

Killing Time: IN EUROPE'S CEMETERIES

Joe Reaney // Roaming Correspondent (josephreaney.com)

You can't beat a good graveyard. An inexorable fixture in every childhood – whether burying your gran, losing your virginity or dabbling in the occult – cemeteries also offer the more adult pleasure of killing time prior to your own pathetic demise. So however you like to do it, from taking a walk out of the grim city to spotting D-list celebrity gravestones, here are ten of the continent's finest time-killing cemeteries.

Cross Bones – London, England

The most famous resting place in London is, without doubt, the wonderfully gothic Highgate the eternal residence of everyone from Karl 'Commie' Marx to Douglas 'Galaxy' Adams; Michael 'Benzene' Faraday to Jeremy 'Withered' Beadle. The capital's most interesting cemetery, on the other hand, is Cross Bones.

An unconsecrated necropolis for so-called 'Winchester Geese' – medieval prostitutes who were licensed by the Bishop of Winchester to work within Southwark – it is essentially a mass grave for those deemed unfit for a Christian burial: the outcast dead. Now it's most famous for a cracking Halloween procession.

Assistens – Copenhagen, Denmark

Assistens is more than just a graveyard: it's one of the Denmark's most popular green spaces. A peaceful park complete with blooming flowers, meandering avenues and poplar-sheltered temples, it's the city's prime spot for picnicking and other such summertime jollities. The rotting people are purely incidental.

Merry Cemetery – Săpânta, Romania

Built in accordance with the beliefs of the long-expired Dacian tribe – that death is a journey to a better place and should be celebrated – Merry Cemetery is an unnervingly cheerful mortuary, jam-packed with colourful tombs that detail the lives of their now-putrid occupants in Beano-esque carvings. Rather odd.

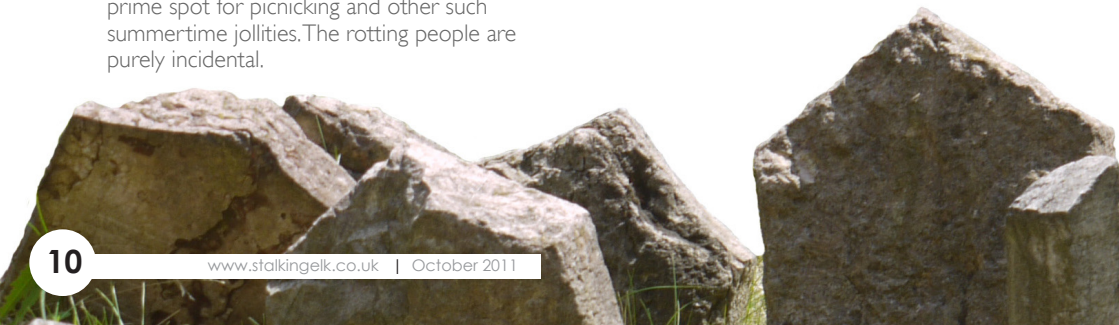
Zentralfriedhof – Vienna, Austria

Home to the continent's musical elite, Vienna's biggest boneyard has the leftovers of Brahms, Schubert, Beethoven and the entire Strauss dynasty, along with a sizable monument to Mozart (actual burial site unknown). With its pretty churches, wooded walks and benches galore, it's also ideal for a sneaky picnic.

Père-Lachaise – Paris, France

Everyone loves a celebrity corpse, and there are quite literally piles of them in Père-Lachaise. Renowned as the final resting place of Jim Morrison, this enormous Parisian landmark is also home to Oscar Wilde, Frédéric Chopin, Molière, Marcel Proust and Édith Piaf (three guesses what's written on her tombstone).

But it's not all about the famous cadavers: come for the dead, stay for the décor. Père-Lachaise's ornate memorials, leafy walkways and smoke-free follies help create a calm oasis in the frantic French capital.



Greyfriars Kirkyard – Edinburgh, Scotland

There are three reasons why Greyfriars is Scotland's most famous graveyard: a ghost, a dog and shit poet. For starters, the skull-dump is allegedly (i.e. not) haunted by an uncommonly-see-through fellow called Bloody George Mackenzie, who was buried in 1691 and is still pissed off about it. Then there's Greyfriars Bobby: an overly loyal terrier who dutifully watched over his master's grave for 14 years until his own doggy demise. And finally there's William McGonagall: the worst poet of all time. Here's proof...

"All ye tourists who wish to be away
From the crowded city for a brief holiday
The town of Nairn is worth a visit, I do
confess And it's only about fifteen miles
from Inverness"

Look out for more McGonagall in Issue #4

Old Jewish Cemetery – Prague, Czech Rep.

The Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague is, rather predictably, a cemetery for old Jews: specifically, those who snuffed it between 1439 and 1787. During this time the Jewish community was kettled into a tiny ghetto, having to stuff their stiffs into a 60-metre-square graveyard, and so over three centuries it was crammed with around 100,000 bodies. That's why it has Europe's highest concentration of tombstones.

Mirogoj – Zagreb, Croatia

For a decadent death, choose Mirogoj. An expansive park designed for strolling, Mirogoj boasts pristine gardens, shaded trails and the most artistic memorials you'll ever see. Plus with Catholics, Jews, Muslims and 'Miscellaneous' buried side-by-side it's a potent, if somewhat belated, symbol of religious tolerance.

...and finally

Cemetery of Dogs – Paris, France

If you ever get fed up of walking over human carcasses, why not tread on some animal ones instead? La Cimetière des Chiens is the world's oldest pet graveyard, home to dearly departed dogs, cats, goldfish and the occasional lion.

The highlight, though, has to be the elaborate tomb of Barry, a Lassie-style hero dog who single-pawedly rescued scores of trapped mountaineers in the 19th century. That's right. Barry. 