The Funeral Practices of
The Pilgrims and The Puritans

Independent Study of:
Congregational History and Polity
CFTS

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Funeral Practices of
The Pilgrims and The Puritans

August, 1993
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All you that doth behold my stone  
Consider how soon I was gone  
Death does not always, warning give  
Therefore be careful how you live  
Repent in time, no time delay  
I in my prime was called away.

Mr. Joseph Plasket  
Died August 1, 1794  
Age 48  
Burial Hill  
Plimouth, MA

"If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a procession for a burying place."1 Abraham purchasing this cave to bury his wife Sarah is the first account of a burial. We will also find accounts of Jacob resurrecting the first monument, a pillar to Rachel, and of Jesus being laid in a cave before his resurrection. From the very beginning we see that having a place to come back to, a place for memories of loved ones, has been important. How did we come about our burial customs here in America? Is the funeral that we celebrate in America now, anything like it was when the Pilgrims first landed in America? Are graveyards important? I will hope to answer these questions and more as we explore the funeral and burial practices of the Pilgrims and the Puritans in the harsh new world they encountered upon arriving in New England.

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1 Genesis 23: 8-10 RSV (Revised Standard Version).
Burial Background and History

When we look upon our first Christian ancestors burial practices we find this information. "The Early Christians, following the example of Jesus, abhorred cremation. In the fourth century A.D., however, cremation was entirely superseded by interment (meaning the actual burial). This however, did not mean that burials or funerals were often. The Greeks interred the ashes of their dead in urns, sometimes of pottery.² The Puritans and the Pilgrims, both English in background, now here in America not only a very long way from those shores, but the theological thoughts going on in their minds were those shaped by the Genevan reformer, Jean Calvin. They accepted Calvin's theory of predestination and wanted nothing to do with the theology of Roman Catholicism. When we look at it in regard to this paper, they wanted nothing even resembling the rite of last unction, which is an anointing with oil and prayer for the soul of the deceased to be on its way to heaven.

²If the fate of the deceased had been determined in advance of his very earthly existence, and if there was nothing that any man or men could do to alter that fate, there was clearly no place for belief in a temporary afterlife state that was a cleansing way station between earthly and heavenly existence. Nor was there a place for the idea that the efforts of an individual, or his family and friends-whether made during his life, at the time of burial, or afterwards-might have any bearing on

his ultimate postmortem fate. Instead, as Calvin wrote, an individual's fate was sealed long before his death, so that one's expected postmortem condition involved merely waiting for the formality of Judgement...."³

The Pilgrim's and Puritan's also feared death because it was so prominent in their society. Children were not kept away from the thought of death, because it invaded their reality just as much as any adult member of the community. Children were weaned from their parents at a very early age so as not to be emotionally attached. They also saw sisters and brothers die constantly of one disease or another, small pox being one of the worst to rip through the child population in New England. In fact most children, if they made it past childhood, died in their twenties, because times were incredible harsh and medical knowledge not very advanced

"Death and Dying were matters of critical importance to the Puritans; indeed they constantly urged themselves to direct their lives toward that moment when their earthly pilgrimage would end. In this effort they spared no one, not even their children. And, as we have seen, the effects of this concern on the Puritan child had profound consequences. As the child grew to adulthood the focus of his anxiety shifted somewhat from fear of separation from his parents to concern and confusion as to the nature

of his spiritual life."4

Puritan thought was toward ridding life of all its impurities, toward a simpler way of life, that also kept Jesus the Christ at the fore front of their daily living. They wanted no ties in any way with the popery of the Roman Catholic church and fought very hard as they entered this new land to keep themselves in accordance with the Scriptures. As we look at the funeral practices of the time we will touch upon the practices of the early Pilgrims as they lived in Plimouth Colony in the middle sixteen-hundreds, but our main focus will be on the changes that occurred during the seventeenth century in regards to the burial practices of the Puritans. I will look at the burial, the customs that were associated with the funeral and also give attention to the gravestones and the symbolism used on them during this time. Let me set the stage by looking at the Pilgrims and their earliest customs.

4 Ibid., 93.
Funeral Practices of the Pilgrims

As folklore of New England would have it, the Pilgrims wanted no indication that anyone within the colony had died because they didn’t want the Indians to know that their numbers were dwindling and attack. In an effort to convert the Indians to the Christian faith, the Pilgrims did not have long mourning periods, which was the tribal practice of their Native neighbors. The Pilgrims wanted a swift removal of the body and to keep the burial very simple, this means that they were against the embalming of the body, and most burials would take place within a week of the death. The only evidence I could find to support what I had been told of the New English folklore was this: “Prior to mid-century, there is no extant evidence of New England’s Puritans taking much care at all to even mark the graves of their deceased. While it is possible that some sort of wooden markers may have been employed in the early years it is a striking phenomenon that only in the mid-1650’s did New England’s cemeteries begin to become populated not only with bodies, but also with carefully carved stones to indicate the sites of burial.”

5 Gordon Carr, Personal Interview on August 17, 1993, Hanson, MA.

During these first years much more was written about the homeland practices in England than those in the new world. But one can find in Thomas Lechford's diary, a report of his findings in the Colony. He traveled there in the late 1630's and early 1640's and writes this of his time there: "At Burials, nothing is read, nor any Funeral Sermon made, but all the neighborhood, or a good company of them, come together by tolling of the bell, and carry the dead solemnly to his grave, and there stand by him while he is buried."\(^7\)

The funeral had to have been an emphasis of the harshness of the new world they were encountering. They had already fought hard to be where they were, first separating from the Church of England, fleeing to Holland, and enduring the long voyage to America. Yet they were not running from England, they hoped to someday return there, after the religious persecution they had felt had toned down. As the story goes this was not the case. In any event, their customs and practices came from the only ones they had known, those of their English heritage. Their home in Plimouth Colony gave them much to be challenged with, the least of which was survival. "...Plymouth had by no means come to the point where it 'enjoyed its funerals' as the Bay Colony early came to do..."\(^8\) "Funerals were almost always starkly severe in old Plymouth. Even when Bradford died there was no burial service, though the whole community stood sadly and reverently by while the grave was

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\(^7\) Ibid., p. 109.

filled. On this occasion volleys were fired and the Train Band did escort duty. A similar show of ceremony marked the interment of various other colonial functionaries. The omission of any form of religious service at funerals was due to the fact that the Separatists were extremely fearful that church ceremonies over the dead would grow into prayers for their souls. The French Protestant churches definitely forbade prayer or sermons at funerals 'to avoid superstition.' Robert Bartlett also accounts for Pilgrim burials in his book and has this to say of the funerals. "The Pilgrim rejected the excesses that had accumulated around funerals and the trauma and mystery of death. They ruled out prayers for the dead along with anniversary masses and memorial services to help take the departed soul through purgatory and into the vast labyrinth of superstitious mythology. There was no graveside service. Friends gathered about their minister and walked to the grave, where they stood in a silent committal." 

The early Separatists, which I use synonymously with Pilgrims, encountered a bitter winter their first year in the new world, and were lucky to survive the new challenges they met here. They had all they could do to erect a few log cabins and keep their people alive. The Pilgrims, who were mostly young strong men and women, had lost some of their people coming over and because of the winters harshness and their lack of good medical supplies, they lost even more that first winter. For those who didn't make it through, they hid the bodies from the Indians by quick burial, for they feared that the Indians would see that

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9 Ibid., p. 221-222.

someone had left the colony because of death, and attack their dwindling numbers. When a person did die, they disposed of the body quickly, and focused on the living, the colony, not the ones departed. V. Gordon Childe makes an interesting comment from his research on funerary practices over fifty thousand years. "As societies become more settled and more culturally and materially stable, he suggested, there is a marked tendency for funeral customs and burial rituals to become less elaborate and less extravagant; conversely, such customs and rituals seem to be most elaborate and most extravagant during periods of social and cultural instability."\textsuperscript{11} If this is so, that would mean that the Pilgrims knew who they were, were they came from, and what they stood for. It would also assert that their counterparts, the Puritans in the seventh-century were beginning to go through changes. They were not in England, they were not going back to England, and they began to adjust to the environment in which they were now residing.

\textsuperscript{11} Stannard, p. 122, taken from V. Gordon Childe, "Directional Changes in Funerary Practices During 50,000 Years," Man 45 (1945), especially pp. 16-18.
If we saw the Pilgrims burials as plain, we will see that as the 1700’s unfolded, the Puritan’s funeral customs were anything but plain. Not only did the funerals take shape during this period, in not only Puritan history, but American history in general, but the graves of our ancestors took on a whole new look and meaning within American culture. This period was the fore runner of the Romantic Era of the eighteenth century, which we will not look at within the confines of this paper.

Funerals during this time began to be expensive affairs for the remaining family. While the Separatists, or Pilgrims, had wanted a quick burial of the body and finishing of the event, the Puritans began to use more elaborate customs and to draw out the affair. Before the funeral or our day, the Puritans believed the funeral to be a civil duty, a rite that concerned the magistrates of the city or village, and certainly not the church.

"Like the English Separatists, the founders of New England held that ministers were not to be 'burthened with the execution of Civill affaires, as the celebration of marriage, burying the dead, which things belong as well to those without as within the Church.' The feeling which prompted this prohibition was due in part to reaction from the Roman conception of marriage as a sacrament and from the Catholic practice of prayers.
for the dead, in part also to the thought that a minister had pastoral
duties only to the particular body of covenanted believers whom he served."\textsuperscript{12}

We see this also clearly in a book by Henry Barrow titled \textit{A Briefe Discoverie of the False Church}.

"The Separatists regarded burials as civil rather than religious in character....He could find no authority 'in the booke of God, that it belonged to the ministers office to burie the dead. It was a pollution to the Leviticaill priesthood to touch a carcass or anything about it.' Barrow also took exception to the costly trappings of funerals for poor men, with the demand for mourning gowns and other paraphernalia, and he particularly excoriated the insincerity that characterized many laudatory encomia for the dead."\textsuperscript{13}

Whether a civil duty or not, we can see that the funeral was becoming a social gathering of the people to celebrate and commemorate the dead. During the seventeenth century the funeral went from very quiet and cheap to sometimes costing upwards of 20% of

\textsuperscript{12} Williston Walker, \textit{History of the Congregational Churches In The United States} (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1894), p. 245.

ones estate. To give us an overview of the funeral, I found a plaque in Boston that helps give a clearer picture of what a funeral was like.

It read, "In late 17th century Boston, funerals were often elaborate rituals. Samuel Sewall noted Capt. Clap's death in his famous diary and we can imagine the ritual as described in other entries and accounts.

Relatives and friends sent white gloves to invited guests and ordered a coffin and gravestone. An elegy broadside was printed and later pinned to the carriage of coffin. The funeral notice recorded the deceased name and death date and often a discourse on death and salvation. Mourners received the broadside and usually, a gold ring inscribed with the name of the deceased. By the 1720's, the ritual had become so extravagant that the colony prohibited the excessive gifts and expenses.

On the day of the burial the mourning carriage carried the coffin slowly toward the burying ground, as the bell tolled. The horses were draped in mourning clothes painted with "Scutcheons of death"; winged deaths head and crossbones, while mourners, dressed in black, followed. Once the coffin had been lowered into the ground, the mourners meditated in silence. Later the party usually gathered for a funeral dinner and the ministers delivered the funeral sermon on the next day."14

One of the greatest expenses, besides the liquor for the feast, was the gloves which became an invitation to relatives, friends, and dignitaries to come to the funeral. Gloves

14 King's Chapel Burial Ground, plaque, Boston, MA.
were given people according to their position, therefore more expensive gloves were given to dignitaries and favored relatives, while less expensive ones might be given to slaves or acquaintances. This form of showery cost a great deal, and there are accounts of people collecting great amounts of funeral gloves.

"...At the funeral of Andrew Faneuil three thousand pairs were given away, the number frequently ran up to several hundred....The under-bearers who carried the coffin were usually given different and cheaper gloves from the pallbearers....The minister was always given gloves....Andrew Eliot, of North Church, in Boston, kept a record of the gloves and rings which he received; and, incredible as it may seem, in thirty-two years he was given two thousand nine hundred and forty pairs of gloves."\textsuperscript{15}

Some people sold their gloves, because they like Andrew Eliot had more than they could ever possibly use. But it was seen as an honor to make a ring, or gloves, or scarf at a funeral. I guess it might be like collecting baseball cards today!

Another funeral custom was that of giving away rings. Rings were given by families to close relatives and persons of prestige in the community.

"These mourning rings were of gold, usually enamelled in black, or black and white. They were frequently decorated with a death's-head, or with a coffin with a full-length skeleton lying in it, or with a winged skull. Sometimes they held a framed lock of hair of the deceased friend. Sometimes the ring was shaped like a serpent with his tail in his mouth....Goldsmiths kept these mourning rings on hand. 'Deaths Heads Rings' and 'Burying Rings' appear in many newspaper advertisements. When bought for use the name and the date of his death, were engraved upon the ring. This was called fashioning. It is also evident from existing letters and bills that orders were sent by bereaved ones to friends residing at a distance to purchase and wear mourning rings in memory of the dead, and send the bills to the heirs or the principals of the mourning family." \[16\]

These customs not only cost families a great deal of money at the time of the funeral, but made them even more elaborate than the Pilgrims could have even imagined! If these expenses, aside from the money due for the pall-bearers, the under-bearers, the tolling of the bell, the casket, did not put the family in financial hardships, then the feast that they served afterwards would. It was not so much the cost of the food, but the drink. Ale and rum could set a family back for a while, and everyone, even the poor, would have a few gallons of rum or a barrel of cider for the friends and family that came to the funeral. An account

\[16\] Ibid., p. 376-377.
of Londonderry, N.H., went like this: "Women flocked to do the household work and to prepare the funeral feast. Men brought gifts of food, or household necessities, and rendered all the advice and help that was needed. A gathering was held the night of the funeral, which in feasting and drinking partook somewhat of the nature of an Irish wake. Much New England rum was consumed at this gathering, and also before the procession to the grave, and after the interment the whole party returned to the house for an 'arval,' and drank again. The funeral rum-bill was often an embarrassing and hampering expense to a bereaved family for years."

I made mention of the pall-bearers and the under-bearers in the last paragraph and I wanted to explain the position these men held at the funeral. There were appointed two sets of bearers; the under-bearers, who were usually young men who would carry the coffin, and the pall-bearers, who were older, more distinguished men who would hold the corners of the pall, was a funeral cloth owned by the town, "which was spread over the coffin and hung down over the heads and bodies of the under-bearers." There were frequently appointed more than one set of each of these bearers since they sometimes had to carry the coffin for long distances to the grave. Some families were able to have carriages carry the coffin. If this did happen, the closest relatives led the procession, with the coffin following and the rest of the party behind. The horses were also adorned with death heads symbols on their foreheads, and signs of mourning on their sides.

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17 Ibid., p. 369.
18 Ibid., p. 368.
One of the greatest changes in the funeral customs was the funeral sermons. At the onset these were not preached at the burial, nor on the day of the funeral itself, but as time moved on this practice did also change. It would seem that the funeral had become a civil responsibly and the Puritans saw to it as responsible citizens that the funeral was arranged and taken care of just like all the citizens. Along with the sermons we find that prayer began to be used, again not at the burial, but at the home with the mourners either before or after the funeral itself.

"In 1685, at Roxbury, there occurred the first instance in the Congregational colonies of prayer at a funeral, - the occasion being the burial of a minister, Rev. William Adams. Yet these observances won their way slowly. When Cotton Mather published his 'Radio Disciplinae' forty-one years later, he found that in many towns of New England the ministers make agreeable Prayers with the People come together at the House, to attend the Funeral of the Dead. And in some, the Ministers make a short Speech at the Grave. But in other places both of these Things are wholly omitted."\(^{19}\)

Funeral sermons began to be quite elaborate productions. Giving evidence to both of these movements in the development of the Puritan burial, we find this in Alice Earle's book on Customs and Fashions which does an excellent job of outlining all that was common during this period.

\(^{19}\) Walker, p. 246.
"Funeral sermons were also printed, with trappings of sombreness, black-bordered, with death's heads and crossbones on the covers. These sermons were not, however, preached at the time of the funeral, save in exceptional cases. It is said that one was delivered at the funeral of President Chauncey in 1671. Cotton Mather preached one at the funeral of Fitz-John Winthrop in 1707, and another at the funeral of Waitstill Winthrop in 1717. Gradually there crept in the custom of having suitable prayers at the house before the burial procession formed, the first instance being probably at the funeral of Pastor Adams, of Roxbury, in 1683. Sometimes a short address was given at the grave, as when Jonathan Alden was buried at Duxbury, in 1697."  

Also during this period we see the use of elegies, epitaphs and the publication of mourning broadsides. People began to remember friends and family members in very special ways. The mourning broadsides and pamphlets would be printed up and then hung on the side of the coffin or carriage during the procession. The sermons as well were printed up after the funeral for distribution to relatives and friends. It is here that we begin to see the roots of Christian burial as we know it today begin to take root. We see the expense of the funeral begin to eat away at a families estates, and that people are beginning to see death as

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20 Earle, p. 367.
something one needs to memorialize and remember. We will look further at the Puritans need to memorialize by looking at their gravestone art. We find rich history and symbolism within these stones and it was a custom that is not only biblically tied but was culturally accepted as the norm as the century progressed.
Gravestones of the Puritans in New England

Adieu vain world I have seen enough of thee
And I am careless what those sayst of me.
Thy smiles I wish not;
Nor thy frowns I fear.
I am now at rest my head lies quiet here.

Mrs. Tabitha Plasket
Died June 10, 1807
Age 64
Burial Hill
Plimouth, MA

Gravestones also became a place of memorialization, a place to go and remember. Puritan theology was repressive and when it came to death they didn’t want the sterile feel that their religion gave them, they felt that harshness preached at them for hours on Sundays. In their time of grief they turned to symbols, not in the church, but in the graveyards. They turned back to symbols of their ancient ancestors for comfort in this time that gave so much uncertainty. Unlike the Separatists, the Puritans needed to remember and see how their society was unfolding and where they were headed.

There are two camps of thought concerning gravestones. Some do not believe that the symbolism is indicative of the Puritan thought which pervaded the land. I am not in that camp. There are three thoughts that hover around this mystery of the gravestones; that they were of Puritan heritage, that the cherubs that we see on stones are somehow representative of the Great Awakening with the uprising of Jonathan Edwards, and that the Greek urn and willow were symbolic of the depersonalization and secularizing of religion. I believe that
these stones are reaped in theology and to learn their meaning can open a whole new world of history and theology as you walk through these burial grounds. Puritans believed that death was a new beginning, that when a spirit left this world it went on to everlasting life. Therefore death to these strong willed, determined people, was not an end but a new beginning. They also took very seriously Exodus 20, the second commandment; "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;" 21 Their thought was not to make something that was to be worshiped, but rather a place for remembrance of the saints that had gone before them. They also, as it has been stated before, wanted no part of anything that had to do with the Pope, or anything related to Rome. For this reason, you will see no crosses on gravestones in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or any thing that we would today think of as religious imagery in, but we do see their great heritage in their own symbolism.

First the stone was brought over. "A hard, dark, flinty slate-stone from North Wales was commonly used, a stone so hard and enduring that when our modern granite and marble monuments are crumbled in the dust I believe these old slate headstones will still speak their warning words of many centuries." 22 Then stone carvers would carve the stones. Often times stone carvers were illiterate, or were carving from what they heard. For these two facts you can find many mistakes where the stone carver fixed his mistake. This may take

21 Exodus 20:4 RSV (Revised Standard Version).
22 Ibid., p. 383.
the form of the letters being crammed in, or above the word to make the correction. Here is a layout of how the stones were actually carved.

Another plaque read, "First the carver choose a rough slab of local gray or mottled red slate. The stone was durable, yet soft enough to carve easily, and its layers split off at a hammers blow to leave a smooth surface. Extra smoothing prepared the face for carving.

Most carvers planned their designs in advance. With chalk or ink, they sketched a figure for the top (head) of the stone decorative patterns for the edges (shoulders) and lettering for the center. Then the carver choose his tools carefully. First he used an awl, a sharp pointed instrument like an ice pick, to scratch an outline into the slate surface. Then a chisel cut away from the scratched lines to create the incised effect of the letters and designs. The rasp, a sepal-like tool with a file end, rounded figures such as leaves wings and faces and gave them their smooth three-dimensional appearance.

The carver could 'sand' down any cutting mistake he made and then carve over it again. Or, sometimes he practiced a letter or design at the very base of the stone. Look for these warm-ups and mistakes."23

During the next pages of this report I would like to show you some of my findings of symbolism upon gravestones in New England. I found this marker that explains how the Puritans actually distinguished gravestones.

23  Granary Burial Ground, plaque, Boston, MA.
"Puritan prohibitions against the use of images, as in the second commandment, probably account for the plainness of the stones. By the 1670's, however, preaching distinguished between images for civil purposes, like gravestone carvings, and graven images in churches. Since a burying ground was municipal land, under secular control, decoration was acceptable. Look at the top of these later stones for the winged death's heads (skull with wings), hourglasses and crossbones. These symbols portray the physical facts of death, but also suggest hope for the souls salvation. Local carvers used these designs for the next 100 years in Boston.24

24 King's Chapel Burial Ground, plaque, Boston, MA.
Look with me at some of the actual stones. These pictures were taken in Boston, MA, at King’s Chapel Burial Ground, and The Grainier Burial Ground, and in Plimouth, MA at Burial Hill.

Here we see the Winged Death’s Head.

This was symbolic of the mortality of the soul. That after death, the soul was in flight.

This was the most common that I found in my search.
Here is the Skull and Crossbones.

This was symbolic of mortality it is also a very realistic symbol of the reality and concreteness of death.
The tree of life, which has had symbolic significance since the Sumerians and has been used in every culture since, was transformed by latter-day Puritans into the willows carved into the early 19th century monuments.


Willows, Trees with Urn.

Trees can be representative of life, and the tree of life.

Willow can be earthly sorrow, or symbolic of the tree of human sadness.

And urns were used in Greek culture to symbolize death.

Therefore together they symbolize death and new life.
Portrait.

These stones were carved to look like the deceased.

At first they were just a picture of a man or woman,

later they were actually styled to look like the individual.

During the carving of the first stones, if the curl went inward

it was a female, and if it went outward it was a male.
Skeleton and Shell.

The Skeleton was a symbol again of the reality of death.

Shells on the other hand were symbolic of the pilgrimage of life, birth and life.

Again together they would mean the pilgrimage of death to life.
Marble.

Marble was used in later stones as shown here.

But some of the slate stones were also encased in marble when they started to crack.

It is ironic, since marble we have found down through the ages does not hold up as well as slate.
My information for these previous pages was received from Mueller's book, and from what I learned from Gordon Carr during our time together. Carr, a 50-year veteran in the stone carving business, has also done extensive research in the area, and I consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to learn from him.

Stone carvings to the Puritans were a place where they could memorialize their loved ones, a place where they could grieve and a place that they could go back to and remember. The neat thing they have given us is that we too can stand among these gravestones today, and remember, and learn. They gave us a great gift of history in these stones, history that will continue to live on for future generations to also remember and learn from.

My original questions were: How did we come about our burial customs here in America? Is the funeral that we celebrate in America now, anything like it was when the Pilgrims first landed in America? Are graveyards important? I think I have answered these questions in these pages, and also given a lot of room for thought and growth. It has been fascinating to uncover why we do what we do, in our own funeral practices, and to learn from what has been handed down in the generations.

The first question was, is the funeral that we celebrate in America now anything like it was when the Pilgrim first landed in America? I think that if Elder Brewster were to know what takes place in an American funeral now, he would probably turn in his grave. Our Pilgrim Father's didn't even mark graves when they first arrived in order that the
Indians would not know that any of their people had died, and certainly any sort of prayer would have been out of the question, anything that even remotely resembled what was going on in Rome would have been disallowed.

Pilgrim plainness prevailed for a while but as the seventeenth century rolled through the Puritans pushed burial’s more towards funerals, and made them in to a costly and stylish affair. We examined the use of death’s head rings and gloves to not only call people to the funeral but also remind them afterwards of that person’s life. We touched on the feasts that began to become customary, and the liquor bills that dipped into families pockets well after the funeral was over.

And we examined some of the Puritan’s art work in their gravestones. After the stones were imported and cut with vivid symbolism, they then stood in memory of a life that we still have the opportunity to learn from today.

As I look back on these early communities here in America, I am reminded of how harsh life and reality were for them. Our Separatist founders were dedicated, hard working, persevering people, who even in the face of death, learned to appreciate God and his loving and bountiful goodness in their lives. Their lives when cut to the core were focused on the task that God had given them of survival in the face of all iniquity in this new world. For those in their company who did pass on, we see here the story of how they grappled with their feelings and fears, and how we have now begun to piece together the strands which
unite us with the dust that we are and the dust which we will one day become. Our burial practices and customs, come from long years of history and change according to our times. May each of us in our understanding of the life cycle never forget the saints who have gone before and the saints who are yet to come. As each gravestone is placed may we see that our history is rich and old, and that one day too our own gravestone may teach a future generation of all that God has revealed to us in our day and age.