



Burke and Hare – Grave Robbing

Advances in surgery in the early 1800's meant that many trainee surgeons needed fresh corpses or dead bodies to practice on, and they were not fussy about where the bodies came from! There were many criminals willing to plunder cemeteries to make a few pounds. Sunderland's Old Parish Church Graveyard was a very easy target because it was situated next to the Town Moor and not overlooked. Grave robbers could escape easily under cover of darkness and the fog that rolled in off the sea. According to records, a body could be buried in the afternoon and stolen by the evening. Legend has it; two of the most notorious "body-snatchers" practiced their trade in Sunderland .

William Burke was hanged in front of a cheering crowd of over 25,000 on 28 January 1829 and, fittingly perhaps, after being put on public display, his body was donated to medical science. The **Burke and Hare** murders were a series of 16 murders committed over a period of about ten months in 1828 in Edinburgh, Scotland. The killings were undertaken by William **Burke** and William **Hare**, who sold the corpses to Doctor Robert Knox for dissection at his anatomy lectures.

Hare was released in February 1829 and escaped across the border into England.