



**DERRY**  
CITY COUNCIL

# A Visitors Guide

to Derry City Cemetery

# Introduction

A visitor to Derry City Cemetery will find the history of Derry~Londonderry all around them – literally written in stone.

This guide provides a brief history of the cemetery and information on some of its more interesting features and on some of those who rest here. For further information visitors can contact the staff of the cemetery or read 'Derry City Cemetery 1853-2003 – 150 Years' by Rev. Bernard J Canning.

# History

By the middle years of the 19th century it was clear that the city's graveyards, attached to churches, were becoming overcrowded.

From 1 January 1867 the graveyards attached to St. Columb's Cathedral, St. Augustine's Church and Long Tower Chapel were closed to new burials, with 'access' restricted to those families with rights to graves.

The City Cemetery was opened in 1853. It is the property of Derry City Council. People buying a grave do not own the grave but simply have the right to burial in it.

The first reported burial here is that of Robert McClelland, a 10-month-old child of Orchard Street, who died 10 December 1853.

Joseph Bigger, died 12 January 1854, was the first adult buried in the Cemetery (His grandson, David, was Superintendent of the City Cemetery and actually lived in the Gatelodge). Today there are over 74,594 burials – an average of 400 per year.

The City Cemetery became the main burial place for both Protestants and Catholics in the city. However, from the 1970s and the onset of 'the troubles', Protestant families increasingly buried their dead in the Waterside, at the Altnagelvin (opened in 1963) and Ballyoan (opened in 1991) cemeteries.

# Memorial Stones

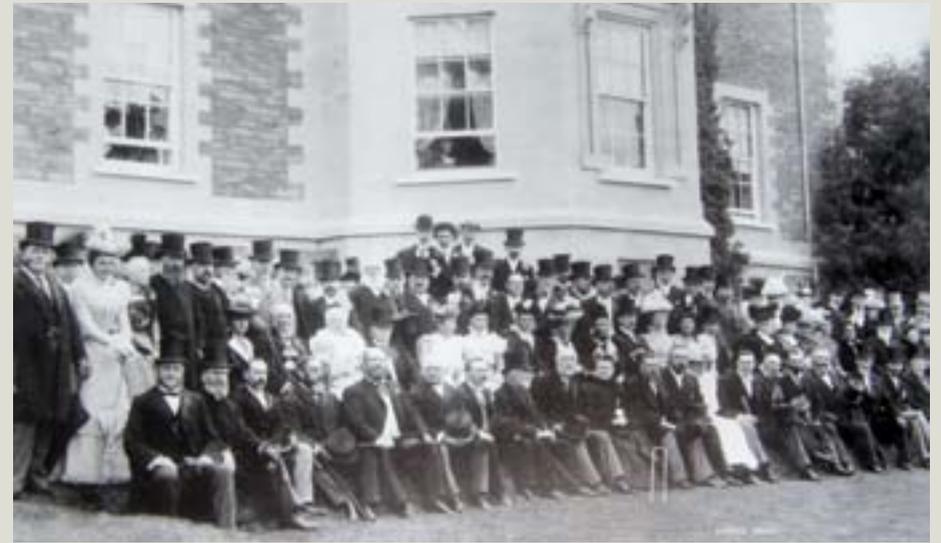
## and Funerary architecture

Three historical periods are reflected in the Cemetery's headstones and monuments – Victorian, Edwardian and later twentieth century.



## Victorian

Victorian funerary architecture often reflected an individual's status in society, and sometimes ornate and lavish monuments were erected. This style frequently includes urns, obelisks, broken columns and angels. This type of imagery, referred to as neo-classical, was popular up to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Influenced by ancient Greek and Roman art it is proportioned and symmetrical.



Many of the smaller headstones include motifs which carry symbolic reference: wreaths (eternal life), grieving women, clasped hands (a farewell or last good-bye), and IHS (Latin form of first three letters derived from Greek spelling of Jesus).

Other features include:

### The covered vase

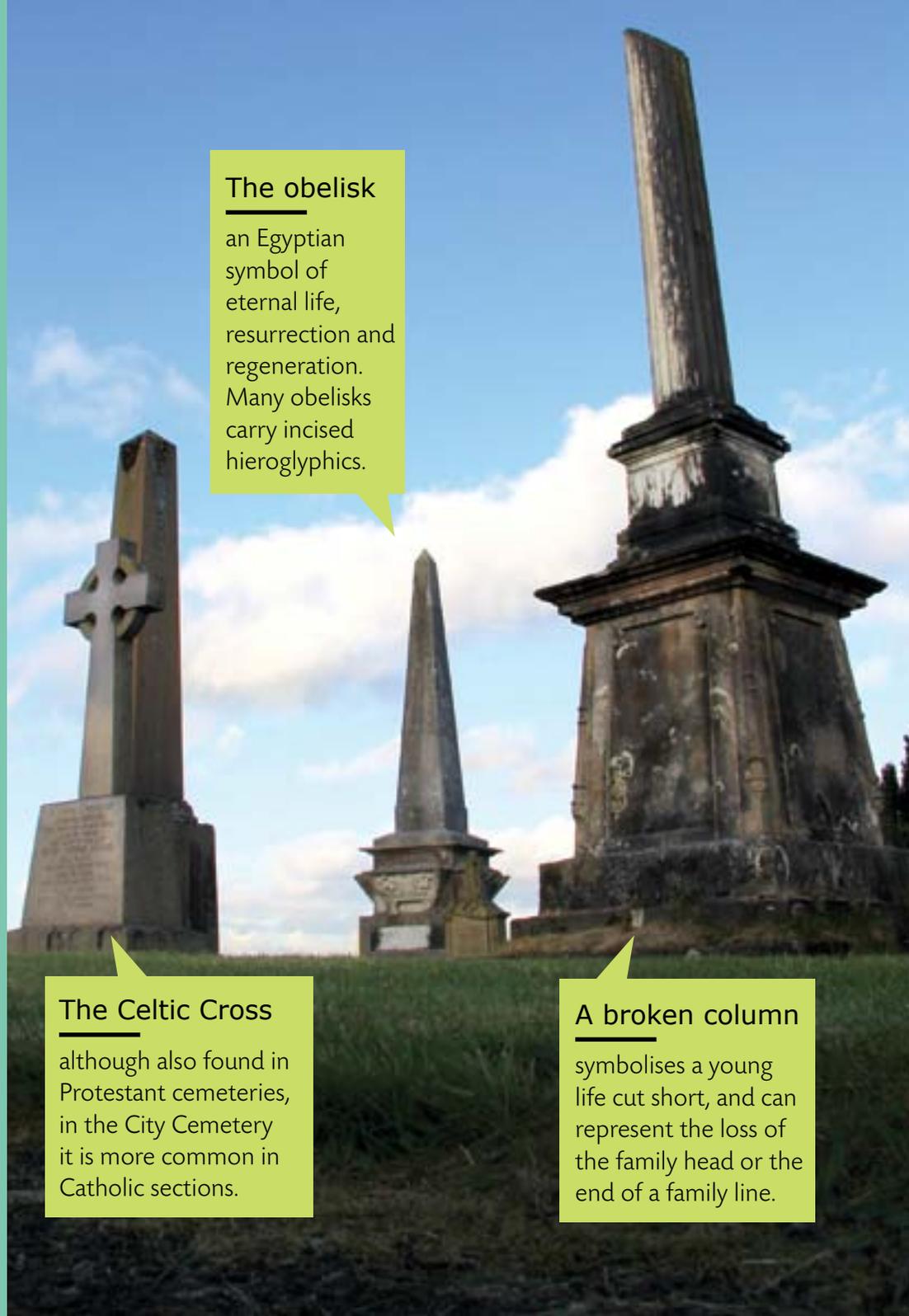
in many ancient civilisations funerary urns were used for storing ashes from cremation. In ancient Greece, vases were used as grave markers.

### The anchor

symbolising hope, confidence and safety, is quite common in the Protestant section. The anchor as a symbol dates back to the early Christian period when it was used as a disguised cross and as a marker to guide the way to secret meeting places. An anchor entangled in a rope symbolises death.

### The Celtic Cross

These stone crosses date from the Celtic Revival at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and refer to the crosses of Irish monasteries of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Tom Hartley, the historian of Belfast City Cemetery, three types of Celtic Cross can be found: Plain, with little or no decoration; Ornamental with a surface covered by interlace and geometric spirals; and Scriptural, where panels carry multiple figures reflecting symbolic elements of the old and new testaments.



**The obelisk**  
an Egyptian symbol of eternal life, resurrection and regeneration. Many obelisks carry incised hieroglyphics.

**The Celtic Cross**  
although also found in Protestant cemeteries, in the City Cemetery it is more common in Catholic sections.

**A broken column**  
symbolises a young life cut short, and can represent the loss of the family head or the end of a family line.

## **Edwardian and early 20th Century**

After the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, a new public attitude surfaced which seemed to resent the large amounts of money required for lavish headstones and monuments. This was accentuated by the mass slaughter of the First World War.



Victorian funerary architecture gave way to the smaller, less lavish memorials and lasted until the 1950s.

## **Later 20th Century**

By now headstones were increasingly regulated to specific dimensions and stone surrounds disappeared to facilitate development and maintenance of new lawn sections. A modern memorial is the open Bible with a suitable inscription. Angels have always been popular implying the Resurrection of Christ at Easter and implying hope. Other popular imagery includes the Dove of Peace and the Rose as a sign of love.

# Features & themes

## of the Cemetery

Many cemeteries will share a range of features and themes which the visitor will see here in Derry City Cemetery. However, it is the sheer diversity of those that are buried here, that make this Cemetery such a unique record of the history of the city and region.

There are a number of historical themes and periods which are reflected in the cemetery.

### Victorian Industry and Commerce

The city which the visitor sees today is very much the creation of the growth of Derry in the Victorian era. Distilling, textiles and agricultural produce were all important, but it was Derry's port which made the city the natural hub for commerce and trade in the North West.



In 1851 **William Tillie** and his partner **John Henderson** established the first shirt factory in Derry. By 1890 Tillie & Henderson employed 1,500 people.

The names **Cooke**, **McCorkell** and **Mitchell** are synonymous with Derry's port, and all are to be found in the Cemetery.

The rise of shipbuilding and emigration was closely related to the development of the region's railway system. A visitor to the City Cemetery will find many references to this era in the older sections of the Cemetery.



## International Conflict

The city and its citizens have often had a prominent role in international conflict. As the British Empire lengthened its reach, so men from Derry and the North West would serve in campaigns around the globe. Since World War One the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) has been responsible for Britain's war dead.

According to the CWGC the Cemetery includes 200 such burials, 95 from World War One and 99 from World War Two. The 'Cross of Sacrifice' is located near to the entrance to the cemetery. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield the cross is located in every cemetery with a significant number of CWGC burials.

This cemetery of course also includes other people who died as a result of international conflict, but on the home front. On Easter Tuesday 1941 a lone German bomber attacked the city, and killed 13 people in Messines Park.

## Arts and Culture

Derry will be the first UK City of Culture in 2013, but its tradition of artistic creation is long established. The City Cemetery references people who have left their mark in

genres as diverse as architecture, hymn writing and visual arts. Often their achievements are less noted here in their home city, than they are in other places around the world!



Within the cemetery visitors will see the headstone of **Cecil Frances Alexander**, who wrote hymns including 'There is a green hill far away', and also the family plot of the Fosters of Ballinacross who, by tradition, are related to Stephen Collins Foster, who became one of the leading figures of American music through songs such as 'Camptown Races'.

## Unmarked Graves

As with all large, urban cemeteries, there are a number of unmarked graves and plots. 'The poor of Derry' are remembered by the 'Celtic Cross of St Columba to the Forgotten Dead of Derry' (erected 1993). On 20 February 2011, a monument in memory of all the stillborn babies buried in unmarked graves was also unveiled.

There are 5 unmarked sections in which the poor of Derry

are buried – 3 for Catholics and 2 for Protestants. An estimated 7,500 adults are buried in those plots plus many stillborn infants.

The Poor Sisters of Nazareth came to the city in 1892 and still care for those in need today. In their plot in the City Cemetery 1,062 residents of Nazareth House were buried between 1897 and 1991.



## Politics and Troubles

Northern Ireland is commonly seen as a politically divided place. It is often commented that 'the Troubles' began in Derry in 1968, but this was only the most recent instalment of a conflict that began 400 years ago. Over the years this conflict has waxed and waned, but many of the significant events have become part of the city and its peoples' identity.

The City Cemetery bears witness to the cost of this conflict. For example, even though the cemetery was only founded in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, it contains human remains from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Siege of the city. These were found during archaeological digs in the 1970s and 80s.



Another era of heightened tensions ran from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century (the Home Rule Crisis) through to the partition of Ireland in 1921. It is often said that this was the period when modern Ireland was created, and the Cemetery includes a number of political activists from that era.

The early 20s saw an eruption of violence in the city, and this was repeated intermittently over the next 50 years, until the most recent upsurge in the late 1960s.



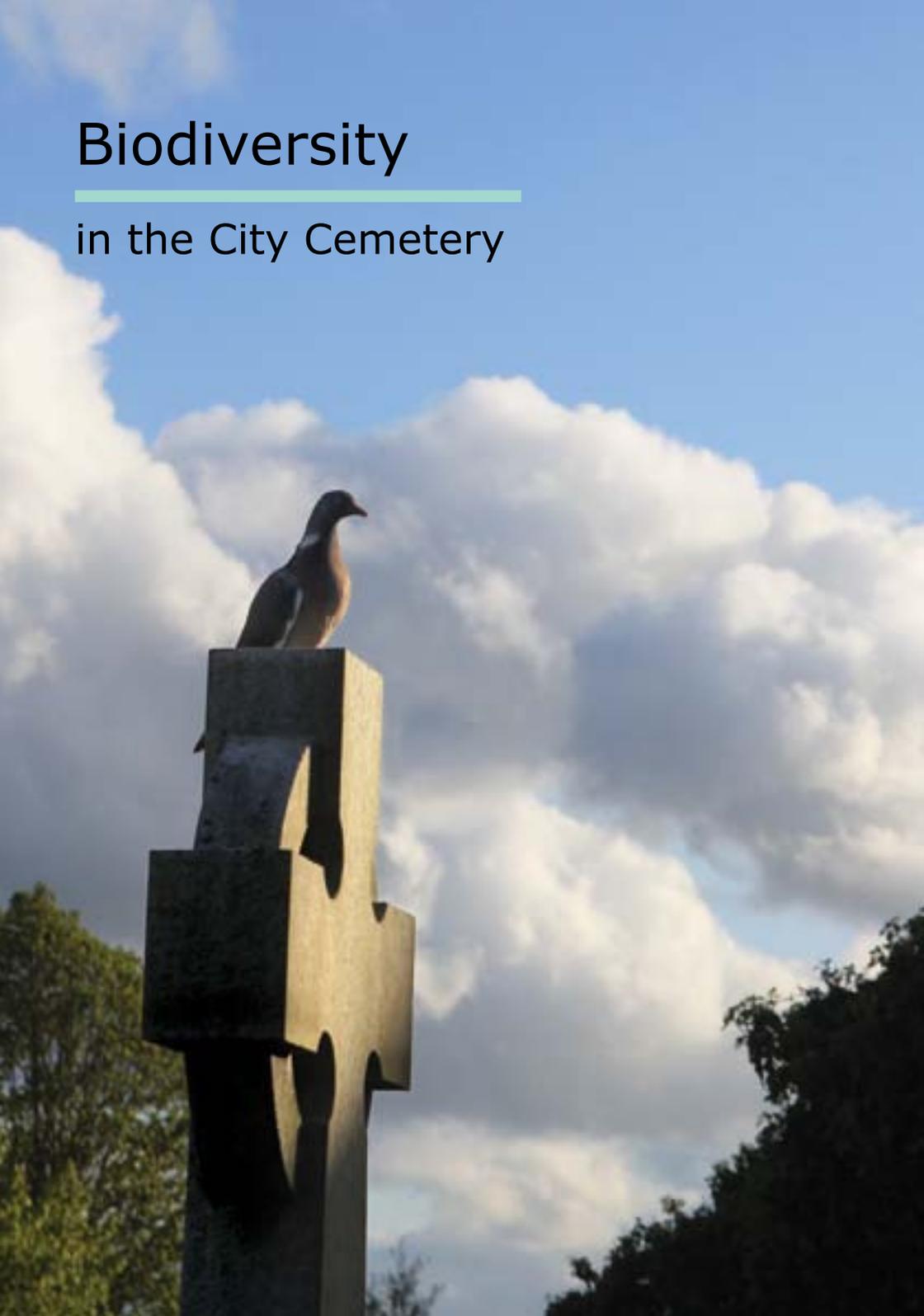
One of the most tragic days of the Troubles was the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972 – Bloody Sunday. A few days later on 2<sup>nd</sup> February an estimated 30,000 people paid their respects at the largest funeral the City Cemetery has ever witnessed.

As tensions rose and violence escalated, many Protestants living on the Cityside crossed the river to the Waterside, and fewer chose to be buried here in the City Cemetery. The visitor will therefore gain a stronger sense of the Nationalist experience of the Troubles. The Cemetery also contains two memorials to the Republican movement.



# Biodiversity

## in the City Cemetery



The peregrine falcon has been spotted foraging over the cemetery. It is blue-grey, with a white face, black 'moustache' appearance with long, broad pointed wings.



The Irish hare also uses the cemetery as a habitat and foraging area. It is larger than a rabbit, with long ears and a white tail and is a Northern Ireland Priority Species.

The City Cemetery is an important green space for biodiversity, with grassland, scattered trees, hedgerows, walls and graves providing a habitat for a range of species.



A bat survey commissioned for the City Cemetery in 2010 recorded two bat species (Leisler and Common pipistrelle). The Leisler bat is the largest in Ireland, measuring 55-65 mm. The Common pipistrelles are the most common species and smallest measuring 35-45 mm in length.

### Conclusion

'The City Cemetery is a place of stories – stories of the famous and infamous; of joy and tragedy; of traditions and beliefs' (Remembering Diversity leaflet). The aim of this brochure and map is to share some of these stories, and to show how relevant our histories are today. Northern Ireland has embarked on a 'shared future', and we all know that there is no future in the past.

However, we also know that a better understanding of that past is essential, and there are few places which can better represent the cost of our conflicts, or indeed of our shared humanity, than Derry~Londonderry's City Cemetery.



# Visiting Derry City Cemetery

**City Cemetery,**  
Gate Lodge, Lone Moor Road  
Derry BT48 9LA

There are two car entrances to the Cemetery – **Lone Moor Road** and **Creggan Gate** and a pedestrian gate at **Kildrum Gardens**. Car parking is available at both the Creggan entrance and the 21st century area. Please remember that Derry City Cemetery is a burial site, which is used on a daily basis. Please treat it with respect. Take care in walking around the cemetery, particularly in the older sections where the ground is uneven and some of the headstones may be in a vulnerable condition. Care should be taken when using paths as some of these are quite steep. All dogs must be kept on a leash.

## Office opening hours:

**Monday to Sunday:** 8.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. 1st May – 30th September  
8.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. 1st October – 30th April

**Telephone:** 028 7136 2615

**Website:** [www.derrycity.gov.uk/citycemetery](http://www.derrycity.gov.uk/citycemetery)

**E mail:** [phyllis.callan@derrycity.gov.uk](mailto:phyllis.callan@derrycity.gov.uk)

## Genealogy Service

Derry City Council's genealogy service is available through the Heritage and Museum Service. Telephone **028 7136 5151** ext **8254** or online at [www.derry.rootsireland.ie](http://www.derry.rootsireland.ie). Genealogical queries relating to the City Cemetery Telephone **028 7136 2615**.

## Bus routes:

From **Ulsterbus Station** at Foyle Street – Telephone: **028 7126 2261**  
**Creggan bus** (FY8) every hour e.g. 9.15am, 10.15am, (Drop off point near to Creggan Gate)  
**Lone Moor Road bus** (FY7) at 11.00 am, 1.30pm, 3.00 pm and 4.30pm.

## Acknowledgements

Derry City Cemetery 1853-2003 – 150 Years' by Rev. Bernard J Canning  
Written in Stone: The History of Belfast City Cemetery by Tom Hartley

## Photos

Pg 5: Londonderry Port and Harbour Commission and Mayor's garden party at Boom Hall  
Pg 7: Officers of Royal Inniskillings Fusiliers'  
Pg 12: University for Derry petition and Civil Rights March October 1968 Pg 15: Irish Hare © John Doherty. Pipistrelle Bat & Peregrine Falcon © Laurie Campbell

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textphone: **(028) 7137 6646** or email: [equality@derrycity.gov.uk](mailto:equality@derrycity.gov.uk)