

## A VILLAGE CHURCHYARD

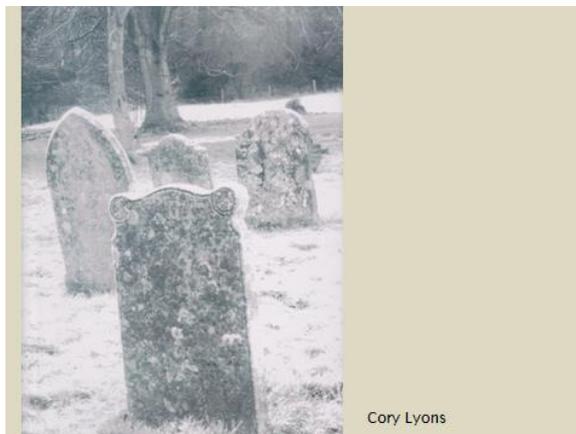


Angela Lambert

### **INTRODUCTION**

**BARBARA [FARQUHARSON]:** The Project has spent a lot of time thinking about people who *lived* in the village - *where* they lived, *what* they did, how they related to each other and to the *landscape*... But we have spent much less time considering the dead. We had done some work – many years ago Sheila Unwin and her intrepid team did a fantastic job deciphering inscriptions on the headstones in the southern churchyard. But it wasn't taken any further: we didn't ponder this *world of the dead*. And yet, as we hope to show, the churchyard is a sort of parallel universe: a landscape dense with meaning and emotion; village history seen through the lens of death and remembrance.

People today have different feelings about the churchyard. Most will think of it as set aside and sanctified.

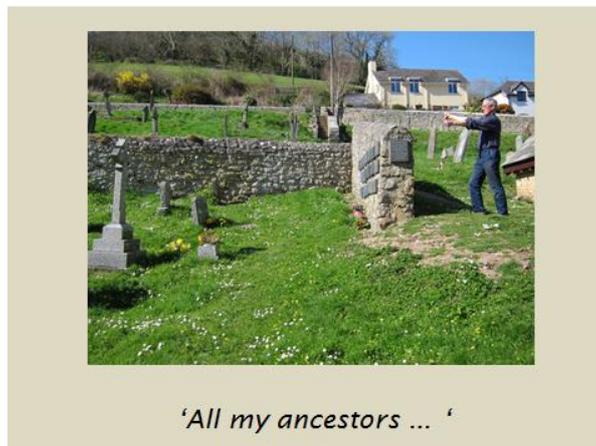


Cory Lyons

Many wander around feeling it's a place of quietude and antiquity. But then, at other times, it's a place of noisy congregation



Or again, for many of us, there's some small part that's intensely personal and filled with memories. And for some there's a profound sense of a place that captures a long family history. Ralph Cox once waved his hand around and said: 'There's thirty six graves and still counting that are part of my family!'



*'All my ancestors ...'*

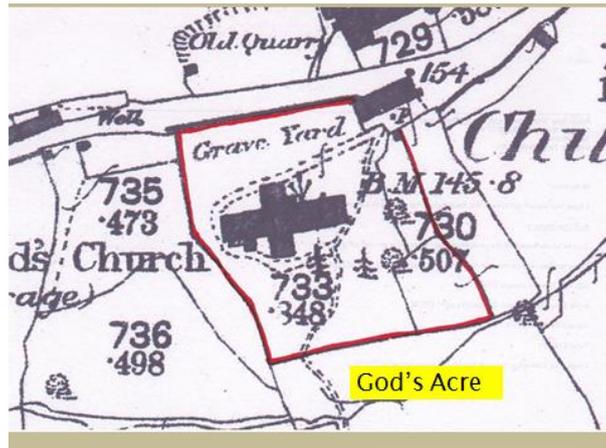
Because people have intense feelings about the most recent part of the churchyard, we're not going to say much about it. We'll concentrate on the older areas to the South, North, and Northwest.

Four of us - Sue Dymond, John Ponsford, John Torrance and myself – and a few more - are going to tell stories about the churchyard. The church only comes into it in so far as it touches on the burial of the dead.

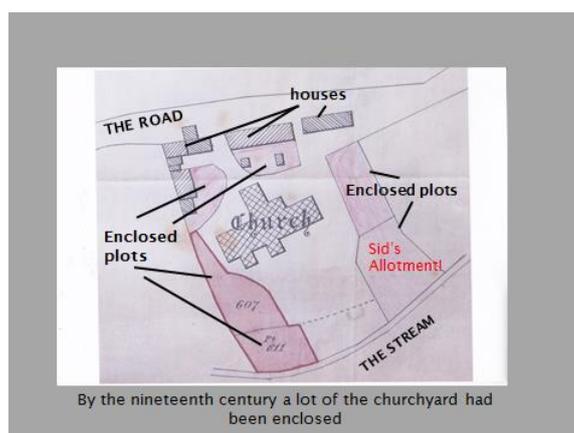
## A MEDIEVAL CHURCH & CHURCHYARD

**NIGEL [FREATHY]:** For the first part of the story you have to use your imagination and enter into a world quite unlike ours.

From very early on churches were set within an enclosed space. 'God's Acre' it was— sometimes still is — called.



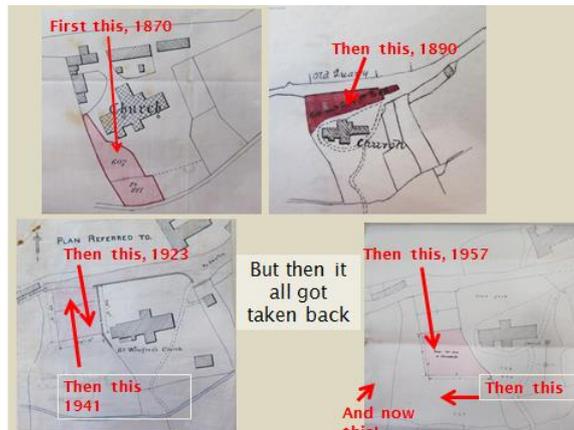
And this, we think, is the original acre. But though it was set aside, only *some* parts were consecrated and for a long time some parts were used for quite other purposes. Here it is in the nineteenth century – with enclosed bits to east and west, and houses and gardens along the road.



By the nineteenth century a lot of the churchyard had been enclosed

Later, as the southern churchyard fills to overflowing, the land is taken back – first a sliver to the southwest, then the northern part, then the northwest, then a larger

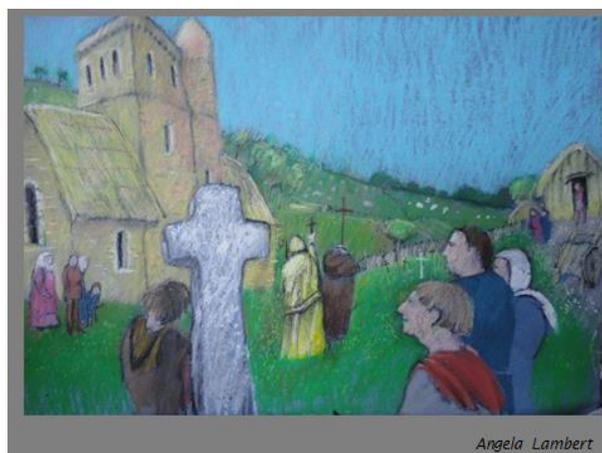
piece to the southwest. Any minute now the churchyard is about to extend still further west – God’s Acre has become God’s Two Acres!



Here’s Alexander Law’s map of 1793 which shows how small the consecrated area was – just the part to the south of the church, and a small section to the north.



When was it consecrated? Perhaps as early as the 900s when the first Saxon church was built. There are some general Anglo-Saxon instructions for consecrating graveyards: the bishop has to lead a procession round the site.

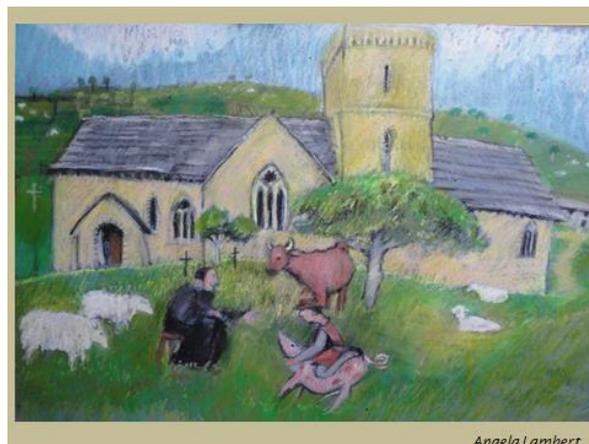


Angela Lambert

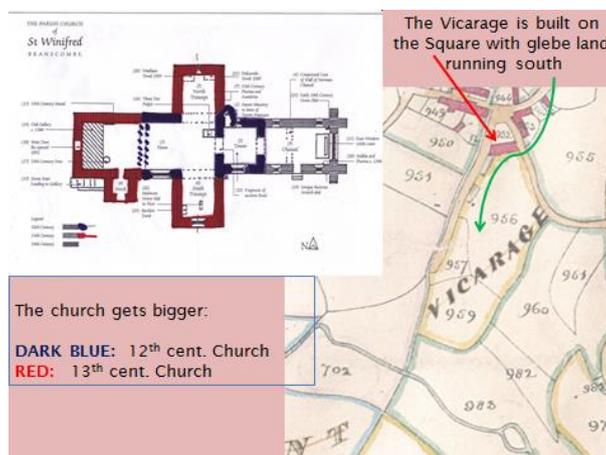
He has to say prayers at the four compass points, and celebrate mass for the souls of the dead in the open air. He may well have preached at the foot of a stone cross that would have stood within the newly consecrated space.<sup>i</sup>

Saying prayers for the dead was incredibly important. During the Middle Ages people believed that the souls of the dead went to Purgatory to be purged of their sins, and that they *needed* all the prayers they could get to help them get to Heaven on the final day of Judgement.

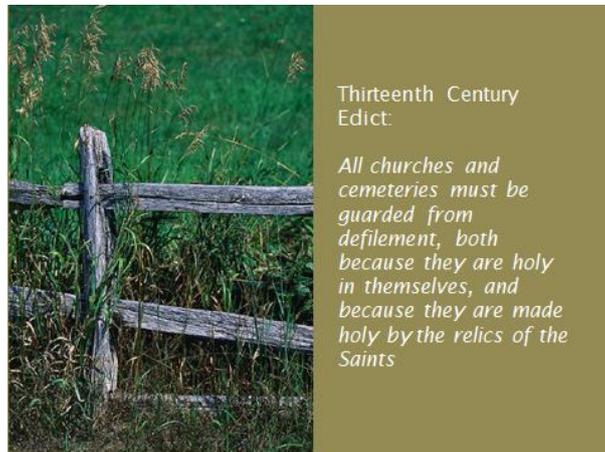
**HILARY [DAWSON]:** To begin with, the church enclosure was probably quite rough.



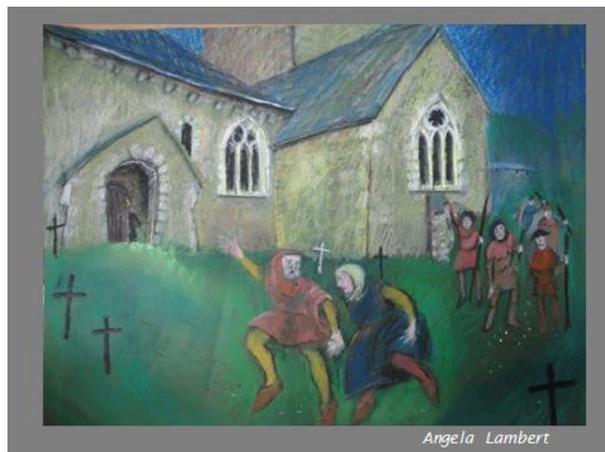
The village priest lived in the church tower and probably kept a cow or a couple of sheep in the churchyard. But then, starting in 1269, things became more formal. The church was enlarged



and the priest was replaced by a Vicar who got his own vicarage on the Square with glebe land attached. Now the churchyard had to be securely enclosed and *no* animals were allowed to graze there.



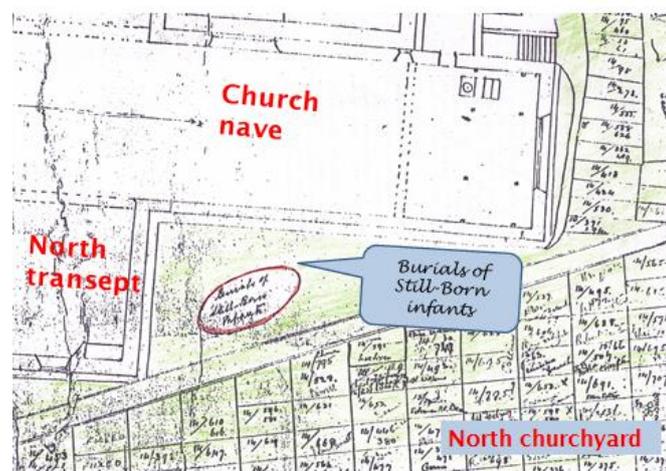
The churchyard was important in another way. Inside its boundary, church law prevailed. So, if a criminal could get there before he was arrested, he could claim sanctuary. In 1248 Adam, the miller at Manor Mill and his wife Matilda were accused of murder, but they fled to the church.<sup>ii</sup>



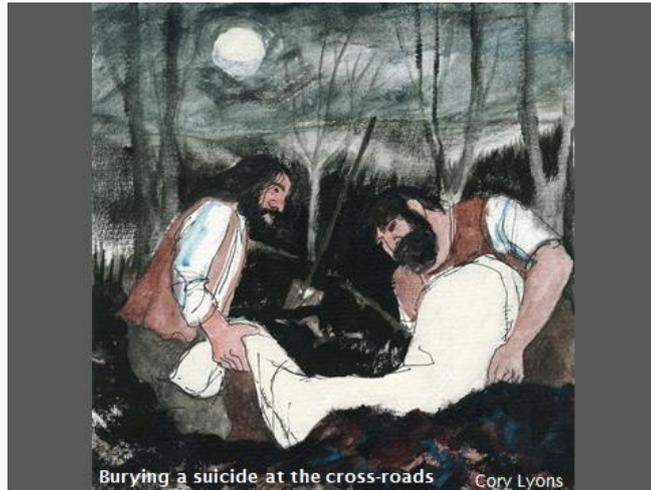
After forty days, having confessed their crime, the coroner gave them the choice: stand trial or go into permanent exile abroad. Not much of a choice: exile was horrendous, but better than being hanged and going straight to Hell! They chose exile.

**NIGEL:** A distinction was made between the north and the south side of the churchyard. The *south side* was for the burial of those who'd been baptized. Their shrouded bodies were placed, awaiting resurrection, with their heads towards the west end of the grave. There may have been wooden grave markers, but if there were, they've long since decayed.

The *north part* of the churchyard was different. It was associated with the *Devil*. At baptisms the Devil was said to be driven out of the infant's body through the north door of the church. We don't actually have a north door now, but out he went - *to the north*. And so unbaptised babies, or people who died suddenly without last rites, were buried on the north side. We didn't think we had any proof of such practices in Branscombe – but here's a very dog-eared copy of grave plots made in the 1920s. And here, outside the church between the north transept and the nave is written: *Burials of Still-Born Infants*.

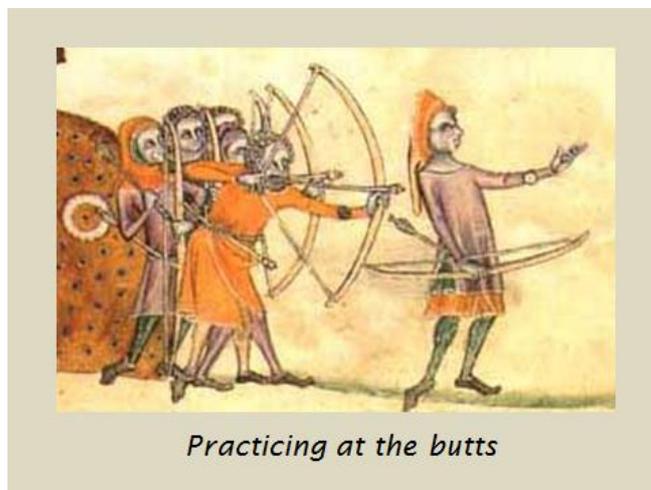


Executed criminals were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground – not even in the northern area – and until as late as 1823 *suicide* was a crime. So, at night, the body would be taken to the parish boundary and buried at a crossroad with a stake through the heart to prevent its ghost from haunting the village. In 1678 a suicide called May was buried on the highway near Branscombe Cross.



Burying a suicide at the cross-roads Cory Lyons

**HILARY:** As Nigel has already said, the unconsecrated land around the churchyard was used for everyday purposes. A Branscombe lease of 1619 speaks of '*a little plot within the churchyard hedges wherein the parishioners used to bowl, and shoot at butts*'.



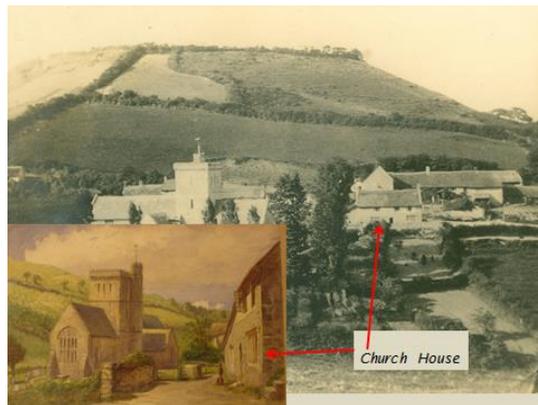
Practicing at the butts

'Shooting at butts' means practicing archery and dates back to the Middle Ages when young men had to practice in order to be ready for war.

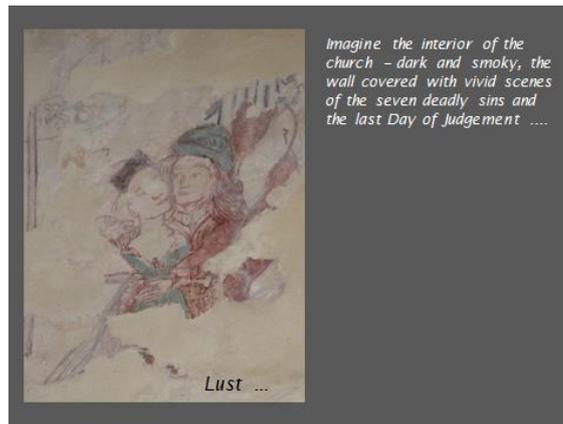
The same lease of 1619 mentions '*the church house or parish house of Branscombe*' and the 1840 tithe map shows where it stood – pretty much where the war memorial is now.



The church house, which probably dates from around 1500, was the medieval equivalent of a village hall. They baked and brewed, held feasts on major saints' days, and offered 'church ales' to raise funds for church repairs and for candles to put in front of statues of the saints. Recently, in a trunk full of Ford family photographs, this old picture was found.



It's hard for us to imagine what medieval life was like. This little Catholic church, with its Virgin Mary who – we happen to know - had '*rings of gold and silver on her fingers*', with its many side-altars dedicated to various saints. Until the east window was put in in the fifteenth century, it would have been dark and musty with flickering candle-light from the altars making the frescoes of the seven deadly sins and Last Judgment very scary.

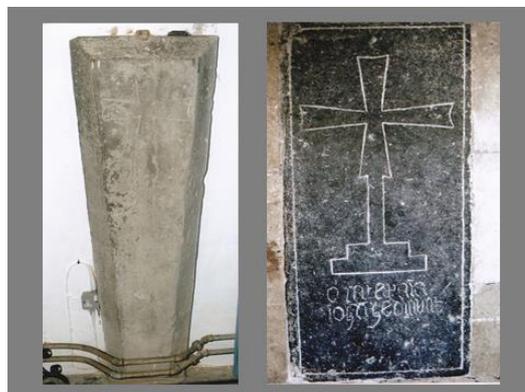


You have to imagine a restless, noisy, smelly congregation – one for whom religion permeated every activity, and who were very superstitious.

### ***BURIALS INSIDE THE CHURCH***

**JOHN [TORRANCE]:** The only evidence of medieval burials is *inside* the church. The Dean and Chapter of Exeter cathedral owned the manor of Branscombe, so there was no feudal lord, no castle, no effigies of crusader knights with their legs crossed. Only clergy were buried in the church.

Maybe you've noticed these two early grave slabs? The one on left is the oldest. It's a very early shape and design and it might even have covered the remains of Lawrence of Sidbury, first vicar of Branscombe. The one on the right dates from the 1400s. The cross shows that it was a priest's grave. The inscription reads '*Pray for the soul of John Hedmunt*'. He wasn't one of our vicars, so we don't know why he's there.



*This is something quite different.*



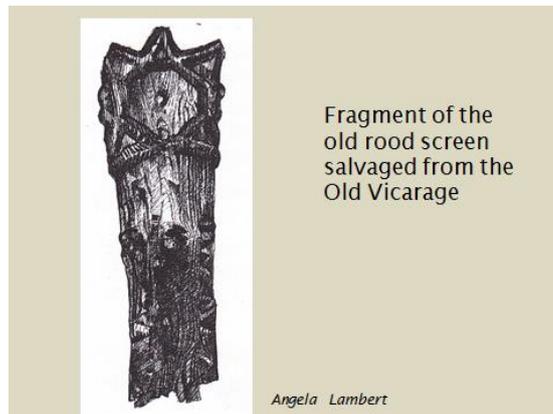
Lay parishioners weren't buried inside the church but, if they were important enough, their bodies could rest for a while in a sealed stone sarcophagus under the church floor. While the corpse decayed the fluids drained out through the little hole in the side. Eventually the bones were removed and the coffin was reused by the family. <sup>iii</sup>

This particular one belonged to the Paytons. The name derives from Le Poitevin so they probably came from Poitou, which in the 1300s belonged to the English crown. We don't know what brought them here, but they cleared the dense woodland of the eastern valley and settled at Watercombe. They did well: this large, expensive coffin shows that they were, in every sense, 'big men' within the community.



## ***THEN CAME THE REFORMATION***

**HILARY:** Henry VIII broke with Rome, and during the Protestant reformation of the 1530s and 1540s churches big and small were stripped of saints and ornamentation. Ours suffered particularly badly. A new evangelical Dean of Exeter thrust the Rev. Taylor, a puritanical vicar, into Branscombe. He threw out the statues of saints and the Virgin Mary, smashed the font and the rood screen,



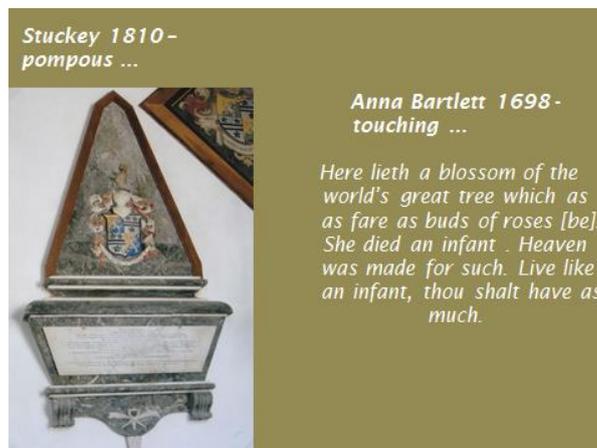
and the stained glass in the east window, and whitewashed the painted walls.<sup>iv</sup> Later, during Queen Mary's short-lived attempt to restore Catholicism, he was burnt at the stake in London, but the church never regained its trappings of medieval piety.

Although the side-altars that held the images of the saints were destroyed, they were quickly replaced by something else. Under Queen Elizabeth the Church of England became a *national* church, a *state* church, and so the nobility and gentry who ran the state and governed the countryside demanded to be buried in their local churches. The late 1500s and early 1600s was the great period for elaborate family tombs, and Branscombe was no exception.

The richest family in the village came first, with this chest tomb and memorial to Joan Wadham. She died in 1583.



The next richest were the Holcombes of Hole House, with this rather clumsy imitation of the Wadham memorial. These families died out, and the next claimants to be 'top people' were the Bartletts. This elaborate tomb belongs to Anne Bartlett who died in 1606. After that the Bartletts and their eventual heirs the Stuckeys contented themselves with plaques of wood or marble. Many were pompous, some touching.

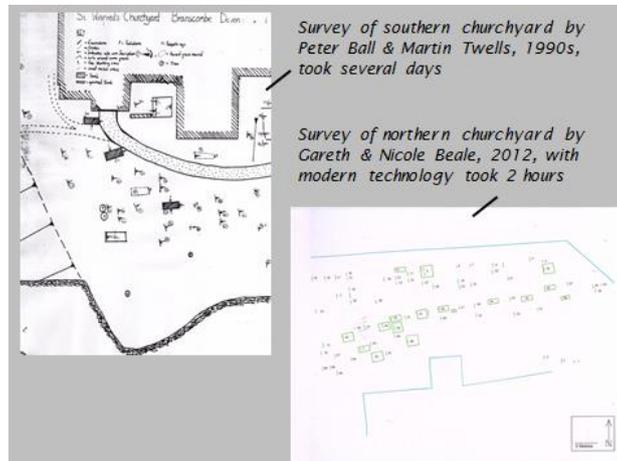


Grand plaques on the walls, but bodies crowded below the church floor, to the point where it became offensive. Someone wrote, *'Our parish churches became honeycombed with graves and stocked with putrefying human remains'*.<sup>v</sup>

Smell or no smell, the grand families continued to be buried in the church right through to the early nineteenth century. But much earlier, starting in the late sixteenth century, the first marked graves appear outside in the churchyard.

## METHODOLOGY

**JOHN [PONSFORD]:** A BRIEF pause to explain how we set about recording the tombs and headstones in the churchyard. First you have to survey all the monuments.



The surveys of the south and north churchyards were taken about thirty years apart. The first took several days, the second, with state-of-the-art digitised technology, a couple of hours. Then you need to decipher the inscriptions and epitaphs.



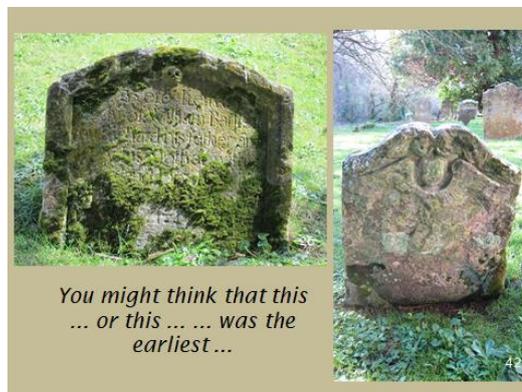
Again, there are state-of-the-art techniques – which take quite a while, or there are old fashioned techniques using sunlight and a mirror which take very little time! Then all the stones have to be photographed, and then, beyond the immediate material evidence of the churchyard, there are the Parish Burial Registers, vestry accounts,

and anything else that you can find - guide-books, postcards, photographs, oral histories.



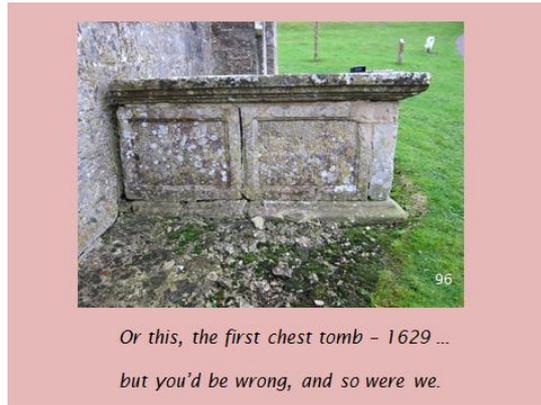
### ***THE FIRST STONE BURIAL MONUMENTS IN THE SOUTHERN CHURCHYARD***

**BARBARA:** So, into the churchyard we go. If you've wandered around the south churchyard you might think that these rather simple, archaic-looking headstones, with skulls or cherubs, are the earliest.



But you'd be wrong!

Or you might think it was this – the earliest chest tomb which dates to 1629.



That's what we thought until, on a cold day in February 2013 we excavated a mysterious slab that lies just south of the porch.



*This is the earliest stone monument in the churchyard!* It dates to 1586 which is, by any standards, very early indeed. There's the inscription as bold as can be, which runs along the lip of a beautifully carved stone block.



Which, on investigation, turned out to be *two* stone blocks, one on top of the other. It's unlike anything in the churchyard. It's pretty much unlike anything anywhere else! The chest tombs that follow were constructed so that they could be taken apart to place more burials underneath them. But this is a single person's grave. We don't know whether the stone is hollowed out, or whether the body was placed in the ground below - it's one thing to discover a forgotten tomb, quite another to open it up! At any rate it's a rare and wonderful discovery (and many thanks to all those involved, and the Exeter Diocesan Committee who gave us permission to excavate, and the AONB who helped with expenses!)

So, 1586, this strange early tomb, and then, forty years later, the first chest tombs.



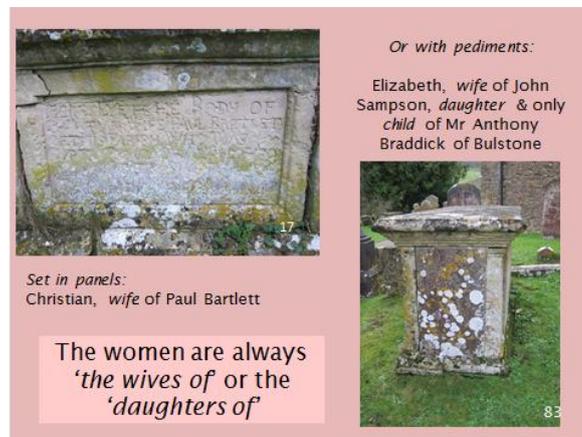
The dating of the tomb on the left is a bit tricky but it was probably built in 1629.<sup>vi</sup> The one on the right is the last - put up in 1787. So about *a hundred and fifty years* between first and last, but only thirteen tombs, containing probably no more than thirty people – a tiny proportion of all the villagers that died during that time.

So who's being buried in these large tombs? Well, this is the time when a class of wealthy yeoman farmers emerge – they often still work their own land but they're rich and respected enough to emulate the gentry.

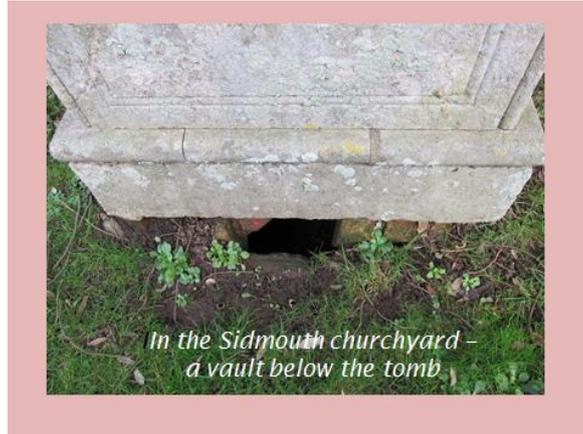


They rebuilt their houses - replacing cob with well-cut stone - something fine and lasting. And, equally, they rehoused their dead in fine and lasting monuments.

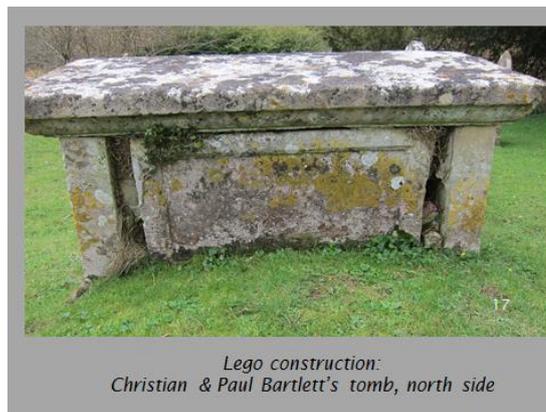
The chest tombs are made of Beer stone and though they all look much the same, there are changes. For example, towards the end, the inscriptions are set in panels, or there are classical pediments.



The bodies were not buried *in* the chest, but below, in the ground. Sometimes there was an underground vault like this one that we glimpsed at Sidmouth.



But how did they get the bodies in? Well, sometimes the side of the chest was removed, the grave re-dug, and the side replaced.



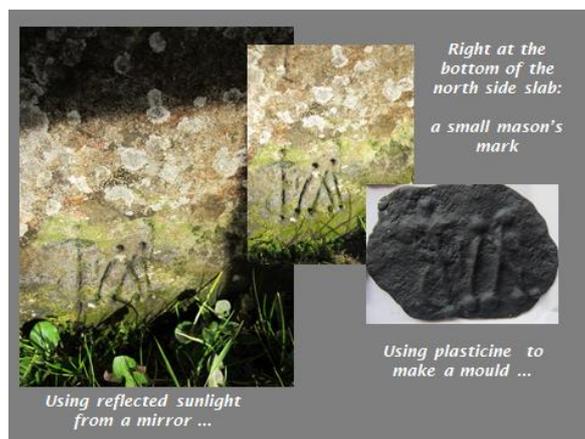
Or else there's a platform in front of the chest and later burials were placed below that.



Let's go back to Christian Bartlett's tomb. It's late, about 1700, and when we first looked at it, it seemed that the main inscription was, unusually, on the south side – facing away from the path. So was the north side left blank waiting for her husband Paul to die? Well, no! On about the fourth time of looking we discovered two things. The first that there was an inscription on the north side to Paul, who died in 1731, many years after his wife, but it is very faint. And second, that there is a tiny mark right at the bottom of the slab.

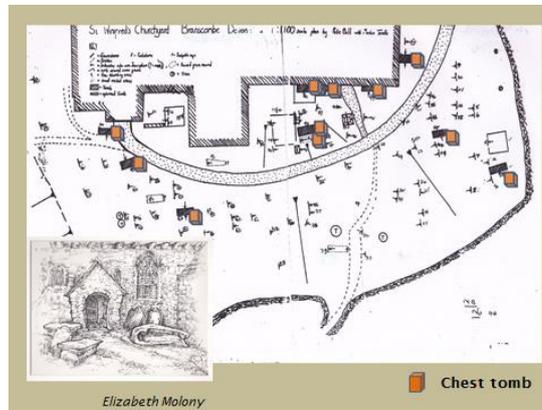


Using reflected sunlight to enhance it, we found that it was a mason's mark.



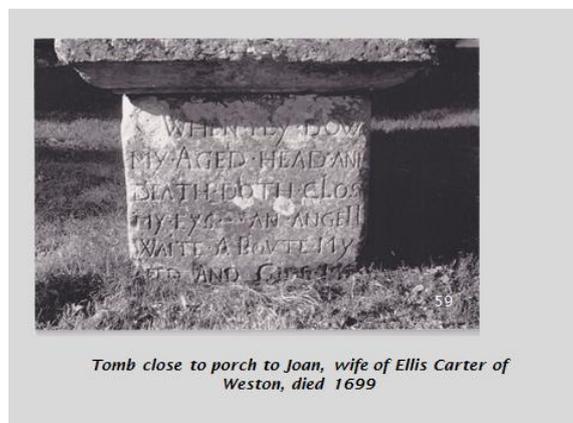
According to John Scott at Beer quarry, these are only found between 1700 and 1780. Our mason's mark could have been put on at the time of Christian's death, or much later, at the time of Paul's. But what do the markings represent? We wish we knew! Perhaps the sign on the right are dividers? But the one on the left?

Now look where these chest tombs are placed: up against the east end of the church; or close to the porch;<sup>vii</sup> or up against or close to the south chancel wall,<sup>viii</sup> and one lines up with the south-east corner of the church. Only one is differently placed and, as we'll see, there's a reason for this.



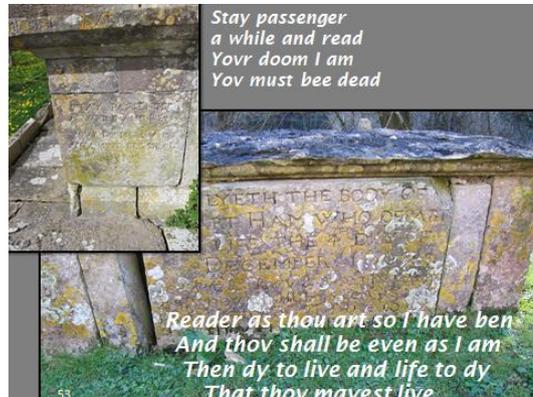
Why this clustering? The east end and the south wall of the chancel are closest to the most sacred part of the *interior* of the church, where the altar is. The porch is the entrance to the church and is also a sacred place –it's the place from which the saints would emerge to be taken in procession, and later, a place for taking oaths and settling disputes.<sup>ix</sup> *In other words, some places within the churchyard were thought more sacred than others.*

The inscriptions always use Roman font, and sometimes the lettering's rather chunky, the spacing between words is odd and mistakes are made because there were not many literate people in the community.



*Tomb close to porch to Joan, wife of Ellis Carter of Weston, died 1699*

As you see, the inscriptions don't just give name and date and address, they add a message. Sometimes they admonish, sometimes express people's fears and hopes, sometimes tell a story. So Robert Ham:



**DAVE [ROCKEY]:**

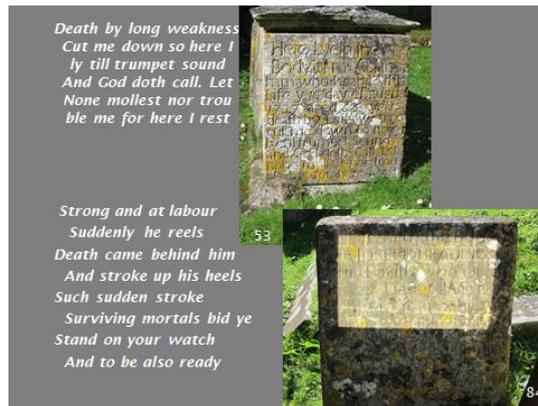
*Reader as thou art so I have ben  
And thou shall be even as I am  
then dy to live and life to dy  
That thou mayest live eternally*

**BARBARA:** Or, more tersely, John Carslake:

**DAVE:**

*Stay passenger  
a while and read  
your doom I am  
you must be dead.*

**BARBARA** Sometimes they voice a fear that the grave might be disturbed:



**DAVE:**

*Death by long weakness  
cut me down. So here I ly  
till trumpet sound  
And God doth call.  
Let none mollest nor trouble me  
for here I rest.*

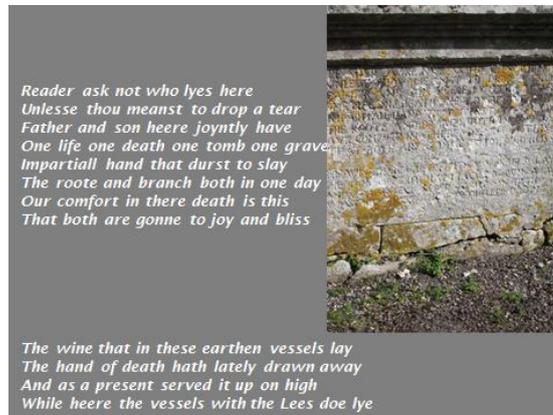
**BARBARA:** It seems that people were worried that the body might not survive intact till the Day of Judgement.

One or two epitaphs seem to button-hole you with their story. Joseph Braddick, though he was a prosperous yeoman farmer, was out working his fields when he was struck down. He was only forty:

**DAVE:**

*Strong and at labour  
Suddenly he reels,  
Death came behind him  
And struck up his heels.  
Such sudden strokes  
surviving mortals bid ye  
stand on your watch  
and to be also ready*

**BARBARA:** And my – sad - favourite. Charity Lee’s epitaph mourning the death of husband and son on the same day:



**FIONA:**

*Reader ask not who lyes here  
Unlesse thou meanst to drop a tear  
Father and son heere joyntly have  
One life one death one tomb one grave  
Impartiall hand that durst to slay  
The roote and branch both in one day  
Our comfort in there death is this  
That both are gonne to joy and bliss*

*The wine that in these earthen vessels lay  
The hand of death hath lately drawn away  
And as a present served it up on high  
While heere the vessels with the Lees doe lye  
(1658)*

**BARBARA:** It says so much. The reader is being addressed ... the father and son have both died ... *The root* (the father), *the branch* (the son) . ‘*The wine* – the soul – is drawn *by the hand of death* to be ‘*served on high*’ ... but the *vessels* – the bodies – remain here with the ‘*lees*’. There’s a pun on the word: ‘*Lees*’ are the sediment at the bottom of the bottle and *Lees* is the family name! This is not long after

Shakespeare and even quite ordinary people knew well how to use the English language! <sup>x</sup>

One chest tomb is anomalous because it's isolated in the southeast corner of the churchyard. There's a good reason. It's *not* the tomb of a yeoman farmer: it's the tomb of John Hurley, Customs Officer.



**DAVE:**

*Here lieth the body of Mr. John Hurley, Custom House Officer, of this place*

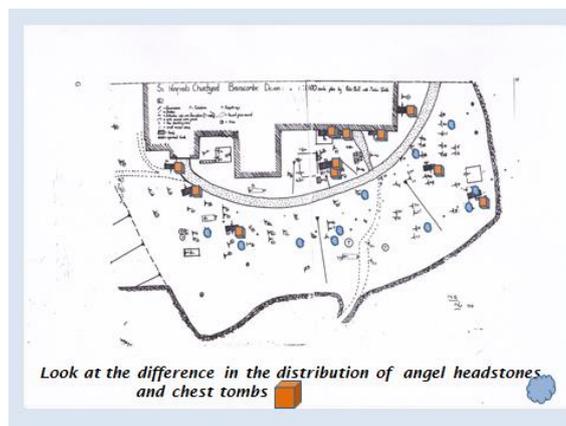
*As he was endeavouring to extinguish some fire made between Beer and Seaton as a signal to a smuggling boat then off at sea, he fell by some means or other from the Top of the Clif to the bottom, by which he was unfortunately killed.*

*... He was a brave and diligent Officer, and very inoffensive in his life and conversation*

**BARBARA:** Looks as though he was killed by the Beer boys! But he's a Branscombe man, and maybe the Branscombe 'gentry', worried that the community might be blamed, decided to give him a rather grand tomb. Even so, he's not to be placed alongside the gentry – so a fine tomb, but in a marginal corner! And when, sometime later, his wife dies, she doesn't get buried *with* him but gets a much more modest grave placed alongside his!

## SKULLS, CHERUBS AND HOUR-GLASSES

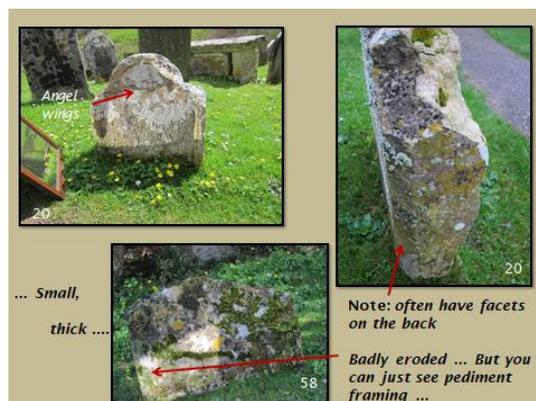
For over one hundred years chest tombs are the *only* sort of monument, but then, from 1742 through to almost 1800, running parallel with the chest tombs, very different headstones make their appearance.



Again, there are very few. Only eleven for something over fifty years, each with only one or two burials. So twenty to twenty-five people.

Notice that they're *never* close to the church - they're all scattered south of the pathway, and there's an interesting thing - those to the *east* of the path face west, while those to the *west* face east. It seems that the main concern is that they should be read by churchgoers.

They're often rather small, and quite thick. They've not worn well, so it's often very hard to decipher names and dates.



Nonetheless, they're very recognizable and they're widely distributed across not just England, but even New England. They often have deep borders and the carvers work in bas relief which means they have to cut away a lot of stone so that the figures stand proud.



The earliest ones, like this one with its tiny skull, are very death-focussed. Or there may be cross-bones, or 'the Book', or an hour-glass. *Time running out*. But there are also angels or cherubs signifying the soul being borne up to heaven.



As time goes on, the angels or cherubs predominate and the shape of the stone becomes more baroque. The one on the bottom of the picture is a bit special: a double headstone with two panels and, just visible, two cherubs.

The symbols carry the message, and so, where we can read the inscription, not much is added beyond the name, date of death and age.

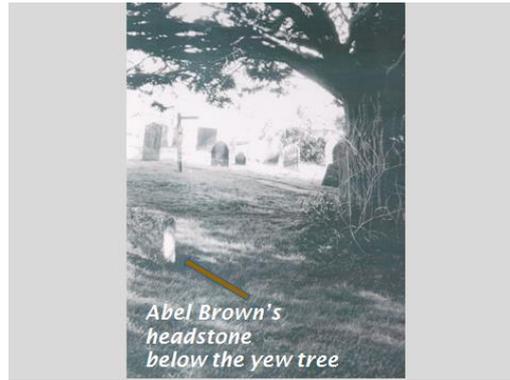


**DAVE:**

*Here lies the body of  
Mr. Abraham Ash of this  
Parish and Mrs Mary his wife  
She died October the 16<sup>th</sup>  
1743 aged 68 years.*

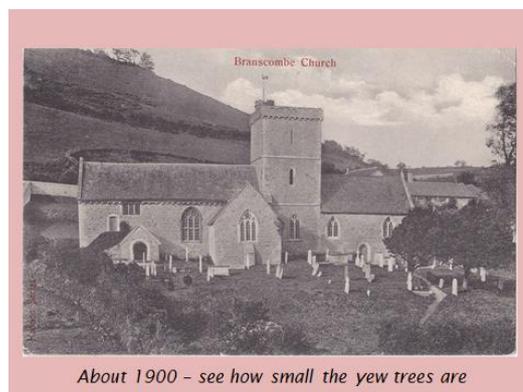
So who is being commemorated? Remember that, for the richer yeoman farmers, the chest tombs are still in vogue. These are more middling people: small-time farmers, people following a trade. Abraham Ash farmed at Weston, Abel Brown farmed Lower Bulstone and was the Parish Clerk, Theophilus White was a mason, George Hook a boat-builder whose parents farmed at Woodhead.<sup>xi</sup> They are *not* ordinary labouring people.

**SUE [DYMOND]:** Abel Brown is buried close to the yew tree, and it's been suggested that this might be another preferred place within the churchyard.



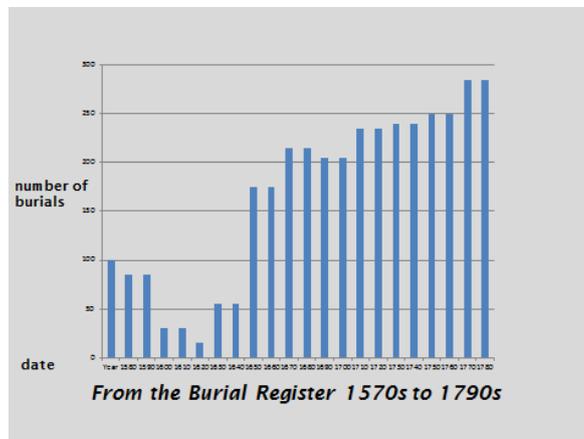
Yew trees often live to a great age and were seen as symbols of immortality. Sometimes they predate a churchyard and mark a pagan site. Sometimes they were planted in medieval times and their branches with their red berries symbolising drops of Christ's blood were laid on the coffin or shroud to ward off evil spirits. Then again, branches of yew tree were particularly suitable for making bows. So it made good sense to plant them in the churchyard - its sacredness was contained within a Christian setting; the archers got their bows; and animals couldn't browse the poisonous foliage!

Unfortunately, in Branscombe, we have got a small problem! As you can see from this postcard which dates to about 1900, our yew trees are not very big and therefore not very old. Going through the churchwardens' accounts we discovered that one of them was only planted in 1824. The tree cost 5s, and the fence cost 6s!

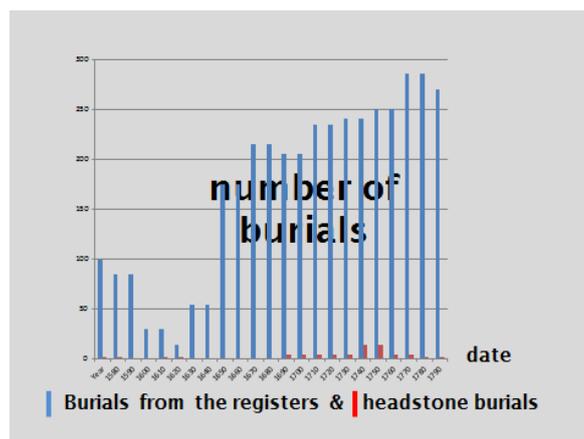


**JOHN PONSFORD:** If you add up the number of people that Barbara has named so far for the first two hundred years of churchyard tombs and headstones you get no more than fifty people. Now, if we look at the Burial Registers, which start in 1578,

we can see how that compares with the overall population of Branscombe. The Registers are not complete and so the totals we arrive at are, if anything, an *underestimate*. But here we are: first, the number of people who died up until 1800.



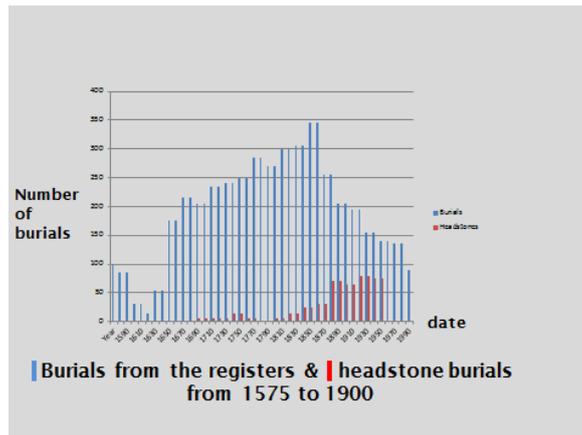
Then the number recorded on headstones or chest tombs:



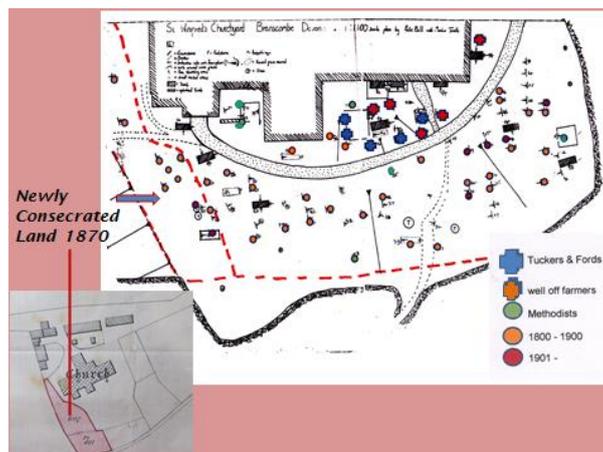
### **THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

We reach nineteen hundred. No more chest tombs, no more cherubs and still not many headstones. From 1800 to 1850 there are *twelve*, and it's only between 1850 and 1900 that the number increases. Even then, it's only thirty-four.

Compare this to the entries in the Burial Register. Between 1800 and 1900 1478 burials are registered. Add this to the earlier ones and by 1900 the churchyard holds – or tries to hold - 3282 burials.



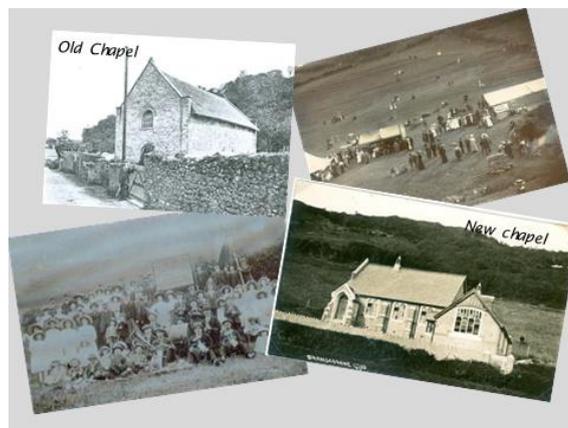
**JOHN TORRANCE:** Not all the churchyard area had been consecrated for burial and there were several parcels of land that had been cultivated or built on. In 1870 the Reverend Tomkins got the Bishop of Exeter to consecrate the plots on the west side, and you can see how quickly the late nineteenth-century graves spread into the new space.



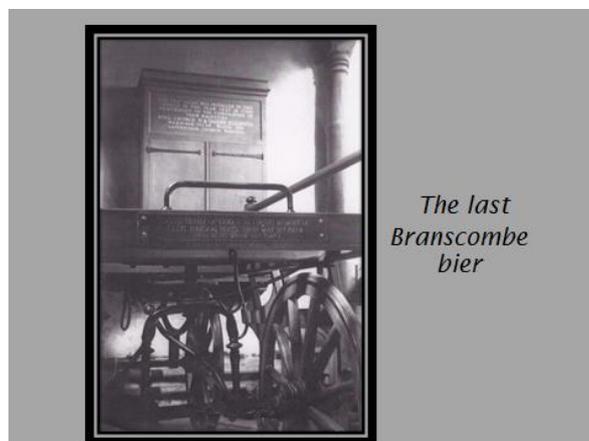
Throughout the nineteenth century, the exclusive area close to the church remained exclusive – with a few odd exceptions, whilst, in the rest of the churchyard, more and more ‘middling’ people were commemorated in stone. On the other hand, labouring families *still* couldn’t afford to put up headstones. In fact, during the nineteenth century, labouring people were having a very hard time. First there was the introduction of the Corn Laws which sent the cost of wheat and bread spiralling and provoked a bread riot in the parish. Then the lace industry went into decline and women couldn’t supplement the family wages, and finally, with increased mechanisation, farm labourers were laid off and wages fell.

Partly in response to all this, a lot of people turned away from the Church of England towards the more inspirational Christianity offered by the Methodists.

**SUE:** The first Wesleyan meetings, in the 1820s, were held at Berry farm. Then as the congregation increased they built their first chapel at Street. By 1900 the building had become too small and dilapidated and a new chapel was built further down the road.



For whatever reason, Street was always more chapel-minded than the Square. And for whatever reason, there seems to have been very little animosity between church and chapel. Which was fortunate, since neither old nor new chapel had a burial ground. So there'd be a chapel service, and then the coffin would be placed on a bier and pulled down to the churchyard.



The same bier would be used by the church-goers, and whether Methodist or Anglican, on the day of a funeral, villagers would draw their curtains as a mark of respect, and the church bell would toll the number of years the person had lived.

A small digression: did you know that paths taken by funeral processions became rights of way? It makes one wonder whether some of the footpaths from outlying places might not have started with a coffin being carried down to the churchyard. Certainly there are fields on either side of the Sellers Wood road called Church Way - they may mark the way taken by folk from Lower House or Gays to church on a Sunday and/or a funerary way. The road from Berry to Street was also called Church Lane.

During the nineteenth century working class Methodists – just like their church-going friends – couldn't afford headstones. So although, by 1900, there were over 70 chapel goers, only six or so got a headstone and all these were put up towards the end of the century.



Again, they're middling people – William Brown the miller <sup>xii</sup>; Edmund Upright the lace-trader <sup>xiii</sup>; George Butter the baker; Otton the tailor <sup>xiv</sup>. There were just a few exceptions. 'Squire' Blackmore was a well-to-do farmer at Pitt. He and his wife Elizabeth were fervent Methodists. Their daughter married James Ash, the minister, who died young looking after people during a smallpox epidemic in Sidmouth. Because of their status, the Blackmores and the Ash family have a *large* grave plot right next to the porch.

At the other end of the social scale, there's John Perryman who some of you will know about.



A poor but devout and much loved chapel man. He'd never have expected a grand stone complete with railings. But, as the inscription explains, he was:

**DAVE:**

*.. accidentally shot dead on  
Culverhole Hill on the evening of  
Saturday Sepr 8<sup>th</sup> 1883  
whilst returning from work in the harvest field  
The memory of the just is blessed/  
Sudden death Sudden glory  
This stone was erected by some who knew  
him as a tribute of affection and love*

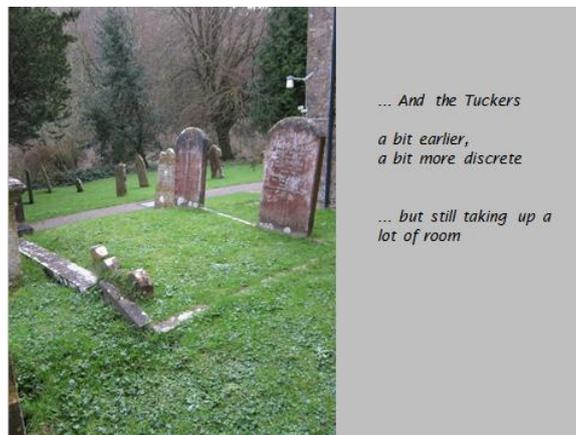
**SUE:** That was his favourite saying: *Sudden death, Sudden glory*' – sad, but appropriate.

**JOHN T:** What about the others – the church-goers?

By the mid nineteenth century members of the Ford family had set themselves up as the village 'squires'.



They colonised the elite space alongside the chancel. They married into other leading families including the lace entrepreneurs – the Tuckers of Barnell - whose graves lie alongside theirs.

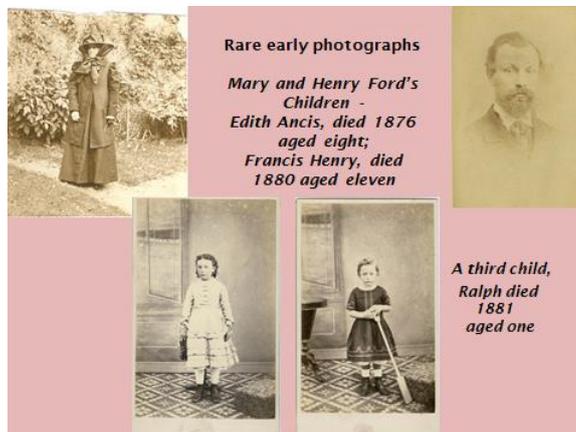


The Fords liked the new fashion in crosses. They'd long been out of favour because they were thought to be a bit too Catholic, but now they'd made a come-back. These headstones, like all the others of this period, were increasingly machine cut and hard-edged, and the inscriptions were also machine-cut and are filled with lead inserts - not a patch on the early idiosyncratic styles!



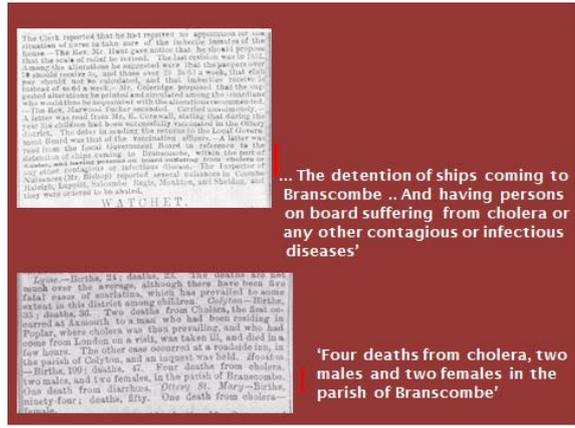
Unlike the button-holing epitaphs of the earlier neighbouring chest tombs, theirs are excessively buttoned up! *'In Memory Of', 'Erected By', at most, 'Beloved Wife of'*.<sup>xv</sup>

What does show up on these inscriptions was that, regardless of status and money, the Fords and the Tuckers, like almost every other family in the village, lost a great many children. They died as infants, or in early or late childhood. Nicholas and Anna Maria Ford lost a daughter, the Tuckers lost three children, and so did Henry and Mary Ford

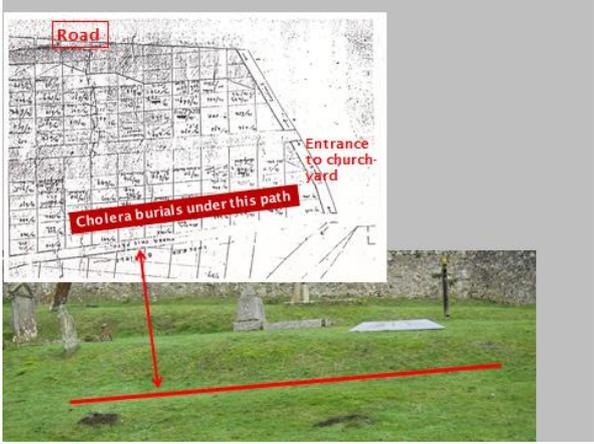


The inscriptions may be formal but much grief lies behind them.

**JOHN PONSFORD:** From the records we know that there was a lot of sickness and disease. The Reverend Puddicombe mentions 'epedemic distemper' and 'putrid fever' and, in 1810, 'an outbreak of small pox'.



In 1866 there was an outbreak of cholera and four people died. In 1873 there was another outbreak and all ships coming into Branscombe were detained. In 1877 The Rev. Swansborough reports four years of 'constant sickness' and 120 deaths. Cholera was a fearful thing and the victims were buried separately from the rest. Again, one of the surprising things that we discovered was something written across the 1920s burial plan: '*cholera burials under this path*'. They were buried just north of the chancel, away from the rest of the graves.

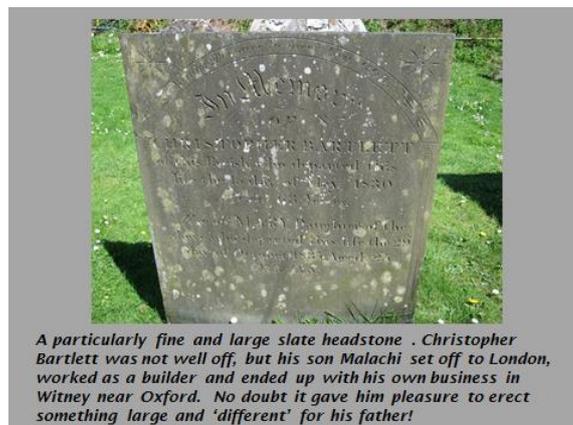


**BARBARA:** The headstones of other more middling people also record, over and over again, the deaths of children. And, like the upper-crust families, they record the interweaving of village family names. Most people didn't travel far afield and they married people whom they'd known all their lives.

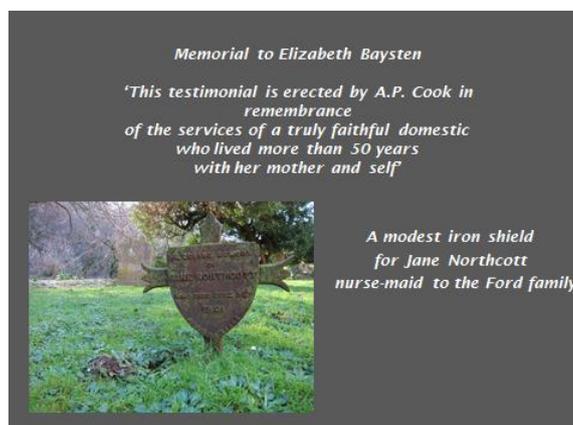
As the century progresses you see more *variety* of middling people— more professions – like, for example, shopkeepers and innkeepers;<sup>xvi</sup> and some ‘incomers’ –coastguard families, or the wife of John White the artist.



You see evidence of men who’ve gone over-seas;<sup>xvii</sup> or men who migrate to the burgeoning cities and new industries who better themselves and erect fine monuments to their stay-at-home relatives.



An occasional headstone commemorates a ‘faithful servant’ .<sup>xviii</sup>

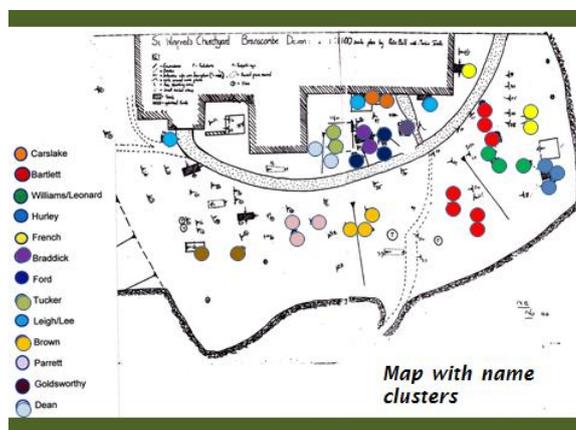


Two headstones mark a change in social attitudes. Even fifty years earlier, a suicide would *not* be buried in the churchyard. But by the late nineteenth century, people were more merciful and rather than being a crime, suicide was treated as something that happened when *'the balance of the mind is disturbed.'* Samuel Parrett and his wife Julianna were both boot-makers and poor. It's possible that it was Sam Parrett who accidentally shot the virtuous man Perryman. In 1885 he committed suicide and his wife went mad and was put away. They were buried in the churchyard and a fine headstone erected – by whom remains a mystery.



At much the same time, William Williams, butcher, cut his throat. He too was allowed a decent Christian burial.

As more people get headstones, so you find groupings within the churchyard. Nothing like the scale we'll find in the northern cemetery, but still -

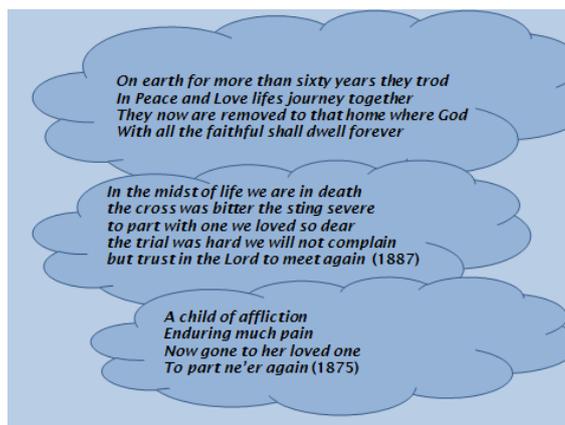


All of the nineteenth century headstones are more professionally made and after 1870 the monumental masons sometimes add their name.<sup>xix</sup> The headstones are taller and thinner, and there are changing fashions in the shape of the stones.



In the early nineteenth century you have what's called the bedstead profile. Later, the Greek or Classical; and later again, the Gothic, the cross and the kerbed grave.<sup>xx</sup> Actually, being Branscombe, people hang on to old designs so you can't create nice tidy sequences!

And the epitaphs? Unlike the Fords and the Tuckers, these middling people do express their feelings. The verse isn't great, but they express love towards a partner and along with the hope of resurrection comes a strong feeling that people – family – will be reunited in heaven.



**FIONA:** some suggest a hard and pain-filled life:

*In the midst of life we are in death*

*the cross was bitter the sting severe  
to part with one we loved so dear  
the trial was hard we will not complain  
but trust in the Lord to meet again*

or:

*A child of affliction  
Enduring much pain  
Now gone to her loved one  
To part ne'er again*

The religious quotations or tags are fairly standardised, and sometimes nicely terse:

*Sorrow vanquished labour ended Jordan past*

Strangely, epitaphs to children are both rare and subdued:

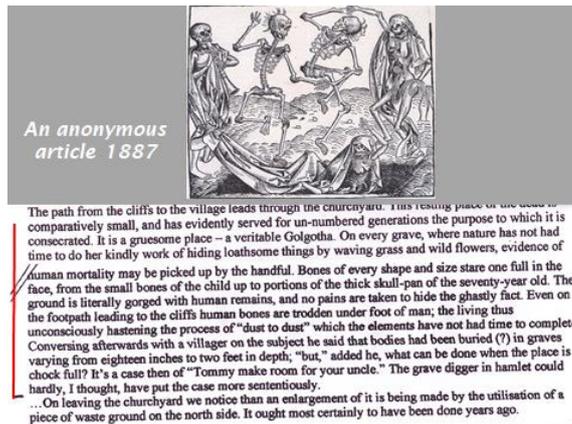
*Cropt in his bud secure from future ill*

or – very quietly:

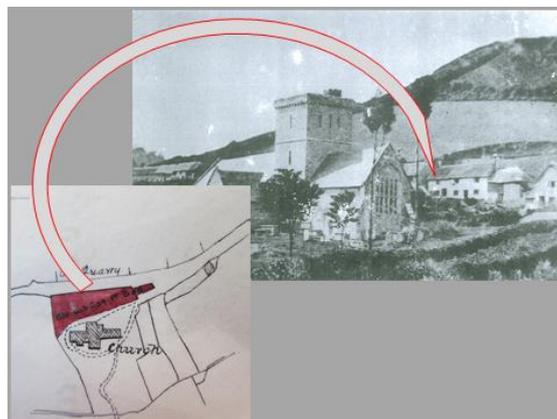
*... died in their infancy  
For which we have believed  
do enter into rest*

**JOHN TORRANCE:** By the later nineteenth century, despite the newly consecrated ground, the southern churchyard had reached its limit –more than its limit!

**SUE:**

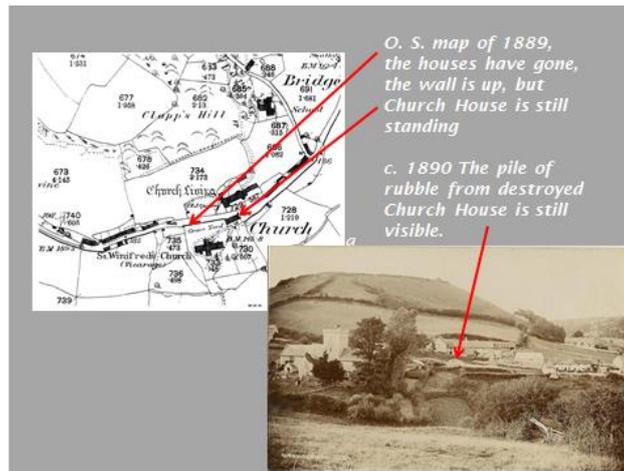


**JOHN TORANCE:** What was to be done? The north part of the churchyard – despite the bad vibes – was obviously a possibility ... but the whole of the top part had been built on.



Three of the four houses had been let to Samuel French by the Ecclesiastical Commission, and he'd sublet them. The fourth plot and house, by the churchyard gate, was the old Church House. The parish rented it from the Ecclesiastical Commission for 5/- a year; the sexton lived there in return for looking after the church and churchyard, and the Vestry held their meetings there.

The Ecclesiastical Commission agreed to give all these plots to the parish for a graveyard on condition that *all four houses were removed*, and a wall was built beside the road. Negotiations dragged on for years - Samuel French died in 1881 but his tenants still had to be evicted. And although the sexton who lived in the old Church House died in 1883, there seems to have been a lot of foot-dragging about destroying an old landmark that was still in reasonable condition. The letters from the Commission to Rev. Swansborough got more and more irritable.



Finally things got moving - the Ordnance Survey of 1889 shows the three houses replaced by a wall, but Church House still standing. A year later, Church House was finally demolished, and in March 1890 the whole northern area was consecrated by the bishop.

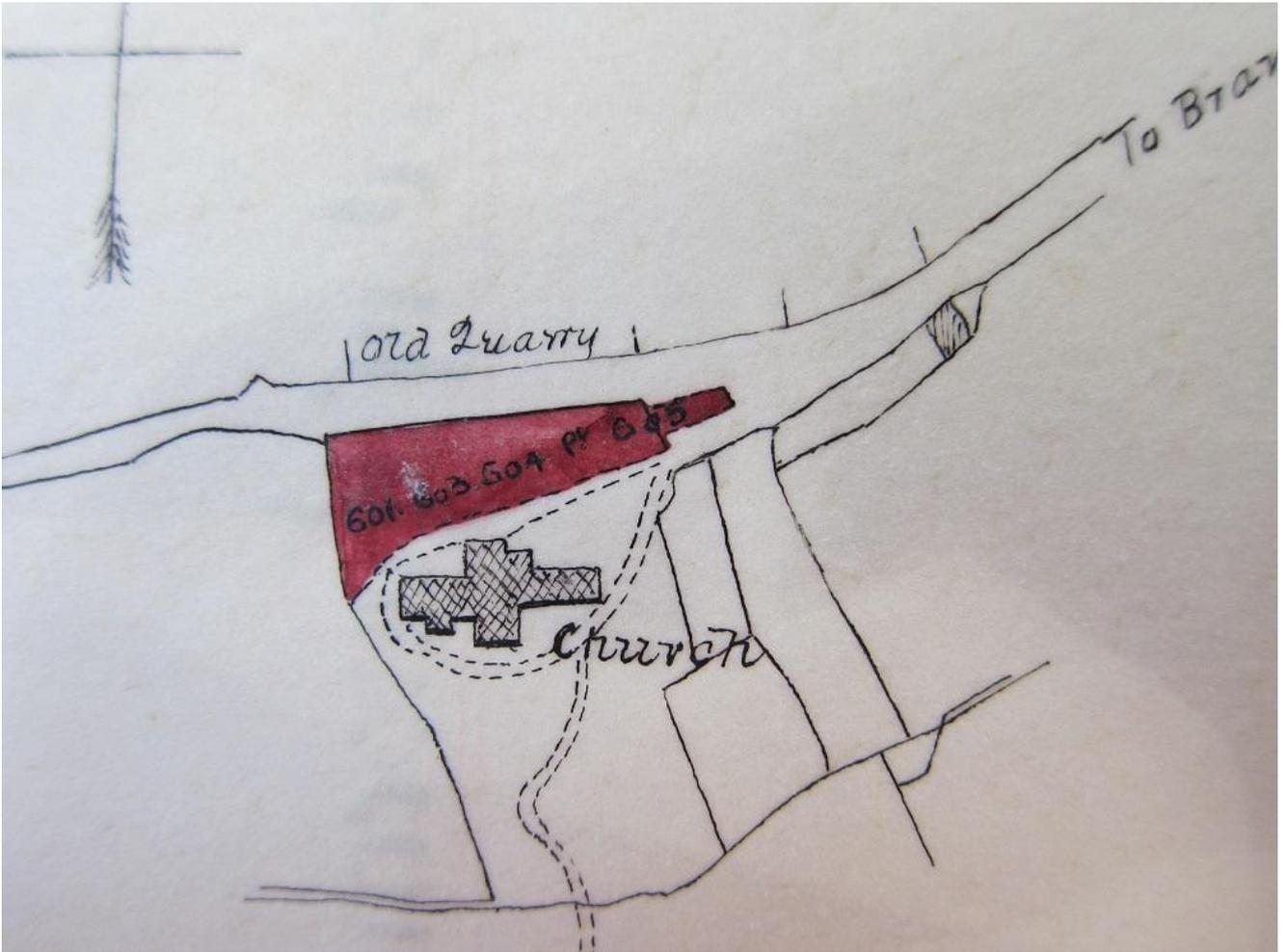


**SUE DYMOND:** Now we move into the northern part of the churchyard which was consecrated in 1890. Looking down on this section from above, courtesy of Google

Maps, a more ordered arrangement of the graves is apparent than in the southern section. There also appear to be large spaces. What is also immediately evident is a lack of chest tombs. These are firmly rooted in the southern section.

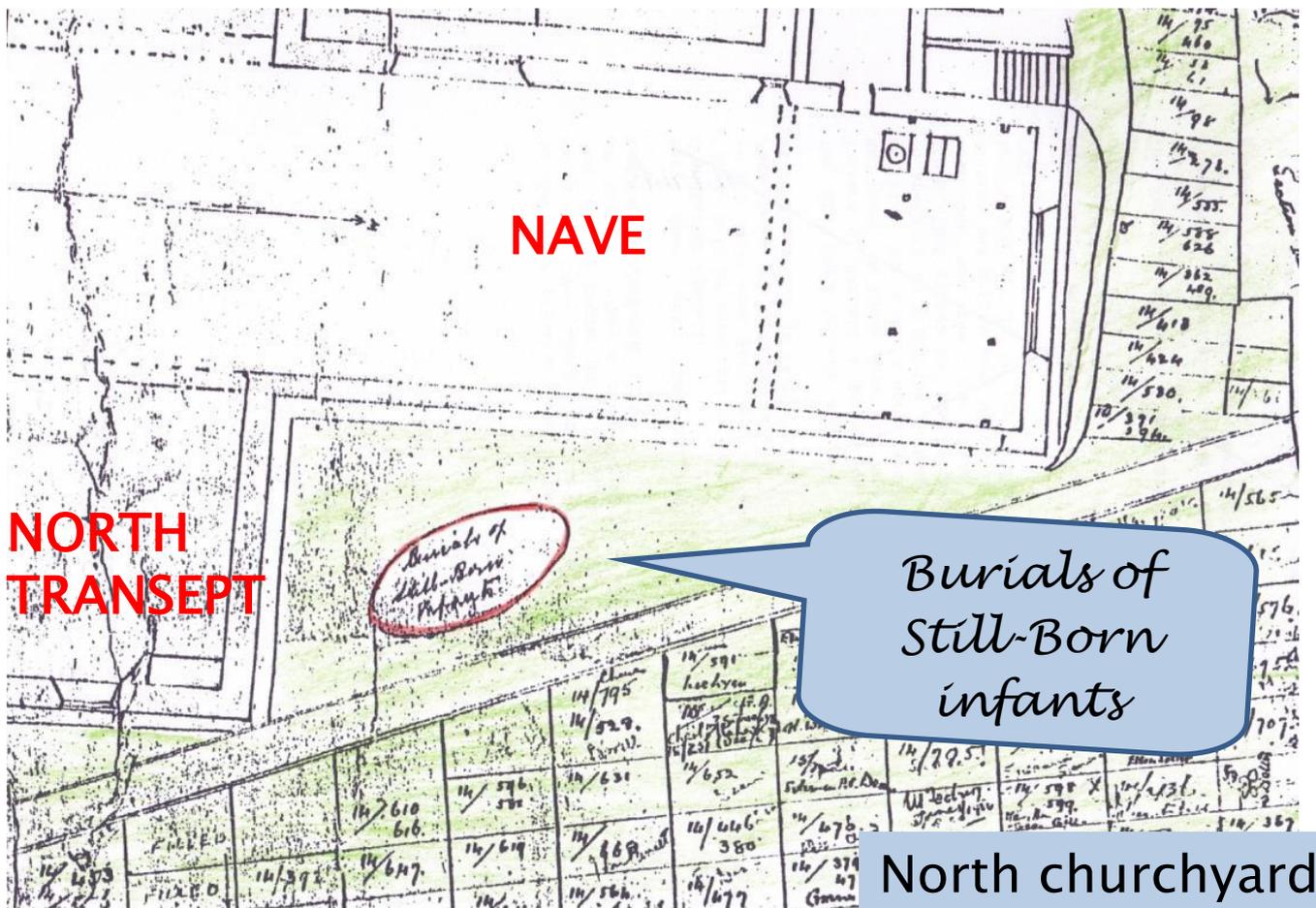


Here is a plan of the newly consecrated land in 1890. Note that this does not extend much beyond the end of the church on the north-western side.



Lots of gaps!





What have we been doing in the churchyard? Well besides trying to look at elements such as infant mortality, social mobility and hierarchy as evidenced from gravestones; on a simple level we are just trying to map who is buried where. The diagram above we have already seen from Barbara, it is a section of a burial plan. The diagram below shows a larger section. These are old documents, photocopied several times and faded and torn in places – even patched up with sellotape.

14/653	14/654	14/655	14/656	14/657	14/658	14/659	14/660	14/661	14/662	14/663	14/664	14/665	14/666	14/667	14/668	14/669	14/670	14/671	14/672	14/673	14/674	14/675	14/676	14/677	14/678	14/679	14/680	14/681	14/682	14/683	14/684	14/685	14/686	14/687	14/688	14/689	14/690	14/691	14/692	14/693	14/694	14/695	14/696	14/697	14/698	14/699	14/700	14/701	14/702	14/703	14/704	14/705	14/706	14/707	14/708	14/709	14/710	14/711	14/712	14/713	14/714	14/715	14/716	14/717	14/718	14/719	14/720	14/721	14/722	14/723	14/724	14/725	14/726	14/727	14/728	14/729	14/730	14/731	14/732	14/733	14/734	14/735	14/736	14/737	14/738	14/739	14/740	14/741	14/742	14/743	14/744	14/745	14/746	14/747	14/748	14/749	14/750	14/751	14/752	14/753	14/754	14/755	14/756	14/757	14/758	14/759	14/760	14/761	14/762	14/763	14/764	14/765	14/766	14/767	14/768	14/769	14/770	14/771	14/772	14/773	14/774	14/775	14/776	14/777	14/778	14/779	14/780	14/781	14/782	14/783	14/784	14/785	14/786	14/787	14/788	14/789	14/790	14/791	14/792	14/793	14/794	14/795	14/796	14/797	14/798	14/799	14/800	14/801	14/802	14/803	14/804	14/805	14/806	14/807	14/808	14/809	14/810	14/811	14/812	14/813	14/814	14/815	14/816	14/817	14/818	14/819	14/820	14/821	14/822	14/823	14/824	14/825	14/826	14/827	14/828	14/829	14/830	14/831	14/832	14/833	14/834	14/835	14/836	14/837	14/838	14/839	14/840	14/841	14/842	14/843	14/844	14/845	14/846	14/847	14/848	14/849	14/850	14/851	14/852	14/853	14/854	14/855	14/856	14/857	14/858	14/859	14/860	14/861	14/862	14/863	14/864	14/865	14/866	14/867	14/868	14/869	14/870	14/871	14/872	14/873	14/874	14/875	14/876	14/877	14/878	14/879	14/880	14/881	14/882	14/883	14/884	14/885	14/886	14/887	14/888	14/889	14/890	14/891	14/892	14/893	14/894	14/895	14/896	14/897	14/898	14/899	14/900	14/901	14/902	14/903	14/904	14/905	14/906	14/907	14/908	14/909	14/910	14/911	14/912	14/913	14/914	14/915	14/916	14/917	14/918	14/919	14/920	14/921	14/922	14/923	14/924	14/925	14/926	14/927	14/928	14/929	14/930	14/931	14/932	14/933	14/934	14/935	14/936	14/937	14/938	14/939	14/940	14/941	14/942	14/943	14/944	14/945	14/946	14/947	14/948	14/949	14/950	14/951	14/952	14/953	14/954	14/955	14/956	14/957	14/958	14/959	14/960	14/961	14/962	14/963	14/964	14/965	14/966	14/967	14/968	14/969	14/970	14/971	14/972	14/973	14/974	14/975	14/976	14/977	14/978	14/979	14/980	14/981	14/982	14/983	14/984	14/985	14/986	14/987	14/988	14/989	14/990	14/991	14/992	14/993	14/994	14/995	14/996	14/997	14/998	14/999	15000
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	-------

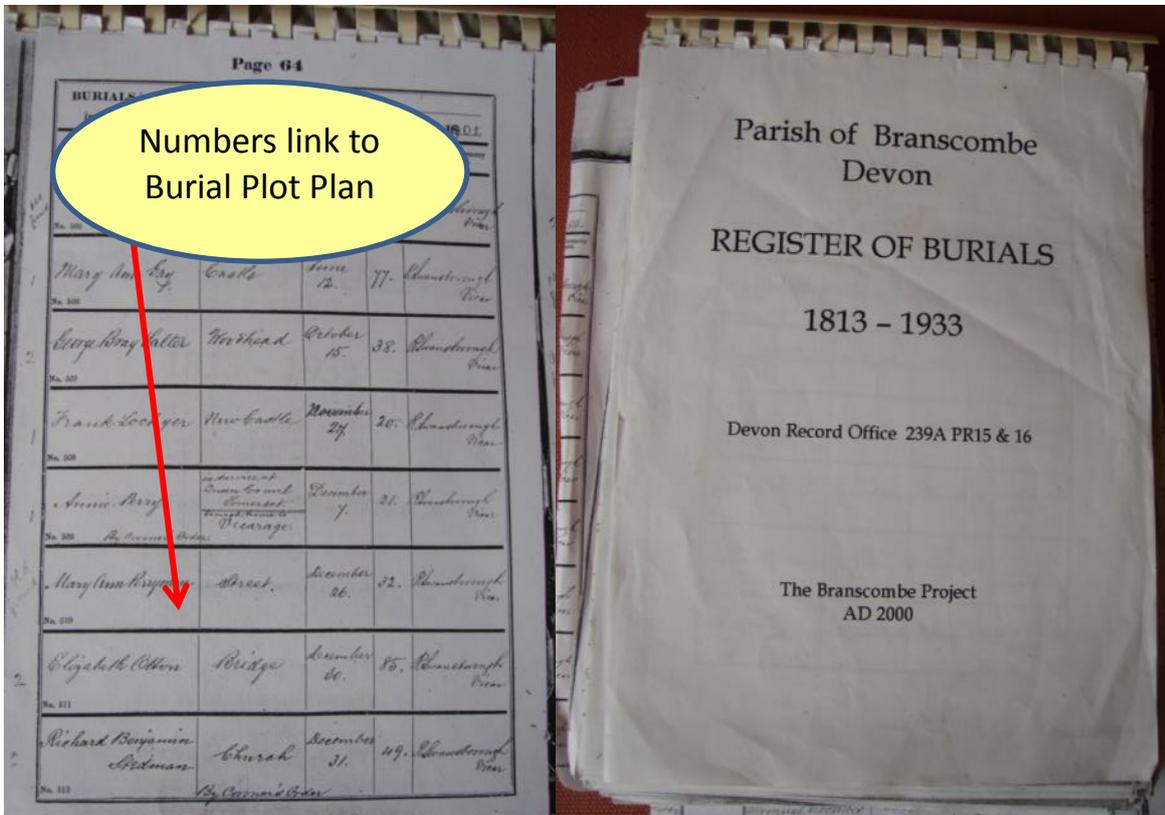
This shows just what we had to work with. Not perfect, but better than nothing!



The above plan shows the entrance to the church towards top left, with a path running more or less parallel to the side of the church and an indication of cholera burials between the path and the church. This area is mainly grass today.

14/719	Maria Rice	John Henry	111/791 Elizabeth Ann Quick.	15/76 KVA GVA	15/76 George
14/728	Maria Rice	C. James Bulle 14/719	111/757 John Quick		
14/720	Maria Rice		111/781 Mrs Fresh	15/16 T. Bartlett	15/128 George
14/732	Maria Rice	Anna 14/745	111/764 lockers	14/785 Bartlett	14/786 Corn
14/727	Maria Rice	111/790	111/757 Howard	15/140 Mary Ann Perry	
			111/908	14/958 W. Perry	15/54 W. Hartole
14/722	Maria Rice	111/733	111/435 John	14/746 Flex Stevens	14/747 Emma Hartole

This is an enlarged section of the plan showing names and numbers. Not all plots have names and not all writing is clear.



The numbers on the plan link to a book — Parish of Branscombe, Devon, REGISTER OF BURIALS 1813–1933. This is the book that Dan and John Ponsford copied out and digitised and we have on our website. Some of the information in the book is not in the digitised version. We will come to that shortly.



Having got the burial plan I noticed that it was all in blocks, cells like a spreadsheet, so I decided to type it up in a spreadsheet! This gave me something easier to work with than the original photocopy. I then wondered how it would look if I overlaid the spreadsheet on the churchyard today. This Google map is very blurry and you need to imagine the numbers all tipped at an angle so that they follow the line of the graves below. Working from the burial plan I found that there were about 220 burial plots, but on the ground only about 70 gravestones. It was immediately obvious that there were graves all over, underneath the spacious green areas. Had the stones disappeared over time or had there never been any for all burials?

Below is part of my spreadsheet, which you won't be able to read, but as I typed I noticed patterns showing family groupings of graves. I have coloured in a family name if there are more than two graves close together..

The image shows a complex spreadsheet with the following structure:

- CHOICES**: A column of text entries.
- SERIALS**: A column of numerical identifiers.
- UNDER THIS PATH**: A column of text entries.
- PATH**: Multiple columns of text entries, some of which are color-coded (e.g., yellow, green, blue, pink, orange).
- PATH PATH PATH PATH**: Additional columns of text entries.
- PATH**: A final column of text entries.

The color-coding highlights family groupings of graves. The spreadsheet is divided into two main sections by a horizontal line. The top section contains the main data, and the bottom section contains additional data or a continuation of the same information.

Family groups

I've only red-arrowed a few groups, but you can pick out more by colour. Let's look at a few of these family groups

There were many groups, some having 5 or 6 plots close together. I decided to see how this matched up with what is on the ground.

The Perry family (below) appeared to have one memorial stone for each plot, but three plots had no stone.



Perry each burial plot one memorial stone



14/442 Arthur Dan Tucker [Arthur Dan Perry on gravestone] 1896 aged 1 and 3/4	14/441 Keturah Brooker 1896 aged 34	14/440 Edward Thomas Perry 1896 aged 66
14/569 Samuel Goldsworthy 1908 aged 85 [or 82]	14/478 William Perryman 1899 aged 50	14/464 Joanna Perry 1898 aged 65
14/494 Robert Perry 1900 aged 1 and 1/2	14/687 Sarah Perryman 1920 aged 77	14/536? Samuel Coombes 1905 aged 85
14/551 Simon Perry 1906 aged 72	14/693 Charles Perry 1921 aged 30	14/561 Henry Holmyard 1907 aged 62
14/604 Mary Ann Perry 1912 aged 80		14/558 Sarah (Susan) Holmyard 1907 aged 73 14/994 (Deep?)

The Dowells had three burial plots but one stone listed the people buried there.  
Three other plots appeared to have no commemorative stone.

Three burial plots for Dowell but one memorial stone



14/453? Edwin Dowell 1897 aged 68	FILLED	14 Se 18
?/605? Dowell 14/605 is James Gush 1912 aged 79 Wesleyan	14/394 John Dowell 1893 aged 82 14/642 William Dowell 1915 aged 83	14 El Pe 15
14/634 Eliza Dowell 1915 aged 80	14/482 Edith Seward 1899 aged 18 14/479 Emma Dowell 1899 aged 28	14 Jo Pe 15
14/708 Donald Roy Andrew Perryman 1922 7 mos	14/519 Emma Dowell 1902 aged 80	

Four burial plots for Salter but one memorial stone



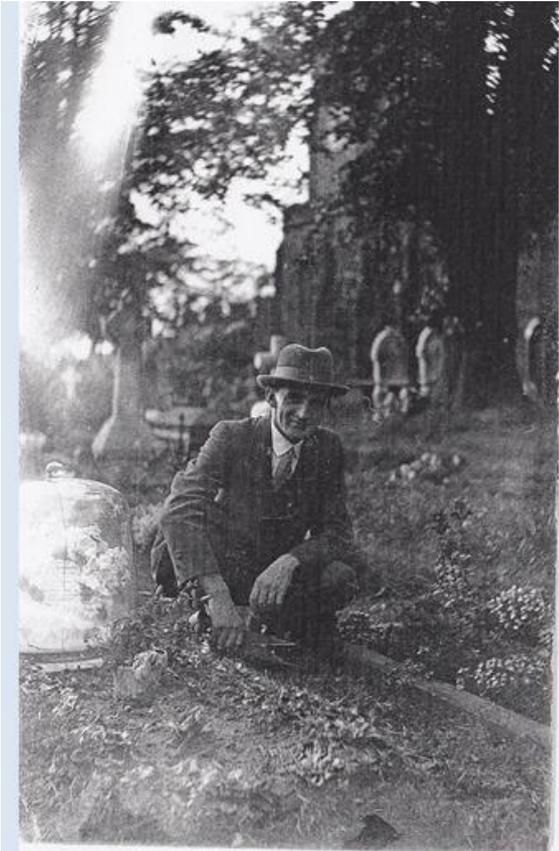
14/495 Mary Salter 1900 aged 60	14/615 George Norish 1913 aged 79
14/638 Robert Salter 1915 aged 78	14/576 John Smith 1908 aged 69
14/507 George Bray Salter 1901 aged 38 15/66	??
14/691 1921 aged 48 Ellen Salter	14/707 William Salter 1922 aged 52

The Salter family have a cluster of five burial plots and the people buried in four of them are listed on one gravestone. So it seems there are variations on how those buried are remembered on gravestones, and spaces will contain burials that do not necessarily have a gravestone immediately over them. This family grouping and spacing is still being looked at and conclusions are some way off. Questions of plot 'purchase' or reserving is interesting and ongoing.

Today...

The image shows a detailed grid of burial plots. The grid is organized into rows and columns. Some cells are highlighted in various colors: red, green, yellow, blue, and orange. There are also some grey cells. The text 'SERIAL OF STILLBORN INFANT' is visible in the upper part of the grid. There are also some smaller grids and text labels scattered around the main grid, including 'CHECK THIS PATH' and 'SERIAL'. The overall appearance is that of a complex record-keeping system for a churchyard.

Looking at this area of the churchyard today the family grouping is evident in only a few cases. The grey stripey cells represent burial plots that are not indicated on any gravestone. Eventually I hope to put the spreadsheets on our website for everyone to be able to look at.



**“Mark Every Grave”  
Is a Privilege and Duty...**

Part of an advert from a newspaper for a monumental mason in Exeter is typed up above. Their business relied on marking every grave, but was it as simple as that?

Above is a photo from 1935 of my grandfather tending the grave of his wife who died at 33 following the birth of their fourth child. Harold had to literally give away the baby and concentrate on raising the three other children all under eleven years of age. He was a cobbler, and poor, and here I see a parallel with many Branscombe families; purchasing a gravestone would not have been high on his agenda. My mother and her two brothers used to walk the two miles to this churchyard many weekends to lay flowers. They knew where the grave was and needed no marker, neither did Harold. As the children grew and eventually moved away the actual site of the grave became forgotten.

With no National Health Service before 1948, people often paid into an association that would help them if their family fell ill. One such association was the Rational Sick and Burial Association. In July 1894 they held their annual Fete in Branscombe. Whilst they would have helped with funeral expenses, it is unlikely that memorial gravestones would have been provided.

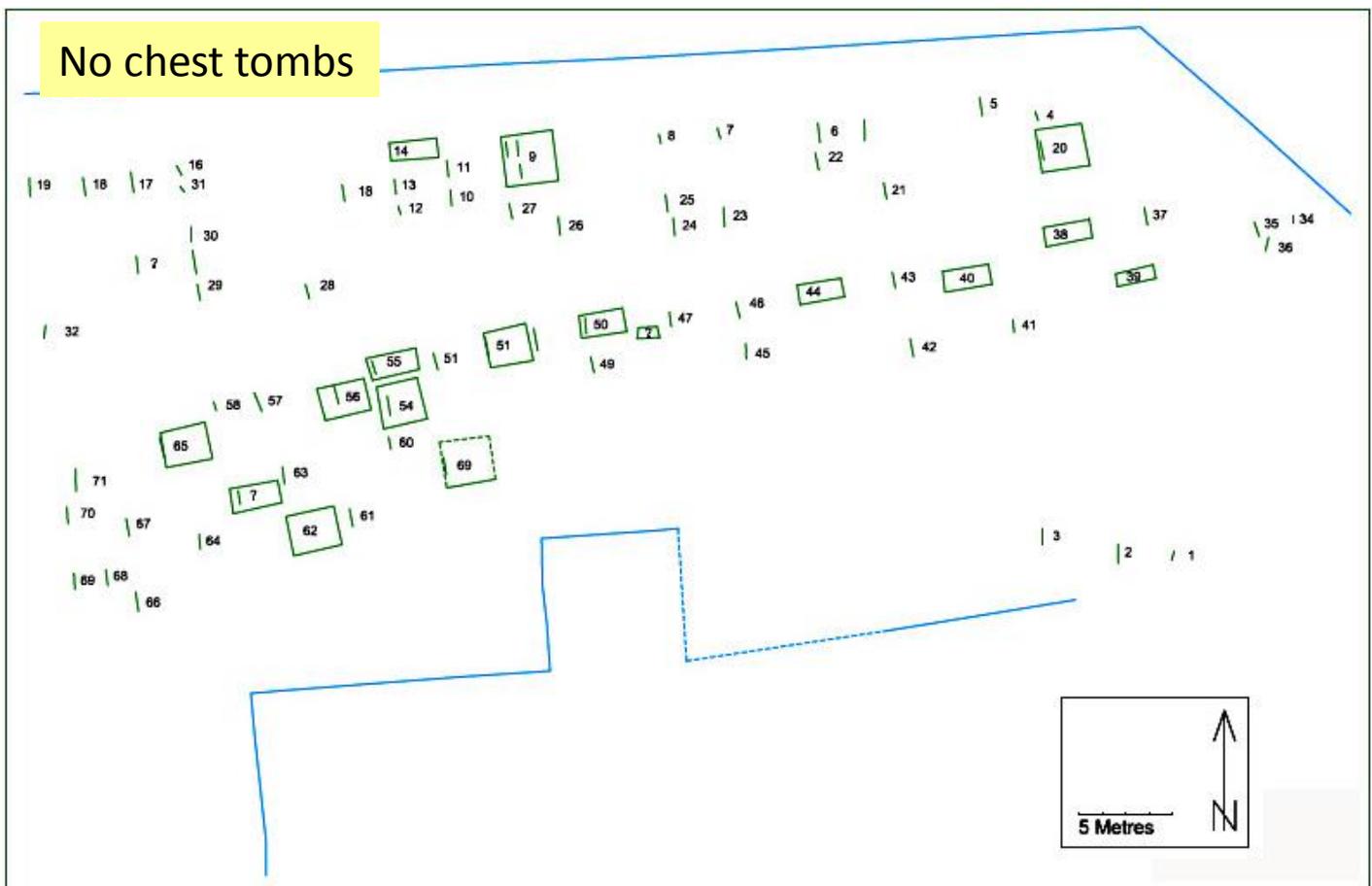
Branch No 569 of the Rational Sick and Burial Association held its annual fete in beautiful weather. After service at the parish church, an excellent dinner was served at the Masons' Arms. Subsequently various sports took place, the results being as follows:- Donkey race-1st, J. Gill; 2nd, E. Gush; 3rd, J. White. Flat race (men) -1st, E. Evans; 2nd, T. Raffill. Wheelbarrow race-1st, E. Perryman; 2nd, E. Evans. Flat race (boys under 16) -1st, J. White; 2nd, G. Perry; 3rd, J. Ellis. Sack race-1st, J. Abbott; 2nd, T. Raffill; 3rd, E. Evans; 4th, A. Williams. High Jump (men) -1st, Frank Ellis; 2nd, Algernon Williams. High Jump (under 15) -1st, R. Bromfield; 2nd, W. Madge. Obstacle race-1st, E. Perryman; 2nd, A. Williams; 3rd, E. Evans; 4th, Alfred Rendell. Tug of war-T. Crews, D. Perry, G. Dowell, F. Gush, E. Gush and E. Perryman. Ladies' race (for three cakes presented by Mr. Northcott, baker of Beer) -1st, Mrs. E.S. Woodrough; 2nd, Mrs. H. Abbott; 3rd, Mrs. E. Dean. Dancing was indulged in the evening.

*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette 27/07/1894*

Another helping hand for funeral expenses would have been a masonic lodge that villagers were members of. This line of research is still in the early stages.

Not to be confused with those who were freemasons, were the men of Branscombe who were stone masons. These families also seem to have benefitted from gravestones. Was it a perk of the job maybe?

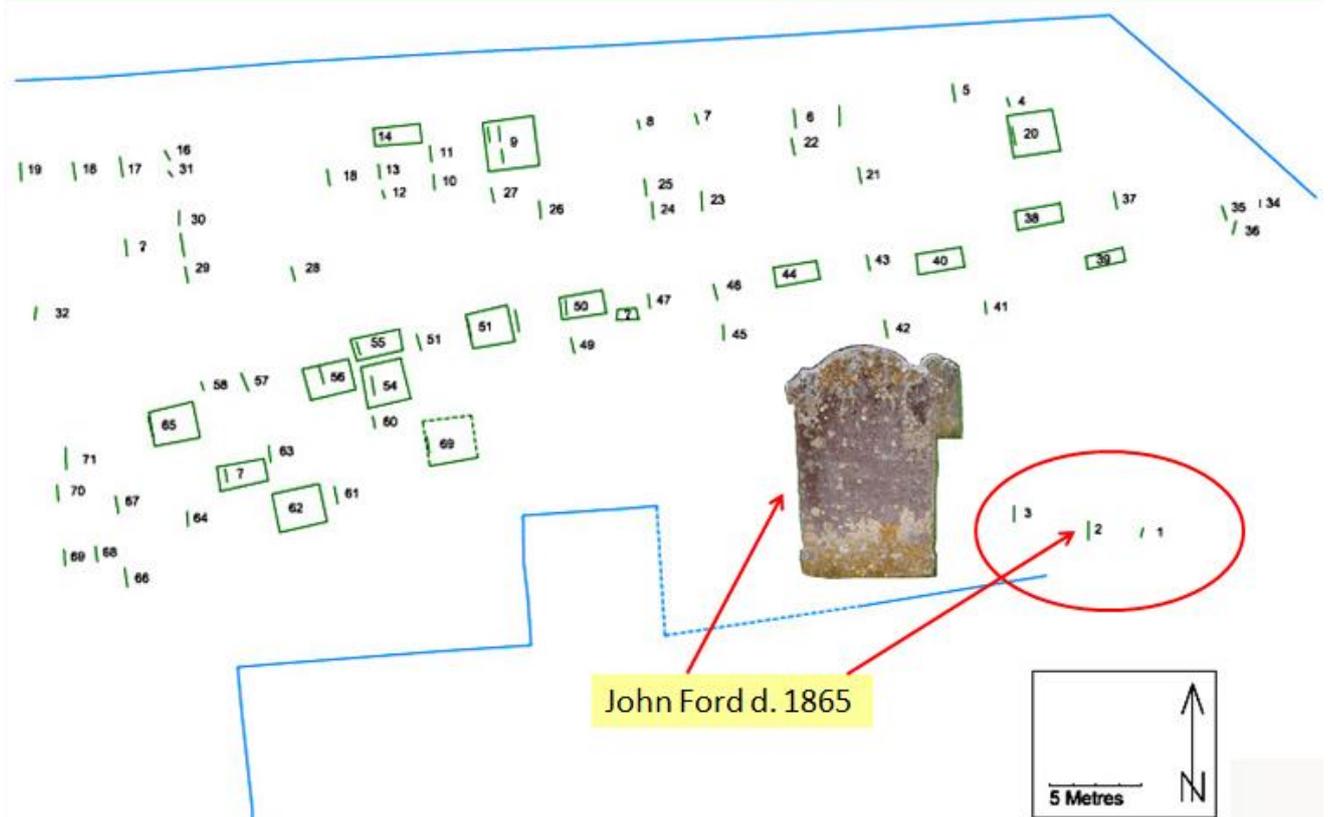
So as we move into the twentieth century in the northern graveyard do we see a change in the sort of people who have gravestones? Not really. At first glance, the families in the northern graveyard mirror those in the southern part by being landowners, farmers and tradesmen's families.



This plan of the northern graveyard was prepared by Nicole and Gareth Beale of Southampton University, and shows what is present on the ground now. Note the presence of gravestones 1, 2 and 3 very close to the church. The rectangular or square outlines represent kerbstone grave markers, not chest tombs. We are still working on matching the plan up to our photographs and epitaph transcriptions. Here we look at the large open space in the northern graveyard towards the southern section (near to the main church entrance).



### Fearer Fly God to Thee?



One of these stones marks the resting place of John Ford, a past squire of the village. There is also a matching footstone. The other gravestone is for Samuel Tillman Newton, who appears to be at the other end of the social scale! It is perhaps easy to see why John Ford would have an important place close to the church, but Newton is a puzzle. Perhaps he was a church servant and thus got beneficial treatment.

Let's look at a few of the gravestones and see what stories can be revealed. The two shown below are both of mariners. Wattez was fished out of the sea by a Branscombe fishing boat and Holmes washed ashore at Branscombe. John Henry Holmes had been on a net drifter escorting the Brixham fishing fleet from their fishing grounds back to port during WW1, when his boat collided with a French steamship Picardie and sank. Seven of the crew of thirteen were drowned, including Holmes. The details of this accident and names of the drowned are available on the Internet. Holmes's grave is a war grave and looked after as such – hence its clean condition.

SACRED  
 TO THE MEMORY OF  
 JEAN JACQUES WATTEZ  
 MARINER  
 OF BOULOGNE SUR MER FRANCE  
 DROWNED AT TORBAY  
 29<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 1897  
 AGED 17 YEARS  
*THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER AND SHE A WIDOW*



Seven out of  
 thirteen  
 crew  
 drowned

J.H. HOLMES  
 SECOND HAND, RNR 14909/DA  
 H.M. DRIFTER "SILVERY HARVEST"  
 16TH MAY 1918 AGE 29  
 GREATER LOVE  
 HATH NO MAN THAN THIS  
 THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE  
 FOR HIS FRIENDS

John Henry

## CURIOUS ACCIDENT AT SIDMOUTH

The next gravestone seems straightforward. Several members of the Evans family are mentioned, including Ernest Thomas Evans who was a stoker.

On 4 August 1902 a report in the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette says that Evans was a stoker on HMS Oppossum on leave in Branscombe. He was returning to his ship in Plymouth by train from Sidmouth. Whilst in Sidmouth he met up with two other sailors. They were making their way to the train station when a bus came along and they ran to get on it. Whilst his friends had got onto the bus, Evans had not and the bus set off. He grabbed a mail basket on the bus as it moved off and it turned over. He fell to the ground on his head. He was taken to the cottage hospital but died later. The newspaper report said he would be buried in Sidmouth cemetery and arrangements would be made by the Admiralty-Surgeon, amongst other officials. The gravestone said he died at sea! What was all this about? Was he drunk? Was all this burying at Sidmouth to keep it quiet? Surely Branscombe folk would have known about it – it's not that far away. So where was he buried? A mystery!

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
EDITH  
ONLY DAUGHTER OF  
ROBERT & ELIZABETH EVANS  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE  
AT HIGHER HOUSE BRANSCOMBE  
9<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1900  
AGED 19 YEARS  
Also of  
FRANK JOHN  
DIED 31ST JANUARY 1879 AGED 10  
YEARS  
REGINALD JOHN  
DIED ? OCT 1882? AGED 5 MONTHS  
*BROTHERS OF THE ABOVE*  
ALSO OF  
ERNEST T EVANS  
WHO DIED AT SEA  
AUGUST 20<sup>TH</sup> 1902  
AGED 24 YEARS  
THIS STONE WAS ERECTED? BY  
.....ERNEST EVANS



This grave with its matching double stones is the resting place of two of the Tucker sisters. Henrietta and Emily died within hours of each other in 1927. This family, who lived at Barnells, were wealthy dealers of Branscombe lace.

It is a melancholy coincidence that two sisters...have died within a few hours of each other. Both were buried in the same grave..

(*Western Times* - Friday 4 February 1927)

Henrietta Sophia Tucker 79  
Emily Abigail Tucker 77  
Barnells 28.1.1927



Whilst Branscombe had a church and chapel, only the church had a graveyard. So where were the non-conformists buried? When the above law came into being we start to find entries in the burial plot record of Wesleyans from Branscombe being buried at St Winifred's.



#### Burial Laws Amendment Act 1880

In 1880 the burial of non-conformists by their own ministers in Anglican churchyards was finally permitted by law, and some non-conformist burial grounds were closed at this time.

Going back to the Burial Book we find the first entry under the 'New Burial Act' is on 6 June 1881. This is William Brown, with W H Parr the Wesleyan Minister officiating.

BURIALS in the Parish of *Branscombe*  
in the County of *Devon* in the Year 18*81*

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>Elizabeth Ward</i> No. 249	<i>Graps Vine</i>	<i>May 19.</i>	<i>53.</i>	<i>Abwansborough Dean</i>
<i>William Brown</i> No. 250	<i>Bank</i> <i>First under the New Burial Act.</i>	<i>June 6.</i>	<i>64.</i>	<i>W. H. Parr Wesleyan Minister.</i>
<i>William Chamberlain Bartlett</i> No. 251	<i>Bridge</i>	<i>June 14.</i>	<i>65.</i>	<i>W. H. Parr Wesleyan Minister certified by the daughter Eve Bartlett</i>
<i>William Selway</i>	<i>Cotte</i>	<i>June 24.</i>	<i>2.</i>	<i>Abwansborough</i>

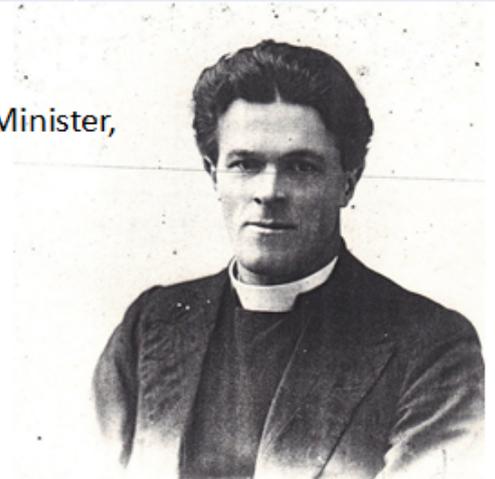
These entries from the burial plot book show that despite the numbers of Wesleyans in the village, most must have had a Church of England minister officiating at their funerals. Newspaper articles from the past and memories of local people, indicate that there was much cooperation and friendliness between church and chapel, so perhaps it was not felt necessary to be buried by a chapel minister.

What happened is shown below when Sarah Gush died – a service at the chapel after the church service.

Much sympathy is felt and expressed among the Wesleyans towards their esteemed member, Mr James Gush, and the family, in the sad bereavement they have suffered by the death of Mrs Gush on October 28<sup>th</sup>, after a long and painful illness, which she bore with wonderful patience. She was buried on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, many of the Wesleyans attending the funeral. On Sunday evening there was a large congregation at the Wesleyan Chapel, where a memorial service was conducted by Mr Dommett, of Seaton, who preached the words...

No.	Name	Lived	Died	Age	Minister
P32 251	William Chamberlain Bartlett	Bridge	1881	65	W H Parr Wesleyan Minister certified for the daughter Eva Bartlett
P76 605	James Gush	Street	1912	79	O K Evans Wesleyan Minister under Burial Law Amendment Act
P78 623	Roy James <u>Loveridge</u>	Branscombe	1914	2 days	Certified under the Burial Law Amendment Act Roland J French Wesleyan Minister
P81 648	Clara Gill	Street	1916	58	Certified under the Burial Law Amendment Act F Ashford Wesleyan Minister
P82 650	Anna Harris	Street	1916	50	Certified under the Burial Law Amendment Act O K Evans Wesleyan Minister
P83 662	Mary Ann Bartlett	Street	1918	85	W M Craich (Wesleyan Minister)
P91 722	Charles Perryman	The Cott, Branscombe	1923	36	R Stanley Bennett (Wesleyan minister)
P92 730	Eliza Jane Wilkins or wilks?	The Haven, Branscombe	1924	62	R Stanley Bennett Wesleyan Minister
P96 768	Anna Maria Loveridge	Street	1928	87	E F Thomas Wesleyan Minister

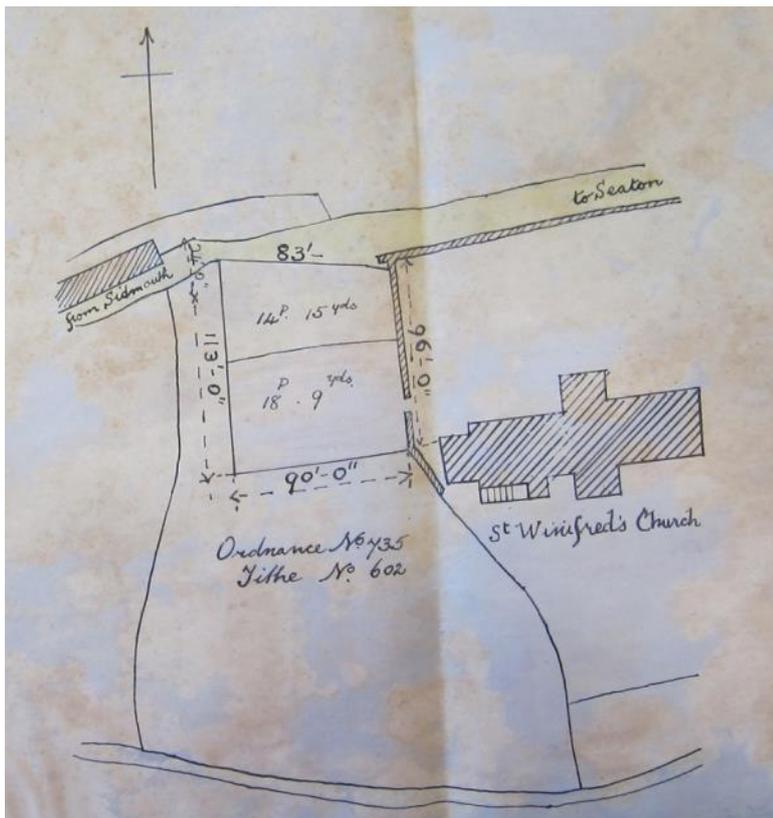
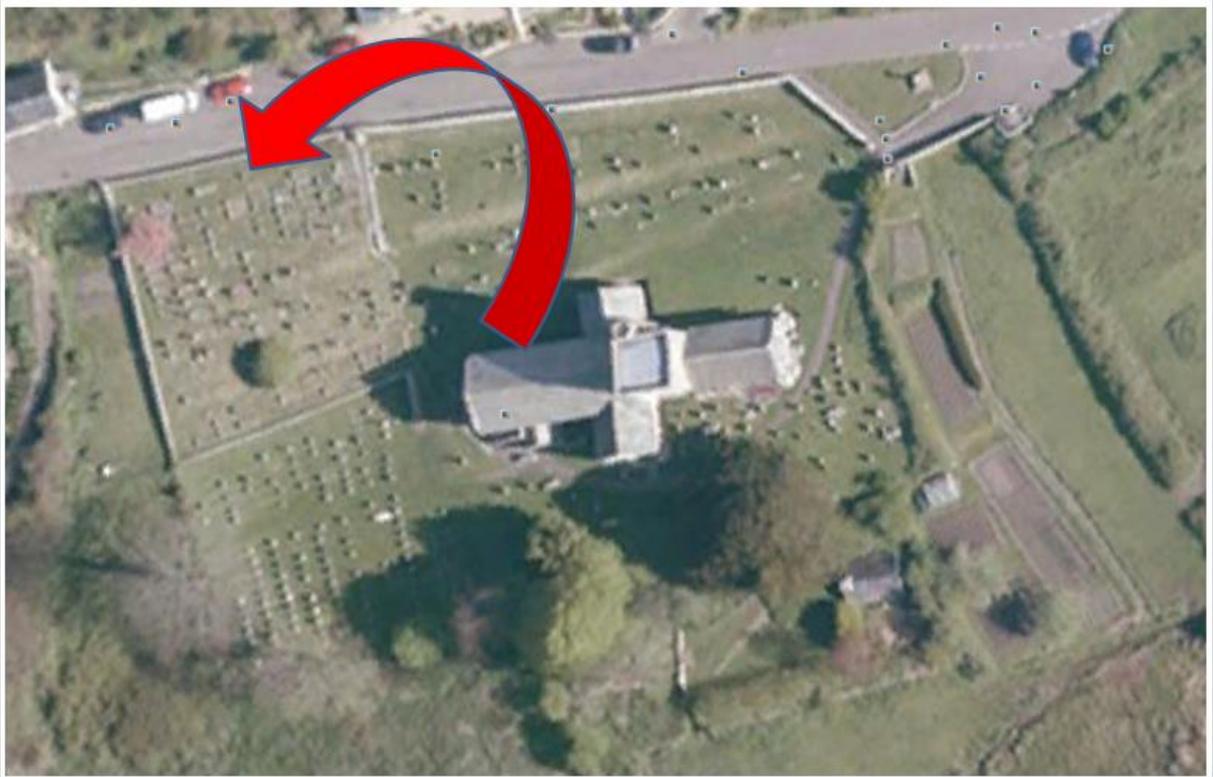
Roland French Methodist Minister,  
Branscombe



Almost 50 years and  
nine occasions a  
Wesleyan Minister  
took the burial  
service

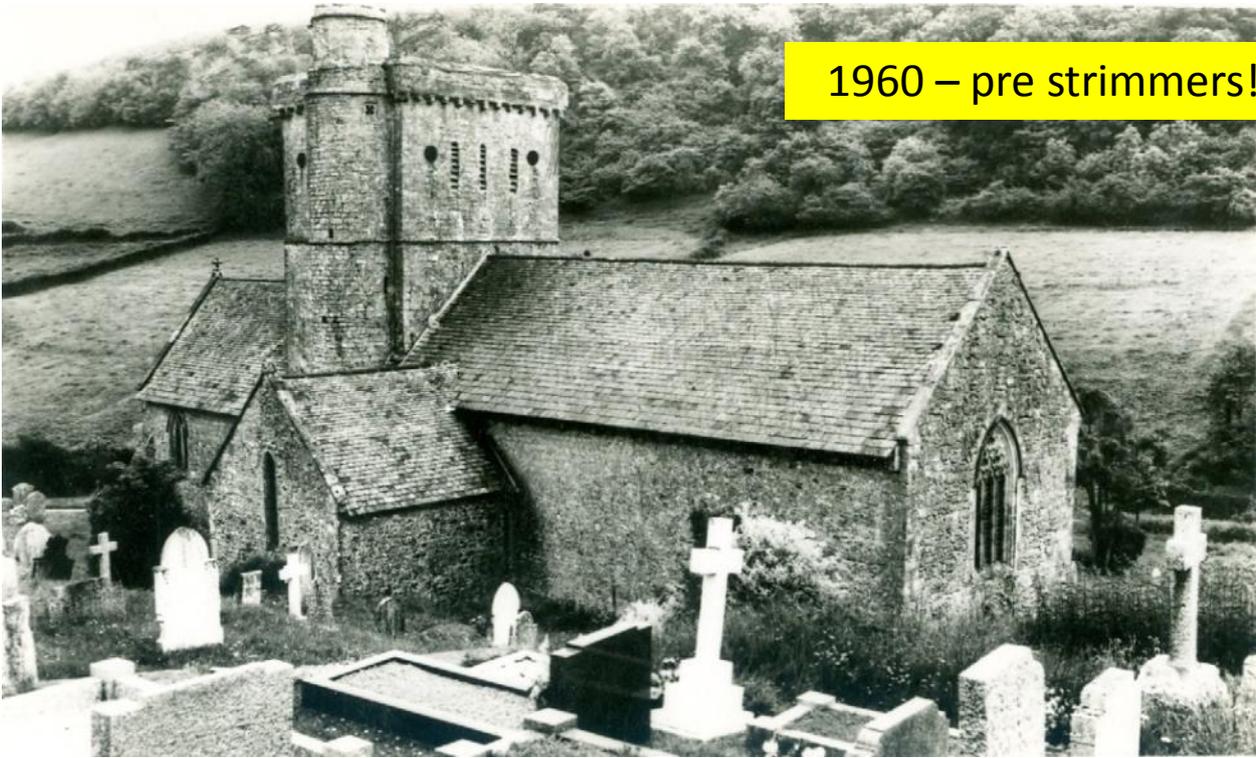


Back to Google Maps and we move into the north-western part of the churchyard. Even more orderly than the northern section and seemingly not so many gaps between the gravestones. This section was added in two parts in the 1940s and 1950s.



There are a variety of gravestone styles with the kerbstone variety being very common. These are a design that easily gets lost and overgrown in the grass. Many are now just bumps in the grass.

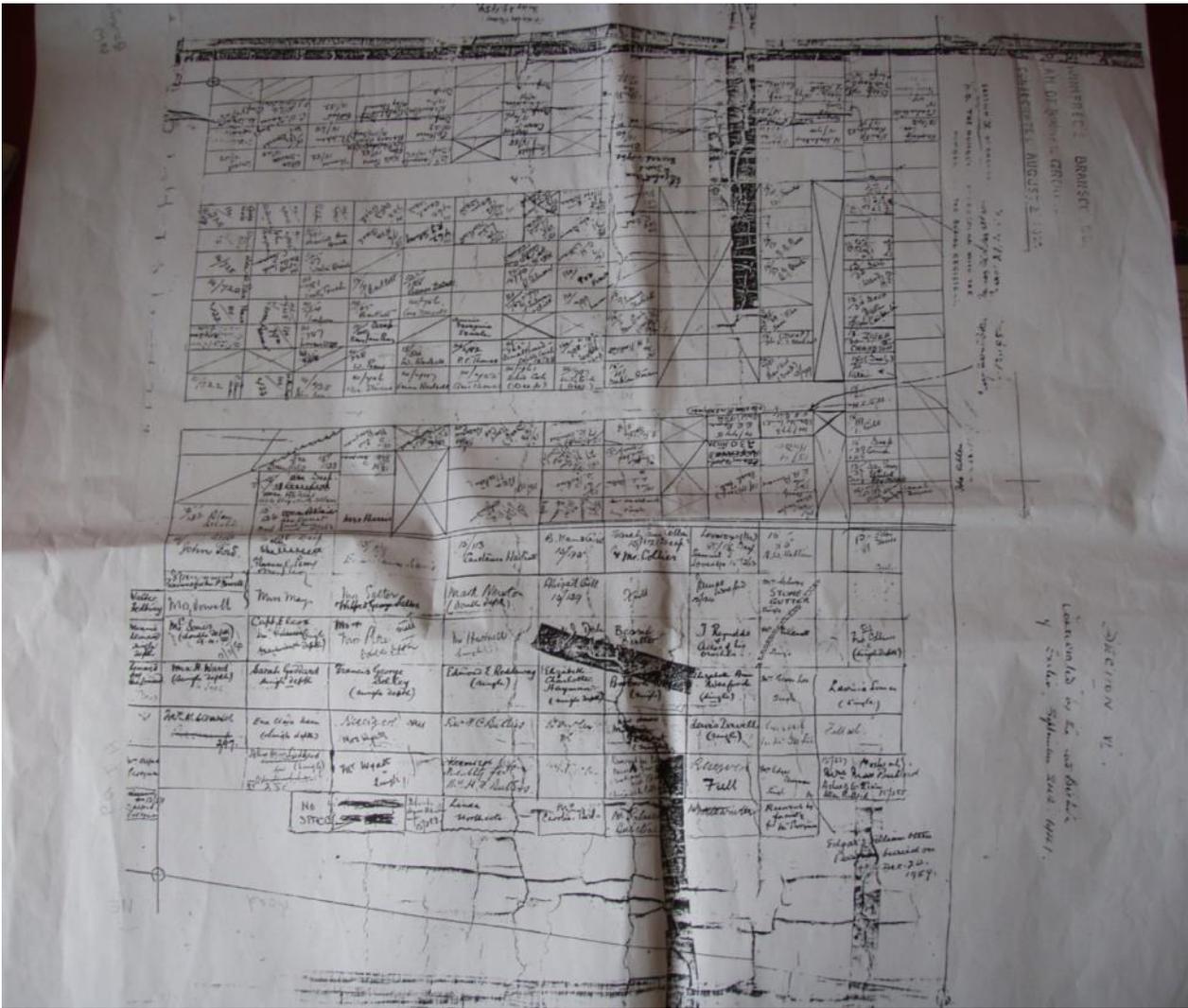
This old postcard shows the churchyard in the 1960s – note bushes and overgrown areas.



More or less the same view today. Note the new toilet building.

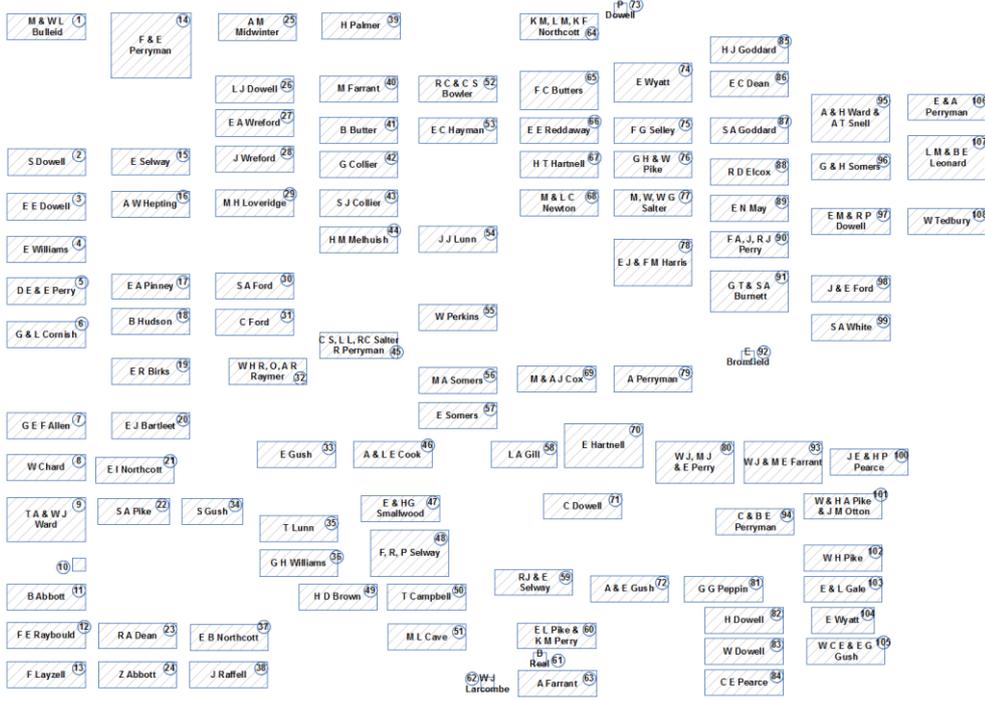


This is a copy of the much-used plan of the burials in this north-western corner.



Whilst I did create a spreadsheet from this plan I found that on the ground things were not so orderly and so with much help from Trevor Dymond, I created this plan of the northwest area. (There is a downloadable version on our website.)

North wall / road



This area looks very congested, but is it any more densely packed below ground than the adjacent northern section? Perhaps it is just that more graves had stones here.



This photo shows the problem with kerbstone graves. They become overgrown and lost.



An example of an almost lost gravestone and epitaph...



There are also quite a few of these memorial pots. Another style that easily becomes lost. I had to scrape away the soil to read who the DEAR WIFE was (Bessie Real)!





By peeling the turf away from this stone it was possible to read the epitaph. This stone could actually be considered lost, and will soon be again. The name reads Reginald Donald Elcox.

Immediately I read the name I realised I'd heard it mentioned in conversation. Why he was living on the cliffs is a mystery. It was Tom White from Berry Barton, now sadly no longer with us, who told me the following:

#### Oral History with Tom White –

Ellcotts was another one. I mean he was different calibre. He was an educated bloke...

Sue: He lived out there during the war?

Tom: Yeah well then he got called up. He finished up a captain out in Egypt somewhere. In the Far East somewhere. I don't know where. I remember they had a Great Dane and one day she came in, in a bit of a state. The bloody dog had turned on her and I had to take the gun out and shoot it then.

#### Transcribed Parish Register Burials –

Reginald Donald Elcox Cliff Heights buried 22.2.1950 aged 54

Now when I typed our talk up I'd spelt the name wrong, but it was the same man. This was part of a conversation about who was living on the cliffs in WW2. His wife must have lived there too. I wondered what else I could find out about Elcox. Quite a bit it turned out. First of all I consulted our own online Parish Registers and found that he'd died relatively young. A quick Internet search revealed in the London Gazette 6/1/1941 that Reginald Elcox had joined the Royal Army Service Corps in January 1941. He relinquished his commission 'on account of disability' on 16th March 1945, when he was granted the hon. rank of Captain. So from scraping the soil and grass off an almost lost gravestone I was able to then find out more about this man. Sadly this gravestone will return to obscurity again.

144 SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 6 JANUARY, 1941

Seafork.

William Francis CAMPBELL (160758).  
Archibald MACARTHUR (160705).  
Sewart Beirage BLACK (160777).  
John Edwin STAGG (160798).  
Harold Edward GIBSON (160903).

Gordons.

John William Canning BENDLEY (160776).  
Frank Evans HOGGARTH (160786).  
James Anderson TAYLOR (160332).  
Reginald Ewen MACDONALD (160916).  
Harry Powell REES (160851).

Cameron.

David Beyth BOGLE (103251).  
Gurney MACINNES (160831).  
John Gordon SHAGHENESSY (160839).  
Norman Graham STEELE (160934).  
Gordon Terence DAVIES (160843).

R. O. Ry.

James Leonard Conleth DILLON (160996),  
to be Lt.  
Harry St. George GALLAGHER (160979).  
Kenneth Sutton GRANNELL (160901).  
Charles Desmond MARSHALL (162012).  
Roger Joseph QUINN (160836).

R. Ir. Fus.

Nicholas Joseph MURPHY (160982), to be  
Lt.  
William Arthur Alphonus WARD (160983).

A. & S.H.

Alexander Douglas BLAIR (160757).  
James Ninian MARSHALL (160766).  
William George WAINWRIGHT (160804).  
James Lawson FAIRBURN (160816).  
Alexander McKEE (160971).  
James Thomas Campbell Nairn (160906).

ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS.

The undermentioned Cadets, from Officer  
Producing Centre, to be 2nd Lts., except as  
otherwise stated. 14th Dec. 1940:—

John Ellis BARELL (160600).  
William Craig BAWDEN (160601).  
Arthur Henry CLARKE (160602).  
Robert George GREY (160603).  
Philip Asterley JONES (160604).  
Gilbert Sinclair LAWRIE (160605).  
Reginald Watson LEE (160606).  
Edward Harry Granville RICHARDSON  
(160607).  
Alan Walter TICE (160608).  
Alexander ANDERSON (160609).  
Frederick Campbell Gordon BATES  
(160610).  
Stuart Lawson BENEY (160611).  
Roland CARLTON (160612).  
George Stuart COBB (160613).  
John Daniel DALE-GREEN (160614).  
Cyril Roy HARBOROUGH (160615).  
Lionel Prince DEMERY (160616).  
Peter Robert EMMET (160617).  
Albert Cyril Kinlock FEATHERSTONE  
(160618).  
John GULLICK (160619).  
John Robert Arthur HARVEY (160620).  
Denis Stuart HICKMAN (160621).  
Harold JENNINGS (160622).  
Frank Lewis LOWE (160623).  
Ronald Harry OGDEN (160624).  
Gerald Brian SPINK (160625).  
Kenneth Fleming STANFORD (160626).  
Emyr THOMAS (160627).  
Geoffrey THOMAS ALEXANDER (160628).  
Alfred James BATCHELOR (160629).  
Reginald Donald ELCOX (160630).  
Stuart Sydney GOODALL (160631).  
The undermentioned are to be 2nd Lts.,



ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS.

Terence RUTILE (342172) to be 2nd Lt., 14th  
Jan. 1945.

14434789 Cadet Robert Michael BRISCOE (331024)  
to be 2nd Lt., 21st Feb. 1945.

War Subs. Lt. A. Holland (98568) relinquishes  
his commn. on account of disability, 15th Mar. 1945,  
and is re-granted the rank of Lt.

War Subs. Lt. R. D. Elcox (160630) relinquishes  
his commn. on account of disability, 16th Mar.  
1945, and is granted the hon. rank of Capt.

E.F.I.

The undermentioned are granted Immediate  
Emergency Comms. from the ranks in the rank of  
2nd Lt. (without pay and alices. from Army

14th Sept. 1943:—

A. L. Farrell (197231).

13th Mar. 1945:—

Lt. P. Caulfeild-Browne (174657).

War Subs. Lt. R. Nilsen (155354), from R.A.,  
to be War Subs. Lt., 20th Feb. 1945.  
2nd Lt. L. H. Baldwin (143718), from Border R.,  
to be 2nd Lt., 12th Feb. 1941.

A.C.F. Section.

2nd Lt. C. H. Nicholl (205160) to be Lt. &  
Paymr., 3rd Mar. 1941.

War Subs. Lt. J. W. Crompton (318765) to be  
Lt. & Paymr., 1st Aug. 1944.

ROYAL ARMY VETERINARY CORPS.

Adolphus Farrant was a farm labourer on the 1911 census and we might know no more about him than that he had a wife called Ellen and a daughter, also Ellen, but the Parish Council archive has a lovely photo of the three of them! We are hoping that after looking at the graves we might be able to build up a bit more about the people buried there – newspaper articles, photos and documents, and perhaps some oral history as well. The legacy of the work we are doing on the gravestones we hope to make available on this website.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
ADOLPHUS FARRANT,  
DIED MARCH 9 1940.  
AGED 69 YEARS,  
AT REST  
ALSO OF ELLEN  
WIFE OF THE ABOVE  
DIED DECEMBER 15 1948  
AGED 76 YEARS



Joining up the sources and leaving a legacy

By 1901 there should have been no question but that a suicide could be buried in the churchyard, but this newspaper article shows that they got a different treatment.

#### BRANSCOMBE

The funeral of the unfortunate girl, Annie Perry (who, together with her lover, was found drowned near Yeovil) took place last Saturday afternoon. A large number of the poor girl's relatives followed her to the graveside, and an exceedingly large number of people who sympathised with the parents in their sad trial were at the churchyard to show their sympathy. What added very much to the sadness of the circumstances was the fact that no bell toiled, and the usual funeral rites were not performed.

*Western Times*  
13/12/1901

Reading through newspaper reports of funerals in the past can be interesting as the relatives and associates are listed. Some give other facts such as freemasonry details.



Theresa Anna Ward (aged 72)  
Lucy Anna Batten (aged 50)

**Lists village men who were freemasons**

**BRANSCOMBE DOUBLE FUNERAL  
Mother and Daughter who Died  
Same Day**

The funerals took place in the Churchyard, Branscombe, on Monday, of Mrs Ward, and Mrs Batten, mother and daughter, who passed away on the same day, December 31<sup>st</sup>. Amid many tokens of sympathy and respect they were laid side by side.

The service was conducted by the Vicar (Rev. W.H. Raymer), assisted by Rev. John Hardwick.

The mourners were Mr. W. Ward (husband and father), Mr W. Batten (husband), Harry, William, Sam, Lewis, Horace, Charley and Jack (sons), Mrs Carpenter and Mrs Adlam (daughters), Mrs Harry Ward, Mrs Sam Ward, Mrs Charley Ward, Mrs Jack Ward, Mr F. Adlam, Mr W. Quick, Ada and Alma Ward, Mr & Mrs E Batten, Mrs Hill, Mrs H. Combe, Mrs B. Collier, Miss Long, Mr & Mrs Cheeseman and Mrs V. Cheeseman.

Masonic Lodge de la Pole 1181, Seaton was represented by Wor. Bro. Hammett, Wor. Bro. Trevett; the Perseverance Lodge 164, Sidmouth by Wor. Bro. C. Clarke and Bro. Alfred Perryman; R.A.O.B. Ye Combe Lodge 5031, Bro. Collier, Bro. Pike, Bro. Real, Bro. Wolfenden, Bro. White, together with many other friends and sympathisers.

*Western Times, 8 January 1937*

**BEER STONE CO.,  
LTD.**

Quarry Owners and Masonry  
Contractors

**MEMORIALS EXECUTED IN  
MARBLE, GRANITE OR STONE.**

BIRD BATHS & GARDEN  
ORNAMENTS IN BEER STONE, in  
Stock

*Extract from 1937 newspaper advert*



Fabric... style...  
We've not really got going  
on this yet!



Churchyard Memorials  
**The Western Memorial Co., Ltd.**  
**HONITON**

GRANITE, MARBLE, and STONE  
HEADSTONES, CROSSES, &C  
Erected in Any Churchyard or Cemetery  
(DISTANCE NO OBJECT)

*Extract from 1927 newspaper advert*

Besides looking at the material the gravestones are made of we are exploring the possibility of hollow spaces – vaults under gravestones. We have a little evidence so far.

The burial plot plan mentions 'brick' in some instances and below is a mention of Henry Ford's grave being brick from a newspaper report of his funeral.

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette  
South West, England  
05/06/1908

Funeral of Henry Ford  
'...a new **brick grave** which was lined with flowers'

Looking at who might have had these more expensive graves it does appear to be the more wealthy people. Here are a few examples:



This plot is noted as 'brick' in the burial plan

Rev Raymer & family

EVELYN  
YOUNGER DAUGHTER OF THE LATE  
THOMAS SMALLWOOD OF SHREWSBURY  
DIED AUGUST 11<sup>TH</sup> 1928  
AGED 81

ALSO OF HER SISTER  
HELEN GEORGINA SMALLWOOD  
DIED FEBRUARY 8<sup>TH</sup> 1937 AGED 94  
AT REST



Father had been a lawyer

This plot is noted as 'double brick' in the burial plan

**Frank Chard** remembers another:

Charlie Perryman farmed at Great Seaside. He was married to Beattie. Charlie committed suicide in Sept 1930...43 years later his wife died.

And I can picture myself standing there with a grave higher than you, looking in ... they took off the two great big slates on the top and there's a perfect coffin shape in brick. It'd been put in after he'd been buried ... sloping wall, it's perfect you know, lovely job. So they literally just had to take off the slate. I don't know why it was done. It must have been her that put a lot of money into it, Beatty.

IN  
SACRED MEMORY  
OF  
CHARLES PERRYMAN  
BELOVED HUSBAND OF  
BEATRICE PERRYMAN  
WHO PASSED AWAY  
SEPTEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup> 1930  
AGED 42 YEARS  
UNTIL THE DAY BREAK  
AND THE SHADOWS PASS AWAY  
  
AND OF HIS WIFE  
BEATRICE ELLEN  
DIED JUNE 1ST 1973



As we worked in the graveyard we were always aware of people visiting the most modern addition (the south-western section), where the gravestones are in orderly rows and easy to walk amongst. We have left this area for future research. Watching these visitors I felt the continuity and imagined people in Victorian dress walking to the church to visit graves, and later on hurried visits in wartime, particularly I thought of WW2 when women were busy with their families, evacuees and possibly billeted soldiers, and yet might find time for a few minutes of peace, solitude and reflection in this tranquil setting.

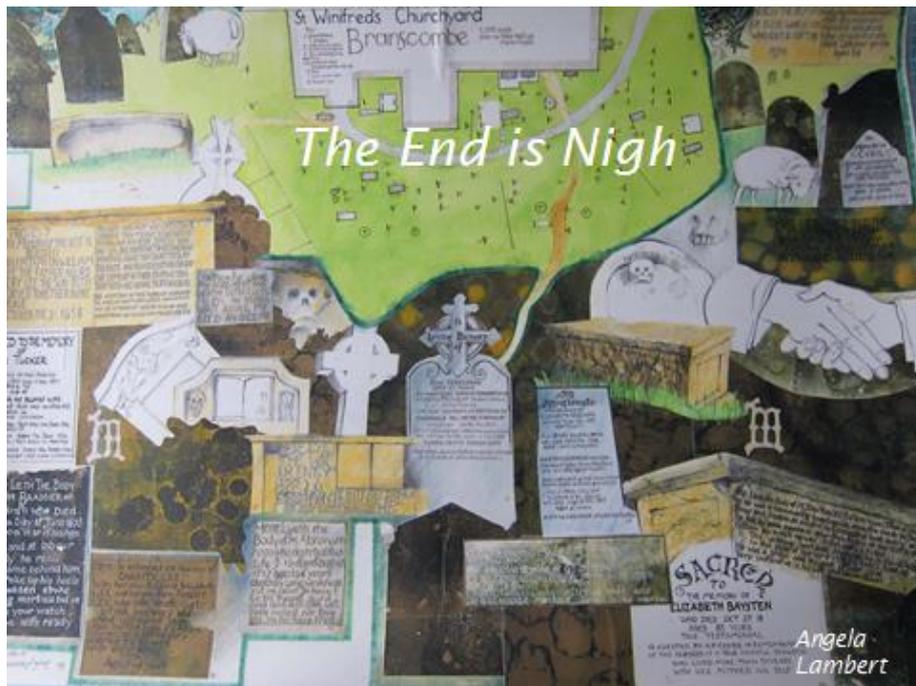
So do the gravestones in the northern sections of the churchyard represent the local population?

A work in progress, but so far it seems that representation is still skewed in favour of the more well off.

For the future



We hope you have enjoyed finding out what we've been doing in the churchyard.  
We have lots more to do and never imagined it would prove so interesting.



**The Project would like to thank Revd. Hilary Dawson (incumbent vicar of St Winifred); Revd. Nigel Freathy; the Exeter Diocesan Advisory Committee; Devon Heritage Services, the AONB Peter Orlando Hutchinson Project; Gareth and Nicole Beale, Archaeology Department, University of Southampton; and Angela Lambert and Cory Lyons for their illustrations.**

<sup>i</sup> The cross played an important part in the processional rituals of the church, being used as a preaching station on days of prayer and thanksgiving such as Palm Sunday. (Hilary Lees: *Exploring English Churchyard Memorials*, Tempus 1993).

<sup>ii</sup> ‘Adam the Miller, of Branscombe, and Willm. and Ricd. his sons and Matilda his wife, slew Stephen de la Dene in the Township. Ricd. was arrested and put in prison there and thence escaped. Adam and the other fled to the Church, confessed their crime and abjured the country. Adam’s chattels were worth 12/7, the other had none.’ (A. Steele King: *Branscombe its Church and Parish* 1923).

<sup>iii</sup> A fragment of another of these medieval tombs was found during the 1911 restoration below the floor of the church.

<sup>iv</sup> ‘Its ancient font, stone screen and canopies over its piscine and sedilia were smashed to pieces ... The rood and its platform under the west arch of the tower were torn down and probably burnt. ..The lovely glass which must have been a miracle of colour was removed from the magnificent east window and destroyed. Mural paintings and other designs in colour were daubed over with lime wash and plaster.’ (F.C. Butters: *Branscombe The Parish and the Church* 1988).

<sup>v</sup> John Evelyn writing in 1682 on the death of his father-in-law said: ‘By a special clause in his will, he ordered that his body should be buried in the churchyard under the south-east window of the chancel adjoining to the burying places of his

---

*ancestors ... he being much offended by the novel custom of burying everyone within the body of the church and chancel, that being a favour heretofore granted to the martyrs and great persons, this excess of making churches charnel-houses being of ill and irreverent example and prejudicial to the health of the living besides the continual disturbance of the pavement and seats and several other indecencies.'*

<sup>vi</sup> Outside the church, on the east side, is a chest tomb. On the north side, without panels, is an inscription to John French 1629, and on the short east end one to Lewes French 1667. On the south side are two panels, the left hand one is to Ellis Wheaton, died 1579, the right to Nicholas Wheaton, died 1710. The use of panels is not found in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century and it looks as though Nicholas Wheaton, who married into the French family, put in the two panels and inscribed one to his ancestor, Ellis Wheaton. It's curious that none of the wives seem to have been interred.

<sup>vii</sup> At the back of the Branscombe Church Register (p.271), Elijah Chick mentions a tomb recorded in Mr Incedon's manuscripts, now in the Barnstable Athenaeum. The copy was made in 1771 and says that there was 'an elevated tomb stone' which read '*Maria Edmondi Walrond de Bovy armageri/et Annae uxoris ejus filia natu maxima/Elizei Bartlet de Brans Armig/conjux maetissima Aug. 23 1684 aetat 72*'. The burial register informs us that Mary Bartlet was married to Elles Bartlet, gent.

<sup>viii</sup> One of these Braddick tombs is only represented by the small east end slab.

<sup>ix</sup> Hilary Lees, 1993, mentions that, at the entrance to the porch, there are engraved crosses –probably made by early pilgrims.

<sup>x</sup> As time goes on the epitaphs on the chest tombs get terser. From 1787 to 1840 four generations of Leighs were buried in Thomazine's tomb, but only two have epitaphs - Thomazine a slightly reproachful: '*I have waited for thy salvation O Lord*'; and William (her husband) a laudatory: '*He lived well respected and died much lamented.*'

<sup>xi</sup> The headstone to Hook is a late one, the shape and lettering are similar to the other angel headstones, but the symbols have vanished.

<sup>xii</sup> The headstone was erected in memory of Sarah Brown, wife of William Brown, in 1853, by her parents Samuel and Mary Hammett of Beer. It also commemorates William, William and Sarah's son Charles, and William's second wife, Mary.

<sup>xiii</sup> It is a considerable puzzle as to how Edmund Bidgood Upright and his wife Jane managed to get buried in the elite part of the churchyard. Upright was a lace trader but not on the same scale as John Tucker. He had left the village and set up shop in Colyton.

<sup>xiv</sup> Thomas and Sarah are commemorated on an earlier headstone erected to the Memory of Ann Richards 1817.

---

<sup>xv</sup> A few 'ordinary' people are buried in the 'exclusive' area. Two very attractive headstones were erected to the Deans in 1877. One of the Deans was a shoemaker, and not at all well off. Sarah Payton was buried alongside the transept. Her husband was described as a 'labourer pauper'. Her epitaph paints a warm picture:

*She was respected by all who know her  
A light is from our household gone  
The voice we love is still  
A place is vacant on our hearth  
Which we can never fill.*

and ends with two lines of Tennyson:

*O for a touch of a vanished hand  
And the sound of a voice that is still*

There are stories here that we can't fathom.

<sup>xvi</sup> John Williams was innkeeper at the Masons Arms and butcher on the Square; Ellis Bartlett Dean was the blacksmith and landlord of the Fountain Head.

<sup>xvii</sup> One died in Fort Royal, another in Rio de Janiero; and another drowned in Melbourne Australia.

<sup>xviii</sup> Stone erected to Jane Bastyn: *This testimonial is erected by A.P. Cook in remembrance of the services of a truly faithful domestic who lived more than 50 years/with her mother and self.*

<sup>xix</sup> Charles of Sidmouth; Richards of Seaton.

<sup>xx</sup> Hilary Lees, 1993, notes that they all owe much to the large number of pattern books in circulation. Such as *Designs for Christian Memorials* by John Gibbs 1852, or *Original Designs for Christian Memorials* by Theophilus Smith 1864.