



Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society

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CIRENCESTER PARISH CHURCHYARD GRAVESTONES AND MEMORIALS

During the summer of 1991, as part of a course in family history at the Niccol Centre, a small group were given a demonstration of how to read and record old tombstones by Mr Julian Rawes of the Gloucestershire Family History Association. It was then discovered by Miss Joyce Barker that the graveyard behind Cirencester Parish Church of St. John was on the Association's list as one which needed to be recorded. Many of the stones were eroding rapidly.

Although other people had apparently 'pottered', the last full survey was included in Ralph Bigland's Survey for Gloucestershire c.1780 - 90, leaving a gap of two hundred years. Very few of the stones recorded by Bigland are now traceable.

The group decided to undertake the survey without really appreciating the enormity of the task. Bigland records only one hundred and the tombs, we expect over six hundred. Our original group of readers dwindled to six. Then thanks to the good offices of Miss June Stacey we obtained a list of interested members of the archaeological society from which we get a further nine readers. We also received a generous grant from that society to help with photography, stationery.

We are grateful for the generous support we have been given from a number of individuals. Expert advice, literature, in the initial stages from Christopher Bishop, and from his surveyor colleague Alan Perry who gave us two full days of his time and expertise during a cold snap in February 1992. He used his modern instruments to pin-point most of the tombs and produced plans giving each a number.

Peter Harris gave us fifteen hundred forms for use in the field. Anthony Harris produced a collection of superb slides to illustrate the surveys numerous interests and difficulties. Stephen Harris adapted a computer programme to record all the information in a modern way. All these things at no cost to us.

We started in the late Spring of 1992, guessing that we needed three summers for the work, yet here we are in 1995 going into our fourth year with perhaps a hundred or so to go, including some hidden away in piles of debris. Some stones may require several visits at different times of day, some are impossible. We have nearly recorded 500 tombs representing 800+ people.

Examining the parish church burial records in the library to check on certain names e.g. ALBERTO of Boulogne-sur-Mer, it appears that for every 8/10 names appearing there is only one with a memorial stone to be found. Over the centuries there have been burials on burials and only a few had memorial stones.

When the cemetery in Chesterton Lane opened in 1871, burial in the churchyard was allowed only in existing brick lined tombs.

There are many interesting memorials to side-track us. trades and professions; causes of death 'Hooping Cough': deaths in infancy, sculpted designs, great families and 'Jimmy' Haines sexton for 50 years whose job it was to site the burials, which he seems to have done with a long steel rod!

We are listing the burials alphabetically in a loose-leaf file, copies of which may be held in various places for public viewing and all other records, photographs and field forms will be held at the County Record Office.

Once again we would like to thank the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society, the Vicar and all others for the great support they have given us.

Don Harris