



Historic Cemetery Documentation and Mortuary Art

The Gravestone Girls' mission is to "Keep Our Dead Alive!" We create decorative artwork using the beautiful and primitive images carved on olde New England gravestones; give lectures on cemetery art, history and symbolism as well as teach gravestone rubbing classes! Our work aims to entertain and educate on the historical perspective of old cemeteries by documenting and preserving the beautiful art they contain.

To produce our three-dimensional art pieces, we perfected a casting technique which exactly replicated the original gravestone carving. The creations in our collection are derived from 17th-21st century gravestones found in cemeteries throughout the New England region. All our pieces are hand-formed and finished in a process we specifically developed. It's important to note that no stones are ever harmed by our techniques—preservation is our primary concern!

Artwork by The Gravestone Girls is used to decorate the home and garden, provide a resource for historical education and fundraising as well as assist people in the genealogical documentation of their ancestral gravestones. Wall hangings, jewelry, magnets, clocks and other interior and exterior pieces are the result of our artistic endeavors. We regularly make our craft available to families desiring a memento from a sacred resting place. We also develop collections of important images related to a town's history to be used as a method to raise money for cemetery restoration projects, fund other historical related projects and help support a group's future activities.

History lessons are a Gravestone Girls' specialty! We regularly deliver lectures on the art, history and symbolism of gravestones and the evolution of cemeteries from the 17th century through modern day. Our programs are tailored to the town, group or organization we are speaking to; and a thorough examination of local burial grounds is conducted prior to the event. Photographs are collected from our exploration and used to build a comprehensive ninety minute presentation.

We would be honored by the opportunity to develop a special commission piece of your family's historic gravestone, present a lecture to an organization you are involved with or participate in another aspect of your local history! Feel free to inquire!

The Gravestone Girls endeavor to help preserve a rich folk art tradition unique to our nation. We hope you are intrigued enough by our activities to investigate and expand on the special history which lives in everyone's backyards.

Brenda Sullivan, Maggie White & Melissa Anderson

The Gravestone Girls - Putting the 'Rave' Back in Grave!

16 Schussler Road
Website: GravestoneGirls.com

Worcester, Massachusetts 01609
Facebook: [The Gravestone Girls](https://www.facebook.com/TheGravestoneGirls)

t. 508.212.3162
Email: [The Girls @GravestoneGirls.com](mailto:TheGirls@GravestoneGirls.com)

SYMBOLS ON GRAVESTONES AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS

Collection from Barbara Rotundo, Laurel Gabel, Francis Duval

ANIMALS

Ant-Christian industry
Bats (rare)-the underworld
Bee-resurrection; risen Christ; chastity
Birds-souls
Birds, flying-flight of the soul back to God
Butterfly-resurrection; Christian metamorphosis
Chrysalis-Christian metamorphosis; resurrection
Cock-vigilance; St. Peter
Descending dove-holy ghost
Dove-peace; innocence; purity (7 doves-holy spirit); messenger of God carrying soul to heaven
Eagle-fierceness; ascension; the heavenly conveyor, national emblem of the United States; the military professional, Civil War casualties
Eagle, winged-St. John, the Evangelist
Egg-regeneration
Fish-Christ; plentifulness
Fox-cruelty; cunning
Frog-resurrection
Hart-the faithful thirsting for God
Lamb-Christ; Redeemer; meekness; sacrifice; child; innocence; most common 19th century child's marker
Lamb with banner-resurrection
Lion-strength; courage, royalty; power; guardian; fallen hero
Lion, winged-St. Mark the Evangelist
Ox, winged-St. Luke the Evangelist
Peacock-immortality; eternity; resurrection; incorruptibility of the flesh
Pelican-feeds young with own blood; redemption through Christ
Phoenix-immortality; baptism
Ram-sacrifice
Rooster-the awakening from the fall from grace; repentance
Sheep & goats-Christians and non-believers
Serpent-symbol of death
Snake-sin; Satan; fall of man
Snake, hooped-eternity
Snake with tail in mouth-eternity; unity
Sphinx-lion represents strength and protection; used to guard entrances
Squirrel-Christian forethought; spiritual striving
Stag-same as hart

FIGURES

Angel-messenger between God & man; guide
Angel, flying-rebirth; guardian angel
Angel, trumpeting-call to the resurrection
Angel, weeping-grief
Breasts-the Divine, nourishing fluid of the soul (17th century); the church; the ministry; the nourishment of the soul
Child, sleeping-Victorian death motif
Death's head, winged-mortality

Effigies-the soul
Effigies, crowned-personal reward of righteousness
Effigies, winged-the flight of the soul
Father Time-mortality, the grim reaper
Four, Evangelists-Matthew, winged man; Mark, winged lion; Luke, winged ox; John, winged eagle
Hand of God, pointing downward-mortality, sudden death
Hand of God, pointing upward-the reward of the righteous; confirmation of life after death
Hands-devotion, prayer
Handshakes-farewell to earthly existence
Hands clasped-in death as in life, the devotion of these two is not destroyed
Imps-figures, some winged, some not, doing funeral related tasks; mortality
Man, winged-St. Matthew the Evangelist
Trumpeters-heralds of the resurrection
Woman, weeping-mourning; recalls myth of Niobe, whom the gods turned to stone as she wept for her slain children

LATIN PHRASES

Fugit hora-"hours are fleeting"; "time flies"
IHS-monogram or symbol representing the Greek contraction of "Jesus"; sometimes regarded as an abbreviation of the Latin phrase meaning "Jesus, Savior of Men"
INRI-often seen on a banner of latin cross; "Jesus Nazareus Rex Iudaeorum", Latin for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (John 12:19-22)
Memento mori-"remember death"
Tempus erat-"time is gone"; "time has run out"
XP-Chi Rho-first two Greek letters of the word "Christ"

THINGS

Alpha & Omega-first and last letters of the Greek alphabet symbolizing the beginning & end of all things; see Revelation 22:13
Anchor-hope, life eternal; may signify seafaring profession
Anvil-martyrdom
Arch-triumph, victory in death
Ark-church; salvation
Ark of Noah (rare)-refuge, salvation
Armor-protection from evil
Arrow-martyrdom, mortality
Arrow, quiver-of-warlike
Banner-victory; triumph
Battle-axe-martyrdom
Bells-call to worship
Bibles-resurrection through the scripture; the clergy
Book-Bible; wisdom
Books, stacked-knowledge
Branch, severed-mortality

Candle flame-life
 Candlestick-Christ; devotion
 Celtic cross-circle on it symbolizes eternity
 Circle-eternity; or earth
 Clock (rare)-passage of time, mortality
 Clouds-the divine abode
 Coats of arms and crests-lineage, status
 Coffins-mortality
 Column, broken-sorrow; broken life
 Columns, doors-heavenly entrance
 Crescent moon-Virgin
 Cross-salvation
 Cross with rays of rising sun-glory
 Cross with winding sheet-descent from cross
 Crown-reward of faithful, victory, triumph, glory; righteousness; resurrection
 Crown on cross-sovereignty of Christ
 Crozier-bishop
 Cup-Eucharist
 Darts-mortality, dart of death
 Drapery over anything-sorrow; mourning
 Field artillery (rare)-the military profession
 Finger-pointing to heaven
 Flame-eternity
 Fleur-de-lis-Virgin; Trinity
 Flyfoot-swastika
 Garlands-victory in death
 Gate-death of departure from life; entrance to heaven
 Globe, winged-disk is symbolic of Creator; wings represent "God over all"
 Harp or lyre-heavenly music; joy; associated with David and the Psalms, St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians, poets and poetry, is the emblem of Ireland
 Heart-charity; the soul in bliss, the abode of the soul; love of Christ
 Heart with anchor & cross-faith, hope & charity
 Horns-resurrection
 Hourglass, winged-swift passage in earthly time
 Incense-worship; prayer; adoration
 Keys, crossed-St. Peter;
 Ladder-Passion; Jacob; aspiration
 Lamp-Word of God; truth; knowledge, good works
 Lance-martyrdom
 Muskets (rare)-military profession, a professional huntsman
 Nimbus-circle or disk around arms of cross; crown of thorns; eternity
 Orbs, as celestial bodies-the reward of the resurrection
 Orbs, as effigies-the soul
 Pallbearers-mortality
 Palls-mortality
 Picks and shovels-mortality
 Portals-passageways to the eternal journey
 Portraits-stylized likenesses of the deceased
 Pyramid-symbolic of death
 Rock-steadfastness of Christ; stability
 Rosary-devotion to Mary

Scythe-time, the divine harvest
 Shell-pilgrimage; baptism of Christ
 Shell, scallop-pilgrim; pilgrim's journey, resurrection
 Ship-the Church
 Ships' profiles-the seafaring profession
 Shrine-wisdom, knowledge
 Skeletons-mortality, Death
 Skull-death; sin
 Skull, winged-flight of the soul from mortal man
 Skulls and crossbones-mortality
 Star-birth; life; Christ
 Star, five pointed-Star of Bethlehem; star of Jacob; divine guidance and protection
 Star, six pointed-the Father, Creation, heavenly wisdom
 Sun-God or Son
 Sun, setting-death
 Sun, rising-resurrection; renewed life
 Suns, moons and stars-the reward of the resurrection
 Sword-martyrdom; courage; warfare
 Swords, crossed-high ranking military person
 Three points, three leaves, three of any thing-Trinity
 Tombs-mortality
 Torch-zeal; enlightenment
 Torch, inverted-extinction of life; death; mourning
 Torch, upright-immortality, liberty, upright life, the scholastic world, the betrayal of Christ
 Trumpet-day of Judgment; resurrection
 Urn-soul; mortality
 Urn, draped-death, sorrow
 Winged wheel-holy spirit
 Yoke-burden-bearing; service; patience

TREES AND PLANTS

Almond-favor from God; Virgin birth
 Apple-sin; Eve
 Bellflower-gratitude
 Bouquets-condolences, grief
 Buds-renewal of life
 Cedar-strong faith; length of days; success
 Cypress-sorrow; death; eternal life, Roman symbol for mourning
 Easter lily-modern flower symbolic of resurrection
 Evergreens-immortality
 Flower-brevity of earthly existence, sorrow; certain flowers may symbolize emotions, particular aspirations, attitudes, both religious and secular
 Flower, broken-premature death
 Fruit-eternal plenty
 Fruit and vine-Jesus Christ; the Christian church
 Gourds-the coming to be and passing away of all earthly matters
 Ivy-abiding memory, friendship, fidelity
 Laurel-victory, triumph, glory
 Lily, lilies-resurrection, purity

Lotus-Egyptian water lily and ornament
 Oak-supernatural power and strength; eternity
 Olive-peace; healing faith
 Palm-spiritual victory over death; martyrdom;
 reward of the righteous; peace; a plant
 whose leaves resemble a hand
 Pineapple-hospitality
 Pomegranate-immortality; resurrection; unity;
 nourishment of the soul
 Poppy-symbolic of sleep, therefore, death
 Roses-condolence, sorrow; the brevity of
 earthly existence; of English descent-
 the Tudor rose
 Sheaves of wheat-time, the divine harvest
 Strawberry-righteousness; humility
 Thistle-of Scottish descent; the inevitability
 of death, remembrance
 Tree-faith; life; the Tree of Life
 Tree, felled-mortality
 Tree trunk, broken-premature death
 Vine-Christian church; Christ; wine, the
 symbolic blood of Jesus; the sacraments
 Wheat sheaves-the divine harvest
 Willow, weeping-grief; death (carried at Ma-
 sonic funerals); earthly sorrow, the
 symbolic tree of human sadness; Na-
 ture's lament
 Wreath-victory in death, indestructible
 crown worn by triumphant Christian;
 eternity
 Wreath worn by skull-victory of death over
 life
 Yew-immortality

Passed on to you by
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 www.GravestoneGirls.com
 FACEBOOK: The Gravestone
 Girls