

**Church of St. John the Baptist, Westbourne, West Sussex**

**Record of the memorials of the churchyard and church**

**Introduction**

This record was carried out between 1999 and 2001, by a team experienced in the work, made up of members of the parish and of NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies). The long-term members of the group were:

Daphne Cooper	Beryl Linder
Janna Cundall	Keith Linder
Shirley Harvey-Whiting	June Marshall
Josephine Hallett	Daphne Meryon
Veronica Jay	Peter Meryon
John Lamplugh	Jill Storer

The plans were surveyed and drawn by Janna Cundall, and the index was made by Keith and Beryl Linder. We are obliged to Mr. and Mrs. O. Kirrage of the Old Rectory, Westbourne, and Mr. and Mrs. N. Briggs of Coachman's, Old Rectory Close, for kindly allowing us to record the fragments of memorials found on their properties; and we express grateful thanks to Miss Susan Judd for her advice on geology, and to the Portsdown branch of NADFAS for their generous sponsorship.

The record has been carefully checked, on site and against the church registers, and should be reasonably accurate. Copies are deposited with:

Westbourne Parish Church Council  
West Sussex Record Office  
The National Monuments Record, the public archive of English Heritage

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**Transcripts of J. H. Sperling**

The Revd. John Hanson Sperling, rector of Westbourne 1862-1871, made transcripts of most of the Westbourne memorials, which he published in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* XXII (1870). These provided us with a useful check, and are particularly valuable where stones have been lost or become worn. There are however omissions and a fair number of errors in Sperling's work, so that a new and fuller record has been worthwhile. Details taken from Sperling are entered in square brackets in our record. Twenty-seven of the churchyard memorials transcribed by Sperling are no longer extant, and searchers are advised to consult his work as well as ours.

## The Record

We follow in general the comprehensive method advocated by the Council of British Archaeology; a form is completed for each memorial which gives a drawing or photograph as well as a *verbatim* copy of the inscription, and other data such as material, dimensions and condition of the monument. The form we use is based on the one published by C.B.A., with the addition of a section for the entry in the burial register, which we find to be an essential check. The registers themselves are not always reliable, and some inconsistencies remain between the inscriptions and the church records.

## Numbering

We divided the churchyard into sections based on the cardinal points in relation to the church and on the main paths, starting in the SE corner and proceeding clockwise: SE, SW, W, NW, NWB, NEB and NE (the two long north sections are subdivided). Within these sections the numbering runs N to S down the rows. Section letters are prefixed to the individual numbers, as for instance SW 60.

Displaced footstones were given a separate number and form for the purpose of recording, but are not included in the total tally or index, apart from a few cases where the headstone has been lost, leaving the footstone as the only surviving memorial, and the initials and date could be matched with an entry in Sperling or the burial register.

Memorials in the churchyard, including displaced footstones, are numbered:	SE 1 - NE 338
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Memorials inside the church, including fragments from the churchyard, are numbered:	wall monuments	CW 401 - 432
	floor slabs	C 501 - 557

Fragments found in neighbouring properties are numbered:	OR 601 - 669
	ORC 670 - 672

The total number of memorials is 413, commemorating 736 persons. Of this total, 368 are or were originally in the churchyard, and 45 are interior monuments properly speaking.

Other inscriptions on *in memoriam* gifts to the church are covered by NADFAS in their record of the church furnishings, 2002.

## **The church**

The present building is not older than the 13c. An earlier church is likely to have existed, but direct evidence is lacking. The village of Westbourne, known formerly simply as Bourne, was substantial enough in the 11c. to merit the holding of an annual fair, for which permission was granted to the Earl of Arundel in 1071; the appointed day was August 28, the feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, which is the unusual dedication of the church.

The building was altered in the late 14c., and considerably reconstructed around 1500, under the patronage of the Earls of Arundel. A thorough restoration was organised in the 1860's by the Revd. J. H. Sperling.

Westbourne parish formerly extended southwards to the seaboard and included the hamlets of Hermitage, Prinsted and Nutbourne, which had medieval chapels of ease, without burial rights. These communities were taken into the new ecclesiastical parish of Southbourne, created in the 1870's when the new church of St. John the Evangelist was built; Southbourne parishioners continued to share the cemetery at Westbourne.

Westbourne has historically been closely connected with Stansted in Stoughton parish, whose owners long held the manor and avowson inherited from the earls of Arundel. There has also been a close relationship with the neighbouring westward parish of Warblington/Emsworth, which lies just across the Hampshire border.

## **The churchyard**

This occupies an area of just under an acre, which was the traditional size of the medieval church enclosure. The church is sited oddly close to the eastern boundary, and the northern section is unusually large, doubtless because the main entrance is on that side. The churchyard is bounded on the southwest by an 18c. mill leat running from the Ems down to Lumley, and for the rest by a flint wall topped by handsome coping stones that are at least 200 years old. The lych-gate and south porch were built, and the north porch rebuilt, in the 1860's. Notable features of the churchyard are the handsome 18c. headstones with carving, and the rare yew avenue, which was planted about 500 years ago.

The yard was officially closed in May 1860 when the new Westbourne cemetery was opened. After this date, interment at the church was permitted only in existing substantially-built family graves.

The churchyard has been well maintained, and an area on the northwest side is reserved as meadowland, supporting various species of wild flowers.

## **The memorials**

Many memorials remain in their original position in this churchyard. Footstones however have been removed, and re-used, along with some fallen and broken headstones, in various locations: the path to the water-tank; the paving round the war memorial; the nave floor inside the church; and the gardens of two neighbouring houses.

Condition is generally good, but inscriptions tend to be very worn, particularly in positions beneath trees.

The oldest gravestones are two medieval taper-sided slabs, without inscription, which are probably not *in situ* in the churchyard but came from inside the church. The oldest inscribed churchyard memorial is to Richard Pay, 1698, and the memorials effectively represent the period from around 1700 to 1860, when the churchyard was closed. After that we have only five inscriptions relating to permitted interments in family graves, plus the war memorials of 1919 and 1945.

An unusual number of headstones from the first half of the 18c. indicates considerable prosperity in a rural village of that period. From the 1830's, more examples of the heavier, grander type of tomb appear: the gentry were now being buried in the churchyard rather than inside the church, and the style of these monuments – coped stones and tapered slabs – shows the influence of the medieval revival becoming fashionable.

There is no good local stone in this area, and the churchyard memorials demonstrate remarkable fidelity to the limestone of the Portland/Purbeck region, that was brought by sea along the coast from Dorset. There are only two examples of other stone, one of Welsh slate and one of imported white marble from Italy, plus the granite of the 1919 war memorial. Memorials inside the church cover a longer period – 1666 to 1972 – and show a wider variety of material.

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