

The Churchyard

Warblington churchyard occupies an area of a little over an acre and was probably extended northwards in the early 19th century. It was closed in 1894, when the new urban district cemetery was constructed. There are around 630 monuments in the churchyard. All but a few date from the early 18th century through to the end of the 19th century. The earliest surviving memorial is to Thomas Till, 1707 ❶.

Many of the headstones are decorated with carving, some very lavishly (especially those of the second half of the 18th century). The stock symbols are well represented and follow the general pattern of development noted in English churchyards. In the first half of the 18th century the low, thick headstones bear emblems of death (skull, bones, coffin, hour-glass, dart, down-turned torch) but here at Warblington these are often accompanied by signs of continuity and resurrection such as a leaved branch or palm, a flaming heart and one example of the ring of eternity formed by a snake with its tail in its mouth.

In the course of the 18th century taller, slimmer headstones are used and these carry symbols of hope and religious emblems: crown, the clouds of heaven and sunbursts, trumpet, dove, Agnus Dei, the eye of God and the angel in the style of the Renaissance cherub. There are also rare motifs that refer to the personal character or profession of the deceased: the musical instruments and music books of Joseph Toms, 1762 ❷; the crozier and mitre of Bishop Short of Adelaide, S Australia, 1883 ❸; a single example of a coat of arms for John Palmer, 1745 ❹.

By the end of the 18th century, the emblem of the urn is becoming popular and by the first half of the 19th century it rivals the angel in popularity.

Scenes carved on monuments are much rarer than symbols but there are several of interest in the churchyard: the carving of a mother holding a baby and reading a book is devoted to Fanny Dassie who died in 1805 after childbirth, to be followed three months later by her infant son ❺; there are two compositions from the Regency period depicting families mourning at a father's tomb, and there are scenes representing disasters at sea.

William Palmer's vessel went down mast first in Dublin Harbour in 1759 and this is a particularly striking scene ❻. William Bean, pressed into the Navy at the age of 20, lost his life in 1758 and the explosion onboard HMS Torbay in Portsmouth that killed him is depicted on his tombstone ❼. Another fine ship appears together with seashells and a figure of a sailor on the memorial to William Cooper ❸. There are also depictions of the overturning of smaller boats in Emsworth harbour in 1785 and 1796.

There are 33 Roman Catholic memorials, recognisable by the use of the conventional Latin prayer for the soul of the departed: *Requiesca(n)t in pace*, and the carving of a small Latin type cross on steps or a mound at a time before the general re-introduction of the cross as a symbol on tombstones.

There are two Roman Catholic bishops buried in the churchyard. One is Richard Southworth who ministered for 30 years at Brockhampton Chapel and died in 1817 ❹. This chapel, built in 1752 just west of Havant, was the only such place of worship between Arundel and Southampton. The choice of this churchyard as a place of burial for Roman Catholics may have owed something to the memory of the blessed Margaret Pole, mother of Cardinal Pole and staunch Roman Catholic, who built Warblington Castle.

The three largest family groups represented in the churchyard are the Holloways (1729-1868), a major Emsworth family engaged in shipping and merchant activities and owning land and property; The Kings (1750-1884), some of whom became shipwrights in Emsworth in the 1780s and gave their name to King Street, and the Tiers (1765-1884). Descendants of all three families are believed to be still living in the district.

Very few tombstones in the churchyard can be attributed to particular masons but John Skelton, an outstanding modern sculptor and a pupil of Eric Gill signed one tombstone and may have been responsible for adjoining memorials ❺. His work can also be seen in Boxgrove churchyard, near Chichester.

Many of the tombstones are badly weathered and it is now very difficult to read inscriptions or clearly see carvings. Between 1996 and 1998 a team of volunteers recorded the details of every churchyard memorial. Copies of these records have been deposited locally with Portsmouth City Records Office, Havant Museum and The Emsworth Maritime and Historical Trust (Emsworth Museum).

Emsworth Museum, in North Street, is open on Saturdays and Bank Holidays from 10.30am until 4.30pm Sundays from 2.30pm until 4.30pm Fridays in August from 2.30pm until 4.30pm.

The Yew Trees

Yew trees are common in older churchyards. It may be that they mark significant spiritual sites that pre-date Christianity in England.

The outstanding ancient specimen near the South East corner of the churchyard has a girth of 8.23m and is estimated to be 1500 years old. Although its trunk has been partially filled with concrete it is apparently healthy. Another substantial specimen stands near the North porch and is several hundred years old. There is also a group of four yews standing near the southern boundary that are much younger, although it is not known who planted them. We do know that in 1850 the then Rector, Revd William Norris, donated several Elms to be planted in the churchyard but they have not survived.

A Diagram of the Churchyard Indicating Notable Monuments

(See overleaf for details)

