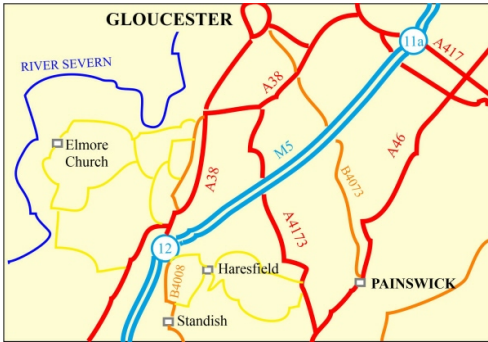


Tour 3

GLOUCESTERSHIRE GRAVEYARDS



Taking a trip around graveyards might seem a rather morbid past time, but these are no ordinary graveyards. Within these ancient sacred grounds hidden away in villages only a stones throw from the busy M5 are historic works of art. Unique carved tombs and memorials created by local masons up to 350 years ago with mysterious symbols and grotesque figures conveying the ambitions of long forgotten families.



The four church graveyards which I visited in May 2009 have within their bounds some of the finest carved chest tombs and gravestones in the country. If it was not for their role as memorials they deserve to have been put on show in a museum such is the quality and unique nature of the work. Thankfully the local stone is durable so that much of the work is still clearly defined although you might be puzzled by the meaning of some of the more grotesque carvings.

To find the graveyards using Google Maps/ Street View or your sat nav just enter the postcodes listed under each title. If visiting the graveyards please respect this hallowed ground and it may be best to avoid times when services are taking place.

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST'S CHURCH, ELMORE, GL2 3SP

Hidden away behind trees alongside a road which meanders close to the River Severn is the remote Elmore church (a few miles south west of the village itself). On first approach there are only a few memorials of interest but walk behind the building and there are some of the finest examples. The cherubs with wings were a 18th century symbol representing resurrection.





The Knowles family tomb at Elmore is arguably the finest of its type on display in a church graveyard anywhere in the country. It is packed with every conceivable symbol and figure carved in glorious detail and yet is over 300 years old.

ST PETER'S CHURCH, HARESFIELD, GL10 3EQ.

Accessed down a private drive by the Vicarage is this wonderful lonely church surrounded by the most fabulously carved tombs. The lyre shaped ends with scrolled consols in the bottom corners was a popular classical form during the early 18th century in this area and was similar to the shape of Dutch gables on the top of late 17th century houses.



ST NICHOLAS'S CHURCH STANDISH, GL10 3EU.

Some of the finest carving and strangest symbolism can be seen at Standish with its graveyard packed with chest tombs. Gravestones and tombs only began appearing in churchyards from the 17th century, before this the area was open with just a single stone cross to show it was consecrated land. Some of the clergy even let their own livestock graze on it! When carved stones began appearing the skull and cross bones was a popular early symbol. It simply represents death and records the rather worrying and morbid attitudes of the age. It has nothing to do with pirates, they simply adopted it as it was a universal symbol of death. Although in my book about gravestones I explain most of these other symbols, even I scratch my head a bit when trying to work out what is going on with the gravestone dating from 1695 pictured here on the right!





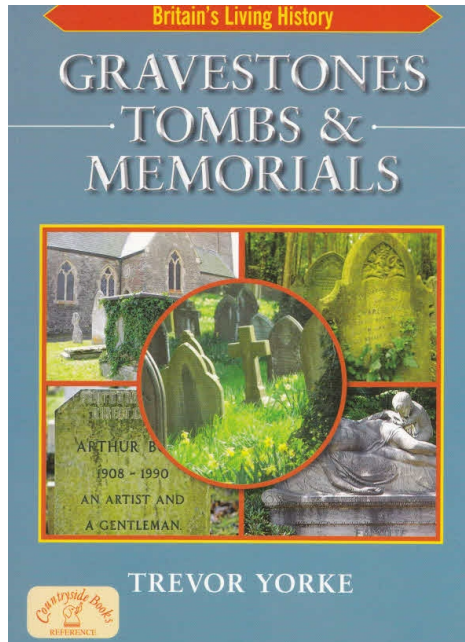
ST MARY'S CHURCH, PAINSWICK, GL6 6UT.

At Painswick there are still many of the early 18th century chest tombs which are unique to this western part of the Cotswolds. Amongst these though are more refined and elegant types which date from the end of that century and compliment the fine houses which stand as a backdrop to this most memorable of graveyards. These late Georgian tombs are more vertical and are often called 'tea caddies' due to their shape. By this period the most popular symbol you find are urns which represent the soul, sometimes with a mourning figure draped over to complete the image of grief. Trees are also common, an upright one signifying life and cut down one death. By the Regency period tombs could become quite plain in form (bottom right) with Greek key a popular decorative form. Painswick graveyard is also famous for its Yew trees (page 6), local folklore states that there should be 99 and if another grew it would be pulled out by the devil ! If you get the time try and count them and see if the Devil has got his work cut out!





If you would like to discover more about memorials then take a look at my book **Gravestones, Tombs and Memorials**. It is packed with photos and drawings showing some of the fantastic carving which can be found around the country and what the symbols and epitaphs actually meant. It is available from Amazon, my publisher's website www.countrysidebooks.co.uk and your local bookshop.



£5.99

64 pages, 113 photos
and drawings (b/w),
A5