

Village Echoes

Anyone familiar with Goudhurst and Kilndown will appreciate that there are a large number of listed buildings in the parish. What may not be generally known, however, is the extent to which listing applies to much smaller structures. There are over twenty memorials in St Mary's churchyard and four in Kilndown churchyard which have had listed status conferred upon them.

In Goudhurst most of the listed memorials date from the 17th or early 18th century and are either chest tombs or headstones with features of architectural interest. The earliest one is a chest tomb for Edward Roade of Combourne dated 1631, and the most recent is that of Daniel West, timber merchant, who died in 1847. Over the centuries, nature and the weather have eroded some inscriptions altogether and made others difficult to decipher, and this was already true when the listing was done. However, thanks to records made in the 1920s, it is possible to identify the families or individuals connected with these memorials, notably that of Edward Roade whose original inscription has now disappeared completely.

Many of the features described by Historic England in their listings relate to moulded corner piers, scrolls, and ornate panels which are probably fairly commonplace. However, others are more unusual, such as the relief of a hunting dog, the head and legs of which are still clearly visible although the body is beginning to disappear under a covering of lichen: this can be seen on the end of one of three chest tombs, on the right of the path leading to the church door, commemorating the 17th century Thorpe family. Three 18th century Williams family headstones display cherubs' heads, a rayed crown, a serpent biting its tail and an open book, while the Collens family from the early 1800s chose an angel blowing a trumpet, a winged female figure with an open book, and death with his scythe and an hourglass.

Another common symbol of mortality, the skull and cross bones, is depicted on the small headstone of Robert Fuller, a yeoman who died in 1678. For obvious - but entirely misplaced - reasons, this is known locally as the "pirate's grave" (more information about Fuller can be found on the Local History Society website under "People").

Memorials to the Groombridge family originally included a triple headed stone with a draped cloth and garlands hanging from a ribbon bow. The headstone itself is now in pieces, with only the section with the garlands visible under the bush which has enveloped the grave.

Kilndown churchyard's four listed memorials all date from the 19th century. Two of these relate to the Beresford and Beresford-Hope family of Bedgebury Park, while the other two remember John, 2nd Baron Decies, and Emily Harrison, wife of Henry Harrison, the first Vicar of Kilndown. These tombs are more elaborate than any in Goudhurst and were constructed of more durable materials such as granite, marble and wrought iron. The Decies tomb is in the form of a medieval style chest with a cross and other elaborate decoration, and that of Harrison is a decorative wrought iron cross.

All the listed headstones are described in more detail on the Historic England website <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

Local History Society

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