

Report to the board of police of Glasgow, by the medical officer and the master of works, on intramural burying grounds.

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R E P O R T

TO THE

BOARD OF POLICE OF GLASGOW,

BY THE

M E D I C A L O F F I C E R

AND THE

MASTER OF WORKS,

ON

INTRAMURAL BURYING GROUNDS.

GLASGOW:

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REPORT.

GLASGOW, *December, 1869.*

UNDER a remit from the Board of Police, we have very carefully considered the state of the various Intramural Burying Grounds of Glasgow, and in doing so have been assisted by Returns obtained on an order of the Board, through Mr. Lang, as well as by the very careful and elaborate Report of a Committee of the Town Council, bearing date 25th June, 1868. We have also visited most of these burying grounds, and have availed ourselves fully of the services of the Sanitary Inspectors, to ascertain the practices followed in burials, particularly of the poor. From these sources of information we are able to present the following suggestions and recommendations, which, however, are here submitted very briefly, as the details on which they are founded are accessible to the Board, and need not be repeated at length.

In a community occupying a vast amount of surface closely packed with dwellings, such as the City of Glasgow, in which about 14,000 deaths, on an average, take place annually on a superficial area of 5763 acres, inclusive of the 728 acres beyond the Parliamentary Boundary, it seems impossible to regulate intramural interments upon any principle of immediate application, without a degree of practical inconvenience, and even serious suffering and pecuniary distress to those who can least afford it, that cannot be contemplated without leading to some modification of the principles. If, for example, we were to forbid intramural interments entirely, the consequence, as matters stand at

present, would be, in the first place, an absolute impossibility of disposing of the dead; and, in the second place, even after private enterprise had been fully brought into play, an enormous increase in the expense of the funerals of the poor, which would of itself be enough to pauperise numbers of families thrown into sudden affliction by calamity. If we were even to recommend, what upon grounds of principle seems only decent and seemly, that a grave, once opened, should be in general reserved for a time for one, or even for a strictly limited number of bodies, at a certain fixed depth below the surface, the effect of such a recommendation suddenly and generally carried out might be to double or treble the expenses of the poorer class of funerals, and probably to place it quite beyond the power of a large number of families to procure the interment of their dead otherwise than by throwing the responsibility on the parish. And for the pauper class of funerals the expenses would be increased in a still greater proportion, so that, in the shape of increased rates, the burden would ultimately reach the community as a whole.

We do not urge these as reasons for leaving things as they are at present; but we feel compelled to state them as difficulties in the way of improvement, and especially of sudden improvement. The difficulties of the case are not lessened by the recent decision of the Town Council against the interference of the Corporation, by Act of Parliament, to secure extramural burying grounds. On this point, as indeed in the general bearing of their Report, we participate entirely in the views of the Committee of Town Council. It seems to us an error to regard the burial of the dead, in a large city like Glasgow, as a matter to be left to the operation of private enterprise. The inadequacy of the ordinary laws of supply and demand to meet the case appears evident, when it is considered that the great majority of the poor, and of the classes having the highest mortality, live and die in the very heart of the town, where the mere fact of sepulture may be considered a gross violation of sanitary

laws, and where, therefore, it becomes the duty of the authorities, on public grounds, to shut out the public from access to their ancient places of sepulture. In towns of moderate size this can be done without extreme inconvenience; but in very large cities, where five or six miles from the centre is probably the least distance that could be recommended as the site of a new burying ground; where, moreover, the cemeteries at present existing are under constant temptations to accommodate the poor in a way injurious to the public interest, it appears to us most clearly the duty of a great corporation to take a large and enlightened view of the whole subject by removing the interment of the dead as much as possible out of the hands of speculative companies. Had the Corporation of Glasgow been possessed of extramural burying grounds, unobjectionably placed, in which ample facilities were given to the poor of Glasgow to bury their dead with decency, and at a moderate expense, it would have been comparatively easy to recommend the closing of the present intramural burying grounds. At present we can only see our way to the following recommendations, which we beg to submit, not as the best possible, but as the best attainable without an Act of Parliament of the kind alluded to above:—

First. We are of opinion that no extension of the present *burial area* should be permitted within the jurisdiction of the Board. It is possible that this may be considered too stringent, but we would nevertheless press it very earnestly as our decided conviction. Not one of the existing intramural burying grounds is so placed that an application for leave to place a *new* cemetery there would be listened to for a moment; why, then, should any *extension* be allowed? Even Sighthill Cemetery and the Necropolis will soon be completely surrounded by houses and public works; and under no circumstances could the burial of persons in these neighbourhoods on a much extended scale be prevented from becoming a nuisance to a greater or less extent within a very few years.

Secondly. We are of opinion that the following churchyards, as being already entirely surrounded by large populations, ought to be entirely shut up from further use, except, perhaps, in case of very special cases (such as a husband to be buried beside a wife, or a child beside a mother, in private lairs), which cases might be met by some form of special application to the local authority, or to the Sheriff. The burying grounds of which we thus recommend the closure are the following, several of which are, however, practically and voluntarily closed at present:—1. St. David's or Ramshorn; 2. College or Blackfriars; 3. North Street and Main Street, Anderston; 4. Cheapside Street, Anderston; 5. Calton; 6. Bridgeton; 7. Gorbals, Rutherglen Loan; 8. St. Mungo's and High Church; 9. Roman Catholic Burying Ground, Abercromby Street; 10. Christ Church, Mile-end; 11. Greendyke Street Episcopal Chapel; 12. Crypt of Wellington Street Church.

Thirdly. We are of opinion that every form of burial is objectionable in which a separate grave is not dug for every body. From the form of the "common ground," in which four, five, or more coffins are piled upon each other in one grave, to the out and out "pit burials," in which large excavations are made, and coffins deposited therein side by side, as well as one over another—there are many degrees of offensiveness and danger. The only way to meet the case thoroughly would be to enact that, *after a certain date* (other provision for the burial of the poor being made in the meantime) all forms of composite interment should cease within the intramural burying grounds; while, in the meantime, a periodical inspection ought to be made, so as to secure against the more immediately noxious forms of evil.

Fourthly. The interments in private lairs are less subject to abuse; but even in this case it might be desirable to make some simple regulations, applicable to all interments within the boundaries, *e.g.*, as to the minimum distance between graves, the minimum depth below the surface, &c., &c.

Fifthly, and lastly. In order to make the preceding suggestions even *possible* to be fully carried out, it would be necessary, if not to create by legal enactment, at all events to encourage to the utmost, new cemeteries arising under good management, at considerable distances from the City; and we are further of opinion that assistance might be given in the conveyance of corpses from the houses of the poor to public mortuaries, from which the most economical means of conveyance might be had to the extramural cemeteries, at such hours as would be reasonably suitable at once for the convenience of the labouring poor and the public concerned in preserving the streets from interruption to traffic.

JOHN CARRICK.

W. T. GAIRDNER.

