

THE HEROIC AGE OF SCOTTISH CREMATORIA 1955 -1975

*Revd Dr Peter C Jupp,
Honorary Fellow, Divinity Department,
University of Edinburgh*

*Hilary J Grainger
Professor of Architectural History,
University of the Arts London UK; Chair
of the Victorian Society.*

Abstract: Of the many differences in death ways between Scotland and England, the persistence of burial and the low take-up of cremation is one of the most illuminating when analysing the development of modernity in the North. This lecture is based on research for our book 'Our Ashes Glow with Social Fires': Cremation in Modern Scotland, History, Architecture and Law' to be published early next year.

Scotland's first crematorium (and the UK's third) was opened in Maryhill, Glasgow in 1895. Its second was not opened until 1929: Warriston in Edinburgh. Four more crematoria were opened before 1939, all built by private companies as local authorities were unwilling to invest in cremation, relying on cemeteries for their responsibilities to the dead. Whilst local authorities in England increasingly invested in crematoria during the 1950s, Scotland's six crematoria conducted 18% of Scotland's funerals by 1955 (England & Wales, 75 with 25%). That year Scotland's first publicly commissioned crematorium at Daldowie, Lanarkshire, was opened, the first of thirteen built between 1955 and 1975. In 1977, the cremation rate reached 50% (England & Wales, 1967).

Crematorium building and patronage in Scotland fell into three distinct phases, the first between 1895 and 1939 where the six crematoria opened were all privately owned. In keeping with the governing agenda of 'Improvement', which prompted the harnessing of 'material betterment to secular utopian ideals', the second phase between 1955 and 1975 witnessed the 'heroic age' of local authority building. The 13 crematoria were: Daldowie, 1955; Craigton, 1957; Greenock, 1959; Kirkcaldy, 1959; Cardross, 1960; Falkirk, 1962; Perth, 1962; The Linn, Glasgow, 1962; Ayr, 1966; Clydebank, 1967; Edinburgh, Mortonhall, 1967; Dunfermline, 1973 and Aberdeen, Hazelhead, 1975, only one of which, Craigton, was private.

This lecture will first analyse the decision-making processes and the cultural and economic changes that had at first delayed and then encouraged the rapid shift to cremation. The most obvious of these were the political and governmental priorities, housing policies and health improvements and above all, the Vatican's 1964 decision to lift the ban on cremation imposed in 1886. After 1975 no more crematoria were built until 1993, by which time the Scottish cremation rate had slowed to 57%.

Scotland's crematoria tell us a great deal not only about the complex, changing and distinctive nature of Scottish attitudes to death and disposal between 1955 and 1975, but also reflect in microcosm, the progress of architectural thinking in period when the relationship between Traditionalism and Modernism and the continued search for a 'Scottish architecture' occupied many architects. The lecture will consider the singular contribution made by Scotland to the architectural expression of cremation during its 'heroic age' of building.

Keywords: cremation, decision-making processes, cultural and economic changes,

architecture