

# MMT News

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Newsletter of The Mausolea and Monuments Trust, Registered Charity No. 1063416

## At home in the Necropolis

*Dr Samantha Matthews reports on her recent research on Victorian literary attitudes to mausolea in cemeteries*



*'Le Cimetiere du Pere La Chaise' Colour lithograph after J.J. Chalon, 1822*

Long before William Godwin complained in the *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809) that 'I am not contented to visit the house in Bread-Street where Milton was born, or that in Bunhill-Row where he died, I want to repair

to the place where he now dwells,' graves and tombs have been understood as our 'last home.' The mausoleum is a commemorative structure which uniquely invokes characteristics and associations of domestic architecture. With four walls, a roof, door and (sometimes) windows, the mausoleum can look like a child's drawing of a house. In his 1843 guide to Kensal Green Cemetery, Samuel Laman Blanchard tells of a child visiting Père Lachaise, who 'when mistaking from the size of the buildings their object, he asked as he stopped before one of them, "Who lives here?"' The child's mistake is ironic as well as comic, since this 'house' precludes the living. Rare cases of the living spending time in mausolea, such as Lady Isabel Burton's penchant for holding séances in the famous 'tent' mausoleum constructed for her husband Sir Richard Burton (in Mortlake Roman Catholic Cemetery) only exacerbate the contrast with home life.

During four years researching the attitudes and approaches of nineteenth-century poets to burial-places, I became curious about the problematic status of mausolea. A mausoleum is the most aggressively monumental and substantial commemorative form found in a cemetery; in contrast, the tendency in poetic representations of graves is strongly anti-monumental. Ambitious monuments are usually read as follies, which outlast the fame of the dead to become a satire on human vanity. My readings of Victorian poetry show that despite radical changes in burial practice in the period (from opening the joint stock cemeteries to legalising cremation), poets remained fiercely loyal to the pastoral ideal of Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' (1751). Readers and poets agreed that the ideal grave was simple, grassy, decorated with wildflowers, and marked by a modest stone or none at all.

How do we square this Romantic iconographic ideal with the contrary evidence found in every Victorian cemetery? Urbane Victorians esteemed material monuments highly, and indexed social status to the size, grandeur and location of their memorials. Some families bankrupted themselves to buy a stately monument.

The mausoleum is historically associated with old families who wanted to make a statement of identity separate from the old family vault in the local church. As the stately home asserted local prestige and power, so the architect-designed mausoleum, dwarfing headstones in the churchyard or splendidly isolated on the estate, ensured privacy and distinction from the proletarian dead. The fact that bodies were deposited above ground in triple-lined coffins also appealed to those who sought to preserve the body against decay. As small scale imitations of the grand house, mausolea asserted the old family's unity and strength. Edward FitzGerald, famous for translating the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, was determined not to lie with his family in the flint-faced FitzGerald mausoleum in St. Michael's Churchyard, Boulogne, Suffolk; his grave, about ten metres away, is a pointed rejection of kin. Yet at least from the



*A visitor descends after peeping into the interior of the Burton Mausoleum in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalen, Mortlake, Richmond.*

time of the Industrial Revolution the aristocratic status of mausolea was threatened: the nouveau riche wanted to be squires with country estates, and they wanted mausolea to match.

When in his great novel *Bleak House* (1851) Charles Dickens argued for the interdependence of the highest and lowest, richest and poorest members of society, he chose two burial-places to represent the extremes. Privilege and wealth (and exhausted aristocratic blood) are represented by the ancient Dedlock family's mausoleum in the park at Chesney Wold. This is the current family burial place, replacing the family vault in the church, where 'there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves.' Degradation and poverty are famously represented by 'a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination' in the 'hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene' where the mysterious pauper 'Nemo' is buried. Dickens campaigned against the city churchyards as a source of both physical and moral corruption to the urban population, who lived overlooking the burial-grounds. These two symbols are connected in the person of Lady Dedlock, the haughty woman of mysterious origins married to the squire, Sir Leicester. The threat that her earlier love affair with 'Nemo' will come to light and shame her husband leads to Lady Dedlock's flight, and ultimately she is discovered dead outside the locked churchyard gates, thwarted in her desire to rest on her lover's grave. Lady Dedlock's tragic death is not the end however; her bereaved forgiving husband brings her body back for deposit in the family mausoleum. Gossips 'wondered [that] the ashes of the Dedlocks, entombed in the mausoleum, never rose against the profanation of her company.' However Dickens's message is more forgiving: 'the dead-and-gone Dedlocks take it very calmly, and have never been known to object.' The narrator looks forward to the end of Sir Leicester's heartbreak, when 'the damp door in the mausoleum which shuts so tight, and looks so obdurate, will have opened and relieved him.'

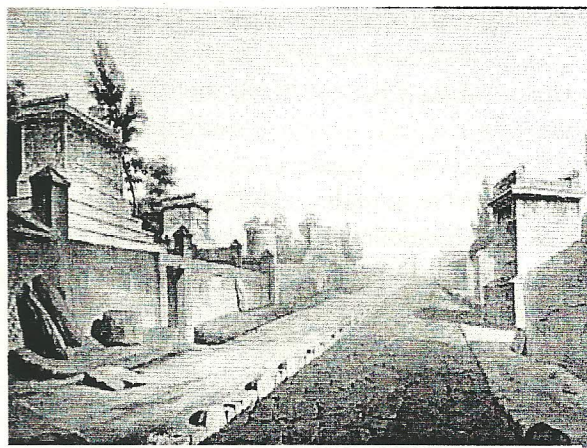
Neither burial-place has a future. The city

churchyard is fatal and doomed under the 1850s Burial Acts; Isabella Holmes, who identifies the *Bleak House* churchyard as the graveyard of St. Mary le Strand in Drury Lane, visited the site in the 1890s, and found 'an asphalted recreation ground, ... often crowded with children using the swings and the seats.' Now the house of Dedlock has fallen, Chesney Wold will be up for sale, and the mausoleum in the lonely park is 'damp' and redundant.

Cemeteries were the future, and in the status-conscious landscape of the joint stock cemetery mausolea gained a new lease of life. Here the upwardly mobile could consolidate wealth and social position by adapting the mausoleum to their own ends. The model for this was Père Lachaise in Paris (opened 1800). Père Lachaise was a fashionable and much copied cemetery, a popular location for promenading and sightseers; the sheer numbers and diversity of mausolea is still remarkable. Blanchard observed of the strong relation between property and fashionable status that 'it is usual with the man of wealth at Paris to possess his town hotel, his country house at St. Cloud, a box at the Italian Opera, *and a tomb in this Cemetery.*' Blanchard protests against this last property investment as a symptom of French narcissism, protesting that 'we have never felt our human sympathies repelled, whilst traversing the English Cemetery, with a suspicion of this kind, - sent back, as from a fruitless errand, by a sound from the hollow mausoleum, which to the ear of imagination might say, "Not at home."' The basis of Blanchard's disapproval is the view that a person's memorial should be a moral judgement on their character. For a grieving family to construct a grand mausoleum in your honour is a forgiveable folly; for you to choose it yourself is culpable and hubristic.

While grand houses in fashionable areas of London seldom stayed in one family for generations, part of a mausoleum's appeal was that it could commemorate name and fame 'in perpetuity.' The concept was sold to the public very much like a new property development. In the early days of Kensal Green, the Company Chairman Sir John Dean Paul ad-

vertised its attractions by constructing a 'show house' - the stolid neoclassical Paul family mausoleum, located on a prominent corner site on the south side of Circle Avenue. This urbane ethos (the desire to see and be seen even after death) encouraged Elizabeth Stone to protest in 1858 against the 'the strange fancy, which can induce persons to prefer to be laid in a gay lounge, the feet of careless, frivolous, and thoughtless promenaders and pleasure-seekers all but treading on your grave.' The character of the fashionable London cemeteries as 'cities of the dead'



*'The Road to Pompeii', RA lecture drawing. Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.*

depends on grand central avenues lined with substantial mausolea; the monuments of Abney Park are often considered to be 'disappointing' because only one of its non-conformist dead occupies a mausoleum.

In 1850, Tennyson's friend William Allingham wrote a poem 'In Highgate Cemetery' which explicitly compared the urban values of London 'Far-spread below' with the suburban charms of Highgate:

Incessant troops from that vast throng  
Withdraw to silent colonies;  
Where houses, lo, are fair and strong,  
Though ruins, all that dwell in these.

He imagines an army of city workers retiring from the field of battle, and coming to rest in the substantial 'houses' of the cemetery. In this dark view of contemporary life, our value system seems to be reversed, so that the 'ruined' dead occupy the best houses. Allingham finds consolation in the pastoral land-

scape of Highgate, where children play under a 'universal' sky. However twenty-five years later the Cemetery was significantly less pastoral. The blind Pre-Raphaelite poet Philip Bourke Marston imagined Highgate as an extension of the city, overtaken by urban expansion and crowded with monuments:

For me no great metropolis of the dead, -  
Highways and byways, squares and crescents  
of death, -

Influenced still by the Romantic desire for pastoral and small-scale burial-places, 'My Grave' identifies the cemetery with the alienating scale and stoniness of the 'metropolis.' The city's frontiers have shifted, encroaching on the suburbs, and ironically reinvigorating the pastoral ideal precisely because it has become more elusive in reality. By the end of the century, the mausoleum was viewed as the final gesture of the upwardly mobile self-made man. Rudyard Kipling, a much more pragmatic writer than Marston, wrote in 1896 'The Mary Gloster' a poem in which a dying shipping magnate talks to his only son about his final resting place. Sir Anthony Gloster is proud of his success and new baronetcy, but frustrated in his desire to build a Gloster dynasty, his wealth has become a burden. Gloster's beloved wife Mary 'died in Macassar Straits' and was buried at sea; the ship of the title is named for her. Dick, blessed with all the advantages his father could buy ('Harrer an' Trinity College'), won't join the family business, and lives the aesthete's life on his father's money. Dick is married but childless, and Sir Anthony laments 'there isn't even a grandchild, an' the Gloster family's done.' As in *Bleak House*, opposing values are represented by different burial-places. Before his disillusion, Gloster bought a vault in the fashionable Woking Cemetery at Brookwood; now all he wants is to be reunited with Mary in her watery grave. However, he fears that this dying wish might lead to his will being contested on the grounds of insanity, and blames himself: 'It come o' hoping for grandsons and buying that Wokin' vault.' He pathetically protests that 'I wouldn't trust 'em at Wokin'; we're safer at sea again,' but the poem ends without the reader knowing whether Dick will do his duty. Gloster dies believing that he is going down with his ship: the

fashionable vault is clearly not his rightful 'last home,' and should remain empty.

Grand mausolea attract contemporary visitors to major Victorian cemeteries; we are curious about this alien concept of burial, and find it hard to resist the desire to peer inside. Yet these abandoned 'homes' can also be pathetic. Mausolea are especially vulnerable to break-ins and vandalism, resulting in access points being cemented or bricked-up, seriously damaging their architectural unity. Victorian mausolea are the last great examples of ambitious and independent commemorative structures in our cemeteries, and these fascinating anachronisms deserve our attention and protection.

*Dr Matthews completed a PhD in Representations of the Grave in Nineteenth-century Poetry in 1998, and teaches English Literature at University College London and Cultural Studies at Central St Martins School of Art and Design. She has published on the graves of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Alfred Tennyson, and is preparing her first book for publication.*

### *Message from the Chairman*

Since the last issue of the MMT Newsletter in September 2000, the Mausolea and Monuments Trust has been stealthily thriving. Our list of Friends, all of whom receive our Newsletter, continues to grow and we have just completed Phase 2 of our restoration of the Sacheverell-Bateman Mausoleum at Morley in Derbyshire. Carried out under the direction of Mark Parsons of Anthony Short and Partners, the work included repairs to the stonework of the west gable and parapet of the mausoleum, built to the designs of G. F. Bodley in 1897. The warm red sandstone from which the mausoleum is built had deteriorated badly in some areas, especially the pricklier details, but we were able to effect the repairs with minimal replacement of stonework. Two wrought-iron cross finials have also been reinstated on the apex of both gables. The work, which cost £6400.38, was in part generously funded by English Heritage. The next phase of the restoration will comprise the repair of a fragment of grit-stone walling next to the mausoleum, said to be the remains of an ancient manor house

that stood on the site, and the conservation of the iron grille in front of the entrance. This work will cost £9,728, so we will have to start fundraising soon!

Some of our Friends may have been wondering how the MMT Gazetteer of Mausolea is going? The project, for which the MMT received a grant from the Pilgrim Trust, is now back on course following the appointment of Dr Clare Graham, who will finish off Will Palin's substantial corpus of information and make it ready for publication. Dr Graham has already made some interesting new additions to the Gazetteer and we are most fortunate to secure her services. Thanks are also due to Dr Lynn Pearson, author of the forthcoming Shire Album on Mausolea, who has kindly made available to the MMT the list of mausolea she compiled while researching her book. *The Shire Book of Mausoleums* (yet another title from this extraordinary publishing phenomenon, joining Dr Pearson's earlier guide in this series, *Discovering Famous Graves*) will be published in the autumn, we will review it in the MMT Newsletter when it appears.

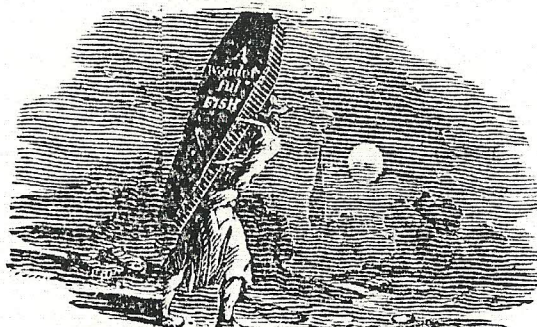
Melancholy news came at the end of last year with William Filmer Sankey standing down as our Treasurer, a post he has effectively occupied since the foundation of the MMT in 1997. William, who was for many years Chairman of the Victorian Society, has taken up a new post as a historian with the well-known engineering firm, Alan Baxter & Associates. We are pleased that he will continue to serve the MMT as a Trustee. Ian Johnson has

heroically stepped into the breach and become our new Treasurer. Ian already serves the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery in this capacity, so will not be taken aback by the curious nature of some of our expenses!

The spectre of depleted coffers led us to hold a fundraising supper on the first of February. The venue was Southside House, an astonishingly atmospheric mansion overlooking Wimbledon Common, lent to us for the occasion by Mr Adam Munthe and the Trustees of Southside House. The purpose of the evening was to raise funds and highlight our cause. We had a

good turnout of luminaries from grant-giving organisations, the press and from the world of architectural history. A fine supper, serenely prepared and orchestrated by our own wonderful Leanne Targett-Parker, was served in the Drawing Room (where Emma Hamilton once struck her 'attitudes'), illuminated by crystal girandoles groaning with blazing candles. We made nearly £2,000 and gifts are still coming in (£5,000 the other day). The evening also generated a tremendous amount of goodwill and promises of publicity. Particular thanks are due to Barnaby Rogerson, a Trustee of the Pennington Mellor Munthe Charitable Trust for making this event possible, and to Mary Miers, Trustee of the MMT, for having had the idea in the first place. Thanks too, to all the Trustees who do things on behalf of the MMT, we couldn't survive without you.

For those Friends who are interested in reading about mausolea, there is an interesting article in the current issue of Church Monuments, the Journal of the Church Monuments Society (vol. xv, 2000, pp.71-88). Written by Mathew Craske, it is entitled 'Entombed like an Egyptian; an Eighteenth Century Surgeon's Extravagant Mausoleum to preserve his Mortal Remains' and discusses the pyramid erected by



'A Wonderful Fish' Woodcut by Thomas Bewick, 1800

Francis Douce in 1748 at Lower Wallop in Hampshire. Not only was the form of the mausoleum inspired by Egyptian models, but Douce left instructions for the bodies of himself and his wife to be embalmed. Craske's article gives a fascinating account of the vogue for embalming in the eighteenth-century and its avowed purpose, to preserve the deceased intact in readiness for the Last Trump!

Finally, can I commend to you our fundraising sheet of 'Current Projects' enclosed with this Newsletter, some small and all attainable.

Tim Knox

### *MMT Gazetteer of Mausolea*

I am happy to report that we have been making good progress with this project, which is being funded by the Pilgrim Trust and was started off by Will Palin as the MMT's caseworker back in 1999. He has visited, photographed and written up mausolea right across the country but has been unable to make the final push to complete the gazetteer since taking up a full-time position at the Soane Museum. I was delighted to accept the MMT's invitation to finish off the job at the end of last year, and have now done most of the remaining writing and editing. The gazetteer itself should be out by the end of the year. It will not be a glossy volume but is rather intended to be seen as a work in progress, which can feed into future MMT publications. It will look rather like the reports published by SAVE Britain's Heritage, and like them its primary purpose will be to stimulate public awareness of a group of buildings which despite their architectural significance are all too often physically neglected, or even threat-

ened. There will be a 5000-word introduction and bibliography, followed by an indexed and illustrated gazetteer of the mausolea themselves. We are concentrating on those built in England before 1939 and at the moment we have details for just over 300; architecturally they form a fascinatingly diverse, and occasionally eccentric, group. We hope that we have picked up on all the obvious examples (e.g. any mentioned by the *Buildings of England* or listed by English Heritage) but we are uncomfortably aware that some smaller or more obscurely sited mausolea, in particular, may have been missed out. If anyone reading this knows of any hidden treasures of this kind, I would be pleased to receive details via the MMT office as there is still time to include these.

*The other area where we would be grateful for your help is with photography. It will add greatly to the reference value of the gazetteer if we can include an illustration of every mausoleum but at the moment there are some gaps, especially in areas further away from London, such as Cornwall and Yorkshire. No ambitious feats of technology are required - 35mm colour slides or prints would be perfectly adequate. If you would be interested in helping out, again please do let me know.*

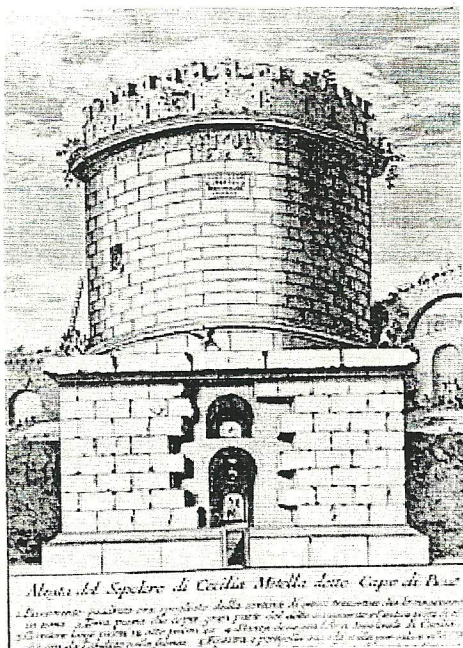
Clare Graham  
April 2001

### *Progress of the MMT Friends*

Since writing about the formation of the Friends of the MMT in the last newsletter, the number has dramatically increased. I will be sending out approximately 500 newsletters, which considering the Friends has only been up and running for about a year is incredibly pleasing.

The source of the increase comes from several areas. Existing Friends pass on names and addresses of other interested friends, (something that is an integral way of increasing membership) and a discovery of a lot of correspondence, dealt with initially by Dr Jill Allibone, where the writers have been contacted again and added to the list of Friends.

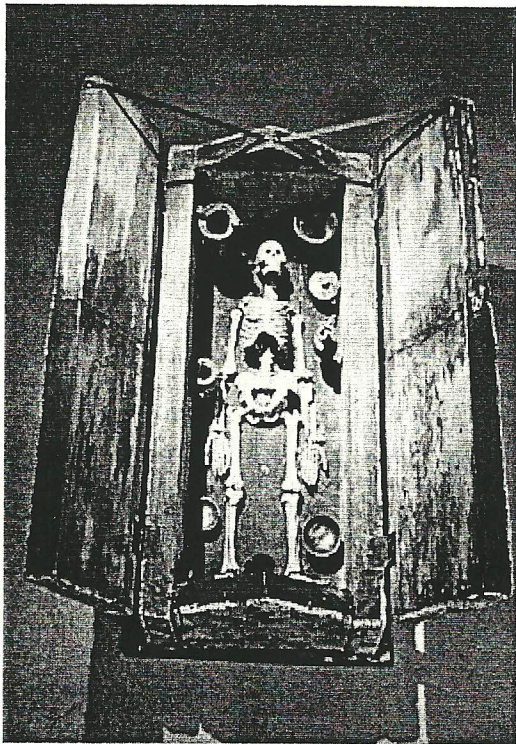
Increasing the number of Friends in a large way



*The Tomb of Cecilia Metella from Bartoli's 'Gli Antichi Sepulchri', 1768. This famous Roman structure was to inspire many 18th and 19th-century tomb builders in England.*

is done by helping other similar organisations with mail shots and them in turn sending out our newsletters. The MMT has developed this sort of relationship with The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery; you would all have received the details about the forthcoming book on Kensal Green Cemetery. This relationship with other organisations is incredibly valuable as one is targeting interested people to start with, rather than hoping for their interest on a rather obscure subject. My project for this year is to try and develop further relationships like this to increase our database and hopefully our fundraising capabilities.

Plans are currently being developed to host a function with the MMT as a host of like-minded organisations at a drinks party to ac-



*Cork Model of an Etruscan Tomb from the collection of Sir John Soane. Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.*

quaint us with each other. This will keep everyone involved about the developments of each organisation as well as obtaining or giving help where needed.

*Leanne Targett-Parker*

## Book Review

### *English Churchyard Memorials*

By Hilary Lees

Published 2000 by Tempus Publishing Ltd,  
£19.99 (p & p free when quoting this review)  
Tel: 01453 88 33 00

In his introduction, the Prince of Wales recommends this book to those who, in the words of the antiquarian John Aubrey, like "grubbing in churchyards". There can surely be no one more 'grubby', than Hilary Lees, whose extensive and nation-wide research has led to this delightful and well illustrated overview of the large range of gravestones, tombs, crosses and other structures that survive in many of our sleepy churchyards.

Did you know, for instance, that the pathway through the lych gate at Kilkhampton in Cornwall has a large and raised centrally placed stone slab for the bearing of a coffin? So large is this slab that one suspects that nowadays such a feature would be banished as a "trip hazard and a Health and Safety risk". But here, reverence for the dead comes first, for only they are placed centrally within the lych gate structure and on the main axis with the Church door beyond. Those of us who survive must walk around and await our turn.

This respect of death and the fear of the after-world has inspired works of great art, beauty and remarkable variety. There are the numerous different types of tombs which one can find. Chest tombs, pedestal tombs, table tombs and 'Greek Revival' tombs are common enough, but then there are also rather sinister looking 'body stones' often very early, plain almost pagan-looking affairs with bold carving. More common and rightly not illustrated are those rather nasty Victorian versions, precision cut like a German Frankfurter.

The most beautiful chest tombs of all are the semi-circular topped 'Bale' tombs which are mostly found in the Cotswold district of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, where there was of course an abundance of beautiful limestone to carve them out of. Indeed the Cotswolds ap-

pear to be where most of the finest monuments can be found, perhaps because of its wealth as a wool producing area during the C16th and C17th. Fortunately this is also the area where Hilary Lees lives.

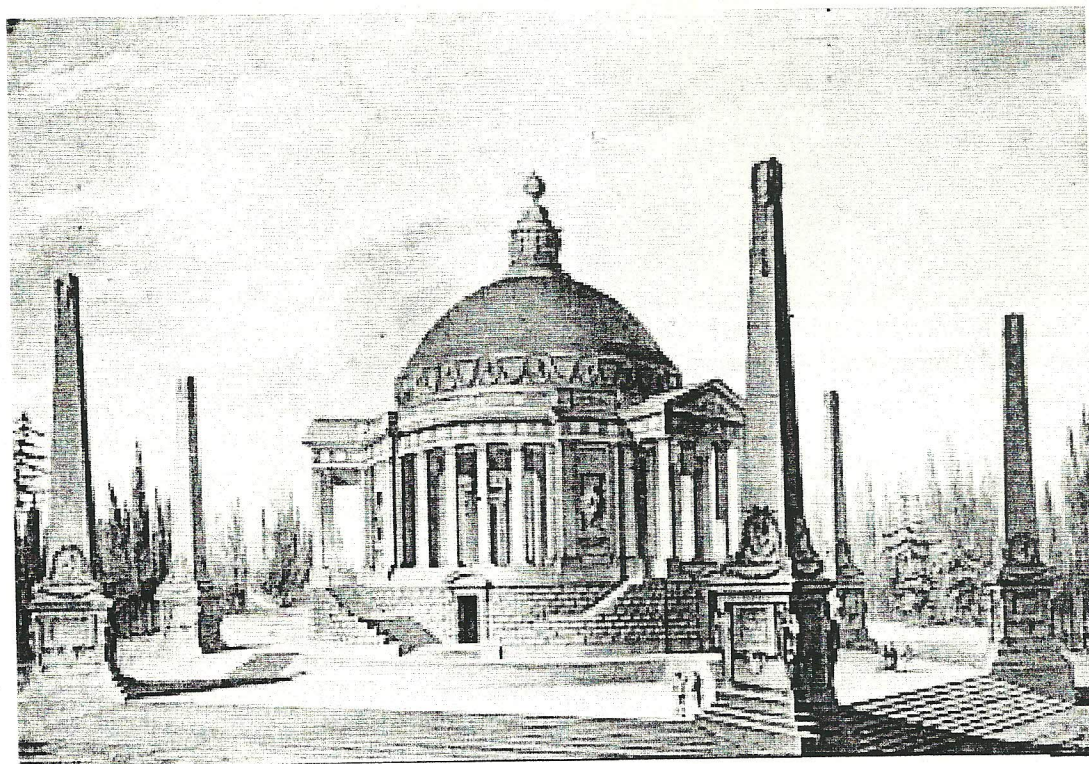
With a wealth of information about monument types, symbolism, inscriptions and materials, there are also some poignant quotes and descriptions that somehow convey the spirit of Churchyards. For instance on the first Sunday in May 1871, Parson Kilvert wrote in his diary "I went into the churchyard under the feathering larch which sweeps over the gate. The ivy grown old church with its noble tower stood beautiful and silent among the elms at its feet. Everything was still. No-one was about or moving and the only sound was the singing of birds..." The church he was describing was Langley Burrell, but it could have been many other places also. Indeed, one of my most early and most vivid memories as a child was in secluded Brabourne Churchyard in Kent where a gravestone read "...and if you listen in the rustle of the leaves, you will hear that she is here".

We are fortunate that so many of these ancient places survive, but it is depressing to note how ugly so often the modern tombstone has become. Hilary Lees bravely illustrates one or

two exceptions, but by and large the design of modern mass-produced gravestones is a continuing blight. Alien granites, hard and indestructible, sit in gravel enclosures of various shrill colours, including that particularly terrible green that John Betjeman used to call 'creme de menthe'. Even in limestone areas, few bother to use the local material, and gravestones in Stow on the Wold will now be identical to those erected in Southend on Sea or Stockton on Tees. Perhaps this book should be sent as an educative tool each and every Church Authority who assess applications for new tomb stones.

While this book lists Mausolea and Monuments which have been statutorily listed at grades I and II\*, we know from the experience of drafting the Monuments and Mausoleum Trust Gazetteer that these lists are often inadequate, and that much of importance will remain undocumented. It must therefore be hoped that this book will stimulate further research and recording of all types of monument nationwide. In the meantime however, Hilary Lees has reopened our eyes to the joys of 'grubbing', and this book will be an invaluable and pleasurable addition to anyone's library.

*Ptolemy Dean*



Design for a Mausoleum for Frederick Prince of Wales by William Chambers, 1751