

Cultural Diffusion of Funerary Symbolism in 18th and 19th Centuries

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Introduction

Recent burial ground studies have continued to shed light on funerary symbolism from 18th century church sites. There is an exchange of culture as the data grows and examination of the two burial grounds will provide information of cultural motif connections during the same time period yet from two continents. It is known the before North America mass produced their own coffin furnishings, they imported most details straight from London catalogues; such as Tuesby and Cooper. England may have already established the use of coffin handle motifs before they drifted over to the Americas years later.

Types of Hardware Symbolism

All types of handle motifs include:

- ❖ Winged cherubs
- ❖ Glory and Urn
- ❖ Deaths Heads (skull)
- ❖ Sarcophagi
- ❖ Uprturned Torches
- ❖ Angels with Trumpets
- ❖ Flowers and Foliage
- ❖ Cross or Crown
- ❖ Plain

Materials and Methods

- Analysis of funerary hardware at FBCP and Christ Church Spitalfields
- Analysis of funerary motifs found on materials from both sites
- Comparing symbolism at three sites
- Comparing the physical coffin hardware quantitatively *and* qualitatively
- FBCP 1702-1859
- Christ Church Spitalfields 1729-present



FIG. 1. Coffin handle from FBCP with two winged cherubs draped on sides and single cherub head centered.



FIG. 2. Coffin handle from Tuesby and Cooper Catalogue (c. 1783)

Results: Coffin Handle Motifs at FBCP and Christ Church

	FBCP	Christ Church Spitalfields
All Coffin Handles with Motifs	21	35
Handles with Cherub Motif *	5 (24%)	15 (43%)
Handles with Deaths Head Motif*	1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Handles with Urn Motif*	2 (9%)	1 (3%)

* percentages out of coffin handles that show motifs

Results: Coffin Handle Motifs

- 21 different styles found at First Baptist Church of Philadelphia
- 35 different motif styles found at Christ Church Spitalfields
- Most frequent motif found at *both* sites was winged cherub
- Both churches have some exact matches of coffin handles to those sold in the Tuesby and Cooper catalogue (c. 1783)

Conclusion

- After researching and comparing both historical sites, the winged cherub was the motif found most often
- Most of the handles are too fragile to survive the long years underground and even the recent excavations which leaves a much smaller number of handles to interpret
- Christ Church gathered coffin materials directly from London while FBCP had to import the materials since they did not start making their own supplies until many years later in America
- It can be interpreted that England had popularized certain motifs at the time period, being the cherub, and because North America was importing materials, that it what was popular to use at the time
- Not until the late 1800s into the early 1900s did North America start mass producing their own coffin furniture

References

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