

GRAVE MATTERS.....Derek Leach

ON 9 JUNE I JOINED IN ANOTHER guided walk around some of Dover's burial grounds. Once again Martyn Webster, who has transcribed so many of Dover's headstones, led the walk. The aim was to make the public more aware of the history contained in our burial grounds, the beauty of them and the peaceful sanctuary they provide both for humans and wildlife.

Some headstones are interesting because they commemorate important people, some because they tell an interesting story and others because they are mysterious. Dover's burial grounds are much more interesting than most because not only do they contain graves of our own townspeople, both great and small, but of many others. There are graves of those who happened to die whilst passing through the town to and from the continent, or those from passing ships, who may have died naturally, been shipwrecked or killed by enemy action.

We started in ancient Buckland Churchyard which is hidden behind the Buckland Paper Mill complex. It has two main claims to fame the first is that Buckland is the only Dover church mentioned in Domesday Book in 1086 and the second is the existence of the 1000 years old (at least) famous yew tree which was successfully moved 60 feet in 1880 to allow the church to be extended. Our group mused about why yew trees are such a feature in churchyards. Was it because their berries are poisonous and helped to keep cattle out? Was their longevity a symbol of eternal life? Were yew trees a meeting point before the era of church buildings? Or, was there another reason? Perhaps you know the answer. The church is situated where the old main road to Canterbury and London crossed the River Dour. It must have witnessed the passage of many notables on their way to and from the continent - kings, queens and emperors, as well as the millions of ordinary travellers, including pilgrims, over the last thousand years.

In walking round we saw the grave of the grandson of Louis Piqué. Louis was an eccentric Frenchman who came to England early in the nineteenth century and earned his living as a freelance interpreter. There are still Piqués in the town. A member of the Stiff building family is buried here. There are a number of impressive wall tombs let into the hillside including that for members of the Worthington family, coopers and brewers, of Maxton House; also inside the church lies Benjamin Jelly Worthington - how did he get that second Christian name? There are Worthingtons in all the Dover burial grounds. We noted the graves of Lewis Hobday, whose father ran the Buckland Paper Mill in the nineteenth century, of John Horn and Thomas Horn who ran the mill even earlier and of Alfred Leney, the Dover brewer. The oldest, legible stone is that of John Hammond, a yeoman of Buckland, who died in 1736.

Martyn told us that in the 1850s the government had to tackle the problem of town churchyards running out of burial space; therefore, every parish was required to set up a burial board to find a new burial ground at their own expense. Buckland acquired land on higher ground adjacent to the churchyard and here there are no burials prior to 1857. I noticed one headstone for three male members of the Wells family, two of whom were killed in action during the First World War and the third, who stayed in Dover, was killed in a railway accident at the Crosswall gates in 1916. Before leaving



Wall tombs at Buckland

Buckland, Martyn pointed out the cremation tablet for 'The Rook' - Olive Rookwood, the first female teacher at the Boys' Grammar School who died, aged 92, in 1973.

Moving on to Charlton churchyard, we looked at the 230 stones that were moved in 1948/49 to the boundary walls. Here, the oldest stone appears to be that of 1690, but the oldest, legible one is to yet another Worthington, John, who died in 1747 - the father of Benjamin Jelly Worthington. This churchyard went out of normal use in 1873 (when the new Charlton Cemetery on Copt Hill was opened) and was officially closed for burials in 1941 but the last one was in 1964 in an existing grave. The medieval Charlton Church was, sadly, demolished following the building, in 1893, of the enormous church we see today. A tablet set in the grass marks the spot of the old altar cross.

Walking up from Frith Road, we entered St. Mary's cemetery which was the last of the three cemeteries on Copt Hill to be opened; St. Mary's 'overspill' until then had been accommodated in what we now call Cowgate Cemetery at the foot of the Western Heights. The new cemetery was opened in 1870 by the Bishop of Colombo, for some unknown reason, the 10 acres of farmland having been purchased from the Crown (former Maison Dieu Estate land) for £200. We noted particularly the headstone dedicated to 22 Lascar seamen who perished in 1916 when the P&O liner *Maloja* was sunk off Dover on her way to India. They were buried according to Moslem rites and we assumed this to be the only Moslem grave in the cemetery; other (British) fatalities were buried in their home towns.

From a high vantage point in St. Mary's Cemetery we could also see spread before us, in this beautiful hollow in the hills, St. James' and Charlton cemeteries and the

Jewish burial ground. The last was donated by Dover Harbour Board in about 1868 and the last burial was in 1995. Strangely, in St. Mary's, but adjacent to the Jewish ground, is the headstone of an Austrian Jewess, Netti Deiches, the wife of a Dover watchmaker who died in 1890. We wondered why she was not in the Jewish ground.

Whilst some of the group had to leave, the remainder were keen to have a quick look in the adjacent St. James' Cemetery. Tucked under the trees we found an impressive tomb of the Terson family and of Sir Richard Dickeson, a well-known Dover figure who died in 1906. There are several notable Dovorian here including William Worsfold, who died in 1903. St. James' also contains the

graves of three holders of the Victoria Cross. There is a Commonwealth War Graves section as well as the memorial to those who died in the 1918 Zeebrugge Raid with the graves of some of those who perished. Sir Roger Keyes, later Lord Keyes, who led the raid also chose to be buried here with his men. We saw the stone of Lieutenant William Roberts, a victim of the 1917 River tram accident and wondered whether it was he who had tried to control the tram as it careered down the hill. Finally, we were attracted to an enormous piece of rough stone marking the burial place of Jorge Hiram Clark Hunt from Argentina. We

could not decide whether this was one man or two - Jorge Hiram and Clark Hunt!

So ended a fascinating afternoon which gave me the urge to spend a lot more time in burial grounds! We were very grateful to Martyn Webster who will be leading another walk on 18 August to some more of Dover's cemeteries.

FOOTNOTE: TO JOIN THE CEMETERY WALK ON 18 AUGUST MEET AT COWGATE CEMETERY AT 10AM.

Photographs by Derek Leach



River tram accident victim (St James')