

“Monumental Design and Memorial Art”

Part XIII.

Granite, Marble & Bronze, Boston, Massachusetts

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The article begins:

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This article, which begins on the next page,
is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

<http://quarriesandbeyond.org/>

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COLONIAL HEADSTONE, GRANARY BURYING GROUND, BOSTON, MASS.

(Photo by Frank Cousins Art Co.)

(photo caption) "Colonial headstone, Granary Burying Ground, Boston, Mass. (Photo by Frank Cousins Art Co.)"

Monumental Design and Memorial Art—XIII.

A Further Consideration of the Headstone —The Danger of the Desire for Novelty

By HUGER ELLIOTT

IN the "Better Headstone Number" of *GRANITE MARBLE & BRONZE* (issue of November, 1916) some general considerations concerning the headstone were given. These should, to take their proper place in this series, appear here. Architectural details—mouldings, the column, the arch, etc.—have been discussed, followed by the articles on lettering and ornament. These matters, which more or less concern all memorials, having been disposed of the different types of funerary monuments can finally be discussed in detail.

As the simplest of these the headstone should first be considered. It is hoped that the reader will turn to the November number and read, or re-read, the suggestions there made as to color and texture, the use of plinths, ornament, lettering and proportion.

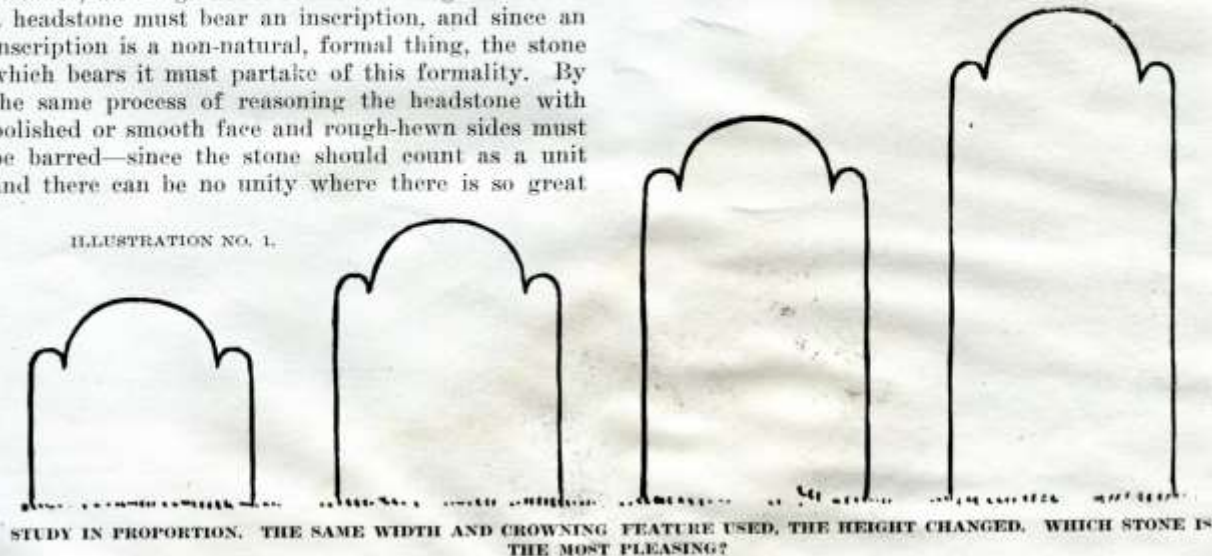
Since headstones outnumber all other forms combined it is greatly to be desired that they should be things of beauty; yet thoroughly satisfactory examples are rarely met with. What is the reason? Evidently—differences in taste. For we all desire to create beautiful things; no man makes what he considers an ugly headstone. The reason that, to me, personally, there seem to be few beautiful memorials is because many designers like what I dislike—it is, in the main, a matter of taste; and, as was observed many centuries ago—there's no disputing about matters of taste.

Reason, however, can help—clear thinking may rid us of some of the absurdities still in use. For instance, all rough-hewn forms are illogical. Since a headstone must bear an inscription, and since an inscription is a non-natural, formal thing, the stone which bears it must partake of this formality. By the same process of reasoning the headstone with polished or smooth face and rough-hewn sides must be barred—since the stone should count as a unit and there can be no unity where there is so great

a difference in texture between front and sides. Clear thinking will show that the two sides of a headstone must be similar and that ornament must be balanced about a central axis. This will throw out all the unbalanced, column-on-one-corner freaks as well as rid us of the spray of flowers cut with artful carelessness on one corner of a panel. If we are logical we will not have naturalistic tree-trunks draped in ivy, all of stone—nor polished horizontal rolls, set upon plinths, looking like sausages or sofa-pillows out of place. We will no longer have ornament oozing out of the edge of a stone, like the filling squeezed from a cream-puff; polished hearts, armless hands holding scrolls and all other products of unreason will vanish from our cemeteries.

A recent contributor to this magazine regretted the desire for novelty for its own sake shown in so many of our productions. This is the cause of much of our poor work. The client, having no standard of beauty and no power of reasoning about what he sees, chooses a memorial merely because it is different from anything he has ever seen; not realizing that just because it is different it is almost certain to be unbeautiful. This does not mean that nothing new can be beautiful. Such a thing is possible—but the history of civilization proves that objects of beauty have been evolved very slowly. One generation would make slight changes for the better in inherited designs—the following generation would improve just a little upon these—and so on until a climax was reached; then with a lowering of the

ILLUSTRATION NO. 1.



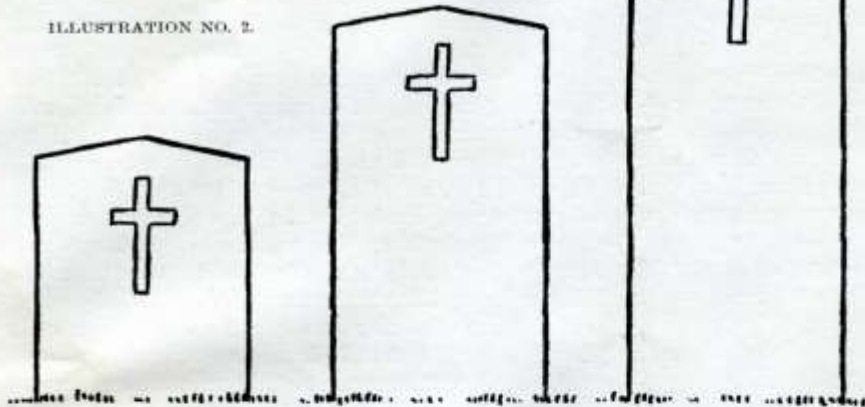
(photo caption) "Study in proportion. The same width and crowning feature used, the height changed, with stone is the most pleasing?"

standards of taste there would follow a long descent and then a slow rise of some new form of beauty (The history of ornament, from the perfection of the Greek period to the perfection of the Gothic style is a good example of such a rise and decline and a new, and different, arising.) True beauty is never dependent on novelty. A beautiful woman is not so considered because she can exhibit to our enraptured gaze two noses, or an extra eye placed

assuming that he dislikes the commonplace stones which please the average man and can tell a good design from one that is less good.

It is a simple matter to condemn the many illogical forms which meet our eyes. It is not so easy to make clear the difference between a design which has no glaring faults, but which is not entirely satisfactory, and one which is wholly admirable. As has before been noted, proportion is one of the most important elements in a design and yet it is the most difficult matter to discuss. An inch taken from the sides of a stone—two inches added to the height—may make all the difference between a good design and a poor one; yet such matters must be settled for each individual stone. The form of crowning—the placing of ornament—of lettering; for all these things general rules are useless. The designer must study each design—making series of drawings (such sketches as are shown in cuts

ILLUSTRATION NO. 2.



STUDY IN PROPORTION. THE SAME WIDTH AND ORNAMENT USED, THE HEIGHT BEING VARIED. WHICH IS THE BEST PROPORTIONED? IN WHICH IS THE PROPORTION OF THE CROSS TO THE STONE MOST PLEASING? NOTE THE TALL STONE DEMANDS A BATTER OR ENTASIS. THIS IS NOT NEEDED IN THE SHORT ONE.

in the middle of her chin—she has only the features of her less fair sisters, but each perfect of its kind and in its relation to the other features.

So with a headstone. It is not something new and undreamt-of which we want; merely the old forms developed with perfect proportions, perfect

Nos. 1 and 2) and comparing the same scheme varied in its proportions and in the placing of the lettering and ornament and selecting that which

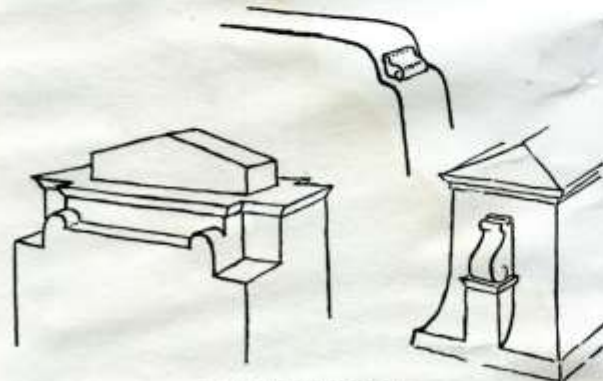


ILLUSTRATION NO. 3.
STRUCTURAL FORMS POORLY RELATED.

lettering, ornament of exactly the right type, beautifully cut; a piece of work which will delight the trained eye. The average buyer, however, will see in it little to distinguish it from a dozen other headstones and, since there is nothing novel, nothing startling about it, will refuse it, preferring something more showy. Therefore the dealer must be an educator—must train the taste of his client, turning him from his liking for illogical vulgarities by

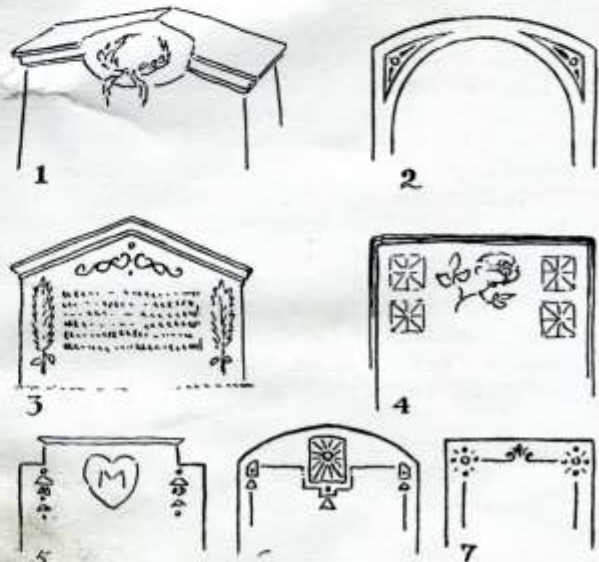


ILLUSTRATION NO. 5.

EXAMPLE OF ILLOGICAL ORNAMENT. TAKEN FROM EXECUTED WORK.

1 Ornament not only has no relation to structure but cuts into structural lines. 2 Relation between form and ornament inharmonious. 3 Abstract scroll-form unrelated to naturalistic palms; ornament badly placed. 4 Lack of scale between floral and geometric ornament—both unrelated to form. 5-6-7 Little relation between ornament and form. Ornament meaningless and childish, suggesting the decoration on a cheap soda fountain.

(photo captions) No. 2. "Study in Proportion....," No. 3. "Structural Forms Poorly Related." & No. 5 "Example of illogical ornament. Taken from executed work."



COLONIAL HEADSTONE, GRANARY BURYING GROUND, BOSTON, MASS.

Photo by Frank Cousins Art Co.

(photo caption) "Colonial headstone, Granary Burying Ground, Boston, Mass. (Photo by Frank Cousins Art Co.)"

seems to him the best. He should avoid meaningless forms—some stones suggest piled-up building

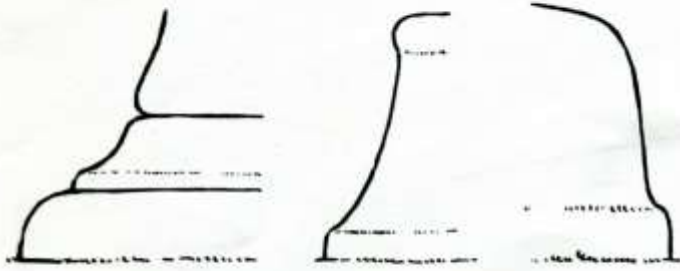


ILLUSTRATION NO. 4.

UNSTRUCTURAL FORMS AND MOULDINGS, SOFT LOOKING, ROUNDED CONTOURS AND PROFILES SHOULD BE AVOIDED. CLEAN-CUT, GEOMETRIC FORMS AND MOULDINGS DESIGNED TO SERVE A DEFINITE PURPOSE SHOULD BE USED. (See article on mouldings, issue of April, 1916).

blocks (see cut No. 3); he should have his mouldings clean-cut and serving a definite purpose of

support or crowning, avoiding rounded forms which look as though they were made of chewing-gum (see cut No. 4); and all ornament used should be consistent in style and correct in scale and placing. (Examples of poor ornament will be seen in cut No. 5.) Ornament should never be made up out of the designer's head: beautiful ornament of all periods should be studied and adapted to present needs—any other procedure means artistic failure.

Crude as is the ornament used in the two Colonial stones which illustrate this article it is, nevertheless pleasing; good in scale and based on easily recognized Renaissance motives. The stone cutters of that day did not try to invent new motives; they reshaped their inherited ornamental forms with all the skill and taste at their command. It is to be hoped that modern designers will follow their example and instead of searching for novel effects will do again that which has been done before, but, if possible, do it a little better.

(photo caption) “Unstructural forms and moldings, soft looking, rounded contours and profiles should be avoided. Clean-cut, geometric forms and mouldings designed to serve a definite purpose should be used. (See article on mouldings, issue of April, 1916.)”