

To the Editors,

Gatherings from graveyards not bones, or forensic work but epitaphs

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Doctors work in the midst of mortality, a situation we face more often than those in many other professions. Therefore, the care of the dying and bereavement counselling are essential components in the training of a doctor. However, with reference to death, the clinical doctor's involvement usually ends with certifying death, the conduct of a pathological post mortem or the issue of a death certificate. Ideally, but not always, does bereavement counselling follow. My correspondence is on an aspect further down the process of death.

I have listed here some gatherings from graveyards - gravestones to be more specific! I hope these epitaphs will interest your readership because they are from gravestones of doctors (1), a dentist (2), a newborn baby (3); and they make reference to morbidity (4) and even mortality itself (5). The reader would agree that epitaphs throw light not only on the lives and work of the departed, but also on disease; in addition to the grammar and attitudes to death, in a bygone era.

Here lies the corpse of Doctor Chard,
Who fill'd half of this churchyard (1)

R.I.P

Here lies the remains of Edmund Fitzgerald
Born: a man
Died: a thoracic surgeon (1)

Here lies Edward Wood
Dentist, 'filling his last cavity.' (2)

Opened my eyes, took a peep,
Didn't like it, went to sleep.
At Lynton Devon UK (3)

Poor Martha Snell, her's gone away,
Her would if her could but her couldn't stay.
Her had two bad legs and a baddish cough,
But her legs it was that carried her off.
At Bangor, Gwynedd UK (4)

Here lies my wife: here let her lie!
Now she's at rest, and so am I.
Epitaph of Dryden's wife

Here lies a woman
No man can deny it
She died in peace although she lived unquiet
Her husband prays if ever you this way walk
You would tread softly,
If she wake she'll talk.
Trotbeck, Cumbria UK

Good friend for Jesus sake forbear'
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Blest be ye man ye spares these stones'
And curst be ye who moves my bones.
Near the tomb of William Shakespeare

As I am now, so must you be:
Therefore prepare to follow me. (5)

You readers all both young and old
Your time on earth will not be long,
For death will come and die you must
And like to me return to dust. (5)

Shall wee all die?
Wee shall all die
All die shall wee?
Die all wee shall. (5)

I hope you found this interesting reading.
Or, do you share the following sentiments?

Friend! For your epitaphs I'm grieved,
Where still so much is said,
One half will never be believed,
The other never read.
On epitaph writers: Pope

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