.

Modern cemeteries in the 19th century seemed to be more concentrated upon imposing rules on the visible aspects such as memorials and above-ground features of the environment rather than what went into the ground. They are primarily concerned with procedural matters such as the allocation of space and recording and payment for the upkeep of the cemetery. It is only later in the 20th century that there was more focus on environmental concerns of what would be placed inside the coffin. For example when reburying the excavated individuals from Assistens any plastic bags or tags that were used for identification during analysis had to be removed in order to comply with cemetery rules concerning non-polluting materials. Despite the mixture of different authorities, the rules and regulations may impress a sense of order and control upon a stressful time but the likelihood of them being followed precisely may be variable.

In the discussion presented the decisions made in creating a funeral have often been attributed to the people mourning the dead person. However there is another prime actor involved in the arrangement of the funeral and the provision of funeral material culture – the undertaker. The dead person who may have left instruction prior to death and those in charge of their burials arrange the details but it is these professionals that deal with burial who help to shape most of the choices surrounding what happens. These can involve competing ideals and aims that clash with the same standard idea of burial. A synthesis is created between the competing ideals and aims of what should be included for the standard burial (Baker 2012). The selection of each aspect of the burial goods and furnishings has limiting factors (such as cost,

available stock and timing) but there are opportunities to test these boundaries which can be pushed to create a funeral that strays outside of the standard view of what a burial should be. All of these factors will affect the choice of clothing, furnishing and possibly even personal grave goods. An example of this is the decision to bury somebody with unusual grave goods. The inclusion of a book by the French writer Voltaire under the mattress in a coffin in Helsingør may have been a strong personal statement of radical thought for the period marking out the person's beliefs (Hvass 2002: 89). Disagreements can arise over burials amongst mourners over furnishing the burial or in the differences between the church and cemetery. Or they can arise between groups in stepping across boundaries of what each considers their jurisdiction. The deceased person may have wanted to include personal mementos, jewellery or clothing expressing their identity however mourners may disagree and choose instead to keep jewellery as a keepsake or heirloom. An undertaker has a professional understanding of what clothing or items work better in certain situations but may also want to encourage mourners to buy special burial clothes from their catalogue therefore influencing the material cultural chosen. The role of the professional undertaker here is vital in understanding the 20th century, where they slowly became the arbiter and controller of 'good taste' where much of the decision making is left to them.

For this chapter it is the interface between undertakers and mourners that is the key point when decisions are taken regarding private and professional burial traditions. Today in Denmark people have generally already formed ideas on how to bury their dead before speaking to undertakers. They then negotiate their way between cost, stated wishes of the deceased and beliefs amongst other factors to arrive at the final decisions (Naja Genet May pers. comm, 2013). This is a contrast to reports by 19th century London undertakers where the structure of the funeral and many decisions were left to them (Litten 1991: 30). The understanding of how a funeral should be created and performed comes from the personal experience of attending other funerals or marketing by undertakers which helps to shape ideas upon what is 'appropriate' or 'decent'. There is a mixture of shared understanding from this experience but this is coupled with both the deliberate and unconscious influence of the undertaker's practice which is now a fully developed commercial market.


### The origins of the Copenhagen funeral industry

The role of the undertaker has been explored in the UK, France, United States and Sweden over the 19th and 20th century (Mitford 1963; Litten 1991; Kselman 1993; Davidsson Bremborg 2002). There are many similarities between these countries in how it developed as a business but in each country it originates from slightly different points. The modern Danish term for undertaker is *bedemand* (Den Store Danske.

Gyldendals Åbne Encyklopædi 2014) which derives from the verb to ask or invite and originated in the position of a specific person who arranged all formalities in respect to religious ceremonies including baptisms, wedding and funerals. In this respect it is similar to the role played by the town crier in France which gradually took over many similar functions (Kselman 1993: 224). The term *bedemand* was in use in the early 18th century mentioned as a profession in a comedy by Ludvig Holberg published in 1731. However its current meaning dates from the late 19th century when it becomes more commonly used in reference only in the provision of funeral services (1920). The original role of *bedemand* became more formalised in Copenhagen during the 18th century when there were eight positions appointed by the authorities, five *bedemand* covered a specific area of the city and the other three were responsible for the Royal Court, University and Admiralty. Copenhageners were obliged to use their services which in effect created a strong monopoly over burial services (Christensen 1912: 339) however the Jewish community had their own separate burial organisation, which was unaffected by most of these regulations (Margolinsky 1958). In principle *bedemand* acted to ensure that the various regulations and obligations were carried out correctly when organising the event, including ordering from approved craftsmen and ensuring all obligatory fees were paid. There was no single business that covered all of these tasks and few municipal rules directly concerning funerals but there was a large amount of complex customs and obligations surrounding the funeral and burial. Payment to the church was necessary for the burial space, the services of the priest and after 1826 an extra payment instituted to the Cathedral of Our Lady in Copenhagen for burial within any city churchyard. This was used to encourage the use of the new cemeteries (Christensen 1912: 40). Bell ringing was an additional payment to the relevant parish church. There were also regulations on payments to various Copenhagen city institutions such as the Our Lady School and if the funeral was more extravagant, then also to the Metropolitan School (Christensen 1912: 336). Carpenters, upholsterers and tailors were needed to supply the coffin, furnishings and clothes. Women who specialised in making wreaths were also used (Bøgh 1981: 24). The hearse and additional carriages with their drivers had to be hired. A further regulation concerned pall bearing, where University students had the right to be paid for carrying the coffin and from 1714, this right was further restricted from general university students to just the Royal College, Regensen's (Christensen 1912: 333). Payment was waived for the poor and the guilds also had special dispensation to carry their own coffins but generally the payment was strictly enforced although in later years the actual work was subcontracted out to labourers.

These conflicting groups involved in the provision of funerals meant that the *bedemand's* role was important in maintaining balance between these requirements. *Bedemand* also had a powerful position within the fields of competing interests to provide authorised burial services. However the early 19th century saw an increasing

desire for reform in Copenhagen which may have been partly inspired by the provision of the new cemeteries as well as the wider social processes happening within other cities in Europe. The city's population was expanding rapidly but space was physically limited by the ramparts resulting in extremely crowded living conditions. This sense of restriction conflicts with the consequences of industrialisation, the expanding bureaucracy of a capital city and the new technologies such as the railways and the development of modern business practices. There was also an increasing trend of municipal intervention into urban life, and a sense that this new type of living required order and improvement. Conditions of urban churchyards and burial areas were being highlighted all over Europe and Copenhagen was no exception in implementing new ideals concerning burial and funeral reform (Sommer 2003: 83-7). Whilst innovations in creating new cemeteries had started in Copenhagen in the 18th century inspired by both church and the city, municipal regulation over funerals took much longer to implement. This disordered state of affairs that created a funeral was at odds with the supposedly ordered nature of the new cemeteries but most of the competing vested interests surrounding the customary obligations around a funeral were naturally not in favour of reform. Public debate over general reform including the need for new facilities such as mortuary chapels was quite vocal throughout the 1840s until in 1860 the municipal Burial Office (*Begravelseskontor*) was formed to centralise funeral and burial procedures (Christensen 1912: 338-42). The role of *bedemand* was now largely defunct. There is nothing similar to the process of creating state-approved monopolies of the Pompes Funèbres and rejection of the free market in burial provision in France (Kselman 1993: 234, 280). It is closer to the professionalisation process of the undertaking business in the UK where different aspects of funeral provision became consolidated into one business from the late 18th century (Howarth 1997).

Changes in attitudes and the increase in regulation during the first half of the 19th century influenced the business of providing material goods and services for the funeral which tended to focus on the provision of the coffin. Like many other European countries, coffins used to be made by ordinary carpenters but by the 1840s in Copenhagen there were specialist businesses. They provided coffins and funeral attire and described themselves as coffin stores, (*ligkistemagasin*) rather than *bedemand*. The effects of professionalisation are observed in standard sizes of coffins or stock funeral clothing. There is no definitive in-depth study of the Copenhagen undertakers or the funeral industry similar to the UK (Litten 1991) but Kragh (2003) has described the development of undertakers from the later 1800s in rural Denmark where general carpentry was the original business with the provision of coffins as a side-line. Copenhagen appears to follow a similar development process, albeit slightly later in date than the UK. Copenhagen as the most populous city would have been in more regular need of coffins and this provided an impetus to the supply of funeral material culture as a specific business.

There are several examples of companies that began in the 19th century and continue today; the earliest firm of Niels P. Rostrup, opened in 1844 and still continues today as N.P. Rostrup & Strandvejens Bedemand (2016). Rostrups was a business owned by three generations of the same family which took care of burials including the royal family and elite Copenhageners. The owners were closely involved in city life including the administration of guilds and later trade unions. The evolution of their business is a model for how undertaking altered throughout this period from a small carpentry business to concentrating on coffins and later expansion to all aspects of funeral services (Rostock 1944). Another firm called Østerbros Ældste Ligkistemagasin was founded in 1899 (Krak 1950: 646). No corresponding business records have so far been discovered in Copenhagen archives although there are some invoices, regulations or catalogues from around Denmark in museum archives. By 1921 there are nine *ligkister* businesses registered in Copenhagen but none are labelled as *bedemand* (Hougaard & Wedderkop Hedegaard 1921). The job title of *bedemand* continues into the 20th century but the role was expanded and eventually superseded by the businesses that created and sold coffins and other funeral items. The term appears to have been co-opted by them, perhaps to continue a reference to the sense of tradition.

Material culture in Assistens such as the coffins can be used to trace an increasing standardisation of funeral fashions which would be taken up by Danish craft businesses sometimes in the form of mass-production. In England the trade of undertaker becomes more professional and appears to offer more choice yet this results in standardisation of the material culture with choices made only from catalogues (Litten 1991: 2). This occurs in Copenhagen too, which is heavily influenced by the large scale production of coffins along with the flourishing capitalist business model. Coffins were no longer built at the undertakers but were ordered in from factories. The first business to mass-produce coffins was the Fuglebjerg Kistefabrik based approximately 100km south west of Copenhagen in 1912 (Fuglebjerg Kistefabrik n.d.). Another coffin factory, Heilskov Ligkistefabrik opened a year later which shows that the need and business opportunity was present at a similar date (Have Espersen 2009). As an example of the influence of standardisation the choice surrounding painted white coffins is examined- how much choice for an alternative really was there in Copenhagen? Changing ideas of material culture are one of the driving forces behind the new business of undertaking.

The development of professional services can be seen in reference to an experience of modernity where expert systems replace individual knowledge of how to deal with death. Individuals or mourners in this example then only retain the ability to negotiate through the system instead (Giddens 1991: 144). It was only in 1957 that the Danish Undertakers National Association (*Bedemændenes Landsforening)* was established which created an opportunity to create an image as a specialised and skilled professional service (Danske Bedemænd n.d.). Not all Danish undertakers

belong to this association. The Swedish Association was formed earlier in 1922 (Davidsson Bremborg 2002: 32) but yet again not all undertakers belong to it. A lack of central regulation or certification leads to a position of being a skilled expert without formal recognition. As pointed out by Bremborg-Davidsson (2002: 63) the undertaker can be in a position of stigmatised expert where their profession is regarded as abnormal but also essential. In many areas of the world people dealing with the dead are stigmatised and shunned from society (Howarth 1993: 222).

In Denmark the profession was generally well regarded and by the early 20th century undertakers had accumulated a standard set of rituals and material culture based upon 19th century and earlier customs which defined what would make an acceptable funeral (Kragh 2003: 52). Although with this traditional mind set comes adaptations such as the abandonment of the horse-drawn hearse which would start to be replaced by the motorised hearse in the 1920s (Bøgh 1981: 26). However an overwhelming sense of continuity lingers as the traditional customs are emphasised and innovations are couched in traditional language. Many of the traditional rituals and traditions which can still occasionally be seen today are derived from 19th century ideals of formal behaviour, such as the formal clothing often used by undertakers. 21st century undertakers are breaking these traditions rapidly. The merging of earlier customs and new ideas is emphasised in the successful adoption of cremation in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe which relied heavily on emphasising not Christian tradition but links to an even more distant past which combined Classical allusions to the pagan Nordic myths (Petersson, A. 2004: 37). Cremation can be seen as an innovation being couched in traditional terms to increase its acceptability. Undertakers acting as a hub for the procurement of funeral material necessities now added a new range – cremation urns.

Within the development of undertaking as a business the choices of mourners become restricted or at least heavily influenced by the undertaker's catalogues defining which type of coffin, clothing or hearse they can use. There is some level of restriction for those who can afford more but at the same time the cheaper cost of coffins and furnishings do allow greater choice for people with lower incomes. Choice has been made more equal. There was slightly more variety in furnishings within the later 19th and 20th century at Assistens but at the same time the variation was of smaller mass produced features. Homogeneity was present for example in the colour of coffins and variation found only in small details. A conclusion from a Swedish perspective suggests that "funerals should be unique and personal, but not too deviant" (Davidsson Bremborg 2002: 248). This perfectly describes a limited sense of choice which would underpin the undertakers business and therefore also influence their customers. So the undertaker becomes an arbiter of good taste as well as ensuring compliance to municipal regulations and religious practices. In this way undertakers influence the material culture and even the rituals of the funeral without necessarily being conscious of their acts (Davidsson Bremborg 2002: 191). Interviews with

contemporary Danish undertakers by May (2007) emphasise their own satisfaction with the more seemingly traditional customs and decry the contemporary trends of increasingly individualised and unique funeral acts more commonly seen now in the 21st century.

Choosing a conforming style of funeral with traditional sets of rituals can be seen as a preferable option and a statement that reflects positively on the person and mourners. In contemporary funeral choice the researcher and now undertaker Naja Genet May (2007) emphasises that the choice is undertaken at a moment of distress - a crisis moment and it is at this point that choosing a safe, conservative and known set of options becomes the simplest path to take. This feeling can be transposed back to earlier periods where even expected or long-prepared deaths create a crisis moment where order and safety can be desired over innovation. Yet innovation and individual choice is a necessary part of society and small, relentless alterations have created the professional industry of today. Therefore when people ask for a traditional funeral there is often an additional request for something in particular which also does not correspond to what a 18th, 19th or even 20th century Danish burial was. Much innovation has taken place over the last few decades. In the 21st century undertakers are at the forefront of these adaptations working with mourners to express their personal wishes.

# Traditions and standards in funerary practices

Research into 19th and 20th century Danish funeral display and material culture is heavily influenced by the findings of Troels Troels-Lund (1908) who studied Danish customs of the 16th and 17th centuries. These earlier and often rural-based traditions appear to be used as the foundation for understanding later urban burial custom. Ethnographic and historical sources including photography have also contributed to describing and creating a standard perception of the rituals and materials used from the moment of death, to the funeral and later decoration of the grave site. Archaeological research into the 19th and 20th century is more unusual, which highlights the unique circumstances of being able to investigate Assistens from a multidisciplinary perspective. The archaeological evidence can be used to compare what is preserved from what was reported to have been used in documentary sources.

The development of burial practice can be traced archaeologically through the excavations of long-used parish churchyards in Denmark and Sweden. St Clemens in Copenhagen contained hundreds of burials dating from the early medieval period to the Reformation. (Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009). The small churchyard led to a congested situation with many intercut burials, charnel activities and reuse of grave space. These were the realities of burial in an urban churchyard and similar practices continued in use until the mid-19th century. Burials were in shrouds with few grave

gifts except for an occasional coin or polished pebble placed on the body. Changes included the increased use of coffins and elaborate styles of furnishings. Excavation of churchyards in other Danish towns such as Horsens and Holstebro which continued in use to the mid-19th century show material culture and symbols that can be recognised over Scandinavia and Northern Europe (Thomsen 2008; Grønfeldt Petersen 2012). In Uppsala Cathedral or Maria Magdalena church in Stockholm styles of coffins deposited in vaults showed greater variation from the mid to late 18th century onwards in terms of external decoration but also a standardisation of style of elaborate coffin elements like handles (Bergman 2010; Kjellberg 2015). Assistens picks up from this long line of research and extends it into the 20th century.

Like many other European countries Denmark sees an increase in amount and also a greater variation of general funeral practices and grave goods from the Reformation period onwards which increases the material available for identifying expressions of grief and loss by elaboration of the body. Practices of the new middling classes, such as shown in the burial traditions within the vaults of Helsingør (Hvass 2002) were further enhanced with expensive clothing, wigs, flowers and books. Despite the demands put upon the family and community from a death and the need to create a correct environment for a decent burial, this emphasis and the pressure appears to have increased in the modern period peaking in the late 19th century. The cost of funerals increased by the early 19th century but the cause of this increase was not in the administration of death but as noted in the cemeteries of the Danish colony of Tranquebar, India (Krieger 2010: 66) in the expense of furnishing the coffin and providing the dead with suitable accoutrements. If this increase in elaboration of the dead and their final resting place happened in the early 19th century even in the distant colonies of Denmark what happened after that and what happened in the capital city? Increasing elaboration even affected charitable acts towards the orphans and workhouse inmates who died at the Vartov Hospital in the centre of Copenhagen. Excavation of a small part of the 18th to 19th century hospital burial ground showed that some burials were provided with painted and gilded burial coffins, possibly by the patrons of the hospital (Mosekilde 2010; 2011). How are these burial patterns connected to the changing social world within Europe and specifically in Copenhagen?

The concepts of what was necessary and customary for a 'decent burial' derive from common understandings of funerary tradition and rituals. To understand what changed and why, it is necessary to understand what was perceived as traditional funeral practice. Recent research by Jill Baker (2012) describes the funeral assemblage to consist of three categories of material culture: personal, status and 'essential' features. Although these divisions lend perhaps too much simplicity to these complex and interconnected categories it is at least helpful to break down the analysis. For Denmark and for most of Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries the essential features which are repeatedly demonstrated as present in investigations are a closed container,

a cleaned and prepared body and some form of body covering. These essentials are combined with a place to dispose of the container, responsibility for payment and a basic record made of the identity of the deceased and burial location. It is in the variation and increasingly elaborate styles of the objects that change is constructed and operative in the social world. Until the mid-20th century death most commonly occurred in the home and therefore preparation of the body was a task completed by relatives or skilled women in the community (Kragh 2003: 51). The local community, family or parish church took care of these basic acts. Decision-taking on treatment and rituals surrounding the dead body and the funeral was a personal and religious responsibility. The growth in hospital and poor-house provision slowly increased the number of deaths in institutional contexts and decreased this personal context (Løkke 1998; Bergqvist 2013). Recording and management of death also became an increasingly secular concern under the remit of civic authorities. Many of these practical acts were transferred to a professional situation at the hospital or undertakers. Instead of physically helping to deal with the dead, mourners now contributed only in their choices of preparation and purchase.

Even within this change the rituals immediately after the death are likely to be similar and included closing the eyes, straightening the limbs and cleansing the body. The body may be placed on a body board and there could have been a variety of religious or grieving rituals taking place in the household. These intangible rituals and preparations are not a central focus of this research as they result in little tangible evidence to study. Rather the work is centred on the intersection of decision-making and preparations concerned with containing the body in the coffin, preparation of the body and additional items placed inside the coffin as grave goods. The mix of private, religious, social and folklore beliefs are enacted through professional frameworks, making them private and public acts.


## Material and terminology

The material focused upon in this chapter is the inhumation (coffin burials) and cremation burials of Assistens including bodies and the material culture placed within them. The 854 excavated *in situ* inhumations are used throughout the text to analyse the whole burial population. The smaller Identified sample of only 545 inhumations is used in analysing chronological trends because it has secure dating for the material.

The finds from Assistens are categorised by material and then sub-divided further into categories which relate to the trajectory of the body from death to the grave. 1980 finds were registered from 884 separate contexts that are dated to the use of the cemetery. Some registrations include more than one find, for example six buttons from a shirt result in one registration. There were finds from both *in situ* burial contexts (953) and residual or redeposited finds from contexts such as layers of soil

(1027). Occasional *ex situ* objects are derived from disturbed burials such as clothing or jewellery. Of the 953 burial finds, buttons form the largest category (382), followed by textile items which includes clothing and textiles lining the coffin (133), then jewellery items (118). For further details and descriptions of individual items the Museum excavation report should be referred to (Anthony, Keenan *et al.* 2016).

There is an intersection between objects that are provided by professional undertakers as part of their service and those requested or included by mourners during the public display of the body or at the funeral. Some objects such as buttons and textiles can be a mix of personal clothing and specific funeral attire. Jewellery items imply personal choice, as do the small quantities of grave gifts. Decoration and furnishings of the coffin and are almost all provided by the undertaker although occasional examples of pillows appear to be personal items. This classification is essential for the nature of archaeological work, particularly in the work of data description and assessment but these categories also need to be linked together again to gain a more coherent interpretation. I have chosen to structure this chapter in a more integrated manner to allow the over-arching narrative to be made clearer. Therefore the division is made between preparing the body, containing the body and additional items added to the coffin or placed on top of the sealed coffin for the funeral as grave goods.

## Preparation of the body

Practices involved in the presentation of the dead reveal broader ideas about the relationship with the body. The people participating in these acts change, from mourners and local community to professionals – medical staff and undertakers. Despite this change, many traditions were adapted and continued. The essential idea of preparing the body has not altered. Death in the 19th century generally took place in the home however the range of hospitals and poorhouses did increase which resulted in the need for facilities and arrangements to be carried out in institutional settings. Mourners may well have been involved in some preparations but the staff would have controlled much of the immediate acts. Storage of the body prior to the funeral could result in it being moved to a mortuary. One was built in the Trinity churchyard in 1870 (Steenberg 1960: 245) after discussion on the lack of space and hygienic problems of storing bodies in the small overcrowded homes of the poor in Copenhagen. Dying in hospital after an accident or operation and the need for a medical autopsy would involve some levels of care and presentation of the body that mourners were unlikely to have been included in. Basic levels of cleansing and perhaps standard hospital clothing may have been the only preparation for people who died without mourners or the ability to pay for additional preparation.

In many cases until the early 20th century, cleansing and preparation of the body take place in the home and was part of rituals involved in public display and grieving that

would last until the coffin was taken to the church and cemetery. Only some traces of these predominantly intangible rituals survived in Assistens. Kragh (2003) describes the rituals that occurred directly after the death involving the family and skilled neighbours, usually women, who would prepare the body and the room in which the body would lay. The display of the body combines a mixture of social and folk beliefs with Christian symbolism. These include culturally specific notions of danger from the dead soul and the warnings of revenants including closing the eyes using coins and closing the mouth using a Hymn or Psalm book underneath the chin. The chin was tied by a folded handkerchief; the spiritual danger that is averted by this action is transformed in the later 19th century to a more biological danger of germs and hygiene (Harris, Robb *et al.* 2013: 188-90). These ideas combine with the desire to beautify the body in death, an open mouth or eyes would not be acceptable to display. These preparations are seen in specific body placement, how the face is presented and what clothing or accessories are added to the body. From the late 19th century the use of photography adds another professional field into the people who have an influence on preparation. Post mortem photographs are full of details of the fragile textile furnishings used which rarely survive (Åhrén Snickare 2009); one exception in Assistens was a burial with lace ribbons suggesting a linen sheet was wrapped around the body and head (G518). There is a level of materiality associated with the staging of the photograph which may have been adapted or added to for the actual burial; it is after the photograph that grave goods seen in Assistens may have been added.

In Assistens the evidence shows that fundamental preparations consist of laying the body placed on their back with some material as a mattress (Fig. 29). The position of the body is associated with Christian ideals about burial and is common to both earlier shroud and coffin burials in Denmark. There were only two exceptions to this norm concerning body positioning: an adult with a spinal curvature placed face down in a prone position (G1508) and an older adult female who was laid on her side. Neither individual would have fitted into the coffins provided if they were laid in a normal supine position. It is probable that neither of these two unusual examples would have been openly viewed by mourners prior to the funeral. Both examples suggest that a larger or individually made coffin was not available, resulting in these more practical solutions. The principle of one body to one coffin is also strong. On only two occasions was an infant buried with an adult. Two adult females were buried with neonates (new-born); one was placed in the left arm. Both burials were interpreted as women and their infants dying in, or soon after childbirth. One was specifically recorded in the Municipal register as mother and child.

Preparation of the body is important to examine because it is the physical expression of ideas about acceptability and how to present the dead. The body would undergo several stages in display of which some were carried out publically and others privately. At each stage there would be some mix of actors involved but the overall

impression would present a last physical link to the body. This is therefore a complex mix of the dead person's personality and requests and the mourner's wishes, combined with the professional ministrations of the medical and undertaking professions. Changes in decision-making power between these actors can be seen in the material from Assistens.



**Fig. 29.**
Burial with the preserved straw filling of a pillow and constricted position of body with upturned clavicles and the close position of the arms and feet suggesting a shroud or tight textile wrappings (G586). Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 26 April 2010.

- *Arm position in the 19th and 20th century*

The overall position of a body in a coffin is limited with the body placed on the back, with the limbs outstretched however there is scope to vary the position of the arms. Research in medieval Scandinavia (Redin 1976; Kieffer-Olsen 1993) has focused upon the position of the arms and were originally used as a dating tool for otherwise undated cemeteries (Jonsson 2009: 32-3). Later research connected arm position to changing beliefs concerning the Resurrection and afterlife allied with an increase in the expression of piety (Cinthio 2002: 222-4). Arm position has been explored in the UK for monastic sites but the idea has been less successful as variations in arm position have also been linked with factors including gender, location of burial or even local practice (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005). The analysis of arm positions has more recently been extended into post-Reformation contexts in Linköping, Sweden where a notable change was observed from 1680. A new arm position, position E (Fig. 30), comes into use and overall there is greater variation in poses (Tagesson 2015: 27-8). It was suggested, in combination with other material culture changes, that it was a physical expression to the profound changes of society but also to the changing expression of the body as an individual rather than a collective. Using Assistens there is an opportunity to build upon this research to examine the positioning of the arms in a 19th and 20th century Danish context and connect it to changing ideas on presenting the dead body. The idea was to explore the possibilities of using the system

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not as a dating tool for modern cemeteries, but instead to test if this new position was present and how it could be interpreted. This continues a strong line of debate within Scandinavian research and acknowledges the links between the more frequently studied early medieval burials and Assistens.
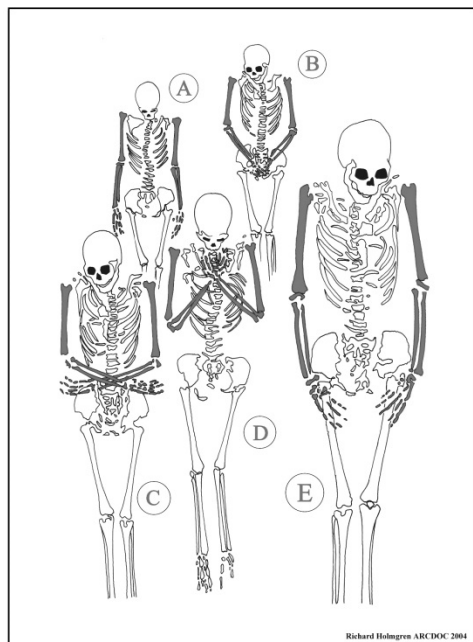


**Fig. 30.**
The arm positions within the burial used for this analysis. Source: Richard Holmgren, ARCDOC, 2004.

Analysis of the arm positions was undertaken for this thesis using rectified images from the excavation. The classification used[8] was that of Linköping (Tagesson & Westerlund 2004) which is based upon Redin's work on the churchyard at Skanör, Sweden (1976). The position observed by archaeologists is accepted as the originally intended pose. Although the position of the body may have changed due to the sliding of the body within the coffin during the funeral, or later movement of the intact coffin when new coffins are added to the grave plot.

One problem that quickly arose during data collection was that arm positions A and E could appear to be quite similar. Differentiating between them depends on knowledge of both how the arm bones look in certain positions and how bones can shift during decomposition. Many of these body parts (hands and hip joint) are

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[8] The five arm positions were recorded separately for each arm – ABCDE, with three additional notations. U for unidentified due to not being observed, severely disturbed or if there was contradictory information between the field records and the images. O for not excavated as some burials were only partially excavated and N for not present when arms were truncated or missing.

described as labile, or unstable (Duday 2009: 4-5) and likely to decay quickly. These are the bones relied upon for identification of the difference between positions A and E which can be harder to identify from images alone. Burials using shrouds to wrap the body instead of coffins meant that the skeleton would retain its original position as the earth covers it. Once within the ground, bodies within coffins are in contrast relatively unconstrained. The void space of the coffin allows natural post mortem decay or ground water to move of the skeleton therefore identifying original positions of the arms becomes more uncertain. Hands and arms placed on the thighs may slip down from an E to an A position. Hands placed over the pelvis in a B position may also slip down and become similar to an E position. Thus there can be a difference between assessment of shrouded medieval burials and these later coffin burials. A second lesser problem arose when classifying arm position B, of each arm lying across the pelvis but without the hands placed on each other, the difference between this position and position E can be minimal if there is extensive skeletal movement in the coffin. This practical problem in recording the data shows that the relatively unconfined body in the coffin could make identification of original arm position uncertain and influence the data. However position E from Linköping was clearly identified as a symmetrical and deliberate placement with clear evidence in its use from the late 17th century (Tagesson 2015). In Assistens it was identified only when certain of the position.

Table 14.
Identified arm positions of the whole cemetery population (n=854 with 983 positions identified out of 1708), divided by category. A position: arms placed straight beside the body. B position: hands placed on the pelvis. C position: hands placed across the abdomen. D position: hands placed high up on the chest. E position: hands placed on the legs.

| Arm position | Total | % |
|---|---|---|
| A | 521 | 53 |
| B | 157 | 16 |
| C | 25 | 3 |
| D | 31 | 3 |
| E | 249 | 25 |
| Totals | 983 | 100 |

Despite this methodological reservation, analysis was to provide some information on burial position. At first the whole cemetery was treated as one population, with 854 skeletons having 1708 potential arm positions. 58% of the arm positions (983 of 1708) were catalogued with the rest being not present, unidentified or unexcavated. The data appear to be robust with no differences between how the left or right arms are placed. Most bodies (Table 14) (380 skeletons with 760 individual arm positions, 760 of 983, 77%) have the same position recorded in both arms. Overwhelmingly, position A was the most frequent by twice that of position E. Arm positions C and D

are very rarely used. Overall there was little difference between male and female arm position or even between age differences although infants and children are poorly represented. Some minor patterns could be noted when examined chronologically.
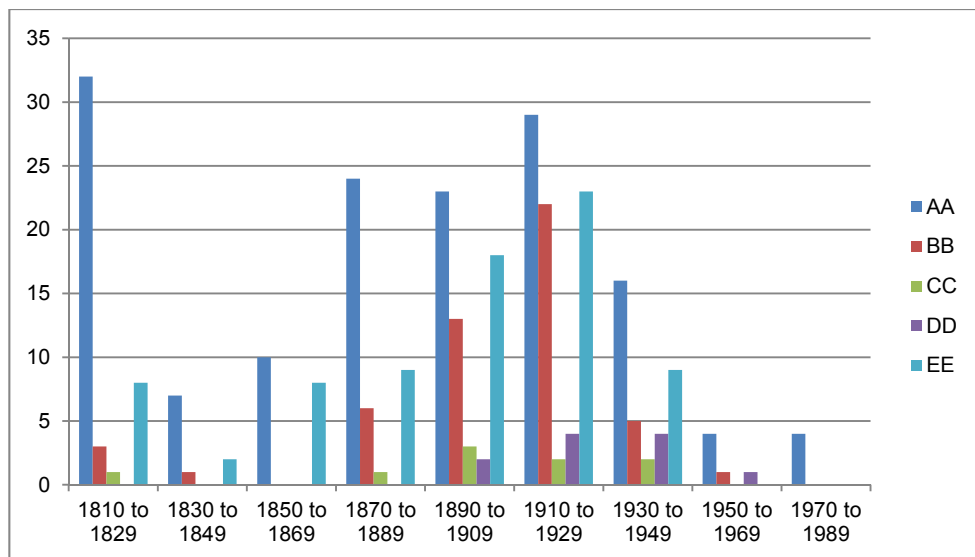


**Fig. 31.**
Burials with matching arm positions from the Identified sample at Assistens (n=297) compared over time from the Identified sample.

To examine changes over time, the Identified sample of 545 burials was used. Only the 297 (55%, of 545) burials which had both arms in the same position were used which gives a data set of 594 potential arm positions (Fig. 31). The A position is dominant, particularly in the early single burials. It begins to be challenged by B and E in the end of the 19th century although E is recorded as a position more frequently in the early years. The positions of C and D are rare overall with only 20 examples (7%, 20 of 297). C positions are all used for people within older age categories, of between 68 and 84 years old, seven individuals are male and only two are female. D positions are again used for mature or older adult categories with many being in their late 80s and 90s; there are eight females and three males. Amongst this group are three plots which contain two D position burials (P653, P669 and P685). These can be linked together as a family relationship including one couple dying within two years of each other in the 1940s and a mother and son in the 1920s. It is quite likely that this choice is influenced by seeing the earlier burial and a desire to replicate this choice. These positions would require an active choice to be communicated to the undertaker. In terms of chronological change, on a smaller scale there is a difference between the earlier burials from the 1817-20s line burials and the later burials in family plots. Most of the burials from the 1810s and 1820s are line burials (93%, 41

of 44 burials were dated to these decades) and 70% of these have arm position A. This is a higher percentage than burials in family plots (256 burials) which have 47% in position A (120) and 27% (69) in position E.

Overall the results showed that most arms were placed extended alongside the body, followed by placing the hands on the thighs with very few examples of other poses used. There were no strong patterns found in the assemblage but there were minor patterns to be interpreted. Position A was dominant in the early line burials of the 1810s and 1820s and continued to be most frequently used until the 1920s. Positions B and E became more frequent from the 1870s. This shows an increase in different traditions was used from this period. There is a larger range of possibilities to present the body in a more active stance. Mourners were less constrained by custom to request a different position. It seems clear that position A is a default position in Assistens; it is in constant use but does become challenged in the end of the 20th century. Having the arms placed beside the body can be interpreted as a result of a pragmatic solution rather than a specific action by the person. There are many examples where clothes, shrouds and sheets covering the body can be used to pin the arms in place to prevent them 'knocking' against the sides of the coffin during transport (Litten 1991: 81) and it is this practical factor that may result in the position. However any arm positions can be made secure in the same manner so practical explanations are not always applicable. Both arm position A and E can be viewed as a 'resting 'position staged to look like a sleeping person. Yet position E also represents a more natural or life-like stance, it is more active than it might at first appear. The infrequent use of other positions suggests that the default position was understood and in certain situations decided against. The rare uses of poses from B to D can be interpreted as deliberate poses to appear as if praying or penitent. In the 19th and 20th century burials this active choice is extremely rare. If this pattern relates to how the body should be prepared for the afterlife then this is something that those who are preparing the body no longer viewed as vital.

I suggest that the use of varied poses show that presentation of the body is arranged to represent the body as it was awake rather than asleep which was favoured from the 1870s. Further that the body no longer needed to appear humble but that the dead person was accepted on account of their life activities, rather than additional intercession from the living. The interpretation of the new arm position in Linköping was associated with modern ideas in society and although Assistens is later in date and within a very different type of cemetery, it appears that here too there are wider changes in societal attitudes towards the dead expressed in something as simple as the position of the arms. Extending the idea of examining body position into the 19th and 20th century may also allow an insight into how the body should be displayed for public view in Copenhagen. So far this line of enquiry has been largely a Scandinavian endeavour. Arm position in medieval burials in the UK has been investigated but is suggested to be reflecting regional variations (Gilchrist & Sloane

2005: 152-3). Comparisons with the wider European area, particularly comparing different religions may shed some light on differences in presenting the body.

- *The presentation and handling of the body*

Arranging the body for display for the funeral includes a range of additional practices sometimes referred to as the first offices, or the initial cleaning of the body. The focus for display is upon the visible parts of the body, the head and perhaps hands. With the focus upon the face, more effort went into creating a recognisable and calming display that removed clear signs of disease or suffering. The effort put into this preparation was for the benefit of the mourners who would observe the final effect but also can be seen as important for the sake of the dead person so was undertaken even if there were no mourners. The open display of the body was mostly undertaken in the home and was an important focus for the mourning rituals prior to the funeral. Post mortem photographs from the late 19th century show common practices used (Jensen, J. 1994) although it is clear that these were staged and enhanced for the act of taking the photograph and should not be used uncritically (Åhrén Snickare 2009: 113). In most photographs, the rest of the body is concealed underneath clothing or sheets and flower displays, hands are occasionally placed in gloves but generally rest outside of the coverings. Men would have been shaved, or beards trimmed and both sexes could be given hats or caps and the jaw secured to stop the mouth falling open. Embalming practices or extensive make-up such as documented in America (Laderman 2003) were not common in Scandinavia for the general population in the 19th or 20th century (Overgaard 2008: 144; Åhrén Snickare 2009: 86).

Other practices became more common particularly from the early 20th century such as using the person's dentures to make the face appear more life-like and intricate hairstyles. Technological innovations in dentures from the 18th century resulted in them becoming more popular and affordable (Boston, Boyle *et al.* 2009: 114-5). They filled out the face and promoted a sense of improvement and beautification. Early dentures were made from ivory and gold with porcelain being experimented with from the late 18th century and later replacing ivory by the mid to late 19th century (Woodforde 1968, cited in Boston, Boyle *et al.* 2009: 116). In Assistens only one set of gold and ivory dentures was registered as a find by archaeologists but many others were recorded by the osteologists. All of the dentures recorded showed signs of use and were therefore not provided solely for the funeral but perhaps seen as an integral part of the body. Overall 77 people were buried with them; 37 with full and 40 with partial. The most elaborate dentures found at Assistens were made of swagged (horseshoe-shaped) gold plates with springs and ivory teeth mounted on thin gold pins. They are dated stratigraphically to the first half of the 19th century. They are an old-fashioned style so it is quite possible that these dentures were made much earlier and adapted for a new wearer. If so they showed relatively little sign of wear and tear although decay of the ivory teeth could be seen where they attached to the plate.

Similar early dentures have been found in London from the late 18th century (Powers, in Emery & Wooldridge 2011: 133) although comparable dentures to those from Assistens were found in St George's in Bloomsbury and were of porcelain with gold and but were of a later date (Boston, Boyle *et al.* 2009: 115). Plastic dentures were found in some of the burials of Jesuit priests in London dating into the mid-20th century (Melikian 2004).

Developments in dentures in the mid-19th century were stimulated by the use of new materials such as vulcanised rubber (*kautsjuk* in Danish) with porcelain teeth. By 1851 vulcanite was used and by 1864 the Goodyear Dental Vulcanite Company was set up in the USA and licensed the patent which limited the supply. From 1881 when the patent expired, general use of vulcanite dentures increased and the distribution increased world-wide (British Dental Association 2013). Originally they were coloured dark red eventually replaced by a lighter pink colour to suit the natural colour of gums. Vulcanite was used until superseded by celluloid and acrylic in the 20th century (Plastics Historical Society 2011) which can be identified through their lighter colour and increasingly realistic shaped teeth. A few vulcanite dentures were found in Assistens but most were acrylic. Many were eroded, showing signs of wear that indicated decades of use. Partial dentures replacing only one or two teeth were also found. Mostly of porcelain teeth fitted upon gold or copper alloy wire fittings. Overall it was more common for females to have full or partial dentures than males in Assistens possibly because there were more edentulous (having lost all teeth before death) females (66 females compared with 22 males and one unsexed adult from all fully analysed individuals, n=89). There is a possibility that as dental care increased in Copenhagen in the 20th century more women would have had teeth removed earlier in life, perhaps even specifically to get full dentures. One intention in this act was to reduce the cost of repeated dentist visits in later life but ideals of beauty may have been prominent with an increased desire for healthy-looking white false teeth.

Of the skeletons which were analysed in detail, 28% (22 of 89) of individuals with no natural teeth remaining had been displayed in the coffin with their full dentures. So almost three quarters of people investigated who had used dentures were not buried with them. However few people die with them in place and it can be difficult to reinsert them after death so it could also be a practical problem. There is a decision to be made by the mourners or by the professional attendants preparing the body, which could improve the look of the dead – but it is not always enacted. Very few early types of dentures were found despite the likelihood of their use in the early to mid-19th century. This suggests a different approach in the presentation of the body over time. This could relate to the change in actors, the people responsible for preparation. If undertakers increasingly took care of the body, dentures may not be considered appropriate or even be passed on by the mourners for use. That dentures were increasingly used from the 20th century in burials does illustrate a pre-occupation with individual improvement, even in death but not everybody used them which

suggest that it was not an essential practice to create this new aesthetic. Another important factor may be the material of the dentures themselves; the modern rubber and plastics used are not materials that were associated with burial, they are very rarely found within the burials in Assistens.

There is a difference between presentation for an open viewing or photography of the body as part of the social ritual and placing the body in the coffin with no further display. There were several burials at Assistens where open display of the body seems unlikely and examining the preparations shows how standards of burials were maintained even if never displayed. People who died in hospital may not have been presentable in an open coffin. Four burials suggested surgery near the time of death as they contained pink rubber surgical tubes found within the body; all were dated to the first half of the 20th century. They were provided with extensive internal coffin furnishings of mattresses, blankets and grave goods. So care was taken with the provision of common furnishings. However another older adult male buried in the 20th century (G 530) was laid in a coffin with their recently amputated left lower limb placed on the torso. Healing to the bone showed that a few weeks or months previously this person had also undergone amputation of their right leg and had survived but did not survive the second operation. This person had also been provided with a mattress and possibly a pillow and was dressed with clothing indicated by copper buttons. The coffin may also have been specifically constructed as it was extremely short at 1.55m long. An older female was placed within a sealed plastic body bag on a mattress of hay. No observation was undertaken on the body, clothing or grave goods but the coffin was of the standard white painted, raised lid with a cross on the lid but it also had an additional set of plaster wreaths on the exterior. These and other bodies which had been autopsied were less likely to be displayed. Autopsy cuts were present in 4% of burials (33 of 854 individuals) where occasional examples were found filled with newspaper or textile after removal of the brain. Other burials with autopsy evidence rarely had any grave goods or evidence of clothing. Only two burials had multiple gifts and mementoes showing that it was possible for mourners to view the body after autopsy and certainly that the custom of providing the person with grave goods could still be carried out. Private acts of commemoration were present even if they were unlikely to be on public display.

The placement of the amputated leg is reminiscent of earlier superstitions regarding reuniting missing parts of the body for the afterlife or resurrection and can be compared to a wooden box containing teeth found in Christ Church although in this case the teeth did not belong to the same individual (Reeve & Adams 1993: 90). This practice may link to attitudes on the potency of body parts such as teeth or hair. It could also be functional if the person died during surgery and the amputated leg kept with the body; if they had survived the leg would have been separately disposed of, as happened with the earlier amputation. From these examples it is clear that some burials were most definitively not open for public viewings; most signs of attention to

these bodies were more perfunctory rather than display driven although the exterior display of the coffin were often at the expected standard.

A unique example of careful presentation was of a young married woman (G826) with two bullet wounds in the skull. One bullet was still present inside the skull and there was a great amount of care taken in arranging an elaborate hairstyle to conceal the entry and exit wounds. The rest of the body was similarly carefully posed on a mattress with pillow in an ornate metal coffin with a stepped and raised lid. Documentary research showed that she died as a result of a murder by, or in a suicide pact with her lover, which took place in Berlin in 1910 and was reported in Copenhagen newspapers (København 1910). The body was transported back to Copenhagen and placed in the family plot although the entry in the Municipal register is a very rare example of a married woman referred only to as 'Mrs' but without adding either her married or maiden surname. In contrast to the other known example of a body transported from Germany in 1872 there was no nameplate on the coffin (G753). The omission of her married name in the register could confirm an attempt to downplay the scandalous circumstances of her death. However the care and attention to the body and richly decorated style of the coffin also suggest the emotional loss being manifested in the material culture and desire to bring her body back to the family plot. With some exceptions most burials were presented to be viewed and this event was designed to be an important part of the mourning process. The presentation of the body does not appear to follow the American, and to a lesser extent British, uses of embalming to preserve and beautify the body. Instead there was elaboration of the body and arm position which was all kept within commonly understood custom and in many cases continued even when an open viewing was impossible or unlikely. Open viewing does not appear to decrease or increase over time, it continues a strong tradition of saying farewell to the dead.

- *Clothing*

The act of clothing a dead body also represents a change in relationships, from one where the living person dresses themselves, this act that is described as vital to individual identity. Yet dressing becomes an act that is done by others, to a body, which moves the ritual from everyday habit and personal memory to something that might only represent what others saw or understood about the dead person. Clothing is an essential part of the funeral assemblage (Baker 2012) and standard clothes create a dominant narrative about acceptable presentation but there is evidence of individual choice and variation throughout the use of Assistens. Birgitte Kragh (2003: 47-8) writes about seeing death as an absolute or solid border where there are separate clothes for the dead and the living but there is much evidence against this with clothes that cross this border, as do other types of funeral material culture. Part of the personal identity of the dead is represented in clothes and burial fashions and while

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much of this presentation appears to be rather standardised I would be wary of presenting it as a completely homogenous culture. Clothes have practical and symbolic functions because they cover the body yet they are also grave goods, personal touches added by mourners or requested by the dead to emphasise required ideals.

During the medieval period there was great deal of theological contradiction over if the physical body was important for resurrection and how it should be treated in burial (Harris & Robb 2013: 147-8). However all the dead were viewed as sinners and did not require worldly accessories therefore they should be buried within some form of simple shroud or winding sheet. Yet this practice was not universally applied to elites as they were often richly furnished with clothes and grave goods (Daniell 1997: 153) which highlights the idea that there were complex and overlapping understandings of bodies and how to deal with them. The Reformation was supposed to have altered attitudes and allowed the dead to be dressed in finery in anticipation for the journey to Heaven (Jonsson 2009: 142). Funeral clothes in the UK are described as changing from a homemade shroud with cap or bonnet to commercially produced ready-made clothes, sometimes covered with a winding sheet (Litten 1991: 81). There appears to be a slightly different pattern in Denmark. A change in language is identified from wrapping the dead to dressing them which emphasises the decoration and treatment of the dead as being somewhat closer to the living (Troels-Lund 1908: 122). Helsingør Cathedral for example has ample evidence for richly elaborate clothing for the 18th century (Hvass 2002). There is also the development of providing specific funeral clothes at first made by the individual or by mourners. By the end of the 19th century specific clothing was often made by the wife of the carpenter who made the coffin (Aagaard 2002: 114). There is not a simple transfer from using shrouds to everyday clothing because there is evidence for great variation. Shrouds were still used in combination with everyday clothes, sometimes with the shroud laid over everyday clothes late into the 20th century (Thyrring 1964: 57-8). Undertakers in Copenhagen certainly appeared to have provided extensive selections of standardised clothing alongside their coffins as part of their advertised service by the first decade of the 20th century (Rostock 1944).

Evidence of clothing in Assistens comes both from textile fragments recovered and also from fastenings, predominantly buttons, which may sometimes be the only sign that there was clothing in the burials. Overall there were 96 finds of clothing from textiles and a total of 387 buttons; very few other types of fastenings were found. Fragments of knitted fabrics were most frequently found although pieces of cotton and even silk were also present. Compared to ethnographic evidence from burial catalogues and post mortem photographs this is a clear underrepresentation of both the quality and type of clothing that would have been present. Within all burials in the cemetery, the buttons found without surviving textiles are mostly made of copper alloys (52%, 198 of 382) which were used both on funeral clothing stock and daily wear. Most were plain buttons and it is probable that many were fabric covered as

traces of textile weave were found in the corroded metal. Very few examples of other materials were found with the exception of white porcelain buttons. Here there is another glimpse into the standardised clothing that was used; 27% of all the buttons were white porcelain with four holes (102 of 382).

Of the burials from the Identified sample, 30% (164 of 545) contained evidence of clothing and generally the frequency of clothing increases in later burials. There are many burials from the peak decades of burial activity around the end of the 19th century which contain clothing particularly in the 1890s to the 1920s (Table 15). Unlike investigations of vault or church floor burials which can contain well-preserved clothing and textiles, preservation conditions underground increase the decay of textiles, particularly of the thinner organic cottons and linens which are suggested as the most common types of burial clothing from ethnographic evidence (Thyrring 1964). It should also be noted that in the earliest burials from the single lines from 1817-23 in the Runddel sample and possibly slightly earlier in the single lines in the area behind the Sexton's House there were no recovered buttons or indeed any funeral textiles at all. However preservation conditions suggest that if there had been clothing with metal or perhaps ivory buttons then it is very likely that some would have survived even in fragmented form. This may be a genuine trend of earlier cheaper burials using simple shrouds with no fastenings.

**Table 15.**
Chronological distribution of burials containing any evidence of clothing, either by textile or button remains (164 of 545 Identified burials).

|  | 1810-29 | 1830-49 | 1850-69 | 1870-89 | 1890-1909 | 1910-29 | 1930-49 | 1950-69 | 1970-89 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Clothing** | 0 | 3 | 13 | 27 | 46 | 54 | 17 | 2 | 2 | 164 |
| **Total burials** | 97 | 29 | 50 | 78 | 102 | 121 | 50 | 10 | 8 | 545 |
| **% frequency of clothing present** | 0 | 10 | 26 | 35 | 45 | 45 | 34 | 20 | 25 | 30 |

Some chronological patterns were visible in the variety of types of clothing. The most frequent items recorded were located on the upper body with knitted cardigans from a total of 33 burials dated to between 1878 and 1946. There was also a jacket identified (G1032) as having a slightly different and more complex construction than the cardigans. The cardigans were worn by both males and females with only slightly fewer females (19 males: 14 females). They were all adults ranging between the ages of 29 years and 91 years although most belonged to burials of older adults as the average was 68 years old. No knitted garments and very few textile fragments were found on child burials although this may reflect the paucity of child burials that were identified. The only artificial textile present was of a polyester shirt from the mid-20th century (G688). It appears to have been made specifically as funeral wear because it had no buttons or button holes, although it did have a display pocket on the chest for a

handkerchief. Two scarves were recorded, both on females dated to the 1870 to 1889 period. A further 12 fragments of knitwear were found but were only tentatively suggested as scarves or cardigans. There were also eight fragments of ribbons and one of lace mostly associated with female burials. The lace came from a burial from the 1970s but as lace is delicate and prone to rapid decay it is quite possible that larger quantities were present in earlier burials.

Clothing on the lower body was far less prevalent with no trousers, skirts and only four examples of stockings or shoes identified from 1909 to 1929. This fits with the overall assemblage pattern where there is little evidence of lower body clothing although some of the larger two holed buttons could indicate underwear when found located on or near the pelvis. The lower body was covered in a sheet or blanket instead. Folk traditions that socks should always be provided do not seem so prevalent by this period (Hagberg 2015 [1937]: 189). Therefore display of the body was possible without significant everyday wear on the lower half of the body. No hats, nightcaps, headscarves or bonnets were found at Assistens so there is nothing to compare with for example, an elaborate bonnet from Horsens churchyard in Jutland (Grønfeldt Petersen 2012). Although nightcaps are generally made of thin delicate material which is easily prone to decay, it is unexpected that no traces at all were found. A single skullcap was found *in situ* on a male (G648) and although the specific nature of this item is unknown, a similar item was found in an earlier context in Helsingør (Aagaard 2002: 104). The only other hat found was a grave gift placed on the body rather than worn as clothing (G1485). Earlier vault burials, particularly from Helsingør in Denmark, contained many examples of caps and also jaw cloths (Hvass 2002). Only two examples of cloths were found in Assistens which kept the jaw closed. The evidence preserved demonstrates that the head was generally left uncovered within Assistens.

The colours of all types of clothing as far as could be determined light, either white or possibly cream coloured. Some colour detail was seen on cushion covers, even one jaw cloth was lightly coloured. Two exceptional items were handkerchiefs that were found covering the faces of two females which were embroidered and dyed either red or green. The clothes found also appear as fairly plain rather than patterned, with no ruffles, stitching and few details preserved. One handkerchief had a detailed embroidered flower design (G156). It is clear that any of the highly detailed embroidery or stitching seen on preserved garments in museum collections or post mortem photographs has not been preserved below-ground or perhaps were only present in small quantities. The clothing found gives the impression of standard types with little decoration focused on the upper body. The light colour of clothing appears to be a dominant choice throughout the use of Assistens.

Where textiles have completely decayed surviving buttons can be used to identify the type of clothing. Their relatively common presence does confirm a higher level of

everyday clothing in Assistens compared to earlier churchyards (Fig. 32). The size and specific material of the buttons can clarify the type of clothing and the changing ideas about providing the clothing used for burial. Buttons are measured in lines, from a French measurement with smaller buttons of 14-24 lines (8-15mm diameter) usually used for underclothes, shirts and waistcoats while medium size 25-36 lines (16-21mm diameter) are used for coats, jackets, pyjamas and trousers (Lindbergh 1999: 51). Porcelain, shell and bone two and four-hole buttons of 10-12mm are relatively interchangeable and can be used on shirts, underwear or pillow cases. Copper alloy, bone and textile were common throughout the use of Assistens and therefore do not provide any closer dating evidence. However porcelain buttons were made in the UK from the 1830s but new techniques made them cheaper from the 1840s, they were then commonly used until the common use of synthetic plastic in the beginning of the 20th century (Sprague 2002).
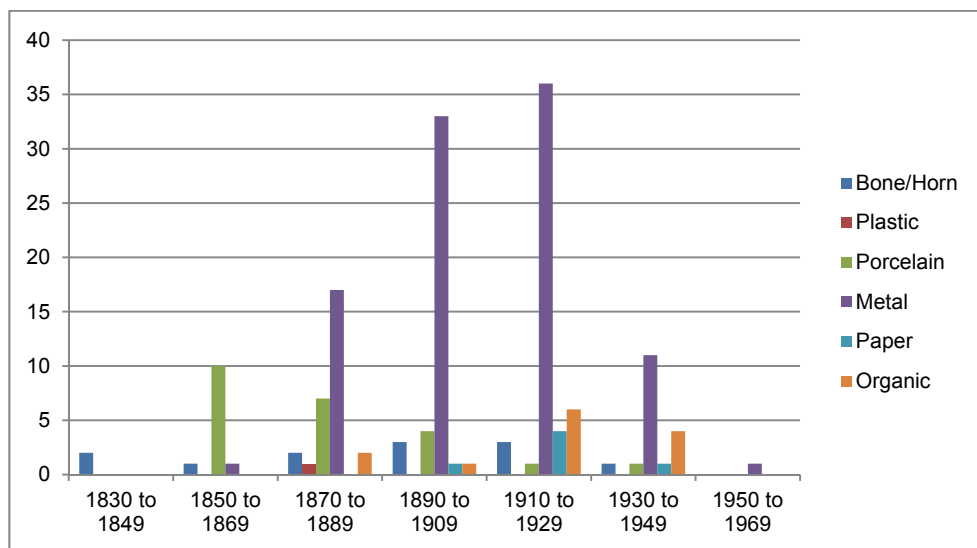


**Fig. 32.**
Burials containing buttons displayed by material and compared with overall clothing fragments. 154 burials from the Identified sample (n=545) had buttons, 161 burials had surviving textiles identified as clothing.

From the group of identified burials, 321 buttons were associated with 154 of the identified burials. This amounts to 84% of all of the buttons found in the whole cemetery (Table 16, n=382). As a comparison a total of 45 buttons were recovered from 20 burials from the mid-19th century burial ground at New Bunhill Fields in London. Most of these were bone or shell with the few porcelain buttons found related to adult male burials. Similar clothing has been identified from the Museum of London's costume collection dating to the 1830s and 1840s (Miles & Connell 2012: 49). The remaining buttons in Assistens which were not identified to a specific burial were mostly porcelain and probably conform to the mid to late 19th century

date. Copper alloy buttons often covered in cloth are most common followed by porcelain which is clearly identified to the second half of the 19th century. Organic materials, mostly shell and mother-of-pearl were a little more common in the first half of the 20th century as were paper or card but there is a clear pattern of the continued use of metal. In examining gender and age variations from the identified burials, there was little difference between button use on male and female adults and no discernible patterns related to age. Only two child burials of a seven year old and a four year old (G1104) were found with one button each. A clear difference is noted in the ratio of bone/horn buttons which were used more for male (15 males: 3 females) than for female adults and in shell buttons which were used more for female adults (4 males: 26 females). Although these patterns appear quite clear the small sample makes the conclusion tentative rather than firm.

**Table 16.**
Total number of buttons found within identified burials (321 of 545).

|  | 1830-49 | 1850-69 | 1870-89 | 1890-1909 | 1910-29 | 1930-49 | 1950-69 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Plastic |  |  | 1 |  |  |  |  | 1 |
| Bone/ Horn | 2 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 |  |  | 18 |
| Porcelain |  | 21 | 32 | 2 |  | 5 |  | 60 |
| Metal |  | 1 | 28 | 64 | 82 | 19 | 2 | 196 |
| Paper (card) |  |  | 1 | 1 | 8 | 6 |  | 16 |
| Organic |  |  | 2 | 1 | 21 | 6 |  | 30 |
| Total | 2 | 25 | 66 | 71 | 118 | 37 | 2 | 321 |

The distribution of buttons around the body is noted as predominantly around the torso with porcelain used on the chest and around the wrists. This confirms the textile evidence that everyday shirts or perhaps nightgowns were used for burial. New materials were being used particularly from the later 19th century when celluloid became popular for everyday clothing, being cheap and easily produced and they could have been an ideal button for disposable cheap burial clothing. However there is little use of celluloid or later plastic types for burial use, instead there is a continuation of existing materials such as copper alloy. The absence of plastic buttons should be noted as a continuing trend of dislike towards using artificial materials in burials which is evident in Assistens and may also be relevant for modern funeral clothing over Europe. Increases in paper and shell are visible in the 1910s however this pattern may be affected by the greater preservation of the later burials. Fashion for the living favoured rich gilt metal buttons on clothing particularly jackets from the 1830s-50s which was followed by a turn towards fabric covered metal buttons (Lindbergh 1999: 52). However there were no examples of decorated buttons present in Assistens. Although the metal buttons which were found were heavily corroded

there was little sign of them having been elaborately decorated and most were stud buttons which were likely to be covered by fabric. In general the buttons used were common to men, women and children for a variety of underwear and shirts with some of the porcelain or fabric covered examples used for the knitwear. The porcelain buttons found in Assistens are likely to be used for underwear and shirts or nightgowns.

The clothing not found, or found rarely, also highlight the standard idea of what should be provided – no trousers, few socks or stockings (only three examples) and only one surviving shoe suggests that the lower half of the body was covered by sheets or blankets and that the focus was on the upper half of the body. The distribution of buttons without traces of surviving textiles over the body also confirms a bias towards the upper body where buttons on the chest, shoulders and wrist formed 68% of the total distribution (261 of 382 buttons). However in earlier burials such as the line burials where there is almost no evidence of clothing it is likely that only very simple and fragile textiles were used with no buttons, indicating more nightgowns or shrouds with no fastenings were used rather than daily wear. The evidence also shows the increasing use of everyday nature of the clothes found in Assistens although this wasn't necessarily ready-made burial clothing. The type of clothing found suggests they can be predominantly seen as common daily wear as suggested by the similarity of the light-coloured machine-knitted woollen cardigans which showed signs of wear and tear from daily use. Fragments of these cardigans were mostly found in the chest area and fastened with copper alloy buttons; one was tied at the neck with a ribbon, some fragments could also be woollen shawls which can often be seen in post mortem photographs. Another woollen shirt with buttons and a padded woollen jacket may have been clothing that could easily have been daily wear. Specific funeral clothes may be more ubiquitous but did not survive to be excavated as there was only one clear example found of the funeral shirt in Assistens, which survived due to the robustness of the artificial fibres. No other formal wear was found including no trace of trousers, belt or suit jacket. This suggests that the suit for men now assumed to be quite common is a very recent innovation of funerary tradition in Denmark.

There is clearly a gap between the archaeological and ethnographic evidence and illustrating this is the post mortem photograph of Mette Marie Pedersdatter of Brønderslev, North Jutland who died in 1892 (Figure in Kragh 2003: 38, from Dansk Folkemindesamling). The act of taking this photograph was an act of grave gift or service by her son to be kept by the family and possibly the only opportunity to have a photograph of his mother. She was pictured by her son wearing a white linen, or cotton, plain dress or nightdress which is tied by a large sash at the waist into a bow with ruffled cuffs and traces of lace at the throat with a black knitted head shawl. The white dress is similar to ready-made funeral dresses described in ethnographic sources (Thyrring 1964; Kragh 2003: 41) but the shawl is an everyday and probably personal item. Although the coffin is lined with white fabric and she has a lace-edged

pillow there is no other sign of grave goods. However of all of this material it is possibly only a fragment of the woollen head shawl and perhaps some buttons that may potentially have survived. Even with reasonable quantities of clothing found at Assistens still it appears that highly degradable clothing without fastenings was used on most bodies suggesting shrouds or funeral gowns were still extremely common.

In the earliest burials, there is scant evidence of surviving clothing either in few burials in the expensive plots or the cheaper line burials. The people buried in lines were not paupers and could afford to be buried; simple metal buttons would not have beyond their budget particularly if people were buried in their everyday clothes. The conclusions drawn are that people from the earliest period in Assistens were choosing to be buried in more simple specifically-made burial clothes, possibly in a material that did not survive well. If ethnographic sources or alternative archaeological sites are compared to Assistens, fashions in burial clothing are presented as highly elaborate. These could include bright colours depending on the age or sex of the person with adults dressed in dark and children in lighter colours (Hagberg 2015 [1937]: 190). Some examples do survive from earlier periods in Helsingør and even some buttons from excavations in Holmens cemetery in Copenhagen (Kjærgård & Engberg 2014). However the general conclusion is that more elaborate and complex funeral clothing is largely absent in Assistens, in all classes of burials in favour of simple shrouds and coverings. However fashions appear to change and from end of the 19th and into the mid-20th century what is present is an increasing amount of daily wear mixed with some highly decorative burial clothing. Although burial clothing is relatively homogenous in terms of colour and style there are also individual touches such as the embroidered handkerchief or woollen socks which were chosen specifically as grave goods with personal meaning. These items were not newly purchased but had associations with the person when alive. It is the increasing emphasis on daily wear comparable to clothes the living would have worn that makes the Danish assemblage distinct. Why it is distinct may be the result of it being a Danish trend or a result of changing customs in the 20th century which are less studied.

*Accessories associated with the body*

In archaeology grave goods are more commonly associated with earlier Pagan periods rather than modern Christian cemeteries. They are a gift that represent many bonds between the living and the dead and are both public demonstrations of emotion and connection at the same time as private expressions towards the dead. The objects are integrated within the rituals conducted by the mourners and wider community where the presentation and deposition in, or on top of the coffin has a meaningful symbolism.

Further presentation of the body is found within specific objects that combine with clothing to adorn the body, or style the hair. In presenting what appears to be the standard for providing grave goods there is an interface between the preparation of

the body and specific gifts, which is highlighted with clothing and jewellery. Jewellery is rarely found in 18th century burials (Aagaard 2002: 110; Cherryson, Crossland *et al.* 2012: 34). Although the presence of jewellery and rings in coffins in Denmark are mentioned by Kragh (2003) the frequency of them is not and here the archaeology can provide clear evidence. By comparison with Assistens, the investigation of the vaults in Christ Church, London examined 968 burials dating up to 1867 but found only three wedding rings, a mourning ring and one pair of earrings as personal jewellery (Reeve & Adams 1993: 89). In St Pancras, London, two tortoiseshell hair combs and a hair grip or clasp, a leather belt and a belt buckle with several buttons serve the 1383 burials recorded, although not all coffins were opened and investigated (Emery & Wooldridge 2011: 179).

Despite being prepared for some grave goods to be present, the range and frequency of items found in Assistens that were associated with the body was unexpectedly large. The largest categories of finds were the 126 pieces of jewellery. The frequency of jewellery in all burials from Assistens was particularly unexpected and consisted of a broad range of types which included four brooches, 15 hair combs, 21 earrings, hairpins including a plain set of grips with a silk hairnet and some cufflinks. Smaller numbers of grave goods associated with the body also came from redeposited contexts on the cemetery; they usually derive from disturbed soil from a burial or charnel deposit. These included the only example of a fob watch made in Paris and the only iron belt buckle found with a few pieces of jewellery and hair combs. Grave goods were found from all periods of use but the increase in grave goods is clear from the first quarter of the 20th century.

Within Assistens many female burials had hair still present in intricate braids and coils fastened by hairgrips, ribbons and combs and three wigs or hairpieces. Tidying the hair was an obvious part of cleansing and ordering the body; formal styles as seen in photographs are attested in Assistens by the finds of grips for a hairnet and silk ribbons for braids. A wig found on a female buried in the 1920s was of long brown human hair stitched onto a textile cap which was held with wool ribbons. The wig was braided, twisted to the top of the head and held in place with a tortoiseshell clip (G604). Elaborate hairstyles were also held in place with tortoiseshell combs. There is limited evidence in the UK for the preservation of elaborate styles in the form of tortoiseshell combs, hairgrips and occasionally surviving wigs. Overall simple styles covered by funeral bonnets were far more popular up to the mid-19th century (Cherryson, Crossland *et al.* 2012: 32). Assistens provides good evidence of changes in the 20th century of preparation of the body with the consequence of making the person appear as they would when awake. The styles observed in the coffins resemble those worn during the daytime, not during the night.

Earrings found were mostly plain gold although some were decorated or had engravings on them. No necklaces were found. One brooch found in a burial from

the 1940s was of an unusual Art Deco-style black glass (G1128). The most frequent item found were 64 rings. Many are wedding rings bearing inscriptions on the inside surface noting the date of marriage and spouse's name or initials (Fig. 33). Eleven of the rings were decorated with coloured stones or other details and could have been wedding rings but were possibly were just decorative.



**Fig. 33.**
Wedding ring found *in situ* on an adult female (G691). Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 11 May 2010.

Examining chronological patterns from the 545 identified burials there were 60 burials (11%) containing jewellery. Burials from the end of the 19th century contained more jewellery and although the sample size is small, burials in the 20th century all had some form of jewellery included (Table 17). Most jewellery was from adult females not males (45 females: 15 males). Jewellery also was matched often with a ring and combs, or earrings and a ring together making a composite package of items for women to be provided with. Male burials have a more limited distribution between 1869 and 1929 and with only one exception consist of a single wedding ring. The exception, buried in 1914 (G853), had two decorated examples: an intricate design of a serpent entwined around the ring and a plain wedding band with inscription and date. A single earring with a blue stone is associated with a male burial from 1879 but it is likely that this is a redeposited find due to the highly truncated and disturbed nature of the context. Another item which may be both jewellery and religious item was the crucifix identified from a male burial from 1923 (G329). Inclusion of jewellery could be considered an active expression of the person in life, expressly referencing their relationships to the living.

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**Table 17.**

Chronological distribution of identified burials containing any evidence of jewellery (n= 86).

| | 1810 -29 | 1830 -49 | 1850 -69 | 1870 -89 | 1890 - 1909 | 1910 -29 | 1930 -49 | 1950 -69 | 1970 -89 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of burials | 0 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 14 | 24 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 60 |
| Total finds | 0 | 3 | 7 | 11 | 18 | 34 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 86 |

The provision of a wedding ring in the burial may indicate that it has become a standard accessory or perhaps a personal choice to be placed with the body rather than passing it on as an heirloom. Roberta Gilchrist (2014) has discussed the fact that wedding rings are not widely found in medieval burials and suggested that it is because in the wedding ceremony the rings are blessed and become a sacred object which materialises the sacred union of the two people. Sacred objects could not be buried. Special, unusual and personal objects are found in medieval burials but not those connected with ritual ceremony. Heirlooms were not generally retained but many were donated to the church instead and become sacralised objects. These transactions tend to treat the personal memories or commemoration of ancestors associated with the heirloom as part of a family or community setting. Rings are also rarely found in historic burials in Britain and Ireland, with only 17 documented in a recent survey of sites, suggesting their prevalence as heirlooms (Cherryson, Crossland *et al.* 2012: 35). The symbolism of wedding rings may represent an alteration in the symbolism of marriage where the marriage ceremony was still a sacred union but this was no longer expressed through a sacred object. Marriage became less of a bond or contract between families but solely between two people. These changes create a buffer around the materialised object – the ring, which means that it is acceptable to be buried with the person. In Assistens there are a few of potential examples of married couples taking their pre-deceased spouse's rings in life and then into the grave with them, this too reinforces the strength of the pair bond. In these examples the ring symbolises the continued bond of marriage even after death of one partner and this can also be connected to the pair bond visible in the gravestones which become increasingly focused upon the married couple. This transformation is undoubtedly not complete; wedding rings can still be heirlooms which are passed on and kept by descendants but they no longer represent a family lineage or a religious item but an individual memory of a particular couple. The rings found at Assistens are part of a modern custom where they are now free to be buried with their original wearer rather than needed to be curated by their descendants. The relationship between the living and the dead has altered but also continued by the acceptance of this specific object's transformation in the living world.

- *Summarising traditions in preparing the body*

The presentation of the body prior to the funeral was an important social process that was achieved through several stages. How it was arranged was an important marker of the relationship between the individual and mourners which in a large part becomes structured and arranged by different professionals. Long-term patterns are traced through churchyards such as at Linköping where changes in funeral clothing and other practices are present from the 1680s onwards with a more individualised approach (Tagesson 2015). These are suggested as enabled by larger scale changes in religious and secular authorities and a profound alteration in consideration of the body as an individual. These changes start long before Assistens is established but have fluctuated in intensity and been subtly modified through to the 19th and 20th century. There was little evidence of hats or caps used which is in contrast to the ethnographic sources and even within the earlier vault burials such as Helsingør (Hvass 2002). The women's hair particularly seems not to have been arranged for sleeping, braided and tucked up under a simple cap but intricately arranged with pins, decorated hair clips and wigs. There is a part of the presentation that does not accord with the sleep metaphor but of presentation to resemble the identity of the person when awake. Reinforcing this idea is the more frequent use of objects that were used in life such as dentures which could also be used in death. As dentures became more commonly used they become everyday personal items which were increasingly part of the ideals surrounding burial. They are something used by the living, not by the dead and therefore cross boundaries between living and dead. The boundary was not fixed and solid but a combination of different and sometimes competing considerations between acceptable materials and everyday comfort and display purposes.

As for the type of grave goods, burials found in the crypt of Klara Church in Stockholm dating to 1760 to 1885 (Bergman 2003) showed that the clothing and grave goods were broadly consistent with ethnographic ideals as detailed by Hagberg (2015 [1937]) despite the difference in comparing urban Stockholm to a mix of composite rural Swedish areas. This suggests that many ideals continued or were transferred into the urbanised world, albeit with minor alterations. In ethnographic evidence there are frequent references to crowns of plants or paper for children or young females to emphasise their innocence (Kjær 1996). Crowns have been found in earlier burials at Ribe or Linköping (Agerskov Madsen & Søvsø 2010: 64; Tagesson 2015: 30). However at Assistens there was no trace of bridal gowns or floral crowns both of which are referred to extensively in ethnographic oral testimony. The practice of providing bridal crowns has been discussed as a practice disliked by the Church and therefore an active choice by people furnishing the body (Tagesson 2015: 30). The rejection of this tradition in Assistens in the 19th and 20th century may well be more evidence of change in the urban modern world, perhaps no longer needing to reject Church practice.

What is clear is that the standards for grave goods changed during the period of use at Assistens. An individual connection to the living person as was given more emphasis in all types of grave goods but is seen most clearly with jewellery. Overall there is a greater degree of variation in preparation of the body and this stands in opposition to the increasingly more simple above-ground practices on grave plots and in gravestones. By the later 19th century undertakers are the prime agents of this preparation and although mourners do have input in the fundamental presentation of the body, it is undertakers who doing this work and presenting the person as awake and as they were when living, possibly as a tribute to their professional skills. However mourners are contributing by providing the specific jewellery, clothing or knowledge of the specific style of hair, particularly in women. The relationships that are materialised between the living and dead are handed over to the undertakers to present for public display. Further connections to the person are made later, prior to the coffin being sealed and more grave goods are laid with the body. These are discussed later as gifts that re-structure the relationship between living and dead. There is a transition to a relationship where the individual as they were awake is increasingly expressed with all of their relationships re-constituted. Sleep is still present but combined.

Preparation of the body is important to examine because it is the physical expression of ideas about acceptability and how to present the dead. These last viewings of the person would stay in memories of the mourners and present a last physical link to the body. This is therefore a complex mix of the dead person's personality and wishes and the living people's wishes, all combined later in the 19th century with the professional attentions of the medical and undertaking professions.


## Containing the body

All burials in Assistens had a wooden coffin; it simply was not feasible or accepted to be buried in a shroud. A limited number also used metal, either zinc or lead in their construction. However the data on coffins is influenced by their survival. Most coffins were in a poor state of preservation with the lid being the most common part of the coffin fully decayed. It is possible that this results from the practice of breaking the lid to hasten decomposition of the body, although this could not be proved because coffin lids are also prone to collapse from the weight of earth. Many coffins were reduced to soil stains with fragments of wood or nails. Others were intact and extremely well-preserved allowing detailed analysis of their features. The type of wood used was not analysed but where noted was generally of poor quality pine wood. A ban on the use of oak for coffins after the loss of the Danish fleet in 1807 meant that oak trees were reserved for the navy (Tamm 1992: 107), leading to a greater variation being used including elm which was recorded during the excavation. The overall

construction and changing styles of the coffin are investigated, followed by a summary of how the standard traditions of the coffin alter so drastically and how they can be compared with research from other European countries.

- *Construction and decoration of the coffins*

The overall construction of the 854 excavated coffins is largely similar; coffins consisted of simple carpentry joins and finishes which seem to have been made of cheaper quality pine wood with few nails used. Functionally the construction of the coffin needs to be strong enough to take the weight of the body and consists of the basic elements of the coffin container, lid, handles and an interior usually with some form of padding to place the body on. Overall the wooden coffins observed tended to conform to a standard size and quality for most funerals in adult, juvenile and infant sizes rather than being tailored to a specific person. This pattern was clearer in the 20th century coffins which were more likely to have been manufactured in a coffin workshop rather than ordered and measured to fit each body. There were occasional examples of coffins being too small for the individual. To fit the body inside the coffin the knees were slightly raised and feet placed flat against the end. Similarly other coffins were too spacious and the body had slid down in the coffin during transit or while being lowering into the grave. The coffins at Assistens are overwhelmingly shaped as a simple rectangle with very few in the double or single break (hexagonal) shape commonly seen in the UK (Emery & Wooldridge 2011: 176).

There were also coffins of more complex construction. Limited numbers of coffins had more intricate dovetailed joints, double linings, false bases and frames for the coffin to stand upon. The few examples that exist are associated with having an extra lining of zinc; one example also had dovetail joints on the corners reinforced by metal brackets (G799). Many of these examples were from the more expensive plots or within vault structures. Another deviation found was in the construction of the base of the coffin, where the boards were not fixed lengthwise but across the width of the coffin. This was recorded as a transverse coffin base. There were at least two photographed examples and it is a possibility that these were constructed to create additional support underneath the body, indicating construction for a larger body. If this is correct these coffins were made or perhaps adapted specifically for the person. An alternative suggestion is that the coffins were constructed to resemble beds similar to coffins from one medieval churchyard in Lund, Sweden which was interpreted as creating a materialised metaphor of the bed and sleeping for death. Some coffins had horizontal base boards constructed like a bed (*spjälkist*), other coffins contained grass, hay or woodchip mattresses (Cinthio 2002: 69-71). In Assistens rare examples of decorative coffin nails, hinges and brackets were found showing that the coffin lid could be opened and closed rather than simply nailed shut prior to the funeral. These were dated as later innovations in coffin construction from the early 20th century.

A small amount of coffins contained thin metal sheets (5%, 39 of 854). These consisted of double layers of wood with zinc sheets in the middle; rarely were they soldered together to create complete sealed cases. There were also sealed zinc coffins from the mid-20th century, these were not opened but their external features were recorded. They were relatively plain in comparison to earlier metal coffins deposited in vaults such as Helsingør or Uppsala Cathedrals (Hvass 2002; Kjellberg 2015). Sealed metal coffins were required for the transport of bodies across national borders into the 20th century (Jes Wienberg pers.comm, 2015) so it is possible that some of these coffins may have been required for legal reasons. Additional features found on coffins included a strengthening wooden framework underneath the base of the coffin and another coffin which had a thin iron band securing the coffin shut. This was unusual but its rarity suggests confidence in the security of the body in the undertakers and cemetery. Status or decorative display do not appear to be widespread in metal coffins destined for burial underground compared with those seen in church vaults. Instead simply using multiple and more expensive construction methods and materials may have been desired to demonstrate the best type of care being afforded for their dead.

- *Changing coffin styles*

The intersection between coffin construction and style considerably overlaps. Marking out stylistic, or non-essential elements illustrates how mourners wished to materially express their emotional relationship to the dead. To examine chronological change in decorative features of the coffins only the sample of 545 Identified coffins is used. The coffins are described from their external and internal decorative and functional features and many coffins contained multiple features (Table 18). 44% of coffins (241 of 545) had external decoration recorded; the most common feature was a raised lid (25%, 137 of 545) and white paint (24%, 130 of 545). Black or other coloured coffins were rare. Other decoration recorded included flower arrangements, coffin handles and moulding (beading or raised wooden decoration creating patterns or borders on the coffin). Other less common decorations included a cross fixed or painted on top of the lid, plaster decorations, and coffin feet which support and raise the base of the coffin. Inside the coffin 32% (172 of 545) had features recorded but these are probably underrepresented as they are often composed of rapidly decaying organic materials. The most common elements recorded are the 23% (125 of 545) of coffins with some form of packing from coffin cushioning and mattresses. Less frequent decorations included flower arrangements, pillows, followed by upholstery textiles and studs. Tar and charcoal was present inside 17 coffins. These are interpreted as a practical feature, known from other countries (Cherryson, Crossland *et al.* 2012: 53) which combined with the wood shavings or organic material in the base helped prevent odour and leakage of bodily fluids. What was observed in the field will be influenced by preservation conditions, remnants of organic objects will be more likely to decay over time leaving a bias towards the later dated coffins. However

the relatively short period of time between the burials means that the assemblage can be considered comparatively well, with certain qualifications.

**Table 18.**
External and internal decorative and functional features in coffins from the Identified Sample (n=545).

| | Total | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **External coffin features** | **(241 coffins)** | **44 (of 545)** |
| Raised lid | 137 | 25 |
| White paint | 130 | 24 |
| Flower arrangements | 57 | 10 |
| Coffin handles | 54 | 10 |
| Moulding | 46 | 8 |
| Cross | 39 | 7 |
| Plaster decorations | 28 | 5 |
| Coffin feet | 25 | 5 |
| | | |
| **Internal coffin features** | **(172 coffins)** | **32** |
| Packing, mattresses | 125 | 23 |
| Flower arrangements | 40 | 7 |
| Pillows | 27 | 5 |
| Upholstery textiles and studs | 26 | 5 |
| Tar/ charcoal | 17 | 3 |

One distinctive additional feature to the shape of the coffin is in the design of the lid; many were recorded as having a raised or roof-like lid. Although some coffin lids went unrecorded, this is partly due to preservation factors. The joints on a raised lid were not adequately constructed to support the weight of soil on top of it. When they collapsed they were pushed down and inwards into the coffin becoming more fragmented than a flat lid. It is also harder to positively identify in a poorly preserved coffin. Therefore secure identification relies on reasonable preservation conditions and the observation of extra side panels of wood or specific joints. Most coffin lids were therefore not categorised (57%, 313 of 545). Of the remaining 232 coffins that were categorised 42% (98) of coffins had a plain flat lid and 59% (137) had a raised lid. The earliest coffins with raised lids were three from 1819 and another from 1820 but the practice continued up to 1984. Although 34 coffins with raised lids had no other elaboration, most had internal elaboration such as upholstery. Most of the raised coffins contained other forms of elaboration such as moulding, beading or painting.

The raised lid is not a practical additional feature, so why were they used instead of a simple flat surface? There are some positive connections with other types of decoration of the coffin; only four coffins with moulding were positively identified as having a flat lid, therefore moulding was associated with having a raised roof. Having a cross on the lid was also positively associated. The raised roof does provide a slightly more visible platform for any flowers or objects placed on top. The shape may be

referencing a house roof and the protection of property over the body. It is also likely to be an attempt to identify the coffin as different, not just an everyday box or container. This specific shape sets it apart and creates a material separation of a container for a body from a container for anything else. Creating a raised lid does not require advanced carpentry but extra time to construct it and additional wood is needed so this shape can also be associated with inventing additional costs in a commercial environment. However it is not simply concerned with associating status with cost but can be connected with the mourners' desire to display their emotional relationship to the person and present their body in the most appropriate manner.
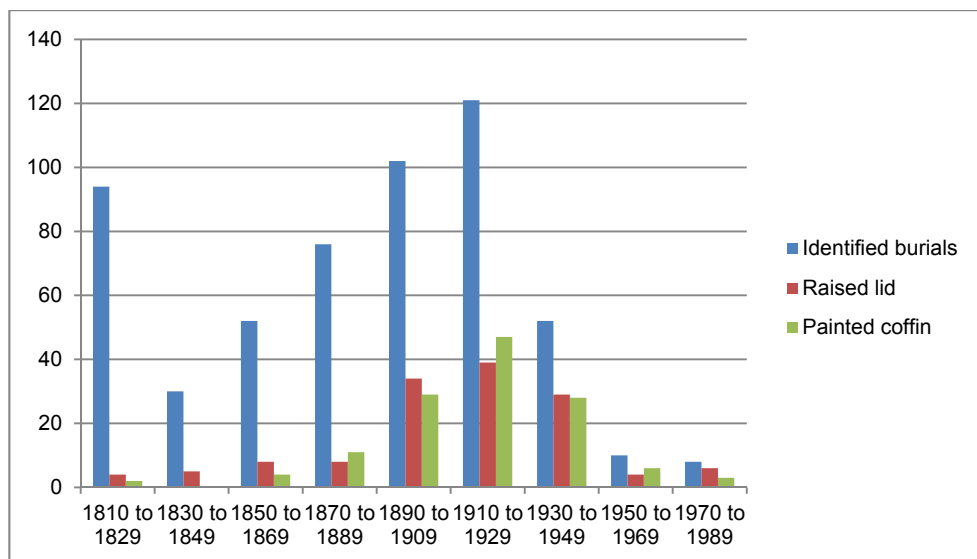


**Fig. 34.**
Coffins from burials in the Identified sample from all areas of Assistens (n=545) with painted exteriors (n=130) and raised lids (n=137) compared over time.

Decorating the exterior of the coffin appears to be a vital part of the funerary tradition. There are 130 coffins recorded as being painted, the vast majority are white and this is often associated with other decorative features (Fig. 34). However the earliest painted coffins are in fact black and are present as early as 1819 although only four coffins were recorded as black, the latest from 1889. It is likely that organic materials (ash, charcoal and oil) in black paint decayed quickly leaving no trace and the more robust synthetic white paint helped to preserve the coffin wood. Therefore the pattern established does not necessarily equate to the precise frequency of use. However the archaeological evidence does show a distinct move away from black or natural wood varnish as an appropriate colour for coffins to white from before the end of the 19th century. The first white painted coffin in Assistens is recorded from 1869 (G573) and there is a distinct peak at the start of the 20th century. This change

is still present today in Denmark where a white painted coffin is considered the 'traditional' choice. Research at a coffin factory which opened in Jutland in 1913 showed that although there was a small increase in different colours ordered, 98% of coffins made in 2009 were painted white (Have Espersen 2009: 18).

There is little variety in coffin exteriors in Assistens. There was no evidence found of coffins that were stained a natural oak or generic wood colour as suggested by undertaker's records as being popular in the mid to late 19th century (Rostock 1944: 28). It is possible that the materials used in this treatment of the wood decayed rapidly and therefore was not visible archaeologically or was simply not as popular as suggested. It is likely that coffins using better quality wood were simply varnished which is also difficult to record archaeologically. Evidence from undertaker invoices for funerals in the 1830s show that palls (cloths to cover the coffin) were still hired for the funeral (Christensen 1912: 335-6) and therefore removed prior to the committal. This would have the consequence that exterior decoration was not necessary. There were two unusually coloured coffins. One coffin possibly being painted light blue with cherub plaster decorations although it could be decayed white paint. Another coffin had a white paint background with black borders. Both examples were dated to 1880. Ethnographic sources from Sweden suggest a larger potential of colours ranging from green to red often depending on the age of the person (Hagberg 2015 [1937]: 182-3) and Protestant coffins in Germany could be painted with Biblical quotations or verses (Kenzler 2015: 156) but none were found in Assistens. Many coffins were not painted at all, retaining the natural wood colour or instead being temporarily covered in fabric. Fabric could either be a hired pall or secured onto the coffin with coffin studs. These are small metal tacks with rounded heads that can also be used as part of the decoration, laid in multiple rows or symbolic designs. Coffin studs are found frequently in 18th to late 19th century cemeteries in the UK (Miles & Connell 2012) but were not present in Copenhagen. Only six coffins were found with white porcelain studs in the interior which were used to hold the textile lining in place. The evidence suggests that hired palls were used to cover the coffin for the funeral and removed before being lowered into the grave.

Coffin handles are dual purpose, being both functional to carry the coffin and also decorative. Where present they tend to come in sets of six or eight handles. There were 54 coffins recorded with multiple handles or sashes. Three examples of textile sashes, used to lower the coffin into the grave were also found in place underneath coffins. These are normally removed when the coffin is in the grave but occasionally get stuck. For heavy metal coffins with a double shell, the outer shell contained holes to enable the sashes to pass through and be lifted down into the grave. 44 individual handles were recorded as finds and most were textile (48%, 21 of 44) or leather/suede (30%, 13 of 44). There were also nine metal handles and one set of plastic handles. The textile handles were sewn and wrapped around a length of rope which was then fed through holes in the coffin. Some textile handles on the same coffin were of

different weave indicating a lack of consistency in manufacture from the undertakers. Only one coffin handle was noted as a long round bar set along the length of the coffin instead of individual handles. Metal handles were more highly decorated, generally D-shaped and only one coffin had composite metal handles of lead with intricate zinc finials. The plastic handles were designed to emulate the ornate handles and included a white plastic cross set on the lid of the coffin. The familiar symbolism was continued just utilising new material. The numbers of handles recovered are very low considering the sample size. Preservation factors or even the potential for grave-robbery may have hindered collection but overall it appears that handles, particularly decorated handles were not a popular choice.
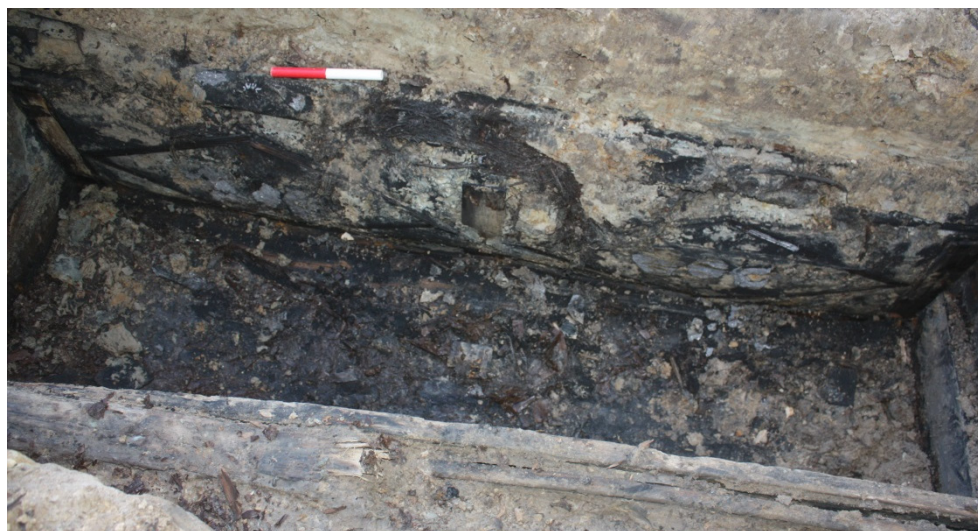


**Fig. 35.**
Black painted coffin with diamond shaped moulding which is shown reversed from being imprinted onto the soil of the grave side and revealed upon removal of the coffin (G1329). The coffin decoration also contained plaster decoration and feet, pine branches and wreaths adorned the coffin lid (not illustrated). Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 6 September 2010.

Some coffins have multiple decorative features and form a group of highly elaborate but not necessarily individualised coffin styles. Some highly decorative coffins had up to 10 recorded features. The decorations are all of commonly used patterns which are easily reproduced. Additional decoration on the exterior included 41 coffins with wooden moulding or beading along the outside edges of the coffin (Fig. 35); these are mostly dated to the start of the 20th century. Only 28 coffins had plaster decorations on the sides or lid which were most commonly of floral wreaths or swags with winged cherub heads (Fig. 36).

**Fig. 36.**
Plaster cherub decorations. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 16 September 2010.

These are generally dated from the mid-19th century to 1920s. Similar moulds for casting plaster coffin decorations are present in the collection at the Museum of West Zealand (*Museum Vestsjælland*). Only four coffins with plaster decorations are for small children, although due to the low number of identified children this may be somewhat misleading as other unidentified child coffins did have traces of plaster work. Some 25 coffins also had carved feet on which the coffin stood. Dating from the 1850s to 1920s, they were in sets of four or six, made of wood and painted. Many were carved to resemble animal or lion's feet and mimic Royal or elite coffins. Having feet may enable easier lifting of the coffin but also requires higher quality construction as they need to bear the entire weight of the coffin. The feet represent an unnecessary addition which shows a greater desire for embellishments. Despite contemporary images of elaborate coffins showing extensive decoration and different coffin shapes (Rostock 1944: 25) there were surprisingly few heavily decorated examples in Assistens. The coffin choices of elite and Royal burials in Denmark and Sweden also have extensive decorations (Olsson 1918; Kruse 1988) and viewing the lit-de-parade of burials such as the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen's in 1844 (Ravn 1944) would have allowed Copenhageners to view the alternatives available. These extravagant displays may well have influenced the upper circles of society in their choice of burial style but appears to be of limited influence on the average Copenhagener when thinking of their own burial choices. It is also possible that choice was limited economically or within the undertakers catalogues yet it seems unlikely that discouraging expensive coffins would be a good business practice.

There were rare examples of unusually decorative coffins such as the coffin of a young male (G753) who was born in St. Croix, then a Danish colony which is now in the

U.S. Virgin Islands. He died in Germany in 1872 and the metal coffin was transported to Assistens to the family plot. The coffin furnishings contain one of the rare nameplates and additional metal decorations which contained Biblical text and symbols associated with death; a flaming lamp, an angel and an hourglass, it is possible that these relate to German funerary fashions rather than Danish. It is quite likely that the metal coffin and nameplate was necessary for the transportation across countries although another individual who died in Berlin c. 40 years later and was transported home in a metal coffin to the family plot was not provided with a nameplate or decorations. Another group of elaborate coffins with lead scroll-type nameplates come from the same vault (P555) and all are relatively early burials from the 1810s to 1830s. Instead of specific nameplates, coffins were probably identified by the use of paper labels, which have been observed on earlier coffins in vaults (Kjellin 1958: 48-9), would not have survived in Assistens. Only four other coffins in Assistens used additional symbolic imagery for the coffin including stars and oil lamps and this very low frequency of use is in contrast to contemporary coffin styles in the UK. Another 20th century decorative addition was a simple wooden cross attached to the raised coffin lid and generally painted white. 39 coffins had crosses with only two earlier examples dating from the 1890s. In general, distribution of any type of decorations had little correlation to specific ages or gender with the exception of the cross on the coffin lid; they were all on older adult coffins and there were many more on female coffins than male (25 females :14 males).

Internal features also comprise a mix of function and decoration. Coffin linings cover the rough construction of coffins and any padding or mattress materials for the body to lie upon but also help to present the body. There were occasional coffins painted on the inside with three examples of white and one potentially of red paint. Oral testimony describing activities at a carpenter's workshop in Malling, south of Aarhus in Jutland, suggested that different motifs were painted on the interior of the coffin but none were found in Assistens (*Moesgård Museum, Fund og Fortidsminder* 150405). Internal textile furnishings were relatively rare and considering the ethnological and photographic evidence of coffin linings, it is quite likely that many more were originally present. Two coffins were lined, not with textile, but either with leather or suede. One example was within a highly decorated coffin containing white nylon lace linings on the interior of the coffin lid which appears to be custom made. Further evidence comes from the upholstery pins, coffin linings, pillows or mattress filings of sawdust, and dried grasses or hay creating an extra layer for the body. All of the pillows found resembled everyday furniture cushions as they were heavily embroidered and could have been brought from the home of the deceased. Two coffins also had plastic bags; one coffin had four small bags filled with sawdust placed around the head which acted to secure the head. The second example appears to be more related to flower decoration or a gift.

Three blankets found covering bodies can also be interpreted rather as a personal grave good than a standard piece of funeral equipment as they were hand knitted and unique in different ways. The best preserved blanket found was folded underneath the head as a pillow (G458); it is uncertain if this represents a more personal expression from mourners or was a cheaper alternative to a standard pillow used by the undertakers. Although there is limited evidence for interior furnishings, their use appears to have increased from the 1890 to 1920s and these included the use of pillows or cushions and blankets that were not standard stock bought from the undertaker.
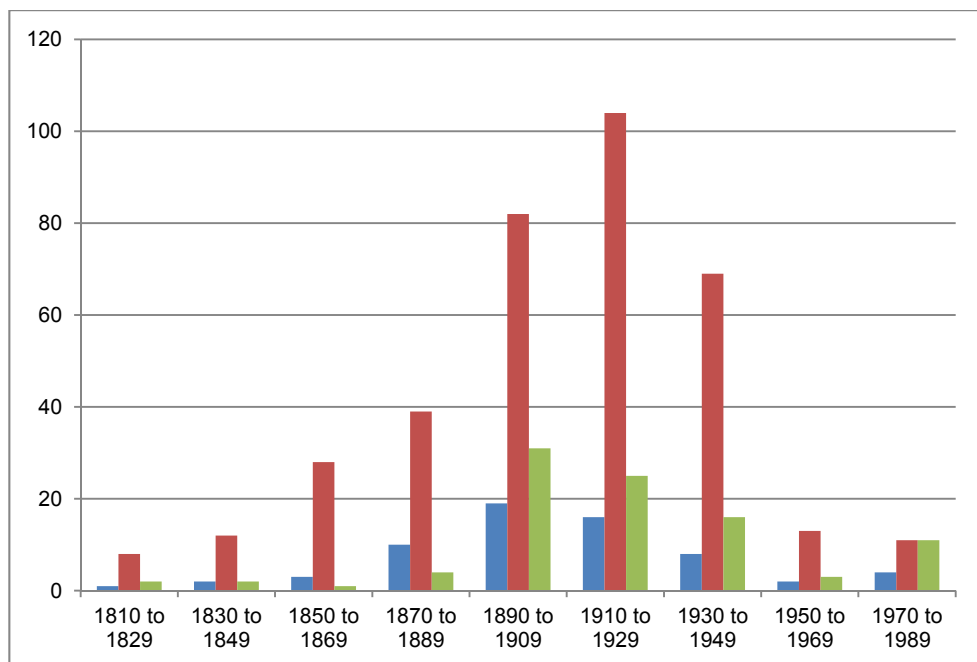


**Fig. 37.**
Essential coffin furniture (handles, sashes, n=65) compared to purely decorative features (feet, plaster, raised lid and paint, n=366) and features regarded as showing a more personal element (religious, flowers, nameplate, n=95) from the Identified sample in Assistens (n=545).

Coffin furniture is both functional and potentially decorative (Fig. 37). It is the choice to provide extensive symbolic options which is rare in Assistens. There is also individual taste and aesthetics to consider. A coffin handle may be formed of plain and simple textile but the colour, texture and overall look can accentuate a simple coffin form therefore emphasising both form and function. Equally, decoration on the coffin often has a symbolic function. The desire to provide elaborate decoration including religious designs can be to emphasise individual beliefs in a society where plainer coffins are more common. However the absence of religious expression does not equate to the absence of strong belief, simply that beliefs were manifested in other

non-tangible ways. The relationship between function and decoration in exterior coffin furniture was analysed to look for change in provision. Handles or sashes were categorised as functional coffin furniture, coffin furniture such as plaster decorations were categorised as decorative features. Other features can be categorised as ritual or personal touches to a coffin such as flower decorations, wreaths or religious symbols like the cross. Functional features were used throughout Assistens but were more frequently used between the 1890s and 1920s. This may reflect the larger numbers of dated burials within this period. For example the low numbers of handles indicate that they may have been regarded as useful or practical but not a standard accessory. Purely decorative, non-essential external coffin furniture is overall more common than functional features and is prominent from the 1890s to 1940s. However after this date they are reduced or simplified and features categorised as expressing a more personal taste or sense of religious identity increase in number. Therefore there is no straightforward correlation between more recent burials and an increase in funeral decorations. It is type of decoration that is important.

- *Containing the ashes of the body - urns*

Coffins were generally the last container of the body but for those who were cremated an urn is necessary to store the ashes. No evidence remains of the original cremated coffin; any metal nails or decorative elements were extracted from the ashes. Urns could be made for display but most were intended for burial underground in family plots. There was no Danish precedent for containing or displaying the ashes but inspiration was taken from Classical urn shapes which had been so commonly used on gravestones.

91 cremation urns were excavated in Assistens, the earliest dated to 1909 (P60). There was only one rectangular, pale yellow ceramic urn (G1075); most urns found were remarkably similar, with most being a standard design of a rounded blackened iron urn with a slightly raised lid. There was little to differentiate the urns on the exterior surface, with limited numbers having a raised rim decoration so their identical design was not subject to a desire for elaboration. There was also some fragmentary evidence of wooden box urns or other organic containers which left the ashes as a loose deposit in the soil. It is possible that the ceramic urn represents one of the earliest cremation burials in Copenhagen as it is similar in style to the urns used for the first decades of the Bispebjerg Crematorium and stored in the columbarium (Bøgh 1981: 29; Helweg 2013). It may have been originally displayed at Bispebjerg but then later buried within Assistens. Many iron urns were moderately well preserved but only a few urns were completely intact when excavated, these were not opened for analysis.

The Municipal register includes the burial of cremation urns and also describes if iron or wooden urns were buried but has been shown to be incorrect in several plots. Some cremations are not always recorded as such. Urns would have been identified with

paper tags tied to the exterior of the urn when it was sealed instead of a formal nameplate. An administrative ceramic cremation tag with a year and identity number is also placed inside the ashes. This is part of standard funeral procedure. These tags identify the body through the process of funeral and cremation, into the urn and can be seen as part of an increase in administrative regulations in managing death. When a group of urns was excavated, they could not always be identified to a specific burial. 24 urns were damaged and the contents included tags, some were partially burnt showing that they were present during the actual cremation process. A single paper name tag was found attached to the exterior of one urn with a metal wire. Only the ceramic urn contained any grave goods - gold wedding ring, copper button and a possible brooch pin. The ring could not have been on the body during the cremation as it had not been exposed to high temperature. The grave good clearly referenced the person and their emotional relationship and were added later as an integral part of the burial.

In Denmark ashes are strictly controlled and cannot be given out to relatives to be kept in their homes, but are stored at the crematorium until being fetched for burial or scattering in a cemetery (Flohr Sørensen 2009: 113). The practice of relatives keeping urns on the mantelpiece at home should not occur in Denmark although there is stratigraphic evidence of two urns identified from different years being buried at the same time in a double grave cut. However it is more likely that the earlier urn was stored at the crematorium and then buried together with the later cremation urn. The columbarium at Bispebjerg was successful but was too small for the rapid increase in cremation in the mid-20th century. Standard round iron urns were quickly adopted and can express a functional approach to cremation. Burial of the urn does not appear to have legally required a ceremony but was rather a practical act. An improvised ceremony may have been arranged where mourners and a priest participated but an official ceremony was only formally created in 1992 (Kragh 2003: 105). Clearly the initial years of cremation were marked with uncertainty and a trial process of how to deal with administration, the ashes and the ceremony.

- *Summarising the development of coffins and urns*

To summarise the evidence presented, coffins at Assistens were generally wooden rectangular containers of standard sizes with a flat lid; raised lids were a later innovation from the mid-19th century. Few durable handles were used and overall materials used tended towards wood and linen with few synthetic materials used with the exception of the white paint for coffins. A plain painted exterior evidently replaces the use of textile coverings for the exterior surface. There were few deviations with some early burials in high value family plots on the Monument Lines or in vaults displaying elaborate decorations. Occasional examples using metal linings or extensive decorations continue throughout the cemetery and must be seen as marking out particular expressions for the person inside. The use of decorative metal studs in

geometric, religious or symbolic patterns on the coffin was non-existent in comparison to UK cemeteries. Decorations using alternate materials on the exterior did increase after the mid-19th century including the use of plaster to create wreaths or angels or wooden geometric designs. These changes in coffin design are likely to be related to the expanding undertaking business but mostly to the increased demand by mourners for additional embellishment of the coffin. The person inside the coffin should be represented in a more decorative and display style where the coffin, which may once have been covered by a pall was now a visual platform for display within the funeral ritual. Some trends such as the use of feet or moulding on the coffins emerged in the late 19th century but were largely absent by the mid-20th century. A cross on the lid and flowers became more popular in the 20th century. Inside the coffin, wood shavings or chippings were used to create a mattress for the body and sometimes a pillow; these may have been covered in textiles which did not survive in Assistens.

Choice in coffin style is not purely concerned with cost or economic status. What most Danes would consider being the basic model of coffin today – the white painted coffin with a raised roof, often with a cross on the lid, can be defined as developing from the 1870s and gaining most popularity in the decades surrounding the end of the 19th century. These features represent a considerable departure from previous coffin styles. The change in coffin colour from black and then natural wood to white is striking particularly as black is still predominantly used in hearses and clothing by undertakers and mourners. The interpretation of the colour change from black to white is suggested as being in line with more romantic ideals of death with lightness and eternity making a striking contrast to the heavy black Baroque coffins. The colour black is heavily associated with darkness and negativity in Europe (Tarlow 2011: 186). Birgitte Kragh (2003: 53) identifies white coffins as being spread throughout the countryside of Denmark by the 1930s but the white coffins in Assistens are strongly associated from long before this date from the mid to late 19th century which would tie in closer with an earlier move towards a standardised industry in the capital city.

This shift in colour choice is much later than the move from black to white in bridal clothing which took place in the end of the 18th century (Kofod 2008: 328). Both events are life-changing and required marking out in the community and it is unsurprising that both would contain dynamic practices reflecting changes in belief or understanding of the body as within a liminal period of time. Practically the synthetic white paint can be seen as a more modern and perhaps cheaper material to cover up inferior quality wood. Previously this may have been covered with a textile pall which would have been removed at the committal. However the white can also represent innocence, peacefulness and heaven making death less negative and final instead death can be treated as a journey, falling asleep or eventually connecting to life again in the person' waking state. The white paint shines and combined with the raised platform of the lid highlights itself as different from a normal box or container and emphasises

the specific function to contain a body. The contrast between the white coffin and the living dressed in black emphasises the clear difference and separation between the living and the dead but there is ambiguity in this relationship. The materiality of the coffin is representing a change in the bond between the living and the dead body in the end of the 19th century where death is no longer displayed in such a final manner. Although the funeral is a way of dealing with the break in some relationship, it is also re-made and presented through the coffin.

The rarity of nameplates in Assistens is striking and worthy of further discussion because it highlights how the relationship between the living and the dead was marked in coffin display. Nameplates from the 16th to 19th centuries are found from churchyards in Denmark such as Holstebro and Horsens but are not ubiquitous (Thomsen 2008; Grønfeldt Petersen 2012). However coffins in church vaults in Scandinavia such as Helsingør Cathedral or Klara church, Stockholm and Sura old church in Västmanland, Sweden (Hvass 2002; Bergman 2003; Jonsson 2009) tend to have nameplates suggesting that coffin burials within vaults required identification but inhumation burials did not. This contrasts with the UK, where preservation conditions permitting, there is often a high frequency of nameplates found on coffins in churchyards, vaults and cemeteries although the material used, designs and inscriptions may differ. For example at the vaults of St George's Church in London used by the upper middle class, 673 individuals out of a total of 781 coffins and 146 detached nameplates were identified. The material used was mostly lead followed by brass (Boston, Boyle *et al.* 2009: 164). At New Bunhill Fields, London used by the poorer working class for inhumation burials, 127 individuals out of a total of 827 archaeologically excavated burials could be identified from nameplates. Many more were present but indecipherable, the majority were tin-plated (Miles & Connell 2012: 36). While these burial populations are not strictly comparable as they represent different social classes they allow a sense of the frequency of coffin furniture in general in the UK. Nameplates are on display for a short period of time often only a few days but could be highly decorative as part of the display function of the coffin. Yet why are elaborate nameplates used at all when they would be seen for only a short time? It could be explained due to the coffin furniture being sold as a set and that it was socially normalised to have a nameplate.

Before excavation started at Assistens, an assumption was in place that there would be many coffins with nameplates based upon experience from cemeteries in the UK (admittedly often from slightly earlier periods). This expectation was based upon an assumption of similarity within funeral traditions in 19th and 20th century Europe being affected by the general social trends of capitalism, consumerism and industrialisation encouraging the increased use of material culture. However in Assistens there were very few nameplates found with only two found in burials and three present in a single family vault. Here the nameplates may have been useful to keep track of people who wished to be buried not just in the same vault but perhaps

in a specific relation to each other. Nameplates are used to identify the person in the long-term, where a coffin may be seen and also disturbed. Reading the name emphasises connections to living descendants and to a person. This could deter disturbance or movement of the body and coffin. The nameplate allows relatives also to be certain of the precise location of their dead and it continues the relationship long after burial. However the lack of nameplates and decorative metal coffin furniture in Assistens shows a local Danish response to the increasingly homogenous view of European societies. So why were nameplates absent in Assistens?

In searching for an answer the suggestion is that the UK had an earlier start in the consumption of funeral goods in the late 18th and 19th century, partly when tin plated coffin furniture became easier to make with the centre of trade first in London, then in Birmingham (Buteux 2013). There were many links between the UK and Denmark during this period, although the battle and later siege of Copenhagen in 1801 and 1807 might not have created the most positive era of relations, there would still be access and connections as well as the influence of funeral furnishings from European undertakers. However it would be incorrect to state that the lack of metal coffin furniture in Assistens was because Denmark was a relatively late consumer in European taste and cultural values. There was a lot of opportunity for Danish undertakers to import or manufacture decorations if desired. Certainly if desired, the demand for elaborate coffin decorations could have been met in Copenhagen and economic restrictions become less of a factor as the cost of coffin decorations fell throughout the 19th century. Instead alternatives such as paper decorations and plaster mouldings represented a viable and preferred alternative to metal decorations. Part of the answer is that metal may not have been desirable material to use in burials, perhaps even being considered too durable and long-lasting for the grave. More natural materials may be preferred precisely because they did decay sooner. However the Danish undertaking business may simply have developed on a different trajectory compared to the UK. Overall decorative trends do seem to have increased particularly from the 1850s; this may be related to the rise of undertaking businesses from this period. Outside of the areas with more expensive plots, few coffins were highly decorated but these represent specific tailor-made items rather than standardised pre-made coffins. The most commonly present standard coffins instead represent the more industrialised scale of the work of an undertaker; coffins were no longer made for each individual but on a factory scale. This is a strong example of the professionalised and more industrialised construction of the coffin furnishings.

However a general trend for comparatively plain coffins would last all the way through to the mid-20th century where even the latest coffins excavated had no nameplates. Even cremation urns display tags only for the practical purposes of tracking cremated remains prior to burial. Therefore neither economics nor access adequately explains the difference between the UK and Denmark. Religious belief in Denmark tends to emphasise humility and simplicity in rituals and may have

discouraged elaborate coffins and furnishings. Examination of practices in other European countries would provide more information on these differences. It appears that in Denmark there was a deliberate choice not to elaborate with extensive metal exterior decorations. The nameplate is part of this set of decorations and also made of undesirable material. An additional answer may lie in the modern cemetery itself where nameplates were not seen as vital for identification or for administration in the relatively well-regulated environment at Assistens especially compared with the visible coffins in church vaults. In this case the environment and institutional nature of the cemetery could be affecting the choices of material culture of the coffin. It wasn't necessary to mark the coffin as there was a high level of trust in the system of individual burial space. Mourners thought they knew where their loved ones were buried.

## Grave goods presented in and top of the coffin

Although many items can be categorised as grave goods including clothing and objects directly associated with the body such as jewellery covered in the last section, the focus here is on the objects placed inside or on top of the coffin that are not directly associated with the coffin furnishing or specific preparation of the body. Although rare, in the medieval period in Europe grave goods could be included in Christian burials. Occasional objects possibly related to profession are also found such as the malt stirrer or a yard stick in Lund (Cinthio 2002: 74). In the UK Gilchrist and Sloane (2005) demonstrate that limited numbers of gifts were present in some monastic contexts and this trend continues through the Reformation period. Small amounts of miscellaneous items are present in burials from London in the 19th century such as plates, an animal figurine or umbrella (Miles, Powers *et al.* 2008: 65-6; Miles & Connell 2012: 50-1). In Denmark, small items often of ceramics, pilgrim badges, seals or coins are found in medieval churchyards, Reformation and later period cemeteries (Dahlerup Koch & Lynnerup 2003; Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009). Small objects such as books or small boxes containing false teeth are recorded in church vault burials (Hvass 2002: 89). Ethnographic evidence suggests customs of including plants and herbs such as hops to prevent the dead from rising (Troels-Lund 1908: 153-4) or to sweeten the smell around the body were also common (Nyberg 2010). Further details are provided by Kragh (2003: 41-2) for occasional grave goods from the late 19th century: love letters, bridal bouquets and pregnant women being provided with extra clothes for the baby and also coins to pay for the first church service after birth. Other gifts noted are food and drink for the journey to prepare for the next world. These traditions often refer to gifts that are less likely to be preserved in an archaeological context. Very few individual items are seen in post mortem photographs although there are frequently flowers posed over the body. Studies of items placed in coffins in the 21st century have been completed in Sweden through

interviews which indicate the complexity of their meanings (Aggedal 2006). Jan – Olof Aggedal also separates out the difference between macro-rites, the official actions and micro-rites, those of a personal nature undertaken by mourners. He suggests the emphasis changes to items that people think the deceased treasured in life and represent their interests and wishes with the inclusion of wash bags, mobile phones or passports (Aggedal 2006: 66).

In Assistens there were 76 wreaths or bouquets and many more unusual, uncategorised finds within coffins some connected with flowers such as vases. Two toys, a rubber ball (G1170) and a porcelain doll, were placed with children and other gifts are deliberate depositions including a photograph in a frame (G1141, Fig. 42). There were also decayed notepaper identified as possible letters, glass bottles and a glass vase, even a miniature flower pot that may have held a small plant or flower. Three small leather bound books were found in three burials, all from female adults of older age categories, all were Hymn or Psalm books. The exact location for the books was generally around the arms or hands suggesting close placement near the body and not being used under the chin to keep the mouth closed as suggested in folk custom (Kragh 2003: 37). Three tokens or coins are found in the coffins with males from early line burials, two were young males of 24 and 18 years, they could represent a form of payment or some other token of association or allegiance. Plastic items were again only found in burials from the 1970s indicating a widespread aversion to placing modern materials within burials. Finds of newspaper and also an enamel urine bottle placed between the legs of a male (G532) are far harder to interpret. Overall grave goods tend to be tokens which appear to express some element of the individual personality of the dead or the relationship between living and dead. Expressions of faith are also present both on the coffins and in the personal items which refer to religious ideals; this includes coffins with plaster cherubs on the sides, palm branches, wreaths shaped like crosses, both on top of the coffin and inside. Personal religious items included a rosary, a cross, hymn books and a small porcelain replica of the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen's statue of Jesus.

Flowers and wreaths were relatively well represented considering the preservation conditions were not optimal. 9% of all burials (76 of 854) had flower arrangements, plant material or other fastenings for wreaths preserved inside or around the coffin. Many burials with surviving plant material had multiple wreaths and bouquets, both inside and outside the coffin. Gifts placed inside the coffin, before it is sealed may be associated with a general presentation of the body. They could be provided by the undertaker if requested by the mourners. However they could also be personally made and placed by the mourners. It is difficult to identify the agency behind the acts. The same difficulty can be applied to material placed on the coffin. These can be flowers or wreaths fixed to the coffin lid, or flowers thrown in the grave after the coffin had been lowered into the grave.

Flowers inside the coffin were dominated by bouquets and individual roses. There were specific choices of flowers, particularly the rare example of the person buried with eight separate bouquets of roses, gypsophilia and other unidentified flowers (G1464). Other burials include one with a bouquet held in the hands, two shaped like a cross and another example of two palm branches held in the hands and spread out over the chest. There were also occasional examples of plastic flower tags and bags inside the coffin. There are no associations of the presence of flowers or plant material to gender or age although there was only one child burial, which is also the oldest from 1818, which had some surviving flower remains. Where dated, flower remains are preserved from 1859 to 1979 but only 13 burials are pre-1900, so it is probable that issues of preservation are more relevant in this discussion than any alteration in fashions over time.



**Fig. 38.**
Artificially coloured palm branches placed on the top of a coffin (G460). Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 30 August 2010.

There is a ceremonial aspect to giving flowers, either on top of the coffin or inside the coffin. It does seem to have been a standard to have some form of flowers or branches as part of the public display of the funeral. On the coffin were found many examples of circular or cross-shaped wreaths, palm and pine branches. Outside of the coffin, wire or ribbon used to fix flowers to the coffin was found and four of these directly associated both with the remains of plants and flowers upon raised coffin lids. One possible chronological trend shown is that of placing either palm or pine branches on top of the coffin, this is predominant found on coffins from the 1900s to 1920s. Pine branches were also used to line the grave cut, often concealing evidence of earlier burials (Chapter 6) but they cannot be dismissed only as cemetery management and may have been placed as part of the ceremony. One example of a coffin lid bearing

five wreaths, one cross-shaped and four round wreaths is unusually elaborate. Remains of three circular pine wreaths were still present on one coffin, other items included pine or artificially coloured palm leaves (Fig. 38). Palm or fir branches placed on the coffin can be interpreted as a religious symbol which may have had relevance to that specific person or their mourners. Evergreens have associations with eternal life and the immortality of the soul and were often used in funeral ceremonies or for coffins (Tarlow 2011: 170). Palms have a clear association in Christianity with the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem. It may be traditional to have flowers but the quantity, quality, types, whether inside the coffin, fixed on top of the coffin or thrown into the coffin may be formed from a network of social and personal expectation of traditions.

One of the final gestures that can be connected as a grave good, or a last gesture of respect was available to anybody who attended the committal procedure. There were also eight examples of sand recorded as external features to a coffin although more examples were noted in the excavation. The sand needed to have been intentionally brought to the cemetery and therefore can also be seen as part of the ritual which represents the separation of dead from living. These can be related to the committal ritual of mourners throwing soil or sand onto the coffin after it is laid in the grave.

- *Summarising grave good traditions*

Within Assistens the early years of burial conform to a low level of individual items but the provision of grave goods rises from approximately the mid-19th century and increases further in the 20th century. These are acts that are completed by the mourners (micro-rites), not the undertakers. Placing a book in the coffin are gestures that help to re-connect the mourner to the dead person but also help as gifts to represent the separation between the two. They are some of the last physical gestures that can be done directly for the person and remain intensely personal acts.

Religious items in other forms, such as the rosaries and Hymn books were still used. The presence of rosaries in Assistens suggests either some Catholic burials or some other individual connection to that object. Burial in Catholic areas of Germany generally had a rosary placed in the hands (Kenzler 2015: 159). Combined also with the few examples of sand on coffins and other intangible funeral rites, the symbolism on gravestones from doves to crosses and prayers on gravestones, Christianity seems to be well represented throughout Assistens. The difficulty lies with attempting to tease out what is a personal marker of faith and what is used according to general custom or individual wish. There was also no pattern of taboo items in coffins, items which were associated with the preparation of the body and therefore could not be used afterwards such as scissors, razors, combs or washbowls. This practice has been investigated in Germany where washbowls are correlated with Protestant burials (Kenzler 2015: 163). It is possible that these elements of folk belief were less relevant in the funerary tradition of the later 19th century after being removed by the

management of professionals although contradictory beliefs are still present (Tarlow 2011: 173).

Grave goods are for public display but also represent private values, so they contain a blurring of lines between private, public, concealed and visible. Although displayed for a brief moment of time what goes into the coffin does not necessarily become completely forgotten but can create a lasting impression beyond the visible and temporary display and within the memories of the surviving mourners. Supplying something into the coffin that the living thought the dead would have appreciated represents a desire to continue relationships beyond death and fulfil responsibilities to furnish them with everything they might need. There is a standard to provide some flowers although chronological patterns are unclear due to preservation conditions. It is also possible that the display of flowers above-ground on the grave was more important than being left inside or on top of the coffin lid. There is a mix between what was customary, to provide flowers or to dress the dead respectably but there was also choice in what exact form this provision took.

Other objects which reference the life or interests, or relationships of the person are increasingly added to the coffin, although this pattern does have a long tradition back to the 17th century. Although there is a conflict where objects made of modern materials are rarely used and this may account for the lack of plastic or artificial fibres within the coffin in general. The use of plastic or artificial materials are often forbidden now in cemeteries on environmental grounds but the continued dislike of using plastic can also be connected with the idea that the material itself is not suitable for burial precisely because it does not decay (Falkenström 2014). The evidence from Assistens is still different from 21st century ideas of multiple grave goods are clearly associated with the identity of the deceased through hobbies or interests. However the latest burials from Assistens are from the mid-20th century and instead represent a period of flexible burial customs which is defined by the mix of traditional and modern practices. Practices which were still heavily defined by previous custom only change gradually. The cause of this may be the continuing relaxation of religious authority over burial behaviour, increasing willingness to express relationships and the person but can also be connected with the change in who is responsible for producing the burial.

Throughout the examination of funerary material culture and practices observed in Assistens and elsewhere, there is strength in seeing the material culture as being active in the human creation and experience of memory (Jones 2007). In these cases, the memory created is both of the dead person and memories surrounding the events of the death and funeral too. The burial of an older female from 1906 (G1485, Fig. 39) provides a good example of a burial rich in coffin furnishings and personal items. They included a cross made of pine branches placed on the body, a student cap possibly belonging to her son which commemorates the completion of the high

school exam, a glass vase and her husband's wedding ring. This burial shows a distinct mix of items provided by undertakers combined with personal choices which indicates the complex interactions involved in furnishing a burial. It is quite possible that the woman herself had specified these items to remind her of family who died before her. However the pine cross and furnishings of the coffin would have been made for the funeral and possibly not specifically arranged for by the deceased but perhaps left to the undertaker to decide upon with only minimal instructions from the people arranging the funeral. This can be applied to the objects referencing the dead woman and her family relationships in the past and the present of the burial. Choosing them, placing them in the coffin and burying them in the ground removes them from the living world but at the same time fixes them as physical reference in the memory of this act.

**Fig. 39.**
The glass vase placed in the burial of an older female (G1485) who died in 1906 and also had fragments of a typical cap used by students upon graduation in her coffin. The cap could not have belonged to the woman but may have belonged to her son who died in his 20s and was recorded as a student. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 14 January 2011.

## Asleep or awake?

Death being associated with sleep has been used as a metaphor since the medieval period in Europe (Laqueur 2015: 217) and it is still used today although the beliefs and emotions it is associated with do change. It is used above-ground in poems, stories, gravestone epitaphs and obituaries and below-ground in the treatment and position of the body in the coffin. The idea of a person falling asleep mitigates against the finality of death, it implies peacefulness and rest and is a comforting metaphor for grieving families as discussed for people in the 19th century (Tarlow 1999a: 135). It can also represent the break between people who are alive but also the possibility that they may wake and would therefore appreciate the treatment of their body and require items placed in the coffin and crucially be able to reinstate their relationships with the mourners. The popularity of sleep as a metaphor is not constant and it can be present in below-ground materiality but absent in commemoration above-ground (Tarlow 1999b: 189).

The idea is materialised below-ground through the position of the body, clothing and the furnishings within the coffin. The body is placed on the back with arms by the sides. Shrouds or tight coverings are also used to secure the body into place and whilst this has a practical function in preventing movement of the body within the coffin they also can be interpreted symbolically by emphasising the body in clothing similar to nightwear. Coffins are furnished to resemble beds constructed with horizontal slats of which examples were found in Assistens. Inside the coffin plant materials or wood shavings are often used to create a mattress and pillow which are covered with material. The position of the body lying back on a mattress with pillow and dressed in simple linens builds an image representing a sleeping person. Many of these elements are found in the evidence at Assistens. Post mortem photographs also show what appears to be normal bed pillows under the head but little trace was found of these in Assistens and it is likely that instead the pillows were mounds of grass or straw covered with plain linen which decays quickly (Fig. 29).

Sleep is strongly referenced in the evidence at Assistens but it reduces but over time is combined with other sentiments. The early burials, whether richly furnished or not, have the body placed supine in the coffin with the arms being placed alongside the body. This is an inert pose where nothing is found in the hands, clothing is limited to simple nightwear or shrouds and there are limited grave goods. From the 1870s burials show more variation with placing the arms on the legs to create a slightly more life-like position, more everyday clothing and elaborate hairstyles for the females. For women long hair would have been styled differently often in braids for sleeping than when awake. However the evidence does not yet show a full transition to life-like preparation of the body. The lower body was largely neglected and shoes were virtually absent. Only in the relatively few burials from the 1950s onwards is there a clearer pattern of full everyday clothing. Grave goods in the coffins are rarely displayed in an active position, for example the dead person seeming to hold the gifts or belongings. This suggests that the grieving mourners did symbolically understand that the person is no longer present in the physical body but that there is still a façade of a once-living person which is being played out. This is enhanced with adding grave goods that they might have needed in life. It is a realistic view upon death which emphasises a strong relationship still between living and dead that is not broken or hidden but acknowledged materially.

In the 20th century sleep appears to be used as an ambiguous concept when it is expressed materially because as it is combined with expressions of the person as if they were awake. The pose found in Assistens is staged and artificial and has only a superficial resemblance to sleeping. This has been explored through the unwritten rules and standards on presentation of the body (Prior, L. 1989: 161). The body is laid out in in the coffin with a fixed, static and straight position which is different to a position where somebody is alive but asleep. This may also relate to the Position E which is identified from the burials at Linköping from the late 17th century but also

the broader range of positions indicating more individual choice in how to pose the body as people may have chosen when awake.

Display of the body transformed in the early modern period from presenting the body of a person awaiting judgement to presenting a softened image of being at peace and resting. This is an analogy which is relevant in the earlier burials at Assistens and never truly disappears. However a threshold is crossed when examining later Assistens material where there is now the sense of the person being presented resembling how they were when awake rather than simply sleeping. The change in practice was subtle over the burial activity in Assistens but appears to become more prevalent from the later 19th century and becomes solidified in the 20th century. This could have been utilised by the business of undertakers extending their practices and wanting to provide more services and furnishings. It can also be connected to a genuine desire by mourners to keep the dead connected to their identity, as closer to being awake than dead or sleeping. In this way mourners are integrating the time frames that the body is being prepared for: for sleep and then for some specified time afterwards. For the religious this may be after the Resurrection but it is relevant for those who do not identify as religious too.

# Divisions in the inclusive modern cemetery

Modern cemeteries are based on a standard of inclusion because they are a place where everybody in society could be buried, at least for a certain period of time, regardless of religion, wealth, status or hierarchy. There are divisions within the cemetery which mark out these elements but the principles of equality and inclusion are strongly referenced. The Assistens data gives an opportunity to investigate how different sections of society worked within the structural frameworks and influences of burial regulations to create their own burial traditions. The principle of equality in the modern cemetery can be tested through examination of purchasing power and choices in consumption patterns. The area under examination was not used for pauper burials with only a few burial plots owned by the wealthier sections of society. Burials from family plots are generally from 'the middling sort' to borrow a phrase from Mollesen & Cox (1993) and therefore interpretation of Copenhagen burial traditions has to acknowledge this limitation. However within the burial population there were two groups of burials that are closer towards either end of the social spectrum which can be broadly represented in their choice of plot. After the discussion of standard practices and material culture for the general burial population, attitudes to death in Danish society can be examined through these variations. The analysis in this following section compares the Sample P group of early, line burials from 1817-23 (n=84) with the High value sample group of burials from the most

expensive and prestigious (high value) family plots which are dated throughout a longer range of years (1813-1924, n=38). Documentary evidence is derived from the Parish and the Municipal burial registers. There were not enough high value burials from the early years of the cemetery to make a direct diachronic comparison. For this analysis the difference in dating is discounted and it is the type of grave plot that is bought that is the defining characteristic used for analysis.

The two different groups are defined both by their archaeological characteristics and by detailed description in cemetery documents. Although line burials were also identified archaeologically to the south of the Sexton's House as Section K and N the lack of references in the documentary data results in uncertain identification and therefore is omitted from analysis. The most fully excavated and identified area of this is Section P in the north which functions as the Runddel sample in previous chapters (Fig. 40). Within the Runddel sample of burials were excavated 84 line burials consisting of 57 males, 16 females and 11 children or infants mostly buried between January and March 1820. These are the earliest burials in the section and are identified by their stratigraphic position as the earliest burials, their paucity of finds and barely preserved thin wooden coffins. Information on these burials comes only from the earlier Parish register.
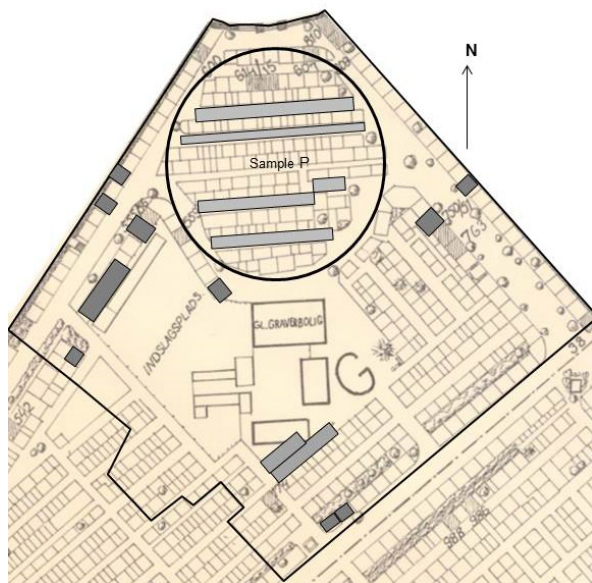


**Fig. 40.**
Location of burials discussed in this section from the 1960s cemetery plan which is based on an earlier version from the 1880s (Source: Assistens Cemetery Archive). Single line burials are light grey. High value plots are dark grey.

Each section was numbered sequentially: Section P started burials from 1 to 376 from East to West in long lines with each burial being allowed space of 1.26 m by 2.51 m,

in old Danish units, 2 x 4 alen (Wiene 2010). Adult and child burials were mixed in the same lines with small child burials taking up half the length of an adult space. Each of these line burials retained the right to grave peace for only 20 years. It was possible to convert a line burial into a family plot, by buying the space around it after the grave peace had elapsed, although this seems to have been a rare occurrence. There seems to have been no official right to an above-ground marker although how much this was enforced is uncertain.

**Table 19.**
Identified high value burial plots: ML (*monumentlinjebetegnelse,* Monument Line designations) or BL (*blandingslinjebetegnelse,* mixed line, Wall Line designations) with data on purchase dates, tenure length and individuals identified in each plot.

| Type | Excavated | Plot numbers of current system | Total years bought | Original purchase length of tenure | Extension of tenure | Identified burials/total documented in registers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BL | Full | 589 | 1809-1950 | 141 | None | 2 adults/ 2 burials |
| BL | Part | 590 | 1843-2010 | 167 | None | 1 child/ 2 burials |
| | | 592 | 1865-1984 | 76 | 43 | None/ 12 burials |
| | | 796 | 1807-2027 | 220 | None | None/ 9 burials |
| | | 797 | 1807-1942 1943-73 | 130 Second owner 30 | 5 None | None/ 5 burials 1 adult/1 burial |
| ML | Full | 21 | 1848-1961 | 48 | 65 | 4 adults/6 burials |
| | | 22 | 1813-1906 | 73 | 20 | 1 adult, 2 children/4 burials |
| | | 548 | 1815-1902 | 87 | None | 3 adults/3 burials |
| | | 549 | 1815-1915 | 100 | None | 1 adult/ 1 burial |
| | | 550 | 1815-1915 | 86 | 14 | 5 adults/5 burials |
| | | 551 | 1815-1931 | 79 | 35 | 1 adult, 1 child/ 2 burials |
| ML | Part | 23 | 1854-1954 | 100 | None | 1 adult/1 burial |
| | | 509 | 1870-1970 | 20 | 80 | 2 adults/4 burials |
| | | 555 | 1868-1980 | 32 known to be bought earlier | 80 | 3 adults/4 burials |
| | | 562 | 1855-1955 | 100 | None | 1 adult/ 7 burials |
| | | 563 | 1853-1980 | 41 | 86 | 5 adults, 1 child/ 8 burials |
| | | 750 | 1811-1961 | 150 | None | 2 adults/4 burials |
| | | 17 plots | | | | 38/64 |

Of the most expensive, high value plots 17 were excavated. Six from the Monument Line and one from the Wall Line were fully excavated, the rest were only partially excavated which provides a limited but important view on the people buried within them (Table 19). Information on these plots comes mostly from the Municipal register with occasional references to the Parish register; they were bought for a longer length of time than average family plots. The ownership rights in many were extended, in the most extreme case (P797) being bought for a total of 227 years. The two earliest plots were bought in 1807 and bought until 1973 and 2027; other plots were bought in the 1860s or 1870s implying that there was an earlier ownership

purchase where the time period has ended which was not renewed. A total of 38 burials were excavated and identified from these plots, which consisted of 16 males, 17 females and only five children or infants.

The two groups are first described and then compared according to the process of decision-making and events surrounding the death and burial. Those selected are relatively small but the archaeological evidence creates a foundation for interpretation of material practice on which wider conclusions can be drawn about social difference. The interpretations are used to make strong conclusions which are firmly linked to both archaeological and documentary evidence.


## Case 1: the earliest line burials

Line burials in the Runddel sample were within Section P where a total of 376 burials were documented in the Parish register. Although not all of the plots were excavated, the poor survival of this category of early and cheaper burial of only 22% (84 out of 376 documented burials) reflects spatial reorganisation of the cemetery. The refusal to use pathway space for new burials also had the effect of preserving some line burials. The burials analysed were largely those that escaped truncation and removal from later family plot burials because they were under these later inserted pathways. The earliest excavated was from plot 101 and was buried on 30th August 1817 (G520), the last from burial 371 buried on 18th May 1823 (G1579) although this is an anomaly as most were buried by March 1820. The register records a population with few younger people, only three are perinatal (infants dying just before or after birth), six are children and two young adolescents with two older adolescents counted as adult. Of the adults the oldest were three in their 80s and eight people in their 70s, with most deaths between the ages of 40-59 years. The sample thus is biased towards adults and also predominantly male leaving unanswered questions regarding the burial of female adults and children. The documentary data fits well when compared to the osteological assigned sex and ages, largely the two sources agree with only limited discrepancies of wrongly assigned sex. Accurate assessment of age at death is more problematic with adults very often assessed as younger than the documentary records. The under ageing of adults is a commonly noted problem within osteological methodology and was extensively discussed for the historical period by Mollesen and Cox (1993). The documentary data contains evidence of incorrect order of burial and gaps in the records which highlights the somewhat lax control over the Parish register. The following sections summarise information on the lives and deaths of this group of 84 people.

- *Life before death*

The broad range of information given for these individuals in the Parish register allows reconstruction of their lives and cause of death in far more detail than later registers (see Chapter 2 for details). Four females are recorded with occupations, three serving girls who were all in their 20s and 30s and one actress who was 29 years old. Other females are referred to by their husband's occupation or as maiden (*Jomfrue*) or widow. Children are referred to by their father's occupation with the exception of a 13 year old boy who was a painter's boy. There were two adolescents, both boys of 17 and 18 years old, but with no recorded occupation. They may have been in poor health and therefore unable to work as they are recorded as dying from chest sickness and convulsions. From osteological evidence the 17 year old male (G365) was potentially highlighted as suffering from Crouzon's disease which fits with the idea of chronic illness. The male occupations came from a range of working class, physically-stressful occupations such as a carpenter, smith, builder, shoemaker, and tailor but also included a clerk, student and a wigmaker. The people buried here are working class to middling tradesmen and their families and were earning enough to ensure a paid burial plot rather than a pauper's grave. All are understood to be of Danish origin although there is no direct evidence of immigration from the country or other nations.

Only one specific family relationship is recorded of a married couple. The 80 year old husband died first in January 1820, followed by his 70 year old wife in April 1820. The husband was buried and unusually a space was left for his wife next to his grave. At least 36 identified burials were recorded between these dates which clearly show that the space was saved for the wife. This could be an example of a line burial being converted into a family grave. Other family relationships are mentioned only as secondary references when people are described as the widow or child of a particular man. The place of death was recorded with the majority dying at home (71%, 60 of 84). Two hospitals were also listed: 24 people died in the King Frederik's Hospital (*Kongelige Frederiks*) which was established in 1757 and four died in General Hospital (*Almindelig*) established in 1769. The latter was more of a workhouse hospital for the elderly although from the 19th century it also had a small medical department for skin and venereal diseases (Københavns Stadsarkiv 2013). There is no pattern in specific illnesses or causes of death that mark out why some individuals died in hospital rather than at home. People recorded as dying from accidents or infectious diseases were not always taken to hospital.

The cause of death varies as the labelling has altered over medical history (Løkke 1998: 59). In this period eight adults could still be recorded as dying of old age while being between 56 and 84 years of age and one child recorded as dying from teething. The most prominent cause of death was chest sickness or weakness (*brystsyge* or *brystsvaghed*) for 28 people with ages ranging between 17 to 77 years old dying from this broadly defined cause. A stroke or convulsions was the cause of death for both

infants and older people with 12 dying from this broad category. Five adult males died in accidents or falls, another from a blow to the head; three of these are recorded as carpenters or workmen. Although one anonymous female is recorded as dying shortly after having given birth (*En barselkone*, G491) no infant is buried with her and she remains unnamed although her age – 32 years is recorded. Comparing documentary and osteological analysis the skeletons did not reveal any evidence for the falls or childbirth although there is one potential connection with the Crouzen's disease case. Unfortunately the skeletons of the workmen were heavily truncated and fragile which hindered analysis, although one who died from a fall was noted as having an old fracture to the clavicle which was well-healed and could indicate a previous accident. Another individual identified as a carpenter who also died from a fall had markedly robust skeleton with pronounced deltoid muscles. The two sources of data thus illustrate potential alternative narratives of cause of death.

- *Between the death and the funeral*

In the period between death and the funeral the body would have been cleaned and prepared with the coffin bought or constructed and the funeral arrangements organised by mourners or the executors of any will. The coffins excavated were generally very poorly preserved, surviving as little more than a stain in the soil. Made of thin wood with few nails there was also little or no surviving decoration or variation in form. All coffins appeared to have flat lids with no moulding or beading and there was no surviving evidence of interior decoration or textiles. During this period undertaking was not a unified business but controlled by *bedemand* who recommended a range of different unspecialised carpenters to make the coffins. The coffins recorded fulfilled a basic function but did not appear to have been further embellished. They may have been covered by palls instead. Despite the lack of archaeological evidence, it is likely that linen shrouds or cotton clothing would have covered the body although no buttons or fastenings were found which suggest the limited use of ordinary clothing. It is likely that basic undershirts or nightgowns may have been used combined with a shroud provided either by the family or local seamstresses. Investigating the arm positions to understand how the body was prepared in the coffin reveals that 43% were largely laid out with arms placed down along the body (A position: 72 out of 168 arm positions). Followed by 11% with hands laid on the legs (E position: 19 of 168), and 4% having hands placed on the pelvis (B position: 7 of 168). Only one person had hands placed across the abdomen (C position). Due to the heavy truncation of the line burials, the other 68 arm positions were either unidentified or not present. Arms were placed in identical positions, with only one exception having their left arm by their side and their right arm placed on their leg. No relationship between sex or age and body position was uncovered. People were generally laid out symmetrically in the simplest position.

Only one burial in the Runddel sample contained a piece of jewellery, a gold ring engraved with the year 1816 which was thought to be a wedding ring (Fig. 41, G847). The register entry however states that the 28 year old female who died of gangrene in 1819 was single so the ring may have been an engagement ring, heirloom or keepsake instead. In Assistens three other burials of male adults were found with coins or tokens in their coffins. Coins could be used to keep the eyes closed (Richardson 1988: 19) although in transit to the cemetery they may have fallen into the coffin. These may represent the transformation of the Pagan practice of paying Charon instead to St Peter (Kragh 2003: 41) or even an accidental intrusion into the coffin. It may simply be part of an act or gesture that mourners wished to give something material along with good wishes to the person in the grave and this has little connection with monetary value. The coins are symbolic and linked more to the physical gesture. Overall the evidence does suggest that the bodies were prepared for open display before the funeral took place.



**Fig. 41.**
The wedding ring from a line burial (G847). The interior view shows the stippled engravings of initials and date with a repaired patch in the centre of the image. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 26 July 2010.

There were very few grave gifts included in any line burials within all of the excavated areas. However none of the people found in Assistens are paupers being given a community or parish-paid burial. Excavations at the General Hospital paupers cemetery on Farimagsvejen (Poulsen 2006) show relatively plain burial traditions for paupers in a slightly later period (1842-58). Although in contrast, pauper burials from the Vartov Hospital and orphanage dated to between 1666 and 1760 are exceptional in having no grave goods but richly decorated coffins showing that poverty did not always equate with a plain burial (Mosekilde 2010; 2011). It is the line burials with their plain fashions and few gifts that present a minimum standard for burials at Assistens in the early 19th century. Decay over time does effect the preservation of the burials and although the older burials are poorly preserved, it should be expected that if there were more grave goods or clothing in these burial then at least some trace of them should be present. Ethnographic sources suggest that placement of grave goods

in the coffin did happen (Kragh 2003: 54) although much of this would decay rapidly if they are organic materials. However other materials might survive such as buttons or coins and the overall lack of this type of goods does suggest that the people buried in the early line burials did have a different practice of funeral rites and material goods than those living in the rural areas of Denmark.

The time (burial interval) between the day of death and the day of burial is documented in the Parish register, the average is four days (n=84) with little variation for gender of adults although the burial interval for children is slightly reduced at an average of three days. Although one male is recorded as being buried on the day he died it is considered to be a recording error as no others were recorded as being buried less than two days after death. The longest interval is of nine days for an older male although there is no explanation why this interval is so long and he is recorded as dying at home not in a hospital. This particular death occurred in January where perhaps the preservation of the body would have been feasible in cold weather. Burial interval does not appear to be affected by the different seasons although as most burials were in the colder months the sample size is small. One exception is from a burial in July 1820 where the interval was six days but this may be unusual. There seems to be no preference for funerals to occur on specific weekdays with the burials evenly spread throughout the week, including Sundays. Within the cemetery multiple funerals could take place on the same day, where the two burials were placed side-by-side, this is noted 12 times. Burial therefore seems not to be dictated by the cemetery or the need for a funeral to take place on a specific day due to mourner's working schedules. There was no evidence of rituals taking place after the coffin was placed in the grave. This does not imply that there were no mourners attending the funeral procession but that if there were material gestures such as flowers on the coffin then they were not preserved.

- *After the funeral – the cemetery*

Combining the documentary and archaeological evidence reveals the working method of the line burials, there were discrepancies in order of burial where gaps were left open for a burial. Small children were buried head to toe taking up the space for one adult. The gap would be left until the next child burial could use the space. Space was also held open for adult burials, one example leaves a plot space open for 16 days with other burials being placed further in the line before it was filled (G452, burial 313). This can leave discrepancies in the register highlighting the potential for faults in the written records. There are also problems with connecting archaeological and documentary data in the registers. One example is a problem concerning the plot numbering in the registers which recorded a 21 year old male (G464, burial 178), to be buried first, followed by an 84 year old female (G636, burial 179) on the same day. The archaeological evidence shows that either the physical order of burial or the recording of the burials of the male or female skeletons have been mixed up. This

may result from the separation of tasks between the gravedigger and the person recording the work. Although this is a minor error it does point to the possibility of mistakes in working practice and also in recording of burials and provides a reminder on being cautious with data of all types.

The method of identification involved matching the registers with the excavated identified single burials based upon age and sex. Amongst the 84 excavated and identified burials there are a further 13 burials in the Parish register that should have been found archaeologically, but were not. No charnel deposits were found which suggests the remains were completely destroyed or combined with bones and placed into the family plot burials. Of these 13 burials, eight of them were perinatal infants or small children, the oldest only 4.5 years old. These burials are quite likely to have fully decayed, been truncated by later burials or possibly even missed during excavation in the sometimes very challenging conditions on site. Another documented burial that is missing is of an older female but there is a gap in the line where the grave should be placed. It is possible that the grave was shallow and later removed or that the skeleton may have decayed. However four other missing burials of three adult females and one 11 year old female are unexplained. There is no space available in the lines for their graves, one can suggest that either there are mistakes in the registers or that they were burials that have been exhumed and moved elsewhere and the space reused. There are many notes of this occurring through the register but not for these examples. The 11 year old female can potentially be explained by the evidence that an older male was placed next to her on the following day. A few months later his widow is buried next to him, placed out of the sequence. Although there is no documentary or archaeological evidence it is quite possible that the child was removed and buried elsewhere to make space for the wife. There was no archaeological evidence in the form of charnel deposits associated with removal or disturbance of the single graves in this early period of burial although the 11 year old girl is a possible example. Disturbance does take place when later family plots truncate the line graves and there is some sign of charnel deposits and disturbance in line burials within the southern area of excavation. There is no satisfactory answer for the remaining problems, all the other evidence fits well with the sexing of adults being secure and the ageing of adults corresponding.

## Case 2: high value plots

There is an immediate contrast between line burials and the high value plots in the ability to own a plot and bury people together over long time periods. Overall these plots were kept for long periods of time and used by several generations, of the 17 plots only one had a change in ownership which consisted of a short 30 year period. The shortest period a plot was originally purchased for was 20 years which was

extended shortly afterwards (P509), the longest 220 years (P796); the average original ownership tenure lasted 122 years.

Within the Municipal register 80 burials are documented from the high value plots. There are more burials present in the Parish register and documented in the Deeds register but comprehensive research has not been completed to create a complete number. Seven people more burials are documented in surviving gravestones but not yet matched to a register entry. Most are coffin burials and only three of them are cremation urn burials. 54 burials were excavated in these plots, of which none were cremation urns. However as most of the plots were not fully excavated it is problematic to make a comparison between the sources. This analysis focuses on the 38 burials that were excavated and were identified but interpretations are extended using the wider excavated but unidentified burials.

Of these 38 burials, most are adults, with only five identified children, another (uncounted) is a neonate buried with its mother. There are 16 males and 17 females and 13 people have no recorded age but are presented as adults. The ages range from infants which have no name recorded and are suggested as dying soon after birth to older adults of 84 years. 85% (17 of 20 known ages) are between 58-84 years old. The sample is therefore biased towards older adults. The first burial identified is from 1813 (G1389) and there are no burials later than 1924 (G191). As these plots were bought for long periods of time the individual burials were spaced over a longer period of time than the line burials. The surnames of the people buried suggest that most plots were inherited and used within one related family.

Using the osteological data to connect the archaeological results with documentary data shows that they compare very well in identifying sex and age with few contradictions. The average number of identified people found in each plot is naturally far lower than the registers document. Some burials are missing from the fully excavated plots which suggest it is not always clearance of a plot for new ownership that is removing older burials. The following sections summarise information on the life and death of the 38 people identified in the high value plots.

- *Life before death*

The later Municipal register only occasionally records addresses, and these often refer to the latest (20th century) owner of the plot, there are also no information collected for place or cause of death. Many individuals, particularly any buried prior to 1882 have no age at death recorded. Some additional information can be taken from the gravestones including relationships and marital status or by creating connections between the burials being placed within the same family plot. Occupation is noted for only 13 males and these include a musical instrument maker, Councillors and merchants of wine, spirits or cloth. Three adult males have no occupation recorded. There are also military officers and a rentier, a person who lives on a private income

*(Partikulier)*. In contrast to the line burials, no females are recorded with an occupation, only one is referred to as the wife of a Privy Councillor (*Gehejmerådinde*), women are referred to either as Mrs, Widow or Miss (*Fru, Enke* or *Frk.*). In contrast to the earlier Parish registers, the few children represented are not referred to by their father's occupation. One gravestone notes that the couple were originally from Iceland (P796) but the origin of other people in the burials is presumed by default to be Denmark.

The burials are well preserved and were fully analysed therefore there is greater osteological information available on the health and lifestyles of the high value plots although the burials were often truncated with missing skulls or only partly excavated. One possible environmental difference is shown in the eroded bone surface of one of the burials in a vault showing that there was a large difference in burial environments between a below-ground grave and a vault. Skeletons in vaults can be more exposed to erosion and damage if the coffin is broken. Some people had evidence of activity-related stress on the upper body or damaged spines which are also found in the older adults of the line burials. So people in high value plots could have completed hard physical work at some point in their lives. Several people were toothless with poor dental health; one person had early vulcanite dentures which had turned black on the palate side. There was also evidence of childhood stress (Harris lines and also cribra orbitalia) which can be associated with nutritional deficiencies among other causes. There were also kidney and bladder stones, gout and one possible case of a benign tumour in the skull (G1193). Several people had healed or active leg infections in the feet and lower legs. There is potential cause of death specifically in one individual, a female of middle adult age (36-45 years) with a perimortem sharp trauma to the skull with no signs of healing so it is a potential cause of, or contributor to death. The person was identified as the wife of a Privy Councillor buried in 1866 (P563). No additional documentary information has been connected to this death. Overall there was fewer traumas than the line burials and most burials are older adults than the line burials; therefore there is frequent osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and general evidence of age-related degeneration of the skeletons.

There is a strong continuity in surnames on the registers indicating that the plots are inherited and used by the same family. There are examples where another surname is used but these seem to be the consequence of a married daughter being buried within her parents plot rather than her husband's. There are two examples where this may have happened (P21, P562). The ability to ensure burial together is a major difference between the high value family plots and the single burials, where burial within a family space seems to be considered a preferable option. In high value plots there is limited evidence of plot space being shared beyond the very close core family. There is only rare evidence of extended families (in-laws, cousins) being placed within the high value plots. There are no obvious examples of servants or people with other surnames being buried together showing that there was a relatively tight control upon sharing

burial space. One exception is what appears to be the burial space given up to a friend or colleague's young unbaptised son (P22, G1097). In contrast, within the less expensive family plots there is more evidence of sharing grave space. Some high value plots were barely used with only two burials recorded, although earlier burials may be forgotten or gone unrecorded in the registers. The descendants of these owners perhaps did not regard the grave plot as an asset to be inherited and used despite it being a viable and cost-effective option.

- *Between the death and the funeral*

In common with the preparations for line burials, within this interval the executors of any will and mourners would be making many decisions regarding the funeral and the material culture used in the presentation of the body, such as the coffin and clothes. Generally coffins in high value plots were poorly preserved in similar ratios to the general population. There is evidence of feather pillows, sawdust for mattresses and white paint on the interior of the coffin. The white paint inside the coffin particularly indicates open display of the body before the funeral. Only two coffins (P563, G191 and G210) had triple linings with an inner zinc layer and decorative iron coffin handles with an identical construction technique. These coffins belonged to a married couple who died six years apart which suggests that the style of coffin could be replicated with ease. Three distinctive coffins were found in the Hagan family vault (P555) with lead scroll nameplates which are similar to one found in Helsingør dating to 1760 (Hvass 2002: 84). One coffin was considerably wider and another of unique eight-sided design with a separate internal body board (G167). They were buried between 1819 and 1834 and demonstrate an attempt to have stylistic similarities within the family burial traditions. These earlier coffins would certainly have been made by a skilled carpenter who would have known how to construct coffins similar to the styles used by upper classes which were placed in vaults. The skill used in creating the lead scroll nameplates also indicates the concentration of funeral provisions within a core of craftspeople who were perhaps the forerunners of the undertaking business. These coffins were constructed to be visible and emphasises an open display of the body and then later display of the coffin during the funeral procession. Coffins from the 20th century continue a tradition of using multiple materials and the importance of elaborate decoration but now are in the upper end of price range within the undertakers business. It is less likely that these decorated coffins would have covered in palls, unlike those constructed for the line burials.

In preparation of the body, the arm position of the individuals did not appear to be vastly different from the overall burial population. Bearing in mind that these burials cover a wide range of the time use of the cemetery, they conform with overall patterns of having most in either A or E position (8 and 9 respectively) but two with a B position. One of the B positions is explained by the presence of a female holding a neonate infant in her arms which is interpreted as a mother and her child. Although

there is no other evidence in the registers of their burial however where neonates were found buried with adults these are only rarely noted. One plot (P550) contained five identified burials from 1840 to 1895 which were all placed in an E position which perhaps reflects a preference for a similar layout which was repeated for over 55 years.

Of the 38 burials which have been identified and their finds examined, 22 individuals had no personal or funeral finds preserved in their burials but these were mostly burials that were highly disturbed or only partly excavated. The dates of burials with personal finds ranged from 1813 to 1899 and there was some small increase in the number of finds retrieved in later burials, although with such few numbers to work with it gives little indication of overall levels of elaboration. Only 13 had some form of personal elaboration involving clothing or jewellery. The only shoe found in the entire cemetery was a burial from 1894 (G765). There were also wedding rings, hair clips and tortoiseshell combs. The same couple who died only six years apart in the early 20th century with identical coffins also had a similar style of personal elaboration. Both were dressed in woollen knitwear, probably cardigans and kept their wedding rings. The similar date and family relationship do suggest a particular way of being buried was being followed, although this was not linked to earlier traditions from burials in the same plot. It is however difficult to make a comparison with these and the early line burials as these are a full 100 years apart. Overall there was a definite difference in material culture between the earlier line burials and the high value plots, although the high value plots do not have demonstrably more elaborate or more frequent material culture compared with the typical family plot.

For most individuals the interval between death and burial cannot be ascertained as high value plots are recorded in the later register and therefore have no date of death recorded. In the few examples where date of death is noted in the Parish register two are children where the burial interval is two and five days, two are older males where the interval is five and seven days. The shorter interval of two days took place in the height of summer and the longer interval took place over February and March. Using gravestone information a further five interval dates can be determined. These are all mature or older adults and the range varies between five and eight days, all of these dates are in winter or spring therefore temperatures and storage of the body may not have been an immediate issue. Overall the average interval is five days and although this is an extremely small sample there is no variation for gender in adults but a slightly shorter interval between death and burial for children. It sets a standard for how long the body was actually kept with the family house, hospital or perhaps in a mortuary prior to burial which appears to be slightly longer than the average of four days for the line burials. This may relate to the desire to make more complex arrangements for the funeral and mourning undertaken in wealthier families. Although there was still some social restriction during the 19th century on females attending the funeral (Kofod 2008: 53). The evidence indicates that open display of the body did take place before the funeral and even that creating a consistent look in

terms of similar clothing was a specific desire for some people. Analysing the 38 individuals for which there is data on the day of the week the funeral was undertaken, there is a slight tendency to choose a Friday or a Saturday, with 18 funerals being held on these days. The spread of deaths over the year are fairly evenly spaced with a few more individuals dying in December and January (13 people).

Unlike the line burials the date when a plot was bought can be compared with the date of the first burial placed within the plot. Of the 17 plots examined, there is clear evidence for five plots being bought and the person placed within it on the very same day. The ownership clearly starts on the first day of interment but there are two plots which have gaps of 18 days and 25 days (P509 and P592 respectively), where the need for burial was identified in advance. This length of time delay is unexplained and either is caused by having an earlier, unrecorded ownership or that the mourners were making preparations for burial in advance of the death. However of the other 11 high value plots there were significant gaps between the date of purchase and the first recorded interment in the later registers, this gap ranged between 5 and 46 years. These gaps can be explained by the change of recording systems undertaken in the 1880s, as there was not a complete record of burials transferred over to the new register showing only that more burials should have been present. A good example of this is a plot (P23) which the Municipal register lists as being bought for 100 years in 1854 and containing only one burial of a male. However the surviving gravestone also records the earlier burials from the same family of a married couple and their one year old granddaughter who died in 1812, 1834 and 1824 respectively. It is possible that the tenure needed to be renewed in 1854 and was administratively categorised as 'rebought' but by the same owners so any earlier burials were not counted as a continuation. Therefore there are three missing burials on the register. Unfortunately this plot was only partly excavated so the presence of the earlier burials could not be ascertained archaeologically. It is also possible that some of the grave plots were pre-bought by the owners as an investment rather than at the time of death.

- *After the funeral – the cemetery*

Organisation of burial in the high value plots differs considerably from the line burials. When burying within a plot, earlier burials seem to have been taken into consideration and there are notes of the precise location of each burial including depth. This should have ensured fewer disturbances to the body. Only one plot (P21) after at least two burials from 1818 and 1824 changed ownership. Tenure elapsed and it was taken over in 1848 by another owner who used it for six burials and kept the plot until the late 20th century. Of the total of eight recorded burials, only four were found, so burials within an active ownership can be removed to make extra space. Of the five other fully excavated plots there were also four burials missing and an additional burial not recorded in registers but found during excavation (in P549). Clearly removal of previous burials did happen in family plots of high value although

seemingly it was used on practical basis to make space for new burials. There were seven charnel deposits from high value plots showing that even within plots which have a long period of tenure by the same owner that some reorganisation was undertaken. As an example, the only plot which changed owners (P21) contained three charnel deposits which probably derived from the first ownership period and were only partially removed. However in the second ownership the burial of a three year old child is missing but was accounted for in charnel deposits associated the latest burials of the same family. Charnel deposits are found within the plot or sometimes even within another coffin.

Above-ground features may also have needed to be avoided such as trees, railings or gravestones or an entrance for the plot. None of the three recorded cremation urns were excavated although as shallow burials they should have been recovered. It is possible that they were buried deeper in some plots and thus left *in situ*. Burials within the high value plots should have been far less likely to have been removed and truncated. This is the privilege gained from buying a long term plot but within them there is still the potential for disturbance. Where plots were crowded, earlier burials are highly truncated or perhaps have been removed completely despite being the same family, within the same ownership period.

As a category, high value plots were designed to specifically show wealth, prestige and lineage connections with earlier generations. Plots are bought for long periods of time, with an expectation that the burial would therefore lie undisturbed, but overuse of the plot will also break this understanding. There are examples of missing burials likely to have been completely removed. Burial plots are limited three-dimensionally and to fit in new burials, the old burials will have to be physically broken up or removed entirely. The materiality of the connection to the earlier generations is then removed below-ground while the image of the burial above-ground continues as a resting place for the entire family. How much the owner of the plot understands about the consequence of these actions is not known. Discrepancies between documentary and archaeological data are present, showing that archaeological work adds competing narratives and nuance to a clean and homogenous story of the family plot.


## Summarising funeral behaviour over different sections of society

Comparing these two groups has been focusing on the differences in funeral tradition toward either end of the social scale in Danish society. Assistens is intended as an inclusive cemetery and there is a good chance that different ends of the social scale can be buried in close proximity to each other. They are also subject to many of the same overall rules and regulations concerning burial at Assistens; this includes regulated depth of burial and a minimum 20 years of grave peace. However other

regulations are governed by the choice and ability to pay for a more highly valued category of plot. Those who could afford the most expensive plots had the ability to pay for a longer period of ownership, to be buried together with family, to use metal coffins and for more ostentatious above-ground gravestones and elaboration of the plot. Both of the groups analysed are dominated by burials of older adults with fewer females in the line burials but more in the high value plots. Children are distinctly underrepresented in both groups and although they could be buried with their family the presence of specific child burial areas elsewhere in Assistens is documented. Relationships are expressed in the ability to pay to be buried together in family plots; this is a great difference in being able to choose the location of burial and can also show family groupings in terms of variation or similar styles of burial elaboration. This is clearly not possible or very rare in the line burials.

Within life there are obvious differences in occupation with females in the line burials having jobs and the males overall having more physical trades and craft jobs. Yet the osteological evidence shows that both groups had signs of degenerative change in the skeletons with evidence both of poor nutrition in childhood and adult years. Further in both groups, there was potentially activity-related stress, so people could have active working lives regardless of wealth and class. Individuals in high value plots also suffered more from long-term illnesses, possibly due to better access to treatment and care which allowed them to live longer. Many more of the adults were over 66 years old (45%, 9 of 20) in high value plots whereas people from line burials died younger with only 22% (16 of 73) dying over 66 years old. The burial interval appears to be a little shorter for line burials at an average of four days and for high value plots five days. With a larger sample size this difference might reduce but it could show the need for extra time to prepare a highly decorated and personal coffin plus the ability to keep the body at home in larger houses. There was also a slight tendency to prefer Friday or Saturday burials for high value plots whereas no difference was noted for line burials. Thursdays and Tuesday are said to be were traditionally avoided in Danish folklore as unlucky and Saturdays because the priest should prepare service for the Sunday (Kragh 2003: 63). However there appears to be no adherence in either class group to any superstitions concerning the correct day to be buried. The need for extra days to allow people to travel long distances to attend or wait for a more desirable time for the service may also be factors. Line burial funerals may not have been large social events; an emphasis instead may have been on the service or events in the home.

There is also a clear chronological difference within the two registers which reveals not just class differences but changes in the relationship between living and dead over the period of use in Division G. The detailed description in the Parish register identifies individuals in their own right and provides far more detailed information on their life and relationships. They do this regardless of which category of plot was purchased, treating all people the same way. The difference here is that family burials

are also recorded in the deed registers along with their details of their tenure. The Municipal registers however from the later 19th century are focused upon the individual. I contend that in this small detail is revealed the stronger sense of individual autonomy within secular record keeping as more important than their relationships within the living society. The dead are later more likely to be officially separated from the living and more clearly regarded as something that can be labelled separately in society. There is a general move over time from single burials in a parish churchyard to a landscape cemetery where it is the family plots that are the temporary fashion. These long tenures of some plots particularly highlight the importance of lineage.

Modernity comes with an increase in the sense of individuality but here also it is highly connected with a smaller family group (Kofod 2008: 185-7) than the previous connections to the parish, community or social group. There is also some transformation in the mid-20th century away from family groupings and back to the individual line burials and ultimately the removal of physical materialisations of the dead body, through cremation and eventually scattering of ashes. However this is not clear-cut because there continues to be a balance between old and new traditions which constitute modern funeral practices, between the continuation of coffin burial and use of family graves. There is no easy to categorise a 'modern' way of burial as it covers multitude of ways to treat the dead.

Line burials dominate the whole cemetery in the early years that it was open but the use of them was reduced over time in Assistens. The family plots continue in use even though the rate of burial slows and it is not just the decisions by the cemetery authorities that create this change. It is possible that the cost but also the prestige of a plot at Assistens decreases in relative value as other cemeteries become more fashionable. This could also correspond with changes in the settlement surrounding Assistens. Nørrebro had become a more working class neighbourhood by this period but the ability to afford a family plot in the local cemetery comes within reach just as burial starts to be actively phased out. Comparing the cheaper burials in the first decades of the 19th century with more costly burials spread through the 19th and into the early 20th century shows some of the changes in overall burial traditions. However it is the ability to pay for a private burial plot that creates a contrast, both physically and symbolically, which may have been of great value for the living. Early burials in the high value plots tend to contain more unique, individually created coffins with sometimes richly decorative styles, inside and out, with more grave goods and body presentation features. So there is a clear difference between material culture used by people who can afford to differentiated themselves through consumption of burial fashions and burial plot within the early years of burial.

There is a clear class division within Assistens– the difference between the early burials from the 1818-20s which were cheaper burial places compared with the later

burials which date mostly to the 1860s-1940s. Early burials consist of simply prepared bodies and furnished coffins. They also have virtually no clothing or grave goods; this corresponds more closely with poor London burial grounds where there are few items, barring an occasional special item such as a plate from New Bunhill Fields burial ground (Miles & Connell 2012: 51). However in the 19th century burials the number of items expands considerably and become comparable to earlier burials found within vaults of Helsingør or Christ church, Spitalfields. The wealthier or 'middling' class burials contained comparably more finds. The frequency of burial goods found inside coffins is suggested as not being purely a consequence of preservation or disturbance variables in comparing burials which have four decades between them. Therefore there do seem to be differences stemming from class and wealth in the provision of grave goods. Although early expensive burials from the first half of the 19th century are comparable to Helsingør (Hvass 2002) these decorative standards are used by the typical family plot burials. The quantity and quality of material culture starts to even out.

In the treatment of burials in both groups after the funeral there is a clear but perhaps obvious conclusion in that the rate of truncation is higher where the plot was bought for a minimum period of time. However this does not hold true for another group of approximately 100 line burials which lie south of the Sexton's House. They were excavated but not used for this specific analysis because they have not yet been identified. They are still good sources for the comparison and treatment of the poorer sections of society. In this southern area there was considerable disturbance of the burials yet some lines closer to the Sexton's House were left untouched. This space was reused for new buildings but the burials were not removed. Their grave peace was extended considerably even if it was unintentional.

Overall the idea that the modern cemetery promoted a fair and equitable sense of inclusiveness in death has been shown in the archaeological record to be exaggerated. Greater equal treatment is clearer from the very first decades of the 21st century. Eventually no status or payment ultimately prevented the excavation of any burial that legally could be removed by the archaeological work in 2009-11. This work for the benefit of the living and future populations of Copenhagen promoted equality in the cemetery by handling all burials together.

# The private relationship between the living and the dead

This chapter emphasises how the private and below-ground funeral material culture is used to express the relationship between the living and the dead, and further how treatment of the dead body is structured through their use. The standard material culture found in Assistens has been presented with comparison made of chronological change and differences in wealth. Attitudes to death and the dead body that have

changed since the early 19th century have been revealed through discussion of the different actors responsible for these decisions. The burials remain the expression of the love and affection held for the dead person by the mourners but they are also affected by the change in who handles the arrangements and what is happening in society.

Unlike the previous chapter which focused on the public expression of grief above-ground world this discussion provided evidence for what is initially presented above-ground but is destined for burial below-ground. This covers the physical entity of the burial starting with the coffin and urn to the presentation of the body and the provision of grave goods within the coffin. These physical objects play a different role compared to the memorials placed directly above them; they are not visible in the long-term. The memories and treatment of the dead relating to the above-ground material culture are physically expressed through being re-worked, altered, embellished and forgotten but this cannot happen to the material culture of the burial itself. The natural decay of the coffin, body, clothing and objects inside and concealed below the ground are not subject to the same active re-working by mourners. Essentially the items stay held in stasis in the memory as when they were placed in the coffin and buried in the ground (Hallam & Hockey 2001: 52). There is a different sense of time for the items and the body placed below-ground. What is created is perceived as stable and unchanging for those who played a part in creating and viewing the burial but then it is put out of sight below-ground.

The relationship between the living and the dead is structured very quickly through the material culture of the burials and then settled. The time between death and the funeral event takes place over no more than a few days as suggested by burial registers. This varies little over the 19th and 20th centuries and it is within these few short days that most arrangements and memories are made. The exceptions may be where people have died away from home which requires a greater level of preparation and time delay. Some details can also have been long planned, often by the dead person in their will or testament. Other burials follow an unexpected death with no details in place. In all situations the actual death will have caused significant changes to the social relationships of the people left behind and it is within this time period that fast decisions must be made. It is in this crisis time that what is considered traditional and acceptable often becomes the default position that is easiest to adopt. However traditions should also be understood as created and modified often so subtly that the adaptation is barely noticed (Kofod 2008: 422-3). The example of changing coffin styles can be employed to emphasise that in the early 19th century the most common coffin by far was a plain wooden coffin with seemingly little or no decoration and a flat lid, possibly covered in a rented pall. The traditional ideal becomes the black painted coffin which is preferred by those who could afford it but from the late 19th century tradition slowly evolves into a white coffin with a cross on the raised lid. Making coffins more visible is a development reflecting the maturing and more

defined undertaking business. Funeral traditions are a process rather than a fixed entity, adapted by choice or by circumstance but always altered a little more by each funeral. When investigated what appear to be formal referents to past behaviours are revealed to be full of successful adaptations.

Modern standards were not just about the individual but retained a sense of adapted continuity in practice and materiality. This relation between living and dead is not just about individual connections but relates to the wider community who have agency in the relationships with the dead. It also challenges abstract perceptions on modern life– as individualistic rather than community based and as new rather than traditional. Certainly practices surrounding the dead body and relationships to it are shown to be contradictory and inconsistent and not always following dominant beliefs (Tarlow 2011: 201). Burial traditions overall are often perceived as more conservative in nature and less subject to rapid change than many other aspects of social life but have been shown as being adapted and altered over the 19th-20th centuries in Assistens. These modifications may be more revealing of actually how modern life really is created and lived, which in contrast to Giddens (1991: 176) perspective does not truly break free of the past.

In the late 19th century the undertakers were responsible for the physical details and it is a simple business model to take old established ideas and market them as an exciting mix of the traditional and the innovative. Catherine Bell (1992) emphasises the flexible nature of ritual practice in particular being able to absorb alterations whilst still citing the original ideals. The arrangements for the funeral need to be made quickly after the death and it is this purchasing with the increased possibilities of the material culture that drives the creation of the specific funeral business with pre-made and mass-produced products. The responsibility of dealing with the physical body and creating the funeral is shifted to a group of professionals. The development of the professional undertaking business helps to shape the funeral materiality available to people. The funeral rites which were a practice of embodiment that helped to break or create connections to the dead were discarded and this becomes a broken link in the modern world of the hospital, mortuary and undertakers office. There are no longer the same opportunities for physical expressions for the mourners to build this memory by personal hands-on participation. Involvement is restricted to the choosing and purchase of items which can also be seen as a form of emotional labour. However options for commemoration of the relationship also expand, often including new technologies such as photography (Fig. 42). The personal contact has been reduced and the professional relationship takes over which creates a newly defined relationship between the living and the dead body.

**Fig. 42.**
Framed photograph found placed under the lower legs of a burial (G1141), the image it shows is blurred but possibly is a three-quarter length portrait. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 27 July 2010.

International or national narratives of burial traditions often create a homogenous perspective but through using individual narratives from people buried at Assistens elements of regional and local practice can be emphasised. This idea works very well for considering the personal level of funerals being mixed with broader social issues involved in dealing with death. When comparing the material from Assistens with other countries it is clear that Denmark itself and Copenhagen as the capital city is going to show some local or regional differences. When Assistens was first opened in 1760, Denmark was in the final years of its 'Flourishing period' a time of economic growth and emerging national identity. This ends with the Napoleonic wars and the State Bankruptcy of 1813. This is the period where there are excavated burials from Assistens of the two extremes of highly elaborate and very plain burials. The theory of funeral elaboration and referencing to a 'safer' past taking place within times of societal stress (Cannon, Aubrey 1989) can be seen in some of the elite burials over the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe which contain frequent allusions to Romantic and Classical great pasts. However it is only present in the high value burial plots, not in the burials of the typical family plot which probably relates to the economic ability to express this level of stress within funerary behaviour. Through the 19th century, Denmark does not have a steadily growing economy but a nuanced situation particularly over the period of the wars over Schleswig-Holstein which led to defeat and loss of population and territory in 1864. At this point in time there are more burials in Assistens and again there is an increase in elaboration of burials but this time it is spread throughout the social hierarchy. The difference here is perhaps more specifically related to the increasing industrialisation and modernisation of Copenhagen rather than the national situation. Patterns in burial traditions were fluid before the opening of Assistens but the changes are solidified by the earlier 19th century. Change within the almost 200 years of excavated data serves

to fit in with the longer term patterns while also showing evidence for specific and incremental change in Assistens.

In other European countries a sense of the growing anonymity of death and a standardisation of cemeteries and funeral practice is suggested as a consequence of the high mortalities from World War One and the later influenza epidemic. Due to the high rate of death, the suggestion was that it was no longer perceived as appropriate to elaborate all funerals as had been undertaken in the 19th century but as David Cannadine shows (1981: 218) many of these mourning customs had already been in decline long before these events. The disapproval of excessive funerary customs in France from the 18th century is also noted by Kselman (1993: 225). With the exception of the southern part of Jutland which at that time had been ceded to Germany after the war of 1864, Denmark was not directly involved in World War One. Denmark suffered only a small number of war casualties and did not need to create war cemeteries nor memorials on the same scale as Germany, France or the UK. Burials within Assistens are not drastically different within this period showing that ordinary burial continues to be more affected by long-term traditions. There is however little change in the coffin, furnishings, clothing or grave goods which might express this break but there is evidence for slow change and much continuity. Although the material from above and below the ground does not always correspond, simplicity in gravestones increases from the later 19th century but complexity and elaboration of below-ground grave goods and furnishings increases over time. The divergence in these spheres shows that individual agency connected to preparation of the body can be strong when the material is not on permanent display despite professional or general social pressure to be less visibly elaborate.

Classic texts on modern attitudes to death describe it as invisible or as a denial of the reality of death (Gorer 1965; Ariès 1981 [1977]). The evidence used to illustrate this idea emphasises the gravestone above-ground and visible social rituals but rarely to the below-ground material. The decisions and actions taken for below-ground funerary materiality seen in Assistens illustrates a private sphere where there are more nuanced displays of grief. The focus on the separation of living and dead, of the classification of death from life in sharp dichotomies is part of the modern world view. Although this separation does not necessarily apply to human emotions, because grief cannot be so easily separated into such a scheme of rationalisation, instead it seems that modernity never reached this far in creating a decisive and irreparable break between the living and dead worlds (Howarth 2000). How it was understood and materialised was what actually altered. Death is not made invisible but strong material elaborations of the relationship between living and the dead are placed below-ground and therefore appear to be concealed.

In general the elaboration inside and outside of the coffin increases over time from the early 19th century and into the first decades of the 20th. This is related to the

creation of a defined funeral market with its standardised coffins, furnishings and clothing. This desire is manifested in the funeral culture in Copenhagen; like other European cities, but it is not only a desire to consume but that the material culture itself is the stimulus to express mourning and the relationship between the living and the dead. A common theme for interpreting death is through the practices of preparing the body, particularly connected to presenting the body as sleeping. Beautification of the body in death from the late 18th century are connected with the changes in society that emphasise the metaphor of sleep and the use of the body as a central element in burial rites. The material culture used such as nightgowns, sleeping caps (although none were found in Assistens), use of pillows and wrapping the body in sheets all create the image of death being similar to sleep and this metaphor is also expressed in the above-ground memorials. A different idea starts to be expressed where bodies are arranged to be presented as they were in life as much as possible. The individuals are still displayed as present within the body to some extent. The person as they were awake creates a more relevant and forceful modern identity even in death. However the strength of the sleep metaphor means that it is found and referenced long into the 20th century in Assistens the evidence shows that it does start to fade in popularity by the 1920s. The idea never disappears completely, it is still present today but it is less overt. There is however a convergence in the amount of elaboration in burials, where there is now a common level of decoration across most burials. However what may appear to happen in Assistens is the rejection of sleep as a dominant metaphor and the adoption of burial customs that emphasise the life achievements and individual personality of the dead person. The body is still the central element and focus of mourning but the traditions change, towards standardised clothing mixed with highly individualised gifts and new traditions. I do not interpret this as a denial of death; in fact it is a clear acceptance of death but moving towards celebration of the personality and living identity of the person. This relationship is created by the living to celebrate the life of the dead and allow the means to continue their relation.

It is possible that the slow accumulation of changes over the 19th century has tipped the balance of funerary traditions so that around the mid-20th century clear changes have now become obvious. The opinion of the currently active *"bedekvinde"* (female undertaker) Naja Genet May is that there is a shift in attitudes where there is an opportunity for greater choice in funeral practices. Recent research into contemporary Danish funeral culture has been undertaken which points to a vast change in attitudes towards death from the mid-20th century which is expressed through the materiality of the grave place becoming a more flexible space in the landscape (for eg. Sommer 2008; Flohr Sørensen 2011). Certainly there is some loosening of restrictions on choice of burial or disposal such as the ability to scatter ashes in the sea now in Denmark (Flohr Sørensen 2009: 113-4). Nonetheless there is still an essence of constraint in these choices not only from undertakers but from cemetery authorities

and the legal regulations that still create an accepted framework for burial in Denmark. Like any period of time there will always be restrictions on choice. The funeral customs and ritual appear to be part of a homogenous response but like most time periods variation occurs – regional, chronological, religious, age, gender, status and hierarchies which all have their influence on modern burial customs. Modern funeral traditions aren't so modern at all. They create the idea of modernity through this process of disguising innovation as tradition, which really is more of a continuum heavily influenced by the past and surroundings. It is the materiality employed by people in life-changing events such as in funerals that forces change and difference to be addressed.

The possibility that the below-ground world has an active effect on the living needs to be recognised. Attempting to create a thick border between above and below is likely to be part of a vital need to seal off the rituals and the physical reminders of the dead away from the rest of the living world. Despite this ideal there is the possibility that material culture concealed below-ground still makes a powerful impression upon the living. It conceals the physical reality of death but is also a powerful tool to re-create memories for the mourners and society in general. The burial of the individual from 1944 introduced at the beginning of this chapter represents a time-specific moment where the inclusion of a patriotic badge was an important element of the funeral furnishing. This was likely to have been displayed before the funeral; the knowledge of that political statement being present may have continued to be an important reference to events of the time. The rarity of burials being disturbed deliberately to add or remove items shows the shock value of any potential disturbance into the perceived static world of the burial below-ground. However the next chapter is where the everyday activity of the below-ground world of the modern cemetery is interpreted.

# *Chapter 6.*

# Dealing with the long afterlife of the dead

> How long will a man lie i'the earth ere he rot?
>
> Hamlet asking the first gravedigger, Hamlet (5.1.163–64)

Shakespeare's scene of the gravediggers (titled as clowns) preparing Ophelia's grave (Shakespeare 2003 [1599-1602]) is almost impossible to avoid in research about Danish grave-digging practices. Of the many themes that run through this scene which has Hamlet watching and then talking with the gravediggers, one is of the effects of time passing on the understanding of the physical remains of the dead. All archaeology has a working interest in the passing of time and the study of cemeteries and the rituals surrounding death are intimately linked with the passing of an individual's time and how the wider community deals with that loss. Previous chapters have explored how the cemetery is set up as a depository of how to handle bodies and death (Chapter 3) and how the community shapes and restructures itself around the time of death using material culture to evoke complex abstract ideas and emotions (Chapters 4 and 5). The focus of the previous chapters dealt with questions regarding the perception and understanding of the body around the immediate time of death. The longer time perspective is also vital for understanding how society understands and deals with the dead long after the burial. The bodies of the long-dead are a material factor that still continues to affect aspects of cemetery life today. Hamlet's question is appropriate to the central principles of how to manage and recycle space within modern cemeteries. The question betrays his lack of knowledge on the extended materiality of bodies. He asks the people who work with this situation and are the experts, yet their expertise is rarely called into use today.

Chapter 6 moves forward in time to consider perceptions and practices concerning the physical remains long after death. The focus here moves from mourners, local community and undertakers to cemetery employees who deal with the body and material culture many years after the initial burial. Managing a cemetery requires many roles such as administration, gardening and maintenance of which some tasks may have also been undertaken by the people who dug graves. Their own professional identity may have emphasised these roles however the emphasis in this chapter is on the grave-digging activities. People are required to manage this transformation above and below the ground. Gravediggers are not reacting to a known and loved individual but expressing a collective response to the physical remains of what was once a person. This is a socially structured discourse involving the passing of time and how the living society chooses to remember or forget individuals and their associated memories. This also neatly ties in with the long term use of a cemetery – a cemetery is not simply a passive place for storage. There is continual activity within it – new burials, placement of grave markers and renewal of plot decorations and landscape maintenance. Despite there being a collective and general response of understanding and perceptions towards the body and material remains, these can also be interpreted differently by living individuals. The people who work in the cemetery tack between social expectations and their own perceptions and ideas concerning the handling of the dead.

The collective experience of gravediggers in handling this work create a different perspective compared to mourners which is directly related to the practices on how graves were created, used, filled in and later disturbed. The bodies they work with are no longer liminal but firmly and irrevocably long-dead. Through examining the disturbance of graves there is the question of the manipulation of human remains and other funerary material culture and how they were truncated, separated and manipulated within the context of the activities taking place in each grave plot. The term manipulation is not necessarily used in a negative association but is a conscious and active handling of the bodies of people long after death. This applies to bodies which were only partially disturbed in their grave and the groups of bones deriving from primary burials – the charnel deposits which are contain redeposited human bone. Both of these types of actions are the material consequences of the actions by a gravedigger in manipulating space and bodies within the tight confines of the below-ground grave plot and cemetery regulations. Modern cemeteries all have regulations regarding the ability to disturb, re-order or remove earlier graves and their contents after a defined period of time. It is this space in-between guidelines and practical reality that the material expression of the ideas and practice of gravediggers is of interest.

This chapter first briefly considers some of the concepts surrounding the passing of time when interpreting below-ground cemetery practices. What happens underground in the cemetery after the funeral can be described as a long after-life of

the entire burial. The term is borrowed from Gilchrist and Sloane (2005: 184) describing the afterlife of medieval graves. This is not the spiritual afterlife but the surprising narratives of how material remains continue to influence cemeteries. The person may have been forgotten but the remains are still present and therefore play a defining role in the working practices and attitudes for those people involved in the working life of a cemetery. It is the gravediggers that are the focus of this analysis and thus there follows some consideration of their working life and practices and how they have been investigated or portrayed in archaeological and historical research. The process of grave-digging creates a framework for examining the manipulation and practices surrounding the long-dead body. There follows an analysis of the archaeological evidence of practices involved in the secondary deposition of bones within the grave and grave-robbing.

# Gravediggers in focus

Despite an abundance of data on their actions, research into gravediggers is largely confined to ancillary or peripheral roles in funeral practices. The focus tends towards the individual and personal – the direct mourners and how they interact with, and furnish the dead body and deal with the process and event of death (Tarlow 1999a; Jonsson 2009). There is also research on the development of undertaking as a business dealing with the body and funeral from the 16th century onwards (Litten 1991; Davidsson Bremborg 2002). The practices of the gravedigger or a sexton are often dismissed as merely digging a hole and filling it up again but they form a significant field of actors that contribute to how the body is treated in the cemetery. Sextons particularly have a more wide-ranging role in administration and maintaining the church, churchyard and later in cemeteries. Evidence of medieval grave-digging has been discussed indirectly for example in the use of charcoal or chalk in the graves or discussion of grave structures (Cinthio 2002). Scandinavian law from the medieval period regulates gravediggers work and specifically refers to the disturbance of new burials. For example, fines would be levied if the body could be identified or if there was hair or flesh still present thus incentivising gravediggers to have a secure knowledge of their churchyard and showing that the church was aware of these practical issues (Nilsson 1989: 175). Manipulation of bones from previous burials has also been discussed by Elisabet Regner at Alvastra, a Cistercian monastery in Östergötland, Sweden, where examples of specific placement of additional bones within coffins conform to the sense of body orientation. Regner sees this as an expression of bodily integrity and suggests that "many individuals have been fashioned into one person" (2005: 187). It is uncertain who precisely is responsible for these acts.

In a wider review of churchyard management in Europe the disturbance of earlier burials and widespread use of charnels have been documented for example in Paris (Ariès 1981 [1977]: 53-61). The disturbance and grave-robbery in Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Europe is also discussed, particularly in relation to the social meaning of these practices where the acts were committed by people outside of the burial community (Cherryson 2007; Klevnäs 2010; 2015b). There is relatively little comparable research on the disturbance of burials from after the Reformation or in the modern period in Scandinavia. In archaeological recording the creation and deposition of the archaeological context, in this case the burial is often emphasised to the detriment of later events and its overall duration. This downplays any subsequent transformations or change of meaning and use (Lucas 2001: 161). Historical archaeology has certainly placed less emphasis on the afterlife of the burial. The potential of researching disarticulated bone to improve representivity of the burial population and contribute to archaeological knowledge was highlighted from excavation of the medieval churchyard at Helgeandsholmen in Stockholm (Iregren 2008). Whilst charnel houses dating from the historical period do received some limited attention (Koudounaris 2011; Höpflinger 2015). Conversely for prehistoric archaeology secondary manipulation is a major source of research (e.g. Nilsson Stutz 2003; Larsson 2009).

From the medieval period there are many illustrations of people digging graves within Christian churchyards which can be valuable sources showing the who was involved, which tools were used, the presence of coffins or shrouds and illustrating ritual practices around the grave. Gravediggers are almost always shown as male and often shown with the symbols of their work – the shovel and disarticulated bone (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005: 131-2). Grave-digging is unlikely to have been a full-time occupation during this period, instead being part of a range of duties. There are also references to gravediggers in church records for payment of services which suggest many were secular and paid by the hour for specific graves (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005: 131). Within Christian Europe the gravedigger may also be an officer of the church responsible for the maintenance of the building and grounds, bell ringing and digging the grave and here gravediggers are also found within research into folklore and traditions surrounding death (Troels-Lund 1908; Hagberg 2015 [1937]). Therefore grave-digging could be a part-time occupation and perhaps also an inherited job that was kept within certain families in the community. Women are occasionally recorded as gravediggers. An early female gravedigger, Esther Hammerton is recorded from the 18th century, in Kingston upon Thames in the UK, who inherited the job from her father. She was considered to be somewhat of a local character and described in very masculine terms (Caulfield 1820: 268-72). Women are also occasionally referenced as gravediggers with one associated with the desecration of the poet John Milton's body in 1790 in London (Wallace 2004: 53-5). It is not until the late 20th century that women become more involved in grave-digging (Prior, S. 2015) although they were

employed for general light gardening and maintenance duties in Assistens from the 19th century (Fig. 43).



**Fig. 43.**
The staff of Assistens photographed in front of the Sexton's House in 1912. Not all staff are present but it includes supervisors, gardeners, gravediggers and coffin bearers. Source: Archive, Københavns Kirkegårde, Unknown photographer, 1912.

As the older churchyards became over-used, particularly in urban parishes from the 18th century, the role of the gravedigger may have solidified as a full-time occupation and could also have included living on, or near the churchyard to guard against thieves and body-snatchers. People describe their occupation as full-time gravediggers for burial grounds in London in the 19th century (Select Committee on Improvement of the Health of Towns 1842).The image and reputation of grave-digging has been adversely affected by its association with grave-robbing. A combination of the need for medical education in dissection and the over-crowded churchyards created an easy way to earn money for poorly-paid people. The gravediggers participation in body-snatching in the 18th and 19th centuries has been admirably covered  and shown as contributing to changing ideas towards society and the need to explore the mysteries of the medical body in contrast to the anxieties and mores of contemporary society (Richardson 1988). Attitudes to medical and legal dissection vary over Europe with death viewed as rapidly separating the body and soul in Italy but involving a longer transition in northern Europe (Park 1995: 119). Park suggests that in northern Europe people saw the physical body as integral to the self while in southern Europe the soul was more significant. This resulted in society restricting access to the body on moral grounds and created incentives to disturb

graves for medical research. The scandals arising from the exposure of body-snatching can be seen as a contributing factor to the development of new cemeteries in the UK although perhaps this is of less significance in countries like Denmark because some bodies were legally available for dissection (Nipper Nielsen 2013). Instead it may be the material gains from jewellery or re-selling of the coffin that was the primary aim. Although we must be careful not to associate all gravediggers with these practices there was certainly the opportunity to be involved. Interviews with gravediggers in London undertaken in the 19th century to investigate sanitation in towns reveal their own moral codes such as a refusal to work in certain of the worst over-crowded burial grounds (Select Committee on Improvement of the Health of Towns 1842: 56-7). Their daily work was more dominated by the constant need to know how to make more space in tightly confined areas which would have been learnt on the job. Tacit knowledge comes via informal apprenticeship which is learnt through the embodied experience of *knowing how* to do the work rather than formalised study. Gravediggers in their work are carriers of individual knowledge and might know more about their job than they can directly express, it is in doing the work that the knowledge lies (Polyani 1983 (1966): 4).

Throughout the 20th century the craft of grave-digging would change due to the decline of coffin burials and the rise of cremation having a significant impact upon the tasks required of them. Gardening and other maintenance tasks would become the more significant task. An interview with an American gravedigger, Elmer Ruiz in 1974 (Terkel 1974) detailed both the continuities and the changes occurring in this period both in practical work and the emotional experience of being a gravedigger. Similar to other municipality occupations, gravediggers were to become more carefully controlled and emerge as a profession re-aligned towards certificated knowledge and following regulations rather than tacit knowledge. By the end of the 20th century machinery would remove a vast portion of the physical labour required in grave-digging although there are some graves might need to be completely hand dug where there are constraints in the landscape. It is also possible that a gravedigger can now be freelance rather than employed by a specific cemetery and that other tasks occupy most of their time, a gravedigger can now be more of a gardener than a digger of graves. Despite the use of machinery and increased regulations the tacit knowledge of gravediggers continues to be essential for the management of cemeteries.

While the development of specialist services has enlarged the distance between those who deal directly with the dead body and created a professional boundary between themselves and society, the same has not happened for the gravediggers. The question of stigma concerning those who work with the dead is culturally dependant, contemporary funeral professionals in some countries can still be shunned by the rest of society. The situation is different in Europe and North America where an undertaker is an established and accredited profession and much of this is connected with their development into a defined business. The work of gravediggers is still beset

with many negative associations which attack both the nature of the work and the personal character of those who undertake it. Further it "suffers from blemished historical respectability and adverse literary comment" (Saunders 1995: 1) which establishes and maintains the uneasiness concerning their work. The emphasis is placed upon the (perceived as) menial and unskilled nature of the work as well as the unpleasantness of the task and could be equated with other rubbish disposal jobs However there is no reason to continue this association. The work requires skill which is rarely recognised as well as a great deal of empathy and communication skills.

Gravediggers are making the same sets of decisions commonly studied in other more domestic spheres of archaeological research and these consequences can be studied in the same way as, for example the remains of a prehistoric house. The postholes of which can be examined by size, shape, location and specific deposits. These are routinely researched and interpreted as a way of accessing the people in past societies. Similarly the grave cuts and manipulation of bodies reveal the intersection of social rules and individual acts, the habitus and doxa of grave-digging. Gravediggers are not separated from the society they live in but their attitudes, ideas and bodily practices are shaped by it and remind us that they are an integrated part of the social and cultural thinking that structures their work. The work within a cemetery involves interaction with other professionals, from the undertakers to the cemetery authorities as well as the mourners. They form part of the network of people and authorities that enable a modern burial to be carried out. So although some of the decisions, such as plot location of the grave does not fall to the gravedigger there may be choice over the exact location of the coffin in a specific grave plot or how to deal with previous burials. Even in a world filled with regulations, within this framework there is autonomy and individual acts which can be archaeologically recorded and interpreted.

## Staff at Assistens

The establishment of the new types of cemeteries like Assistens would significantly influence the role of the gravedigger. They would eventually adjust from being employed directly by the church to secular authorities. Gravedigging may be superseded and tasks change to performing full-time tasks around the cemetery including gardening and night security. There was a hierarchy in the work with the Sexton responsible for keeping registers and following regulations. Others were employed for digging the graves or gardening. The gravediggers could have moved from employment at the churchyard to the cemetery and thus continued their long traditions of dealing with the body; after all they were already skilled and able to deal with the situation. During the early years at Assistens when the cemetery was surrounded only by fields and the occasional farm building, the gravediggers were not

paid a salary but for each grave dug but were also given housing on the cemetery and doubled as an extra form of security (Helweg 2010: 121). Shortly after the cemetery was extended in 1805, the Sexton's House was designed to provide space for them to live in the upper floors whilst coffins waiting for burial were meant to be stored below (Fig. 44). It was obviously imagined to be acceptable for people to live in the same building although in reality the design of the coffin storage was impractical and therefore rarely used for this purpose. The building was constructed in the first years of the extension of Assistens in 1808 to form a focal point of interest and was intended to present a sense of classical architecture facing onto a grand entrance (Lindberg 2010: 87). The monumental front of the building is in marked contrast to the back façade which was styled as an ordinary building with little decoration. The building had one side for the dead and visitors and one for the cemetery staff.



**Fig. 44.**
The Sexton's House that lies within the centre of the excavated area, the building was moved and will be replaced into its original location after the construction of the Metro station. Source: Archive, Københavns Kirkegårde, Unknown photographer, unknown date.

Despite having their own accommodation on site, conditions of employment were poor for the gravediggers and at times they looked for ways to supplement their living. Grave-robbing may have been one of those ways; news reports (Nielsen, A. 1939: 147; Jørgensen 2007: 9) suggest some were prosecuted for their acts in Copenhagen but involving theft of clothes, objects and coffins rather than stealing

bodies. Another source of income was the provision of refreshments from the Sexton's House (Chapter 3). As attitudes towards the new cemeteries became more positive in the 19th century they began to be used more for social reasons and although the intention and emphasis was upon healthy excursions into nature and moral improvement, the reality may have been different. Churchyards in the city had been used for social activities or markets but this behaviour was not tolerated in the new cemeteries. The position of gravediggers and other staff improved when the municipality took charge of Assistens in 1880 (Andersen, A. 1991: 7). Wages improved with permanent employment contracts and tips regulated according to a specific scale which would allow a stable income (Valeur Larsen 1960: 72). In the 1920s the coffin bearers were given the same uniform as the cemetery wardens (Valeur Larsen 1960: 128). From the 20th century Assistens was managed by a cemetery director and similar to other large cemeteries the work undertaken within Assistens is predominantly gardening and maintenance of the grave plots (Kjøller 2012: 340).

# How to make (and fill) a grave

The working practices and attitudes of a gravedigger towards the dead can be examined through the direct evidence of their practices in the grave cuts and the decisions made concerning the movement and reuse of earlier bodies, coffins and memorials. Through the archaeological evidence of the graves the craft tradition of the gravediggers comes through as something that is highly skilled and which is passed onto others. These traditions also transform and adapt slowly as new technology and new ways of thinking about graves came into use. Within the framework of traditions and societal rules it must also be stated that in contrast to the mourners and undertakers, gravediggers rarely see the body at the time of the funeral. What is brought to the cemetery is simply a box – the coffin. Of course they are well aware that there is a dead body inside but they do not see or touch it directly. Gravediggers might not have known the person in life but many are affected especially when burying a child, which can be known from the small size of the coffin or from wreath messages (Saunders 1995: 5). Therefore at the immediate point of burial, which is a vital turning point in the relation between the dead person, mourners and society in general this moment is of less significance to the gravedigger. When the gravediggers do come into contact with the body, death was a long time ago and the body has altered considerably.

There is a standard sequence of events that gravediggers are involved with and archaeological evidence can be observed from most of these events. Where the archaeology comes into full potential in describing the working life of the

gravediggers is in the actual physical remains of the grave. Although a grave cut could be considered to be quite standard (doxic) this observation in itself begins to describe the practical and social requirements involved in burying a coffin or cremation urn and continues to shape and influence later actions and requirements. Within the data there are unusual examples that represent small deviations from the standard expected that represent individual wishes, requirements or even simply practical matters such as larger cuts required for a larger coffin. However there is still scope for the gravediggers in their working actions to influence their ideas of the correct ways of burying people. The following sections describe and interpret different stages of work within a cemetery, from choosing the precise site to the manipulation of space within the plot.

## Choosing the grave location

The practices within Assistens can be used to illustrate how cemeteries and grave plots were managed in other modern cemeteries in Europe. The space in cemeteries is structured according to pre-set principles and designs. However when determining the exact position of a grave, the majority are often pre-determined by the prior purchase of grave plots.  Family grave plots have often been bought many years in advance and can only be used with the owner's permission. Where there is some limited autonomy for gravediggers to decide upon grave location it is within the cheaper line burials. These are plots that are not pre-bought but bought after a death occurs; the burial would be placed in a row amongst other unidentified graves. A pragmatic assessment suggests that these cheap rows would have been filled in, row by row, on the basis of daily practice until the row has been completed. Even within the rows of burials there may be other restrictions, for example the specifically designated smaller rows for child burials (for children up to approximately 12 years old) which were cheaper and required less space. There were deviations from this pattern (Chapter 5). Overall despite written records suggesting disorder and a lack of supervision in the cemetery (Valeur Larsen 1960: 71), particularly before the municipality took over control of the cemetery in 1880, the line burials were spread out very evenly with equal space between them. No line burials were placed outside of the specified Section areas into major pathways. In Division G this supervision was the responsibility of the cemetery sextons and was clearly successful. The archaeological evidence suggests that contrary to the written records there was a good awareness of spatial planning and organisation in the 1820s.

Precise position of the coffin was recorded only sporadically within the later Municipal register, recording the depth and indicating whether placed to the right, left or sometimes the centre of the plot. So within this framework there were also opportunities to choose the precise position of the grave within the spatially defined family grave plots. In a multiple plot there could be space for two or three coffins in

columns or stacks, to lie side by side. There may be space to fit in a burial of a small child into the very edge of the burial plot. This is where a combination of practicality, craft skill and innovative solutions for how to fit coffins into a restricted space is needed. Practical considerations apply but there is equally likely a desire to avoid encountering human remains if possible. Some examples of planks of reused coffin wood were used to mark out the location of earlier burials; these indicate forward planning and realisation that this underground space would likely be reused. Gravediggers would also have their own knowledge of the cemetery and the records to guide them in their practices. If a grave is to be dug within a previously unused space there are less practical problems to be faced but if a grave is to be dug within a frequently used space then a larger number of factors come into focus. This can include the presence of above-ground earlier monuments, fencing, trees or plants that may not be disturbed. A burial placed only one or two years ago could remain relatively intact, the coffin is therefore heavier and harder to move, the remains inside potentially unpleasant to deal with. The soil (the grave deposit) could also be unsettled, soft and loose and more likely to cave in. Therefore an experienced gravedigger could instead opt to place the coffin to the far side of the grave plot where there may be more stable ground and less chance to encounter decaying remains. The space underground of a multiple grave plot may be compared to a three-dimensional puzzle fitted within a crowded and over-used space with coffins side-by-side or lying on top of each other which must be reordered and manipulated to enable more space.

## The acts involved in digging the grave

What digging a grave entails in a modern cemetery has been rarely formally archaeologically researched. These acts are examined from the perspective of Assistens to create a foundation of understanding the interpretation made here. Today and from the late 20th century the methods involved in creating a grave have changed. There is generally less need for a gravedigger to stand deep inside the grave although there may be exceptions where there is a requirement to remove earlier human remains. This is a significant transformation of the practices and knowledge required for the task. Whilst excavating at Assistens part of my job was to carry out the reburial of the skeletons and material culture excavated so I had the opportunity to observe the work involved in contemporary grave-digging. On site, within the laboratory, I had reunited all the finds and skeletons and these were placed in new white painted coffins with raised roofs. The new location had been chosen as an area of empty space within Assistens. A small excavating machine was used to create the new grave and pile the soil to one side. Four cemetery staff threaded rope through the handles and slowly lowered the coffin down; the physical acts took less than 30 minutes. This sequence of acts can be compared to earlier methods where there are similarities in the sequence but the method has changed. The differences lie in the manual labour,

length of time and the number of people needed to dig a grave. Earlier methods required at least two people for several hours dependant on the depth required and the previous burials that may need to be dealt with. The tools would be standard – a spade, shovel and pick (Fig. 45). Additional equipment used would include buckets, rope for hoisting and lowering the coffin, ladders and wood, both for supporting the sides of the grave and creating solid platforms to stand upon. Surrounding gravestones may need to be moved or protected during the process. Some tools were found within the grave fills of Assistens, a small lump hammer without the wooden handle and a shovel with a broken shaft lying on a coffin lid. Whether these were accidental losses or the deliberate discard of broken tools they remind any archaeologist of the similarities between archaeological excavation and the gravediggers work.



**Fig. 45.**
The essential tool of a gravedigger, a corroded spade with a broken wooden handle found within a grave fill. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 29 December 2010.

In the course of their work gravediggers might meet obstacles in the soil. A few very large boulders were found in Assistens which would have been difficult to remove but overall the soil was relatively easy to dig through. Tree roots or foundations of walls or vaults might also limit their work. However after the initial decades gravediggers would also have to deal with previous burials. They could have to deal with solid intact heavy coffins or fragmented wood and bones. Any disarticulated bones would have to be hidden from the sight of mourners and dealt with after the committal. Although the geology at Assistens is relatively stable sandy clay if there was a large number of previous burials or waterlogged conditions then the danger of collapse increases. Deep graves would require shoring (supporting of the sides of the grave pit), this requires knowledge in how to support potentially soft earth and to stop other exposed coffins from collapsing into the new grave. Observation during

excavation showed that there were several grave cuts which were larger than necessary and this was potentially caused by the collapse of surrounding earth into the grave pit. There was also some evidence of steps or ledges cut into the sides of the grave which may have enabled access in and out of the grave cut. Shoring to support the sides of the grave would be removed during the filling of the grave and only a single *in situ* reused coffin plank placed against the side of the grave cut was recorded (G893). In general coffin wood may have been reused as shoring if it was in good condition but decayed wood was also found used to mark out a place of a burial, one deposit of bone had a double layer of coffin wood marking out its location (G284). Medieval customs of supporting and marking out a grave with stone, tile or brick linings, sometimes instead of coffins, were largely discontinued by the 18th century but perhaps can be seen transformed into the desire for grave vault structures. Many examples of vaults have been excavated particularly from the early and mid-19th century (Brickley, Buteux *et al.* 2006; Thomsen 2008).

Analysis of the features such as the size, shape and depth of the grave cuts suggests a standard set of guidelines that does not alter over the 200 years of burial activity in Assistens. The size of each grave (length and width) corresponds to the size necessary for adult, or child coffins and cremation urn burials, very little deviation was noted for this throughout the cemetery and the only exceptions were in graves surrounded by loose, soft earth containing multiple coffins. This shows that the practical requirements were adhered to, after all few people wish to create extra work for themselves. The graves were also standard rectangular cuts with sharp vertical walls with very few exceptions. The exceptions are those that were impeded by other factors such as other structures or coffins. So far the work in creating the initial grave can be considered as standardised and with little deviation. The gravediggers work can be stated as conforming to regulatory control and they are assisted in this by the relative lack of overcrowding in Assistens which are the principal problems in traditional churchyards. However one last factor - the depth of the graves reveals some important and significant differences in the work practices of gravediggers.

The shallowest grave cuts were for the cremation urns which were rarely deeper than 0.5m[9]. The proximity to the surface is highlighted by the soil deposits covering the urn which often contained large quantities of the gravel or pebbles that are frequently used to cover the grave plot surfaces and so reflects their shallow nature. Not only are cremation burials not requiring great depths but it is a measure of the relative chronology in the cemetery. Cremation burials are from the 20th century and in all cases are the last burials to take place in each grave plot. They therefore represent an extra phase of use in each plot which requires very little space and did not disturb any

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[9] All depths are discussed relating to the ground level of the cemetery which varied little over the period of time it was in use. Contemporary ground level over the investigated area was 9.4 metres above sea level in the north-east and 9.2m in the south-west.

earlier burials or create charnel deposits. A proponent of cremation, Gustav Schlyter (1922) illustrated his vision of a long deep grave cut with a column of perfectly stacked urns compared to the surrounding chaos of truncated inhumations. This idealistic vision of the ordering of cremation is misleading in a practical sense because there was no acknowledgment of how cremation urns may be placed within the earth or how they too decay and become manipulated and disordered over time. In Assistens, cremations were placed in separate, shallow pits usually within the top 1m of the ground level which led to them being vulnerable to shallow gardening activities.

From analysis of the coffin burials it is the line burials that were overall the shallowest; it is one of their defining traits. They lay between 1.4m and 1.6m below the ground level. There is no reason to make them deeper as they were assumed to be cancelled after 20 years and the space reused and a greater depth would make them more difficult to exhume. The fact that they were not always exhumed due to changes in spatial layout where removal was no longer necessary reflects a divergence in cemetery manipulation of space. The lid of the shallowest coffin (G61) lay only 0.6m from the contemporary ground surface. Amongst the shallowest graves the majority were the coffins that lay within specific child rows and were of young infants. There were 23 infant graves buried only 1m below the contemporary ground level; some of these are interpreted as illicit child graves (discussed below).

The deepest coffin excavated was 3.35m from the contemporary ground level. However this particular burial (G167) and the second deepest (G1263) were within vaults making their circumstances unusual in this part of the cemetery. The deepest non-supported grave cut for an adult was 3.05m deep (G1319) this depth would certainly have required some form of shoring or support during its creation. The deepest juvenile grave was of an adolescent also buried within a vault but there were four child graves from family grave plots that were around 2.4m deep. These are not the deepest graves known from analogous grave cuts; the churchyard of St Marylebone, London recorded cuts from 1.57m to 4.15m down from contemporary ground level all within highly unstable sandy soil (Miles, Powers *et al.* 2008: 35). Although it could have been possible to create a stack of burials, one on top of the other similar to those in city centre cemeteries such as Crossbones, London (Brickley, Miles *et al.* 1999). This was not carried out in this area of Assistens. In many urban burial grounds there is rarely evidence for use of shoring. Trenches for multiple coffins tend to be deeper but were also correspondingly larger in size and dug in stable ground like at the City Bunhill cemetery, London (Miles & Connell 2012) which helped to prevent collapse of the sides. Some of the most intensively used grave plots in Assistens did have coffins separated by a thin layer of soil which could be categorised as a form of stacking. The crucial difference is that they weren't deposited at the same time within an open grave, between the deposition of coffins the grave was filled again sometimes for decades. Large communal pits which were filled with

stacks of coffins and only closed when the space was full were not present in this Division of Assistens. All graves were created as separate grave pits and overall the majority of graves (60%) on Assistens were placed between 1.7m and 2.2m from the ground surface. The depth from 3.35m below the surface and up comprises the actively used spatial layer where the majority of burials were placed.

- *Regulation and practice in grave depth*

Analysing the grave depths allows some understanding of the reality of the gravediggers practices on the cemetery and illustrates the different behaviour towards classes or categories of burial. As discussed by Per Kristian Madsen (1990) for medieval burials, there may be a large discrepancy between documentary and archaeological data in the type of evidence that is available and this problem continues into the modern period. The archaeology can be compared with the regulations on grave depth set out by the cemetery. These regulations were set up to ease concerns about the possibility of bodies being dug up, either by animals or by people and also enabled the enclosing and concealment of the sights and smells of the processes of decay. The pragmatic perspective and need for rapid on the spot decisions meant that the actual grave depth was something that gravediggers had a measure of autonomy over. It is considered unlikely that someone in authority would measure every grave to ensure the correct depths had been reached.

Regulation measurements at Assistens are not specific but are related to the depth from ground surface down to the lid of the coffin. The earliest cemetery protocols from 1805 states required at least 1.26m of soil over the coffin (15 February 1805a). Later protocols (*Reglement for Begravelsesvæsnet i Kjøbenhavn*, 22 December 1860) coming into force in 1861 describe two levels of burial: single depth which requires a depth of at least 1m of soil over every coffin and double depth that requires at least 1.8m of soil. Double depths enable the coffins to be fitted into the grave space. The protocols estimate 0.6m should be sufficient for the height of the coffin itself therefore the base of a grave cut should be stated as at least 1.6m below-ground level for single depth and 2.4m for double depth. The single burial depth was the minimum requirement but double depth required an extra payment to the gravediggers by the people arranging the funeral. These measurements are similar to many cemeteries in Europe, for example guidance to Burial Boards in the UK in 1852 recommended 1.2m between the ground surface and the coffin and at least 0.3m between each coffins, which was later reduced to 0.15m (Rugg 2015: Appendix 2).

Ground level on the cemetery excavated area is deceptively flat but does slope downward from north to south by only 0.2m over the 110m of the site. So there is a slight gradient which is barely perceptible when present at the cemetery. Using the contemporary ground level of 9.4m in the north-east and 9.2m in the south-west, a level can be extracted of the required depths to which gravediggers should have dug

graves in both northern and southern excavated areas. The northern area is the Runddel sample. The southern area consists of the graves lying to the rear of the Sexton's House up to the southern extent of the excavated area. These figures are then used as a baseline to compare the actual measured depths of the graves (Table 20). These calculations include both adults and children and although children could be buried in shallow graves many were placed in deeper graves within family grave plots. Assessing all burials within a range of 0.05m around the regulation levels shows that only 6% (north area) and 5% were placed at the correct depths (south area). This low level suggests chance and random variation rather a specific exact methodology. It is naïve and impractical to suggest that gravediggers would have dug to a precise depth as this would have required constant measurement and adjustment. A comparison with a wider range of 0.2m around the precise depth allows for a more likely result including smaller variations in ground level and a pragmatic working system that dug to a correct depth using visual estimation rather than exact measurement. Yet even when this greater range is used, the overall percentages of graves placed at the correct regulation depths were only 23% (north area) and 25% (south area). These percentages suggest that although these figures are derived from an approximation of the burials as a whole group rather than reacting to individual factors or chronological change there is still little to suggest that the regulation depths were genuinely used by the gravediggers. The percentages are also extremely consistent over the cemetery, for both north and south areas the numbers of relatively correct grave depths are higher for the single depth graves than for the deeper, double depth graves. This suggests that the deeper burials were generally placed incorrectly at levels far shallower than the regulations intended.

**Table 20.**
A comparison of the accuracy of excavated grave depths in accordance to cemetery regulations. Comparing the percentage of graves that were correctly buried within 0.05m of the correct regulation depth and within 0.2m of the correct regulation depth. Depth of burial is related to Danish systems of metres above sea level.

| NORTH (Runddel sample) | Precise depth in m | 0.05m range | Total | % | 0.2m range | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Single | 7.8 | 7.78 to 7.82 | 20 | 4 | 7.70 to 7.90 | 80 | 17 |
| Double | 7 | 6.98 to 7.02 | 8 | 1.6 | 6.90 to 7.10 | 28 | 6 |
|  |  |  | 28/477 | 6 |  | 108/477 | 23 |

| SOUTH | Precise depth in m | 0.05m range | Total | % | 0.2m range | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Single | 7.6 | 7.58 to 7.62 | 8 | 2.5 | 7.50 to 7.70 | 52 | 16 |
| Double | 6.8 | 6.78 to 6.82 | 9 | 3 | 6.70 to 6.90 | 29 | 9 |
|  |  |  | 17/319 | 5.5 |  | 81/319 | 25 |

These patterns are further illustrated by graphs comparing the grave depths (in percentages) from areas in the north and south. The complete assemblage of burials with grave depths is shown with arrows indicating the precise depth where they should have been placed according to regulations (Fig. 46). These should have been two clear peaks in the distribution reflecting single and double depths but both areas have two small peaks that do not correspond to the precise levels. In either area, the percentages are relatively small and distributed over the range of grave depths. Line burials in both areas are represented in small peaks as shallower than required by regulation. In the Runddel sample they are approximately 0.2m too shallow and 0.1m too shallow in the southern area. Within the south area is a small peak of graves that seem to lie closer within the required double depth however not only is this a very small number of graves but they are also still far off the ideal grave depth. The graph also reflects the deeper grave depths within the south as a general pattern, probably reflecting the slight slope downwards of ground level within this area. In general it can be concluded that the gravediggers were not digging graves down to the regulation depths. Most graves were placed around 2m below-ground level (between 7.45m and 7.25m) and perhaps this depth can be compared to the average height of a ladder needed to climb in and out of the grave. Overall despite the discrepancy these results can be viewed positively, most burials were dug to a reasonable depth, enough to satisfy the gravediggers own perceptions of a 'decent burial'. This may not be the same as the cemetery requirements but the pattern continues over the approximate 200 years of burial seen in Assistens.
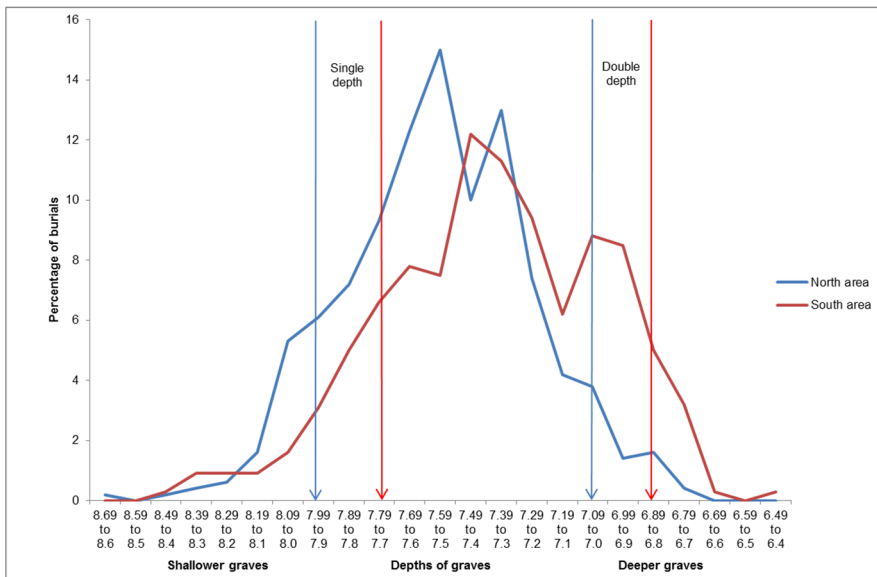


**Fig. 46.**
Depths of graves using the lowest recorded level of the skeleton, divided into areas which lie in the north and south of the excavated area. Labels indicate the regulation depths (single and double depth) at which graves were required to be placed within. (n = 790 skeletons, not all graves excavated have been included).

So far investigation has focused on the grave assemblages as a whole but separating and analysing infant and juvenile graves from adult graves allow for observation regarding attitudes to child burials. Infant and juvenile burials with available grave depths are compared with a small group of infants interpreted as an illicit (unregulated) cluster of burials (Fig. 47). It is clear that this small cluster of six burials (one burial had no depth recorded but was in the same range) were markedly shallower than other burials. A second clear distribution is the shallower depths of infant burials compared to juvenile burials with very few infants buried deeper than 2m below-ground level (at between 7.45m and 7.25m). These few exceptions to this rule can be explained as the occasional examples where infants were buried in the same coffin as an adult. In general juveniles were buried far shallower than adults; most were buried above 7.49m.

The evidence shows a standardised pattern of grave practices. There were practical reasons to use shallow graves and in the example of the line burials consistency in depth was a defining factor which helped them to be identified. Hygiene and fear of contamination of the living by dead bodies is expressed in the fact that there were regulations on depth but the fact that deeper graves could be bought also shows that there is no clear association between hygiene and the precise depth of grave. A picture is created of conformity in grave practices and a continuation of order and regulation that is the same as envisaged above-ground. Assistens regulations from 1880 show that the deeper the grave, the more expensive it was (Wiene 2010: 20). Therefore the shallowness of the line burials could also be a physical expression that they were a cheaper kind of burial. As shown in the tables and graphs there are reasons to believe that the shallowness can be explained due to practical and economic considerations although the fact of a shallow grave still expresses a material social difference. Children's graves are shallow and could be linked to a feeling that it was not desired or necessary to bury them so deeply. Children were also included in family grave plots and many were placed together with adults. A social choice is presented within the cost of burial, between a plot for the family to lie together or an unmarked line grave. Children could be included but may not be treated in the same way as adults. A further social dimension to the depth of graves is that cemetery protocols do allow deeper graves but extra payment is required to the gravediggers (Wiene 2010). The awareness of the risk of disturbance particularly of grave-robbery and thus securing a deeper grave lowered the risk at the same time as giving the social cachet of being able to afford a more acceptable grave which marks it out from surrounding graves. So although grave depth is a practical issue, it also reflects back to the idea that shallow line graves could have been regarded as socially less acceptable and therefore both grave security and social acceptance could be bought on the cemetery.
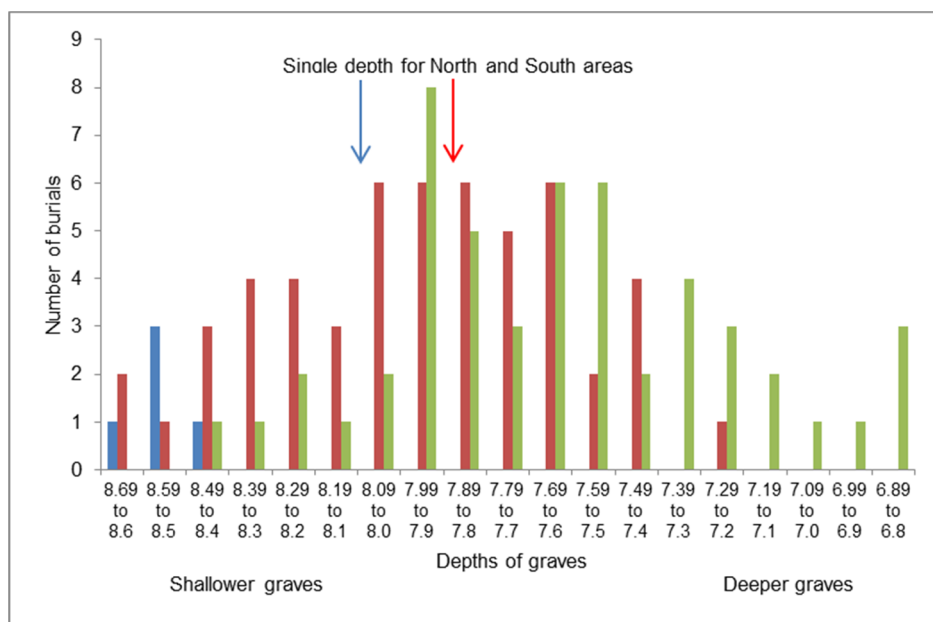
**Fig. 47.**
Depths of child graves using the lowest recorded level of the skeleton. The burials are separated into infant (up to 2 years old: Red), and juvenile (2-16 years old: Green) and compared with the cluster of infant graves that are interpreted as an illicit burial group (Blue). Labels indicate the regulation depths (single depth) at which graves were required to be placed within (n = 103 skeletons, not all infant graves have been included).

- *Deviation from standards - illicit burials*

One of the explicit features of modern cemeteries is of the above-ground visible control and spatial regulation of the burials. However there was one clear example of a group of infant burials found outside of the allocated grave plots. Within the cemetery are specific rows of burial plots for children. Several rows were partially excavated and showed a standardised burial rite, with each plot containing one burial within a coffin. There was no intercutting of the graves which might have indicated a known position or visible marker above-ground and all burials were placed at a consistent shallow depth. However there was an exception to this norm where a cluster of six child graves were positioned around a tree (Fig. 48: G68, G72, G120-3). All were buried just underneath the topsoil and some were intercut suggesting that they were less likely to have had above-ground markers. They were outside of any known grave plot and no associated documentary record has been located. Despite their unusual location they were still oriented north-south to align with the closest adjacent grave plots which indicates willingness on the part of the gravediggers to accord with the normative burial orientation. The burials were of infants, two were new-borns and the eldest was only two years old. The coffins were made of thin wood that had mostly decayed and there were no grave goods or other evidence of burial ritual observed.
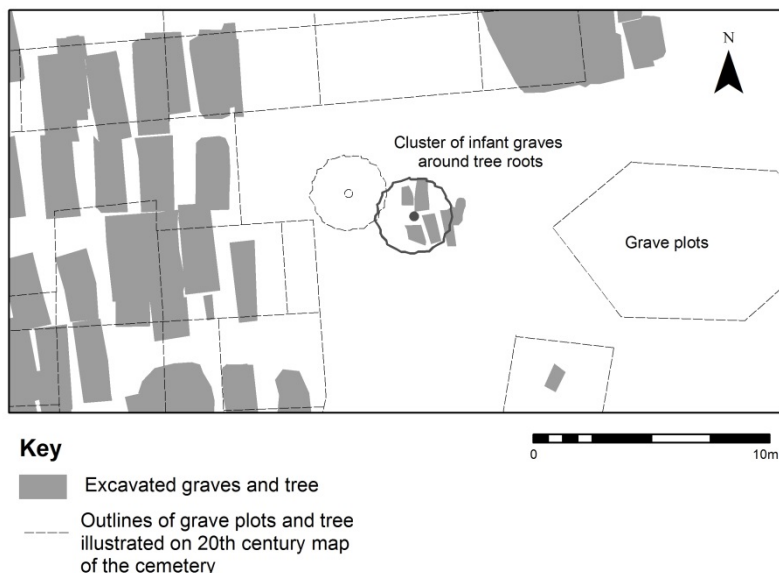
**Fig. 48.**
Cluster of infant burials around tree roots compared with outlines of grave plots and a tree from a 20th century map. The excavated tree roots may belong to the tree illustrated on the historic map or a second tree that had been removed.

The nature of these burials suggests a variation to the standard. It is possible that the loose soil around tree roots could conceal a new grave of a small child and that this could be carried out by the gravediggers without the knowledge of the cemetery authorities or visitors to the cemetery. The intercutting of some graves suggests that this specific place was known about and used repeatedly and therefore represents some form of concealment by gravediggers of their illicit but also sympathetic actions. None of the bodies were removed and no charnel deposits were associated with these burials. For the parents, they could achieve a burial of their child within a prestigious consecrated burial ground without the possible stigma of using a pauper's grave. These child burials are evidence that there were challenges to authority regulations in regard to the organisation of space and concealment of the gravediggers' actions. The small cluster of infant burials may also illustrate a mix of modern and traditional ideas, practical and symbolic elements. The tree would have acted as a natural grave marker for the burials but perhaps also relate to earlier Scandinavian folklore in the concept of *vårdträd*, literally translated as a guardian or sacred tree (Tillhagen 1995: 35). This was a prominent tall tree beside the farm which safeguarded the prosperity of its inhabitants and farm, *vårdträd* were also planted in churchyards. The placement of young children under a large tree could have referred back to this folklore, giving an extra feeling of security and care for them, mixing both Pagan and Christian traditions (Andrén 2014: 36-8). Documentary evidence from 1909 of gravedigger's

actions concerning the burial of infants who were stillborn showed that they could be stored for long periods in the chapel or temporarily buried in other family plots, without the owners knowledge, until removed for burial elsewhere in the cemetery (Aftenbladet 1906). Certainly there was a certain amount of autonomy in how some burials were treated.

## The committal – placing the coffin in the grave

Turning from the preparation of the grave we move towards the point of interaction between gravediggers and the mourners and the coffin which is to be placed in the newly-dug grave. This part of the funeral service may form the final formal ceremony and the last direct interaction between mourners and the deceased but is the first interaction for the gravediggers. In churchyards the burial service and committal may not have been separated due to the proximity of the church and churchyard. For modern cemeteries located further away from the parish church it requires a separate event. There are some chapels on cemeteries including one on Assistens but even a service held there may still require a procession to the actual graveside where many different rituals have been noted in folklore (Kragh 2003: 84-6). The burial service therefore could have taken place elsewhere and the physical committal of the coffin into the ground may have been attended with another short service and rituals or may have been largely a matter of routine with very few or no mourners attending.

The physical part of the process has remained the same; generally four people are needed to lower the coffin into the earth, more people were required for a heavy lead or metal coffin (22 December 1860: §3b). In Assistens there is some direct evidence that the coffin was lowered into the grave cut during the committal, while the mourners were still present. This consists of the presence of fine clean sand, flowers or other objects lying on the top of coffins (Chapter 5). The placement of cremation urns may appear to be a different form with fewer traditions associated with it and taking place potentially long after the cremation service. There were no traces of ritual associated with the placement of cremation urns in Assistens that would confirm if mourners were present but this does not exclude their presence.

At the end of the committal the gravediggers who would have been discretely standing on the periphery of the scene will be able to fill the grave. Part of Catholic Irish tradition can include participation in the grave making and filling as a final social and commemorative action for the deceased and the living (Mc Mahon 2011). This practice occurs in many other European countries including Denmark, if there are mourners who wish to participate in the funeral. It is quite possible that, similar to today the completion of filling the grave occurred after the mourners were gone. There was no evidence of the practice of creating small 'shelves' in the sides of the grave (Heilen & Gray 2010: 21), these were to place wood over the body or the head

area which would symbolically prevent earth from falling directly on the person. This can be a traumatising moment for the mourners if they were present, or indeed active in the refilling process. It is also possible that some committals took place without mourners present, one example where a coffin was lying on its side rather than placed flat on its base may relate to this (G959), although it could also be related to movement after grave-robbing. Similar to the other rituals discussed in earlier chapters these tasks mark out the ending of a transitional state from a living person and identity that was within society into a new category. The rituals in the burial service and at the committal help to normalise this process and are controlled in this period by the assistance of people such as the priest, undertakers and gravediggers, they help to control this process and monitor the stages of what is deemed by society as necessary.

## Completion of the process – filling the grave

When the mourners have left, any shoring and anything covering the shoring or sides of the grave cut would be removed and grave backfilled. The soil fills of the graves at Assistens were very homogenous with very few inclusions – occasional pieces of broken ceramics and flower pots. Some ceramic tobacco pipe stems were found which may have been dropped by the gravediggers as they worked. There was also some evidence of broken coffin lids in Assistens. Most of these are related to the sheer weight of soil on top, particularly for coffins with raised lids which were very prone to inward collapse. Yet other lids appeared to be in pieces or to be virtually absent when the rest of the coffin was well preserved. Fluids from the decay of the body could help to preserve the sides and base of the coffin wood but even this does not adequately explain the broken coffin lids. A controversy in Sweden from 2008 highlighted a practice where before the grave was backfilled, gravediggers used a machine to specifically break the coffin lid to speed up decomposition and facilitate reuse of the grave space (Brändström 2008). When this common, but undeclared act was filmed by a member of the public it led to a wider debate of contemporary practice and banning of the practice.

There were 945 recorded coffins from Assistens; only 83 of these were recorded as fully complete, so there was a moderate to poor level of preservation for the whole assemblage. When examining the lids, 439 (46.5%) were recorded as not present, meaning either completely decayed or sometimes suggested as disturbed and removed. Whilst poor preservation or differences in recording certainly accounts for many of these coffin with missing lids, it is certainly possible that some coffin lids were broken or removed in order to encourage rapid decomposition and enable quicker reuse of the grave space. In Assistens due to the combination of good soil conditions and potential lack of disturbance to a coffin, it is possible that a body would still consist of

significant soft tissue after 20 years. In observation of the burials at Assistens, coffins with broken lids were generally more advanced in decomposition in comparison to intact coffins. So it is possible that coffin lids were deliberately broken in Assistens. Encouraging rapid decomposition could assist the future work of grave clearance. It is at this stage perhaps that the tools, such as the broken spade (Fig. 45) and lump hammer, were lost by the gravediggers in removing shoring, backfilling the grave, packing down the soil and perhaps creating a small mound of earth and placing a wooden marker to indicate the grave. However it is also at this point that gravediggers have an opportunity to deposit disarticulated human bones which have been disturbed during the digging of the grave. These acts probably occur when there is nobody else around to witness them. The gravediggers are free to make decisions in their work. This stage in the process of creating and using a grave is the last that occurs underground, from this point any acts towards an individual grave are focused on above-ground commemoration.

After a certain amount of time the grave fill will settle and often a depression is created in the ground surface, this settling happens when the loose soil becomes compacted. The placement of any permanent monuments or markers will then be decided or replaced back onto the grave plot. This period can last for approximately one year; therefore a completion of the burial and commemoration process potentially covers a far longer period than the immediate few days around the death and funeral. This stage can be viewed as the final stage in this particular individual grave biography but in fact is only the continuing of processes that continue underground - the decay of the body and coffin, animal activity and later perhaps human disturbance. These are the taphonomic activities that are concealed below-ground for the benefit of the visitors and mourners to the cemetery. Perhaps it is with the placement into the below-ground world that the individual coffin now joins into a more social collective and entangled space which is the world of the dead. After this point, it is rare for individual identity to now be exhumed again. So far discussion has focused upon having a previously unused grave space in which to create a grave. The following sections discuss the implications of having previous burials to contend with.

## Eternal rest and grave peace?

After the events that take place around the immediate death and commemoration of the individual there is a new stage in the biography of the burial and of the space it lies within. Above the ground the plot is a static time where on the surface the plot may be decorated and mourners visit the grave. Gravediggers continue to act as gardeners maintaining the plot. However underneath there is an active process of decay of the body, coffin and associated material culture. This stage may come to an

end if the plot is no longer paid for. The 'long after-life' of the grave plot and its contents then commences.

Christian doctrine emphasised the peace of burials although often practicality and grave-robbery disturbed or removed burials (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005: 195-7). Current legislation in many European countries contains a measure of 'grave peace', which is a defined period of time in which the body is allowed to decay and cannot legally be exhumed. Disturbance of the grave during this period would require legal applications on good grounds for the act such as requirement for reburial to another cemetery or for forensic and legal enquiries. After this period however the coffin and contents can be legally exhumed and the grave space reused. The legal time period varies in different countries, sometimes only 10 or 15 years, others slightly longer which makes a cemetery more of a rentable 'decomposition site' rather than a permanent resting place (Heessels & Venbrux 2009: 122). In some examples where a particularly short grave peace is defined such as the town of Volendam in the Netherlands, where space is at a premium, burials are only allowed to decay for 13 years before being removed. The removal is a routine business, although differentially made, for at Volendam in contrast to the adult burials, child burials are not removed at all, nor are the burials of the parish priest (Van Egdom 1999). In Denmark current law allows for 20 years of grave peace (*fredningstiden*) for a coffin and 10 years for a buried urn before disturbance is permitted (2009: §13, Stk. 2). Although the formal and legal term is *fredningstiden*, the more common term of *gravfred* is generally used. This principle means that a burial is not necessarily allowed to rest in peace eternally and reuse of the space is a distinct possibility. In practice burials may be left *in situ* for longer than the designated period but much depends upon the need for space.

It is often only the abandonment of the grave plots that breaks these rules, albeit briefly before being brought within the business again to be resold. There was a financial barrier to renewal of a grave plot, renewal of a family plot could allow the possibility of cheap additional burials but even if a line burial was renewed no more burials could be added. Being able to afford a space for a limited period of time implies that a burial, as a material remnant of a person, was only valued as such for this short period, after that it is something that can be disposed of. It is clear that grave plots were commonly reused in Assistens and burials were removed, sometimes only partially. The archaeological evidence shows a whole range of handling, including different treatment of the coffin and the skeleton. This disturbance occurred both after completion of the period of grave peace and within a paid ownership, there was no guarantee of the quality of that grave peace. Grave plots can be seen as a commodity where space is rented for a defined time only and the disturbance of the body is not automatically perceived as a contentious issue.

In Christian tradition the breaking up of the human body resulted in moral discussions as there was a commonly held idea that the whole body was necessary for

Resurrection. The principal focus was on saving the soul but the fate of the body was controversial. Theological debate focused on statements by Augustine of Hippo who wrote of the ability to be resurrected despite separation of the body and soul at death. The debate was continued in discussion over the legitimacy of disturbing the dead (Bynum 1995: 56). However in practice there was little compunction in removing or manipulating bodies as long as the bodies stayed within consecrated ground (Harris & Robb 2013: 147). One way of dealing with this problem was by adding more soil to the churchyard, building up the level of the churchyard. Evidence for this was found at the medieval churchyard of St Clemens but it still did not prevent the necessity of grave reuse or the intensive use of space resulting in the intercutting of graves (Jark Jensen & Dahlström 2009). The stratigraphical sequences of burial in most medieval churchyards therefore is of shallow burials repeatedly disturbed to create more space followed by added layers of soil, an intensively used, denser horizontal layer of activity. There is often very little evidence for the sequence of grave cuts in this process; sequencing has to rely on the presence of the coffins or skeletons. The stratigraphical sequence in modern cemeteries, as represented at Assistens, is different as it comprises deeper graves within carefully monitored space. The grave cuts were visible (although sometimes complex) and there was no additional soil. There was no build-up of material and the stratigraphical sequence covered a deeper and more visible clusters or groupings of burials that could be related to specific plots. The difference is not binary, there was intercutting of burials in Assistens but there was an overall trend towards clearly defined and deeper disposal of the burials.

There are pragmatic reasons to allow the removal of earlier burials and the secondary deposition of any surviving remains. Many traditional churchyards reused space and examples of this practice are frequent (Thomsen 2008; Grønfeldt Petersen 2012). In managing this situation the church sexton's knowledge of where there is potential space or where earlier, more decayed burials are situated could have been invaluable in avoiding more recent, less decayed bodies and so avoid offending sensibilities of the living population. Enlargement or rebuilding of the church or associated buildings could also result in the disturbance of earlier burials. Examples of this show there is a range of different handling of the remains and often there is no removal or special treatment towards the human remains with many being built over or used as part of the foundations (Cinthio 2002: 64; Cherryson 2007: 135). Other examples have clear evidence of considered removal or re-organisation. There is variation in the attitudes towards these practices particularly when influenced by the different divisions of Christianity after the Reformation. It is also possible to believe that the body after death is not important or necessary for the Resurrection and therefore if the remains, particularly of unknown anonymous individuals are found then it would be of no concern to manipulate them in any way that is considered necessary. Thus there is little consensus on the treatment or distribution of burials from the medieval to the modern world either theologically or in practice. However there are some

overall patterns observable in the practical handling of bodies in churchyards and cemeteries.

Many of the concerns about earlier treatment and practices towards the body still resonate today and there can be great dissonance between the public understanding of how human remains should be treated and what is allowed legally (Chapter 2). This dilemma is faced through archaeological work in debates over excavation, analysis, reburial and public display (Iregren & Redin 1995; Sayer 2010a; Anthony 2016). One example is where excavated skeletons from a consecrated churchyard in Bonderup, Sweden were removed for analysis against the wishes of some of the church community (Petersson, B. 1995). Further there can be conflict arising between a desire for reburial and a desire to retain remains so they are available for future archaeological research. It is a subject which can be addressed by examining over-arching principles and motives for archaeological research but also with consideration and sensitivity towards each individual case. Yet in the context of the routine clearance of disused grave plots and their remains within a cemetery, although it is fully legal and often carefully controlled these actions are not widely discussed or understood within the society at large. For if there is a widespread societal view of cemeteries as places of peace and rest then the movement and removal of remains is in direct opposition to this perspective. Where there is a cemetery which is increasingly overcrowded and there is a desperate need for space (Rugg & Pleace 2011) removal or re-arrangement of earlier burials may form adequate solutions to these increasing problems. Yet these methods may also appear unpalatable and arouse opposition from some people or sections in society who may not know that it has been a routine matter in Europe for many centuries.

## Disturbing bodies and coffins at Assistens

Modern urban cemeteries are generally seen as places of order and rationality, in contrast to the chaotic burial grounds which they replaced. In a cemetery the need to disturb burials might simply be following regulations and uncontested work practice, something which is agreed to by plot owners as part of the purchase contract. However there was not a completely clean and ordered management of graves as is suggested by burial registers and protocols. The manipulation of bodies within the grave plots is one example where archaeological evidence can show different practices which are necessary to maintain the cemetery. It is not a simple and clean procedure: coffins are moved intact or broken up; bodies are chopped in half, pulled apart, sometimes when still fleshed. This is in direct opposition to the ideals that the cemetery is expected to represent. What processes, or transformations occur to allow this manipulation of the body and the funerary material culture surrounding the body?

**Fig. 49.**
An in situ coffin with a partial skeleton present inside, only the top half of the body has been removed, the rest lies undisturbed (G774). Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 27 May 2010.

It is clear that the doxic rules were not followed but that this was an example of the tacit handling and understandings of the body being enacted. There were many examples of skeletons still lying *in situ* in coffins that were truncated across the body or longitudinally with the rest intact (Fig. 49). This was most commonly observed in the earliest of the line burials which were adjacent to family plots and perhaps even part of an earlier cemetery design.

Truncated and manipulated skeletons in Assistens were also present within the active tenure of tightly dated family plots showing that this treatment could be expected over a short period of time to bodies from one plot. This could result in situations where the burial of a child could displace or truncate the body and coffin of a grandparent. The burial of a widow could truncate and be mixed together with the body of her husband. The position of some skeletal elements clearly showed that it was possible for some bodies to be treated like this when still retaining significant amounts of soft tissue. Disturbed human remains could be thrown into the grave as part of the backfill. However there was also careful and deliberate placement of disarticulated bones. The context of these deliberate depositions was often covered by pine branches or palm leaves whose scent may also have distracted from the smell from the surrounding soil and decomposition. Other examples involved the placement of almost entire skeletons within another coffin.

Truncation of earlier graves could take many forms, although they could be completely removed there was also evidence where the coffins had only been partially broken up and the rest of the body and coffin left *in situ*. In the majority of these examples the skeleton in some form was still present, with only a small part disturbed but with some of the truncated bones placed over them. Within the Runddel sample there were 18 coffins which were recorded as being truncated partially on one side, showing that a new grave cut was placed partially over the old and that truncation

occurred longitudinally down the length of the coffin and body. This action expands the amount of space that could be used in the grave plot by truncating and potentially removing older graves. Truncation across the coffin, in a transverse line was also present, in these cases both the coffin and body were cut in half with part left *in situ*. This form of truncation was more common where the earlier and cheaper rows of line burials were encroached upon by the space laid out for the more expensive family plots. This started from the late 1830s although not on a consistent basis. The amount of truncation and removal of these cheaper burials varied within the cemetery.
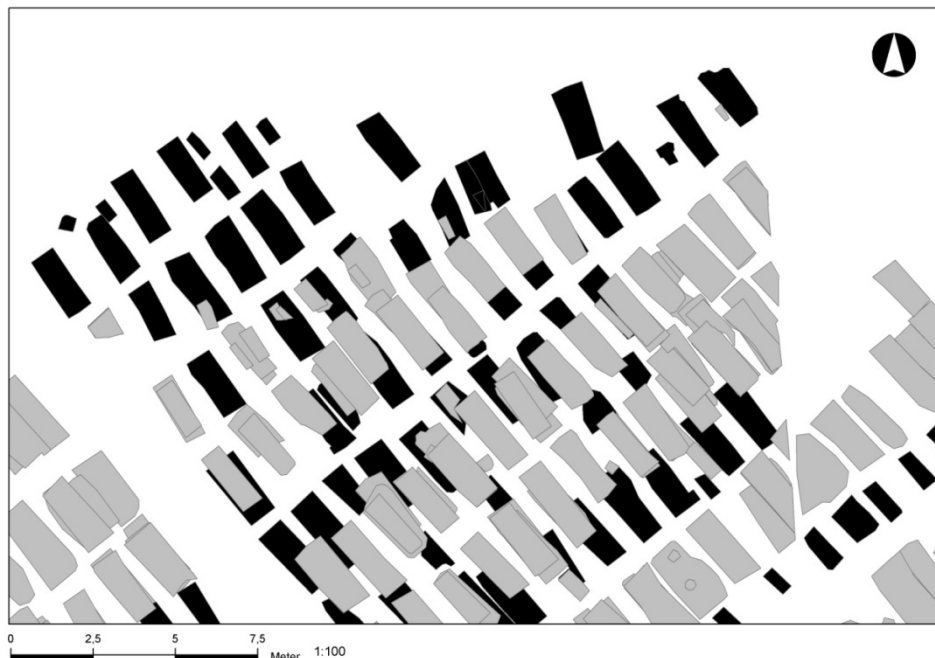


**Fig. 50.**
Rows of line burials within the cemetery showing the different levels of truncation. Line burials are solid black and other later graves from family plots are light grey. Illustration by Jens Winther Johannsen, in Anthony, Keenan *et al*. 2016.

Within the southern area of excavation (the area behind the Sexton's House) there were two rows of line burials with only marginal truncation from later outbuildings (Fig. 50) whereas rows further south were entirely removed by later burials. Truncation could also be severe; in the Runddel sample 22 truncated coffins consisted only of the base meaning that truncation occurred horizontally, removing the lid and sides to allow for a certain extra depth for a new coffin. The remaining base was sometimes left to act as a form of support and flooring for a new coffin.

There were also graves where there were often substantial remains of a coffin but no skeletal remains present. The effort in removing the entire skeleton from within it but not moving the actual coffin itself may seem to be self-defeating but the coffin provides a firm base for the new burial. One example is where gravediggers had started to remove a skeleton from its coffin but did not complete their work (Fig. 51). The missing bones were not found within the coffin or in the grave fill so must have been transferred elsewhere.



**Fig. 51.**
Truncation and partial removal of body and coffin, leaving only the right side of the body and no skull (G613). Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 7 April 2010.

Within the excavated area were 70 empty graves, all within family plots but more in the Runddel sample than the southern area suggesting a higher usage and higher turnover of graves in the north. Although some of these may be graves where the entire skeleton had decayed, in general the preservation of skeletal material in Assistens was good and even in burials that were most poorly preserved there was some trace of the remains. In these examples there was no trace of the skeleton. The majority of empty coffins were highly truncated and these examples illustrate the standard procedures for removal of earlier grave contents. For example, an intact coffin (G1344), except for the lid, contained no skeleton. The coffin above it truncates and sits almost inside it; there is also no charnel deposit in the sequence. Therefore it is likely that the skeleton was removed during the digging of the new grave and disposed of elsewhere and that the coffin was visible during the committal. In this example, there was no evidence of covering the wood but it is possible that there was a cloth or other organic material since decayed concealing the partially destroyed coffin underneath. Here the coffin is also transformed into another object and used for different purposes. Within cheaper line burials there were no empty graves therefore after these rows were filled there was no evidence of organised removal of them even after the area above-ground was converted into pathways. The cheaper burials under paths could have been removed and reused but this would have blocked access to the family plots whose owners may not have been aware even of the presence of these surrounding graves. Although above-ground the pathway acts as a visible and natural seeming border which helps to define the plot, underneath it has

been used to its most economic advantage. The cemetery practices and use of space reveal a shift over time from taking cheap burials placed in convenient spaces to a focus on providing enclosed and defined grave plots for wealthier clientele.

Manipulation of remains is not solely focused on body parts; there was evidence of movement of coffins that were not broken up. Comparison of documentary and archaeological evidence suggested several cases where the stratigraphic sequence of coffins was altered to create more space within a grave plot. Several examples are related to infant and juvenile remains which were moved aside to make room for larger adult coffins and then placed on top of the new coffin, creating a new sequence of burials. They show decision-making by gravediggers in reaction to the ordering of space and also the possibility of concern for smaller, more fragile coffins to stop them being destroyed by heavier weights placed on them. There was also one example of a burial with the coffin in an unusual position on its side and on top of another coffin (G959). This cannot be explained due to a lack of space available, the grave had been dug to the required width and depth and there were no other obstacles. The coffin lid was not completely in place perhaps due to subsidence caused by the earlier burial or pressure from overlying soil. The body was still articulated, held together by the coffin and the presence of a large amount of wood shavings and a preserved pillow filled with feathers. These soft furnishings evidently helped to stabilise the body in one position. This is the original placement of the coffin; it is not moved to create extra space as there were no later burials in this plot. As this stands as a unique example it could have been a mistake during the lowering of the coffin in the funeral which was not corrected indicating there were no observers present at the funeral. However there is evidence from the burial underneath suggesting that there was some possibility of grave-robbery. This is not the only possible evidence for grave-robbery in Assistens and these cases highlight evidence about gravediggers' decision making and actions far beyond cemetery regulations. These coffins are examples of ordering space within a grave to allow the manipulation of bodies and coffins.

The evidence of what the gravediggers did with the coffin wood and human bone is an important clue to how they interpreted cemetery regulations and how they viewed human skeletons and their burials. If a grave became eligible for removal, then the wood should have been disposed of and the skeleton collected and removed to another place. As already noted coffin wood was used for shoring for the grave cut or as a marker. The connection between a body and its coffin becomes separated after some time in the ground. Similarly how should grave goods be disposed of? Although most organic, textile or iron objects would have fully decayed leaving no trace, precious metals would still be intact and valuable. From the large number of items found in the undisturbed burials in Assistens, it is likely that disturbed burials also had objects which were removed. There are few clues to this however a set of earrings were found separately in charnel fill (G1112) of a very disturbed grave. This may be evidence of theft where the earrings were accidently dropped or normative removal of

earlier burials. Other items found mostly in grave fills were belt buckles, combs, a gold ring and a copper alloy fob watch. A multitude of handling solutions was used with different disposal of the coffin wood, grave goods and human remains.

The below-ground disturbance of bodies and funeral material culture is one category but there is also disturbance and removal of above-ground material culture which make up a part of the entity of the burial and grave plot.  The sense of change and renewal in the cemetery therefore extends both above- and below-ground. Removal of burials from plots which had been rebought also necessitated the removal of the memorials and any decoration above-ground. There was ample evidence of the breaking up and reuse of gravestones in Assistens with many scattered fragments found throughout the cemetery soil (see Chapter 4). Gravestones were seen more as raw materials for convenient reuse and no longer connected with their primary purpose or context. Disturbing bodies and transforming the grave plot both above- and below-ground is related to chronological change and the hope that the acts of forgetting past generations by the living society which would allow this change (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2010). These transformations are not automatic in the cemetery they need to be enacted and enabled by gravediggers too.


# The consequences of deconstructing bodies


One of the principal complaints about urban churchyards was the obvious and public practices undertaken that disturbed earlier burials. This work could be seen by visitors to the churchyard and were understood as practices that enabled burial to be continued but these doxic practices began to be questioned. One of the consequences of clearing and partially removing graves were the necessity of dealing with the coffins, grave goods, bones, and sometimes body parts that were recovered from the soil. Kragh (2003: 142) writes about  gravediggers from Randbøl churchyard in Jutland from around 1900 shovelling loose bones onto the lid of a newly placed coffin despite regulations to the contrary stating that they should have been buried deeper. Replacing the remains back into the grave plot provides one obvious solution. The other solution was to collect and store the bones, usually in the churchyard. The Christian origins of this were the ossuaries or charnel houses, which were buildings used to store bodies or bones from disturbed graves (Pearsall & Trumble 1996: 247). In this way human remains could be stored on sacred ground which feeds into the need to have the body available for resurrection. Few medieval charnel houses survive today with their contents intact, some have their bone assemblages re-arranged (Crangle 2013), while others have been excavated such as at St Mary Spital, London (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005: 41-2). The catacombs at Paris were deliberately chosen to store the remains moved from cleared churchyards in the 18th century from the

centre of Paris (Etlin 1984). The use of charnel houses declines in the Protestant world after the Reformation as they were closely linked with intercession for the dead but continued in elaborate displays in the Roman Catholic areas of Europe (Höpflinger 2015: 24). As a practical solution ossuaries and charnel houses were still necessary and resulting in their construction on modern cemeteries. There were ossuaries created on Assistens although none are preserved now (Lindberg 2010: 105). However the first option of replacing disturbed remains back into the grave plot appears to have become more widely used and importantly continues in modern cemeteries.

When gravediggers excavate for a new grave is their intention to also disturb an older pre-existing burial or is the disturbance an unforeseen consequence? Secondary disturbance has been categorised through the potential motives which provide a useful overview of what may have been the intent behind the practices (Chroustovskýa & Průchováb 2011) but these actions cannot be separated when interpreting archaeological material. Removing a burial to create more space or removal of the bones of a Saint for translation are quite different motivations but result in identical archaeological evidence. Interpreting or separating these actions by intention causes logical problems (Giddens 1984: 11) when dealing with the material. However intention may be observed through the repetitive patterns in deposition of the remains and the interpretation can be built upon this physical foundation. For the gravediggers the earlier burials represent a problem which needed to be dealt with on a regular basis. The manipulation of remains and the creation of charnel deposits below-ground represent a solution to the consequences of clearing and finding new grave space. These solutions are greatly under-researched for modern cemeteries.


## Handling the long-dead in Assistens

Within Assistens there are no formal cemetery regulations or guidance that specifically details the procedure to be carried out when removing old burials and how to handle earlier human remains. For the extension of the cemetery which includes Division G, guidance for the sextons notes only the requirement to keep the cemetery tidy and ordered (15 February 1805a: §16). Although constant complaints were made concerning exhumed bones lying on the ground up until the 1880s which indicate that the guidance was not always followed (Valeur Larsen 1960: 71). Burial registers showed that grave plot ownership was changed frequently with the majority of family grave plots having been bought and sold at least twice. When tenure on a plot was completed and it was bought by a new owner, all of the previous burials should have routinely been removed to make room for the new burials. Similar to most cemeteries, the bones would have been placed either in small pits at the base of the grave cut or in special charnel pits elsewhere on the cemetery. The procedures of how

to handle remains from earlier graves in Assistens are left to the tacit knowledge passed between gravediggers within the interplay of habitus and doxa.

While the excavation at Assistens was on-going, the recognition that there was a form of handling and redeposition of human remains present caused a change in recording methodology and strategy (Anthony, Dahlström *et al.* 2009). Bones were found redeposited into a different grave, often underneath or above the new coffin before the grave was filled. Occasionally they were found placed deliberately inside another coffin or in some particular position or pattern. An operational definition was created during fieldwork to separate these actions from the commonly found human bone that showed no sign of deliberately handled. This action of destruction and active redeposition of the bones is the action that was recorded archaeologically, not the earlier inhumation.

Human remains were separated into either charnel groups or disarticulated bone. Disarticulated bone describes small amounts of bones found throughout the soil; it describes the act of filling the grave where human remains were treated in the same manner as fragments of ceramic or coffin wood. The bones were considered in the same manner as finds within a deposit and relatively little analysis or interpretation was undertaken. They continued to be treated as finds within the grave fill. During the excavation the term charnel was used to distinguish the manipulation of human remains from general and expected finds of disarticulated bone. A charnel group is defined as an assemblage of (usually) disarticulated human bones that was recognised as requiring a different treatment which showed in observable patterns of behaviour. The term was applied to secondary deposits of disarticulated bone found in particular arranged clusters or assemblages. Charnel deposits are formed by the active manipulation of human bone by removing a skeleton from an intact burial which is redeposited into a new context. It is transformed from being a burial to a new context, the charnel deposit.

The operational definition used during excavation was by identifying large assemblages of bones found which could potentially form a charnel deposit. The identifying principle was defined as consisting of: *'at least five major bones'*. The major bones were: skull, humerus, radius, ulna and clavicle, substantial sections of vertebrae, sacrum, pelvis, femur, tibia, and fibula. A second possibility could also be used to define a charnel deposit, this was if: *'a complete articulated part of the body such as a foot or hand or limb'* was excavated.

Upon identifying a charnel deposit using this guidance archaeologists were asked to describe the placement of the bones and consider if there had been some specific and observable arrangement of the bones. This could involve a particular grouping of bones within the corner of a grave cut, or bones placed within another individual's coffin and the lid replaced. It may also include placement underneath broken coffin wood or tree branches. These field recordings and interpretations are the foundation

of this analysis and are complemented by the brief assessment made of the charnel deposits by the osteology team. This included a simple count of the bones with element identified, age and sex attribution and an MNI for each deposit. Further detailed osteological analysis was unfortunately not possible within the constraints of the project.

Pieces of bone would normally be recovered as a find within the grave soil which tends to diminish their status as a deposition that requires recording and interpretation. At Assistens, charnel groups were created to place a higher interpretative emphasis on the redeposition of bone and to encourage recording and thinking about what was being observed in a different way. Separating charnel from the rest of the grave deposit is not in strict accordance with single context recording system but I considered it was vital to emphasise the importance of disturbing the grave and manipulating the bone as an act in itself. The most important part of this redefinition was to redefine the human bones from finds to stratigraphical units derived from handling of the human body. This activated human remains as not just evidence of a past burial but as the act that was created by gravediggers and was clearly present also for the archaeologists.

A charnel deposit is an action that can be de-emphasised in the archaeological record, but as a form of repetitive behaviour enacted by gravediggers, it should be recorded as part of the biography of a burial. It is recognition that events do affect burials long after they are placed in the ground and how they can be transformed and manipulated in this long after-life. Charnel deposits can be an indication of how many people have been buried in the plot and later removed, so it was vital to describe and record archaeologically. There is also the possibility of identifying and describing where there was deliberate deposition, for example bones placed carefully in a corner of the grave cut, on top of a coffin, or even inside a coffin. All of this could be described as part of the soil deposit and grave fill but in bringing the active handling aspect into prominence it spurred greater involvement and recognition of the gravediggers' practices.

Using the definition described above, charnel group deposits were identified in 198 deposits. Disarticulated human bone was found in 432 individual contexts on the site, with an additional number of bones recovered from cemetery soil. It is likely that small amounts of human bone were not recovered by archaeologists especially within the upper parts of the cemetery soil and fill which were excavated by machine. The vast majority of deposits with charnel or disarticulated human bone were within grave fills and were related to sequences of cemetery activity. Occasionally human bone was also found in other deposits such as general purpose pits or deposits from gardening activity such as tree root features. The amount of charnel deposits must be considered in the light of the overall findings on the site. There were 854 coffin burials excavated on the site and 432 contexts containing human bone. It is quite likely that there were

more examples of charnel handling that have been missed during the fieldwork either due to the recording method or the strict definitions used to define charnel deposits. No attempt was made to combine charnel data or compare data within different charnel contexts; therefore the same person could have been identified multiple times as in the example which is later used to illustrate a group biography. The data should therefore be seen as a guide for interpretation when considering the composition and details of the assemblages rather than precise figures.

- *Specific placement of the deposits*

Occasionally charnel deposits were found redeposited within the line burials after they had been disturbed by later burials. The remains from most of the truncated line burials appear to have been mixed into deposits within the family plots. Disturbance resulting in charnel deposits being placed into infant or child graves were very rare. Some charnel deposits contained elements of domestic residual finds such as domestic pottery, flower pots or small pieces of brick, tile and animal bone with loose soil, organic garden waste and gravel. These do reflect some part on the intermixing with topsoil and movement by animals and perhaps also gardening maintenance. However most charnel deposits were placed deeply within heavily intercut sequences of burials within family grave plots and would have been part of the creating and filling of a grave. Although funeral or personal related finds were rare in charnel deposits there were some finds; a gold ring, a hair comb and a set of earrings (G1397, G806, G1112). It is possible that some objects could have been removed by the gravediggers along with the bones, coffin wood and metal.

A quarter of all charnel deposits (50 of 198) showed some form of very specific arrangement that would have required greater effort by the gravediggers to achieve. These examples consist of cases where either charnel bones were placed in deliberately created pits or placed in obvious piles either directly under a coffin, within another coffin or placed on top of the lid of another coffin (Table 21).

**Table 21.**
The specific placement of charnel deposits (50 of 198).

| Placement | Amount | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| Pit | 11 | 3 were pits created within grave plots |
| Below a coffin | 6 | |
| Within a coffin | 11 | |
| On the lid of a coffin | 20 | 3 are articulated torso sections |
| Both above and below a coffin | 2 | |
| Total | **50** | |

Of the charnel deposits found in pits, only three examples were within grave plots. The rest were from shallow pits that were unrelated to grave plots and often outside

of marked grave rows. Other pits were found in the gravedigger's garden area mixed with domestic rubbish. These shallow pits may be a simple means to dispose of occasional pieces of human bone from disturbance by routine maintenance tasks. Yet the time was taken to create the pits indicating behaviour which recognises the nature of the material. Of the three pits within grave plots, one (G74) contained a displaced coffin adjacent to a grave plot. Another charnel pit was created at the base of a grave cut (G1509), where more than 100 bones had been laid out in an organised manner, filling the pit to make the maximum use of the space. This would have taken time and effort to organise. It is possible that the sheer amount of bone to be dealt with created a more robust response to their fate.



**Fig. 52.**
Several examples of charnel deposits. Fig. 52a (top, centre) Charnel bones arranged on one end of a coffin lid (G577), 19 April 2010; Fig. 52b (lower,centre) Charnel bones arranged in a possible pattern (G1286), 30 August 2010; Fig. 52c (left) Skull and partially articulated pelvis on a coffin lid (G634), 17 March 2010; Fig. 52d (right) Coffin filled with charnel bones of one almost complete individual (G1572), 27 January 2011. Source: Museum of Copenhagen.

When examining charnel bone found underneath, within or directly on top of another newer coffin these are examples that have been observed to be a very obvious grouping or deposit of bones (Fig. 52). These placements should not be dismissed as created by accident as they consisted of groups that were large enough to be identified as charnel groups and were observed as distinctive in some form while being excavated. Examples found below the coffin were in direct contact with the base of a coffin and when the coffin was broken apart and lifted out of the grave they were clearly observed. One of these examples was covered with fir branches probably to

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hide their presence during a committal ceremony – it can be suggested that in the other five cases there were no other mourners at the committal or that the presence of other bones was not considered a disturbing sight. Other examples were gathered in separate groups suggesting some form of recognition of their being more than one individual represented. Two examples consisted of piles of bone pushed underneath the new coffin; it is possible that this was to replace earlier burials back into the space where they once were lying *in situ*. Although there were few finds within these deposits there was one example of a juvenile skull and lower jaw which contained a coin in the mouth (G760). This suggests that there was some element of soft tissue connection still present when this charnel group were moved and redeposited or the coin would have been lost or displaced. It is also possible that the gravediggers found the coin and replaced it after redeposition which would have been shown a further concern for the bodies found.

Gravediggers sometimes opened the lid of a coffin with an intact burial and added in charnel deposits on top of the body (G1572, Fig. 52d). There were some large amounts of bone, for example the displaced coffin within a pit (G74) which contained approximately 360 bones representing two adults, male and female. The bones were mixed and appear to represent a secondary deposit as only major bones were present and the two skulls were placed together in one corner of the coffin. Another large charnel deposit (130 pieces, G626) was also placed on top of an *in situ* skeleton in another grave. The bones represented approximately 65% of a mature female with almost all the body present in some form, with the notable exception of the small bones of the hands and feet. It is possible that her remains were carefully picked up and removed to create space for a new coffin and the deposition observed suggests a connection between the charnel and the *in situ* burial. Another charnel deposit was placed in a small box (G572). This box could have been a small infant's coffin but was unlike any other coffin and described more as a shallow simple box with a lid, 0.9m long, 0.3m wide and only 0.18m high which is comparable in size with other small infant coffins. However this box was chosen specifically to contain the poorly preserved remains of two individuals which were predominantly of the limb bones and autopsied skull of an adult female. The grave cut was also specifically created and shaped to fit the box so the evidence indicates a specific reburial of bones, either from within Assistens or from another cemetery, rather than a more normative common disposal. There are notes of bodies being moved to Assistens within the burial registers, often when a family grave is newly purchased. Although in this particular case there is no clear documentation for this plot. The use of boxes to hold disturbed bones is attested in Maastricht, Netherlands both in excavated contexts and in contemporary use (Anne Brakman, pers.comm, 2015). Small boxes have also been excavated in the cemetery at Farimagsvejen, one of the poor burial grounds in Copenhagen (Winther Damsbo 2009). A further example of active handling is shown in the patterned deposition of limb bones and a skull within another coffin (G1286,

Fig. 52b) where there is some effort to frame the skull using the perhaps still articulated limb bones. Although far removed from the highly artistic creations found in many charnel houses in Europe (Koudounaris 2011) it is still a departure from ordinary practice.

Charnel deposits within coffins have a fairly high number of bones within each context (on average 33.6) but they also have a lower number of individuals present, usually represented as one main person with some fragments of another present. The actions carried out here are likely to represent the concealment of an individual who needed to be removed to create more space within a grave plot but who was hidden away inside a convenient nearby coffin. In general these specifically placed deposits show the careful collection of large amounts of robust identifiable bones, such as the femur, pelvis, skull or humerus which suggests a deliberate collection policy and intention to rebury after the committal ceremony had been carried out. Here too there was evidence for the disposal of articulated body parts, a torso placed within another coffin (G487). This action shows that the actions of a breaking up a body were sometimes necessary but perhaps it could be seen as important to be able to return them to the grave context, even if fitted into somebody else's coffin.

The most common placement of deposits was those placed directly on the lid of another coffin (20 of 50). This action would have to occur directly after a committal after mourners had left and the gravediggers were filling up the grave (G577, Fig. 52a). There were also a high number of bones present in these deposits, on average 34.7 per charnel deposit. Some examples contained high numbers of individuals, up to five people in one case (G925). Child and infant bones were more commonly found on the lids of coffins although the generally fragile nature of their bones could be the real reason why so few have survived being dug up, collected and then redeposited which skews the interpretation. There were also more females represented than males (7 males: 14 females) although there seems to be no real interpretation to explain this as it is unlikely that gravediggers would be able to identify differences. All other charnel deposits were approximately equal in terms of representation of sex attributions.

The presence of four charnel cases which have secure evidence for articulated body parts also show the actions required by the gravediggers. One is discussed in detail below, where an articulated torso was deposited inside different coffins (G676), but three others present similar evidence for the manipulation and placement of parts that may have been recognisable as a body. One consists of a pelvis and sacrum found together with the femurs found lying prone on the lid of another coffin (G634, Fig. 52c). This is another clear case where the body is recognisable rather than just a skeleton and again the evidence suggests some form either of deliberate positioning of the bones or that they continued to be partially articulated and were held together by some form of clothing or shroud. Another example comprised parts of a torso of a

person placed on the coffin lid (G1225). These examples all illustrate a composed deposition and other evidence of care includes a layer of reused coffin wood planks covering the charnel bones. Overall the evidence suggests deliberate placement of bones after the mourners had left the cemetery. Many (31 of 50) were documented as being deliberately placed into a pile, rather than simply described as 'within the coffin' or 'spread out upon the coffin lid'. A further 10 deposits also consist of specific acts such as placed within a pit, laid out in a pattern or with layers of coffin wood placed on top, which all indicate a measure of composure and conscious action on behalf of the gravediggers.

In reviewing the potential for deliberate arrangement of human bones in Assistens there are clear signs that the gravediggers were taking into account the earlier burials in the grave space. Time and effort could be spent on breaking apart bodies and collection of the remains while digging the grave and concealment during the public act of committal. Afterwards there was deliberate arrangement of bones, sometimes within, sometimes on top of the newly deposited coffin. In some examples articulated bones would have reminded the gravediggers of the whole body, rather than a single bone and this is reflected in more careful positioning of the body part. These more structured acts of deposition are indications of the skill and practices carried out by gravediggers but they also contrast with the more specific burial or disposal of bones within the cemetery soil or sometimes in small domestic rubbish pits. Although there were alternative places to store or dispose of bones on the cemetery, for example there were numerous sumps for drainage accessible on ground level that was not used. These features or perhaps building foundations could easily have been used to dispose of human bone yet little or none were found in either situation. So there appear to have been limits to which places were considered appropriate for the disposal of human bones by the gravediggers.

- *The composition of the deposits*

Overall there is more bone represented in charnel groups than in disarticulated deposits – 5700 bones, from a total of 198 registered charnel deposits, with an average of 28.79 bones in each deposit (Table 22). Most deposits contain a range between 8 and 30 bones. Only nine deposits contained over 100 bones and in each case these are interpreted as being derived from multiple individuals. The highest number of bones in a charnel deposit is 360 representing two adults (G74), the lowest five, which is the lowest number that could be defined as constituting a charnel deposit. There are proportionally less bones found within the stratified deposits classified only as disarticulated human bone – 1049 bones with an average of only 4.48 bones in each deposit. The highest amount of disarticulated bone from a deposit is 24 bones which were all small fragments. Overall 21% of these deposits contained only one piece of bone. Most deposits contain a range between one and six bones. This is a strong pattern however it is derived from and limited by the operational

definition of a charnel group. In both groups more adults than juveniles were represented – this likely derives from the robustness of adult bones and the higher numbers of adults buried in the excavated area. However child burials could have been handled with more care than adults.

**Table 22.**
Summary of human bones found within charnel groups (n=198) and disarticulated human bone found in grave fills (n=234).

| | | Total no. of bones | Adult MNI | % | Juvenile MNI | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Charnel groups** | Total | 5700 | 360 | 87 | 54 | 13 |
| | Average per deposit | 28.8 | | | | |
| **Disarticulated bone in deposits** | Total | 1049 | 268 | 88 | 38 | 12 |
| | Average per deposit | 4.5 | | | | |

Overall more individuals were represented in charnel deposits than in typical grave fills, this also might be expected due to the larger number of bones which define a charnel deposit. However a charnel deposit group does not tend to represent just one person but multiple people. If a grave were disturbed and the bones placed into a charnel deposit, one person would be represented. However there were almost always more individuals represented in charnel deposits, indicating a high degree of mixing of deposits. Charnel could have manipulated multiple times, added to and moved around. This indicates repetitive practices throughout the use of the cemetery. The other point from these figures is the consistent percentages deriving from adults and juveniles irrelevant to which type of deposit they come from, 87% were adult and 13% from juveniles[10]. This compares well with the percentages of adults (86%) and juveniles (14%) from the *in situ* burials on the site (Adults = 735, juveniles 119, total 854 burials). The ratio of adult to juvenile suggests a good representation of the general burial population excavated on the cemetery and have no bias in charnel deposition towards either adults or juveniles. There were no significant differences in treatment of human remains according to sex; there were equal proportions of male and female elements within charnel deposits. The most significant benefit of collecting the sex attribution data was to assess individual grave plot sequences and to compare archaeological with documentary data to identify *in situ* burials.

However analysis of the most represented areas of the body did provide some interesting data on how bodies were handled and kept, or manipulated in the grave

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[10] MNI (minimum number of individuals) must be used with caution, as they cannot be combined across different contexts. Several charnel deposits within one stratigraphic sequence could potentially be the same person. They are used here only to aid general interpretation.

deposits. When the bones within each charnel group or deposit of disarticulated bone were recorded, the area of the body was also noted. A charnel group with ribs and arm bones would be counted as having the areas 'Arms and hands' plus 'Torso and pelvis'. Not all bones recorded could be categorised within the limited time available for analysis. Within each of these groups are a range of bone size and robustness, for example the area 'Legs and feet' includes small fragile foot bones and the robust femur and tibia. Therefore selection biased towards the collection of the most visible or best preserved bones is minimised. The majority of the charnel deposits contained large numbers of bones from all areas of the body (Table 23).

**Table 23.**
Comparison of areas of the skeleton which were present in charnel (n=198) and stratified deposits (n=234) Percentages do not add up to 100% as deposits could have all four areas of the body represented.

| Bones identified from specific areas of the body | | Skull | Arms and hands | Torso and pelvis | Legs and feet |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Charnel groups** | Total | 155 | 191 | 178 | 189 |
| | % | 78 | 96 | 90 | 95 |
| **Stratified deposits** | Total | 105 | 135 | 107 | 157 |
| | % | 45 | 58 | 46 | 67 |

The most frequently represented area of the body was 'Arms and hands' where out of 198 charnel deposits, 191 or 96% contained bones from this area. The percentage represented for each area varied in charnel groups from 78% to 96%. In disarticulated deposits there were fewer bones identified overall, as many were more fragmented and poorly preserved pieces of bone. The percentage represented varied from 45% to 67%. Both types of contexts had the lowest levels for the skull, followed by the torso and pelvis, disarticulated deposits then contained more bones from arms and hands followed by bones from legs and feet. In charnel deposits, all areas of the body were consistently strongly represented except for the skull. This seems to highlight a consistent attitude and method of collection towards the whole body for charnel deposits rather than one specific body area. The large amount in charnel deposits suggests bias towards removal of the whole body while stratified deposits tend to represent removal of only one part of the body, such as legs and feet, or the head.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this data. The first is that skulls appear to be handled in a different way than the rest of the body. Gravediggers were reacting more to the skull than any other part of the body possibly because they are most likely to be recognised as human bone. The second conclusion is that how bodies were handled appears to be dependent on the need to remove either the whole body or only one part of it. If the whole body needed to be removed the entire body was treated in a different way, more and smaller bones from every area of the body was collected and were more likely to be specifically placed together and covered up. However if only one area needed to be dealt with, such as removing the lower end of the coffin, or the side of the coffin then either the legs or one arm would be removed and put back into

now truncated coffin or mixed together as general soil. If a body was still partially *in situ* within the original coffin then less effort was made to handle the disturbed bones there was a sense of something original still present.

## Manipulation and active handling of the charnel deposits

Dealing with human remains was simply part of the day-to-day handling of human bones and bodies within the work of the gravedigger. The fact that many were placed in small piles, often in corners of the grave or on one end of the coffin indicates that the gravediggers had collected bone during the digging of the grave, concealed them during the public act of committal and then redeposited the bones into the grave. There was however a varying amount of care in the specific handling or placement of them. Examination of the details of how and where they were placed in the matrix or sequences of burials suggests that there were opportunities for deliberate actions in choosing how the bones would be handled and deposited. Overwhelmingly what was archaeologically defined as charnel deposits were found within newer graves with a mean average of 28.8 bones found in each deposit. Although this mean average is skewed by some very large deposits of almost complete individuals and by the MNI which defines the least number of bones to qualify as a charnel, nevertheless there is evidence to state that there is manipulation of human bone within the cemetery. There was also casual deposition of human bones which were mixed within the general grave soil and this is expected to some extent in a well-used cemetery or churchyard. Although as discussed in earlier chapters the new cemeteries were supposed to be highly ordered and controlled in relation to human remains, dealing with the long-dead after the specified time period was a complex process subject to the tacit knowledge and habitus of the gravediggers. Although dating these practices in Assistens requires more intensive identification and research, it appears that charnel practices are spread over the use of the cemetery. The latest acts which are potentially dated are from the 1930s.

It is possible that a lot of the bones were being removed to another charnel pit elsewhere on the cemetery and although occasional pieces of disarticulated bone were found in the general cemetery soil, they do not account for the quantities that should be expected. When disposing of a body there was the possibility of digging an extra pit in the base of the grave itself in which to place the remains. In fact there was very little evidence that this was enacted. In comparing the amount of graves that should have been removed there is a clear situation where this option was not being taken by the gravediggers.

The officially sanctioned regulations of grave peace which last only 20 years reflect not only the contemporary lack of knowledge and under-appreciation of the processes of decay but also a need for a swift renewal of the grave space and with it a speeding

up of the process of forgetting of the deceased person. As already discussed, the actual speeding up of decomposition processes can also be aided by actions of the gravediggers themselves, by breaking the coffin lid (Brändström 2008). Coffin burials are expensive and specifically breaking the lid of a coffin and exposing the recently deceased body directly to the earth is not compatible with the sentiments and expectations behind coffin burial. It seems that in general people may not have the information to make informed choices on the realities of what can and does happen in cemetery practice.

There are also consequences of breaking up bodies for the gravediggers, as they are the people who have to deal with the manipulation of human remains required of them. The bodies they had to face were often just that – bodies – rather than skeletons and one of the solutions in dealing with them was to attempt to keep them within their original grave space, to conceal and hide these bodies for a longer period than the purchased tenure of the plot. Whilst some report being unstressed by the type of work they may also meet with prejudice from others much as undertakers do (Davidsson Bremborg 2002). However even the strongest people may be influenced by the work of deconstructing a recognisable human body and it would be a mistake to imagine that all gravediggers are untouched. Rather that their response is hidden within the seemingly respectful manipulation of bones and bodies. Evidence suggests that in Assistens intact coffins could be moved at any time after burial, with known individuals being moved in and out of grave plots only one year after deposition. In fact it may be practical to move coffins when intact to avoid having to move a weakened coffin and its decaying contents. The hierarchy established where bodies are more important than bones is present and cause a problem when dealing with human remains which decay at variable rates (Anthony 2016: 30-1). At what point of disintegration of the soft tissue and bones can they be regarded as no longer a human body to be treated with respect? Even charnel and disarticulated bone were manipulated carefully in Assistens suggesting that deposits at the lower end of the hierarchy still retained some importance. There continues to be a direct problem between the perceptions of society in general about this knowledge and the gravediggers' experience that is called into being by the manipulation of bodily remains. It seems that despite the appearance of socially acceptable limits on the movement of human remains; the people who worked with them in cemeteries were moving and transforming contexts for the bodies at any time after the burial.


## Biography of a family grave plot

The creation and manipulation of human remains where the original context – the grave and skeleton is transformed into another event is often missed within the stratigraphic sequence. Part of this problem can be solved by the use of interpretive

illustrations which are based on the linear sequences created from archaeological data but add a spatial dimension. This is where archaeological contexts have been grouped into meaningful constructions that replace or exist together spatially to create a biography of the site. A narrative based upon this grave plot biography represents the different phases and layering of remnants observed during excavation.
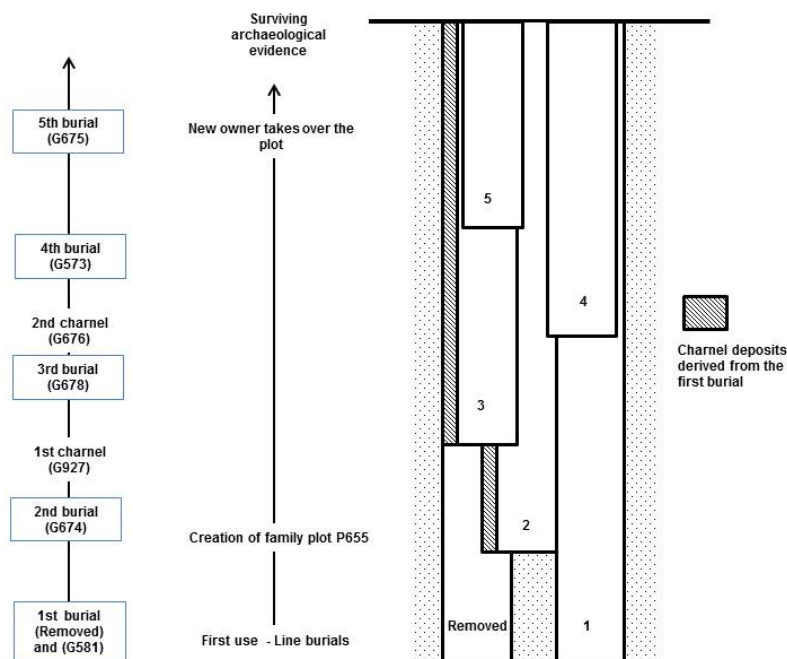


**Fig. 53.**
Simplified diagram representing the sequence of actions within a family grave plot (P655).

The decisions required to ensure there was sufficient space within a plot (P655) are illustrated by using a stratigraphic sequence of five surviving burials with two instances of manipulation of human remains in Assistens (Fig. 53). The diagram simplifies the complexities of the description, it does not represent actual archaeological measurements of depth but instead the reconstructed sequence of actions. It illustrates not only the creation but the duration of certain archaeological elements and the ability to transform them into new classifications from intact burials to secondary charnel deposits.

The space is first used for two line burials, of which only one survived to be excavated (G581). Evidence for the other line burial survives only through its skeleton being removed and transformed into charnel deposits (G927 and G676). The line burials are placed side-by-side and do not impact on each other. After 20 years of grave peace the space is then converted into a family plot. The second excavated burial (G674) is

then placed into the centre of the plot; it is situated between the line burials, but partially truncates the line burial that is missing. This results in part of the body being disturbed and transformed into a charnel deposit consisting of a few bones from a male adult. This is the first deliberate movement of human bones and the first transformation from a skeleton to a charnel deposit.

Space for the third surviving burial (G678) was required. It completely removes the conjectured line burial. It also truncates the second burial (G674) whose right side limbs are removed. The gravedigger collects the bone from both graves and carefully places it within the new (third) coffin as a new charnel (G676) which consists of bones from two adults including a section of partially articulated skeleton. The gravediggers would have opened the coffin to take this action.

Then the surviving line burial (G581) is removed to make space for a fourth burial (G573)), leaving only the wooden base of its coffin intact and *in situ*. The majority of the skeleton must have been removed from the plot as only a few bones were found in the deposit for the fourth burial. The fourth burial also slightly truncates the second burial. A few years later the ownership of the plot changes and a fifth burial (G675) is deposited which partially disturbs the third burial and its charnel deposit.



**Fig. 54.**
The third surviving burial in P655, the undisturbed skeleton (G678) with the partially articulated charnel group (G676). The lower legs of the in situ burial are not visible as they are covered by the charnel bones and soil. Source: Museum of Copenhagen, 4 May 2010.

The charnel bones, which are derived from two burials, have been deposited and transformed into two charnel deposits and is now associated with two different burials. Throughout this process there still remained an articulated body part (G676) which was placed carefully at the foot end of the third coffin. This did not disturb the *in situ* body (Fig. 54). The unusual feature of this deposit was that it consisted of partially articulated bones: the decay processes had not broken down all the soft tissue

connecting the joints together. When redeposited it must have appeared as a body part not a skeleton, it consisted of the lower part of an articulated spine, pelvis and legs, with the legs folded underneath the pelvis. Yet the legs were in an anatomically correct position in respect to the joints, indicating the presence of ligaments that were present but flexible enough to create this position. This provokes an interesting discussion. Many of the joints present are described as persistent because the soft tissue connections do not break down rapidly (lumbar, lumbar-sacral joint, knee and ankle, from Duday 2009: 4-5) indicating that they are likely to have been articulated for a long period after original deposition. Yet other joints in this part of the body break down rapidly, for example, in a body within a void space (such as a coffin) it is common for the femoral head to move and displace the pelvis in the early stages of the decomposition process as there are no strong ligaments which keep it in place. Therefore for this section of abdomen and legs to stay within this articulated state suggests either a rapid disinterment or some other form of containment such as clothing or a shroud. This would keep the body intact and enable movement of this part as a complete unit into the new coffin. Eventually the cloth fully decays leaving the bones in the position found during excavation. In this example the body is likely to have been held together by clothing or a shroud. The gravediggers are thus deconstructing coffins and bodies that are in some form intact and visibly recognisable as a human body. They are still providing a measure of care during the processes of reburial. Although this example appears to be unusual, there are other examples of confirmed articulated body parts from Assistens. It is possible that this behaviour could have occurred in other circumstances where manipulation of the more recent dead was necessary to create space within a grave plot.

When comparing the archaeological and documentary sources for this plot the chronology of the actions are revealed. The first burials are of line burials of adults probably undertaken in 1818 or 1819 which would have had grave peace until 1839. The family plot was purchased in 1845 and three burials are recorded until the plot is abandoned in 1938. A second ownership started in 1944 and only one person was buried in this tenure. Only one burial (the fifth burial from 1944) should still have been present upon archaeological excavation but none of the earlier burials were removed. In contrast, the gravestones above-ground are removed according to regulations; there is no documented marker for the first line burials but the gravestones for the first plot ownership were removed when the second took over. In reality the physical space was still occupied underground. The materiality of the burials had a longer duration in the ground than indicated by either cemetery regulation or documentary protocols and an endurance that had a direct effect and consequence for the gravediggers in their work. Of this specific grave plot biography (P655), within the five different phases of burial preparations, gravediggers have acted twice where burials have intersected and created a new and deliberate placement of human bones. In contrast the skeleton from the surviving line burial (G581) was

almost completely removed from the plot by gravediggers, leaving only a few scattered bones in the backfill of the grave. This example shows that not all skeletons were treated in the same way in the same plot. This sequence also illustrates that a new ownership does not automatically imply that remains would be cleared out of the grave plot.

Overall on Assistens 9.5% (81 of 854 burials) of the burials had some form of soft tissue present ranging from mummified individuals to a relatively intact individual preserved by a plastic shroud. These examples were often from the latest burials from the 1940s onwards. So excavation in 2010, some potentially 70 years later could not guarantee complete decay of the body's softer elements. Preservation was higher within intact metal coffins which had less direct contact with soil or the ability for decomposition liquids to drain away. However other factors are involved, a connection with artificial materials - polyester clothing or plastic body bags increased the potential of incomplete decay. Often it was just small sections of the body, most often from the torso but other elements survived such as brain tissue or even one case the lungs were preserved. These remains are not just a slightly gruesome list but the reality of what gravediggers had to cope with in their work. There are also eyewitness reports about graves at Assistens from the 19th century with very well preserved bodies from waterlogged clay soils further in the south of the cemetery (K. Zander pers. comm, 2009). So there is evidence that the decay of bodies on the cemetery did not follow a clear and rapid pattern of decomposition but that decay even in one cemetery depends on different factors such as preservative qualities of the coffin, the individual body and soil conditions. These examples compare well with evidence from Volendam, Netherlands where the short grave peace of only 13 years does not allow bodies buried in clay soil enough time to fully decay. This causes logistical and ethical problems for the gravediggers today when trying to clear the ground for new burials (Van Egdom 1999). How the gravediggers deal with their work in these circumstances is still relatively underexplored.

There are also implications concerning the destruction of coffins in different stages of decay which can lead to examining the manipulations of complete coffins and the acts necessary to reduce them to pieces of wood. These are examples where remains have been manipulated within the one continuous ownership of a plot. This means that an owner retains tenure of a plot yet the bodies and coffins are truncated, moved around the plot and transformed into charnel remains for the new burials of their relatives. This manipulation is following demands from the owner, economic and/or emotional, to fit more of their burials within the existing space regardless of the consequences. It is possible that the reality of this situation would not have been made clear to the owner, only the gravediggers might know of the practical measures that needed to be enacted to make this happen. These points illustrate the extent of manipulation and concealment which was expected of gravediggers in their daily

work which is likely to have been undertaken without much consideration or understanding by the rest of society.

These actions described illustrate what happens when a burial is broken up and disturbed, the once intact coffin and body become another type of object. The body is no longer an entity, it transforms into skeletal parts that can be easily manipulated. The coffin is wood that could have been broken up and burnt for firewood or possibly even reused as a form of grave marker. The objects become reclassified after a period of transition within the grave which makes them easier to manipulate by the gravedigger. A hierarchy can be interpreted in the actions surrounding dealing with the dead body and previous burials although as discussed by Eva Åhrén Snickare (2009) this is culturally informed and perhaps specific to Western Christian Europe. Julia Kristeva however describes a more encompassing idea of abjection in relation to the dead body which she contends is a universal theme. For Kristeva, the dead body is abject, neither subject or object and something that threatens the social and symbolic orders of society, thereby horrific (1982: 3-4). The decay and degradation of the physical is tied in with the mental classifications of what a human is, what their body means as a part of their identity and when this association breaks down (Sofaer 2006).

It also fits with the mental categorisation of what constitutes a grave, discussed in Kaliff & Oestigaard (2004), which in modern society is the requirement to have a complete skeleton in it. The hierarchy would start from the socially visible event of the burial of a person, to the material being considered as a body in a coffin, thereafter perhaps to a less recognisably human skeleton in a box and finally into separated skeletal elements and broken coffin wood. A single bone or piles of bones may not always be classified in this way as a grave but as a secondary manipulation and perhaps less meaningful category. A hierarchy is then established of what a grave is and how gravediggers are allowed to handle or manipulate the contents which are dependent upon both the context and the completeness. A primary *in situ* undisturbed grave is a very easy classification and can be dealt with according to rules and regulations set by society. Secondary disposal, separation and active handling of the remains may change the classification of how 'human' this deposit is and therefore change how it can potentially be handled. This transformation of the human body and its resting place is what is occurring through the gravediggers' practice of manipulation and alteration of the grave context. The relationship between the living, in this case the gravediggers and the dead do not change over time but is a constant factor in their work in the 19th and 20th centuries. Instead where the concept of time does matter is between the deposition of the burial and the later manipulation of the remains.

# Grave-robbing

Contrary to the legal movement of graves there is also the illegal removal of bodies or grave goods. Scandinavian research in the historic periods highlight the traditions of translation and the crime of mound-breaking (*haugbrott*) associated with Viking burials first discussed in detail by Anton Brøgger (1945) for the Oseberg ship burial. These practices have been interpreted as ideological acts which can be related to various Scandinavian sagas, laws and attested to from runestone inscriptions against the desecration of graves (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992). In some examples it is the bodies which are moved or removed (Klevnäs 2015a) and in others the focus is upon the differential removal of grave goods both between males and females and in types of objects removed (Gjerpe 2007). At Jelling in Jutland, western Denmark, grave-robbing is discussed in relation to the transition to Christianity and whether this is reflected in the deliberate removal of Pagan grave goods (Staecker 2001). Breaking into a grave may be regarded as abnormal or at least lying on the boundaries of acceptable behaviour  (Omland 2002). There is also research into the deliberate selection of grave goods in Anglo-Saxon England which appear to affect the living descendants by removing prestige of the dead (Klevnäs 2010).

Research into grave-robbery in Christian Europe has focused on Merovingian Germany and France (Ariès 1981 [1977]: 366-8; Steuer 1986; Effros 2002; 2003) which compared the physical evidence with the liturgical doctrines and laws of the different regions and kingdoms. Although there were severe penalties for disturbing graves the archaeological evidence shows it to be relatively common practice where there may even be strategic digging of the grave to minimise the work. This suggests that grave-robbing took place soon after the burial because grave-robbers knew who and what was buried within the grave. Digging was thought to have concentrated around the head area for female graves and by the side of the body for male graves to maximise the likelihood of finding the grave goods (Roth, quoted in Effros 2002: 59). In a neat parallel a more recent example of grave-robbery from 1930s France by a farmer on Merovingian burials concentrated upon the head area to maximise potential gain (Effros 2003: 158). In this case the knowledge of where to dig was likely to be derived from archaeological research. Grave-robbery in medieval to modern churchyards and burial grounds is rarely researched but it surely occurred. Despite extensive documentary evidence from the 19th century in the UK (Richardson 1988; Wise 2005) there is less corroborating evidence from excavations. Although at the Quaker burial ground at Kingston-upon-Thames, London, 28 empty graves were documented which were suggested as the consequence of grave-robbing (Bashford & Sibun 2007: 114). Ideological motives are reduced and it is now undertaken for profit, focusing on the valuable clothes, grave goods, the coffin and its expensive fittings or occasionally the body. The vaults in Christ Church, Spitalfields, London contained a strengthened coffin bound with metal bands and straps

identified as belonging to an undertaker (William Horne who died in 1826). The authors suggested that his knowledge of what happened in the grave-robbing and body-snatching world, even if he was not complicit within it, led him to take extra precautions (Mollesen & Cox 1993: 205). There is no archaeological evidence that bodies were removed for anatomical dissection in Assistens. The bodies of criminals were available for dissection in early modern Copenhagen therefore there was no real development of the trade in body-snatching compared to the UK (Nipper Nielsen 2013).

Systematic grave-robbing in Assistens is recorded in documentary sources in two episodes which occurred in the southern end of the cemetery. The re-opening in 1952 of the vault of Giertrud Bodenhoff, a rich young widow who was buried in 1798, was prompted by the wish to investigate a family story of her being buried alive but then murdered by grave-robbers. The investigation suggested from the position of her body that she was buried alive but no evidence was found to corroborate stories of the murder. Grave-robbery was suspected from the lack of jewellery in the coffin and the partial destruction of the tin nameplate (Starcke 1954). The evidence from the exhumation appeared to confirm this hypothesis but remains inconclusive when reviewed today. I believe that the evidence presented for being buried alive is weak. The evidence for grave-robbery is more reliable due to the lack of documented jewellery supposed to have been buried in and destruction of some of the coffin decorations.

The second episode of grave-robbery occurred in 1804 and investigation was prompted by the disturbance of a child's grave. The coffin was found to be missing and the body later found nearby in a snowdrift. A wider investigation commenced where a further 509 grave places were investigated by police to determine the extent of the crime by poking long poles into the ground to find the coffin (Starcke 1954: 61, 93). Six gravediggers from Assistens admitted to selling coffins, linen and clothing from graves and were given prison sentences of between three and four years (Bidstrup 1973). This occurred at the very earliest stages of the newly extended cemetery and gives an impression of the more chaotic nature of the cemetery in this period.

Recorded cases such as these may also have contributed to the unpopularity of being buried so far away from the city and under the supervision of these gravediggers. This episode led directly to more closely monitored practices by the authorities, yet the archaeological evidence suggests that grave-robbing continued. These particular thefts are recorded as usually taking place just after the committal and often breaking or removing coffin lids in the process. However items could also be removed during the truncation and removal of older remains. There are no regulations stating what should happen to artefacts such as jewellery when existing graves were disturbed in the course of digging new graves. This could have been a legal way of accessing items

and even breaking up the coffin for firewood could have been practical as well as economically valuable, for how else would the gravediggers dispose of this quantity of wood? However there is also the distinct possibility that grave-robbing was carried out by people not employed at the cemetery.

Overall it is difficult to prove grave-robbery in urban churchyards and burial grounds because there is a lack of archaeological evidence. Digging down into a grave for robbery may be indistinguishable from the original grave cut because it is often impossible to see clear contextual details such as individual grave cuts. There may be no evidence of disturbance to the body or coffin or there could be disturbance of the coffin or body that could be explained by other factors such as natural collapse and decay of the coffin (Effros 2002: 58). An empty coffin with no skeleton inside could be an indication of body theft but it would need to be combined with a number of other signs such as the destruction of the lid and an absence of charnel deposits in the grave fill that would indicate a complete body was removed rather than a decayed skeleton. A burial containing no grave goods may simply be a reflection of the chosen burial custom rather than robbery. Another explanation is that although disturbance is common in cemeteries, the intention behind the disturbance cannot be securely identified and there are many other reasons why a grave should be disturbed. It is equally possible that the body was removed for other purposes – a legally required medical autopsy, burial elsewhere or cleaning a grave plot to create new space within it. Therefore there are methodological problems in separating grave-robbing apart from other factors of burial taphonomy.

Alison Klevnäs (2010: Appendix 2) has created a checklist for the identification of grave-robbing  in which some elements can be applied to the Assistens material. Grave-robbery can be indicated by a careful combination of factors: broken and disturbed coffins, particularly damage on the lid only, missing coffin decoration on an elaborate coffin (holes where handles or plates should be), disturbance of the skeleton particularly around the head and hands for jewellery and grave goods found in the grave fill. More importantly identification of stratigraphic actions could also provide evidence for a logical sequence of actions that can point to disturbance after the burial. These factors have been successfully applied to the Assistens data to identify potential examples. One possible example of grave-robbing is the coffin buried within a shallow grave cut (G188). It was white painted coffin with internal upholstery indicated by white ceramic pins. However there was no skeleton present and no coffin lid and there was no truncation by other coffins or documentary or archaeological evidence for reuse of the grave plot which would explain removal of the skeleton. The coffin was 0.85m long which is approximately similar to children's coffins who have been aged to less than one year. It is possible that the skeleton has decayed, however the majority of other infant skeletons on the site have been poorly preserved but not completely decayed. It is also possible here that the coffin was disturbed for other

reasons and the skeletal remains moved elsewhere so it cannot be confirmed as an example of grave-robbing, yet it remains a possibility.

Several other coffins showed evidence of missing handles, many other skeletons showed disturbance centred on the head and hands indicating a search for jewellery however this does not constitute clear proof of grave-robbery. Another possibility was the burial (G959) where the coffin was found on its side, on top of another coffin. My interpretation suggests that the uppermost coffin was placed on its side to gain access to the earlier and more elaborate coffin which would have been visible. This earlier coffin lid was broken and the body inside had been disturbed particularly around the head and hands. Despite the elaborate decorative style of the coffin there were no ornamental fittings present such as coffin handles nor were there any sign of personal grave goods inside the coffin. Although an absence of these grave goods and decorations do not prove robbery, combined with other factors they contribute towards suspecting robbery.

Stronger evidence for grave-robbing at Assistens is suggested by combining the examination of the remains and the sequence of actions observed by archaeologists. The coffin (G863) lay at the bottom of a sequence of three surviving coffins. The coffin itself was not disturbed yet the lid had been unfastened and removed but then replaced upside down. The coffin was relatively simple but well-constructed with a double lining of wood and while there were holes for handles and possibly a grip plate none were recovered. The skeleton had been disturbed in ways that suggested human activity rather than natural movement resulting from decay processes of the body. The skull was missing and about 25% of the rest of the skeleton had been scattered within the surrounding grave deposit which was recorded as a charnel deposit. The coffin lid had been covered with a deposit of soil 0.15m thick then followed by the second later coffin. This sequence can be suggested as occurring when the second grave was dug - the gravediggers found the earlier coffin, disturbed it and removed coffin fittings and displaced the skeleton while looking for personal items of value. The lid had been replaced (albeit upside down) and a layer of soil was then deposited to hide the activity. Adding an extra deposit of soil did not create extra space for the later coffin and there would have been no need to disturb and randomly scatter bones or only remove fittings of the coffin if the entire skeleton and coffin was to be removed. It is possible that the original intention was to remove the coffin but the idea was abandoned in the middle of the process but in this example the intersection between act and intention is a problem. The key to the interpretation of grave-robbing here is the layer of soil over the disturbed coffin; this places a deliberate act within the stratigraphic sequence combined with the disturbance of the remains inside the coffin. Grave-robbing cannot be confirmed even in this example but it can be suggested as a strong possibility.

Gravediggers may be involved but the act of grave-robbing should not necessarily be always linked to the gravedigger. The motif of the venal gravedigger in a churchyard is a common one in literature but casts unfair aspersions on all gravediggers. Standards in the cemetery were greatly improved from the change in 1880 to a municipal central authority (Helweg 2010: 125). It is possible that illegal activities within Assistens became more difficult as the cemetery became surrounded by new buildings and busy community of Nørrebro. Moreover it seems that a gradual movement to restrict burial in Assistens and increase burial in other cemeteries in Copenhagen resulted in less truncation and changes of plot ownership in the 20th century restricting opportunities. However, a recent incident of grave desecration within the cemetery, but not on the excavated site, was undertaken in 2003 (Pinborg 2003). A former member of a biker club was buried in Assistens with full honours complete with items of ritual and personal affiliation to his club. However after his death, he was accused of informing on colleagues to the police and this led to his grave being dug up in the middle of the night and various clothing and symbols relating to his affiliation being removed from the body. This action would re-write the legacy of this person. This modern grave-robbery shows not only a living memory and consciousness of what was inside the grave but also that what was hidden from view was still considered an active and powerful symbol in the living, social world.

# Transforming bodies in the working cemetery

In contrast to the rest of this thesis, the focus of this chapter is the activities of the gravediggers rather than the dead, their mourners or the professionals involved in the undertaking business. The understanding surrounding the dead body and manipulations of bodies long after the event of death are therefore of a different type to discussions in previous chapters. The bodies are a physical remnant of what was once human rather than a loved individual. The actions described are carried out by people who did not have an emotional but a professional association to the dead person. Gravediggers work could be compared to undertakers except that there is an added component of the passing of time which has a distinct and transformative consequence upon ideas and feelings concerning the dead as well as the physical remains. The central question is to examine how the transformation of the long-dead bodies is deal with in the cemetery. The main actors in this chapter are the gravediggers who in their working lives and practices within the cemetery are manipulating the rules in how they work with the bodies and coffins. The evidence is focused firstly upon the creation of graves, how they are used and reused according to different principles. Secondly the evidence focuses upon the manipulation and

breaking up of bodies and coffins into charnel deposits. Space within the grave is manipulated and bodies are actively handled and transformed into other deposits to enable the acts to be carried out. Regulations on the digging of the grave are generally followed but there are exceptions in the depth of graves which do not always conform to the stated guidelines. There were also gravedigging contrary to regulations such as the illicit placement of infants or perhaps even grave-robbing. The handling of charnel bones, although not officially regulated by the cemetery shows clearly the habitus developed by gravediggers to deal with them. Treatment varied, for example according to how much of the body would be disturbed or if there was soft tissue present. During life and even in the liminal period between death and burial, the body is fleshed and a part of an active material object/subject within society. Once in the ground it becomes invisible, reduced to a skeleton which is also not seen during life. It is a distinct archaeological body often regarded as not so much a body any more but something else (Sofaer 2006: 45). To the mourners and society, the individual and their body may disappear as an identity gradually, so that processes happening within the physical body are no longer important. The meaning and value inherent in the physical remains has already been dissolved or transferred to other physical objects. To visit the cemetery is to revisit memories of the individual which doesn't usually involve contemplation of the physical. The actual physical bodies are then contained and dissolved by the grave plot but the perception remains that they lie undisturbed and complete. The focus on the body which was the locus for the individual person is then transferred away from the body to the above-ground commemoration in the grave plot.

The physical body may no longer be perceived as relevant for the relatives but it continues to be a physical fact for the gravediggers who must find ways to manage body parts and also disassociate their feelings whilst engaged in this work. The evidence discussed shows that it is not a simple and clean procedure, the coffins are moved and bodies are chopped in half, pulled apart, sometimes when still fleshed. The gravediggers in the cemetery both create these actions and also hide them from others and continue the idea of the abject dead body by their actions (Kristeva 1982). The evidence is concealed underground and is not marked above-ground where the pretence of order is maintained. This is in direct opposition to the ideals that the cemetery is meant to be representing and the ideals that are manifested above-ground. However upon exhumation, movement or disinterment, the bodily remains emerge from their protective grave environment and they become something to be disposed of and hidden.  The people handling this work may have different concepts and meanings associated with the dead body that are vitally different from those who knew the dead. The practices undertaken many not even fit with their own socially created views on acceptable actions. To work in a cemetery is to know that these transformations and practices occur but are concealed underground and that the

bodies are a part of the manipulated material culture within the cemetery soil and continue to be an active presence in their daily work.

The world of the gravedigger comes to the surface rarely. During the transition from churchyards to modern cemeteries their practices move from a craft tradition into a regulated but often unobtrusive presence. Grave-digging today does not have the same negative social stigma that was attached to it yet it has not developed in the same way as other death-related professions such as undertaking or medicine. The work is often wrongly dismissed as unskilled. This is a simplified view of the situation as gravediggers have to complete complex tasks involved in moving, disturbing and manipulating bodies and coffins within the below-ground world.

Making these practices less visible to people is paralleled with the movement during modern times of death and grave-digging away from the centre of town and churchyard. There is also evidence illustrating how gravediggers reacted against guidance and expectation in the illicit burial of small children and evidence of grave-robbery. The new cemeteries in the late 18th and 19th century were very carefully planned to avoid some of the criticisms of the past. A balance was sought to control cemetery practices by the imposition of regulations on maintaining order in the cemetery – a public transcript (Scott, J. 1991; Hall 2000). However the gravediggers were responding to these regulatory demands by handling remains in ways contrary to the expected public transcripts.

The difference between expectation and reality can be seen elsewhere in an Australian cemetery which was charted in documentary sources by Lisa Murray (2003) who showed that the reality of 19th century cemeteries could be in direct contradiction of the contemporary ideals. The archaeological evidence from Assistens showed the physical resistance to these contemporary ideals. There have always been rules and regulations in traditional churchyards but the idea of cemeteries was formed within new intellectual environments. Cemeteries were a material expression of this modern thinking which also actively contributed to the continuation of modern ideals by their very presence and operation.

Occasionally the two separate worlds, above and below meet, in the open grave pit at the funeral, the capture of grave-robbers or in archaeological investigation. Orientation metaphors are commonly used in archaeology (Holtorf 2004) and are also connected with time in a feeling that the past is in the underground and archaeologists reveal it. Gravediggers who work below the ground are working to mediate the physical past but they, like archaeologists are principally working with objects that are still present. There is also a sense of the underground being both a stable and unchanging idea as well as one that is unknowable described by Wendy Lesser 'the underground is simultaneously and inseparably a concrete thing and an abstract notion' (1987: 3). These metaphors can be extended to the examination of the relationship between these two worlds or states. Seeing gravediggers as playing an

active part in both allows our understanding to unite, or at least, link the two discourses. The result is interpretation that needs to be blended together to create a more nuanced view of human emotional experience and relation to the social and professional worlds.


## Gravediggers within society

The activities occurring in the cemetery of Assistens were in contrast to the original public perspective of how they were intended to be viewed. The grave plot is the bounded and organised space which is mediating the sense of control from the cemetery. If designers intended to create an ordered and controlled response to death and the dead body with their neatly partitioned plots creating borders between their inhabitants, then they succeeded above-ground. There is a difference between the quiet, calm and unchanging atmosphere promoted by the new cemetery and the reality of an active and changing landscape in continual discourse with the living society.

The material cultural remains associated with death and the funeral which have been concealed in the ground or above-ground in the form of grave memorials are transformed by the passing of time. This transformation allows the social acceptance of the manipulation of these remains. To allow the successful operation of the cemetery as a socially beneficial place, work must be carried out under social acceptance of the facts of renewal and clearance of older grave plots and previous human remains. Yet the realities of the situation are concealed within the working practices in all respects, occurring deep underground, rarely recorded or spoken about. The evidence of the practices in creating graves and the variation in their depths are not according to written regulations. The tacit knowledge and practices of the gravedigger are revealed as highly skilled which illuminates wider social concerns about the interaction between the living and the remains of the dead.

Gravedigger's personal reactions to burial and cemetery practices are potentially revealed in Assistens. Three men's professions are recorded as Sextons in the Municipal burial register, although it is not confirmed if they worked at Assistens or other cemeteries. Two were excavated and one in particular may reveal how the gravediggers themselves thought each other should be treated. The man was buried in the early 1900s (P653), his widow buried five years later and on the tenure of their plot being completed the plot was bought by a new ownership. The older burials should have been removed but were not. The deepest coffin containing a male and decorated with lion's feet was left at the base of the grave. The lid had been opened and a charnel deposit of a mature female placed carefully inside. A layer of soil was then placed over the coffin. Although identity is not securely confirmed in this research it is strongly suspected to be the Sexton and his wife. Did the gravediggers

know this man and allow an extra measure of respect towards a fellow professional by leaving him in the grave and adding his wife's bones to his coffin?

The gravediggers work practices can be considered as encoded within social practices but are physical manifestations of the individual decisions concerning the grave cut, the grave fill and handling of earlier burials and bodies. Gravediggers themselves attach a strong sense of duty and care towards their work seeing the benefits of the outdoor work and autonomous responsibilities (Terkel 1974; Saunders 1995: 9). Andreas Brun (2008) a gravedigger from Brørup, Jutland also expressed the responsibility felt by them in their task and how they consider themselves to be a vital part of society. That their work is largely invisible may not be perceived as important by them but any of the strikes by gravediggers, for example in New York City in the 1970s or Liverpool in 1979 (Saunders 1995: 3) highlights the problems occurring when the dead cannot be buried. There is a sudden realisation by the public of the necessity for their work.

Through the period examined by this work the craft of grave-digging has changed; new technology has altered some of the heavy manual labour aspects of the job and new trends in cremation or body disposal lessen the need for burial. These factors threaten the skill set and knowledge carried by gravediggers although it is unlikely to displace their job entirely, as there is a continuing demand for burials, such as within Islamic communities. However the skills, tacit knowledge and oral traditions are being lost at a time when cemetery and relations towards the management of bodies are coming under scrutiny due to the need for burial space in some urban areas.

It is the gravediggers who were the people who transformed this new context for the body, which was assumed to be sitting tight within its coffin. The cemetery as an institutional authority continued to place emphasis on ideas that were enacted on the surface but not below the ground; perhaps this surface acquiescence was enough for the authorities? The grave plot location may have been bought and chosen by the mourners and the rules set by the cemetery yet the actual work and reality of the situation was known to the gravediggers and perhaps deliberately ignored by the cemetery authorities. Gravediggers are part of the same society; they would have participated in the same traditions and rituals when their own loved ones died and felt the same grief and loss of relationship. I suggest that the gravediggers were not on the borders of society but working within it, to keep the peaceful, ordered image of the new cemeteries, to hide the body and what it becomes, therefore concealing the dissonance between what is meant to happen and what actually occurs in practice.

Now we return to William Shakespeare's comedic gravediggers in Hamlet. The first presents a riddle "Who (builds) is stronger than the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?" Of course the answer is the grave-maker, for his houses last for eternity. Yet as they make this joking claim they are in fact digging up the remains of earlier

burials and therefore cancelling out their own assertion of the practice of eternal grave peace.

> Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull
> ass will not mend his pace with beating; and, when
> you are asked this question next, say "a grave-maker":
> the houses that he makes last till doomsday.

*Hamlet* (5.1.56–59)

*Chapter 7.*

# Materialising modern cemeteries

En Død veed Mere, end alle vi Levende vide, den Døde kjender den Angest vi ville føle for Noget saa selsomt, som Det, at de kom til os; de Døde ere bedre end vi Alle, og saa komme de ikke. Der er Jord over Kisten, der er Jord indeni den. Psalmebogen med dens Blade ere Støv, Rosen med alle sine Erindringer er falden i Støv;

The dead know more than all we living ones know, the dead know the fear we would feel for something so unusual, as it, when it comes to us; the dead are better than us all, and they return no more. There is earth piled over the coffin; there is earth within it. The pages of the Psalm book are dust; and the rose, with all its memories, has crumbled to dust.

Hans Christian Andersen, *Grandmother* from 1845 (Dal 1966: 48)

Death was a recurring subject for the Danish author H.C. Andersen. Much of what he wrote has become tied into popular understandings of the circumstances and moral issues surrounding death. In the poem *Grandmother* he describes her being placed in a black coffin, shrouded in white linen and provided with a Psalm book and roses. The physical materials reference an ideal preparation of the body of a loved one, placed into the coffin and then the cemetery. Andersen stated that nobody should fear their presence, even a child at night because the dead do not return. The earth covers them and their grave goods decay. Yet the dead and their entire furnishings do sometimes return, unearthed by cemetery staff or occasionally by archaeologists. In fact the dead can be present in the modern cemetery for long periods after their deposition and can continue to affect the visitors who use it. Cemetery and funeral practices of the 19th and 20th century are all distinctly material and physically present even if there is a tendency to defuse the physicality through emotion and sentimentality in literature, on gravestones or within a beautiful cemetery environment.

The establishment of modern cemeteries does represent a change in burial behaviour in Europe from the late 18th century. Towns and cities required a solution for the

increasing numbers of dead. Urban churchyards are eventually closed and modern cemeteries, positioned outside of the city, replace them. What happens inside the cemetery, the commemorative and funeral practices also undergoes change. These patterns are seen over Europe and North America as well as other colonial countries. What makes them so intriguing are the close similarities in the cemeteries over broad geographical and chronological frameworks while simultaneously each individual cemetery retains its own character. The link between broad, border-less and local ideals or practices can be investigated using one key case study, Assistens in Copenhagen.

The aim of this research is to analyse the phenomenon of modern cemeteries, by investigating the relationships between the material placed within them and their own physical presence. It is about how a cemetery functions and what drives the changing relationship with its community who had to deal with the consequences of death. This was examined through three principal objectives where the evidence of the cemetery as a place, with its materiality of bodies, gravestones and containers contributes with new insights towards how it was understood. The first objective was to describe the principal characteristics of modern cemeteries through connections between the place and the bodies within it. This sets a context for cemeteries as a phenomenon and the specific context of how Assistens was created and adjusts with the changing world around it. The second objective focuses within the cemetery on how it is used above and below the ground. The changing relationships between the living and the dead are expressed through the choice and decoration of the grave plot but also in the decisions over how the body is treated from death to the coffin and then to the grave. The third objective was to examine how the dead body is understood and engaged with through cemetery and funeral practices and how the people working in the cemetery deal with the transformed body, long after the act of burial.

What this research has done is to stress how cemeteries actually work, not just through the daily work of the staff and use or visiting of graves but how all the things within the cemetery fit together and affect each other. There is an active discourse which changes as the cemetery develops. They are places of active practices, where everyday acts are learnt and transmitted unconsciously which reproduce but also alter ideas of how to behave. This works with the concepts of habitus and doxa, of practices involved in the handling of dead bodies and material culture such as gravestones that have an evolving role in dealing with emotions and grief. All of this occurs within socially structured frameworks and individual agency (Chapter 2). There is influence from precedents of legislation and cemetery regulations combined with social expectation of the 'correct way' to bury and commemorate the dead and maintain the cemetery. Grave plots were expected to be chosen, decorated and maintained but then also removed after the tenure had elapsed. There are also elements of choice which are channelled through social rules and limitations of

consumer choice. For example the choice of coffin styles was broad in the 20th century but limited by cost and the availability of styles provided by the undertaker (Chapter 5). Taking care of burial preparations involves expressing religious belief and complex emotions in a physical manner within the given framework. Choice was also affected by the beliefs and emotions of people involved, including a desire to do their best for the dead as well as help their own grief. Cemeteries work successfully through these frameworks and individual acts for people by being places of integration and absorption of tangible things and intangible beliefs, ideals and emotions.

The title of the thesis, *Materialising modern cemeteries*, was chosen to explicitly highlight the physical qualities of cemeteries - the gravestones, trees, plots and stratigraphic sequences of burials and to illustrate their influence extending below the surface and into the time beyond the immediate few decades after the funeral. Previous research on the materiality of cemeteries has been dominated by the above-ground features using physical aspects of gravestones and landscapes but is often reflecting the symbolic communicative nature of the material culture rather than considering the quality of the thing itself. The below-ground world has also been less studied as an affective part of the physical environment.

What the excavation of Assistens did was to re-materialise the invisible part of the cemetery and generate a new tangible sense of that concealed material. By digging up the cemetery a new physical past was generated from what was meant to lie concealed below the ground. The acts of grave digging and cemetery maintenance were re-enacted through the archaeological procedures and recorded in new documentary records. The affective presence of the below-ground bodies, objects and coffins were made visible again by being brought back up to the surface. The creation of the archaeological record is a fundamental materialising practice and is in itself a transformative and embodied process. Archaeology as a bodily practice is particularly referential when emptying a grave which re-enacts the opposite of the process of the gravediggers and undertakers by opening the coffin and unwrapping the body. All these practices reflect upon the original events and create materiality, even to the extent of archaeologically instituted reburial which creates a new grave cut, coffin and the acts of replacement of the body and grave goods. Physical evidence of the cemetery now includes archaeological and osteological recording forms, photographs, x-rays and GIS data – these are what have stayed above-ground.

This concluding chapter brings together some of the aspects uncovered during this research and highlights some of the interpretations that apply to Assistens and modern cemeteries in general. The outline, research background and material used in the research were presented in Chapters 1 and 2. The establishment and development of modern cemeteries were discussed in Chapter 3 with an emphasis on the specific narrative of Assistens. Chapter 4 dealt with the above-ground practices of making the grave while Chapter 5 focused on the funeral materiality of preparing the body, coffin

and grave goods. Chapter 6 expanded to a longer time scale to examine how the cemetery dealt with the long-dead bodies in the ground. Conclusions from the chapters are integrated here by detailing the modern characteristics of cemeteries, the relationship between the living and the dead, the three-dimensional nature of cemeteries and the ideal of the beautiful landscape. Finally there are some comments on the archaeological perspectives that have contributed to the study of cemetery and funeral practices.

# Funeral materiality creating modernity

Modernity is not a unified or easy concept; it can be used as a phenomenon or a series of practices and a concept of time. Assistens and other cemeteries in Europe established from the late 18th century are part of the processes associated with 'modernity' such as industrialisation, capitalism, nationalism, professionalisation and rapidly increasing urbanisation. There are also ideological concepts of scientific rationalism, individualism, linear progress and secularisation of authorities. Many of these processes and ideas are not new to this period but chronologically new cemeteries are established within the visible height of modernity where there is the most rapid, intensive visible change in societies as part of these practices or phenomena (Chapter 2). Despite this, they can't be explained by the concept of 'modernity'. Cemeteries are part of a wider phenomenon where people and their bodies, alive and dead, were being improved using scientific theories and moral instruction that transcended national borders. Cemeteries were also closely linked with ideological reform and practices to improve living conditions of urban areas so they are a conjunction of different factors. The stakeholders creating and working within the modern cemeteries define their character both according to ideals of the time and in opposition to the existing churchyards. The idea that modern cemeteries are framed as a new response is meant to be principal characteristic. Yet modern cemeteries are not new inventions but instead are a combination of these ideals and precedents of how society had previously structured responses to death.

When people were concerned about the introduction of the new modern cemeteries it was often due to a sense of loss from their community because they understood how a churchyard worked. Objections could also be related to a loss of control over bodies or sense of community, or even financial reasons in the loss of burial fees. Possibly to ease the transition from churchyards and transitional burial grounds, many characteristics of cemeteries are shared with their predecessors. They were marked out in the landscape with solid boundaries and symbolic entrances, often designed for the majority community, leading to exclusion of others. The living community and the dead were often represented in burial location and commemoration. More distinctive

characteristics of modern cemeteries are commonly suggested as the placement outside of cities, a new initiative from secular authorities to become involved and regulation of burial location, space and depth amongst other guidance. All of these characteristics can be traced from earlier churchyards and burial grounds. Moreover, all of which when examined in depth are found to be more variable and flexible than suggested. Modern cemeteries however were presented and designed to be acceptable, new improved versions of churchyards. They contained enough recognisable features such as similar external and internal boundaries or gravestone styles with many burial regulations continued in gently modified form. For example the need to define and enclose the place for the dead continued, as did restrictions on behaviour inside it.

Continuity was essential within modern cemeteries and funeral behaviour as it allowed easier acceptance of what was new. The use of gravestones was not new but the changes in styles, material and text and even the increased possibility to purchase gravestones was new (Chapter 4). Many Christian symbols continued in use, sometimes transformed with new meanings and the popularity of Classical knowledge also continues today with the use of urns and broken columns. Seemingly simple gravestones from the 20th century reflect the influence of the new waves of modernistic art but importantly are shown to contain subtle meanings that were more connected to the existing understandings of the family and community. The acceptance of cremation burials (Chapter 6) in the modern cemetery provides a good example of the old and new as they brought together the 19th century understandings of pre-Christian rituals with 19th century technology. From the beginning administrative records for cremation burials were treated differently but they did not result in completely new requirements for disposal of the remains. Yet the shape of the majority of urns was vastly different to the coffin, instead referencing the Classical urns that had been used on gravestones. Even after the cremation process the ashes still needed to be contained and were buried within the existing cemetery landscape. This disposal method did not require separation from others buried in the family plot and even increased the ability to bury more people together in a small plot. However changes in cemeteries were made relatively quickly with the introduction of urn grove and ash scattering places. How cremations were dealt with show that new technologies of disposal were at first absorbed into the cemetery but initiated change in the landscape too.

One of the principal characteristics of modern cemeteries is that what was implemented in them was a mix of existing practices with new ideas. Practices and behaviour that may appear to be firmly traditional within the cemetery and funeral business can be illuminated by examining their often very recent invented origins. Through archaeological material a link can be made between the older traditions enacted before the 18th and early 19th centuries which are then adapted. Displaying a cross on the lid of the coffin was a new addition in the 20th century in Assistens but it does refer back to earlier Christian ideology, it is understood in a different way in

the modern world (Chapter 5). This is to suggest that there are changes that are identifiable being enacted within modern cemeteries but that not everything was new. As a business, undertakers were closely allied with capitalism, industrialisation and professionalisation which become important in the supply and control of material destined for the cemetery. Undertaking as an emergent profession provided material goods for the funeral but they also connected mourners with the cemeteries (Chapter 5). They worked within the existing system providing new consumer goods and services which were carefully adapted to fit in.

Furthermore the more abstract concepts of modernity may never have been fully implemented in everyday life including funeral practices. Archaeologically defining changing coffin styles may be referring to modernity but might never have been recognised by the people choosing them at the time of purchase. What was new was to characterise the use of the cemeteries as new ideas, as a part of a new package of ideas of modern life including reform (Chapter 3). These practices may have been slowly accumulated and difficult to understand or analyse at the time and therefore perhaps went unrecognised. The long continuity of grave-digging and charnel practices is also clear; they only changed in the late 20th century with the use of machines rather than hand tools. The reasons why gravediggers continued to reject cemetery rules were not just pragmatic but also show continued beliefs in the desire to keep bodies and bones in their grave space which has a long history (Chapter 6). What may be modern practice here is a combination of desire to keep individual bodies together *whilst appearing to conform* to cemetery regulations on space and property rights of grave plots.

More interesting and relevant to this research is to ask what the processes found in modernity do for the cemetery and how materiality shapes the success of the modern cemetery. In their creation cemeteries are a consequence of modernity but once established as a successful place within the urban society, associated practices increasingly influence and create new meanings of modernity. The evidence from Assistens shows that modernity is formed from a mix of traditional (existing) and innovative thinking and practices. The cleverness of the label of modernity is that it conceals the work that goes into making something appear new, it conceals the background of modern processes. Modern cemeteries can be continually adapted to be relevant and contemporary. Modernity doesn't have to disappear or be taken over by a new era because it reinvents itself.

What has emerged from this research is evidence that shows the practices taking place at the cemetery introduced a permanent state of change. Through this understanding we can see the continuous and on-going process of re-invention in the changing ideas of the body and the place they were kept in. This is achieved through the physical components of the place and all the things put into it and connected to it. Changes in cemeteries also affected existing churchyards and transitional burial grounds which

were updated to fit into the new ideas. They were redesigned, planted with new trees and had gravestones moved to more regular rows or set up against the walls. The ultimate change for churchyards is in their eventual disuse and decommissioning as places to be buried in. From the late 20th century it has been the fate of modern cemeteries to face this issue too. Most recently archaeologists have become the new actors engaged in the field of cemeteries. Overall considering the connections between archaeology as a discipline and modernity, it may even be the archaeological work itself that is the new underground component of modern cemetery practices.

# The relationship between life and death

Cemeteries are places which integrate life and death, after death is a potentially long period of time where mourners and the community have to re-adjust to cope with the loss. The relationship between the living and the dead is broken and re-made. The binary opposites of life and death are frequently referenced in cemetery and burial research, often noting the combination of the two. This thesis reflects these tendencies in how it has been structured through chapters focusing on above and below and through asking questions on life and death. An important reason to continue the presentation of binary positions is to make connections between previous research on death and cemeteries and to illustrate the argument that binary positions are not irrelevant or superseded but rarely adequately explain changes in behaviour. Implicit in binary structure is the need for both halves – life and death, above and below and it within, or by integrating these stages that explanation can be sought.

One of the key characteristics of modern cemeteries is understood to be their placement outside of the urban space, outside of 'life'. Yet often this placement is only symbolic, the area around the cities was an important part of how the urban communities worked. However physically distant they were located; a strong connection is maintained with the people it served. Cemeteries as places are integrally linked to the communities they serve. They were connected by the roads used out from the city, through continued control by each church but most importantly through their functions performed for people, living and dead. This connection is only emphasised in Assistens as Nørrebro developed around it. As more bodies are placed inside the cemetery gains in material presence. The term 'city of the dead' was commonly used as a metaphor by people describing some of the early cemeteries like Père Lachaise and it clearly conflates life and death motifs in a way that does not really reflect the material and active use of a cemetery (Chapter 3). The relationship between life and death was never really separated, only presented as such, to assist the idea that cemeteries were new types of places.

Many of the conclusions made on public and private cemetery and funeral practices are that there is continuity between social structures from life to death. How gender, age or class and wealth distinctions are presented in life are replicated in the material culture of death. Ideas of how society is structured are visible in the purchase and accessibility of for example, burials rights in grave plots or gravestones. People are not buried in an egalitarian cemetery and are not given the same social space (Chapter 4). The bodies are dressed and presented in the correct manner to represent themselves, their mourners and the network or index of relationships (Chapter 5). In this way they are understood and structured within funeral practices, created by the living for the dead.

Far from being places solely for the dead, a principal characteristic is that cemeteries have always been for the living too. They are full of different types of life which has been recognised in the growth of ecological interest within cemetery studies. This includes the study of lichens on gravestones or the birds and animals within cemeteries. There is also the biological decomposition caused by bacteria, worms and insects in the soil. Although these are not pleasant subjects to consider it is this reality that much of the design of modern cemeteries goes to conceal. These are vital parts of the cemetery entity as they are part of its life cycle or narrative (Chapter 4). Modern cemeteries allow change in attitudes towards the living and the dead whilst allowing both to be represented and balanced but not to overawe each other. Neither death, nor life is denied.

To illustrate the point of how modern funeral practices combine life and death, a good example is how the relationship between the living and the dead alters concerns the sleep metaphor (Chapter 5). The sleep metaphor has a long history and is not restricted to modern cemeteries but it does alter over time. Of course the metaphor of sleep is just that and is not meant to be literally true. Clearly the family and mourners do not understand the person as still alive in a formal sense but that the body simultaneously acts as a container for the person as they were and as they might appear for the Resurrection. The metaphor is physically expressed in funeral posture, accessories and also gravestones. How the body is presented from the late 19th century onwards strikes a discordant note, people do not sleep in a suit, their best dress or with dentures in place or elaborate hair styles. The evidence presented in Assistens suggests instead a combination of the metaphor of sleeping with how the person looked when awake. This is exemplified in the pose of sleeping lying on a mattress while being adorned with jewellery and everyday clothing. There is a mix of the presentation of the relationship between living and dead in the body which is a modern blend of religious, social and medical beliefs. What these images present is a composite image of the body and the individual as understood and arranged by the family and undertakers. Sleep becomes a porous and negotiable metaphor which is suitable to be understood in different ways by mourners.

The cemetery is balanced between different ideas: modernity and tradition, life and death, above and below but the evidence at Assistens shows the artificial nature of these binary positions. To create this balance requires constant activity and decision-making to express the cyclical nature of life and death and the contradictory relationships between mourners and the deceased. Modern cemeteries are designed to alleviate grief processes, the fear of death and the fear of the passing of human time within the modern world so they are a meeting place between living and dead. The trajectory of the body does not stop; it can be extended through visiting practices. This continuing relationship may be more evident in the 21st century on the cemetery but had been important and reproduced previously although in different ways. Glennys Howarth (2000: 134) suggests that people are only now beginning to dismantle the boundaries separating death from life. I would take this idea further using the evidence at Assistens and propose that the boundaries between living and dead, above and below, have in fact always been more porous than people may believe.

# The three dimensional cemetery

Walking through the city of Copenhagen there are glimpses of the underground world, steps leading down to cellars, basement windows, drains and sewers but there is no hint of the underground in Assistens. There is no church vault or crypt, only a few small buildings with hints of what may lie beneath. The underground world is efficiently covered up. Bodies are placed underground and become represented and sometimes temporarily replaced above-ground with physical things. The third theme presented here is that analysis requires a below-ground presence, focusing on the above-ground gives only a partial view on what the cemetery does and how they function. But there is an ambiguous relationship between the cemetery and those who use it, between above and below where attempts are made to keep what is placed below the surface secure, yet it comes back up again. Any burial ground or cemetery which has the principle of storage of the dead, whether visited or not, works both above and below-ground. They can only function properly for the living if they integrate physical and immaterial, intangible aspects of the dead. That is a necessary role and when there is the opportunity to connect the two there will be more nuanced conclusions which can be drawn about how mourners deal with their loved ones and perhaps also their own mortality.

Within this thesis the physical entity of a grave plot is regarded as three-dimensional, extending below the soil and encompassing everything from the grave markers to the burials within it. The interpretations made have shown that cemeteries are not places of static time, where people are buried and left in eternal rest and nothing alters. In

particular modern cemeteries are places where space and time are bought, sold and renewed within tight regulations, where there are additional burials requiring change within the grave plots. This process is active and mourners do still take part in many aspects perhaps decorating or carrying the coffin at the funeral. Even digging the grave, or later adding small plants or decorations (Chapter 4) to the grave plot all of which continue a modified relationship between life and death. Practices completed below-ground are a necessity to keep modern cemeteries functioning. The constant process of exchange, movement and work is what maintains the success of modern cemeteries even when this is restrained by the ideal of what the cemetery should be.

There is flexibility in the relationship between above and below, it is not always an equal exchange. In Assistens the organisation of space above-ground by creating new pathways resulted in very early line burials being preserved long after they were supposed to be removed. It was not the affective presence of the burials that caused this, merely re-organisation of administrative plots but it created new circumstances for the burials below it. Objects could also move between the two spheres deliberately as in the re-use of gravestones for construction footings or conch shells for drainage. Accidental loss of a gravedigger's spade or a child's toy was also possible to lose below-ground, all of which resulted in specifically above-ground things becoming underground objects. The fluidity of material culture characterises the use within the cemetery. However the remembrance of what had been deliberately placed underground as funeral traditions, specifically seen in the similarity of coffin styles or clothing used repeatedly within family plots, could influence mourners when making decision over the next burial (Chapter 5). A key component of the three-dimensional cemetery is the gravediggers who through their work blur the borders between above and below the ground (Chapter 6). They have multiple work tasks including gardening and facilitating funerals but also balance managing the space in the grave and dealing with the transformation of dead body. How they differentially handle the long-dead body in creating charnel deposits within the stratigraphic sequences of the grave plot shows that they understand and distinguish between some bones as bodies and others as remains.

What happens above and below in the cemetery in the 19th and 20th century does not always correspond. There is no linear relationship between them as seen by comparing data where there is increasing simplicity in gravestone design but also increasing complexity and quantity of objects provided for the coffin (Chapter 4 and 5). This is the difference between long-term public display and a shorter-term mix of limited display which is relevant for mourners' own relationships. There is no suggestion that practices should correspond but they do inform each other. The conclusions that Sarah Tarlow (2011) draws for the early modern period in the UK and Ireland are that there are overlapping, messy and contradictory consequences to the mix of beliefs, ideals and practices of dealing with the dead. In Assistens there is internal logic and consistency within grave plots for the management and

understanding of how to structure and engage with the dead body (Chapter 6) but there is also contradiction compared to the established regulations particularly in comparing what happens above and below.

# The ideal and beautiful landscape

The final theme which highlights the objectives are that modern cemeteries are tied into a general understanding as beautiful landscapes designed to mitigate the horrors of death and beautify the processes of decay and grief. Cemeteries were created within the period of Romanticist idealism for natural landscapes in which garden design was utilised to change attitudes to death. A principal characteristic of the landscapes of modern European cemeteries is that they were designed to create an impression of a traditional and timeless natural environment in urban space (Chapter 3). Modern cemeteries were to inspire calmness and control over emotions to deal with the traumatic events in people's lives. Rather than being left alone to deal with grief or even the anxiety over our individual deaths, cemeteries function as a place to go and visit and reassure people of their place in the community. Modern cemeteries project a positive place for people to know where they will be buried rather than being a modern *memento mori* which has tones of decay and moral warning to live a decent life. Churchyards by the 18th century have become the essence of this perspective which may even be a contradiction compared to some of the religious awakenings inspired by non-Conformist thinking of the 19th century. Perhaps one difference for modern cemeteries is that the practices that have slowly developed in them carry less overt didactic messages for the living. While still being hierarchical and structured through wealth and class they also become more inclusive, for example creating space for other religions, for people outside of the parish, for the homeless. However they are not necessarily more secular as in Assistens where Lutheran ideas retain a strong influence within the landscape and on coffin styles or grave goods.

The expectation is that burials should be as little disturbed as possible; the grave is imagined or perceived as a static resting place. They continue the ideal that they are a safe repository for people's bodies but they are also places of constant exchange and work. What the evidence has presented are signs that material practices within modern cemeteries enforced an expectation of security in dealing with the physical consequences of death. This is manifested through the spatial topography where pathways and grave plots created the bounded and organised space and mediate the sense of control throughout the cemetery. If cemetery authorities intended to create an ordered and controlled response to death and the dead body with their neatly partitioned plots creating borders between their inhabitants, then they succeeded above-ground (Chapter 3). Cemetery grave plots and rituals are structured by

different groups of people which are repeatedly enforced by family visits over time so cemeteries sustain largely unacknowledged vital functions for society. All of this requires effort to maintain, not just tending trees and cutting the grass by cemetery staff. It needs the families and the community to visit, maintain the grave plots and carry out their personal acts of mourning to re-affirm the purpose and function of the cemetery (Chapter 4). These are repetitive practices that structure the ideal nature of the modern cemetery but tend to de-emphasise the work that is required.

The expectation below-ground, if considered at all, is perhaps a mirrored, 'clean' cemetery where total decomposition occurs neatly within the initial 20 year period as prescribed by rules and regulations. Within these two spatial locales there are perspectives that shape the ideal nature of, for example, the durability of funerary materials and social influence in what should be displayed on a permanent basis (the gravestone) and what emotional expressions can be concealed beneath the soil within the material of the coffin and furnishings. The idea of improving the dead body is clearly shown in the coffin burials in the increase of elaboration of clothing and objects. Giving people a look of being awake and dressed for after their long sleep is a physical consequence of how the living chooses to prepare their dead (Chapter 5). It is the last intersection of the body and the mourners that creates the final memory or image of the person which is important, regardless of eventual disposal.

One function of cemeteries is to actively reduce the individual human subject to a collective object by breaking down the tangible person (Chapter 3). This creates a paradox at the heart of cemeteries because they are created through the presence of human bodies and physical things which shape the memory of the dead person. The activity undertaken to achieve this function must be concealed to allow it to continue (Chapter 6). The person, body and coffin are transformed, de-materialised and replaced with gravestones and memories. The cemetery is positioned as storage of intangible collective humans where each individual burial becomes a part of the whole and also becomes an object rather than a subject. There are patterns showing that bodies do still matter long after burial where the breakdown from an individual body to a collective mass is a variable but affective presence. Death in modern cemeteries is successfully concealed through this position. The beautiful landscape works to counteract the realities of the practices carried out within them.

# Archaeological perspectives on modern cemetery and funeral practices

Historical archaeology has much to offer the subject of cemeteries in terms of the interpretation of materiality, contexts and perspectives of longer time frames. Physical material, stratigraphic sequences or even consideration of practices that create archaeological evidence has produced interfaces between documentary, oral or material narratives. This thesis does build upon on previous, often multidisciplinary research into different aspects of death and cemeteries. Additional data and theoretical insights have derived from ethnographic and historical sources and also on social studies into attitudes to death, grieving and visitor behaviour. The extension of knowledge complements and challenges existing written sources, ethnographic or sociological narratives of death in the modern period. The link between documentary sources and archaeological material is proved to be not as obvious and linear as is generally believed (Chapter 2). A narrative of Assistens derived from documentary sources would be very different from the historical archaeology narrative presented here in this research. What this study has done is to adapt previously posed questions, raise new questions and apply new evidence with which it sought to provide new avenues to explore the subject.

This study of Assistens has explored a time period and subject that is often little investigated through archaeological excavation. It is unusual for archaeologists to have the opportunity to excavate cemeteries in Europe and it is the first time that a modern cemetery has been excavated in Denmark. It has also utilised a multidisciplinary approach and evidence to expand the frameworks. For example, a new approach has been opened using methodology which shows that modern cemeteries produce different types of stratigraphic sequences than churchyards and that these are valuable for interpretation of their practices (Chapter 6). Similarly a new perspective is confirmed that modern burials are not just another mass of undifferentiated and uninteresting burials where all preparation and understanding of practices was stable and the same as it is today. Instead varied and contradictory understandings of the body and of cemeteries have been produced. This research does not claim to present a homogenous statement on the materiality of modern death but that one cemetery in Copenhagen provides archaeological narratives with which to evaluate Danish and European funeral and cemetery practices.

There are many potential areas of research that Assistens has contributed towards, connecting archaeology and creating an evidence-based materialised story of the very recent European past. This research could be only the first step towards realising all that Assistens can hold as potential for cemetery studies. There is great scope to make further connections to documentary archives, for example the mass of information held at the cemetery archive has only been barely explored. Further documentary

resources that could be connected to the archaeological material includes probate documents, wills, autopsy and any available medical records. Genealogical records would uncover relationships between families and how they dealt with death in relation to the cemetery or to ownership of family grave plots. A wider study of the gravestones and plots over time could also provide a valuable research project on the evolution of the cemetery landscape and how this relates to the changing familial and spatial topography. The osteological evidence contains great potential not only to explore subjects of health or demography but also to compare osteological methodology and documentary evidence.

Despite the opening up of a new period of human relations to death and burial for investigation, not everybody or every archaeologist accepts that modern cemeteries are valid for archaeological study. These modern graves may be too close to our own society; some of the burials were within our lifetimes. Current approaches to historic and modern cemeteries accept that this is can be emotionally affecting and divisive subject. The placement of our research is committed to embedding it within the context of the current community and acknowledging that it can feed into political controversies and that other groups engaged in cemeteries have a part to play in the research. Historical and contemporary archaeology pushes forward the time limits of the period studied and addresses ethical and emotional questions of working within the more recent world. Approaches to cemetery research can embrace this and recognise the powerful impact of using modern material to make the archaeological perspective relevant and connective to people today.

Cemeteries are placed at an intersection of different interests; mourners, community, each parish church, secular authorities, medical, urban planning and cemetery professionals, architects and slightly later the development of undertaking business and cremation advocates and archaeologists. Other actants involved are the existing churchyards and burial grounds, the funeral material culture and the bodies within the cemetery. All are active in how cemeteries would be created and develop and it is where they overlap that the physical consequences exist. What makes up the cemetery is more than just the concept; it is everything within it too. The emphasis in this research is how people create, structure and use the place and collective materiality of the cemetery.

When choosing a front cover for this book I had been reluctant to perpetuate two of the most commonly used images of modern cemeteries. These tend to fall into either a re-wilded, 'back to nature' Gothic landscape just waiting for the odd ghost to wander through or the open green lawns and clean design often presented by architectural themed books. I wanted to capture more of the complexity that shapes cemeteries by acknowledging its links to the surrounding city, the place itself with its material aspects and the people living and dead. The illustration used for the front cover is the evocative painting by the Nørrebro artist, Folmer Bendtsen from 1944.

Aspects of the cemetery discussed in the research merge together in this painting, of physical elements and the actors who participate in creating and maintaining the place. The coffin with its hidden but powerfully present body inside is the reason for the procession yet is pictured on the very edge of this painting, simultaneously being on the periphery but also the focus of the event. This image only emphasises that a funeral requires the integration of the community, the cemetery as a place and the above and below-ground worlds. This is just one of many ordinary scenes that show what a cemetery and what its material does on a daily basis.

# Att materialisera modernitetens begravningsplatser – en sammanfattning

I- och kring Europas allt större och mer industrialiserade städer anläggs från slutet av 1700-talet och under 1800-talet allt fler landskapsutformade begravningsplatser. De var en del av modernitetens samhällsordning grundad i upplysningstidens ideal, väsensskilda från medeltidens och den tidigmoderna tidens kyrkogårdar. Det har visat sig vara en lyckad innovation. Modernitetens begravningsplatser var välanpassade till samhällets behov av minnesplatser och sorgerum. Dessa platser beskrivs ofta och upplevs av många som oföränderliga rum för eftertanke och behärskad sorg. Men hur relaterar denna bild till den nödvändiga hanteringen av materialiteten både på- och under markytan? Hur har dessa platser förändrats? Hur förhåller sig allt detta till den gängse uppfattningen om vad som egentligen bör hända på en begravningsplats?

Dessa frågor belyses genom avhandlingens tre målsättningar. Den första målsättningen är att identifiera vad som karakteriserar modernitetens begravningsplatser, samt att belysa hur de omdanas och hur detta relaterar till förändringar i det omgivande samhället. Den andra är att belysa praktiker, bruk och sedvänjor knutna till hantering av kroppen från dödsögonblicket till begravningen. Det handlar om vilka aktörer som är inblandade och hur relationerna dem emellan resulterar i olika former av materiella uttryck. Den tredje målsättningen är att undersöka hur gravar och mänskliga kvarlevor hanteras och förstås av de personer som arbetar på begravningsplatserna.

Det empiriska materialet består i första hand av resultatet från en arkeologisk undersökning av Assistens kyrkogård i Köpenhamn. Detta material är kompletterat av och relaterat till resultat från andra liknande undersökningar utförda i framförallt nordvästra Europa. Forskningsområdet är emellertid tvärdisciplinärt. Därför är

ambitionen att perspektivisera, integrera och relatera avhandlingsarbetet till detta vidare forskningsfält.

# De arkeologiska berättelserna om modernitetens begravningsplatser

Det första kapitlet innehåller en introduktion och fördjupning i avhandlingens källmaterial, teman och målsättningar. Kapitlet inleds med en genomgång av forskningen om modernitetens begravningsplatser. Dels beskrivs var och när de uppkom, men även vilka drivkrafter som kan förklara varför de skapades. Dels beskrivs vad som karakteriserar deras utformning och vilka begrepp som används i forskningen.

Begravningsplatserna är inte bara avgränsade rum i anslutning till städerna. De består av fysiskt definierade rumsliga enheter i form av gravrätter. Dessa köptes för minst 20 år, vilket definierar vad som karakteriserades som den legitima perioden för gravfrid. Vissa gravrätter, som familjegravar, kunde köpas för betydligt längre tidsperioder.

Assistens kyrkogård är belägen cirka två kilometer norr om Köpenhamns centrum. När begravningsplatsen etablerades år 1760 var den lokaliserad i fortifikationsområdet längs med en av huvudvägarna in till staden, långt utanför själva stadsområdet. Den var inledningsvis avsedd att förse Köpenhamn med gravrätter till ett överkomligt pris. Efterhand blev behovet större, varpå en betydande utvidgning norrut stod klar år 1805. Den arkeologiska undersökningen genomfördes under åren 2009-2011 i denna nya del. Sammanlagt undersöktes nästan 1000 kist- och urnbegravningar som gjordes under perioden från 1800-talet till 1990-talet. Det fanns välbevarade lämningar efter kyrkogårdsarbetarnas skötsel av begravningsplatsen, inte minst hur de hanterade äldre gravar. Det fanns även möjlighet att studera hur gravplatser- och gravstenar utformats.

Avhandlingens teoretiska grund belyses inom ramen för en diskussion om vad som äger rum på modernitetens begravningsplatser. På detta sätt aktiveras såväl studiens handlingsteoretiska föresatser som den begreppsapparat som följer med denna inriktning. Kapitlet avslutas med en redogörelse och perspektivisering av avhandlingens målsättningar.

# Modernitetens gravskick och begravningsplatser i forskningen

Kapitlet innehåller en översikt av de forskningsperspektiv som är nära knutna till studier av modernitetens begravningsplatser och gravskick.

Diskussionen inleds med en genomgång av arkeologisk forskning om gravar och gravskick. Därefter analyseras vilka inriktningar som varit dominerande inom historisk arkeologi och i studiet av medeltidens och den tidigmoderna tidens kyrkogårdar. Här beskrivs även den mer generella utvecklingen av kyrkogårdarnas utformning och gravskickets utveckling. Fokus finns på förhållandena i Skandinavien. Detta skapar förutsättningar för att diskutera hur modernitet kan belysas genom arkeologiska perspektiv på begravningsplatser och det gravskick som finns representerat på dessa platser.

Kapitlets huvuddel ägnas åt att definiera vad som kan uppfattas som begravningsplatsernas materialitet. Arkeologisk metodik och det källmaterial som genereras vid arkeologiska undersökningar, relateras till andra typer av källmaterial. Detta gäller inte minst skriftliga källor och kartor som tillkommit genom administrationen av begravningsplatserna. Inom den historisk-arkeologiska traditionen problematiseras relationer mellan olika källmaterial och dess utsagovärden. Det är en komplex process som ser olika ut för varje plats. Därför analyseras källförhållandena relaterade till Assistens kyrkogård. Detta gäller inte minst bevaringsförhållandena, den arkeologiska metodiken och dokumentationen, i förhållande till hur det skriftliga materialet tillkommit och strukturerats. Därigenom identifieras kontaktytor mellan de olika källmaterialen som i sin tur möjliggör mer sammanhängande tolkningar.

Kapitlet avslutas med en diskussion om etiska hänsynstaganden som bör göras när det gäller arbete med gravar från det nära förflutna.

## Att kontextualisera landskapet

I kapitlet diskuteras dialektiken mellan begravningsplatserna som platser och dess landskapliga kontext, samt relationerna mellan de döda kroppar som ständigt tillförs i förhållande till utvecklingen av begravningsplatserna. Relationerna mellan de levande och de avlidna omskapas genom förändringar i hur dessa platser utformas, administreras och förändras.

Från att ha varit administrerade av kyrkan, drivs allt fler begravningsplatser av offentliga institutioner. Assistens var exempelvis inledningsvis administrerad av de olika socknarna i Köpenhamn. Efter en tid, år 1880, tar kommunen över driften. Detta leder även till att den rumsliga utformningen blir allt mer reglerad, genom nya och mer rigida dokumentationssystem knutna till gravrätterna.

Vid samma tid försvinner de fortifikationsområden som fanns runt många av Europas större städer. Nya stadsdelar växer fram runt de tidigare fritt liggande begravningsplatserna. De blir inkorporerade i städerna och blir efterhand populära offentliga rum. Begravningsplatsernas innebörd förändras igen när det inte längre finns plats för fler gravar. De ersätts av andra typer av gravplatser. När den aktiva funktionen som begravningsplats försvinner, utvecklas de till rekreationsområden för de närliggande stadsdelarna och till historiska minnesmärken. De får mer karaktär av parker och besöksmål för turister.

I etableringsskedena kan invånarnas väg ut från stadsområdet till begravningsplatserna samtidigt uppfattas som metaforiska resor till efterlivet. Trots detta talar de arkeologiska spåren från picknics och andra aktiviteter, att dessa platser också var livliga utflyktsmål. Detta förstärker intrycket att Assistens kyrkogård redan från inledningsskedet var en integrerad del av Köpenhamn.

## Publika praktiker och åminnelse

Kapitlet belyser de synliga miljöerna på en begravningsplats. Fokus finns på gravrätter, gravstenar och utformningen av de gröna miljöerna på begravningsplatserna. Genom att studera detta, framkommer kronologiska förändringar och sociala skillnader i hur gravrätterna gestaltas, samt hur gravstenarna och inskriptionerna på dessa utformas.

Regler och sociala förväntningar skapar ett ramverk som begränsar de efterlevandes inflytande över själva utformningen av graven. Ett av de mest betydelsefulla ramverken är de förordningar och regleringar som är knutna till gravrätterna. Gravrätterna bildar utgångspunkter för gravarnas materiella utformning. Placering, storlek och utformning är statusuttryck. Själva gränsen markeras genom växtlighet, olika former av inhägnader och konstruktioner. Den materiella kulturen, dess placering, utformning och kvantitet används på detta sätt för att offentligt exponera relationer mellan avlidna och efterlevande. Men i gestaltningen finns även utrymme för uttryck av privat karaktär. Sambanden mellan materialiteten i jorden och utformningen på markytan belyses genom fyra fallstudier. Studierna visar att lämningarna efter äldre gravar påverkar utformningen av gravrätterna.

Gestaltningen av begravningsplatsernas påverkar besökarna. En kvinna minns hur hon på Skogskyrkogården i Stockholm, som barn tillsammans med sin mor, besökte systerns och faderns gravar. För flickan tog gravstenarna och träden gestalten av ett hus. Ett av rummen i denna fantasibyggnad hade en inskription med systerns namn. Den vuxna kvinnan betraktar minnet av leken som ett sätt att hantera sin och moderns sorg. Utformningen av begravningsplatserna skapar på detta sätt narrativ som formar relationerna till avlidna och efterlivet.

## Privata och professionella begravningspraktiker

Kapitlet fokuserar på vad som är ämnat att följa med till underjorden. Det berör hur den döda kroppen presenteras genom positionering, kläder och utsmyckning, samt kistan och dess utformning. Men kapitlet belyser även andra föremål som placerats i kistan.

Denna materialitet är skapad och vald för användas under begränsade men betydelsefulla tidpunkter före gravsättningen. Den är också ämnad att ses av olika grupper. Det är där och då det funnits möjlighet att deponera föremål i kistan. Efter det att kistan har stängts är endast exteriören synlig. Interiören blir en stängd sfär, och innehållet blir minnesbilder för de som deltagit i de ceremonier då den har varit öppen. Efter begravningen, när kistan är i jorden, blir även den förflyttad från den publika sfären.

Proceduren är resultat av efterlevandes beslut och de val som görs inom ramen för begravningsentreprenörernas yrkesutövning. Relationen mellan efterlevande och dessa yrkesgrupper är på detta sätt avgörande för gravskickets materiella utformning.

Denna interaktion förändras efterhand som begravningssektorn blir mer professionaliserad. De tjänster som erbjuds, bidrar till att de efterlevande inte längre har samma närvaro och roll i planering och utförande. Industrialisering och standardisering gav visserligen färre val, men öppnar upp en marknad för större sektorer av samhället. Allt bredare befolkningsgrupper fick på detta sätt möjlighet att köpa gravrätter och kunde förse dem med enklare gravstenar. De efterlevandes nya position i förhållande till begravningssektorn är att välja, betala och medverka vid specifika ritualer, snarare än att utföra och delta i hela processen.

Resultaten visar på en förändring från att ha utformat kistans inredning och positionerat kroppen för att gestalta "den eviga vilan", till att återspegla den avlidnes personlighet som levande. Förändringarna har på detta sätt sammantaget medfört ökade möjligheter att uttrycka de avlidnas individuella identiteter.

Det finns skillnader i gravskick som avspeglar rikedom och sociala normer. Modernitetens begravningsplatser skiljer sig inte från kyrkogårdar i detta avseende. På Assistens kyrkogård fanns det betydande skillnader i begravningspraktiker mellan de som begravts i dyra familjegravar och billiga linjegravar. Idealbilden av modernitetens begravningsplatser som mer jämställda, är inte överstämmande med hur den avlidne hanterades från dödstillfället till gravsättningen.

Materialitetens emotionella betydelse kan illustreras av ett rockslagsmärke (*pin*) som fanns i en av gravarna. Trots att föremålet var ämnat att följa med den döde till underjorden, trots att märket endast syntes under kort tid för en begränsad grupp människor, var det laddat med mening och innebörd. Märket bar ett politiskt budskap i en turbulent tid. Den döde begravdes med en symbol för dansk enighet mitt under den tyska ockupationen under andra världskriget.

## Att hantera de dödas långa efterliv

Efter att ha belyst de handlingar och praktiker som resulterar i själva begravningen, handlar detta kapitel om vad som händer med gravarna under tidsrymderna efter att gravsättningen ägt rum. Gravgrävarna upplöser de betydelsefulla gränserna mellan ovan och under mark. De beslutar om var gravarna ska placeras inom gravrätterna och kistans placering i gropen. Men genom grävningsarbetena hanterar de samtidigt lämningarna efter äldre gravar.

Begravningsplatsens föreskrifter ger visserligen gravgrävarna viss autonomi. Men det finns bevis för att de även utövade sitt yrke med en viss flexibilitet i förhållande till dessa regler. Detta relaterar till hur de hanterade bestämmelserna kring gravdjup. Det finns exempel på olagliga begravningar. I skriftliga källor och vid den arkeologiska undersökningen framkom bevis för att gravar har plundrats på föremål och värdefulla material.

Önskan om att placera många gravar i en begränsad yta krävde aktiv och direkt hantering av det som fanns i jorden. Mänskliga kvarlevor separerades och kistor bröts upp, trä från kistor återanvändes, och skelettdelar placerades i och runt intakta kistor. För att begravningsplatserna skulle fortsätta uppfattas som fridfulla och säkra viloplatser doldes de fysiska konsekvenserna av dessa handlingar.

Gravgrävarna ska uppfattas som medlare som överskrider gränsen mellan markyta och underjord. De kontrollerar och bevakar processen mellan döda och levande som gör det möjligt att hantera döden. Gravgrävarnas roll är att dölja det arbete de utför.

Detta motsatsförhållande mellan konkret fysisk hantering av de döda och stilla och vackra viloplatser är fångat i ett citat från Shakespeares pjäs Hamlet. Fast scenen

utspelar sig under en äldre tidsperiod, så kan budskapet högst påtagligt relateras till förhållandena på Assistens kyrkogård. Gravgrävarna skämtar om inkonsekvensen i sitt arbete, förklarar sig vara skapare av eviga och säkra gravar fast de samtidigt, precis som efterföljarna i Köpenhamn, bryter sönder äldre gravar efter för dem okända människor som inträtt den eviga vila de är satta att beskydda.

## Slutsatser – att materialisera modernitetens begravningsplatser

Det sista kapitlet innehåller en analyserande sammanfattning. I kapitlet problematiseras dialektiken mellan utformningen av begravningsplatserna ovan mark och den nedgrävda materialiteten, mellan de aktörer som är involverade i skapande och upprätthållandet av begravningspraktikerna och utformningen av begravningsplatserna.

Begravningsplatser som Assistens kyrkogård introducerades som nya och moderna i förhållande till innerstädernas kyrkogårdar. De var snarare innovationer som hade en förankring i sedan tidigare etablerade traditioner. Men vad som trots allt var nyheter i begravningspraktikerna och begravningsplatserna, blev ganska snart något som upplevdes både oförändrat och traditionellt. Hur människor hanterar relationer mellan liv och död har visats sig vara komplext, överlappande och beroende av många faktorer. Men begravningsplatserna är ett av de väsentliga fysiska rum där dessa relationer struktureras; det är här de utövas, påverkas och förändras. Tidigare forskning har visat på att döden osynliggjordes genom att de efterlevande inte längre deltog i hela processen från dödstillfälle till begravning. Men denna bild behöver kompletteras. Döden synliggjordes samtidigt genom att det skapades nya plattformar och roller, som inte formaliserades eller tillerkändes samma status som de äldre traditionerna.

Ett av de mer betydelsefulla metodiska perspektiven i denna avhandling är att betrakta och analysera gravrätterna som tredimensionella enheter. På detta sätt blir begravningsplatserna inte längre statiska, oföränderliga och kanske ointressanta rum. De blir aktiva och levande platser där det som äger rum synliggörs, vilket i sin tur bidrar till mer förståelse om människors sätt att hantera sorg och relationer till döden. Modernitetens begravningsplatser är knutna till uppfattningen om att de är utformade som måleriska landskap i syfte att lindra dödens fasor och för att försköna den fysiska nedbrytningen av de jordfästa kropparna. Begravningsplatserna är emellertid inte bara vackra landskap. I avhandlingen argumenteras det för att det är förknippat med rigida praktiker och mycket arbete för att upprätthålla de estetiska och etiska kvaliteterna. När väl kistorna gravsatts och jorden fyllts på, fungerar den

gröna markytan som ett förseglande skyddslager som det är socialt oacceptabelt att bryta. Avhandlingen avslutas med en betraktelse av Folmer Bendtsens målning *En begravelse* (avbildad på bokens framsida). Den illustrerar begravningsplatsens olika beståndsdelar; den involverar människor, det kringliggande samhället, själva begravningsplatsen och dess världar både över och under markytan. Detta är bara en av många händelser som äger rum på begravningsplatserna. De formar både våra relationer till döden och de platser som vi har för att hantera dessa.

# References

**Excavation report**

Anthony, S., Keenan, S., Winther Johannsen, J. & Jørkov, M. L. 2016. Assistens Kirkegård, Copenhagen. Archaeological Report No. KBM3830. Copenhagen: Museum of Copenhagen.

The excavation report should be referred to for further technical details, raw data and many more photographs. It is in English and is available to download from the Museum of Copenhagen, or from the author's Academia web page:

https://cphmuseum.kk.dk/artikel/nørrebro

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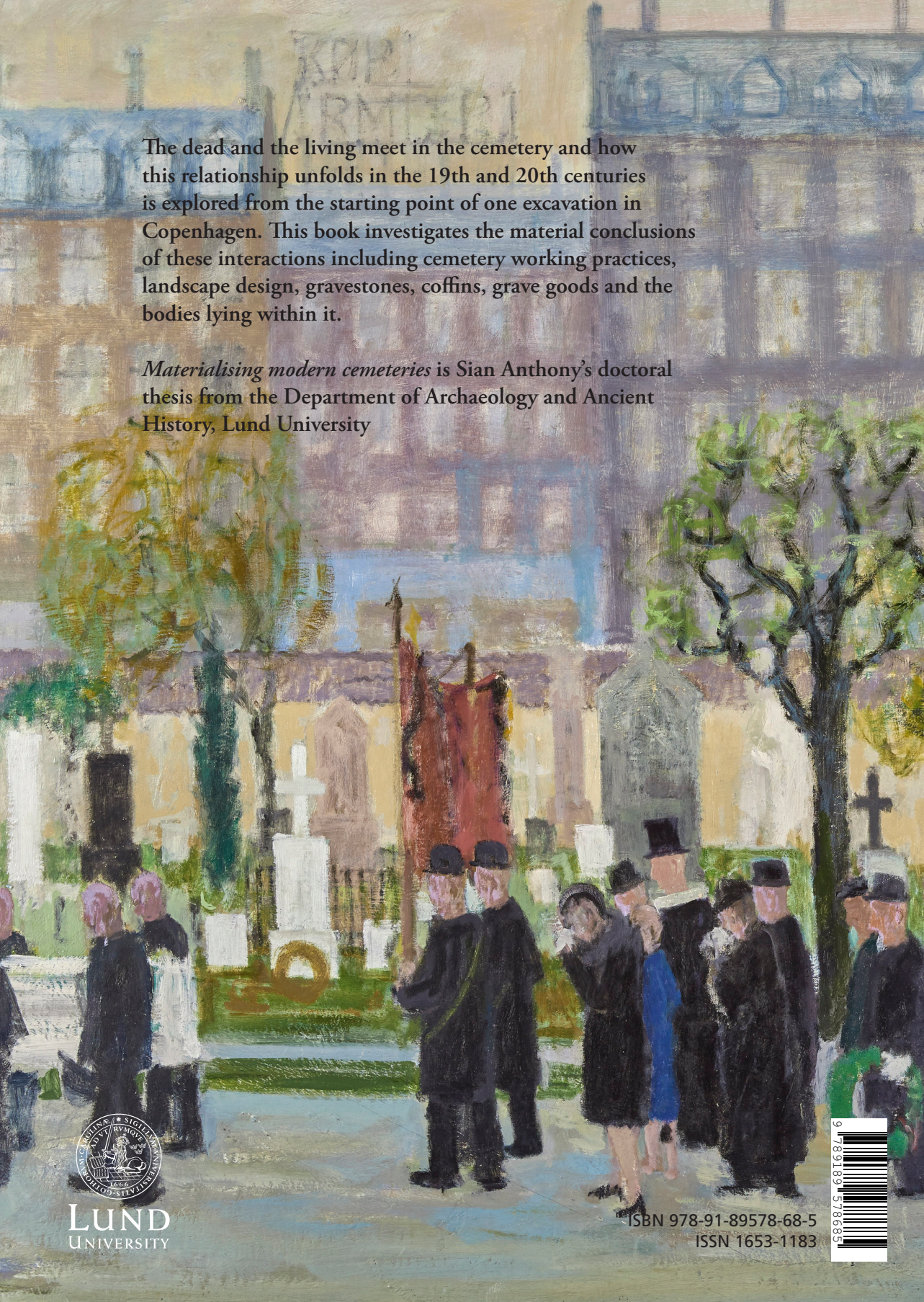

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The dead and the living meet in the cemetery and how
this relationship unfolds in the 19th and 20th centuries
is explored from the starting point of one excavation in
Copenhagen. This book investigates the material conclusions
of these interactions including cemetery working practices,
landscape design, gravestones, coffins, grave goods and the
bodies lying within it.

*Materialising modern cemeteries* is Sian Anthony's doctoral
thesis from the Department of Archaeology and Ancient
History, Lund University

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