Body Snatchers (a.k.a ‘Grave-robbers’, ‘resurrection men’)

A body snatcher is one that steals bodies from their graves and sells them, usually for the use of dissection. There are many novels about “invasions of body snatchers”, which usually consist of aliens stealing bodies. However many body snatchers are not aliens, but people. Burke and Hare were two famous body snatchers. They killed 16 people (three men, twelve women, and one child) in the time of one year only to sell the bodies to medical centres to be used for dissection and other uses. The first body they sold had died of a natural cause in Hare’s lodging house. They realised they could sell the bodies for a lot, and started murdering to gain money. Dr Knox bought every single body from Burke and Hare, stating he likes his meat “fresh”. The Press found out about this horrible trading process and used his name as a play on words. “Knox, noxious, and obnoxious”. Burke and Hare were arrested after two lodgers became suspicious when a visitor suddenly went missing. Burke was convicted and killed on January 28 1929. Ironically his body was used for dissection and shown to the public. Their favourite method to kill was to lean on their chest and stopping them breathing, which since then, has been called the term “to burke”. Burking them left no forensic evidence that the bodies were murdered. Many body snatchers worked in groups, and chose freshly dug graves because of the soft soil which was easy to dig up. The topic of body snatching was covered by many novelists at the time including Charles Dickens

Who wrote of Jerry Crucher, a character in A Tale of Two Cities, who worked at night as a resurrection man.

 By Rachael Noven (:

Information gathered from Burkeandhare.com