

PRESERVED IN STONE

THE FRAGILE MONUMENTS OF GLASSMAKERS

Nick Baker

Memorials to some of the people who made Stourbridge the global centre of glassmaking can be found in local churchyards. Many of these poignant and fragile monuments are falling into decay so visit them soon.

St Mary's Churchyard, Old Swinford

The oldest monuments are located at St Mary's, Old Swinford. Two early nineteenth-century stones close by the main entrance commemorate members of the Batchelor family. The Batchelors were amongst a first generation of English glassmakers who married into, and inherited from, the original Huguenot craftsmen (in their case the Henzeys) of the seventeenth century.

On the opposite side of the church is a veritable 'townscape' of later monuments marking where the great, good and rich of Stourbridge – including glassmakers – were interred. The adjacent 'chest tombs' of the Grazebrook and Littlewood families demonstrate the assault from destruction that make their long-term survival doubtful – overwhelming vegetation, smashed stones from attempts to prise the grave open and an inappropriate restoration that involved laying the stones flat.

St Peter's Churchyard, Kingswinford

The oldest graves found here are of the Richardson family, with an early nineteenth-century stone listing several members who were glass furnace builders.

The relatively modern (yet still overgrown) churchyard extension holds two of the most important glass artists from the turn of the twentieth century: George Woodall (d.1925) – described as 'The most brilliant of the cameo engravers' – and Joshua Hogetts (d. 1933).

Meanwhile an impressive obelisk commemorates the Skidmore-Westwood family, whose 1930s bequest of glass to the old Brierley Hill Urban District Council formed the basis of a local public collection and is still catalogued under their name at Broadfield House Glass Museum.

Holy Trinity Church, Wordsley

Known as 'The Parish Church of the Glassmakers' Holy Trinity Wordsley contains a number of notable individuals and families. There are large impressively-marked Richardson, Webb and Stuart



Gravestone of Owen Gibbons, first Principal of Wordsley School of Art.

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vaults. Sadly some of these have also suffered from vandalism, ironically after a massive effort to clear away destructive undergrowth.

Fortunately, the grave marker of John Northwood (d.1902), whose cameo reproduction Portland Vase of 1876 represented a triumph of glass manufacture, remains intact.

The Northwood vault is surmounted by a chest-tomb complete with a marble 'Portland Vase'. Also at Wordsley is a delightful gravestone to

Owen Gibbons (d.1911), first Principal of the Wordsley School of Art, with a carved trophy of artist's materials.

Amblecote Holy Trinity, St James Churchyard and Stourbridge Cemetery

The nearby churchyard of Amblecote Holy Trinity contains two of the Bohemian engravers recruited to the Stourbridge industry in the nineteenth century: Adolph Zinke (d.1926) and William Fritsche (d.1924). Bohemians can also be found at Wollaston St James Churchyard and Stourbridge Cemetery. The latter opened in 1879 to take the pressure of overcrowded church and chapel burial grounds. Here lie Ludwig Kny (d.1937), Frederick Kny (d.1906), Joseph Keller (d.1934) and Joseph Palme (d.1930), amongst others, including a veritable plantation of Webbs. There is a poignant monument to several infant children, offspring of Jules Barbe, who worked at the Dennis Glassworks from the 1870s; whilst that of William Price (d.1896) proudly declares he was 'Secretary of the Glass Cutters and Odd Fellows Friendly Societies'. ●

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Further Information

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