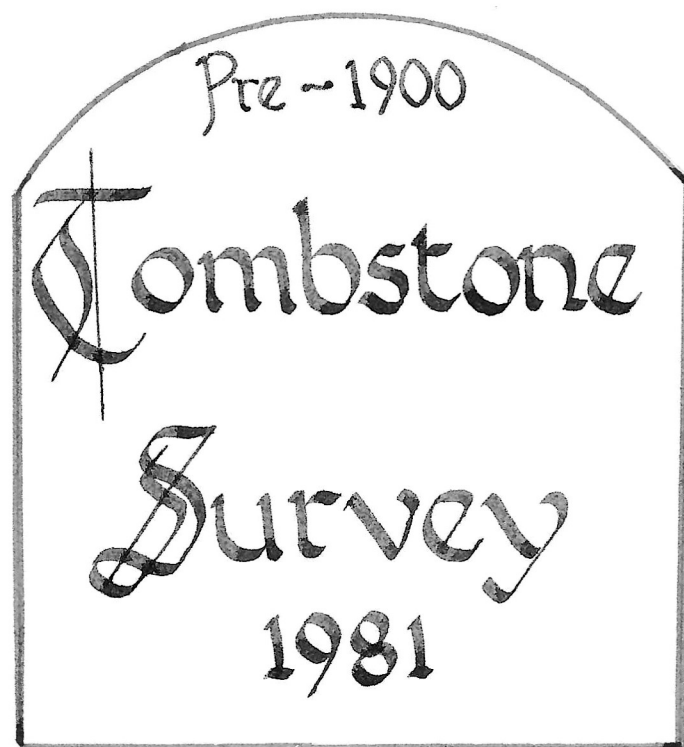


St. Mary's Church Priors Hardwick



Margaret Powell

Sylvia Sutherland

Preface

St. Mary's Church, Priors Hardwick is of early to mid-13th Century origin with later additions. Like the Church, the majority of tombstones are of local Hornton Stone.

Although this was essentially a pre-1900 Survey, post-1900 tombstones have been recorded briefly and are marked in red, both on the Plan and in this Record.

There are 240 tombstones in our Churchyard: -
- 168 are pre-1900 and 72 are post-1900. The oldest legible date found was, 1643, on tombstone no. 18 in section A. The oldest graves are to the South of the Church. It was thought desirable, in those times, to avoid the Church's shadow falling across them. The Devil lurked among the shadows and was always supposed to enter a churchyard from the North; hence for many years, the North side was not used for burials, at least until the South side could take no more.

Parts of some tombstones were either illegible or only partly legible, e.g. Christian names, ages, months, dates. This information was obtained, when possible, by cross checking with footstones or by researching into Burial Registers in the Church or at the County Records Office. The Burial Registers for this Parish date from 1662. However, not all burials were recorded and the

earliest Register was incomplete but some useful additional information was given, such as, the trade of the person buried and notes on when the trees were planted in the Churchyard and when various gifts were given.

Until the mid-18th Century the Julian Calendar recognised the beginning of the Christian Year as March 25th which was the feast of the Annunciation or 'Lady Day'. The dates from 1st January to 24th March in any year were written, for example, 17th February 171 $\frac{7}{8}$ which would nowadays be given as 17th February 1718. The year in our Burial Registers during these three months was often recorded in this way until the mid-1700's. In 1752 the Gregorian Calendar, widely used by Catholic countries on the Continent since the 16th Century, was adopted by Britain and it made January 1st the beginning of the civil and legal year.

"Burying in Woollen"

The Burial Registers, for this Parish, from 1695 to the late 1700's record the bodies as being, 'buried in woollen only'. This fact is recorded in this Survey by the appropriate tombstone.

Under Acts of 1666 & 1678 corpses were not to be buried "in any suit, sheet or shroud" other than of wool, nor was the coffin, if indeed there was one, to be lined with any other material. It was intended for the encouragement of English woollen manufactures and was eventually repealed in 1814, after it had largely fallen into

abeyance; it had long been ignored by those able and willing to pay the fines for its non-observance.

An affidavit had to be sworn before a Parson, Vicar or Curate within 8 days of the burial under a penalty of £5.0.0 that the deceased was not buried in linen.



"Odious! in woollen! 'twould a saint provoke!"
(Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke).

"No! Let a charming chintz and Brussels lace
Wrap my cold limbs, and shade my lifeless face,
One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead;
And — Betty — give this cheek a little red."

POPE: Moral Essays, Ep1, iii (1733)



1981

Sylvia Sutherland.



Tombstones from 1981... onwards have been added to this Survey
and are recorded in blue.

Women brush up on local history

VILLAGERS in Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick could hardly believe their eyes when local ladies of the W.I. descended with relish on their churchyards.

There were suggestions of bodysnatching — but there was nothing to worry about.

The good ladies of the Institute were simply taking part in a tombstone survey, putting down for posterity all the details of the burial ground.

The idea came from the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry,

worried that much family and local history had already been lost with the destruction of tombstones.

It was taken up by Warwickshire W.I. and turned into a competition. And the Priors' ladies have found their work has paid off.

Their survey has just been placed second by the judge, actor Donald

Sinden, amid stiff opposition from groups throughout the county. Winners were Warming-ton W.I., near the Oxfordshire border, and the ladies of Easenhall, near Rugby, came third.

Members were asked to make plans of their local churchyards and catalogue all the grave-stones.

But the Priors Marston and Hardwick W.I. were soon scurrying to Warwick records office to scour burial registers to find out more.

Warned not to damage crumbling gravestones, they gently used loo brushes to get at the ancient inscriptions.

Some did surveys of the flowers they found — identifying, listing and even drawing and painting the specimens.

They were joked with and jeered at, but they came to enjoy spending several hours a day on their hands and knees cleaning up tombstones in bitter winter weather.

"We got obsessed with it," said member Sylvia Sutherland.

by a sherry from the local postmistress. They got to know people from the village. And they often shared a smile. One lady was moved to write a poem.

One verse went:

*"And then there came a little dog,
He did not bite or bark,
But went up to our plastic bag
And promptly left his mark!"*

Priors Marston and Hardwick W.I. had two churchyards to survey — St Leonard's at Marston and St Mary's at Hardwick. Now they'd like to see them preserved as a permanent record for the villagers.

For some of the members, this first-hand taste of local history has whetted their appetites enough to make them want to continue their studies. Others may be glad the whole thing's over.

At that poem goes on: *"And now the survey's finished,
It's here for all to see.
Reunited with our husbands,
Now we can R.I.P."*

SYMPATHY

Over long wintry weeks they learned of the 17th century plan to bury the dead only in woollen clothes as a boost to the industry.

They found out about calendar change - overs which had September 2nd followed immediately by the 14th, and some sad people celebrating Christmas in January.

And they came to sympathise with the luckless driver of a horse-drawn hearse who, they learned, had literally frozen to death.

But there were compensations. They were occasionally bucked up





Sylvia Sutherland + Margaret Powell
survey the tombstones.

Vaudeville Theatre

DONALD SINDEN, C.B.E., F.R.S.A.

London W.C.2

My dear Ms Sutherland,

Thank you so much
for your delightful letter - and for
your most evocative poem. I am
so glad that the Tombstone Survey
has sparked off a further interest
for you. Certainly my own interest

→ P.T.O

Reply from Donald Sinden to a letter + poem
"Ode to the Survey" (see front of book) sent to him
by Sylvia Sutherland.

in Ecclesiology has been a life-long
passion — and it grows with age!
The Pious Nat^l ^{Hardy} was superb and
was only just pipped at the post (in
my view) by the winner.

I wish you many happy years of
visiting our National stories.

Dr. Donald Sinden



Sylvia Sutherland receiving the 2nd Prize Certificate
on behalf of Priors Marston & Hardwick W.I. from
Mrs. Donald Sinden at The Royal Show Ground Stonleigh.

W.I. COUNTY DAY 1981

(Over 1200 members from the Warwickshire W.I.'s
attended this event.)