

# MORTIFEROUS MUSE

*First Edition (Halloween 2022)*

When Headstones Go Wrong

*Not Quite Right*

Career Profile: **Spotlight**

**on the dissecting room**

Cemetery of  
the Month

**Last Rides: Patch**

**Club Biker Funerals**

***'The Muse prevents death'***

Mozart's Skull

**Bodies in the Wall**

**Poetry Series**

The Desecration of the Royal

Necropolis in France

**SAMHAIN AND DEATH**

THE EXTRAORDINARY AFTERLIFE OF **URSULA KEMP**

## Introducing Mortiferous Muse

The Dead Body as Subject Matter

Archaeology | History | Creative Writing | Halloween | Careers

Featuring: M.T. Bennett | Kathryn Berry | Gina Bond | Katherine Crouch | Lorraine Evans |

Michelle Fisher | Frank Raw

# A Note from the Editor

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*‘Mortiferous’ – deadly or fatal.*

*‘Muse’ – A person who is a source of inspiration.*

Hello!

Thank you so much for downloading a copy of *Mortiferous Muse* – and welcome to our first edition! I am delighted to bring you an online magazine where the dead body is subject matter. I have wanted to do this project for a long time and never really had the chance to start it, but I decided Halloween 2022 was the right time to get going.

I am an archaeology PhD candidate with a huge interest in the ethics associated with the display and retention of the human body. I have always been fascinated with the dead body as subject matter, and it is obvious from conversations with many people online that it’s not just me who finds the topic riveting.

I can’t wait for you to dive in and read about some fantastic subjects from an array of authors. We have poetry, career pieces, as well as essays on history and death practices. As the magazine grows, I hope to one day get articles down ‘on paper’ in a physical format – but for now, all our articles are free to download in the online magazine format.

Thanks so much,

Aoife ☠️ x

Aoife Sutton-Butler

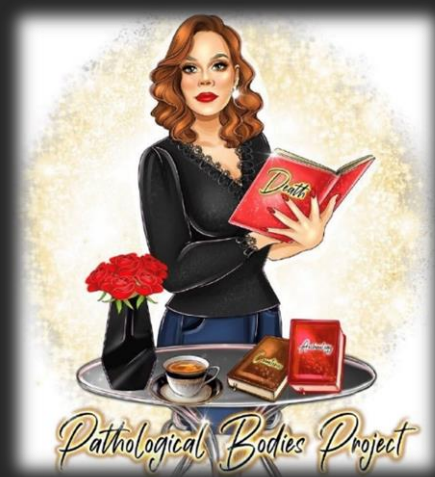
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**Content Warning (Death, dying and the dead body)**



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# *Not Quite Right: Headstones with something wrong*

By Frank Raw

You won't walk far in a churchyard before you find a headstone with something wrong. Place names, dates, spellings, even the date of the death. Were people sloppy in their work in the past? Or are we just being picky?

Well to be fair to the past, the spelling of place names and even people's names was fluid. You might see headstones side by side, for two generations of the same family, where the surname is spelled differently. The name of a town in the early 18th century might be different to the name we use today. Purely phonetic spellings might be dropped, or they might become fixed. There was no rule, but one spelling generally rose to the top of the pile and became the 'right' way to spell the word.

*'Headstones use many variants of DIED, DYED, DIE'D, DIETH, DYETH and so on. In my area the small town now called Heage can be found on some stones spelled that way or as Headge, the two versions being used interchangeably for a hundred years.'*

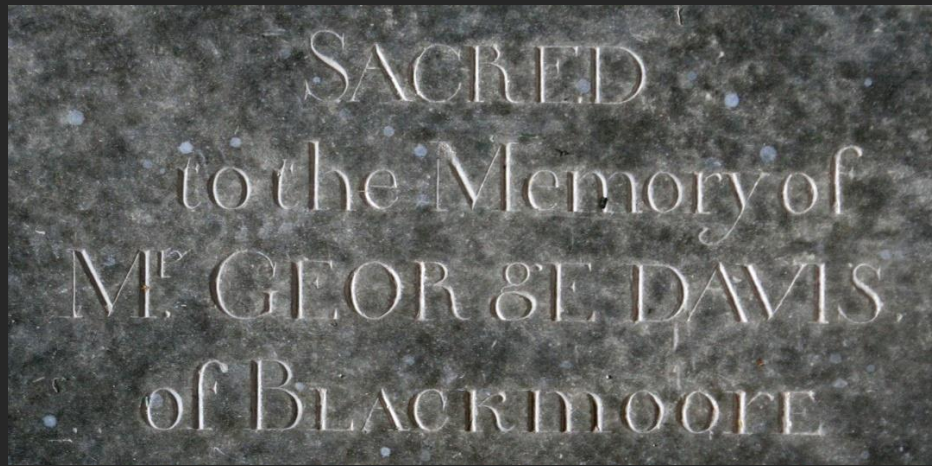


Sometimes though, the letter carver just got it wrong, and we can see the evidence. If an error was discovered, there were four main ways to try to deal with it (five if you include throwing away the stone and starting again - which we can't know about):

1. Overwrite it. Maybe a letter can be re-carved on the same spot so that the difference isn't too glaring
2. Chop it out, leaving a lowered surface and re-carve the letters or numbers in the depression
3. Chop it out and patch the surface with a piece of the same stone, then re-carve on top of the patch
4. Leave it alone. The customer is probably illiterate and will never notice.

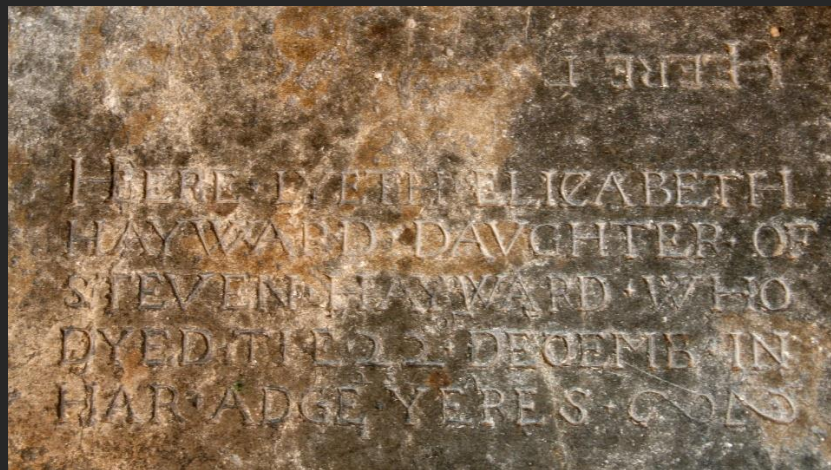
Here are some I've seen recently.





*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*

**Dore Abbey (above):** The use of random upper- and lower-case letters in GEORgE and BLACKmoorE. The letter carver may not have been very literate. The letters are all well-formed and the right way around, but use of case is, shall we say, inconsistent.



*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*

**St Peter, Oare, Kent (above):** A mixed bag here. Much of the spelling and lettering is good, but it also has ELIZABETH, but the Z used to be a C; DECEMB but the C was originally reversed, and the last part reads IN HAR ADGE YERES 2. The HAR may mean HER, or it may be an attempt at the name of the village, Oare. ADGE YARES seems to be AGE YEARS, but then comes a squiggle and a 2 on its side. Is that 2? 82? 28? and why is the 2 sideways? We will never know. But the carver also had a stab at the first word at the top right of the stone before turning it round and starting again.





**St Alkmund, Duffield, Derbyshire (left):** This young man departed this life in 1788. When the stone was first cut though, the year probably said something different.

An alternative explanation for some of the patched stones or recessed areas is that the stone chipped badly when the cutter was working and could not be reworked to disguise the break. This circular recess is less common than a rectangle just big enough to rework the error.

*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*

**All Saints, Bakewell and St Mary's, Astbury (below):** On the left, a stone with a slot reaching all the way to the edge. The slot may once have held a patch which did not stand the test of time. On the right is a patch which matches perfectly, neatly fills the hole, has stayed in place and again we will never know why it was put there.

So much for the successful concealment of errors or damage, which means we can't tell what happened and why the fix was carried out. But what of simple overwriting (over-carving), where a letter carver has just carved another letter or number on top?



*Photos: Courtesy of Frank Raw*

**All Saints, Bakewell and St Mary's, Astbury (next page):** On the left, a stone with a slot reaching all the way to the edge. The slot may once have held a patch which did not stand the test of time. On the right is a patch which matches perfectly, neatly fills the hole, has stayed in place and again we will never know why it was put there.



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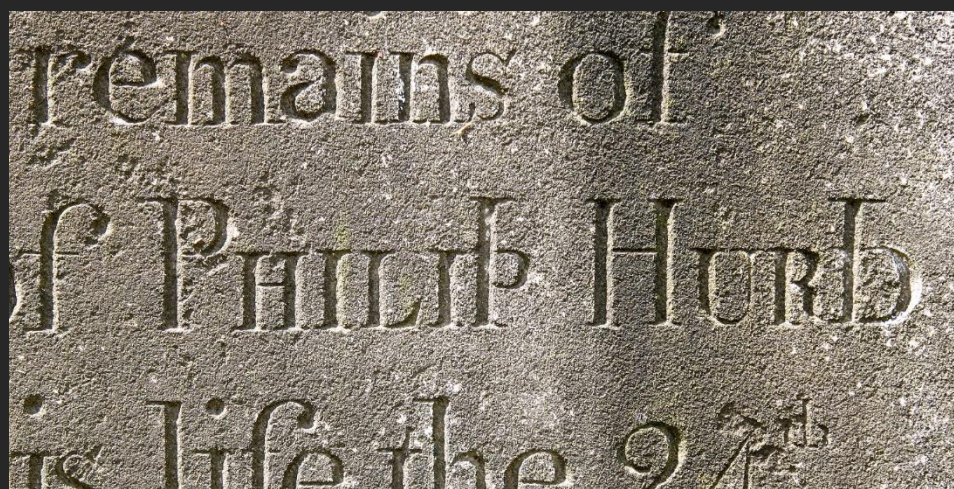


*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*

**St Peter, Ellastone, Derbyshire (Right):**

This one shows perhaps a lack of knowledge about letter forms in general. I don't know what strokes on these letters came first, you be the judge.

*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw.*



Two favourites now, the first from **St Chad, Longford, Derbyshire**. The daughter of Joseph and Jane Hill died on 26 July 1767. Her name? Ahhh. Not entirely sure. It might have been Elizabeth, or it might have been Hannah:



*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*



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*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*

The letter carver had a bad day at the office. I wonder if he was paid.

*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*



This one is from **St Giles, Matlock, Derbyshire**. In 1840 the wife of James Pearson died. We're not entirely sure of her first name either. It might have been Mary, or it might have been Ann. The stuff in the letters

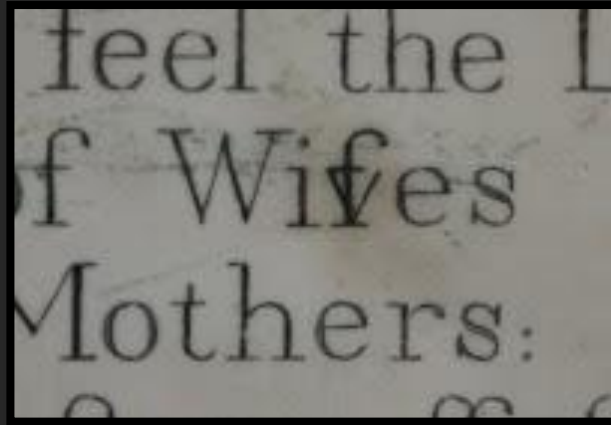
appears to be mortar as an attempt to fill the cuts of the first version, now partly eroded and partly covered by lichen: The thick stroke of the M seems to be filled, which would make that the 'wrong' name, which means the lady's name was probably Ann. I picture the grieving husband by the graveside as the stone is being erected... "Mary? Who the hell is Mary?"



Finally, two contrasting approaches. Leave it alone and hope nobody will notice? Or make the change and be certain that everyone will notice, put their finger on the guilty letter and draw attention to the error for ever more. Like the worn-out spot on a map which says "You Are Here" - people can't resist poking it with their finger.

This large and expensive memorial in **Worcester Cathedral (Next page)**, to the spouse of William Hall Esq, states that she was "the best of Wives"... I mean, "best of Wives"... better fix that. Pretty sure nobody will notice. Except for the thousands of people who noticed, put their grubby finger on the correction and left a grey smudge the size of half a crown. You can see it from 20 feet away. They should have left it alone and we wouldn't have noticed.





*Both Photos Courtesy of Frank Raw*

A wiser letter carver made an error on a stone at **St Edmund, Fenny Bentley, Derbyshire (below)**. The second word on the stone, right at the top, in full view. Fortunately, not the name of the deceased or any of the important details, so probably never noticed. I wonder how many people have looked at this stone and walked by, not seeing the error right in front of them. Fanny Turnbull. In 'LOVNIG' Remembrance:

*Photo: Courtesy of Frank Raw*



We all make mistakes; we just hope they don't hang around for hundreds of years to shame us.

### About Frank Raw:



Frank has worked in IT and as a silversmith but is now retired. Frank is happiest crawling round churchyards, looking at hand carved lettering, or carving lettering at home on limestone or slate.

Twitter: @poorfrankraw Website: [www.poorfrankraw.co.uk](http://www.poorfrankraw.co.uk)

## *Musa Vetat Mori – ‘The Muse prevents death’: Part of a line from Horace inscribed on Mozart’s skull*

By Michelle Fisher

From ancient times to modern museums, we as humans have been using remains as decorations, trophies, exhibits, study and collectors’ items. The urge to connect with ourselves, our cultural past and our present has led us to own, handle, see and display the human body throughout history.



Mozart began composing music at an age when most of us are still learning how to complete simple tasks. Given at age thirty-five he was stricken with a fatal illness that has never been conclusively diagnosed, maybe his introduction to music so young was a good thing. He would continue composing and playing until the very end, composing his own funeral anthem. He never finished the Requiem and in the delirium of his final hours he was observed inflating his cheeks to try and make the sounds of the kettledrums.

Mozart was buried in a common grave as was the custom in Vienna and like

most other graves of the time, his was cleared ten years later to make way for new bodies.

‘Fortunately, there was one person willing to save at least a part of Mozart from disposal.’





It is unclear who rescued Mozart's head. According to one story, it was the sexton at Vienna's St. Marx cemetery, where the composer was buried. The sexton is said to have been a music lover who had admired Mozart since childhood and had once been moved to tears by his work. When the composer's body was brought to the cemetery, the sexton made note of where it was buried, some believe he twisted a piece of wire around the corpse's neck to aid identification. When the plot was cleared in 1801, he saved Mozart's skull as a personal memento.

It is said that the sexton kept the skull until the end of his life and was then later passed on into the hands of another Viennese music lover, engraver and amateur musician Jakob Hyrtl. Jakob had been visiting the grave of his mother at St. Marx for years and had struck up a friendship with the sexton's successor who was nearing the end of his own life and was hoping to pass the skull onto someone who would appreciate it. The skull would pass to Jakob and then his brother Joseph in 1868 after his death. Joseph Hyrtl was one of the most popular anatomy teachers in all of Europe and a pioneer in anatomical preparations who had amassed a collection of skulls from around the world. When adding Mozart's skull to his specimens, he attached a red label that told the story of the sexton's rescue and his brother's prior ownership.

*Hyrtl may also have been the one to add the inscription on the skull's right temporal bone: "musa vetat mori," part of a line from Horace's Odes and translates as "the muse prevents death."*

In 1894 after Joseph's death the skull was briefly lost until a cranium said to be Mozart's was donated to the International Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg, Austria in 1902. The skull was now reduced to just a skullcap with the lower jaw and skull base missing.

Throughout the twentieth century, a succession of anatomists, anthropologists and other scientists have examined the skull to try and establish its authenticity, as well as to find clues to Mozart's untimely death. Every few years the skull was conclusively linked to that of Mozart, only for the tower of evidence constructed by one scientist to be eroded and dismantled by another. 118 causes of death were proposed from poisoning to heart disease.

In 2006, scientists hired by an Austrian television station sought to find out conclusively whether the skull belonged to Mozart by comparing DNA samples from the skull with bones, hair and teeth belonging to Mozart's dead relatives. The conclusion was published in a scientific paper with the words, "the dead took their secrets to the grave." The samples used for comparison were biologically unrelated to each other- let alone to the owner of the skull.

The skull remains with the Mozarteum having been removed from display in the 1950s. Visitors would weep at the sight of it whilst others would claim to hear faint music emanating from the bones- perhaps the final strains of the Requiem, lost forever inside Mozart's head.



### **About Michelle Fisher:**



Michelle Fisher is a teacher living in Oxfordshire in England. With a lifelong passion and interest in the paranormal Michelle created Haunted History Chronicles Podcast in October 2020 to combine and share some of her passions and connect with other like-minded individuals. Michelle has featured in Haunted Magazine and in Volume III of The Feminine Macabre created by Amanda Woomer.

Michelle's website is <https://www.podpage.com/haunted-history-chronicles/> where you can find a community of writings from different individuals as well as access to the podcast. Michelle can be found on Instagram at [instagram.com/haunted\\_history\\_chronicles](https://www.instagram.com/haunted_history_chronicles), twitter at <https://twitter.com/hauntedhistory4> and Facebook on <https://m.facebook.com/HauntedHistoryChronicles/>



# *Poem Series: Bodies in the Wall, Psychopath, Grand Creation, and Skull*

By M.T. Bennett

## ***Bodies in the Walls***

There are bodies in the walls  
Bodies hiding where they fall  
Slowly desiccating, secrets ruminating  
Silently they're waiting for terror of discovery.

There are horrors hiding near  
Just beneath the clean veneer  
Under the foundation, an abomination,  
Quiet mutation of cancer metastasizing quick

There are people that we've lost  
To the periphery they're tossed  
Slowly they are fading, memory degrading,  
Morphed into the shading of the shadows in the corner

There are fingers reaching through  
They reach for me and reach for you.  
Seek an abdication from affiliation  
Of souls held in damnation, searching to be seen and known.

Walk through life in ignorance,  
Try hard not to see,  
There are bodies in the walls  
Surrounding you and me.

## Behind the poem: Bodies in the Walls

In 2019 a small grocery store in Iowa discovered something terrifying while renovating. Behind the cooler walls there was the decayed body of a man. The man was an employee who went missing 10 years earlier. While working on a cooler he fell between the walls and became trapped. For a decade no one knew what macabre terror was mere inches from their ice cream. It highlights the nearness of death in our lives and how we ignore it and focus on mundane things instead. Just as thousands of grocery shoppers didn't know how close death was to them, we all go through our lives unaware of how close death is to us.



Graphic: Courtesy of M.T. Bennett



## *Psychopath*

I'm sick to my core  
Yet giddy and elated.

Disgusted  
Yet oddly resigned to what I've done.

I cut a man's heart from his chest yesterday.

No metaphor, no figure of speech.

I literally pulled his heart out of his body.

Some friends and I took a bone saw,  
Carved through his chest and opened his thorax.

We peeled out each gelatinous lung,  
And there, like the inside of a carefully cracked egg,  
Lay the vitellus secured by chalaza,  
the heart and its vessels.

With a sharp scalpel I severed the moorings  
(Arteries, fascia, and veins)

Then, with a slight squelch it was done.

This man's centre was gone

And clutched in my trembling hands.

My eyes were wide in wonder and awe,  
Yet I swallowed the rising bile back down.

I clasped it, turning it over for hours.  
Observing, inspecting, cradled in my palm

Till the heat from my hand  
Melted the cushion of fat and it

Drip

Drip  
Dripped  
Down my gloved wrist.

This...this isn't normal, right?  
This is what psychopaths do.

Last week, on the same supine man,  
I peeled the skin off each finger.

Frightened at my task,  
yet fascinated with what I found.

In a month I'll take a hacksaw  
And remove an entire leg.

Sawing straight up the sacrum,  
Then lateral over the Iliac Crest.

Shortly thereafter,  
another person will fall under my care,  
and I'll crack open their skull

I know all this  
Because last year I did the same  
With an old woman.  
Someone's mother, grandmother, sister...  
By some mistake I learned her name.  
I... I don't think I will ever forget it,  
Or ever share it.

I promise I'm not crazy.



I'm a student, a medical student,  
Right now, I hold scissors and rat-toothed tweezers,  
And spend time with the dead,  
Systematically pulling them to pieces.  
In a few short years  
Society and my patients  
Will trust me with their lives.  
Despite these atrocious anatomy activities.

One would argue though,  
That anyone who works so hard  
To put themselves through a hellish experience,  
Such as American medical school,  
Must be psycho,  
Or at least darkly masochistic.  
And sickly sadistic.

Are we sure this makes us more humane?

I get to the Gastrointestinal course  
And I unzip the belly with a scalpel  
And literally pull out someone's guts.  
I lay it on cookie baking sheets  
to help display structures.  
When finished I sequentially place the viscera  
Back into the empty abdomen  
With the motions and apathetic attitude  
Of one placing laundry back into a dresser drawer.

Pausing in horror,  
Transverse colon in hand,  
Halfway between cookie sheet and cadaver,  
I realized how callous and casual I'm being.  
When did I lose feeling and empathy?  
When did this "person" become an "object"?  
Isn't that how sociopaths  
And people with anti-social personality disorder  
View others?  
Objects?  
No feeling or emotion  
Just a cold detachment from the task at hand.  
Are we sure this is making us more qualified  
to be mankind's "healers"?

Over the weekend I opened dozens of body bags  
Examining, inspecting, and memorizing muscles.  
Formaldehyde preserves the body of the dead  
But it increases the appetite of the living.

I try not to think how I crave jerky and steak.  
This is insane!  
People don't just take other people  
And chop them up!  
I guess I'm grateful for the...  
Privilege?  
Is that the right word?  
Opportunity?

Gift?  
But honestly,  
The only people who cut up  
And dissect other human beings  
Are a select group of medical professionals...  
And sick psychotic degraded killers.  
Psychopaths.  
Sometimes I look around,  
At my peers, professors,  
And myself.  
I wonder,  
How wide is the space between  
Physician  
And  
Psychopath?  
We cut up bodies,  
The zealots hope others fail to increase the curve  
We compete to be the best.  
We spend more time with books than with people.  
We set aside family, happiness, and health.  
I know this is making me a more technically proficient physician.  
But is it making me a better Doctor?  
A kinder, more understanding, empathic, human?  
  
I guess that is up to me.



## *Skull*

A macabre symbol of death  
To frighten and cause horror.  
It lies beneath the friendly flesh of our faces  
The eternal grin leers reminding  
Memento mori.  
But for me  
What I see  
Is a masterpiece formed by Divine hands.  
A cathedral.  
Gothic, yes, but only in architectural style  
Of flying buttresses of the zygomatic arch,  
Dental crenelations decorate the smile  
The nasal cavity formed by maxilla and nasal bones  
Creates the characteristic pointed window,  
And bilateral temporal bones as fragile and translucent  
As stained glass.  
And like a fluted organ fills a sanctuary  
With holy music  
The skull carries a most wonderful organ  
The brain which fills our skull with beauty.  
  
A fascinating, nuanced container,  
The literal crowning piece of the body  
The Skull.

## About M.T. Bennet:



M.T. Bennett is a husband, father, student, and poet. His poetry and other writings have been featured in various publications and he is the author of "Dark and Bright: Poetry and Prose". He physically resides on our shared mortal plane and electronically resides on Twitter @BennettEmpty.

## Links

<https://www.joehaward.co.uk/post/the-murder-of-who-i-could-have-been-by-m-t-bennett>

<https://medium.com/@BennettEmpty>

[https://www.amazon.com/Dark-Bright-Poetry-M-T-Bennett/dp/1980752591/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=2WVWLGDC6GHDA&keywords=dark+and+bright+poetry+and+prose&qid=1665424268&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjYwIiwicXNhIjojMC4wMCIzInFzcCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&srefix=dark+and+bright+poetry+and+prose%2Caps%2C184&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Dark-Bright-Poetry-M-T-Bennett/dp/1980752591/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2WVWLGDC6GHDA&keywords=dark+and+bright+poetry+and+prose&qid=1665424268&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjYwIiwicXNhIjojMC4wMCIzInFzcCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&srefix=dark+and+bright+poetry+and+prose%2Caps%2C184&sr=8-1)

## *Cemetery of the Month: Cahir Quaker Burial Ground*



On a small country road outside the town of Cahir, Tipperary, is a small Quaker burial ground. The area was looking beautifully autumnal on my trip in early October. The cemetery, known as ‘Garranalive’ was found in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is the final resting place for 170 people of the Quaker faith – the burial ground was used up until the 1950’s. The site is reported to be the location of a Church associated with St Cummin dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The headstones are simple and uniform – there are also customary yew trees at the site.

*Images: Aoife Sutton-Butler*



# *Rituals and Last Rides: A Brief Analysis of Patch Club Biker Funerals*

By Kathryn Berry

This study aims to investigate the specific rituals of 1% biker funerals and to connect these rituals to the tribal nature of the biker community as well as to death theories.

This study will be both from an outsider and insider perspective as the writer is part of the biker fraternity as a full patch MCC (Motor Cycle Club) member – the MCC is a support group for a ‘1%’ MC (Motorcycle Club). A 1% patch club is a club that sets itself outside the ‘norm’, a group of bikers who, it could be argued, exist in the “liminal state” (van Gennep, 1988:11) between lawful and unlawful behaviour. These clubs can be both included and excluded from mainstream biker events, they are “betwixt and between” (Turner, 2011:95). Furthermore, to be a member, bikers, have to make a transition from their non-club life and undergo their own very specific “...postliminal rites (*rites of incorporation*)” (van Gennep, 1988:11) before being accepted into the ‘brotherhood’.



*Photo provided by Kathryn Berry: A custom built tribute to Sophie Lancaster. The bike is called Black Rose, S.O.P.H.I.E*

When a biker dies there are the same processes within any death – mourners, funeral arrangements, and various rituals. There can be, in certain cases, specific funeral rituals and practices connected to their status as a biker, especially in 1% clubs, where identity as a ‘biker’ is far more foregrounded to the individual and their lifestyle choices.

The main ritual is the ‘Last Ride’, where the ‘fallen’ biker is either taken in a hearse or, recently, in a coffin sidecar whilst surrounded by club members and other bikers. Traffic is stopped, police are informed, and it is a huge event reflecting hours of organisation and planning.

The public spectacle around 1% biker funerals could be said to reflect Walter’s views about “private experience [becoming] part of public discourse” (Walter, 1994:24). These events are performative and there is usually a compulsory attendance missive to all club members and invites to other clubs. They often become a ‘White Flag’ event, where traditional rivalries and geographical ‘turf’ boundaries are put aside to honour a ‘fallen rider’ – albeit still following specific club rankings in the ritual via riding positions and ‘pack’ placement during the ‘Last Ride’ journey.

These events do not hide death behind closed doors, they can be argued to “revive death, but in a transfigured form” (Walter, 1994:24). Moreover, the making of these funerals into a public spectacle also challenges the belief that “public rituals around death have withered and contracted” (Walter, 1994:24). The clubs encourage open involvement and almost create a “spectacle of death” (Bauman, 1992:136), challenging the “emphatic refusal” (Bauman, 1992:136) to acknowledge death shown by many at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Walter argues that “traditional death is rooted in community” (Walter, 1994:51), yet many of us “no longer live in the dense circle of kinship and community” (Walter, 1994:52). The argument is that the funerals of 1% bikers reflect their immersion in exactly that ‘kinship and community’ - reflected in the carefully organised and structured rituals, in particular ‘Last Rides’ and memorials.

The bonds created by membership to 1% patch clubs could reflect a reaction to the transient nature of society. To Bauman, the consistent focus on individualism in a ‘liquid society’ has led to “the brittleness and transience of bonds” (Bauman, 2000:170). The movement towards structure, rules and a sequence of codes and behaviours within these patch clubs implies a return to the ‘community’ ideology and a rejection of liquidity. They “serve to distinguish the true members from the outsiders, while providing comfort and identity to those on the inside” (Austin, 2009:71). This gives comfort as part of the mourning process; the group identity ensures a continuation of memory and involvement in something beyond an everyday life. However, failure to adhere to these codes leads to rejection from the group and, in essence, a ‘social death’ being banished from club life. Ironically, death in the terminal sense leaves members more involved in club life than the social death of club banishment.

The biker community often portrays links to death via its symbolism, in particular the skull, which is heavily featured in 1% club 'patches'. It "provides a constant reminder of the biker's – man's – own mortality [due to] the relative fragility of a man or woman on a bike" (Browne & Ambrosetti, 1993:260). Perhaps this seeming 'closeness' to death is a sign of the risk-taking nature of riding a motorbike. Furthermore, the foregrounding of the 'patch' could be seen as like an allegiance to a flag – and there are some similarities with military funerals where the flag plays a significant role. This "...totem constitutes a kind of powerful secret, binding the group together" (Davies, 2018:83) – akin to a patch club symbol, which only members of the club can wear upon their clothing. This connection could lie in the history of early bike clubs themselves, which in America were "returning WWII veterans" (Austin et al, 2010:943) seeking togetherness in a post-war society. These ordered bonds are seen today in patch club constitutions and in funeral rituals across the biking world.

After the 'Last Ride', the biker is commemorated within everyday club life. There are memorials – usually the 'cut' of the biker is displayed in the clubhouse (the 'cut' is the leather waistcoat displaying the club backpatch and badges showing the status of the biker in the club e.g., officer). This will be on display alongside photographs, comments and, of course, the club patch and motto - reflecting the desire to keep the memory of the 'fallen brother' alive. There are also memorial rides over the years that club members organise. These memorials and events could be argued to "avoid the possibility of oblivion" (Hallam & Hockey, 2001:4) as they act as a reminder to club members, old and new, about the bonds of membership in both life and death.

*'There is almost a mythical concept of eternity within biking - stories are passed on via the oral traditions of storytelling in clubhouses and rallies. Memorial rides, club displays and other memorials could ensure that the dead live on, almost in a new "communitas" (Turner, 2011:96).'*

Finally, for outsiders witnessing the ritual performance of the 'Last Ride' as well as for those members being a part of the ritual itself, there is a positive outcome; the sensory experience of engines, the seamless choreography of motorbikes and the display of colours can, if we believe Davies' interpretation of Hertz, "...turn the negative face of death into a positive image of some transcending reality" (Davies, 2018:19). This 'transcending reality' is one where the 'fallen brother' lives to forever 'ride free'.

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### **About Kathryn Berry:**



Kathryn Berry is a Doctoral Candidate in Death, Religion and Culture with a specific focus on Victorian rural death. A full-time secondary school teacher, a mum of five (mostly) grown up children and owned by a menagerie of rescued animals, Kathryn now lives in the rural Forest of Dean – which is a bit different from her origins in the Black Country.

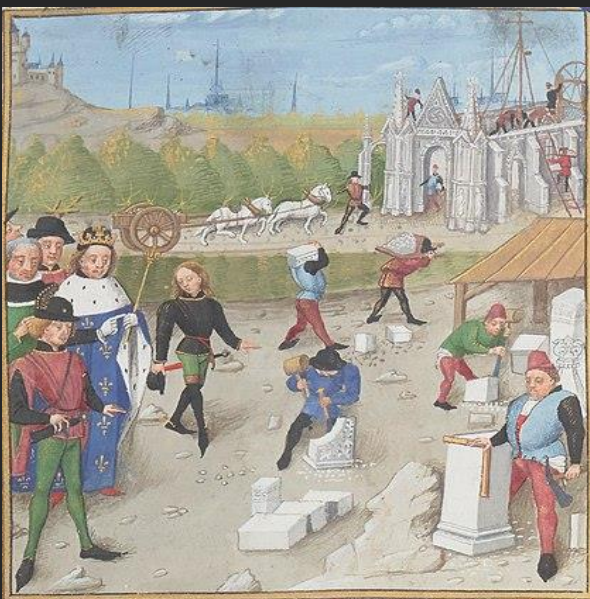
Kathryn likes to ride around on motorbikes, owns a Pinzgauer army truck and reads a ridiculous amount of books.

@Kathryn\_B\_Berry

# *The Desecration of the Royal Necropolis of France*

By Lorraine Evans

On the northern outskirts of Paris, approximately ten kilometres from the city centre, stands the ancient basilica of St. Denis. Built upon the grounds of an old Gallo-Roman cemetery, the basilica has traditionally housed the French royal necropolis since the time of the Franks, King Dagobert I became the first Frankish king to be buried within its confines in 639. Part of the Carolingian crypt was later officially consecrated in the year 775 by Charlemagne, the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The list of those once buried within resembles a Who's Who of French nobility and includes forty-six kings, such as Clovis I, and Francois the First, thirty-two queens, such as the likes of Catherine of Medici, together with sixty-three princes and princesses, ten nobles and an assortment of monks. Yet such regal designation held little reverence for members of the newly formed National Convention, for the year was 1793 and France was now officially a Republic, the last Bourbon monarchy being ousted the previous year. Under an ambitious enterprise entitled 'the Last Judgement of Kings,' the National Convention was hell-bent on destroying all traces of past monarchies. Consequently, the royal tombs at St Denis would feel the full force of this new regime.



*Dagobert I visiting the construction site of the Abbey of St. Denis (Painted in 1473)*

In celebration of the Republic's first anniversary, in July 1793 the National Convention issued a decree ordering the destruction of all signs of feudalism including both noble and royal tombs across France. It read: *"The tombs and mausoleums of the former kings, mounted in the Church of Saint Denis, in temples and in other places, across the entire Republic, will be destroyed on August 10<sup>th</sup>.* The desecration of St. Denis took place in two stages. Between the 6th and 8th of August a group of specially chosen labourers attacked the funerary monuments of the earlier Merovingian and Carolingian kings with hammers, smashing both stone and marble shrines to the ground and removing any surviving lead. What few human remains did exist, unsurprisingly most had turned to ash by this point, were thrown into a freshly dug pit sited by the now demolished Valois Chapel. The dismembered

remains of the Valois dynasty would follow suit, unceremoniously dumped into the open pit.



*Violation of the Tombs of St Denis by Hubert Robert*

The second stage of the destruction would commence two months later, on Monday 14th October, when under the watchful eye of skilled mason François-Joseph Scellier, several commissioners of the Convention and a throng of delegates from the Commission of Fine Arts, the Bourbon vault, which lay in the central part of the crypt was hammered opened. The first tomb the labourers targeted was that of Henri IV (1553-1610), and as they prized his coffin open the watching crowd gasped in astonishment, for his corpse was in a remarkable state of preservation. A plaster cast, i.e., the famous Death Mask of Henri IV, was hurriedly made from his face, after which his corpse was propped up in his coffin, placed in the crypt for protection over the weekend, before going on public display in the choir the following week. Responses to Henri's exhibited mummy were especially varied. The archaeological artist Alexandre Lenoir claimed: *"I had the pleasure of touching these venerable remains . . . I took his hands with a certain respect that I could not resist, as true a Republican as I am."* He also noted a soldier who embraced the corpse and cut a lock of the still-soft red beard. Others, however, turned violent with one woman allegedly approaching the displayed corpse and, cursing it as a royal, struck a blow that sent it crashing to the floor. Ultimately though Henri's remains were tossed into the second large open pit.

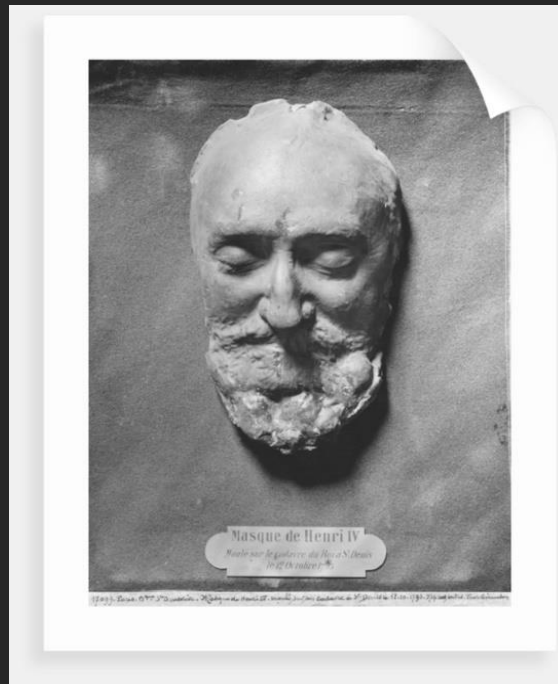




*The Lotting of the Church in 1793 by Friedrich Staffnick*

Henri's second wife, Marie de Medici, fared less well. Upon opening her leaded coffin, the labourers found only a few bones floating in a muddy coloured soup. According to eyewitness Henri-Martin Manteau, insults at the queen quickly followed as many believed she had murdered her husband. Some even pulled out the remaining tufts of hair still from her skull. The workmen then made their way over to the burial of Anne of Austria. In her casket they found a putrefied body wrapped in very thick and red fabric, the costume of the Third Order of Saint Francis. After that, it was the turn of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. In total a further nineteen lead coffins, encased in wood, were broken into that day with the remains of three generations of kings, including both hearts and entrails, flung into the open pit. Most cadavers were dismembered during the process with an eyewitness describing the scene thus: *"Most of the bodies were decaying. A foul-smelling, thick, black vapour was released, which they desperately tried to dispel with vinegar and powder that they had taken the precaution of burning, which did not prevent the workmen from feeling unwell and feverish but without consequences."* Although the Municipal Council of Franciade decided to close the Basilica to 'people not involved in the work,' this directive was largely ignored, with gathering crowds cursing and jeering as the royal remains were thrown into the grave pit. Predictably the odd souvenir was appropriated. For instance, Lenoir witnessed a soldier cut a lock of hair from the beard of King Henry IV, prominent journalist and member of the National Convention, Camille Desmoulins, appropriated Turenne's right little finger, whereas it is said that a certain Charles Brulay, the official Collector of Revenues, seized Dagobert's jaw, a section of Saint Louis' skull, the teeth of Henry III, Philippe Auguste's hair and the leg of Catherine de' Medici!





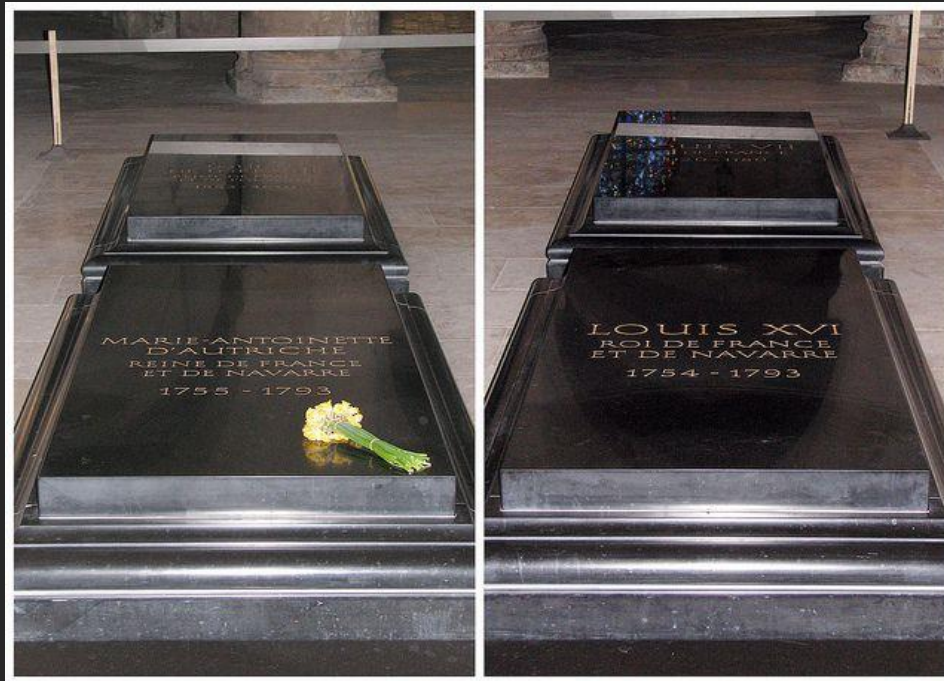
### *Death Mask of Henry IV*

Only one exhumed corpse was spared that day, that of Louis XIV's Supreme Commander, Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, Vimcomte de Turenne. Despite being of noble blood, Turenne was regarded as a hero by many Republicans, and he rapidly became a shining example of France's new Revolutionary force. As with King Henry IV, bystanders were astounded to find his skeletal remains were remarkably intact, with 'no accompanying smell of decay.' A rare illustration of his corpse, lying upon a decorated slab, does exist, drawn by the previously mentioned Alexandre Lenoir. Albeit somewhat stylised in nature, Turenne is depicted in a funeral shroud from the waist up, one would surmise to hide the fatal wound to his abdomen. Avoiding the finality of an open pit, Turenne was placed on display in a small sacristy within the confines of St Denis for eight months, before being reburied in the Elysian Gardens of the Museum of French Monuments. In 1800, the new First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, had the corpse moved once more, to its present location in the main floor of Louis XIV's Church of the Dome of the Invalides, republican France's Temple of Mars. He then ordered the coffin to be buried in front of Turenne's original monument, which had been transferred shortly before to the Invalides from Lenoir's Museum of French Monuments, where it had been deposited after its removal from St Denis.



*The Remains of Turenne Exhumed from his Tomb in 1793 by Alexandre Lenoir*

In total the skeletal remains of over one hundred and seventy individuals of royal and noble birth were thrown into two large mass grave pits, one for the Valois dynasty and the 'first races,' the second reserved for the Bourbon family, the latter dug into the monks' cemetery adjacent to the north of the basilica. Both pits were hurriedly covered in quick lime and soil, in the belief this would destroy all evidence of France's monarchical bloodlines. It was not to be. For in 1814 Louis XVIII ascended to the throne of France and the Bourbon monarchy was restored to its previous position. Aiming to restore the royal necropolis and basilica to its former self, the new king began the unenviable task of retrieving the remnants of his ancestors. Luckily, many the funerary monuments had already been preserved by the efforts of the Commission of Monuments, namely Dom Germain Poirier, a former Benedictine monk of Saint-Denis and Alexandre Lenoir who, in Paris in 1795, opened the "Musée National des Monuments Français" in order to display the numerous funerary sculptures saved from the basilica. To begin with, on the 21st of January 2015, the day of the anniversary of the death of Louis XVI, the king decided to transfer the remains of his brother, King Louis XVI, and that of Marie-Antoinette, from the cemetery of the Madeleine, for reburial within the confines of Saint-Denis, their tombs were covered with black marble slabs in 1975. He also returned the remains of Louis VII and Louise de Lorraine, the wife of Henri III.



*Final Resting Place of Louis XVI and Marie Antionette in St Denis*

Next, in 1817, after a week of intensive searching, and with a little assistance from the mason Francois Joseph Scellier who had witnessed the desecration, the remaining royal bloodlines were uncovered in the two mass graves, hidden within the adjacent monks' cemetery. Regrettably, due to the quick lime, none of the remains could be identified, all that had survived were the lower portions of three royal corpses, the rest were a jumble of bone fragments. After careful excavation all remains were removed from the grave pits and returned to the ancestral necropolis, deposited within two ossuary's sited in the crypt. Two marble plates now bear testament to the royal dynasties that lie within.

The story, however, does not end here as throughout the intervening years St Denis has been offering up many secrets in respect to the royal necropolis. The first true excavation of the site began in 1859, when architect and head restorer Violett le Duc began digging under the high altar. Here he found a series of previously unknown sarcophagi, their whereabouts sadly now unknown. Much later, between the years 1953 and 1976, archaeologists Édouard Salin and Michel Fleury carried out further excavations and found a further sixty tombs, including that of Queen Aregonde, daughter-in-law of Clovis I, who died between 580-590. Buried in a violet silk dress, she was identified by the insignia on her ring. Finally, in 2004, the mummified heart of the Dauphin, the boy who would have become Louis XVII, was verified by DNA testing, placed in a crystal vase and sealed into the wall of the crypt.

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## **About Lorraine Evans:**



Lorraine Evans is a professional Mortuary Archaeologist and Death Historian, specialising in non-conformist burial rites and practices, funerary architecture, and mortality symbolism. She is a successful author of several books, ranging from Ancient Egypt to the history of burials grounds, and has worked on countless historical projects and documentaries. A working committee member for the

International Institute for the Study of Egyptomania and Media Manager for the Journal of Wetland Archaeology, she is also currently a PhD Candidate at the IIPSGP and can be contacted via [www.lorraineevans.com](http://www.lorraineevans.com) or at [msbonecollector@gmail.com](mailto:msbonecollector@gmail.com)



# The world of the dissecting room technician: Career profile

By Gina Bond



## *Introduce yourself*

My name is Gina Bond and I currently work as a Specialist Technician in a dissecting room/anatomy lab at a University in Yorkshire. I have worked here for over 5 years now, after completing a BSc in Biology and an MSc in Human Osteology and Funerary Archaeology. It was during the MSc that I discovered cadaveric dissection and I fell in love with the opportunity for discovery.



## *Body donation in the UK*

Cadaveric dissection for teaching human anatomy has been around for hundreds of years.

Unfortunately, there have been many ethical issues over the years. The Human Tissue Authority was formed, mainly after the Alder Hey scandal, to regulate the use of human tissue in a variety of sectors. Today, the Human Tissue Act (2004) regulates our work (Anatomical education and training), as well as Organ transplantation, Post-mortems, Public Display and Research. The act, for us, covers consent, governance, traceability and premises, facilities, and equipment. This basically means, all donors must have appropriate consent in place before donating their body, audits must take place regularly alongside appropriate record keeping, all parts of all donors must be

trackable from start to finish and the areas in which the anatomical examination takes place must be safe, secure, and up to standards.

Nowadays, you can only donate your body if you fill out a consent form in life. Families can no longer consent on your behalf as with organ donation. The form must be witnessed, and you have the option to consent to the desired length of time within the facility, consent to imagery of your remains and consent to the transfer of your remains. Most donors will be with us anywhere between 1 and 2 years, but some of their remains may stay with us for revision purposes.

Our students will undertake a full dissection of all areas of the human body and will use a variety of resources to support their learning.

### ***Main duties***

My days and weeks vary depending on the time of year, but I have a set number of roles that I will undertake at some point over the course of the academic year.

- Processing donations - I will answer phone calls from the bereaved to start the donation and see if their relative is suitable. We will organise their collection and transport into the university with our contracted funeral director.
- Embalming - Once we receive the donor, a colleague and I will complete their embalming straight away. This consists of undressing the donor and shaving all bodily hair (for hygiene and anonymity purposes), raising their carotid artery, and injecting with our preservation fluid until full and then cleaning them.
- Creating prosections - The word prosection refers to “professional dissections” and are the specimens that are created by the staff in the lab. We will dissect various body parts to show structures, which are then available for students to revise from or for use in examinations.
- Maintaining the potted pathology collection - I look after our 3000-specimen strong collection of historical potted pathology specimens, collected from the

local hospitals since the 40s. This involves topping up fluid levels, replacing the pots and getting them used during the classes.

I also do a few other tasks like cleaning the lab, setting up and taking down classes, removing brains, helping with our annual memorial service, and supporting student societies.



### ***Favourite part of the job***

My favourite part of the job is probably the opportunity I get to see the intricacies of the human body. Most of us know the basic ins and outs of our anatomy, but it's only when you get hands on and see inside a real cadaver, that you can see the full process of disease or what maldevelopment means and how the human body can put up with a lot of things going wrong and will work out a way around it.

For example, we had a gentleman who had a heart with both a left and right superior vena cava. A persistent left superior vena cava is only found in around 0.3% of the population so it was a fantastic opportunity for the students, although it did confuse them a lot to start!

I also love watching the students get excited about anatomy. There is a lot to learn, and it can be quite overwhelming, but it's so wonderful watching something click and seeing them really enjoy their dissection classes as they start to piece it altogether.

### ***How to follow this career path***

Experience working with human remains is hard to come by so trying to find volunteering work may be difficult to start with. Put yourself out there, create a good presence on social media and make sure people are aware of your interests. Attending conferences is a great way to network and meet people in the field. I was lucky that Carla Valentine, of Bart's Pathology Museum, allowed me to shadow her because that has opened so many doors for me and I will be eternally grateful for the opportunity she gave me. I wouldn't be where I am now without her.

Also, although not necessary, getting a degree with some sort of anatomy component would be beneficial. Not all universities will expect their technicians to have university education but getting a background in the area allows you to hit the ground running.

### ***Socials***

Personal twitter - [georginab2610](#) and My labs twitter – [SheffAnatomy](#).

I also used to have a blog about Body Donation, which you can find at [thedonationdiaries.wordpress.com](http://thedonationdiaries.wordpress.com).



# Death and Samhain: Halloween traditions associated with the dead

By Aoife Sutton-Butler

Halloween owes much of its origins to the pagan festival called Samhain – the Gaelic holiday most often associated with Ireland and Scotland. Archaeological evidence can trace the celebration of Samhain all the way back to Neolithic Ireland. Samhain was traditionally celebrated the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> of October to mark the start of winter and the end of the harvest season. The festival falls about halfway between the autumn equinox and the winter solstice. The Church attempted to displace Samhain with the Christian celebration of saints. This was only partly successful, with bonfires, trick or treating, and pumpkin carving still carried out today.



However, Samhain also has a spiritual element associated with the dead. Samhain was the night of year when the veil between the living and the dead was at its thinnest. Some believed the sun entered the underworld for a time, and that demons, spirits, and ancestors could enter this world through a gate. With that in mind, it is no wonder the dead played a role in the celebrations and rituals of the festival. Halloween/ Samhain has often been compared with the Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos, which honours the departed.

*‘So, how do the dead play a role in Samhain? Besides the throwing of bones on bonfires and the ancient ritual sacrifice, the dead play a largely spiritual rather than tangible role in the celebrations.’*



## ***The carving of turnips to scare away the evil dead***

Before the arrival of pumpkins in Ireland, turnips (and sometimes potatoes) were the vegetable used for carving. But why did they carve faces into them? Did the dead have something to do with it? These carvings were meant to ward off any wandering or evil spirit that may be stumbling around given the thinness of the veil between this world and the next. One particular spirit tends to be associated with the 'jack-o-lantern', and that is Stingy Jack. In life, he was a blacksmith who was a mean drunk. Jack was thought to have tricked the devil himself, so he was both banned from heaven and hell – left to wander aimlessly between worlds. The lighting of the turnip was also thought to stem from the story that Jack was thrown an ember from hell by the devil (which Jack placed in a turnip) to light his way back to this world. Here again, we see the amalgamation of both pagan and Christian beliefs.

## ***The dumb supper***

The tradition of the dumb supper is also associated with Halloween. A dumb supper was held to celebrate and satiate the dearly departed in a family meal setting. A feast would be consumed by family members at the dinner table. They would leave an empty seat for their departed loved ones and invite them to join them. Again, given that the veil was meant to be thin, this was thought to have been the ideal time to extend the invitation. The dead would be updated by those at the dinner table on what had happened the previous year. Soul cakes were sometimes baked as part of the celebration – a simple biscuit – as an offering. Sometimes the supper would be conducted in silence – hence the 'dumb' in the name, in the hopes to hear the dead.

## ***Guising or mumming***

Why do trick or treaters dress up? Again, this is linked to the dead. Guising involved children dressing up as to disguise themselves from any vengeful spirit who may have returned to cause harm. Children were thought to be the most vulnerable, with adults fearing children would be a target of someone they crossed in life. Guising became trick or treating in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in America, particularly through the Irish who immigrated during the Great Potato Famine in the 1840s. So, when you are next dressing up as a witch, ghost, or vampire, remember the original reason for your fancy dress was the vengeful dead. The scarier the better!



## ***Today***

Today, many modern pagans, practicing wiccans or witches, still include the dead in their Samhain celebrations. Ancestral altars are often created, with photographs, and items belonging to the deceased family members. Libations and food offerings are also placed upon the altar in celebration.

Halloween is one of the biggest holidays celebrated every year – it is the dearly departed we owe for the establishment of such wonderful traditions.



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# The extraordinary afterlife of “Ursula Kemp”

By Katherine Crouch

*As Halloween approaches, settle down for a tale about witches, skeletons, curses, and a case of “mistaken” identity...*

In 1921, Charles Brooker—a builder in the Essex village of St Osyth—was digging for sand in the back garden of what is now 37 Mill Street when he happened upon the skeletal remains of two individuals lying side by side. Buried on an “unchristian” north-south axis and located outside the boundaries of the parish graveyard, it was not long before there were whispers in the village, likely initiated by Brooker himself, that he had unwittingly unearthed the bones of *witches*. There was, perhaps, good cause to proclaim the unusual find as such: the village had seen more than its fair share of [witchcraft accusations](#) as part of the [Essex Witch Trials](#); a dark chapter in the county’s history and a time when individuals found guilty of the crime would most typically be buried in local unconsecrated ground after execution (Brown 2014). The first set of remains, poorly preserved, were therefore widely agreed to belong to Elizabeth Bennett, while the second and more complete skeleton was thought to be that of the village’s most notorious witch of all: Ursula Kemp.

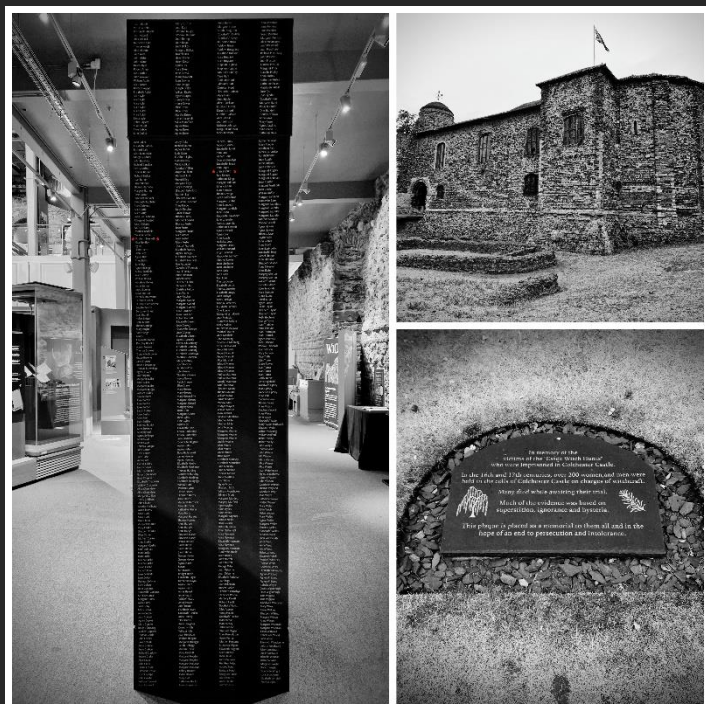
Ursula (or Ursley Kempe alias Grey, b. 1525) was an impoverished local woman who scraped together a living as a cunning woman and was called upon by her neighbours to heal ailments, attend births, and wet nurse infants (Worland 2012). In addition, she was believed to possess the ability to remove spells from those who thought they were the victim of black magic, but she also had a ready temper and her relations with many of her neighbours were strained, resulting in her acquiring a dubious reputation or a ‘naughty name’ (Howe 2014). When terrible misfortune repeatedly struck the village—including the death of a child falling from their cradle—the villagers looked to Ursula to blame (Callow 2018).

*“Take heed, Ursula, thou hast  
a naughty name.”*

She was imprisoned first in the Cage in St Osyth (the village lock-up, now part of a private residence, that possesses its [own extraordinary story](#)) and then [Colchester Castle](#) (St Osyth Museum, n.d., 1579 - St Osyth Witches and Witch Trials). She was tried for witchcraft in Chelmsford in February 1582 where she confessed, under duress, to having made a demonic pact and using familiars to kill and bring sickness to her neighbours (see Gibson 2005; see also Howe 2014). During trial proceedings, she implicated four other women after falsely being promised that she would be treated with leniency if she confessed, one of whom was Bennett. These women, in



turn, named a further nine women as witches, but it did not save Kemp and she was hanged, along with Bennett, that same year (Guiley 2008).



**Left:** The list of individuals executed as part of the Essex Witch Trials, displayed in the [Wicked Spirits](#) exhibition at Colchester Castle. The red stars denote the names of Ursula Kemp (the middle right column) and Elizabeth Bennett (the far left column). **Top right:** Colchester Castle, where Kemp, Bennett, and the other accused women were imprisoned. **Bottom right:** The memorial to the victims of the Essex Witch Trials situated directly opposite Colchester Castle and installed after [a campaign by John Worland](#).

*All photographs: Katherine Crouch.*

The discovery of the skeletons caused considerable excitement locally and the entrepreneurial Brooker capitalised on the intense public interest. He erected a wooden frame around the bones, with a grill and trapdoor on top, and surrounded the entire grave site with iron railings (Callow 2018). He then charged people sixpence a time to come and peer into the “witch pit”, marking the beginning of “Ursula’s” unexpected afterlife as an “object” of curiosity. The sight-seers were confronted with a grim spectacle: the remains bore iron spikes that had been driven through the knees and elbows. Iron is a metal traditionally associated with offering protection against witchcraft (Roud 2003), while the pinning of skeletons to the ground is a practice attested to archaeologically in “deviant burials”—meaning they “deviate” from what is considered the “norm” for that period, place, or burial population (Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow 2012)—as post-mortem protection against the returning or “walking” dead (see Murphy 2008). As if making “her” feelings known about this posthumous punishment, the detachment of “Ursula’s” jaw, a natural part of the decomposition process, nonetheless gave the impression that the skeleton was emitting ‘a silent scream that had gone unheard for centuries’ (Moore 2021). The striking appearance of the remains ensured, however, that these early [“dark tourists”](#) snapped up [Brooker’s postcards of the find](#) (CW: link displays image of human remains) which were available to purchase from the village post office as a souvenir of their visit (Wilkin 2016).



*Curious tourists gather to view the bones of “Ursula Kemp” in Charles Brooker’s garden. Source: reproduced with permission by John Worland.*

The money-making enterprise came to an abrupt halt in 1934, when Brooker’s cottage burnt down: an event that was quickly attributed to the “cursedness” of the witch bones (but which his grandson believed had been caused by Brooker accidentally knocking over an oil lamp whilst drinking) and which appeared to be corroborated after a firefighter fell into the “witch grave” while trying to bring the blaze under control (ibid.). After the fire was extinguished, the decision was taken to cover the remains, and the grave remained concealed from view until 1963, when Brooker’s son-in-law, John Scolding, redeveloped the plot (Worland 2012). In an interview with the [\*Clacton and Frinton Gazette\*](#), Brooker’s grandson, Paul Scolding, recalls that his father bought the plot from his grandfather, but ‘couldn’t get planning permission because Ursula Kemp was still buried there’ (Wilkin 2016). His father didn’t want to disinter the bones himself because ‘he was religious’ and so Paul was tasked with exhuming them once more (ibid.).





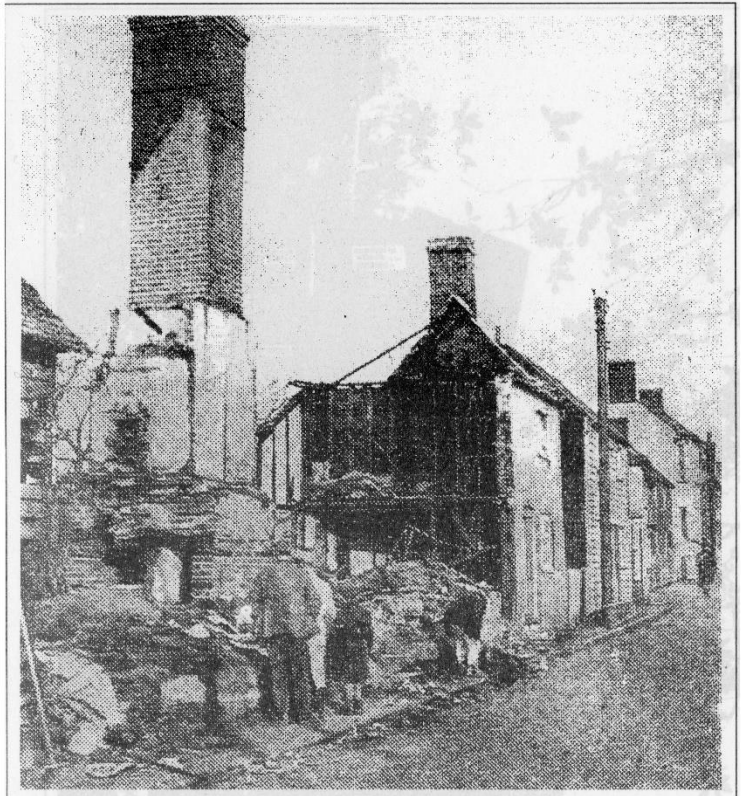
## FIRE AT ST. OSYTH

Four timbered cottages at St. Osyth were destroyed by fire early on Monday, and only the splendid service of the Clacton Fire Brigade saved other dwellings.

One of the destroyed buildings was known as the "Skeleton House," where were exhibited two iron-bound skeletons of witches. These were found in an old grave behind the cottage, and allowed to remain there.

Six families in the four cottages were able to escape. Mr. and Mrs. Brooker, three daughters, and a son rushed out in their night clothes just as the roof fell in. Mr. Brooker who first discovered the fire, was able to rouse the occupants of the other cottages. Mrs. Curtis, who is 85 and an invalid, was wrapped in blankets and carried from her bed by three men. Her room was then partly in flames.

The firemen obtained water from the tidal mill pool a quarter of a mile away.



**Left:** A report of the fire in St Osyth by the *Essex Newsman* (3 February 1934), but was it an accident or the “curse” of the bones? Source: [The British Newspaper Archive](#). **Right:** The ruined cottages in St Osyth. Source: Hendy 1993.

[Cecil Williamson](#) (18 September 1909 – 9 December 1999)—a screenwriter, editor and film director, a former spy for MI6, as well as the founder of the Museum of Witchcraft (now the [Museum of Witchcraft and Magic](#) in Boscastle, Cornwall)—heard of the find through the press attention it received and travelled to St Osyth to perform a televised exhumation of the skeleton, which was then added to the museum’s collection (Worland 2012). He paid £99 for the acquisition and promised to safeguard “Ursula” from exploitation (Wilkin 2016), although while he had a coffin made for the remains, lined with purple silk, they were placed on public display once more to the delight of visitors (Callow 2018). Yet Williamson—who practiced magic himself—developed a kinship with the skeleton in his care. He viewed “Ursula”, together with the skeletal remains of another “witch” in the collection, [Joan Wytte](#)—who died in Bodmin Jail under accusations of witchcraft in 1813 and was reburied in 1998 (Sayer 2017)—as “guardians” of the museum (Worland 2012). He stated to an interviewer that ‘I would never dream of going into the museum without having a chat to [Ursula]’ and writing elsewhere that ‘she lies snug and warm, and well cared for with a deal of affection from those who see and come to know her’ (Callow 2018).



*Image (left): The door of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle. Source: Ethan Doyle White, via [Wikimedia Commons](#) and licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.*

Yet, before his death in 1999, Williamson did begin to think about passing on custody of the bones. The Plymouth-based artist [Robert Lenkiewicz](#) (31 December 1941 – 5 August 2002) had visited the museum in the 1980s and took a keen interest in the remains and made several offers to purchase them, but they were all refused (ibid.). Shortly before Williamson's death, Lenkiewicz contacted him again and this time he agreed to the sale of the bones for an alleged figure in the region of £5,000 (ibid.). Lenkiewicz had a fascination for witchcraft and, at the time of his death, had amassed a personal library of 25,000 rare books, many of which

were on the occult. He displayed the skeleton in an open coffin as the centrepiece of his library, along with, quite extraordinarily, the embalmed body of a local homeless man he kept in a secret drawer (ibid.). It would appear, however, that the “curse” of the bones followed the St Osyth skeleton to Lenkiewicz's property: it is reported that windows would fly open, or jam shut, while alarms would be triggered for no apparent reason (Winsham 2018).

When Lenkiewicz died in 2002, heavily in debt, the St Osyth skeleton became tied up in the legal wrangles of his estate. At this time, John Worland—producer of a documentary film about the skeleton, [The Witch Who Wouldn't Stay Buried](#)—petitioned the trustees to release the bones for reburial in St. Osyth, where he felt they belonged, stating that ‘[W]hoever's skeleton it was, I felt they had spent far too long above ground and should be returned back to their resting place’ (Grant 2012). When the estate agreed and the remains were released into Worland's care, they were examined for the first time by an osteoarchaeologist—Wessex Archaeology's [Jacqueline McKinley](#)—prior to reburial. There had been speculation that the skeleton may have been unearthed from a pre-Christian, possibly Roman, burial ground, as a further three sets of remains were recovered from the site in 1966 (Worland 2012). Taken together with the alignment of the burials, their location in unconsecrated ground, and green staining to the bones in the area of “Ursula's” chest—presumed to



have been from a bronze object like a pendant (that disappeared shortly after the burial was uncovered because it was never mentioned in any of the coverage of the discovery)—the case for the bones being ancient seemed compelling.

Radiocarbon dating suggests, however, that the remains do belong to a 16th century resident of St Osyth and it would appear, therefore, that the remains represent an individual denied the sanctity of a Christian burial: a fate that befell unbaptised infants, non-Christians, strangers, those who died by suicide, criminals and, of course, witches (Tarlow 2011). Yet, it had been noted, not least by historian Professor Alison Rowlands (see Dwan 2007; University of Essex 2007), that the skeleton could belong to any of the ten women who were executed for witchcraft in St Osyth. Hendy (1993: 2) writes that evidence of execution for witchcraft was visible on the bones themselves, stating that they retained ‘traces of tar on the shoulder blades’, proving that the individual had been ‘subjected to the standard practice for witches of “dipping in tar” before hanging’. No such substance was found during McKinley’s analysis and furthermore, she revealed that the remains likely belonged to a male, in his early 20s, rather than a female in her mid-50s, as Ursula is presumed to have been at the time of her death (St Osyth Museum, n.d., 1921 - The Witches’ Skeletons). Most startlingly of all, however, was the revelation that the iron nails that had been driven into the skeleton were not of 16th century origin but were a later addition to the burial, put there for dramatic effect by Brooker to enhance the credibility of the witch narrative: a fact that was later corroborated by Paul Scolding who admitted that his grandfather had a proclivity for “embellishment” (Wilkin 2016).

*“Grandad put the nails there...  
he embellished things - that  
was Charlie Brooker.”*

The final resting place of Ursula Kemp therefore remains, for now at least, a mystery, while the St Osyth skeleton, whose identity is likely to remain forever unknown, was returned to the village in 2012 to be reburied. In co-operation with the parish council, a multi-denominational ceremony was held which was attended by both Pagan and Christian representatives, before the remains were interred, once again, on a north-south orientation in an unmarked plot in an unconsecrated corner of the graveyard (Winsham 2018). It marked the end of a story in which, fuelled by our cultural appetite for “witchy” and transgressive women, the remains of this individual were (ab)used, to varying degrees and purposes, for the benefit of the living. The unusual afterlife of this individual undoubtedly highlights changing attitudes towards the treatment of human remains and is a cautionary reminder about the ethical pitfalls of projecting our own preconceived ideas on to the remains of the dead. Yet, it also stands as testament to the value of the professional expertise of archaeology practitioners, as well as the hard work and dedication of John Worland in bringing

the truth to light and laying this individual to rest for, what is hoped to be, the final time.

Special thanks to John Worland for answering my questions about the discovery of Ursula Kemp. You can purchase a copy of his documentary about the remains [here](#).

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### **About Katherine Crouch:**

Katherine Crouch was awarded her PhD by the University of Manchester for a thesis on the emotive impact of excavating human remains on archaeology practitioners, furthering her fascination with the relationship between archaeology and the supernatural during her fieldwork. She tweets about all things deathly, uncanny, haunted, and cursed [@ KateCrouch](#) and micro-blogs on Instagram about folklore [@deathstiges](#).

## Write for the Magazine

*An online magazine dedicated to the dead body: Become a Mortiferous Muse*



*‘Mortiferous (adjective) – deadly or fatal’*

*‘A Muse (noun) – personified source of inspiration’*

### **Become a Mortiferous Muse and write for us.....**

I am delighted to open a call for article submissions for a new online magazine dedicated solely to the dead body. *Mortiferous Muse* will be accepting articles related to the following topics:

- The anatomical body
- The preserved body
- The archaeological body
- The body in the cemetery
- The body and grief
- The display of the dead body

Subject matter can relate to historical practices, archaeological human remains, the gothic, funerary practices, and death studies – submission topics are quite broad! Pieces can be fiction or non-fiction. The magazine will be realised in an online format. Submission criteria includes:

- Articles are to be no more than 1500 words.
- Articles can be opinion pieces, research works, career profiles, fiction etc.
- Article sources must be compiled in a bibliography (any referencing style).
- Image sources must be listed.
- Articles must be accessible to a wider audience – i.e., language.



Ideally, submissions should need minimal editing and have a lot of imaging as to fit with the magazine format. If you would like to include any artwork or logos, you are more than welcome to do so. I will format the pieces as I feel best suits the aesthetic of the publication.

*Mortiferous Muse* is a 'death positive' publication with emphasis on the dead body as subject matter. Aesthetically gothic and dark centric, the zine will be accessible to wider audiences who are interested in morbidity, death, and the human body. The magazine will be free for download.

Submissions for the next issue will be open until February, with a release date expected to be in March 2023.

Submissions and enquiries can be sent to Aoife at [mortiferousmuse@gmail.com](mailto:mortiferousmuse@gmail.com) with the subject line MUSE.



## End of Issue

