THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF CHURCHYARD MEMORIALS

Julian Rawes

Introduction

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

Thomas Gray.

It is hoped that this article will go a little way towards creating awareness of the value that memorials bring to historical study, not only in the detail of their inscriptions or the beauty of their architecture but as objects of historical importance in their own right.

'Sacred to the Memory of' - the words encapsulate the need for tombstones: the loss and sorrow felt by the bereaved; the spiritual need formalised within a religious framework. Mankind has always had a desire to indicate the resting place of the departed, whether it be with a simple grave marker, communal mound, or pyramid. The advent of writing made the tombstone a perfect medium to perpetuate the memory of the deceased and feed the spirit of the bereaved. Sometimes the inscription is enhanced with a pithy comment on the vagaries of life and death, as on a 4th century memorial mosaic found in Algeria which was dedicated to someone who had a sound grasp of his own mortality and who presumably had no faith in the afterlife.

I WAS NOT I WAS I AM NOT I CARE NOT

Putting aside the feelings of the above individual, for most of humanity there has been an enduring link between death, the afterlife and religion, which has determined the method of the disposal of the deceased. In the British Isles for at least the last fifteen hundred years, the Celtic and English way of disposal has been burial, associated with a religious edifice or site, sometimes enhanced by a memorial however small or temporary.

In normal conditions a tombstone inscription will last between a hundred and four hundred years depending upon stone, position and luck, so our existing memorials convey the impression that they are for the most part a relatively modern result of wealth and social change. However, the tradition of erecting inscribed memorials dates back in an unbroken line to the early centuries of the first millennium.

During the last few decades the precious church, churchyard and memorial relationship has been under attack: first, with the enforced closure for burial of many of our traditional churchyards; secondly the devastating tombstone clearances so prevalent in the fifties and sixties; thirdly the current threat of redundancy looming over the very fabric of our churches and chapels. The problem is all the more great as Britain goes through arguably the greatest religious and social transformation since the 4th to 6th centuries, there has been an inability or unwillingness to protect the memorial, churchyard and church as a single unit.

Before further consideration of the problems now threatening our existing memorials, it is necessary to examine the historical development of the memorial.

The memorial in Roman Britain

Evidence comes mainly from examples of stelae found in excavations of Romano-British towns. The Corinium and Gloucester Museums have some fine specimens such as a gabled headstone from Cirencester (fig 1) with the inscription:

SEXTUS VALERIUS GENIALIS, TROOPER OF THE CAVALRY REGIMENT OF THRACIANS, A FRISIAN TRIBESMEN, FROM THE TROOP OF GENIALIS, AGED 40, OF 20 YEARS' SERVICE, LIES BURIED HERE. HIS HEIR HAD THIS SET UP.

Fig 1 Tombstone of Sextus Valerius Genialis

These examples survive because they were made as one unit, while other more grandiose memorials such as mausolea have not. The remains of a fine mausoleum was found at Lullingstone, Kent, a building in its own right also acting as a temple[1].

It is now impossible to judge how common in Roman Britain was the practice of erecting permenant tombstones to the dead. There is a marked incidence of memorials dedicated to individuals with either a military backround, or from elsewhere in the empire, who perhaps wished to declare their Roman citizenship.[2] There are also memorials to apparently ordinary individuals including many dedications to women and small children.

TO THE SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED: CORELLIA OPTATA, AGED 13. YE MYSTERIOUS SPIRITS WHO DWELL IN PLUTO'S ACHERUSIAN REALMS, AND WHOM THE MEAGRE ASHES AND THE SHADE, EMPTY SEMBLANCE OF THE BODY, SEEK, FOLLOWING THE BRIEF LIGHT OF LIFE; SIRE OF AN INNOCENT DAUGHTER, I, A PITIABLE VICTIM OF UNFAIR HOPE, BEWAIL HER FINAL END. QUINTUS CORELLIUS FORTIS, HER FATHER, HAD THIS SET UP

Tombstone found at the Mount, York.

The impression gained is that epigraphy may have been as common as that of approximately three hundred years ago, at least in the early decades of Roman rule, but was probably confined to the more Romanized areas.

The Celtic tradition

There was at least from the 5th century in the west and north, including Ireland a tradition of erecting menhirs, many with Christian symbols and inscriptions, a custom perhaps originating in Roman Britain or Gaul. Menhir is Celtic for a tall upright memorial stone. These early memorials were often inscribed in both Latin and Ogham, such as a stela to Voteporix, a King of Demetia (Pembrokeshire) with a Romano-British background, dated to the 5th century, from Castelldwyran and now in Carmarthen Museum (fig 2) and inscribed

MEMORIA
VOTEPORIGIS
PROTICTORIS

Several hundred Ogham inscriptions have survived the centuries, almost all on memorials. Examples are also known of large Ogham inscribed, pebble shaped grave markers.

A headstone from Carnsew in west Cornwall dated to not later than 475, and originally set on a mound covering a cist grave is inscribed in Latin:

HERE IN PEACE LATELY WENT TO REST CUNAIDE.
HERE IN THE GRAVE SHE LIES. SHE LIVED 33 YEARS.

The Ballaqueeney graveyard in the Isle of Man produced a memorial that bore an interesting Ogham inscription:

(THE STONE) OF DOVAIDU, SON OF THE DRUID

An especiallyinteresting memorial called the 'Cadfan Stone' is from the Tywyn parish churchyard of St Cadfan on the west coast of Wales, reputedly founded early in the 6th century. The stone, now placed in the church, is dated to the early 8th century and inscribed on four sides with what is believed to be the oldest recorded example of Welsh. Two sides are quoted here:

TENGRUI (or cengrui) LEGAL WIFE OF ADGAN,
BETWEEN BUDD AND MARCIAU

CUN WIFE OF CELEN, LOSS AND GRIEF REMAIN

Fig 2 5th century Celtic memorial in Carmarthen museum

English memorials

The Anglo-Saxons probably followed the Germanic and Scandinavian custom of erecting mounds, sometimes delineated by small stones, sometimes topped by a simple rough-cut stone, perhaps on occasion decorated with Runes. Within the mounds, as the Sutton Hoo ship burial testifies, there could be many items personal to the deceased. But grave goods are not memorials, they are items arranged to assist the deceased in the afterlife and not to prolong awareness of the individual on earth. There is little surviving evidence for early Anglo-Saxon memorials. There are rare examples of small rounded topped headstones decorated with crosses, however these are difficult to date and may come from a later period.

There was an Anglo-Saxon custom, almost certainly taken from the

Christian British of erecting large crosses. Examples date from the 7th to 11th centuries. One fine specimen is at Bewcastle in Cumbria, while in Gloucestershire we have the 7th century Lypiatt cross. The erection of these appear to have been commemorative and religious rather than as grave markers.

William of Malmesbury writing in the early 12th century[3] described stone pyramid-shaped memorials at Glastonbury dating from the 7th century and inscribed with the names of previous bishops of Glastonbury. The memorials were likely to have had Celtic or British influence. In a footnote, J A Giles the editor of the Bohn edition, added 'The Saxon mode of interment appears frequently to have been under pyramids or obelisks'. These pyramid shaped memorials were not small Egyptian style pyramids but probably similar to ridged and hipped ledgers or rectangular grave slabs so beloved by the Victorians; the obelisks were probably menhir type headstones. At this period there were decorated stone grave or coffin covers one of which came to light during an excavation at St Oswald's in Gloucester[4].

Perhaps we must give The Venerable Bede the recognition for being the earliest English tombstone recorder because his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*[5] included a transcription of Augustine's memorial inscription. Augustine, the first archbishop of Canterbury, died in or shortly after AD 604, and was buried at Canterbury. Bede states that he 'was laid outside, close to the church of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul...because it was not finished or dedicated. But as soon as it was dedicated, the body was brought in, and fittingly buried in its northern chapel;...' He goes on to say that an epitaph was 'inscribed upon the tomb of Augustine'. The memorial was possibly a chest tomb, probably in stone, with the inscription almost certainly in Latin. Ethelbert, the king mentioned in the inscription, was king of Kent. Please excuse my irresistible urge to set out the inscription as it just might have appeared.

HERE RESTS THE LORD AVGVSTINE
THE FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBVRY
WHO BEING FORMERLY SENT HITHER
BY THE BLESSED GREGORY BISHOP
OF THE CITY OF ROME
AND SVPPORTED BY GOD
WITH THE WORKING OF MIRACLES
BROVGHT KING ETHELBERT
AND HIS NATION FROM THE WORSHIP OF IDOLS
TO THE FAITH OF CHRIST
AND HAVING FVLFILLED IN PEACE
THE DAYS OF HIS OFFICE
DIED THE TWENTY SIXTH DAY OF MAY
IN THE REIGN OF THE SAME KING

William of Malmesbury states that Bede died in AD 734 in his 59th year, and records his epitaph which he thought unfitting for such a great man. The epitaph, inscribed in Latin and apparently erected at Durham[6].

BENEATH THIS STONE BEDE'S MORTAL BODY LIES;
GOD GRANT HIS SOUL MAY REST AMID THE SKIES,
MAY HE DRINK DEEPLY, IN THE REALMS ABOVE,
OF WISDOM'S FOUNT, WHICH HE ON EARTH DID LOVE!

Cuthbert, bishop of Hereford AD 736-740, set up a monumental inscription in the Cathedral church at Hereford to Mildfrith son of Merewalh, king of the Magonsæte. Cuthbert is also stated to have erected monumental inscriptions to his predecessors in Hereford[7]. The implication is that early Christian Britain whether under British or English control had a tradition of erecting memorials to the dead albeit to the wealthy or greatly respected.

Viking memorials

Mouldering bones and ashes of mighty heroes and noble women now forgotten under the mounds, or in the graves made hoary by the centuries that shroud you by their oblivion, I salute you! we also shall be forgotten.

du Chaillu

The Vikings in Scandinavia followed both customs of inhumation and of cremation. In either case a mound would be raised to mark the spot. The Sagas and Eddas abound with descriptions of funeral practice. Runic inscribed bautastenar (memorial stones) associated with mounds, either solitary or set within large cemeteries are found throughout Scandinavia. The graves are often placed in organised rows consisting of turf mounds topped by a stone (fig 3). Other graves are delineated by smaller stones sometimes marking out an oval grave, sometimes in the outline of a ship, sometimes rectangular, reminiscent of the kerbed memorial of today.

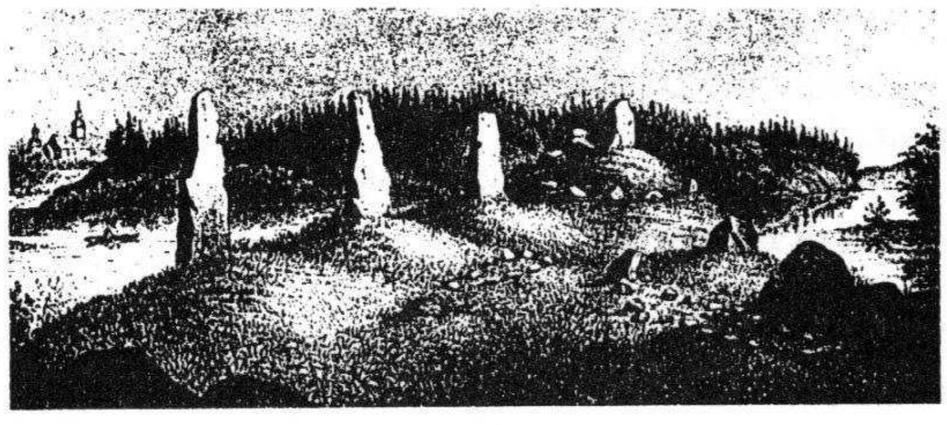

Fig 3 Rows of mounds with bautastenar up to 2m high Rekarnehygden Sweden

The Viking presence can still be seen in the Isle of Man. A fine 10th or 11th century memorial cross at Michael, Isle of Man, gives one an insight into what has been lost. It is remarkable that we can still witness these

precious objects. Here the cross, elaborately carved front and back, carries a runic inscription carved on the edge of the stone that reads:

> (JOALF) SON OF THOROLF THE RED ERECTED THIS CROSS TO THE MEMORY OF FRIDA HIS MOTHER.

A few surviving rectangular raised grave slabs described as hog-backs, often highly decorated and mostly found in Scotland, remind us that Viking graveyards were not devoid of memorials.

Memorials in the Middle Ages and later

While the stone used for the traditional graveyard memorial is mostly of local origin, inside the church from about 1600 onwards there is a gradual increase in the use of black and white marbles. Marble monuments did not start to appear in the churchyard until well into the 19th century, later followed by granite. Now most types of stone are represented, many in a reconstituted form.

Church memorials, although many succumbed to the transitory whims of Victorian architects, have on the whole escaped the wholesale clearances that have so bedevilled the churchyard and we are indeed fortunate in the number of memorials that have survived from before 1600. We have stone and alabaster effigies lying on large chest tombs often covered by elaborate awnings made of wood and plaster, occasional chest-tombs and grave cover slabs often with attached brass. In the 17th and 18th centuries we see a large increase in floor ledgers and wall memorials. As the nineteenth century progressed floor ledgers were discouraged due to the lack of space and increased concern over hygiene, while wall memorials reached their peak in the Regency period.

However, for the great majority of people, the churchyard was the place to be buried. The occasional wooden head-cross survives as a reminder of a past and probably quite extensive tradition practised by poorer folk. Generally the earliest stone memorials are chest-tombs from the late sixteenth century which reach their peak of popularity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Types of memorials

What must be realised when discussing memorial types is the part that fashion plays. Although memorials are physically durable and are subject to long-standing custom where few wish to step too far out of line, the evidence of the last 300 years shows the dramatic changes in epigraphic styles. Presumbly fashion would have played a role in earlier centuries but it is difficult to gauge as so few examples survive.

HEADSTONES: The headstone / stela / menhir is the commonest and perhaps the oldest form of memorial. Found under different names throughout ancient Europe, North Africa and Asia. The earliest form of headstones are menhirs, a roughly cut tapering block erected vertically, a custom probably dating back to the Bronze Age if not earlier. In time, depending on the locality, they developed into the classic headstone that we recognise today. Early inscribed headstones immortalising sacrificed children are found at Salammbô tophet, Carthage, dated to the 8th century BC[8]. Surviving Greek, Etruscan and Roman examples were often finely carved and closely resemble our own 18th century headstone.

The Civil War appears to be a watershed for headstones: was it that people became richer almost overnight, or a sudden change in custom, or were the churchyards cleared during a time of religious correctness? Whatever the reason there are probably only a few dozen headstones in Gloucestershire that date from before the Civil War, characterised by small plain rectangular shapes with large plain script. There are by contrast many thousands of headstones that survive from the late 1640's onwards. As the century progressed the architecture became more elaborate. This is echoed in the script which became finer and more delicate. Some truly beautiful examples of sculpture and calligraphy are to be found on these stones. One can point to many churchyards but that of Lydney has produced some unique artwork where there appears to be a local late seventeenth century school of sculpture, although not of spelling. Various styles and shapes have come and gone over the centuries, and the headstone is of course still evolving.

One point not often realised is that the practice of standing at the foot of the grave to read the inscription on the headstone is relatively modern. In the seventeenth and early to mid eighteenth centuries the headstone was inscribed on the side away from the grave. Once this is understood then the context in which headstones are positioned becomes clearer. The change of custom which took place over a long period of time may well have begun or certainly encouraged the practice of erecting foot and kerb stones, owing no doubt to unfortunate mistakes by confused sextons.

CROSS: The cross as a symbol incised on small headstones, or marker stones, often round-headed or wheel-headed and otherwise devoid of inscription, though found in the medieval period, originated in the early years of Christianity.

Memorial crosses set upon two or three plinths with surrounding kerbs became common in Victorian times. Forms range from the standard open cross to the often

highly decorated Celtic cross with arms enclosed within a circle to form an open disk.

FOOT STONES: The footstone started to appear in the late 17th century but really came into its own in the early 1900's as a miniature replica of the headstone. Later they were accompanied by kerbs in an attempt to define the grave.

KERBS AND CORNERS: Popular from the 1860's onwards and now, like footstones, are frowned upon because of mower access. The modern kerb and corner memorial has origins stretching back into the mists of time, with rough stones arranged to define a grave[9].

LEDGERS: Another class of memorial is the ledger, slab or grave-cover. Little used now and indeed banned from many graveyards, they reached their peak of popularity in the 18th and 19th centuries. The ledger evolved into many forms ranging from the plain flat rectangular slabs, to highly elaborate ridged and hipped and apexed monuments. Ledgers are often raised on base stones covering a brick-lined vault. The more elaborate types occasionally support horizontal crosses or effigies.

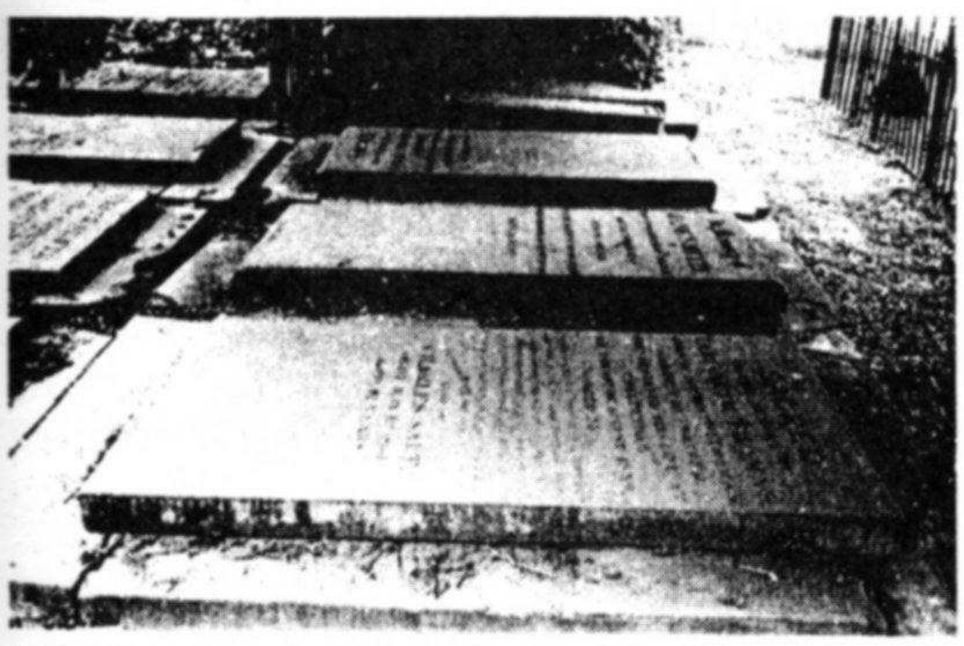

Fig 4 Group of early Victorian ledgers in Leckhampton churchyard

Floor ledgers are amongst the earliest surviving church monuments and are closely related to the coffin lid. Early examples are at St. Piatus, Seclin in France *c*1142, and in Salisbury Cathedral 1139. From the beginning of the 13th century ledgers inlaid with brass start to appear.

The bas-relief outline of the deceased, the forerunner of the effigy, begins to appear on ledgers before 1200. The full effigy becomes popular in the 13th century, although this memorial has its origins in classical times, Athenian tombstones dated to the 4th century BC carried relief or semi-relief portraits.

Table tombs are ledgers raised on four legs or pillars with an open place beneath.

CHEST TOMBS: Another type of memorial is the enclosed chest tomb which originates in the classical world. Early rather plain examples date from the early 17th century. From the mid-17th century their structure becomes more elaborate and decorative with distinctive styles. The chest tomb has a far older history inside the church where it is often seen supporting effigies. Chest tombs near to church entrances were on occasion used in parish events as convenient tables, hence the confusion with table tombs - chest tombs are often called 'table tombs'.

GRAVE MARKERS: Used in modern cemeteries either in wood or stone to mark the grave prior to the erection of a headstone and almost always inscribed with a reference number. Similar stones were occasionally used in churchyards for the same purpose .

WALL MONUMENTS: There are of course many other types of memorial of which perhaps the most significant are the monuments to be found attached to walls inside the church. They become popular from the 16th century, firstly in stone then in marble, often in classical or baroque form, but their existence in early centuries is attested.

The modern cemetery

The modern cemetery came about because of the appalling situation in the fast expanding cities and towns. By 1840 London was having to find space for 40,000 burials a year and along with grave-robbing one can just imagine the chaotic and unpleasant situation.

I saw from out the earth peep forth
The white and glistening bones,
With jagged ends of coffin planks,
That e'en the worms disowns;
And once a smooth round skull rolled on,
Like a football, on the stones.

Meller

In smaller places the situation was perhaps not so dramatic, nevertheless Cheltenham, for example, desperately needed its new parish cemetery which opened in 1831. It had a classical style mortuary chapel and was laid out in quarters, one being set aside for paupers' graves where no permanent memorial was allowed. Little, however, can surpass the degree of sophistication and splendour which mark the great Parisian or London cemeteries such as Père Lachaise (1804), Kensal Green (1832) and Highgate (1839).

Most towns now have cemeteries and their ancient burial grounds are closed for burials. Villages fared better as their population did not rise so dramatically and most graveyards had room for expansion. In the majority of cases the village churchyard continues to be used serving as a link with the past. With the legalization of cremation in 1884, the pressure on the churchyard has been reduced.

Inscriptions

Historians have questioned the need to record inscriptions as they are for the most part duplicates of entries in the registers. Although there are obvious correlations with the registers there are major differences which makes the memorial inscription a unique historical document in its own right. The registers record who is buried in the church or churchyard whereas the memorial is commemorating the death of someone who is buried below but on occasion will record the existence of other members of the family, even of their deaths in distant parts. There is often much historical detail that is inscribed on a memorial which is not found elsewhere.

This
plate is inscrib'd to the memory of
William Fowler of this parish,
Miller & Baker,
who was supposed to be robbed & murder'd by some
person or persons unknown, as he was returning from
Cirencester Market; which place he had frequented
more than forty years.
This meloncholy accident happened Feb'r 20th 1792,
in the sixty-forth year of his age.
The sudden change ah quickly me befel,
I had not time,to bid my friends farewell:
but all must die place where or when
is known to GOD but not to men.
Mary his wife died the 12th
May 1762 aged 29
years.

Sapperton 1792.

Memorial recording - whose responsibility ?

When I tell people that I transcribe memorial inscriptions, it is as if a door to a forbidden world has been opened. There is a pause while various thoughts pass through their minds as if the question of their own mortality has been raised. Once the shadow of death has been exorcised, further questions arise in rapid succession: why would anyone want to record tombstones, does one get paid, who would want them recorded, the council, the church?

The above comments on tombstone recording encapsulate some very serious problems with memorials to the dead, in respect of the emotions they arouse which affects the way people respond to them or rather don't respond to them. It is also complicated by the way the historically aware fraternity view tombstones depending on which branch they come from.

To the archaeologist although they are for the most part stuck in the ground, tombstones are not considered truly archaeological and are usually too recent even for the medievalist. To the architectural historian they are mostly in the wrong place in that they are not part of a building, are not grand enough or are too many and hence common or unimportant; to the historian they are not on paper but are in cold damp churchyards and cannot be placed in an archive where they can be preserved for future generations, so best ignore the problem and hopefully it will eventually go away, which of course it will, in time. To the family historian who more often than not debases the memorial by extracting only relevant genealogical detail, often getting it wrong and ignoring the full unique story that the memorial has to give, as object they have little intrinsic value. To the modern local historian, who does appear to be making the greatest effort in their localised attempts to create high standard surveys taking into account the full value of the memorial, the historical detail in the inscription, the architectural detail and diversity, the type of stone, the poetry, the calligraphy and the sculptor, all have importance.

As I was riding in the night
O're a Common for want of light
Off my horse I there was tossed
And at a millrail my life ! lost.

All Hollows South Cerney 1737

The problem is that the subject is generally not taken seriously as an historical study whether by professional body or individual and if considered at all it is thought unimportant or unnecessary. Memorials need to be considered with a greater sense of responsibility by all the historically aware fraternity, and with more communication between its branches.

However, there is no professional standard, no school of tombstone surveyors. So most people who put inscriptions to paper think of themselves as perfectly capable of carrying out a simple task as copying down text.The tragedy is that once a memorial has been transcribed and that transcription is known, then it is less likely to be transcribed again. But it may need transcribing again because it is surprising to see the mistakes in transcription; interpretations by the transcriber of what the memorial should be recording rather than what it actually records. Also whole sections are missed, dates are transposed, words have

been shortened when they should not be shortened and lengthened when they should not be lengthened; even sections inserted from completely different memorials.

Groups have proudly told me that they recorded a churchyard in a day as if it was a race! At present no authority feels responsible and it is left to family history societies, local history groups and individuals, to record them. They do not have the power to preserve them, that is left to the beleaguered church authorities and therefore to luck as to whether a memorial survives.

In vain Physicians strive to save
themselves or patients from the grave;
in vain we court the Doctors art
to ward off death's uneering dart
for as death came thro' Adam's fall,
death must be the lot of all.

Taynton 1789.

Statutory requirements

The Common Law that governs where we are buried has come down to us through the mists of time, with alterations and additions over the centuries.

Modern civic cemeteries have a strict code of what is allowed and not allowed. One can either purchase a plot on a lease, in which case a permitted tombstone with inscription can be erected, or the interred can be buried in a short-term plot without headstone facility. Modern cemeteries also keep excellent records of who is buried and where, and often make efforts to retain the atmosphere by preserving their memorials.

The law governing the ordinary churchyard or burial ground memorial is vague. The decision to allow a tombstone is normally delegated to the incumbent. The PCC is responsible for the graveyard as a whole. Whoever is given permission to erect a memorial assumes the responsibility of looking after it and the task falls to their heirs. However, there is nothing in law to penalise those who do not. Nor could there be as the task of establishing the legal responsibility for a 300 year old memorial would not be practical. Neither should the church officials remove a memorial without prior warning which usually takes the form of a notice in the local newspaper. Ultimately the responsibility is shared between the church and the family of the deceased but over time the church gains an often unwanted authority while the family loses interest.

Many active churchyards keep only rough burial plans while some even today, have none, so unless a headstone is erected the site of an individual's grave is quickly lost.

If the local church officials decide to make major alterations to the appearance of the churchyard then a faculty has to be raised. Minor alterations can be carried out with minimal requirements. How extensive an alteration has to be to require a faculty is ill-defined. Once permission has been granted to remove memorials, then a list has to be made of the individuals interred and their dates of burial (inscribed on memorial), along with the memorial's location in the graveyard. There is no necessity to record the memorial's architecture or inscription as a whole. Then the tombstones can be removed. If someone wishes to exhume a body or bodies an application has to be made to the Home Secretary though oddly it is still legally permitted to re-use a grave or over-bury after a gap of at least fifty years.

Death comes apace the Judgment nigh,
Go read those lines and learn to die.
Serve the Lord with Godly fear
For we no resting place have here.

Lydney 1779.

Churchyard clearances

Unfortunately in the past the story in a majority of cases was not like what should have happened. There has always been the occasional small scale tidying up and removal of stones, but between the fifties and eighties, hundreds of churchyards in Gloucestershire alone were ruthlessly cleared and levelled, many thousands in the country as a whole. Memorials, piled up in corners, used for paths, or broken up for hard-core. In most cases the memorials were removed leaving no record of their description, no record of the inscriptions they carried, and no record of where the memorials were situated therefore leaving no record of who is buried where. It is as if a vast swathe of the

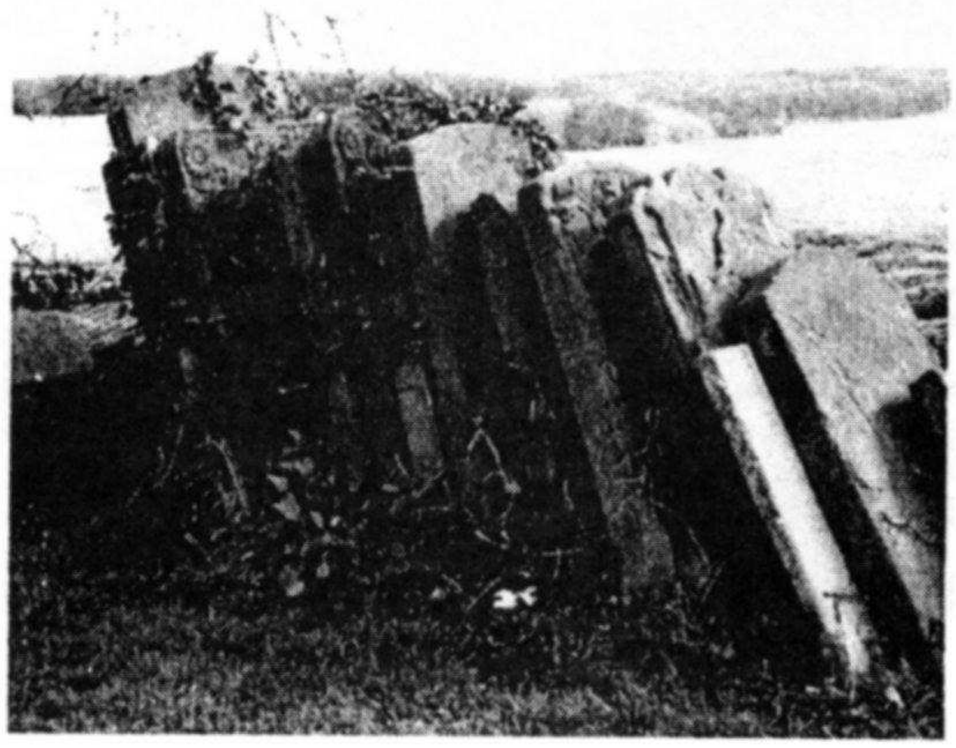

Fig 5 Piled-up tombstones in Pauntley churchyard

county's parish registers had been thrown on a bonfire and the rest left in a damp cellar.

Fortunately the rate has slowed down although the pressure is still there with the ever increasing number of redundant churches. Only a small minority of churchyards have had no loss of their tombstone population, and we are truly fortunate that their incumbents fought against the mainstream to retain the memorials in their setting around the church as if guarding it against adversity. One outspoken incumbent complained to me that he had repeatedly come up against local sensitivities, while his meek well-loved conforming predecessor had brought a JCB into the churchyard and destroyed hundreds of unique memorials turning the area into a bleak open swathe of grassland surrounding a now isolated forlorn church, no record whatsoever being taken of what was destroyed.

So we are here dealing with an apparent gap in public awareness that permeates into the minds of the very people who should know better. On the other hand it has not been easy for the church. The pressure was on the ever decreasing congregation to keep the churchyards 'tidy' but they could no longer do so. If they were lucky the local council would take on the task but only if most of those inconvenient stones were removed to allow in the mowers, and few people in the community cared one way or the other.

Reader here lies a woman of such are left too few
the poor ones friend and not the riches foe
the virtuous wife and tender mother too
whose deeds were ever faithful, good and just
beneath this stone lies slumbering in the dust.
Go live like her so that when deaths warning giv'n
your works may reach unto the highest heaven.

Taynton 1780.

What is to be done ?

I have painted a damning and sad picture of neglect and wanton destruction and I meant to do so. The responsibility should rest with a body such as English Heritage that has the power to guard these national treasures or at least to ensure that a comprehensive and fairly inexpensive survey of them is carried out. The Secretary of State is empowered to schedule ancient monuments and some of the more prominent monuments such as chest tombs have been listed but the interest is always on the architectural rather than historical quality and does little to record position, inscription or relationship to other nearby monuments. So the problem comes back to who is responsible and it is only when that decision has been made that we can

SACRED
to the memory of Private
THOMAS STEEL,
14 th King's Light Dragoons
who departed this life May 12 th 1832
Aged 45 years.
He served His Country with fidelity
upwards of twenty four years,
was in several Campaigns in
Portugal, Spain and South of France
from 1808 to1814 and at
New Orleans South America 1815.
This Stone is erected by the Non Commiss d.
Officers and Privates of the Troop to
which he belonged, as a Testimony of their
high regard for the deceased, as
Comrade and good Soldier.

Fig 6. The tombstone of Thomas Steel, in the graveyard of St Mary de Crypt, Gloucester.

Note the similarities with that of Sextus Valerius Genialis of seventeen centuries earlier, (fig 1).

feel more confident about the survival of what is left. Meanwhile, concerned individuals, family history societies and local groups will soldier on to survey churchyards before the passage of time takes its toll.

How loved, how valued once avails thee not
To whom related, or by whom begot
A heap of dust alone remains of thee
Tis all thou art and all the proud shall be

Gloucester, St. Mary de Crypt 1852.

Anyone who takes on the task of recording a churchyard's memorials must bear in mind that a survey has to be an exact record of what is inscribed which in time will became the only record. It is not a task to be taken on without due care and thought and can take months or even years to complete.

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