



Cultural and artistic heritage of the Hólavallagarður cemetery

ROUTE IS 4

Presentation of the route

The route takes you through a part of the cultural and artistic heritage in the cemetery Hólavallagarður, with focus on the cast-iron burial monuments with iron crosses. One of the reasons Hólavallagarður is considered unique is because of the large number of such monuments, one of them even said to be able to be „a splendor in any cemetery in Northern Europe“. This is a walk where you get to know about the cemetery, the crosses and the symbols on some of them, but also a little about the life of the people who are buried underneath.

The main reference on these burial monuments is the book, *Minningarmörk in Hólavallagarður*, by Björn Th. Björnsson, art historian

This is an alternative route for those who are not able to walk long distances or prefer to visit heritage close to home. It is an easy and pleasant walk for people fifty years and older, but could be difficult for disabled people, since a short part of it is narrow, but it is possible to avoid by taking the broader path. The route is short but one might want to extend it and linger among the burial monuments, or just to sit down on a bench and enjoy the tranquility of the cemetery.



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Waypoint 1

HÓLAVALLAGARÐUR



Welcome to Hólavallagarður, the cemetery that has been said to be the largest and oldest museum of relics in Iceland, because of its significant and well preserved collection of burial monuments such as tombs, gravestones and crosses. Hólavallagarður is also a very significant and unique cemetery, because it has been left much undisturbed since the first grave was taken there in 1838. It is also considered unique because it contains a relatively large number of cast-iron burial monuments, iron fences and crosses. Such memorials were often lost in Europe's cemeteries, where they were merged into weapons of war.

Waypoint 2

ENTRANCE



You are now facing the path that goes from east to west through Hólavallagarður. To your right is its oldest part, which is also the most unorganized, and here rests its „watchman“. Some facts: Hólavallagarður became Reykjavík's main cemetery in 1838 and remained so for the next 94 years. It is Reykjavík's second cemetery after the ancient cemetery, Víkurgarður, in central Reykjavík, was abandoned. Hólavallagarður was at this time located at the outskirts of Reykjavík, the population of which was then about 800 people. The funeral processions went from the town centre along Suðurgata. The size of Hólavallagarður is 3 ha and it contains about 10,000 marked graves.

Waypoint 3

CAST-IRON CROSSES



The iron crosses in Hólavallagarður were erected in the 19th century and created by new technology in iron casting. This technology made it possible to cast the same basic form over and over again, while altering the engraving on the crosses, and adding sprouts and flora that characterized the Gothic style in which most of the crosses are fashioned. A whole monument could also be created by casting them in multiple units. The engravings on most of the crosses are the names of the deceased, and their birth and death dates (Fæddur and dáinn). Also „Here rests... and name“ (Hér hvílir...), and sometimes their occupation. The elaboration of the crosses and ornaments differs.

Waypoint 4

GRAVE OF JÓN SIGURÐSSON, „PRESIDENT“ (1811 -1879)



It is not possible to pass the burial monument of Jón Sigurðsson without mentioning it, even if it is not made of cast-iron. Jón was the leader in the struggle for Iceland's independence in his writing and speech in the 19th century, and became a national hero. Jón is most often called Jón president when spoken of, being the president of the Icelandic Literary Society. His birthday, June 17th, is the National Day of Iceland. The monument on the grave of Jón is made from an ancient Icelandic rock with a profile picture of Jón.

Waypoint 5

THE LARGEST IRON CROSS



The iron cross on Guðrún Oddsdóttir's grave is the largest iron cross in Hólavallagarður, and among the largest known. The ornament of a flaming lamp on the front and back of the cross is a symbol of the soul according to ancient Greeks, but it also refers to a place in the Bible where the lamp is the symbol of truth. In symbolism, the lamp combines Wake and Night and it is said to be difficult to think of a more suitable symbol for a "watchman" of a cemetery, such as Guðrún is. Engraving on the ledge says „Á garði þessum grafin fyrst allra 23ja November 1838. Math. V,8,“ or „In this garden the first of all buried 23rd November 1838. Math. V, 8.“.

Waypoint 6


THE WATCHMAN, GUÐRÚN ODDSDÓTTIR (1799 – 1838)





Not anybody could be a „watchman“, and Hólavallagarður had to wait several months for its. Guðrún was found suitable for this role, having been the wife of the Chief Justice of the National Court, and also as her husband offered her as the „watchman“. The role of a „watchman“ is to welcome the dead to the cemetery and to be its guardian. Before marrying the Chief Justice, Guðrún was the widow of one of the highest officials in Iceland, Stefáns Stephensen. Guðrún's funeral took place in grand ceremonial style on November 23, 1838 and Hólavallagarður was consecrated at the same time. Guðrún was the daughter of a priest at Reynivöllum in Kjós. She bore five children, but outlived them all.

Waypoint 7

GRAVE OF GUÐBRANDUR STEPHENSEN (1786 – 1851)

	<p>The cross on the grave is decorated with leafs and scepters at the ends of the cross arms and a small cross above Guðbrandur's name. On the ledge are the names of two boys, who were close relatives to Guðbrandur's wife. Guðbrandur was an inventor and became reknown nation wide for inventing and constructing various tools for making work in agriculture more easy. But most of all was he known for the lock system he constructed for the Reykjavik Municipal Treasury, which contained three different locks, all with different keys and thus three people had to be present when the treasury was opened. Guðbrandur came to know Jón Sigurðsson when he lived in Copenhagen. Guðbrandur is named Stephensen, not Stefánsson, in the 1816 census.</p>
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Waypoint 8	GRAVE OF JOHANNES ZOEGA (1796 – 1852)
	<p>The arms of the cross are decorated, but without any religious symbols. Johannes's family descends from Rome and Verona in Italy, but later settled in Schleswig, Germany and in Denmark. His father, Johannes Zoega, came to Iceland in 1787 and became warden at Reykjavík's prison. The son, Johannes, who rests here, married Ingigerður Ingimundardóttir, and they had seven children, Geir, Tomas, Christian, Johannes, Christiane, Einar and Geir. Johannes made his living as a fisherman on open boats.</p>

Waypoint 9	GRAVE OF EGILL ÞÓRÐARSON ZOEGA (1879 – 1883)
	<p>Very little decoration and no symbols are on the cross. Egill is the great grandson of Johannes, who died 31 years earlier and rests with other members of the family to the right of Egil. Egill died as a child of only four years. Egil's grandmother,</p>

Waypoint 10	GRAVE OF JAMES ROBB (1818-1861)
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The cross is without decoration, except for the engraving of James's name and of two different figures (angels), one on each side of the cross holding a cross and a leaf in their hands. Birth and death dates are not engraved on the cross, but one record tells that James died in 1846, and another in 1861. James Robb was a British man from the city of Liverpool in England, who came to Iceland in 1813 as the representative of a trading company in Liverpool. James became an independent merchant in Reykjavík and ran a store there until he died. James Robb married Valgerður Ólafsdóttir and they had nine children, five of them are buried in Hólavallagarður.

Waypoint 11

BURIAL MONUMENT OF STEINGRÍMUR JÓNSSON, BISHOP



The burial monument of Steingrímur Jónsson, Bishop, is a large cast-iron upright structure, a „stele“, with many shapes shown on its front. It is considered to be able to be "a splendor in any cemetery in Northern Europe". Symbols of Steingrímur's status of respect and life honor is shown by a large crozier on the front of the monument and a wreath with ribbons and two stars; a star in this context is referring to the words of Christ "I am ... a star shining..." The two roses and a cross on the arched top of the monument, and also on the arms' ends of the cross mean purity from sin in a symbolic sense. The roses occur also on the iron fence around the monument with lilies (purity and piety), but most prominent on the fence is the Greek Alexander's meander pattern, which is said to refer to Steingrímur's classical education.

Waypoint 12

GRAVE OF STEINGRÍMUR JÓNSSON, BISHOP (1769 – 1845)



Steingrímur Jónsson was appointed Bishop of Iceland in 1824 and sat in Laugarnes, east of Reykjavík, until his death in 1845. After a farewell ceremony at his home, his corpse was transported from Laugarnes by sea to Reykjavík on a decorated boat from a French warship anchored in Reykjavík's harbor. Steingrímur was shown this respect as he had received the order of the French Honorary Legion the year before. Bishop Steingrímur's funeral is considered to have been "one of the most magnificent" funerals ever witnessed in Reykjavík. Steingrímur has been described as "the best educated man, a dutiful official, and an honorable man, a great scholar, and prone to scientific pursuits", and one of the greatest genealogists in Iceland at that time. Jón Sigurðsson, the leader

for Iceland's independence struggle, worked as a young man for Steingrímur.

Waypoint 13

GRAVE OF VALGERÐUR JÓNSDÓTTIR, (1771 -1856), BISHOPS WIFE



Valgerður Jónsdóttir, Bishop Steingrímur's wife, is buried in the same grave as he, and shares the same burial monument. An honorary wreath and a big star are placed over the plate with her name on the back of the monument. Valgerður's name is also engraved on the burial monument of her former husband, Bishop Hannes Finnsson, the last bishop of Skálholt. When he died, Valgerður became one of the wealthiest women in Iceland, if not the wealthiest. She inherited many farmlands in South and West Iceland, among them Skálholt, Laugarnes and the island Engey. She also collected books and manuscripts. Valgerður is considered to have been the first Icelandic woman to wear daily the traditional Icelandic costume.

Waypoint 14

GRAVE OF SÍMON HANSEN (1782 – 1847)



Palm leaves on the arms of the cross on Símon's grave refer to the palm branches the people of Jerusalem used welcoming Christ's coming to the city on the Sunday before Easter. The palm tree is a symbol of a joyous reunion with the Christ. Simon was living at Bäsendar when the biggest flood in Iceland, Bäsendaflóð, hit the South-West coast of Iceland in 1799, and the farm Bäsendar became ruins. Símon was a merchant in Reykjavík and served as steward of Reykjavík's Cathedral. Simon is considered to be of the first generation of burghers of Reykjavík and his home was considered among better households at that time in Reykjavík. Their daughter, Sigríður Kristín, married Bishop Steingrímur's only son, Hannes.

Waypoint 15


GRAVE OF SIGRÍÐUR KRISTÍN JOHNSEN (1814 – 1869)




The elaborate and ornamented monument on the grave is a decorated cross on a foundation inside a decorated iron fence. The names of three of her children, Valgerður, Kristín and Halldóra, are engraved on the foundation. Sigríður was the daughter of Símon Hansen and wife of Hannes, the son of Bishop Steingrímur Jónsson. The family name, Johnsen, is added to his name, as his father was called Johnsen by officials. Hannes (1809-1885), who was a merchant of most part of his adult life, rests inside the fence with his wife. One of their daughters was married to Royal Treasurer, Árni Thorsteinsson.

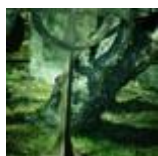
Waypoint 16	MORGUE AND LYCHGATE (BELL GATE)
 	<p>Where the the lychgate stands now is the former site of Hólavallagarður's morgue and, its foundation can be seen as a small mound around the lychgate. The morgue was used to keep corpses of the poor, corpses when pestilence erupted and the corpses of foreign sailors. Those who were more affluent were kept at home until the funeral took place. The morgue was also used as a funeral chapel and as a church, and at times it was the only church in Reykjavík. The morgue was moved to the cemetery in Fossvogur, Reykjavík, in 1950. The lychgate that now stands on its foundation is designed by Guðjón Samúelsson, architect and State Architect at that time. Inside the gate is the same bell that used to be in the morgue.</p>
Waypoint 17	CORPSES WANTED
 	<p>The disciples of the medical school in Reykjavík, before a hospital was built, had a hard time getting corpses for autopsies and lectures, since not everyone was willing to give up corpses standing in the morgue. Some living, however, agreed to their bodies being paid for while still alive, they were "bought on foot", Þórður Árnason Malakoff being one of them, as described in a lyric from that time, that bears the name of Þórður.</p>
Waypoint 18	GRAVE OF BJÖRG ÞÓRÐARDÓTTIR ZOEGA (1822 – 1884)
 	<p>On the cross says „Hér hvílir húsfrú...” meaning „Here rests the Mistress of the house ...”. Björg was married to Johannes, the grandson of warden Johannes Zoega, warden and thus a grandmother of Egill, who rests with his Zoega ancestors. Björg and Johannes lived at Nýibær on Vesturgata in the western part of Reykjavík.</p>
Waypoint 19	GRAVE OF KRISTJÁN MERCHANT ÞORSTEINSSON, (1827 – 1859)
 	<p>At the bottom of the cross on the grave is an upside down and extinguishing torch, meaning "sleeping love" or carnal death. No records were found on Kristján, except he is listed as a merchant at Vesturgata 3 in 1857, in a short telling of Vesturgata 3 and its neighbour, Vesturgata 5. Many firms and stores were run at Vesturgata 3, which got its name, Liverpool, after a son of James Robb had a store there. On Vesturgata 5 was a big house, Glasgow, the largest building in Iceland at the time, where a well known poet and writer Einar Benediktsson, lawyer and</p>

		<p>businessman, and industrialist started the first newspaper in Iceland, Dagskrá (Agenda), in collaboration with reporters in Copenhagen, England and America. Both Liverpool and Glasgow burned down but Liverpool was built again in its current image.</p>

Waypoint 20	GRAVE OF GUÐRÍÐUR MAGNÚSDÓTTIR, MIDWIFE (1801 – 1864)
	<p>At the bottom of the burial memorial of Guðríður, the cross, is an upside down and extinguishing torch, meaning "sleeping love" or carnal death. The handshake on the back of the cross is a symbol of reunion. The stone foundation under the cross is elaborately made of Icelandic dolerite. The hour glass on its front is made up of two inverse and wide bowl shapes, tied with a knob or neck, not unlike chalices. Guðríður worked as midwife and was considered to be excellent, both in skill, accuracy and luck. She has also been described as a very beautiful lady and even so as she grew older. Guðríður was married twice, and is resting between her son and grandson.</p>

Waypoint 21	GRAVE OF KRISTÍN ARADÓTTIR (1797 – 1861)
	<p>No records were found on Kristín except that in Book of Icelanders says that she lived in Lambhús in Akranes in 1801 and moved to Reykjavík about twenty years old. She was a mistress of the house in Reykjavík 1835 and 1845 and is said Árnadóttir in the census of 1845. A statue of an angel in front of the cross on the grave seems to be a later addition.</p>

Waypoint 22	GRAVE OF MARGRÉT KNUDSEN (1861 – 1868)
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This is a grave of a little five year old girl that bears an iron cross, different from all others crosses. Names of members of the Knudsen family are engraved on a tombstone behind her. The Knudsen family stems from Ludvig Mikael Knudsen born in Jutland, Denmark, in 1779, who died in Iceland in 1828. His wife was Margrethe Andrea Hölter Knudsen. Ludvig Árni Knudsen, one of the names on the tombstone, was the son of Ludvig Mikael.

Waypoint 23

GRAVE OF JÓRUNN MAGNÚSDÓTTIR (1842 – 1872)



The arms of the cross are with expanding angles and the cross is decorated with a small cross above the engravings „Here rests the remarkable lady Jórunn Magnúsdóttir...“. The psalm engraved on the base can be translated as „Thus death deprives everything of earth – floats away from the original us – everything will become earth again – this is imposed on all mankind“. Jórunn was born on the island Engey, outside of Reykjavik, daughter of a couple living there. At that time 56 people lived in Engey and the occupations on the island were agriculture, farming and shipbuilding. Jórunn married and had six children who were still young when she died, thirty years old. Jórunn is the ancestress of a great kin.