

## **SOME COMMON SYMBOLS FOUND IN 17th and 18th-CENTURY BURYING GROUNDS**

(The expanded symbolism of 19th and 20th-century cemeteries is not covered here.)

- Anchor - Christian symbol of hope, strong faith, steadfastness
- Angels - symbolic messengers between God and man
- Arrows - darts of death, mortality
- Bird - the soul, flight of the soul
- Bones/crossed bones - death, mortality, finality
- Broken branch, tree, column, or cross - a life cut short; death; mourning
- Candle - human life, spiritual life, time; the candle flame is often seen as the breath of life and when snuffed, the act of dying, death
- Circle - no beginning, no end; eternity; resurrection
- Clock - passage of time, mortality
- Clouds - divine abode; with hand emerging from clouds, the hand of God
- Coffin - symbol of death, mortality, finality
- Compass and square - fraternal emblem of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons
- Crown - triumph over death; the crown of immortality is the reward of faithful Christians; righteousness, resurrection
- Death's head or skull - death, mortality
- Dove - Holy Spirit, soul at peace
- Father Time - personification of death, mortality; the grim reaper
- Flame - life, breath
- Flowers - life, cycle of life/death
- Flyfoot or swastika - an ancient form of the cross; life, good fortune
- Frieze panel - sculpted or carved band of decoration, usually between the tympanum and the inscription tablet on 18th-century gravestones.
- Fruit - eternal plenty
- Geometric designs - pinwheels, rosettes, or concentric circle disks were often used as artistic space fillers, often with little apparent symbolic intent
- Gourd - like the pomegranate, a symbol of life, renewal; with its many seeds gathered in a protective skin, the pomegranate is also sometimes compared to Christ's church
- Grapes, grapevines - Christ, the spiritual sustenance of the church; the promise of abundance in the next life
- Heart - life; love
- Horn, trumpet - the voice of God; call to the Last Judgment
- Hourglass - death, the end of time on earth (and when turned over, a symbol of rebirth, a new beginning, resurrection); winged hourglass has long been used as a message of man's fleeting time on earth, the uncertainty of our mortal future
- Moon - rebirth, afterlife; sun, moon and stars are seen together as heavenly bodies
- Pall - cloth drape or cover carried over the coffin
- Palm - spiritual victory; heavenly reward; eternal peace
- Peacock - resurrection

Pelican - sacrifice, redemption through Christ  
 Pick, shovel, spade, coffin, pall - symbols of death, burial, man's mortality  
 Pomegranate - renewal; symbol of Christian church  
 Poppy - death; eternal sleep  
 Portal, arch, doorway - transition from one place to another, entry to another world, heaven  
 Pulpit - on gravestones of ministers, preachers  
 Rising/setting sun - death/resurrection  
 Rose - love that transcends death, reverence toward the dead  
 Rooster - ushers in the new day; victory over darkness, rebirth, resurrection; repentance  
 Scythe - used to cut down or reap; tool of the grim reaper, Death  
 Shell - a journey, particularly a pilgrim's journey (St. James); Christian faith  
 Skeleton - symbol of death, reminder that all must die  
 Skull - symbol of death, mortality  
 Snake or serpent - the snake is often associated with death, but a snake with its tail in its mouth (uroborus) is the symbol of eternity  
 Star - spiritual light, divine guidance; birth/rebirth; Star of David = Jewish symbol of divine protection  
 Sun - life, life cycle; sun, moon and stars are seen together as heavenly bodies  
 Sword - military involvement; also as part of coat of arms  
 Tipped basket - end of life  
 Thistle - emblem of Scotland, scottish heritage  
 Tree (or branches) - life  
 Tulip - life  
 Urn - classical symbol associated with death; draped urn is traditional symbol of sorrow, mourning  
 Vine - symbolic of Christian faith, the Church; Christ and his followers ("I am the vine, ye are the branches....")  
 Weeping willows - mourning, grief, sorrow  
 Wreath - victory, honor; eternal love

