

u3a Monthly Meeting April 2024 – Grave Robbers

80 members and several visitors were present to hear Steve Bacon's enlightening (and sometimes gruesome!) talk about Grave Robbers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Steve was dressed for the part and brought along examples of a grave robber's kit.

We learnt that there was an art to robbing a grave - "leave no trace". Whilst a master tradesman would earn an annual salary of £75, a grave robber could expect 190 Guineas per annum for seasonal work - unsurprisingly, the demand for dead bodies reduced in the heat of Summer. Surgeons and magistrates colluded with the grave robbers in order to obtain bodies for dissection, so the chances of being punished if caught were minimal.

The Anatomy Act of 1832, together with public disdain and the formation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, marked the beginning of the end for such a lurid profession. Today, although we may judge their actions unsavoury, we owe much of our medical knowledge to these characters.

Thank you Steve for such an informative and entertaining presentation.



