

Cremation and present pasts: a contemporary archaeology of Swedish memory groves

Howard Williams

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Abstract

I present a case study in the contemporary archaeology of death: an investigation of the minneslunden ('memory groves') of present-day Sweden. In recent decades, memory groves have been adapted and condensed from their original suburban cemetery locations and added to rural churchyard settings. Eschewing individual memorials with text or images, memory groves serve as architectonic environments that facilitate the staging of the presence of the cremated dead and encouraging ongoing relationships between the living and the dead through personal commemorative practice. I argue that memory groves choreograph commemoration through the diffusion and sublimation of ashes into landscape utopias with implicit, and sometimes explicit, archaeological themes. In rural churchyards, memory groves serve as 'present-pasts', newly-created ancient monuments and primordial sacred microlandscapes, affording the cremated dead with a collective, emotive and mnemonic material presence and simultaneously serving to revitalising the commemorative use of traditional churchyard space within a largely secular and mobile contemporary society. Using memory groves as a case study, the paper seeks to demonstrate the potential in the archaeological investigation of contemporary death and its material culture.

Keywords

churchyards; cremation; memory groves; Sweden

Introduction

I contend that mortuary archaeologists are as well-situated to investigate the material cultures and spaces of cremation in the contemporary world as for both prehistoric and historic societies. For both past and present, cremation can be regarded as a strategy of commemoration that involves the rapid, but culturally and technologically-varied, transformation of the corpse by fire. Simultaneously, the subsequent display, translation and incorporation of ashes into a range of landscapes and materialities can serve as technologies of remembrance: the selective and practical social remembering and staged forgetting of the person in death. While modern cremation is often regarded as the antithesis of pre-industrial open-air cremation ceremonies, regarding cremation as a technology of remembrance provides a theoretical basis for interpreting very different social, economic, political and religious contexts in which cremation is deployed. In particular, this approach affords insights into post-cremation disposal strategies for ashes in both the past and present (see Back Danielsson, 2009; Williams, 2004, 2008).

Post-cremation ritual practices have diverse material and spatial manifestations in Western societies. While the actual cremation process itself is usually highly controlled and hidden from the gaze of mourners within crematoria, the treatment of ashes can be viewed as 'secondary rites' (Hertz, 1907/1960; see also Davies, 2002, pp. 30–32) that afford

innumerable opportunities to commemorate and sustain links with the dead through place and material culture. In the UK, many mourners wish for the ashes of loved ones to be disposed of by the crematorium staff, memorialise them within the crematorium's garden of remembrance or else have them interred and memorialised in cemeteries or churchyards. Yet there is a widely recognised and increasing trend for kin to take away and dispose of ashes at home, in the garden or the wider landscape (Hockey, Kellaheer, & Prendergast, 2007; Kellaheer, Prendergast, & Hockey, 2005; Prendergast, Hockey, & Kellaheer, 2006). Memorialising the cremated dead in traditional commemorative environments, and the choices made over how to dispose of ashes elsewhere, represent the diversification, personalisation and re-sentimentalising of death in a late-modern postindustrial world. Simultaneously, ashes facilitate this diversification, providing a substance for commemoration that is part-person, part-material culture with a distinctive, malleable and shifting materiality of its own (Prendergast et al., 2006). Of course, the dead have never been fully disenchanting in Western societies during the twentieth century. However, the enhanced rituals associated with ashes might be regarded as a 're-enchanting' of the dead, a new emotive structure by which mourners express their loss and negotiate links with the dead person (Prendergast et al., 2006). As such, this is a process of relevance far beyond the UK and finds parallels in Western Europe and Scandinavia in both the treatment of corpses and ashes (e.g. Heessels & Venbrux, 2009; Javeau, 2001) and the creation of new commemorative landscapes incorporating the cremated dead (Clayden & Dixon, 2007; Sørensen, 2009).

In Sweden, cremation is as popular as in the UK, although a key difference is that the Church of Sweden, rather than mourners, has legal control over the ashes after cremation (Prendergast et al., 2006, p. 883; Walter, 2005, pp. 180–181). Human ash is therefore not as widely utilised as an ambiguous, affective and mnemonic substance for disposal by the mourners themselves. Due to legislation only a minority of individuals choose for their ashes to be scattered in the landscape (Back Danielsson, 2011).¹ Instead, it is the place and material culture of interred ashes that help configure the social remembering and forgetting of loved ones by mourners. Over the last half-century, Swedish cemeteries and churchyards have seen changes to incorporate new architectonic and botanical environments and material culture to commemorate the cremated dead within a largely secular society, but in one where the Church of Sweden has responsibility for the dying and the dead.

Ashes have many destinations in Swedish contemporary commemorative practice, reflecting the increasingly sophisticated and varying material relationships between the living and the dead. Ash disposal can take place at the traditional grave-locations for families and individuals within churchyards and cemeteries or in separate lawn cemetery areas designed principally for the disposal of ashes (see also Sørensen, 2009, for Denmark). However, for this paper, I attempt an archaeological perspective on what might appear the most extreme form of modernist cremation memorial in Sweden, one that has been an increasingly popular destination of ashes in rural Sweden over the last half century: memory groves (*minneslund*).² This modernist-style of memorialisation comprise

¹ I thank Ing-Marie Back Danielsson for her personal observations on this issue.

² Subsequently I refer to 'memory groves' rather than 'memorial groves'. 'Minneslund' has a poetic air, meaning 'grove of memories' that suggests the contemplation of personal

utopian micro-landscapes that draw their design elements from traditional graves but also other forms of public art and garden design, affording public anonymity to the ashes interred there.

Memory groves are part-garden, part-cenotaph, part-grave. They began in Swedish cities in the 1950s and 1960s when cremation rose rapidly in popularity, seemingly because they avoid the obligation and cost for families of maintaining a traditional grave-plot and they provide an efficient use of space for ash disposal that assists in the management of cemetery space. As with Danish lawn cemeteries (cf. Sørensen, 2009, p. 120), memory groves may also reflect the widening spatial distance between the living and the dead in Swedish society. An increasingly mobile population is unable to regularly tend grave-plots. Likewise, memory groves may also embody changing attitudes towards the dead as memorable in personal, private and virtual environments alongside the public cemetery (Sørensen, 2009, pp. 122–123, 2011).

Memory groves eschew individual memorial texts, images or the marking of the precise location for each disposal. However, more recently, there is a trend to temper the textual anonymity of the dead. New gardens of remembrance have adapted the memory grove commemorative formula, and while retaining their deployment of an idyllic garden environment, the locations of each ash burial receives a stone and plaque more like a traditional grave. These are widely known as 'ash groves' (askgravlunden: Back Danielsson, 2011; Petersson, 2004). Through their dissemination, memory groves have created a new emotive and mnemonic environment for commemoration in Swedish cemeteries. Memory groves have been added to, and transform, existing cemeteries and churchyards (see Williams & Williams, 2007). They are also added to abandoned and cleared cemeteries and churchyards in town and country. In all these environments, memory groves facilitate a novel form of place-making through ash disposal (see also Kellaher, Hockey, & Prendergast, 2010), revitalising existing commemorative environments, setting up new possibilities for engagement between the living and the dead and facilitating the transformation of Swedish commemorative practice.

The textual anonymity for the cremated dead does not mean that memory groves are depersonalised, nor does it help to regard them as 'non-places'. The grove itself supplants the compartmentalised and fixed location marked by text offered by traditional burial plots. Instead, the grave is simultaneously visited by many different sets of living visitors, who can mourn and remember their loved ones, and who successively occupy the same space. The removal of text means that many personal 'memories' are written onto the same environment by visitors without leaving specific enduring material traces. Only ephemeral acts of lighting candles and leaving flowers connect the living to the dead person. Text still has a role, but by replacing the commemorative significance of traditional gravestone script. Hence the single word 'minneslund', found upon stones and other features in memory groves, stands as the only text in these spaces, supplanting and

reminders of the dead rather than the formal remembrance of people and events implied by the use of the term 'memorial grove' in English. 'Memory groves' serves as a useful compromise to allude to the contemplative and personal nature of remembrance suggested by these memorial places.

invoking the imagination of absent gravestones that might have been successively added to the grove had a grave been there. Hence, groves are proxy graves for the cremated dead. Yet they might be best also considered as liminal landscapes, places of tension between the corporeal presence and absence of the dead and hence they serve to stage the social selective remembering and forgetting of the dead mediated by creating a collective space into which ashes are subsumed. Furthermore, they are places associated with the dead, but also perceived thresholds into realms of the imagination for the mourners, inhabited by memories of deceased loved ones. Therefore, I argue that this largely text-free landscape setting means that material culture and place combine and serve as powerful emotive media for negotiating individual acts of commemoration and facilitating ongoing care of, and bonds with, the dead by the living, linking the biography of individuals to a seemingly timeless microcosm of the Swedish landscape (see Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Petersson, 2009; Prendergast et al., 2006).

In this paper, I focus on only one commemorative theme to illustrate how the material culture of Swedish memory groves renders them effective media for commemorating the dead as described above. I explore how archaeological themes pervade the design and use of memory groves. In this commemorative environment, prehistoric and historic mortuary monuments are reused and made anew (see also Holtorf, 1996; Holtorf & Williams, 2006). In this regard, my paper dovetails with Back Danielsson's (2011) where she considers the role of archaeology in configuring Swedish mortuary and commemorative practice over the longue durée since the sixteenth century. Here, I focus on 'replica' pasts; in another paper I consider in more detail how ancient material culture and places are reused by memory groves (Williams, 2011). For archaeologists, this evidence is of interest not only because it shows how archaeological materials and ideas are enmeshed in contemporary Swedish mortuary culture and practice, but perhaps it will also serve to challenge archaeologists to rethink the widely made association between cremation deposition in collective contexts and the negation of personal biographies into place. Rather than seeing ash disposal in architectural and collective contexts as negating, denying or masking social identities, the staged and selective social remembering and forgetting of these commemorative environments can instead be seen to facilitate technologies of remembrance that engage with the dead as material and spiritual presences, sometimes distant and safe, sometimes close and tangible. This discussion therefore has implications for understanding the mnemonic and emotive materialities and spaces of contemporary ash disposal that may in turn afford insights into cremation in the human past (see Williams, 2004, 2008). The paper's relevance to the study of death in the present-day is to investigate the hitherto unexplored role of archaeological themes in memory groves.

Ash and antiquity in Sweden

Ash and antiquity have been linked together since the inception of modern cremation in Sweden in the late nineteenth century. Cremation's ancient Nordic, as well as Classical, roots were both used to justify its reintroduction as a modern practice (Ahren, 2009, Back Danielsson, 2009, 2011; Petersson, 2004, p. 38). These ideas were early on enshrined in landscape design. Drawing on nineteenth century Continental romantic ideas of the woodland cemetery and the memory grove, including the art of Casper David Friedrich, the Stockholm Woodland Cemetery has set an enduring precedent over Swedish death-ways

and mortuary material culture. An existing pine wood and gravel pits were transformed to evoke hallowed antiquity married to national romanticism (Clayden & Woudstra, 2003, p. 191). The woodland itself alludes to the primordial Swedish forest as a place of eternity and regeneration. However, both nature and antiquity are combined in this site (see Sundin, 2005, p. 10). The ancient past is materialised in a range of prehistoric, Egyptian, Classical and medieval architectural allusions within the cemetery, including its boundary that mirrors Sweden's historic churchyard walls (Clayden & Woudstra, 2003, p. 193; Curl, 2002, p. 314). Likewise upon individual graves, natural themes and symbolism are ubiquitous as they are elsewhere in Sweden (Gustavsson, 2002).

When a memory grove was completed at the Stockholm Woodland Cemetery in 1961 (the third constructed in Sweden), it unsurprisingly drew upon the existing antique themes of the woodland cemetery landscape (Figures 1 and 2). The grove is, as the word suggests, a clearing in the woodland. At its focus is a bronze pyramid to receive floral offerings, surrounded by benches. The grove is set on the hill adjacent to the 'meditation grove' above the Woodland crematorium. The hills upon which both groves are placed are the results of quarrying and landscaping, yet they resemble the sweeping landscape of the prehistoric burial mounds at Gamla Uppsala, an icon of Sweden's national heritage and identity (Worpole, 2003). Indeed, the woodland cemetery, including the memory grove, is now regarded to be an historic landscape with World Heritage Site status in its own right.³ Designed for private contemplation and acts of commemoration, this form of memorial suited the individualised, privatised and hygienic dead of late twentieth century commemorative culture.

³ <http://www.skogskyrkogarden.se/en/>



Figure 1. Stockholm Woodland Cemetery looking from the Woodland crematorium towards the meditation grove (hill on the left) and the memory grove (wooded hill on the right). Photograph: Howard Williams, 2009.



Figure 2. Stockholm Woodland Cemetery memory grove. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2009.

Therefore, despite their modernist character, memory groves from their inception employed the archaeological and ancient themes of romantic Swedish cemetery design. Memory groves illustrate how nature and antiquity continue to be entwined in Swedish perceptions of heritage (Sundin, 2005, p. 14) and extend to recent and contemporary commemorative practice (Back Danielsson, 2011; Petersson, 2006). They embody a love affair with the past and a wider embedded nostalgia in Swedish cultural and political life (Andersson, 2009). The spread of memory groves into country churchyards reflects the diffusion of cremation but also the desire to continue to root memorials to the cremated dead in traditional spaces. Memory groves perpetuate the rural churchyard as a site of memory (see Welinder, 1991). This trend also makes sense in relation to the Church of Sweden's desire to show itself as caring for the dying and mourners in the face of ever-smaller congregations (Jeppsson Grassmen & Whitaker, 2007, 2009), their unique appearance perhaps not only a response to the distinctive churchyard environment but also the requirements and identities of local communities.⁴ Memory groves also counteract the perceived absence of the body from the Swedish funerary process, affording a material presence otherwise lacking from mourners' experience (Bremborg, 2006; Walter, 2005). Therefore, since the 1970s and 1980s, these idyllic micro-landscapes designed for urban and suburban cemeteries have been adapted and 'down-sized' to be incorporated into rural churchyards. Thus, memory groves allow the cremated dead to have a distinctive place for mourning and commemorated in the rural setting. While ashes may depart from local communities for the crematorium, they come back to rest in the traditional churchyard environment in a discrete locus.

Encountering memory groves

I first observed memory groves in the late 1990s in Västergötland and Uppland. However, in the summer of 2005, I repeatedly encountered them during visits to Swedish churchyards while co-directing archaeological fieldwork at a Viking Age site in Östergötland (Rundkvist & Williams, 2008). During subsequent fieldwork, I made visits to 158 Swedish churches and churchyards in the historic regions of Uppland, Västmanland, Scania, Blekinge, Småland and Öland in 2007, Gotland in 2008 and Södermanland and Östergötland in 2009.⁵ The vast majority of churchyards had memory groves and I amassed a detailed photographic record of those I encountered. I also repeatedly witnessed the use of memory groves by mourners laying flowers, lighting candles and sitting quietly in contemplation or prayer.

My intention was to realise the potential of memory groves for a contemporary archaeological investigation of mortuary commemoration. Rather than adopting an ethnographic approach based on interviews, I instead rely on the material evidence of the spaces themselves. This includes a study of their design but also the evidence of their management and use. This approach proposes that memory groves have emotive and mnemonic agencies; staging and invoking mourners' dispositions and actions, prompting and facilitating commemorative practices in ways that may be only partly intended by their designers or consciously recognised by their managers and users. This archaeological perspective serves as an example of the potential archaeology to reveal the non-discursive,

⁴ I owe this point to Ing-Marie Back Danielsson.

⁵ Each site is referred to in relation to its historic region, a system somewhat anachronistic but familiar to archaeologists and commensurate with emphasising the historical background to each site: Blekinge (Bl), Gotland (Go), Södermanland (Sö), Uppland (Up), Öland (Öl) and Östergötland (Ög).

the un-constituted and ephemeral in modern mortuary commemoration: seeing between the conventional grand-narratives in the history and sociology of death distilled from texts and verbal discourse by exploring embodied, personal pasts so far unexplored and unwritten (see Buchli & Lucas, 2001a; see also Andreassen, Bjerck, & Olsen, 2010).

Memory groves in the rural churchyards of Sweden

While each memory grove is a unique memorial environment, and seemingly intentionally no two are alike, let me first outline a description of the 'typical' design and management features that those I encountered appear to share. The groves are always immaculately maintained by cemetery staff regardless of the time of year, although water features may be seasonally covered over. As with almost all Swedish rural churchyards, neglect, decay and ruination are denied as a key aspect of cemetery management. Within the groves are spaces for mourners and commemorative acts: benches (usually one or two), lanterns for placing votive candles (again, usually one or two) and one or more flower-holders for floral offerings (of varied designs): the numbers of these will vary depending on the size of the mourning community using the memory grove. Architectonic features provide foci for the memory grove and are usually faced by the benches and framed by lanterns and flower-holders. These might be memorial rocks, their single inscribed word 'Minneslund' simultaneously describing the place and inviting visits to mourn and remember. These are cenotaphic gravestones, often framed by pairs of evergreen and/or deciduous trees in a similar manner to contemporary traditional grave-plots. These may be joined by sculpted stones, flower-beds and/or crosses. More elaborate memory groves include water features (fountains, pools and streams) as focal points associated with the memorial rocks.

The ash disposal area of the grove is usually an open lawn space, sometimes with areas of freshly cut turf indicating the sites of newly interred ashes. Memory groves can have clear borders of hedges, trees or landscaped banks, but in other instances their edges are blurred, merging the grove with the surrounding churchyard. In other words, 'memory groves' are often not 'groves' at all, either they are not surrounded by trees or the boundaries are ambiguous. Each grove therefore affords a distinctive design and location but also a different choreography of integration and separation from the rest of the churchyard with its traditional grave-plots, trees and paths.

The locations for memory groves vary within churchyards and churchyard extensions, but they tend to be placed away from church buildings and close to or against churchyard boundary walls, usually away from the principal entrances. Only rarely is access obtained directly from outside the churchyard. Often, minimalistic signs bearing the word 'Minneslund' direct the visitor to the memory groves, as its location is often not clear when one enters an unfamiliar churchyard. Hence, visiting a memory grove usually involves embodied engagement with the material history of the churchyard: not only circumventing the church itself but also passing by ancient rune-stones and historic and recent gravestones. Likewise, it is extremely rare for memory groves to be positioned en route between the church and its entrances. Like the church itself, the spatial choreography of visiting memory groves is one of reaching a destination (a cul-de-sac) rather than passing through (see also Kellaher et al., 2010). The groves are a locus for private, personal mourning in solitude, facilitating contemplation and prayer. Indeed, while often inter-visible with the church, the positioning of foliage and benches often encourages the visitor to sense the

natural landscape, the trees and sky above, the surrounding graves, churchyard boundary and the rural landscape beyond (as at Lundby, Sö; Figure 3).

Creating present-pasts

The idea of a memorial grove is itself primordial and elemental, distilling and invoking romantic components of the Swedish natural environment including stones, trees, plants and water. Like many late twentieth century gravestones, the stones placed within memory groves embody the antiquity of the landscape through the choice of glacially-worn or water-worn boulders. In other instances, the allusion is archaeological rather than geological, with the stones set on cairns or upon earthen mounds reminiscent of the many prehistoric monuments that are still prominent features of Sweden's countryside (Figure 4).

These forms are apposite for memory groves; their use as collective memorials mirrors the fact that many Swedish prehistoric monuments were either intended as collective monuments or attracted successive burials over many decades, centuries and millennia (Holtorf, 1996). In other words, their design pre-empts their role as foci for successive and inclusive commemorative acts. Other 'cairns' may allude to the folk tradition of raising piles of stones ('offerkast') and crosses by roadsides following unexpected deaths (Pettersson, 2009). Perhaps this represents a further implicit link between the cenotaphic and antique allusions incorporated into memory grove design. Like road-side memorials, the materially absent dead are rendered present through stones and crosses.



Figure 3. The memory grove at Lundby (Sö) is situated in a separate hedged area outside the southwest corner of the churchyard. The grove is reached by a winding lit path leading out of the west side of the churchyard's southern extension. When seated in the grove, one looks out southwards away from the church over the surrounding agricultural landscape towards wooded hills. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2009.



Figure 4. The memory grove at Hagebyhöga (Ög) utilising four glacially-worn boulders, three supporting a fourth inscribed with the word MINNESLUND. This pseudo-prehistoric monumental form is joined by an antique-style flower pot set against the ancient churchyard wall. View from the south-west. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2009.

I have also observed memory groves incorporating tricorn stone-settings and boat-shaped arrangements that are equally prehistoric in inspiration. Indeed, this theme has been enhanced, not diminished, among the more recent 'ash groves'. For example, ash groves in the cemetery at Motala (Ög) resemble Iron Age cemeteries and prehistoric ship-shaped stone settings (see Williams, 2011). Crosses themselves are multi-vocal, symbols of hope and resurrection and perhaps also a link to nature and the long history of Sweden's conversion and Christian faith (discussed by Worpole, 2003, pp. 38–44). They also provide a link to the Swedish roadside 'offerkast' folk tradition. Therefore, crosses and piles of stones might allude to memory groves as not simply resting-places, but as spaces connecting the living and the absent dead. In this sense, the design of memory groves has spiritual qualities, rendering them liminal way-markers situated betwixt and between this world and the next and as places where the twain can meet. This is enshrined in memory-grove location: many are located just within, or just without, the churchyard boundary. In these ways, the architectonics of memory groves simultaneously allude to Christian, folk and prehistoric memorial traditions.



Figure 5. Smedby (O" l) memory grove with the churchyard boundary as a backdrop and an 'antique' depiction in a gravestone-style. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2007.



Figure 6. Tofta (Go), the focus of the memory grove incorporates a bench (on its far, concave, side) built in identical fashion to the churchyard boundary wall (beyond to left) made from local limestone. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2008.

Other memory groves replicate more explicit historic forms of churchyard and church monuments, including in one case a church altar (Mörbylånga, ÖI), historic crosses and grave-slabs (e.g. Öja, Go; see also Figure 5), obelisks (Hjortsberga, BI), columns (Ängsö, Vs) and small gravestones (Övergran, Up). Architectural fragments (or features intended to appear as old fragments) are used in the memory groves at Martebo (Go) and Väskinde (Go). The association with antiquity is extended in numerous instances where an ancient gravestone from the churchyard is re-used as a commemorative focus of the memory grove. As mentioned above, memory groves are often placed adjacent to the ancient churchyard boundary (Figures 4 and 5) and many groves use dry-stone walling as an integral element of their design; seemingly invoking liminality, the boundary between sacred and profane but also between the physical and the spiritual world (Figure 6). A further use of walls to represent the historic environment is at Lärbro churchyard (Go). Here, the octagonal walls of the grove and the fountain within it mirror the adjacent octagonal church tower and the medieval font found therein. The same applies at Å church (Ög), where the brand-new memory grove (as observed in 2009) has a monumental focus comprising of two touching circular walls of white stone, the lower one of two courses containing gravel, a higher one of three courses planted with bracken. Their colour and shape evoke the three-tier white stone-blocks of the adjacent church's chancel apse.⁶

⁶ I thank Elizabeth Williams for making this observation.

Further internal metal features of the groves allude to the tradition and 'heritage' of the Swedish churchyard. These include black lanterns, black iron flower-holders, lamps, fences, water-pumps and flower pots (Figures 3 and 4). In one instance, a traditional black iron churchyard gate provides the backdrop to the memory grove (Figure 7). Placed behind the 'minneslund' inscribed stone and a flower bed, this is clearly intended as a symbolic threshold for the dead to enter or depart the grove, situated directly opposite the entrance used by mourners. In material terms, the memory grove is here a meeting ground between the living and the dead, fossilising the deceased's rite of passage into a timeless steady-state absent-presence.



Figure 7. An iron gate set upon the stone inscribed with the word 'minneslund' in the memory grove at Rappestad church (Ög). A very rare instance of a memory grove built adjacent to the historic church. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2009.

The designers of the memory groves are neither mimicking any single prehistoric or historic mortuary monument nor alluding to any specific time period, and many contain no such explicit antique references. Indeed such direct and precise references might destroy the diffused and ambiguous allusions to timelessness and antiquity and are embodied in the memory grove that serve to render the dead present in these spaces. Instead, they are creating the impression of antiquity without antiquity, and simultaneously the sense that the dead are present in these places through their ashes, even though visibly absent in the sense that they possess no personal grave-markers. They are trans-temporal monuments. Both a sense of the link between past and present, and a sense of the presence of the dead, are constructed through this primordial material dialogue: what I call 'present-pasts'.

Indeed, the exception that proves this rule is the general absence of rune-stones reused or replicated in memory groves. One may often pass Viking Age runestones proudly displayed within churchyards while visiting memory groves, yet these monuments are seemingly too precisely tied to the heritage of Christian conversion to be used within memory groves themselves. I encountered only one memory grove that incorporated ancient rune-stones (Tingstad, Ög). Meanwhile, I encountered one further replica rune-stone with a pseudo-runic inscription of a popular Swedish hymn.⁷ Notably, this provided the focus of a memory grove from an urban, not a rural, context (Mjölby, Ög). Rune-stones may be simply too public and too historical for inclusion.



Figure 8. Källunge (Go) memory grove, the inscribed central gravestone has flowers planted in front of it. The raised circular walled grassed area has a black-metal flower-holder. These are surrounded by a lantern for placing candles, two benches and a large wooden cross topped with a replica of the Källunge weather vane. The original Viking artefact is on display within the church. Photograph: Howard Williams, 2008.

Källunge, Gotland

An example of how multiple temporalities are drawn together in the material culture of memory groves is the churchyard at Källunge (Go). Here, the memory grove is situated in a clearly liminal location; outside the eastern boundary of the churchyard, surrounded by

⁷ I thank Martin Rundkvist for making this observation.

mature trees (Figure 8). The grove is therefore between the churchyard and the surrounding countryside at the private east-end of the church and farthest from the main entrance to the west. A large wooden cross topped with a replica Viking weathervane marks the church-side of the memorial space. East of the cross, away from the churchyard boundary, two benches, a lantern and a flower holder surround a circular 'cairn'. This cairn consists of a drystone wall of limestone composed like the adjacent churchyard boundary wall. This wall surrounds a raised grass area, at the centre of which is a memorial stone to the cremated dead: at once gravestone and cenotaph. The stone is inscribed with yellow flowers and a five-pointed star, between which an inscription speaks of the continued bonds between the living and the dead through floral offerings: 'Och minsta blomma på min stig/ Den är ett ord av tro' st dig [And even the smallest flower in my path/ It is a word of comfort (from) you].⁸

The past is made present in varied ways within this memory grove. Gotland's famous late first millennium picture-stones are thought by archaeologists to have been originally placed centrally within circular stone-settings in a comparable fashion to the memory grove's arrangement (Burström, 1996; Nylén & Lamm, 1988, pp. 28, 158–159). The circular monument in any case replicates the many cairns that comprise the Iron Age cemeteries that still litter the Gotlandic landscape. The Viking past is celebrated in this memory grove by the replica weather-vane: the original is on display within the church itself (Nylén & Lamm, 1988, p. 104). The shape of the central 'gravestone' is a replication of a late nineteenth century memorial form. Meanwhile, as previously mentioned, the grove is set adjacent, but outside, the ancient limestone wall of the churchyard itself and within view of the ancient church building. Incontrovertibly contradicting these antique allusions, the concrete at the base of the cross is crudely inscribed with the date of construction: 24-5-2007.

Through these spatial and material allusions, the Ka'llunge memory grove is rendered unique to the site and different from all other memory groves found elsewhere. It becomes a trans-temporal pastiche invoking Christ's crucifixion, prehistoric mortuary monumentality, the specific Viking heritage of the church as well as the traditional inhumation practices of raising gravestones over burial plots. The location and form creates a liminal and timeless space for prayer and contemplation. All these themes merge together into the commemorative form of the grove with benches, lantern and flower-holder facilitating the commemorative acts of visiting mourners.

Conclusion

Memory groves certainly relieve mourners of the costs and emotional burden of leasing, maintaining and visiting a grave-plot. Furthermore, their archaeological themes perpetuate an existing aspect of Swedish mortuary architecture and, indeed, archaeological allusions may serve to legitimise their addition to, and radical transformation of, the heavily romanticised heritage of churchyard space they inhabit (see Back Danielsson this volume). Yet more than a form of present day mortuary antiquarianism in Swedish commemorative practice, memory groves enshrine national ideology through a sense of *communitas* in death, celebrating Swedish ideals of equality in public society (Jacobson-Widding, 1988).

⁸ I thank Martin Rundkvist for explaining the apparent error in the Swedish text, the missing word seemingly is: från/from.

Memory groves certainly deny the opportunities afforded by the traditional gravestone for the public expression of social identity (Reimers, 1999; Welinder, 1991). They enable the Church of Sweden to perpetuate their role as carers for both the mourners and the dead, affording ashes with a place within cemeteries and churchyards alongside traditional gravestones.

Yet memory groves can also be understood as technologies of remembrance by which archaeological themes operate as material agencies, creating specific mnemonic and emotive architectures (see Sørensen, 2009; Williams, 2004). Hence, it might be missing the point to see memory groves as anonymous and 'depersonalised' spaces (cf. Petersson, 2004, p. 46). Memory groves construct and weave together a temporal and emotional perpetuity and parity for the dead and their relationships with the living, yet they still facilitate the personal engagement and remembrance of deceased loved ones through alternative media (see also Sørensen, 2009, p. 130). Material culture is employed to stage and constitute commemorative acts by mourners. The limited use of text (the presence of the single word 'minneslund') facilitates this strategy. The dead may be corporeally absent from sight and their precise location receives no memorial, but they are rendered present in a collective material form, diffused and sublimated through evocations of a timeless Swedish landscape embodied in botany, geology and antiquity. Simultaneously, the memory grove's materiality recognises that, through ashes, the dead are present, yet they are temporally and corporeally 'elsewhere'. Like the traditional grave-plot, the memory grove is a site for mourners to meet and imagine the dead, not a place simply 'inhabited' by them. In this regard, I argue that groves serve as a place of selective social remembering and forgetting, the staged and simultaneous corporeal presence and absence of the dead, disembodied but tangible to visiting mourners.

Memory groves' use of the past are also effective in place-making; in a fluid and largely secular society where rural communities are struggling to retain a coherent identity, the memory groves and (more recently) ash groves revitalise the churchyard as a site of meaning and visitation. While the boundary and church fix the memorial space, the traditional grave-plots are fluid and the monumental and rich symbolism of headstones belie their temporary nature (Gustavsson, 2002); they are removed once the family no longer pays for their maintenance. Churchyards do not contain abandoned and broken memorials and are in essence filled with 'temporary' grave-markers leased for 25 years. The memory groves contradict this monumental ephemerality. Each rural memory grove is designed to be unique; adapting urban and suburban cemetery forms to the distinctive settings of each of Sweden's historic churchyards in which they are built. Also, by escaping the expense and maintenance necessary for a traditional grave-plot, they afford a sense of place and enduring permanence. Because they are collective and well maintained, there is the potential for individuals to visit irregularly without meeting signs of decay and ruination; the space promises to defy the passing of time since the time of death and bereavement. Ironically therefore, through the absence of a discrete grave-marker, memory groves commemorate by materialising the absence of the dead while simultaneously diffusing the presence of the dead within the traditional commemorative space of the churchyard. As such, they were sites of memory, where loved ones are located or presenced; more importantly they are sites for memory, the repeated visiting and perpetuation of bonds with the dead through memorial practice.

Contemporary archaeologists have recently defined themselves as investigators of the artefacts, sites and landscapes of recently-abandoned or ongoing human habitation, and in doing so have explored how memories are mediated by material culture involving both intended commemorative material cultures and the vestiges of material existence (Andreassen et al., 2010; Buchli & Lucas, 2001b; Harrison & Schofield, 2010). In doing so, contemporary archaeologists promise to write stories that might be otherwise unwritten and unspoken. This study explores how contemporary mortuary practices provide rich potential for this approach, and how mortuary archaeology can provide fresh perspectives on present-day commemorative practice (see also Mytum, 2004; Sørensen, 2009; Welinder, 1991). The mortuary archaeologist can explore the themes, variability and contexts in mortuary practice and mortuary commemoration beyond those intended at their inception or consciously recognised by their managers and users (see Buchli & Lucas, 2001a, pp. 12–17).

Swedish memory groves deploy a multiplicity of pasts in configuring the commemoration of the dead. Rather than epitomising the modern 'denial' of death in which corporeal absence enshrines memorial oblivion, memory groves are liminal places. In tension between social remembering and forgetting, memory groves materialise the dead and invoke memories of them through the timeless void created by the material sublimation of ashes into 'present-pasts'.

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