Death redesigned: British crematoria, history, architecture and landscape


Type of Research: Book
Creators: Grainger, Hilary J.
Description: This book, the first full-length study of the subject, represents the culmination of eight years research and provides the first critical reading of this significant modern building type, hitherto neglected by architectural historians.

With Forewords by leading British cremation historian Dr Peter C Jupp and international architectural historian Alan Crawford, the book examines the special historical, social and cultural conditions that surrounded the design of Britain’s 251 crematoria. It focuses on the ways in which architects and designers of crematoria have responded to the challenges of modern secularism and relativism.

Although cremation did not claim widespread support until the second half of the twentieth century, it called for a new building type and a new landscape for mourning and a collective sense of loss. The book argues that the absence of a shared understanding of what is required by a crematorium has led to ambiguity and evasion in its architecture. Crematoria nevertheless have the marks of modernity upon them and can be seen to reflect the evolving values and social life of a changing urban society. As cremation slowly gained acceptance, this process was reflected in its architectural expression and each crematorium can be seen as a symbol of social change.

Increasing secularisation of society raises the role of the crematorium to that of a highly significant public building; architects and designers are responsible for an environment where the ritual, function and remembrance are centred on the crematorium and its setting. The gazetteer provides comprehensive information about individual buildings.


Additional Information (Publicly available): Hilary Grainger's research interests include late nineteenth and early twentieth century architecture and design, the late Victorian architect Sir Ernest George, architecture and design of British crematoria.

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Our final encounter with architecture increasingly takes place in crematoria but, despite an association with modern bureaucratic society, the type has a long history. Italy crematorium 1881 granger. The first modern crematorium in the West was built in Milan in 1876. The innovation was strongly opposed by the church, and the Cremation Society of Great Britain’s first experiment with the carcass of a horse sparked an intervention by the home secretary. In the end it was the action of a Welsh Neo-Druidic priest, William Price, that led to the legal acceptance of cremation in this country; he was arrested during the attempted incineration of the body of his child in 1884 but a trial found there was no legal impediment to the practice.