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Contents

Editorial
Eileen M. Murphy ................................................................. 1

Invited Paper
Children within Anthropology: Lessons from the Past
Heather Montgomery ......................................................... 3

Research Papers
Phases of Childhood in Early Mycenaean Greece
Judit Lebegyev ........................................................................ 15

Hearth and Home: The Burial of Infants within Romano-British Domestic Contexts
Alison Moore ........................................................................... 33

The Archaeology of Play Things: Theorising a Toy Stage in the ‘Biography’ of Objects
Sally Crawford ......................................................................... 55

Children in an Increasingly Violent Social Landscape: A Case Study from the American Southwest
Kathryn A. Kamp ....................................................................... 71

Children’s Play in the Later Medieval English Countryside
Carenza Lewis .......................................................................... 86

I Am Not Dead, but Do Sleep Here: The Representation of Children in Early Modern Burial Grounds in the North of Ireland
Lynne McKerr, Eileen Murphy and Colm Donnelly ............................. 109

Natural History in the Periodical Literature of Victorian Working Class Boys
Christopher Banham .................................................................. 132
Contents

Saving Childhood in Everyday Objects
Elizabeth Wood .................................................................................................................... 151

Review Paper
Breastfeeding and Weaning Behaviour in Archaeological Populations:
Evidence from the Isotopic Analysis of Skeletal Materials
Mandy Jay.................................................................................................................................. 163

Book Reviews
edited by Simon Mays
Babies Reborn: Infant/Child Burials in Pre- and Protohistory
edited by Krum Bacvarov, reviewed by Anastasia Tsaliki .................................................. 179

Science in the Service of Children, 1893–1935
by Alice Boardman Smuts, reviewed by Anne Hardy .......................................................... 181

Children, Identity and the Past
edited by Liv Helga Dommasnes and Melanie Wrigglesworth,
reviewed by Rebecca Gowland .......................................................................................... 182

Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600–1914
by Anthony Fletcher, reviewed by Lynne McKerr .............................................................. 184

An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on
Children's Lives
by Heather Montgomery, reviewed by Anna Kjellström .................................................. 186
Abstract

The nature of burial practices relating to children within formal ecclesiastical burial grounds in the period from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century has, to date, been largely ignored by archaeologists. Even a preliminary survey of such memorials, however, indicates that gravestones erected in the memory of children form a substantial component of the overall corpus of memorials within individual graveyards or cemeteries. A child from a wealthy background might be buried with an elaborately inscribed gravestone, while others were buried anonymously within their family plot, with only a brief reference to their short lives recorded on the memorial. In contrast, many un-named victims of epidemics or famine were buried in common pits, whilst unbaptised children denied burial in consecrated ground were laid to rest in the local children’s burial ground or cillín, without formal burial rites by the Roman Catholic church. This study examines the commemoration of children in four case study graveyards in the north of Ireland which date to between the later seventeenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. A survey of the number of memorials and the inscriptions they carry enables a more complete picture of the lives and deaths of the children they commemorate to become apparent.

Keywords: Early Modern, Ireland, children, grave memorials, indifference hypothesis

Introduction

Burials in Ireland during the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century were most commonly associated with graveyards and later with municipal cemeteries.
Where grave memorials survive they can present brief, but often salient, facts about an individual child and the inclusion of infants and children in what are perceived to be normative burial rites. This may represent only a minority of the local population, however, and within these graveyards there are large areas which contain now unmarked graves. These latter burials are generally those of the poor or are communal burial pits for individuals who died during epidemics of cholera or typhus (famine fever). In addition, the poor who died in institutions, such as poorhouses, workhouses or infirmaries, were buried in deliberately anonymous plots in graveyards within the institution’s grounds. During the same period, less formal burial grounds known as cillini were being used by Roman Catholics for the burial of unbaptised children and others who were excluded from consecrated ground, including suicide victims and strangers (Donnelly and Murphy 2008, 191). Many of these ‘children’s burial grounds’ are marked on early nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps, while records of others survive in townland names and within local memory (Donnelly et al. 1995, 109, 112; Hurl and Murphy 1996, 23).

There is perhaps a perception among archaeologists that children are given ‘a subsidiary role in commemoration’ (Mytum 2004a, 128). Using data derived from four Early Modern burial grounds located in the north of Ireland – Friar’s Bush, Belfast; St Augustine’s Church and St Columb’s Cathedral, Derry, and St. Ronan’s Church, Aghalurcher, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh (hereafter referred to by its more commonly known name of Aghalurcher; Figure. 1) – this paper will seek to examine the representation of memorials for children within these graveyards. In an attempt to gain an overall understanding of
the representation of children in the case study graveyards the proportions of memorials which mention adults only and those which include references to children will be compared. A chronological review of the numbers of memorials erected for children will be undertaken and this will be compared with the corresponding information for memorials which mention adults only to see if any different trends emerge or if the two data sets follow a similar chronological development. The information contained within the inscriptions for children will then be scrutinised to see what information can be gleaned concerning social attitudes towards the dead children.

Childhood in the past is an area about which there is still intense theoretical debate (Baxter 2005, 3–4; Dommasnes 2008, xiii; Scott 1999, 5). Although the original work is almost fifty years old, first appearing in 1962, the views of Philippe Ariès in Centuries of Childhood (1973) have been extremely influential (Cunningham 1995, 35–6; Pollock 1996, 1). Within the modern family children are seen as the primary focus of parental concerns. There is a belief, based perhaps on the concepts of French family life of the Medieval period proposed by Ariès (1973, 38), which suggests that, in general prior to the eighteenth century, parents did not value their children as individuals with accordingly different developmental needs, but rather saw them as ‘miniature adults’. Indeed some writers would hold that this view persisted into the later nineteenth century (see Pollock 1996, 4–7 for discussion). Ariès (1973, 38) himself considered that within French society an awareness of the charm of children and interest in the concept of childhood had developed initially among the upper classes from the sixteenth century onwards, but he also suggested that the ‘lower classes’ viewed their children as an economic resource, regardless of the suffering incurred in child labour (see Pollock 1996, 10). There is also a perception that very high mortality rates made emotional investment in very young children undesirable (e.g. Gittings 1984, 7, 81) – the so-called ‘indifference hypothesis’ which is largely derived from the work of Ariès (1973) and Lawrence Stone’s The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800 (1977; Woods 2006, 16). Woods (2006, 17), however, considered that child mortality rates in England may not have been as extreme as they are frequently believed to have been and that, even if rates had been as high as suggested, it does not necessarily follow that the risk of loss would have prevented parents loving their children, or grieving for them when they died. The attitudes that may have been shown towards the children included in the case study burial grounds will be explored through a study of the proportions of memorials with named and un-named children and an examination of the proportions of inscriptions with specific and non-specific age-at-death information. The inscriptions with specific age information will be further scrutinised to gain an understanding of the representation of children of different ages. If the ‘indifference hypothesis’ – which suggests that the social value of children is based on increasing age – holds true, for example, one would expect to see this reflected in the presence of a higher number of memorials for older children.

Background to the Burial Grounds

The study is based on inscriptions commemorating child burials from four graveyards known to have been in common use from the seventeenth century until the end of the
twentieth century but only inscriptions that pre-date 1900 have been included. In cases where the inscriptions are no longer totally legible it has often been possible to verify the details from published sources (Clarke 1984; Maguire 1958) and church records. In addition, the information obtained from the grave inscriptions was supplemented, where possible, by information from church registers relating to births and deaths. It should be appreciated, however, that documentary records in Ireland are by no means as complete as those from other regions of Western Europe largely because of Ireland’s troubled past (Macafee and Morgan 1982, 50–58; Tait 2003, 1).

Two of the graveyards have Church of Ireland congregations attached to them – St Columb’s and St Augustine’s, both within the walls of Derry City. St Columb’s Cathedral was completed in 1633, while an earlier church on, or near, the site of the present St Augustine’s had fallen into disuse at some time after the city’s siege of 1689 and was not rebuilt until the mid-eighteenth century.

The situation for Aghalurcher is more complicated. The ambiguity concerning the religious denomination of a number of Ireland’s burial grounds is a legacy of the Penal Laws. These were in force in Ireland from the late seventeenth century up until their final abolition in 1829 and were created by the island’s Anglo-Irish Protestant landowning class in an attempt to buttress the position of the Anglican establishment against Presbyterianism and Catholicism (Donnelly 2004, 120). The laws meant that no religious group other than the Church of Ireland – then the representative of the Anglican or ‘Protestant’ faith – could legally bury their dead (Donnelly 2004, 121). The case studies included in the current project, however, clearly demonstrate that the other religious denominations did accord their dead formal burial within official burial grounds. In Medieval times the graveyard at Aghalurcher had been the traditional burial place for Roman Catholic families, including the Maguires, the local Gaelic lords. The ruined Medieval church that exists at the site today, however, would seem to have been the location for an earlier ecclesiastical foundation, possibly dating back to the seventh century AD (Hamlin 1976, 693), although the earliest record is its entry in the 1306 Papal Taxation (Lowry-Corry 1919, table 1). In the wake of the Ulster Plantation of 1610, Aghalurcher was selected as a burial place for the incoming Scottish and English Protestant settlers who had arrived in the Lisnaskea area of Fermanagh. The church, however, was in a ruinous condition; it is recorded as being roofless in 1622 (Lowry-Corry 1919, table 2). As such, the main Protestant parish church for the area was located at the nearby Plantation settlement at Lisnaskea. Catholic burials, however, continued to be made at Aghalurcher and it was primarily a Catholic graveyard, although some local Protestant families did bury their dead here through to the nineteenth century.

The situation with Friar’s Bush is different in that it was not the site of a post-Reformation church of any denomination, but rather the site of a Mass Station used by the small Catholic population of Belfast during the eighteenth century (McCann 1999, 48; Phoenix 1988, 7–8). Although there is some uncertainty as to its supposed earlier monastic associations, from the later eighteenth century onwards it was used as a Catholic graveyard and is marked as such on a Belfast map of 1783 (Clarke 1984, ix; Phoenix 1988, 8), although Protestants continued to be buried within it, even after 1829 when it became formally consecrated as a Catholic cemetery.

It needs to be appreciated that, as a result of the legal framework of the period, the
graveyards associated with the churches of St Columb’s Cathedral and St Augustine’s Church (which was a Chapel-of-Ease rather than a parish church) also contain non-Church of Ireland burials made by Dissenting Protestants; the latter site in particular would seem to have been the preferred place for the burial of Presbyterians within the city’s walls. Indeed, it is difficult to generalise about the proportions of non-Church of Ireland burials that may lie within both of these graveyards because such burials would normally be unrecorded in parish registers, although on the rare occasions that this does occur, it can offer valuable insights. Analysis of early eighteenth-century burials in one such area – the Church of Ireland graveyard of Magherafelt Parish Church, Co. Derry (which was settled during the seventeenth century first by English and later by Scottish families), can provide some indication of the manner in which burial grounds were used by the different religions. Between 1717 and 1736, 41.4% of recorded burials were members of the Church of Ireland (‘Protestant’), 12.5% were ‘Irish’ (i.e. Catholic), 25.3% were Dissenters (Presbyterian), with the remaining 20.8% being of uncertain affiliation (Macafee and Morgan 1982, 52). The representation of different religious groups will vary from area to area, and across time as it reflects the changes in population and also the religious choices of settled inhabitants. This is an obvious limitation in that one cannot be certain of the exact proportions of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter burials within most of the case study graveyards. The study focusses not on burials, however, but rather on memorials.

Within the time period examined most of the people who erected these memorials were at least moderately wealthy and literate (or intended the memorials to be read by those who were). As noted above, while there are undoubtedly many more unmarked burials of adults and children within the case study graveyards, by necessity this study, with its focus on memorials, is comparing the commemoration of wealthier children across time in the community of the dead within each graveyard. In terms of differentiation between religious groups, the burial grounds can be defined as ‘predominantly’ Protestant (which over time became a common term for ‘non-Catholic’) or Catholic although the situation will vary between graveyards. Names alone – as in those of Irish, Scottish or English origin – will not reliably indicate religious affiliation since, over time, inter-marriage between these ethnic groups blended the people, with individuals changing their religious denomination to that of their marriage partner, although they may still provide some insights concerning the ethnic origins of the deceased. In some instances details on the gravestones – such as iconography, phrasing or biographical statements – may indicate the origin or beliefs of those buried but these are the exception rather than the rule until the later phases of use for the burial grounds included in the current study when ‘IHS’, the monogram of Christ (Timoney 2005, 14), increasingly became a visible symbol of Roman Catholic commemoration.

Defining ‘Childhood’

There is a perception that children may have been regarded as ‘adult’ or somehow ‘independent’ at a much younger age in Early Modern times since many are known to have been working at fourteen years of age. This situation is not clear-cut, however, and the literature of the period suggests such individuals were still legally regarded as
minors and – even when aged eighteen years – youths were still considered to be ‘boys’ who had to learn the ways of the social world (Fletcher 2008, 16). Certainly, children older than fourteen years of age belonging to the wealthier households commemorated in the graveyards under study were being buried as dependents. For working class children of this period, whose memorials may have never existed or have since decayed, the situation of dependency is less obvious.

Age categories vary in terminology and definition between those who work with children or their remains – paediatricians, medical and evolutionary anthropologists and bioarchaeologists, for example, all have different but overlapping definitions of infancy and childhood (Halcrow and Tayles 2008, 194–7; Lally and Ardren 2008, 64). Legally, the age of majority or formal adulthood remained twenty-one years until 1969 in Northern Ireland (Age of Majority Act (Northern Ireland) 1969) and until 1985 in the Republic of Ireland (Age of Majority Act, 1985), when it became eighteen (or upon marriage if that occurred earlier). If we accept that childhood is a process of becoming adult, ‘in which the body becomes accomplished’ (Lally and Ardren 2008, 65) and will vary across time and between individuals, cultural and legal definitions may not always coincide with economic, cognitive and physical maturity. The term ‘infant’ in particular presents problems in definition and the biological determination of infancy is dogged by nuances in ageing and definition (Lally and Ardren 2008, 64), from pre-birth to the onset of ‘early childhood’. In social terms the transition from infancy may have been determined by the age at walking, talking, continence or weaning (Gottlieb 2004, 43–4; Rogoff 2003 158–60; Shahar 1992, 21). Only one of these variables can perhaps be studied for the past populations of the case study areas – birth intervals may indicate the duration of breastfeeding in societies which had no other means of regulating family size, other than abstinence. The only records available are those from St Columb’s Cathedral, which are incomplete. Nevertheless, in his study of family formation in early colonial Derry, Colin Thomas (2000, 100) has used these records to study the intervals that occurred between the baptisms of siblings. He noted a mean of 106.9 weeks between the first and second child in a family, rising to 111.3 weeks between the fifth and sixth child, which may correspond to birth intervals. Allowing for a pregnancy of 40 weeks this trend would tend to suggest that breastfeeding decreased or ceased on average around 70 weeks (just below 18 months). However, Thomas (2000, 97) himself has acknowledged the deficits in the records and, given that this was a largely urban population, the figures may not be relevant in rural areas. It would appear to be the case that the cultural recognition of particular stages of childhood cannot accurately be reconstructed across time without a great deal more documentary evidence (for example, in the form of workplace records, personal papers and records of legal proceedings such as the Coroners’ Courts) than we are likely to find in Ireland.

Bearing in mind the problems of assigning age categories to past populations it was decided to adopt the terminology of Shahar (1992, 21) listed in Table 1. This approach avoids the necessity to make an arbitrary decision of selecting a ‘working age’ or a ‘legal age’ at which childhood is somehow perceived to have ceased. By applying such social age categories, however, we need to be mindful that they are in fact our constructs and, while useful for observing patterns in the data, they may have had different significances in their original context. No-one is described as an ‘adolescent’ or
as having ‘died in middle childhood’ on any of the gravestones but we can apply these categories to compare the relative frequency of recorded deaths within the different age ranges which may in turn correspond with life-cycle stages; this may shed further light on the attitudes of the period towards children of different ages.

**Methodology**

All of the case study graveyards contained memorials commemorating children. It needs to be remembered, however, that they will not be a representative sample either in terms of the total number of child burials – since not all will have been commemorated in stone – or in terms of the original numbers of such memorials, since many may have been damaged or destroyed in the intervening years since their erection. Weathering has taken its toll on many of the gravestones, particularly those at Friar’s Bush and Aghalurcher, but the two Derry graveyards are very highly maintained which brings different problems in that they have in the past undergone a degree of landscaping which has resulted in the removal or re-placement of gravestones to create pathways, or to remove perceived hazards or eyesores.

In total, the inscriptions on 1280 legible gravestones – those where at least the minimum information was visible, such as names and dates – were examined. The number of gravestones that commemorated children (i.e. those which mentioned ‘child’, ‘children’ or ‘infant’, or described an individual as a son or daughter) were then compiled. These raw figures were further scrutinised and refined so that gravestones with ambiguous terminology were excluded from the study. Some stones simply stated names with no descriptions at all, and the interred could have been children or adults at the time of death; when the inscriptions contained terms such as ‘children’, ‘child’, ‘son’ or ‘daughter’ but no mention of the age-at-death of the individual it is also problematic since these expressions can also be applied to adults. Indeed, it was observed that such terms were used on some family gravestones to describe people who had died in their seventies and eighties! Taking this into account it has been possible to identify 1018 gravestones that unequivocally pertain to either an adult only or make reference to one or more individuals who had died at less than eighteen years of age. Where children are un-named or their dates of death are unrecorded they are frequently described simply as having died young, in infancy, or in their early years. For the purposes of examining the age-at-death values represented on the memorials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term assigned in this study</th>
<th>Chronological age ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Birth–23 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood</td>
<td>2–6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle childhood</td>
<td>7–11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>12–17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>18–20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>21+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Age terminology and the associated chronological age ranges used in the study (cf. Shahar 1992, 21).*
each inscription was studied separately and a total of 750 inscriptions were found to pertain to children. Three of the graveyards are urban, while Aghalurcher is rural and this difference may affect the frequency or distribution of commemorative stones. Finally, statistical tests were undertaken to determine if any significant differences exist between the representations of child memorials in each of the four burial grounds.

**Results**

*Proportions of Memorials for Adults Only Versus Children*

As noted before, a general perception seems to exist that children are given ‘a subsidiary role in commemoration’ (Mytum 2004a, 128), but it was interesting to note that some 15% of memorials in the burial grounds named children first or solely. It is evident from Figure 2 that children are quite well represented in gravestone memorials and some 36% of the 1018 unambiguous gravestones were found to have borne epitaphs for children. The frequencies ranged from 16.2% (n= 42/259) for Aghalurcher to 50.5% (n=160/317) for Friar’s Bush. When a chi-square test was carried out using the values provided in Table 2 it demonstrated the existence of statistically significant differences between the proportions of memorials for adults only versus children between the four graveyards. The differences in the observed and expected figures were particularly marked for Aghalurcher where only forty-two epitaphs for children were observed but 93.6 were expected – suggesting a very notable under-representation of children. The converse was true for Friar’s Bush and St Augustine’s where the observed numbers of children exceeded the expected values, while at St Columb’s the observed and expected numbers were more similar.
The Representation of Children in Early Modern Burial Grounds

It was possible to record details of the date of death or the date of commemoration of the first child and/or children mentioned on a gravestone for 330 gravestones (Table 3). Previous researchers have observed that the number of individuals being commemorated through the provision of gravestones gradually increased from the seventeenth century onwards (e.g. McCormick 2007, 355; Mytum 2004a, 35; 2004b, 113) and by the later part of the nineteenth century ‘all classes actively participated in external commemoration’ (Mytum 2006, 107). As such, it is not unexpected that the data included in the current study indicates an increase in the number of memorials having been provided for children between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. Unfortunately, a number of the earliest gravestones had to be excluded from the study since, although they were clearly for children, no specific dates were provided for these individuals and a legible date was not evident for subsequent burials which may have supplied a terminus ante quem, as with this gravestone from St Columb’s:

Here lyeth the body of Mary/ Ele …wife of Mr John Gregg/ M’ Taylor of this City who/ departed this life the … of Decbr 1716 A … / Also the body of … John Gregg/ who died 1 Dec … with/ 5 of his children who died young.

Table 2: Chi-square test to compare the proportions of memorials which mention children or adults only in the four case study sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Observed value</th>
<th>Expected value</th>
<th>Observed value</th>
<th>Expected value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friar’s Bush</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>114.6</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>202.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>81.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Augustine’s</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Columb’s</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>119.7</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>211.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghalurcher</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>156.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( P = 0.000, N=1018 \)

Table 3: Chi-square test to compare the proportions of child memorials across time in the four case study sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Pre 1800</th>
<th>1840–1849</th>
<th>1850–1899</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friar’s Bush</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75.938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Augustine’s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Columb’s</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghalurcher</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( P=0.000, N=1018 \)

Proportions of Memorials Through Time

It was possible to record details of the date of death or the date of commemoration of the first child and/or children mentioned on a gravestone for 330 gravestones (Table 3). Previous researchers have observed that the number of individuals being commemorated through the provision of gravestones gradually increased from the seventeenth century onwards (e.g. McCormick 2007, 355; Mytum 2004a, 35; 2004b, 113) and by the later part of the nineteenth century ‘all classes actively participated in external commemoration’ (Mytum 2006, 107). As such, it is not unexpected that the data included in the current study indicates an increase in the number of memorials having been provided for children between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. Unfortunately, a number of the earliest gravestones had to be excluded from the study since, although they were clearly for children, no specific dates were provided for these individuals and a legible date was not evident for subsequent burials which may have supplied a terminus ante quem, as with this gravestone from St Columb’s:

Here lyeth the body of Mary/ Ele …wife of Mr John Gregg/ M’ Taylor of this City who/ departed this life the … of Decbr 1716 A … / Also the body of … John Gregg/ who died 1 Dec … with/ 5 of his children who died young.
When the results are simplified into three groups – pre-1800, 1800–1849 and 1850–1899 – a number of different trends are apparent for each of the four burial grounds (Figure 3), and a chi-square test indicates the presence of statistically significant differences (Table 3). Notably few child memorials dating to pre-1800 (1.4%; n=2/143; observed=2; expected=19.5) were evident at Friar’s Bush but these became more common as time progressed with comparatively higher than expected values occurring in the 1850–1899 period (observed=57; expected=39.4). At Aghalurcher, the converse was true, with the majority of child memorials dating to before 1800 (51.4%; n=19/37; observed=19; expected=5), with the number then gradually declining over time. The trends for the largely Protestant burial grounds at St Augustine’s (pre-1800 – 11.8%; 1800–1849 – 64.7%; 1850–1899 – 23.5%) and St Columb’s (pre-1800 – 18.2%; 1800–1849 – 65.6%; 1850–1899 – 16.2%) suggest that memorials for children followed a similar development at both sites, with a peak in frequency occurring during the period 1800–1849.

### Proportions of Memorials with Named and Un-named Children

A total of 352 gravestones displayed epitaphs for either named or un-named children, while a further sixteen memorials included references to both and have therefore been excluded from this aspect of the analysis. The frequencies of memorials with named children amounts to approximately 84% (n=297/352), with a range of 78.9% (n=116/147) for Friar’s Bush to 95.1% (n=39/41) for Aghalurcher (Figure 4). A chi-square analysis of the relative proportions indicates the presence of significant differences between the four sites (Table 4). In this case the observed number of memorials with named children was lower than expected at Friar’s Bush where 116 memorials were observed, while 124 were expected. The observed and expected results at St Augustine’s were
The representation of children in early modern burial grounds

Practically identical, while at Aghalurcher and St Columb’s the observed number of memorials exceeded the expected values. It would therefore seem that memorials for named children were under-represented at Friar’s Bush but slightly over-represented at Aghalurcher and St Columb’s.

Proportions of Inscriptions with Specific and Non-specific Age Information

A total of 402 of the 750 (53.6%) inscriptions for children did not provide specific age at death information but rather used terms such as dying ‘young’, ‘in early life’ and ‘in infancy’ (Figure 5). The frequencies of inscriptions with non-specific age indicators ranged from 33.3% (n=18/54) for Aghalurcher to 59.1% (n=215/364) for Friar’s Bush. A
chi-square analysis indicates the presence of statistically significant differences between the four sites (Table 5). At Friar’s Bush a greater number (observed=215) of inscriptions contained non-specific age-at-death information than expected (expected=195.1), while the converse was true for Aghalurcher where the observed number of eighteen such inscriptions deviated markedly from the expected value of 28.9 non-specific age-related inscriptions.

**Table 5: Chi-square test to compare the proportions of memorials with specific and non-specific age at death information in the four case study sites.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Number of children with non-specific age terminology</th>
<th>Number of children with specific age terminology</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friar’s Bush</td>
<td>Observed 215, Expected 195.1</td>
<td>Observed 149, Expected 168.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Augustine’s</td>
<td>Observed 48, Expected 52.5</td>
<td>Observed 50, Expected 45.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Columb’s</td>
<td>Observed 121, Expected 125.4</td>
<td>Observed 113, Expected 108.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghalurcher</td>
<td>Observed 18, Expected 28.9</td>
<td>Observed 36, Expected 25.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P=0.002, N= 750

**Proportions of Inscriptions by Age**

The non-specific age-at-death descriptions were assigned by the families of the children at the time of their death or commemoration and it is impossible for us to know how
The representation of children in Early Modern Burial Grounds

The representations of children in Early Modern Burial Grounds closely aligned they are to ‘infancy’ and early childhood within the parameters of the current study (see Table 1). As such, and to avoid misrepresentation of the age of these individuals, inscriptions which do not refer to specific age-at-death values have been omitted from Figure 6. When the 348 inscriptions with specific age terminology are examined it is evident that children of all ages are represented at the four burial grounds, although a chi-square test indicates that statistical differences are again evident between the four graveyards (Table 6). The most notable deviations from the expected values arise from Friar’s Bush and Aghalurcher. At the former site, with an observed value of fifty-seven and an expected value of 46.7, children of 2–6 years appear to be markedly over-represented. Conversely, individuals of 12–17 years had an observed value of 29 and an expected value of 38.1 which suggests they were under-represented. At Aghalurcher, only three infants were observed and the expected number would have been 8.7, suggesting an under-representation of this age group at the site. In

Figure 6: The proportions of inscriptions for children in the different age categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>0–23 months</th>
<th>2–6 years</th>
<th>7–11 years</th>
<th>12–17 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friar’s Bush</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Augustine’s</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Columb’s</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghalurcher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Chi-square test to compare the proportions of inscriptions for children in the different age categories in the four case study sites.

\[ \chi^2 = 20.379 \]

\[ P = 0.016, N = 348 \]
addition, the presence of seventeen individuals of 12–17 years was notably higher than the expected value of 9.2.

Discussion
Gravestones are a comparatively recent commemorative device. Within Britain and Ireland they survive from the seventeenth century in relatively small numbers, gradually increasing in popularity until the nineteenth century when growing wealth and improved technology led to a marked increase in the material culture associated with mourning, both private and public (McCormick 2007, 355; Mytum 2004a, 35; Tarlow 1999, 129–31). The increasing frequency of grave memorials from the seventeenth century onwards (Mytum 2006, 101), in addition to their form and the information contained within their inscriptions, has the potential to provide important insights into the cultural context of the period. Bourdieu (2008, 175) describes the exercise of choices in acquiring material goods as a ‘systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence, i.e. a distinctive lifestyle’. Gravestones are also a material expression of the ritual behaviour of a society. Through such ‘ritual communications’ from the past (as well as during the present) we can view its social structures, ‘given to us in the very words of the people we study’ (Bloch 1977, 286). Although such trends in material expressions may provide information about the cultural values of the period, however, it should be recognised that there will have been a limit to the choices available, based on wealth and literacy, and the specific relationship between memorials and populations needs to be considered within its social context (Mytum 2004a, 121). The results obtained during the current study indicate that not only are memorials for children visible, they account for almost one-third of the ‘unambiguous’ gravestones – those which can be definitely attributed to either adults alone or those which commemorate children – included within the study. It is acknowledged that the grave memorial data generated in the current study has been derived from a very specific section of the community, regardless of their religion, for these stones were erected by people who were presumably literate and comparatively wealthy. The results of the analysis have indicated that the children of these families were frequently commemorated on grave memorials.

Chronological Development of the Burial Grounds
When the frequencies of memorials for children over time are examined it is evident that in all four burial grounds their numbers are mirroring the situation for adults (Figure 7). Aghalurcher was the oldest foundation included in the study and it was the only one to have included a memorial to a child dating to before 1700 – that of Marie Belfourd who was two years old when she died in 1672. It also had five adult-only memorials of this date – the greatest number recorded in any of the case study graveyards (2.5%; n=5/198). Here, the majority of dated child memorials were pre-1800 (51.4%; n=19/37) in date, but over time this number gradually declined, most notably during the period 1800–1849 (32.4%; n=12/37). This was the period in which the other graveyards demonstrated a greatly increased frequency of child memorials.
Approximately 12% of children’s memorials from St Augustine’s (n=6/51) and 18% at St Columb’s (n=18/99) were dated to the eighteenth century, proportions which rose to around 65% for both sites in the first half of the nineteenth century and had an overall proportion of 80–90% for the entire century. The trend appeared to differ somewhat for the nominally Catholic cemetery at Friar’s Bush in Belfast where the proportions of child memorials rose from only 1.4% (n=2/143) in the eighteenth century to 98.6% (n=141/143) in the nineteenth century. Similar findings for adults were recorded at Friar’s Bush, with only one definite adult gravestone dating to the first half of the eighteenth century and three to the latter half of that century, representing 2.7% (n=4/147) of adult-only gravestones in the graveyard. As was the case for child memorials, this rose to 97.3% (n=143/147) during the nineteenth century.

It is possible that the paucity of identifiable adult and child burials from the eighteenth century at Friar’s Bush is a reflection of the relatively small number of Catholics living in the Belfast area in that century, and of the limited economic resources that this population had to expend on items such as grave memorials. In 1759 the Catholic population represented 6.6% (n=556) of Belfast’s 8,459 inhabitants. Twenty-five years later, in 1785, the town’s population had risen to 13,650 people but Catholics only represented 8% (n=1,092) of this total. It was in the period between 1784 and 1808 that Belfast’s population almost doubled in size to an estimated 25,000 of which 16% (n=4,000) were Catholics. This increase in the Catholic population continued in the early nineteenth century to reach 32% (n=19,712) of a total population of 61,000 by 1834, and by 1901 the Catholic population represented 24% (n=84,992) of Belfast’s population of 349,180 (Hepburn 1996, 4). Their increase in numbers within the town can by gauged from the number of churches required within its boundaries, from...
St Mary’s in Chapel Lane (opened 1784) to the construction of St Patrick’s (1815), St Malachy’s (1844) and St Peter’s (1866; MacAuley 2002, 7–8).

The similarity in the rate of child memorials during the nineteenth century at Friar’s Bush to those at the Protestant burial grounds of St Augustine’s and St Columb’s in Derry may indicate that the financial position of the town’s Roman Catholic population had changed, with the growth of its own lower middle class – publicans, shopkeepers and builders – and a small elite of large business owners and professionals; while still an overall minority within Belfast, these people could afford gravestones similar to those being erected by their Protestant neighbours. As such, it can be suggested that the commemoration of children from wealthier Catholic families in nineteenth-century Belfast was equally as visible as that of their Protestant counterparts and contemporaries in Derry.

In the case of the three urban graveyards a decline in use occurred in the later nineteenth century when the authorities – increasingly concerned about hygiene – opened municipal cemeteries; Belfast City Cemetery opened on August 1st 1869 and Derry City Cemetery holds records from November 1853. In the two Derry graveyards under study, only a limited number of families retained burial rights after 1870 (Aubrey Fielding 2007, pers. comm.), while a similar decline in use occurred at Friar’s Bush in Belfast. In the case of Aghalurcher, the Catholic Church in Lisnaskea was now fully in control of the burial of its own parishioners at a new church and graveyard on the outskirts of Lisnaskea; the result was a decline in the use of the old isolated rural graveyard.

**Urban Versus Rural Differences?**

The results of the statistical analysis clearly indicate that both the proportions of child memorials and the information contained within the inscriptions were not uniform across all four graveyards. At St Augustine’s (48.6%; n=54/111), St Columb’s (33.8%; n=112/331) and Friar’s Bush (50.5%; n=160/317) the proportions of memorials erected for children (compared to those for adults only) were very well represented, while they occurred relatively infrequently at Aghalurcher (16.2%; n=42/259). Memorials for named children were under-represented at Friar’s Bush (only 78.9%; n=116/147) compared to an overall average of 84.3%, but over-represented at Aghalurcher, where they account for 95.1% (n=39/41) of children’s gravestones. When the inscriptions were examined it became clear that in all of the burial grounds quite a high proportion of the children mentioned in epitaphs, both named and un-named, were described simply as ‘dying young’ or ‘in infancy’. In fact, near equal proportions of the inscriptions displayed specific and non-specific age at death information; inscriptions indicating non-specific age were very similar in St Augustine’s (49%; n=48/98), St Columb’s (51.7%; n=121/234) and Friar’s Bush (59%; n=215/364) graveyards, while once again the information derived from Aghalurcher did not correspond with the general trend. Here the memorials contained fewer than expected inscriptions with non-specific age-at-death information – only 33.3% (n=18/54), compared to an overall average of 53.6%.

It is possible that the anomalies noted for Aghalurcher were simply due to the smaller sample size of inscriptions at the site but, given the differences apparent for this site in terms of the proportion of memorials for children, it is possible that this is a genuine
trend which is reflecting a cultural or economic context dissimilar to those of urban Derry and Belfast. The absence of a substantial category of children described as ‘dying young’ may be indicative of the existence of a different cultural approach to the death of young, or very young, children. At Aghalurcher the greater majority of those who are commemorated, however, are being precisely documented. The corresponding absence of the expected number of children described as being under two years of age may be indicative that these individuals are being deliberately excluded from the public domain. This trend is in marked contrast to the findings from Friar’s Bush in particular, where there are high numbers of children described as ‘dying young’ or as ‘infants’ (59%; n=215/364) and also a substantial proportion of children known to have been under two years of age when they died (25.5%; n=38/149 of those aged precisely). This finding will be discussed in more detail when considering the impact of religious attitudes to death and baptism on burial and commemorative practices later in this paper.

When the four sites were compared there seemed to be an over-representation of 2–6 years olds (38.3%; n=57/149 compared to an overall average of 29.5%) and an under-representation of 12–17 year olds (19.5%; n=29/149 compared to an overall average of 29.3%) at Friar’s Bush. When this data in considered in conjunction with the high overall numbers of children ‘dying young’ (59%; n=215/364) recorded for this site it is possible that the finding may be a reflection of urban health problems. In Friar’s Bush, there is a well-known mass burial dating to the year 1832 and recorded as containing the remains of some 400 individuals who died as a result of the Asiatic cholera epidemic. This burial pit was re-opened during the Great Famine of 1845–49 which had also resulted in mass death, largely as a consequence of its associated epidemics, particularly typhus and cholera (Phoenix 1988, 14–15). These infectious diseases would have been indiscriminate in terms of class and would have been particularly severe on the weakest members of the population – principally the very old and the young – regardless of their wealth.

**Anonymous Children**

Approximately 80–90 percent of the child memorials were for named, as opposed to un-named children, and this finding raises some intriguing questions as to the status of the children who were buried without names. It could perhaps be argued that the presence of un-named children lends some weight to the ‘indifference hypothesis’ discussed above and based on the premise by Ariès (1973, 36) that the brief nature of their lives meant their loss was not socially or emotionally significant: ‘the little thing that had disappeared so early in life was not worthy of remembrance’. If this hypothesis is accepted, however, the notably smaller proportions of memorials for un-named relative to named children would tend to suggest that it was a generally uncommon attitude among contemporary society. Furthermore, this explanation is incompatible with the fact that many memorials make specific reference to un-named children, often many years after they have died. A closer examination of the details in the inscriptions from Friar’s Bush, for example, indicates that – far from being an afterthought on adult gravestones – six memorials had been erected primarily or solely in memory of un-named children. A similar memorial, to the children of a Reverend Knox, and an inscribed plaque on one side of a chest tomb to the three un-named children of William and Anne Haslett
exist in St Augustine’s. No memorials which give first place to un-named children were present in the burials grounds at St Columb’s or Aghalurcher.

Why the children were not individually named in these instances is intriguing. Certainly in the case of the nominally Catholic cemetery at Friar’s Bush, it is highly unlikely that so many publicly acknowledged babies had not been baptised and therefore given names. Perhaps, as Clodagh Tait (2002, 68–69) has suggested, being so young such individuals were considered to exist in the ‘private’ sphere of family life and their public naming may have been considered to be culturally inappropriate. To have gone to the expense of erecting a memorial or even to have paid a mason to add their details to the family gravestone following the death of a mother or father, however, is an indication that they were most definitely considered to be a part of family life and history. In some cases it is clear that their memory remained even as long as fifty or sixty years after their deaths, as is the case in the following example from Friar’s Bush:

Erected by Peter Hughes in memory of his beloved wife Mary who died 29th December 1878 aged 75 years. And of 5 children who died in infancy.

As mentioned earlier, perhaps equally intriguing is the very low number of burials of un-named children recorded at Aghalurcher, primarily also a Catholic burial ground, which only had two memorials commemorating un-named children (the expected figure, from chi-square calculations, should have been 6.4). In part, this may have been a reflection both of the low overall numbers of children’s burials recorded at Aghalurcher and the somewhat later date of most of the memorials at Friar’s Bush. It is highly unlikely, however, that the numbers in Aghalurcher are a true reflection of the population at the time. It seems more likely that a lack of resources, perhaps as a consequence of the severe economic conditions imposed on Roman Catholics in the eighteenth century due to the Penal Laws, meant that infants and young children, and much of the population in general, may have had ephemeral grave markers of wood or iron which have not survived to the present (Figure 8). An overgrown area lies in the north-east corner of the burial ground where no visible grave markers are apparent, for example, and it is possible this part of the graveyard may have been set aside for their burial and for that of the people without the economic ability to erect gravestones.

An alternative explanation that requires consideration may be that in Aghalurcher many infants were being buried elsewhere, perhaps because they had not been baptised. For Early Modern society the existence of life after death constituted a real and immediate concern. Among Catholics in Ireland there was a particularly dangerous period in early life when a child was not yet baptised. This stemmed from early Christian church teaching which stated that baptism was essential to cleanse a person of Original Sin, the sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and subsequently inherited by humankind ever since (Walsh 2005, 108). Limbo provided a means of reconciling the problem of what happened to the souls of the unbaptised who were barred from heaven. It was an ‘in-between state, neither the happiness of heaven nor the torments of hell’ (Walsh 2005, 109). Canon Law, the formal law of the Catholic Church, stated that the unbaptised could not be buried in consecrated ground.
This ruling appears to have been strenuously enforced by the reinvigorated, reformed Catholic Church of seventeenth-century Counter-Reformation Ireland and resulted in the proliferation of unconsecrated burial grounds – cillini – which were largely used as the burial place of unbaptised infants (Donnelly and Murphy 2008, 191). As such, it is highly probable that all of the babies buried in formal Catholic burial grounds at this time had been baptised. The same is not necessarily true for the Church of Ireland, which seems to have held a more ambivalent attitude to this issue. While it placed great importance on baptism (Church of Ireland 1960, 340), it also allowed for a modified form of burial service for unbaptised ‘infants of tender age, the offspring of Christian parents’ (Church of Ireland 1960, 280). Historians within the Church of Ireland would admit to somewhat ‘woolly theology’ on the matter of baptism and burial, but overall there was no differentiation in death, as Limbo was never recognised by the Anglican Church in Ireland (Bruce Pierce 2009, pers. comm.). Differentiation by baptism then ceases to be a major factor in mainly ‘Protestant’ graveyards.

Treatment of Children of Different Age

The possibility that children were differentiated by age can be investigated using the information derived from gravestones (see Figure 4). In all four of the case study graveyards children of all ages are represented in the inscriptions. The earliest surviving gravestone for a child is that of two-year old Marie Belfourd, dated 1672, and was found at Aghalurcher. The youngest individual recorded was Jean Vans, buried in her family grave at St Columb’s, who was aged only 10 days when she died on 3rd March 1707, while Jane Bracegirdle – a member of a Protestant family who buried at Friar’s Bush – was only fourteen days old when she died c. 1847. With the exception of Aghalurcher, the stated numbers of infants and young children commemorated are either near equal to, or actually outnumber, the proportions of older children and
adolescents. It seems unlikely, therefore, that younger children were seen as somehow less ‘worthy’ of commemoration. If one can equate the social value of a child with their commemoration then it would seem probable that Ariès’ (1973, 36–7) theory that the social and emotional value of children is based on increasing age does not hold true within the context of Early Modern Ireland. Indeed, the Irish evidence would suggest that regardless of the age of their death ‘children were mourned, grief was felt’ (Woods 2006, 210). As before, the results for Aghalurcher are somewhat anomalous – not only did it have a much lower proportion of memorials for children compared to adults, but the majority of children commemorated were adolescents (47.2%; n=17/36), and there seems to have been a corresponding under-representation of infants with only three such young children (8.3%) recorded. Aghalurcher was the only rural graveyard included within the study, however, and – as previously discussed – it is possible that the community it served may have had less access to the resources required for the production of inscribed gravestones. Nevertheless, adult gravestones were well represented in the burial ground (see Table 2) and more detailed comparisons with other rural graveyards of the period will be necessary to establish whether the reasons for this difference are linked to economic or cultural reasons, or to chronological or religious factors.

Conclusions

From the seventeenth century onwards children’s burials become increasingly visible in burial grounds mirrored by the appearance of children in public spaces, which has continued until the present. The majority of children’s gravestones commemorate named children across all the age categories selected, from infancy to adolescence. The results obtained from the four case study graveyards indicate that the number of children’s memorials increased across time in a manner which largely parallels the trends for adults – the relative scarcity of seventeenth century examples gives way to an exponential increase by the nineteenth century. The number of eighteenth-century memorials varies across the sample; at Aghalurcher almost half (51.4%; 19/37) of the children’s gravestones date from this period. Very few child memorials occurred prior to 1800 at Friar’s Bush but this changed dramatically during the nineteenth century when the frequencies became more similar to those present in the Protestant graveyards at St Augustine’s and St Columb’s in Derry.

Graveyards are, of course, subject to transformation processes in the same way as any other site and weathering or re-organisation may account for differential survival of stones. There is also the possibility that the comparatively late increase in memorials arose at Friar’s Bush because stone became the preferred material, replacing more ephemeral markers made of material such as iron, wood or undressed stone. The marked differences in frequencies across time at Friar’s Bush may also reflect the growth in numbers and financial strength among Belfast’s Roman Catholic population as the eighteenth century ended. The restrictions that had been placed on the public burial of Catholics through the Penal Laws was in decline by the late eighteenth century and the final repeal of the last of these laws in 1829 really only confirmed the changes that had already occurred in Irish society, with the economic and social visibility of Catholics.
within society having become more accepted by the British government. As such, the increase in the number of child memorials present in nineteenth-century Friar’s Bush may reflect the rise of a Catholic middle class in the town of Belfast. While much work remains to be done on this topic, it should become apparent, however, that this brief investigation of Early Modern burial grounds in the north of Ireland has shown that the loss of a child in the past was indeed a meaningful event – one that was not just a private loss to the parents but also a loss that was deemed worthy of public record and attention. Within formal burial grounds, the surviving gravestones and inscriptions indicate that for the wealthy, whose memorials have survived, children were not marginalised in death and this holds true for all age categories. In the majority of the graveyards, young children were commemorated equally to older children, and often with very decorative and noticeable memorials. These burial grounds are public spaces, often very peaceful and even beautiful places, containing memories summarised on gravestones which represent the ‘terminated life of children and the unrealised potential, unfulfilled predictions and expectations of parents and other adult members of the community’ (Mizoguchi 2000, 149).

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