

Examples of 18th century stones

Right: 1717
Below, left: 1740
Below, right: 1733



It was only in the **18th century** that rows of grave markers as we know them today became commonplace. However, in this rural community, it was still only those with some wealth who could afford a permanent reminder of their affluence. Of the 1,000 burials in the 18th century at St Maurice's, only 40 remain marked with a gravestone. These burials were all on the southside of the church as people believed the northside was associated with darkness and the devil. Carved locally in sandstone, each one is a creative original. The earliest, dated 1717, is a small, simply-carved stone in memory of James Young.

Left to right: Robert Dunn; Archdeacon Henry Martin; Christina Gray; John Carr.

Since the **20th century**, additional diocesan rules mean that more recent mass-produced stones (mostly in the 1927 eastern extension) are smaller and tend to give little away about the people who lie beneath. However, there are a few exceptions of stones collected from the moors or specially designed by the family, which reflect more individual stories. Now, there are fewer burials as nationally 80% of bodies are cremated. The Garden of Remembrance was created in the 1980s.



Amongst these old stones are some fine examples of *memento mori* symbolism – stark reminders of the transience of life and the inevitability of death.

By the **19th century**, local carvers had given way to monumental masons. There are more than 50 headstones by Alnwick mason Daniel McMillan. Victorian fashion also demanded larger stones in architectural revival styles. Chosen from classical pattern books, there are fine examples in the western section erected by the families of the Archdeacons of Lindisfarne, and the principal landowners.



Acknowledgements

This leaflet has been produced as part of a project transcribing the inscriptions of the 480 memorials and taking quality legacy images. Researching the stories of the families buried here is a continuing part of this project, and will form a record of the social history of the local community as well as their connections across the world. More information at www.coldstreamhistorysociety.co.uk

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THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

A brief guide to

St Maurice's Churchyard

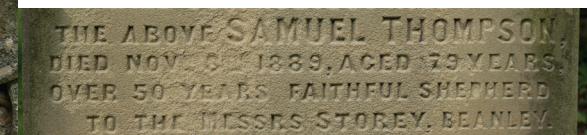
EGLINGHAM, NORTHUMBERLAND



God's Acre



There has been a Christian burial place in Eglingham for more than a thousand years. The surviving gravestones are historical treasures which should be preserved. They reveal much about the cultural heritage of this community, and their inscriptions can provide a fascinating insight into past lives. On the south side of the tower, the table top memorial belonging to the Storey family of Beanley records many generations and over 100 years of their family's history. Other gravestones tell tragic tales of infant mortality, but also positive stories of longevity and faithful service in the parish.

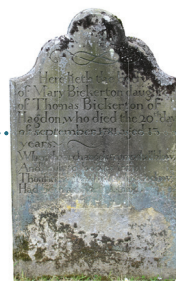


In the **Middle Ages**, the churchyard was used for bustling fairs and noisy markets which were an important source of income for the priest. Those in the parish with power and influence had the privilege of being buried under the church floor and in family vaults. In contrast, the poor were buried in unmarked graves covered in a simple shroud with no coffin, and it was common for graves to be reused. In a practice which continues today, bodies were laid on their back with the head facing east. The exception was for priests who were buried facing west so they would rise in front of their congregation at the second coming of Christ.



3 SMALLPOX STONES

Two stones identify the burials of **MARY BICKERTON** and **JOHN PAXTON** who were neighbours in life and death. Both children died of smallpox in 1781 within a few weeks of each other. They were from coal mining families, living and working at Hagdon on the moors above Eglingham. Mary and John's burial register entries mark the first recorded occasions of smallpox and, in the following 14 years, there would be a further 30 deaths, all but two being children. It is not known why these poor children have headstones, perhaps the landowner or mining operator was moved to mark their passing. Mary's handsome memorial has an epitaph composed by Charles Wesley – common on children's graves at this time.



4 THE LOST MAIDEN

This small marble gravestone, delicately carved with roses symbolising both love and beauty, is dedicated to 27-year-old servant girl **ANNIE GREY**. In November 1890, she left work near Whittingham to walk home. The last part of her five-mile journey involved crossing the footbridge across the River Breamish close to her parent's house at Brandon. That night there was a violent storm and the wooden footbridge was swept away in the floodwaters. After a week, when she had not returned to work, the police began an investigation. Her hat was found on the river bank, and it was feared she had drowned, but mysteriously, no one knew exactly what had happened. Annie's body was eventually found five months later, trapped in willow branches, 18 miles downstream in the River Till. Her father recognised her decomposed body and the little handkerchief from her pocket.



*The mighty flood in darkness rolled
In silence on its way;
It swept away from home and friends
The loving Annie Gray*

*Poor Annie Gray, your fate we mourn,
And feel for your parents dear;
Time's gentle hand their wound will soothe,
And hope their hearts will cheer*

Annie's tragic story was immortalised in the 23-verse ballad of *The Lost Maiden*, by James Thomson, a poet and gardener at Shawdon Hall. Her gravestone, erected nine years after her death, was paid for by 130 local inhabitants. After a long period of damage and neglect this monument was sympathetically and generously restored by Bart Endean in 2024, and the story of her sad and untimely death revived for another generation.



A Self-guided Tour of the Churchyard



ERECTED BY PUBLIC
SUBSCRIPTION,
IN MEMORY OF
ANNIE GREY,
WHO WAS DROWNED IN
THE BREAMISH NEAR
BRANDON NOV. 2. 1890.

5 DOUBLE BOULDER STONES

Near the churchyard gate, **ELIZABETH ANDERSON**'s unusual memorial is made from two huge granite boulders placed one on top of the other, and secured on what is thought to be a medieval cross socket base. The daughter of a shepherding family, Elizabeth was born high in the Cheviot Hills and came to work in Eglingham as a young woman. She died in 1875 of typhoid fever aged only 22.

Caused by poor sanitation and spread by bacteria in contaminated food and water, typhoid can cause serious complications. In Elizabeth's case it was fatal.

The stones, rounded by thousands of years of water erosion, were carefully chosen from the River Breamish by her grieving family. Elizabeth's younger sister Isabella, who lived to be 88, has a similar memorial in Ingram churchyard close to the river.



2 BLACKSMITH'S STONE

This small, but elaborately decorated, stone is a memorial to **WILLIAM HUMBLE** and his five children. Dated 1749, it is a unique example of 18th century folk art which is rare in Northumberland. The carving illustrates a touching theatrical scene centred around his blacksmith's shop which is full of symbolism surrounding death and resurrection. The tools of his trade - anvil, hammer and horseshoe - ensured everyone knew he was the village blacksmith. The twin angels hold back the pleated drapes giving a last glimpse into the smithy before the curtains finally closed on his life on earth and began his resurrection from this life to the next.



1 BURN FAMILY

The fine Victorian Burn's family gravestone, from monumental masons in Newcastle, has a sentimental carving of a Weeping Willow. Many generations of this family were rooted in the village of Eglingham. They volunteered support for the church, parish council, school and village hall. For over 100 years, they earned their living as innkeepers. **THOMAS BURN** was a master carpenter until in the early 1850s when, in his 60s, he also became the tenant and landlord of the recently extended Tankerville Arms. After his death his wife, **ELIZABETH BURN**, ran the inn for eight years, followed by their youngest son **EDWARD BURN** who retired after 27 years. Edward's son, Thomas, who is also buried in this churchyard, continued the family tradition for another 55 years, finally retiring childless, aged 81 in 1951.

