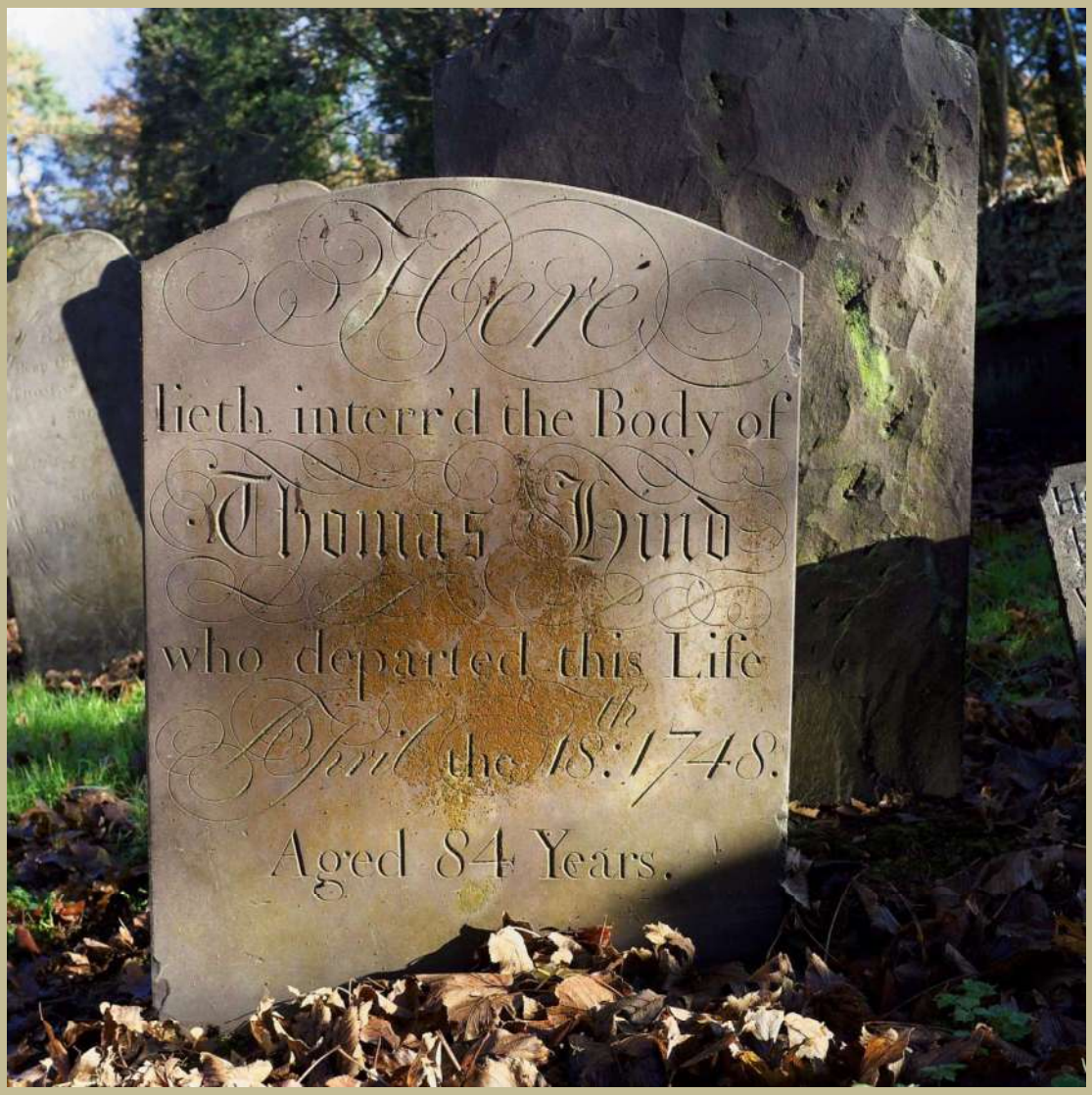
SWITHLAND SLATE HEADSTONES

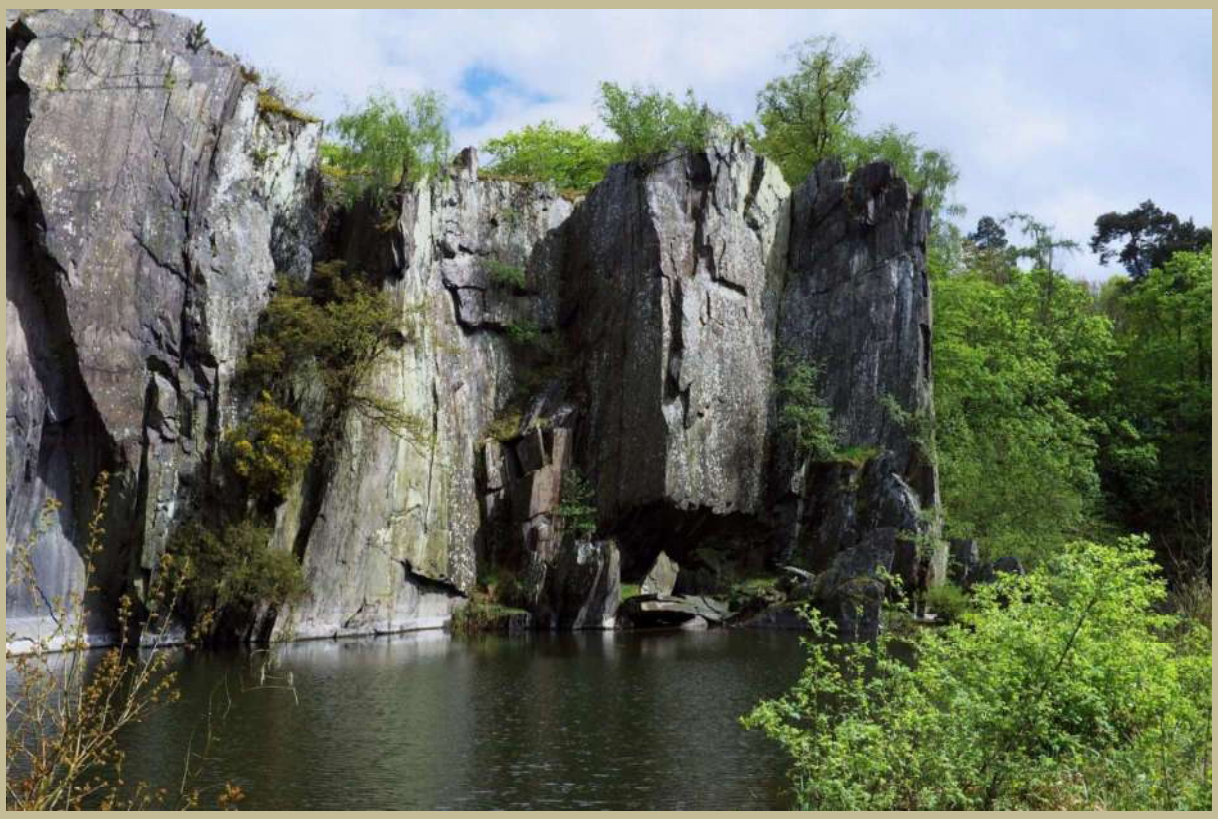
An Illustrated Survey



David Lea

"The slates...when engraven by a skilful hand, produce letters, etc., superior to any other sort of stone which is used for the same purpose." *

"Loveliest of all, though, are the purple, green or blue slate headstones from the Charnwood Forest quarries to be seen in Leicestershire..." **



A slate pit within the beautiful private grounds of The Brand, near Woodhouse Eaves, Leicestershire. Unlike the now-fenced pits in Swithland Wood (a public country park), this is totally unfenced though the cliff face is some 70 feet in height. The Brand grounds are sometimes opened to the public.

Numbers for photographs refer to the page on which the photograph appears.

(* John Nichols: see Note a; ** Sacheverell Sitwell: see Note b)

Thanks to Penny Duggan of Bexley Historical Society for checking the Henry Bailey headstone in the parish churchyard for me and photographing it.

Cover photo: Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. Headstone of Thomas Hind, 1748.

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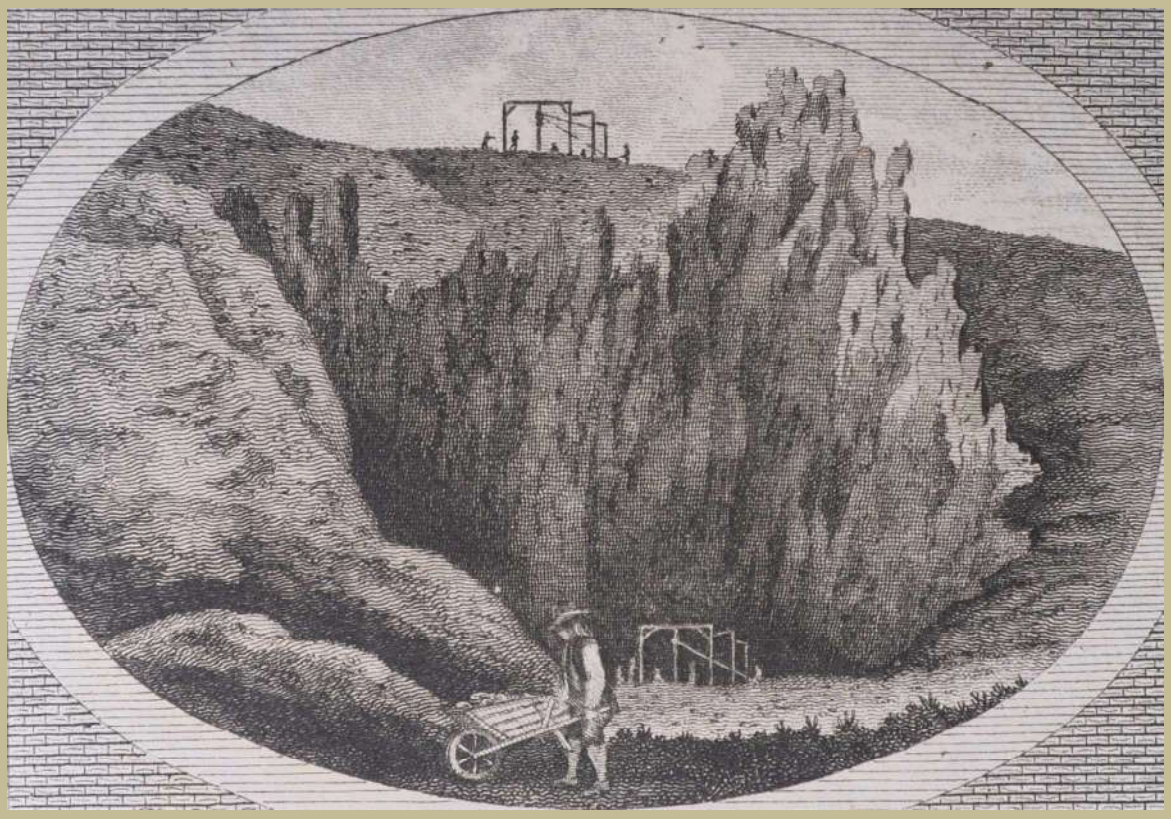


A late C18th view of a Swithland Slate pit: an engraving from John Throsby (1791).

1) Introduction

There is as far as I am aware no publication which brings together some information on Swithland Slate headstones and a collection of colour photographs which (hopefully) do some justice to the remarkable craft of the carvers. Furthermore, I feel that a photograph can convey the essence of a headstone far better than a verbal description, drawing or "brass rubbing" copy.

Swithland Slate headstones are to be found in churchyards (and some old non-conformist chapel graveyards, but not in cemeteries) throughout Leicestershire and there are many to be found in the adjoining counties too: in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire (where Grantham churchyard has a large number), Rutland, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire (Note a). Nottinghamshire probably has the finest collection of works to be seen outside Leicestershire. There are thousands of such headstones in existence. Apart from Herbert's pioneering work and the very useful information in Frederick Burgess's book (see bibliography), there seems to be little published on the subject with the exception of the topic of the "Belvoir Angels". Burgess is the only author to do any justice to the quality of the craftsmanship which is to be found. The aim of my study is to give a little information about the headstones and hopefully stimulate the interest of others. In this connection, I think it is worth emphasising the remarkable state of preservation of many of these gravestones, even the earliest of them. They are likely to be interesting to many people nowadays due to the current wide popularity of family history. There must be a great many people with C18th or earlier C19th ancestors whose Swithland Slate headstones are still perfectly legible.

I make no claim for this to be in any way a definitive listing or a guidebook: I have visited only some of the churchyards where Swithland Slate headstones are to be found. My photographic examples mainly illustrate those slates which I saw under favourable photographic conditions. One of the reasons why Swithland Slate headstones can be easily overlooked is because under a grey sky (the norm rather than the exception in this part of the world) they simply look like rather drab slate headstones. But to view them in favourable light, especially when the angle of the sun picks out all of the details of the lettering and symbols and the beauty of texture and colour, is a quite different

experience. Other factors than a bright day can be important too: the presence of a tree or bush or the position of a nearby building can mean that a headstone may be in near-permanent shadow. (Leaning headstones may also be permanently in shadow). On winter days with the sun low in the sky more of a churchyard will be in shadow for more of the time. As a general rule, headstones facing east or west and situated on the south side of a church are the easiest to view in favourable light, ideally when the sun is shining obliquely from the southerly side rather than shining directly onto the slate, since light from this angle best reveals incised details.

I personally do not really like cemeteries or indeed most modern graves in churchyards. Polished black marble, white marble or pink granite seem alien in an English churchyard. But Swithland Slate headstones always look “at home” in a sea of churchyard grass with the backdrop of a church, whether built of Leicestershire granite, or locally-sourced limestone or ironstone.

2) Geology

Swithland Slate is the term used to describe the early Cambrian slate found in the Charnwood Forest area of Leicestershire, in the East Midlands of England. The rocks which form most of Leicestershire are of Mesozoic age, essentially Triassic in the western half of the county and Jurassic in the eastern half. Charnwood Forest is a compact area of unusual geology where the Precambrian basement rocks form an upland area poking through the now-eroded Triassic sediments which once completely covered these far older rocks (6). Charnwood is an area of small crags of sharp rock of volcanic origin giving rise to a landscape of dry stone walled fields, heathland and woodland. It resembles the lower parts of the Lake District far more than the pastoral Midlands of England. The slates and the other (still economically very important) hard rock types are generally found towards the periphery of the Forest (Note c).

It was long believed that Swithland Slate belonged to the Precambrian like the volcanic rocks of the area. However, some years ago trace fossils (*Teichichnus*) were identified on some headstones, proving that this rock is actually of later, early Cambrian age.

Although the name Swithland Slate is geologically-speaking the term for this rock, not all of the slate was quarried in the vicinity of Swithland. Slate was in fact obtained from pits in Swithland Wood, from just across the road from there at The Brand (2), and also from pits along the course of the Slate Brook, upstream of Groby Pool. All of the long-disused pits are now quite natural-looking and most are water-filled.

The Precambrian rocks of Charnwood Forest (example above, at Buck Hill, Nanpantan) were believed to include the Swithland Slate until the discovery of the trace fossil *Teichichnus* proved the slate to be of somewhat younger, early Cambrian, age. Swithland Slate is the oldest English building slate.

The largest pit, Swithland Great Pit, approaches 200 feet in depth and provides sport for scuba divers. It is well fenced-in and protected by razor wire. The easiest location to visit is the pit beside the public road at the northern end of Swithland Wood. The very attractive grounds of The Brand are sometimes opened to the public and are well worth a visit, though care needs to be taken on the exposed cliff-top above the highest quarry face. (Note d).

The colour of the slate is remarkably variable considering the small area from which it was obtained. Most is blue-grey-green or a fairly pale purple (some is darker purple), whilst Groby slate is distinctly green and is sometimes called Groby Green Slate. The latter variety is readily distinguished from the rock quarried in the Swithland area and it seems to have been especially favoured by

some Nottinghamshire carvers. Some of the Groby slate was especially green, as can be seen at Wymeswold, where some headstones have the appearance of verdigris. The Groby slate generally weathers a little less well but in the main Swithland Slate is very resistant to attack by the elements. It has however suffered from the atmospheric pollution of the past at St Margaret's churchyard in a once quite heavily-industrialised part of Leicester.

Ashby Folville churchyard, Leicestershire. The backs of these west-facing headstones show the characteristic roughness of the undecorated side of Swithland slate headstones.

Swithland Slate is very hard and unlike the North Welsh slates it does not have a well-developed cleavage. It cannot therefore be easily split into thin sheets. This was the chief reason why Welsh slate supplanted Swithland Slate as a roofing material once cheap transport by canal and later by rail became possible. A Swithland Slate roof requires much more massive timber supports. On the other hand a Swithland roof, with its attractive colouring and textural variation and the gradation of slate size from larger to smaller towards the ridge is much more visually appealing (151). In the case of headstones the practical advantages of Welsh slate were of less consequence. A headstone was intended to be and look durable, and being self-supporting, weight was not an issue. Moreover, many

masons would have been steeped in a tradition of carving the local stone. As long as good quality local stone remained available there can have been little incentive for many to change to using the Welsh varieties (Note e). Slate quarrying in Charnwood finally ended in 1887 but the great period of Swithland headstone carving was certainly over by then (and probably before 1830). It is the lack of easy cleavage which gives rise to one of the distinguishing characteristics of Swithland headstones dating from the period when it was hand-cut: the often very rough appearance of the unadorned face. Frequently this side of a headstone can look as if it has been literally hacked into (7, 156), and this can be the case even with headstones exhibiting carving of the very

Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire.

highest quality. It was clearly the carved side which was considered important. Characteristic tooling marks are also frequently to be found, used almost decoratively as a background on the carved faces of many headstones (Note f).

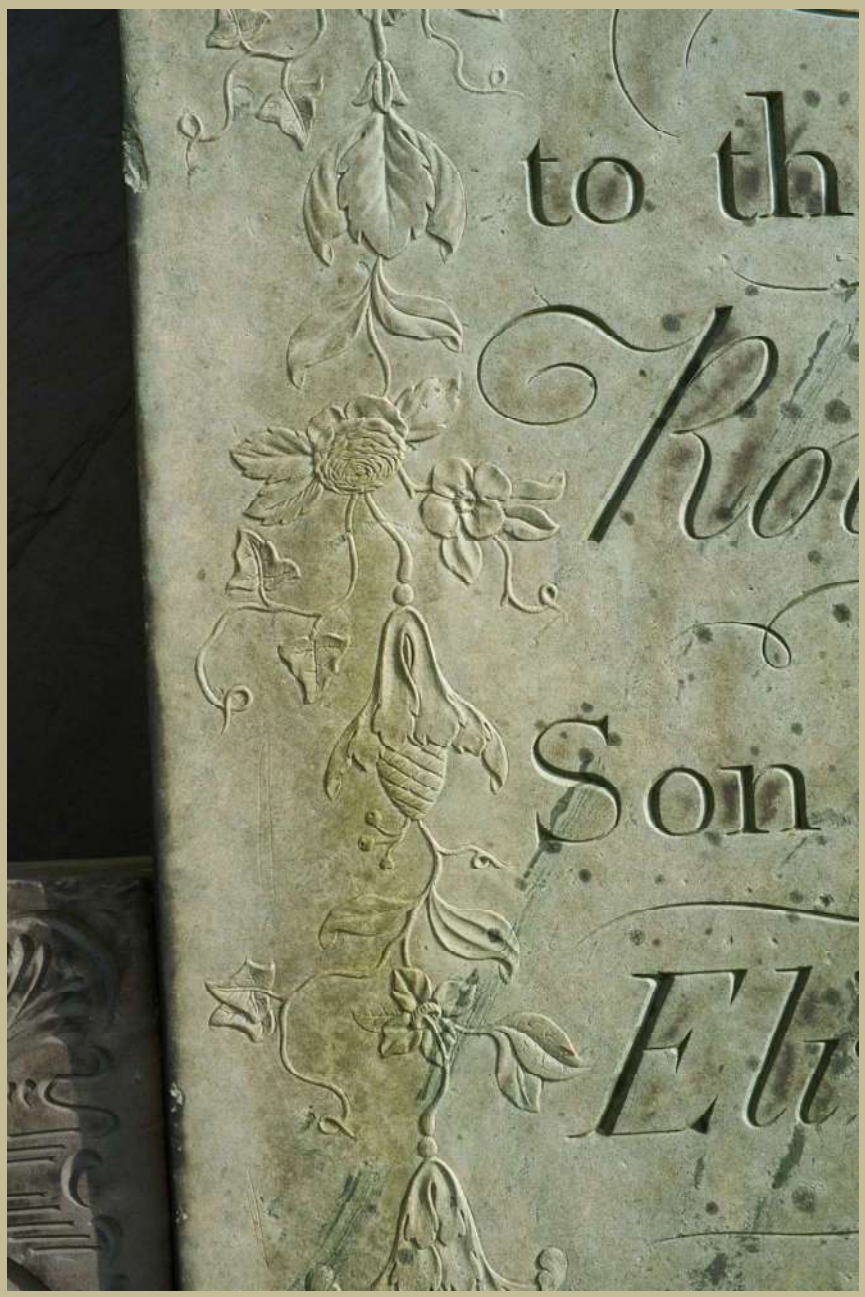
Swithland Slate was certainly quarried as early as Roman times and during the medieval period it was used at Leicester Castle and the Guildhall. In 1688 a 99 year lease was taken out on some of the Swithland pits and by 1706 the Hinds were in control of that part of the operation (Note g). They would remain central to the business well into the C19th and became very fine slate craftsmen too. However most slate was carved by masons spread throughout the area where the

headstones are found. The earliest headstones date from the last quarter of the C17th. These early works can be very rustic, the lettering and layout quite crude and the headstones from this time are quite small. As the C18th progressed, the headstones became larger, the quality of the craftsmanship improved and the finest work of the C18th is of extremely high quality. This is illustrated by the contrast between the following two headstones, which could hardly be greater:

Newtown Linford churchyard, Leicestershire.

This especially rude late C17th headstone is in Newtown Linford churchyard. (Newtown Linford village lies at the western edge of Bradgate Park, one of the most beautiful areas in Charnwood Forest, which adjoins Swithland Wood on its eastern side). The lettering is crude, the layout is haphazard and the carver seems not to have understood the Latin phrase “hic iacet” (here lies). The headstone is very small and there are no decorative elements used. Contrast this with a headstone in Wanlip churchyard, Leicestershire, from the last quarter of the following century. This is a very large headstone which, although unsigned, is probably a work by one of the Hind family of carvers (a headstone sharing stylistic similarities, also at Wanlip, is signed by Hind of Swithland).

This headstone, which has a very rough non-carved face, is a work of exceptional craftsmanship, a fact not very obvious to a merely casual glance. (A view of the whole headstone can be seen on page 88). Whilst the lettering is cut into the slate, as is the case with most Swithland headstones, the foliate decoration is *cut in relief*. This means that an extremely delicate tendril, for example, is what remains after the surrounding slate has been carefully cut away (Note h).



Wanlip churchyard, Leicestershire. Detail of a 1776/1782 headstone by? Hind of Swithland.

The trailing ends of the tendrils actually loop over themselves. It also means that even a tiny slip of the carver's tool would have spoiled the headstone,

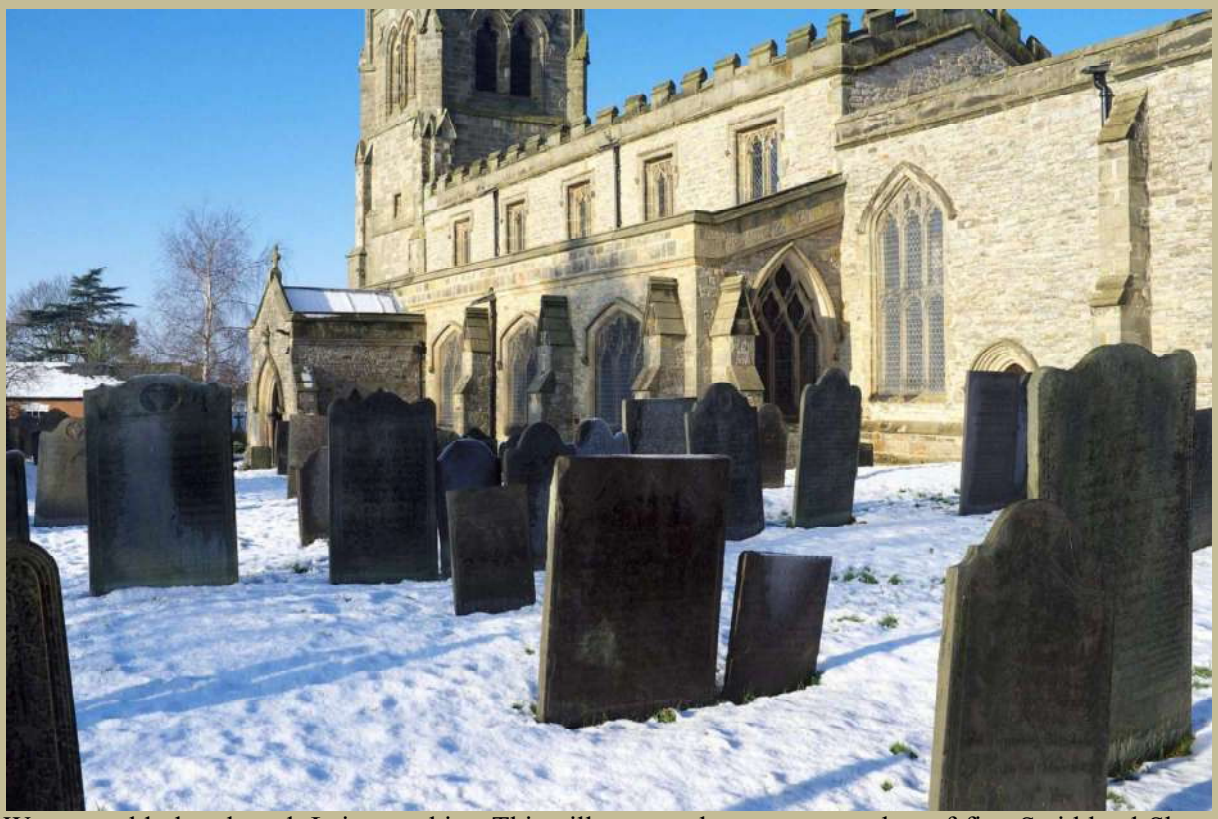
maybe after hours of painstaking work had been expended on it. This is craftsmanship of a very high order. To quote Sacheverell Sitwell again, referring to this very headstone and its companion:

"headstones...particularly at Wanlip, with incised urns and vine tendrils and formal foliage, designs that are ultra-Adam in delicacy and refinement, to be ranked as works of art with the finest Sheffield plate..."

(To which eulogy I must just add the correction that these elements are not incised but carved in relief and all the more remarkable for that. There are further illustrations of the Wanlip headstones later in this monograph). Both of the particularly accomplished headstones at Wanlip are also rather unusual (though different from each other) in colour. It should be borne in mind that the Hind family, in control of the Swithland quarrying operation, would have had first call on the very best of the slate found in the quarries. This is also borne out by the quality of some of the slates which they carved and which can be seen in Swithland churchyard.

Wanlip churchyard, Leicestershire. Detail of a 1776/1782 headstone by? Hind of Swithland.

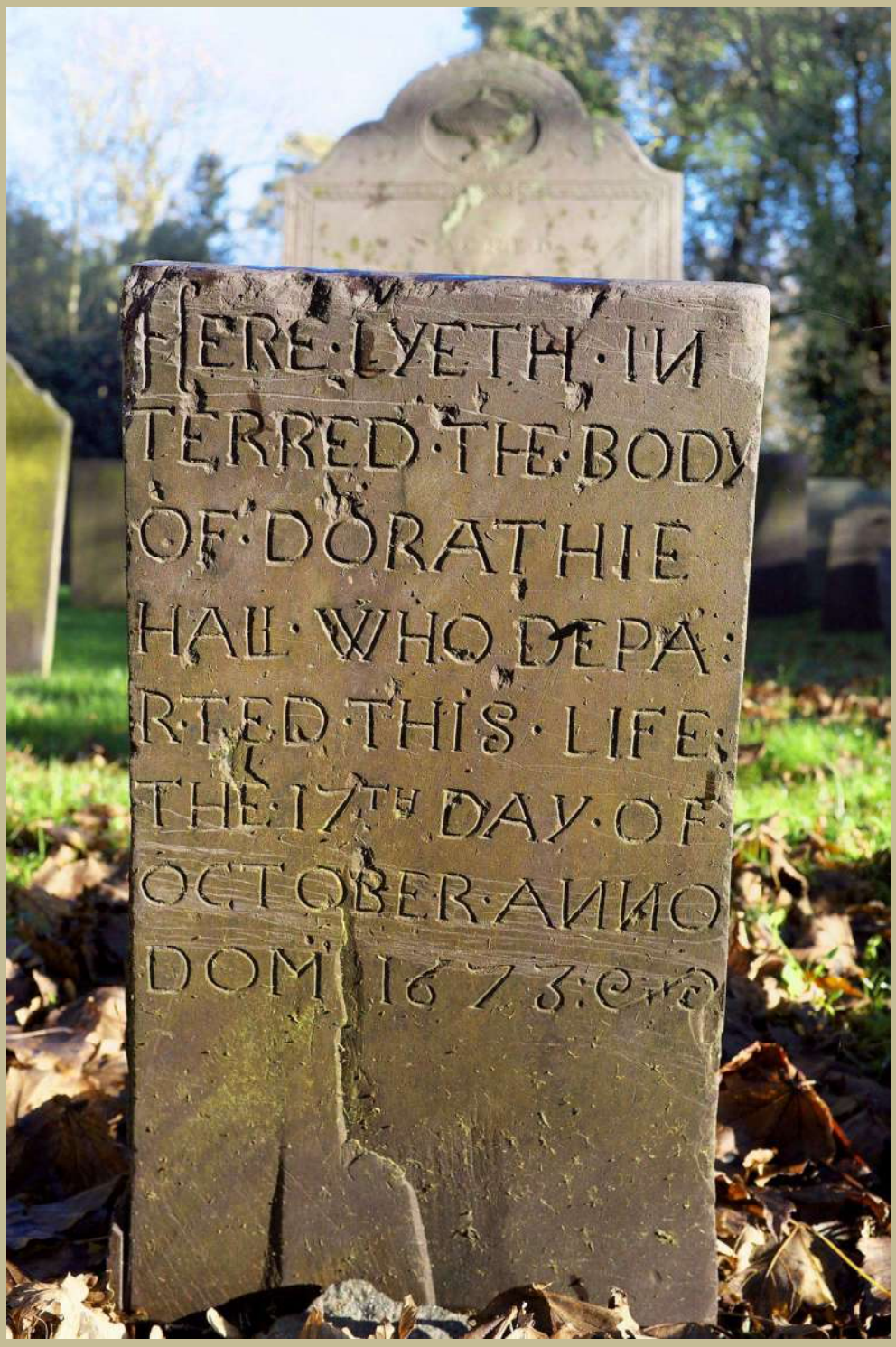
Hickling churchyard, Nottinghamshire. This churchyard in the Vale of Belvoir contains a large number of fine Swithland Slate headstones.



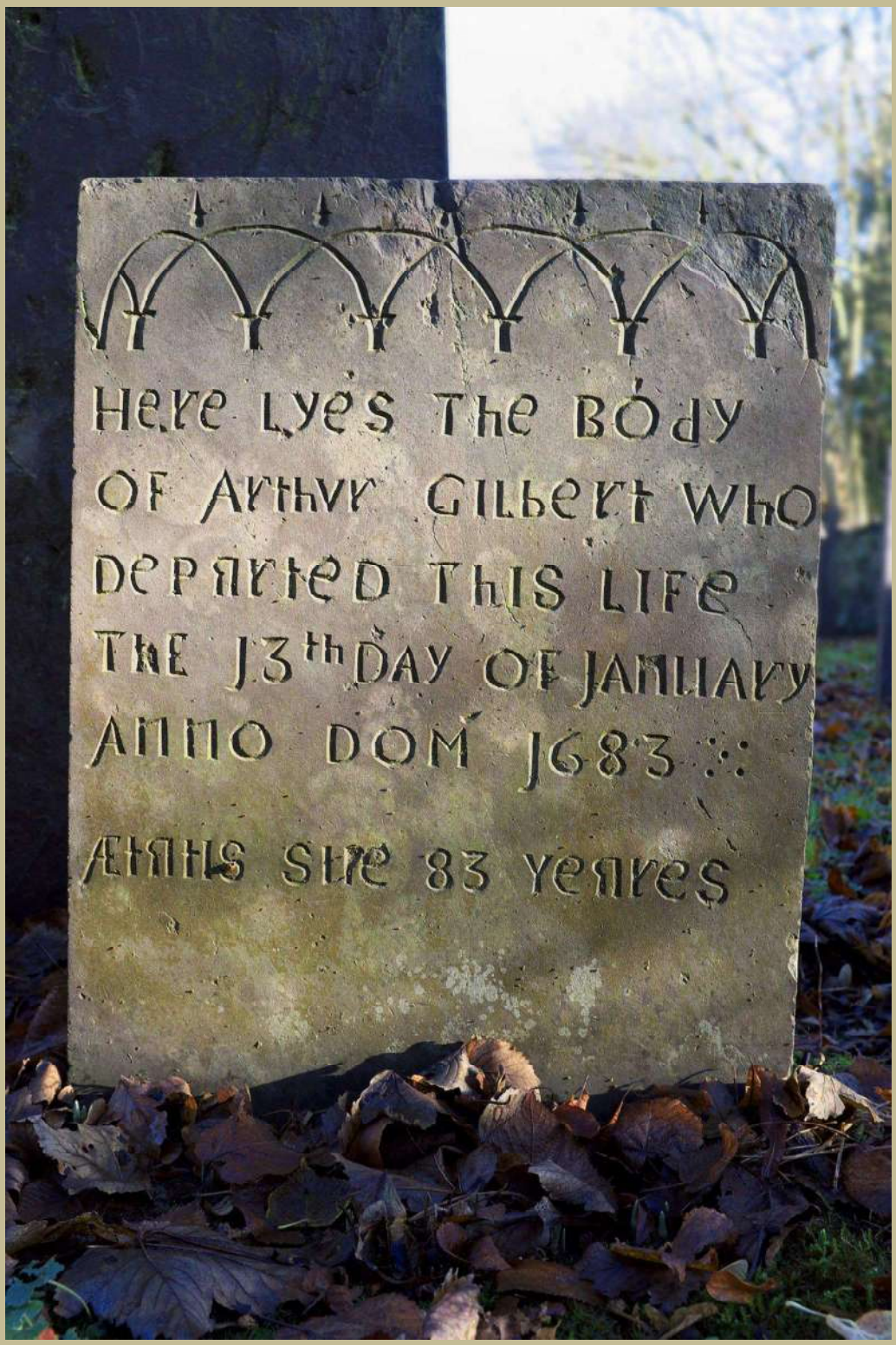
Wymeswold churchyard, Leicestershire. This village was home to a number of fine Swithland Slate carvers including W. Charles (father and son) and the Winfield family.

3) Lettering

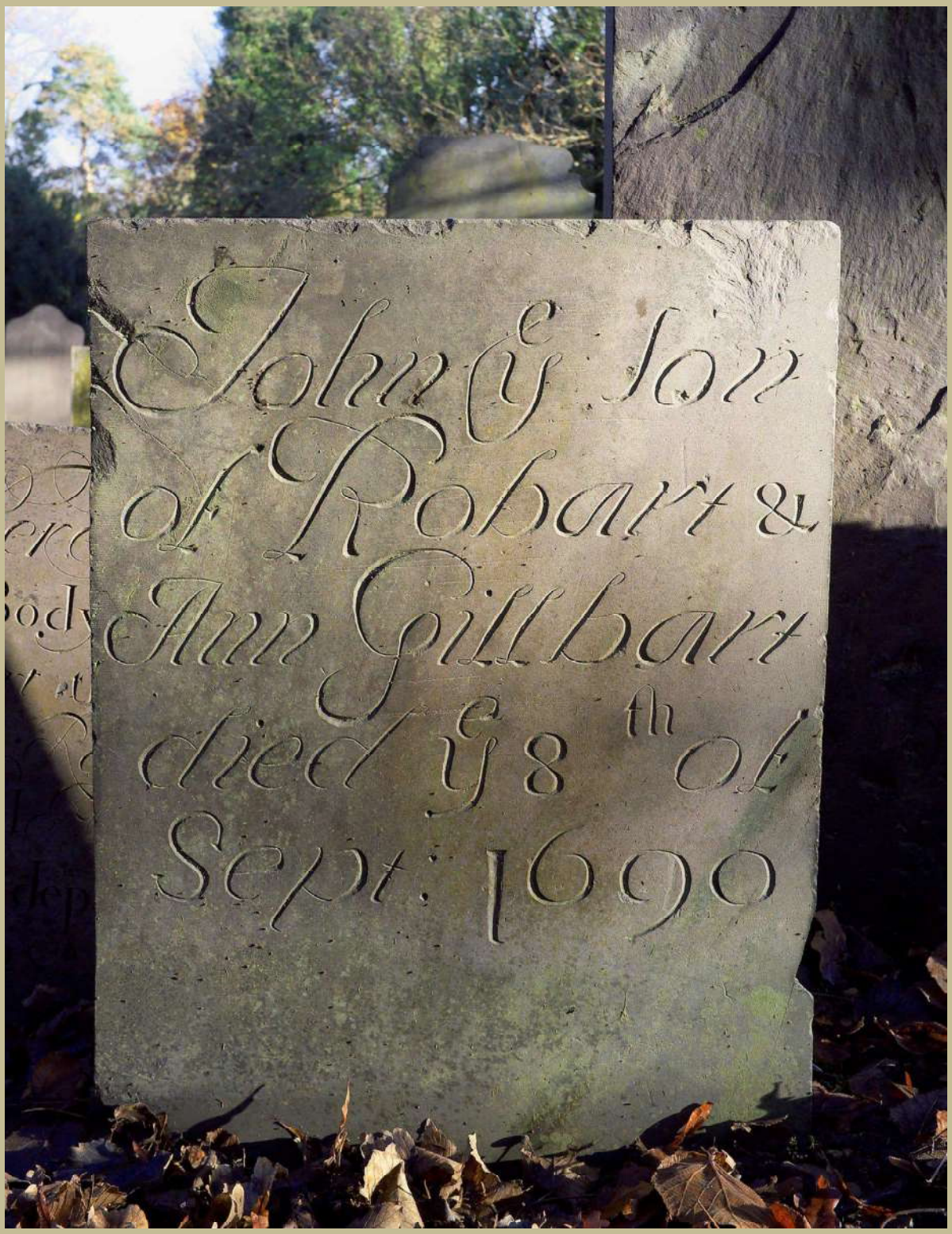
Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. This small headstone of 1673 is probably one of the two earliest surviving examples carved from Swithland Slate. Words are laid out rather haphazardly so that name Prier runs into “the” and other words are simply split to fill a line. There is no decoration.



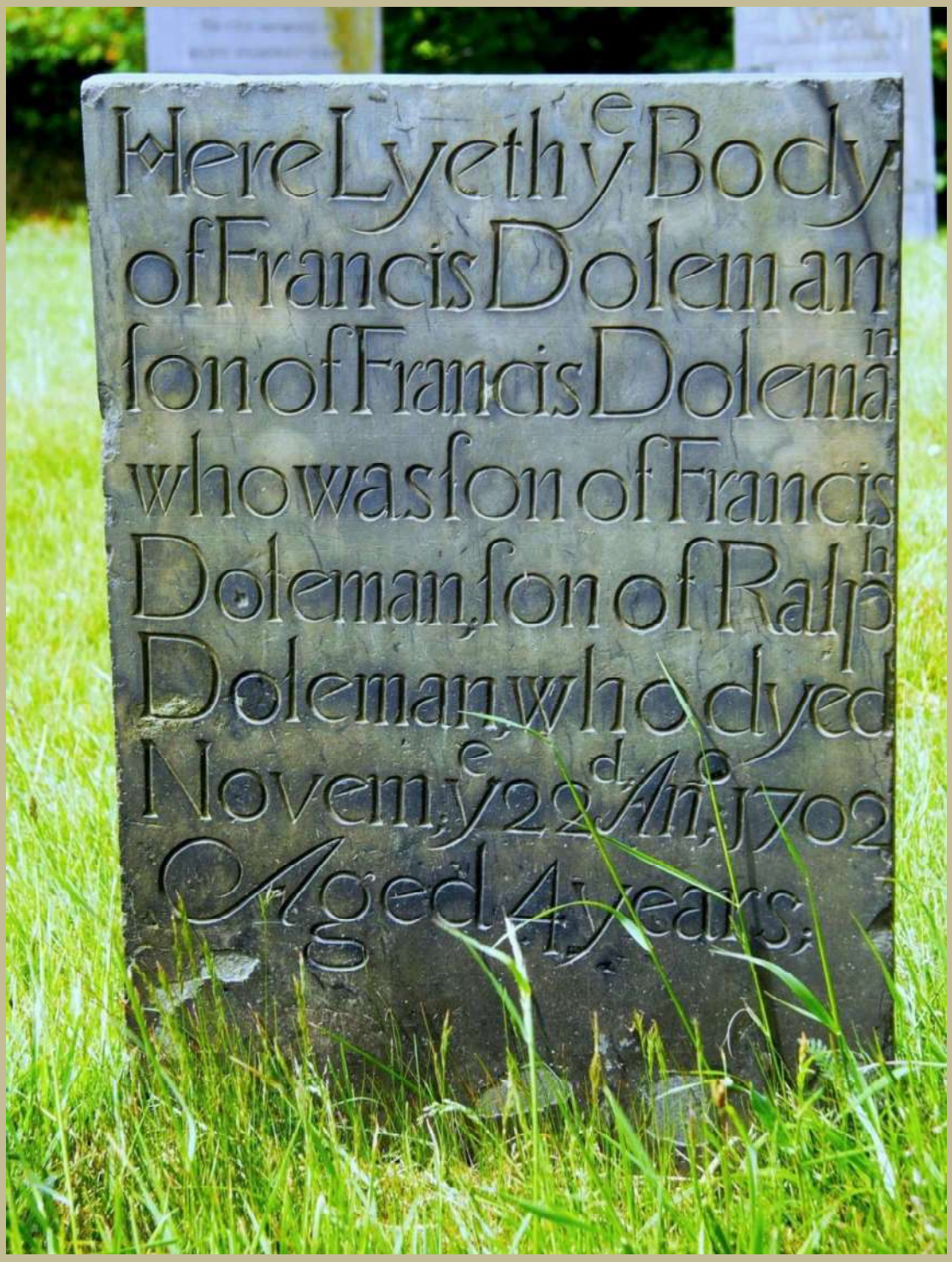
Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. From the same year as (13) above. A tiny decorative element fills the space after the final word. All of these C17th headstones are still in excellent condition and as legible as the day they were carved.



Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. Ten years after the preceding headstones some more extensive but still very simple decoration appears, though the lettering is bizarre. Words are not split here, though splitting words oddly did generally remain very common.



Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. A 1690 headstone showing rather more accomplished lettering than seen here previously. There is a sense of flow to the lettering.

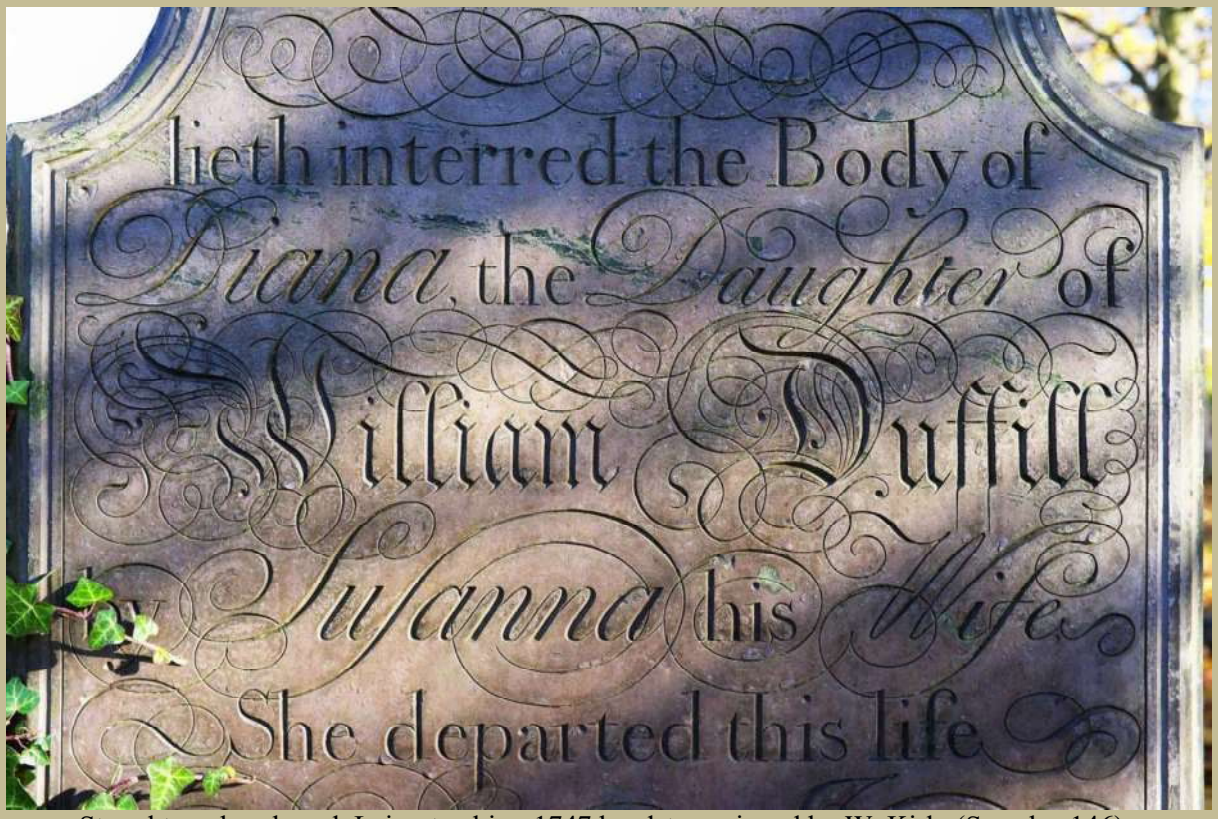


Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire. A Swithland Slate headstone from the very beginning of the C18th. The lettering is quite accomplished though some of the words do not fit onto the line and so odd letters appear above the words to which they belong, a common practice in the earlier part of the C18th. This is one of a small number of headstones (all early works) which are carved on both faces. The reverse face carries a verse and some abstract decoration.

Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. 1711 calligraphy together with foliage and crown.

Blaby churchyard, Leicestershire. Early C18th calligraphy. It was unusual for the carver to sign his work at this period [W.V. (Jun)]. He was presumably the son of William and father of John.

Stoughton churchyard, Leicestershire. 1747 headstone signed by W. Kirk.



Stoughton churchyard, Leicestershire. 1747 headstone signed by W. Kirk. (See also 146).

Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire. Headstones of 1768 and 1769.

Nothing shows a more remarkable degree of development in the evolution of the Swithland Slate carving craft than the lettering. From generally crude and rustic beginnings in the later C17th, Swithland Slate engraving reached great heights (“little short of metal-chasing”, in the words of Frederick Burgess). The influence of the “writing masters” of the later C17th and C18th centuries was certainly important (see Note i). Elaborate calligraphy appears on early C18th headstones, which must have been inspired by the designs of writing masters like John Seddon and Edward Cocker. Towards the middle of the C18th, the most influential was probably George Bickham, whose “Universal Penman”, a compendium of examples by numerous calligraphers, was first issued in parts between 1733 and 1741. To generalize, the most elaborate calligraphy was first confined to the initial letter as in the examples at Blaby or Whatton (18, 31). Later the extreme elaboration of the sort seen in the Stoughton example (19) developed. This was followed by the use of very elegant but less extreme lettering (e.g. 82, 93) and towards the end of the C18th, new forms were used (95, 96, 144, 145, based on modern type face), before lettering became altogether simpler (and less inspired) as the C19th progressed. The techniques of copper-plate engraving and slate engraving are similar, so whilst fine calligraphy was executed on many C18th headstones (seen, for example, on the fine Ketton oolite headstones in east Leicestershire and Rutland), Swithland

Slate carries by far the most refined work. For some illustrations of the work of the writing masters see section 6.

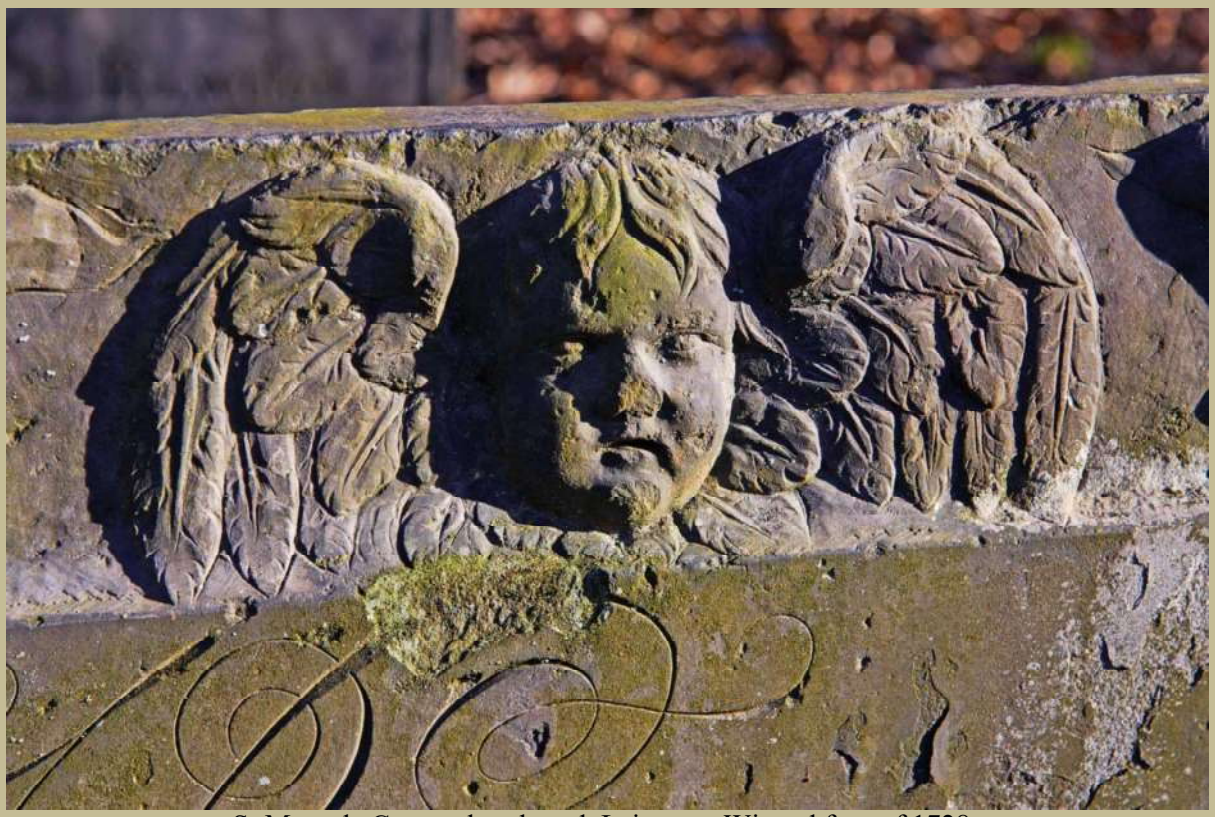
4) Decoration, Symbolism and Imagery

The earliest decorative elements to be used on Swithland Slate headstones were very simple, like the intersecting semi-circles across the top of a 1683 headstone in Swithland churchyard (see 15). More ambitious but still rather crude foliate or floral decoration is found on e.g. the 1711 headstone in Humberstone churchyard (62) or the contemporary slate at Kirby Bellars (63, upper). Advances on such designs, sometimes carved in fairly heavy relief, came later (e.g. 68, 71). Rococo decoration then became popular (e.g. 75, 81, 90) and finally, Neoclassicism took over (51, 86, 88) and the urn became the chief symbol on headstones in the later C18th and into the C19th. This summary is admittedly a simplification, since there was some overlap of styles. Above all, the lettering became and remained very much an essential part of the decorative scheme on most Swithland Slate headstones. The designs must have been produced on paper before being drawn on the slate and then carved into it. It is possible that practical workshop pattern books were produced and some designs may have become more generally available in this way.

Winged Faces and Angels

Winged faces were very commonly carved on Swithland Slate headstones. The earliest were broadly similar, highly stylised types (30, 33). The well-known “Belvoir angels” (see later) belong to this category. Later, the classical winged cherub head (23), of the sort already long-used on church monuments, became popular. (They were also the most common motif on the C18th Jurassic limestone headstones of this region, e.g. 48 upper). Another variant of the winged face, the “calligraphic angel” (26), was derived from the works of the writing masters. These different varieties of winged face are all symbolic of the flight to Heaven of the soul of the departed. *They do not represent angels*.

Later in the C18th angels, carved as complete figures, were often depicted blowing the Last Trumpet (27 lower, 132 lower), sometimes with a banner carrying a Biblical text or message (28 upper).



St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester. Winged face of 1728.

Ratcliffe on the Wreake churchyard, Leicestershire. Rather comical-looking angel.

Bringhurst, Leicestershire. A winged cherub head, C18th. Swithland Slate is rare in this east Leicestershire churchyard, where C18th Ketton oolite headstones with cherub heads abound.

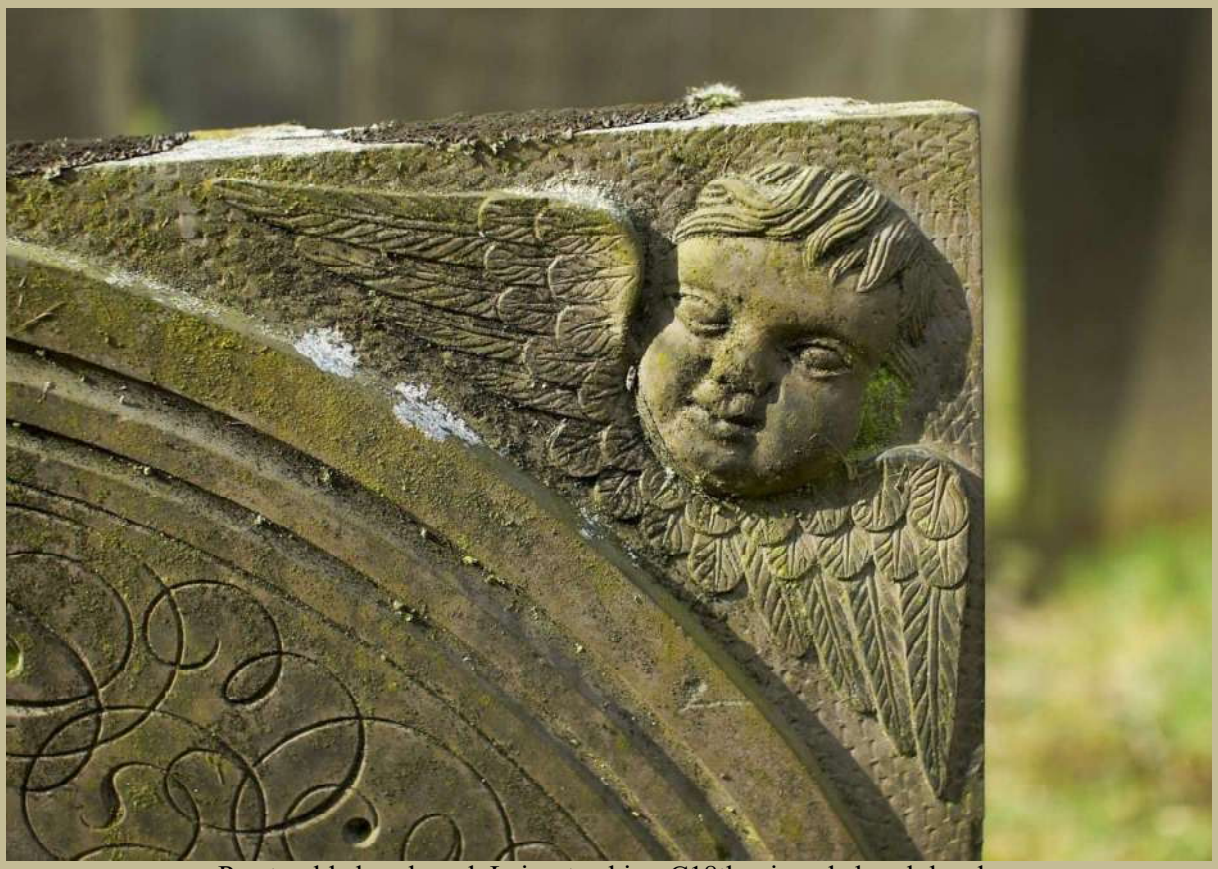
Hickling, Nottinghamshire. C18th winged cherub head carved by William Charles of Wymeswold.

Langar, Nottinghamshire. A pair of “calligraphic angels”, 1762.

Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire, 1723.

Whatton, Nottinghamshire. C18th headstone with winged cherub heads, skulls and crossbones and floral decoration.

Tilton on the Hill churchyard, Leicestershire. 1760. Note also the stylised, low-relief foliage and the Latin motto: “PULVIS ET UMBRA SUMUS” (“We are but dust and shadow”, a quote from the Odes of Horace, Book IV Ode vii).



Prestwold churchyard, Leicestershire. C18th winged cherub head.

Blaby churchyard, Leicestershire. 1739 and 1741 headstones with “calligraphic” angels of a type close to an example illustrated in George Bickham’s “Universal Penman”, Number XXVII.

St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester. 1755 headstone. One of a pair of incised winged faces. Note also the gravedigger's spade, dart of death and flaming urn.

All Saints churchyard, Leicester. Angel carved by William Firmadge (1774/1782), possibly inspired by one illustrated on the dedication page of George Bickham's "Universal Penman".

East Bridgford churchyard, Nottinghamshire. Angel sounding the Last Trumpet. A very similar depiction appears on the 1797 headstone of Henry Bailey in Bexley churchyard, Kent, suggesting a Nottinghamshire origin for that headstone (Note a).

Woodhouse churchyard, Leicestershire. 1797 angel by Benjamin Pollard with Biblical texts and an unusual Eye of Heaven depiction (something of a Pollard speciality- see also his Death scene in Quorn Baptist Chapel graveyard). Pollard was both a stonemason and a Baptist minister (See Note j).

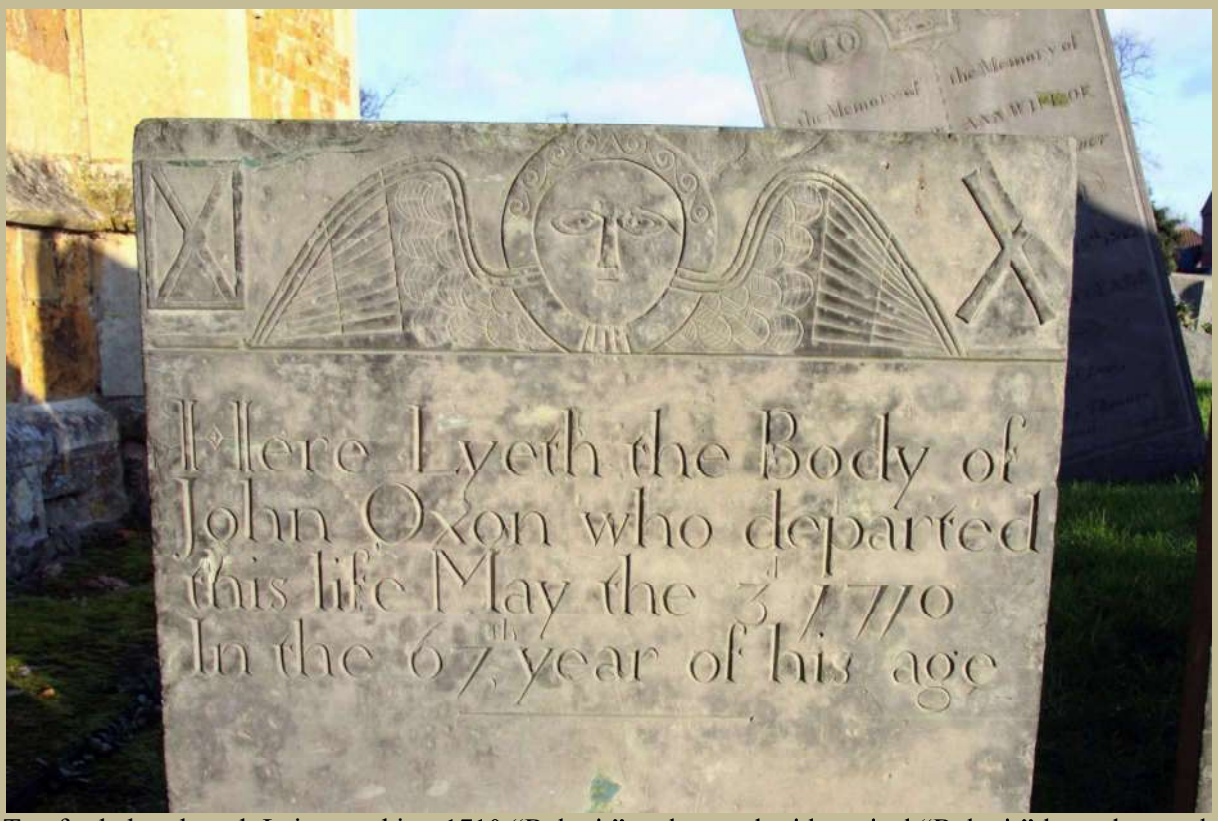
“Belvoir Angels”

Stylised angels, essentially of a flattened, symmetrical triangular shape with frontally viewed face are one variant of a quite widespread type. There are some highly stylised examples from the earlier C18th to be seen on Jurassic limestone headstones in east Leicestershire. Further afield there are a large number dating from the later C17th and C18th in the English colonies of present day New England in the U.S.A. They ultimately quite possibly derived from the same source (though initially much the most common symbol there was actually a winged skull of the same basic shape*). It is fair to say that the series of Swithland Slate headstones known as the “Belvoir Angels” are by far the most well-known and popular of Swithland headstones. The naive and rustic charms of these slates are more attuned to modern taste than much of the highly elaborate calligraphy, decoration and religious symbolism of the second half of the C18th. Known as “Belvoir Angels” because the majority of these headstones are found in and around the Vale of Belvoir in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, they are actually rather more widespread than the name suggests.

Angels of a “Belvoir” type are certainly quite common, found for example on a headstone of the 1690’s at Seagrave, Leicestershire and in the work of William Charles at Wymeswold (63). A classic “Belvoir Angel” headstone is in fact composed of a number of variable elements, including associated symbols (e.g. stylized hourglass and crossbones) and characteristic phrases (e.g. “Come ye Blessed” or “To Die is Gain”). Even within this classic category, examples can be found at some distance from the Vale, for example at Gaddesby and Rearsby in Leicestershire. A sub-type carries two angels, side by side, whilst another sub-type has a rather more curved upper edge to the wings (seen e.g. at Burton Lazars and Twyford (31 upper), both in Leicestershire and both, especially the latter, considerably distant from the Vale.

* See the excellent monochrome photographs of the Farber Gravestone Collection online, for example some of the slate headstones from the late C17th and early C18th. It is tempting to believe that these colonial examples may have shared a common source with our East Midland angels.

Old Dalby churchyard, Leicestershire. An early example of a “Belvoir Angel”, 1694.



Twyford churchyard, Leicestershire. 1710 “Belvoir” style angel with typical “Belvoir” hourglass and crossbones.

Whatton, Nottinghamshire. 1723 headstone combining a particularly intricate angel with other elements which are also rather different from those found on “classic” “Belvoir Angel” slates. Note, for example, the skeleton with dart and also the highly calligraphic “H” of Here.

Langar churchyard, Nottinghamshire. Double type “Belvoir Angel” headstone, 1728. The verse “All Flesh you see...” is almost certainly based on a verse in George Withers’ “Emblemes” of 1635 (107).

Hickling churchyard, Nottinghamshire. 1749 “Belvoir Angel”: a surprisingly rustic-looking headstone for its mid C18th date.

Gaddesby churchyard, Leicestershire. A classic “Belvoir Angel” headstone of 1705 situated some way from the Vale. The wording “Come Ye Blessed” is common on these headstones.

Prestwold churchyard, Leicestershire. An early C18th angel which is similar to the “Belvoir” type.

Mortality Symbolism

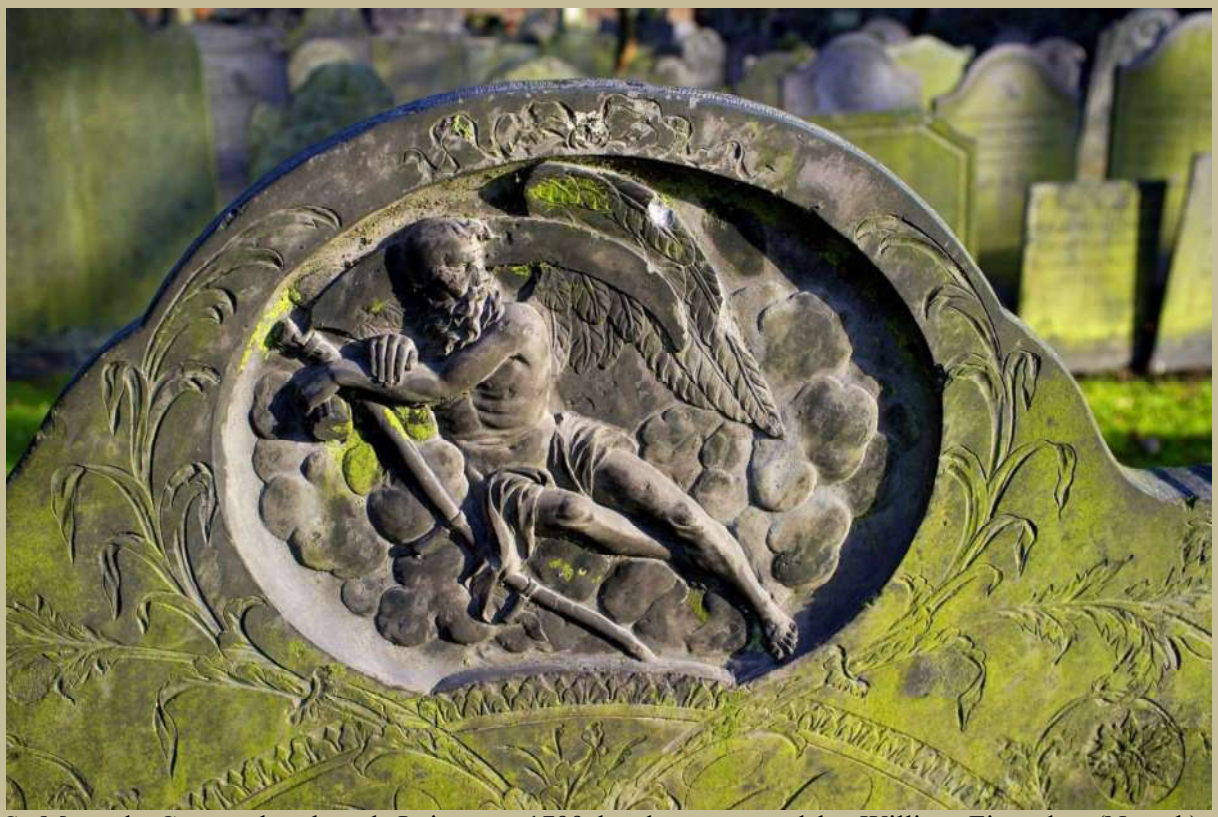
The early mortality symbols depicted on Swithland Slate headstones include stylised crossbones and skulls, though the winged skull, so popular on early New England slates, was rare (35). Skulls were also later sometimes delineated with a precision which suggests that the carver was working with a real model. (Little Dalby has a headstone with three skulls which show very painstakingly incised cranial sutures). Death in the form of a skeleton, the tools of the sexton's trade, and hourglasses were also much carved, along with depictions of Father Time. The latter is always shown as a winged man with a windswept forelock holding his attributes: the scythe (symbolising the cutting down of life) and hourglass.

Stanford on Soar churchyard, Nottinghamshire. 1779/1791 headstone signed by Hind. Father Time tramples a globe, a frequent symbol on Swithland Slate headstones, signifying the transient nature of earthly concerns (see also 49, 56). Beneath Father Time is the Biblical quote "All that are in the Graves shall come forth". The work of the Hind family (and Benjamin Pollard) in particular often carries Biblical quotations. This headstone would have been carved at Swithland. Stanford of Soar churchyard also has numerous headstones carved by Wymeswold masons.

Scraptoft, Leicestershire. A 1735 headstone- details: winged skull and crossbones.

Scraptoft, Leicestershire. Detail on the same 1735 slate as above: winged hourglass.

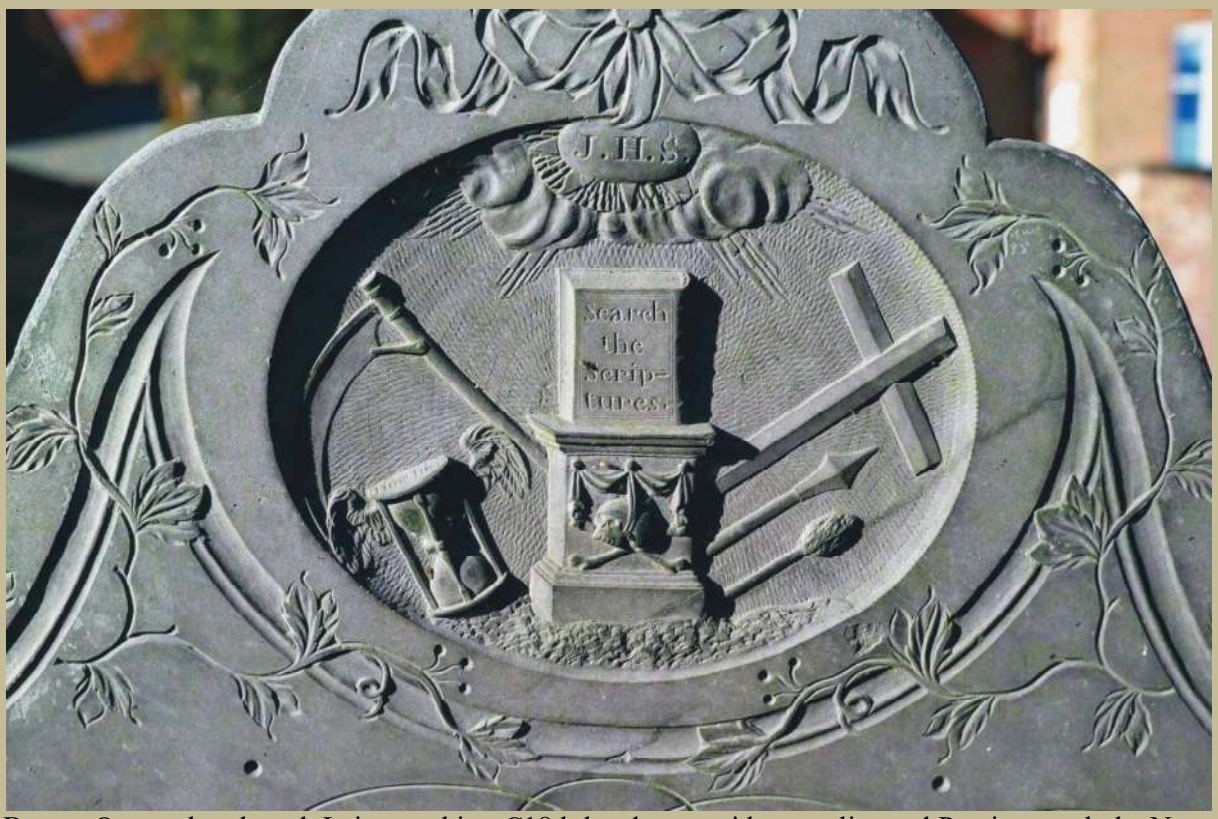
St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester. 1780/1788 headstone with mortality symbols: skull, scythe, snuffed candle, Serpent (note its tongue).



St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester. 1799 headstone carved by William Firmadge (Note k). Firmadge was certainly one of the most accomplished figure carvers in Swithland Slate: lettering and decoration tended to be rather better than human figure carving in the work of many masons (Note r).

Anstey churchyard, Leicestershire (1768). Father Time is surmounted by a fine winged hourglass, with the Crown of Life above all. Note also the Passion symbols and mortality symbols (see Note l).

Newtown Linford churchyard, Leicestershire. Later C18 mortality symbolism: Death symbolised by a skeleton and Father Time, whose banner reads: “Times flies, our Glory fades, and Death’s at hand”.



Burton Overy churchyard, Leicestershire. C18th headstone with mortality and Passion symbols. Note that the top of the winged hourglass is minutely inscribed “Time Flies”.

Whatton, Nottinghamshire. Early C19th headstone carved by Thomas Wood of Bingham. The figure of Death emerges theatrically from behind a draped urn, to hurl his dart at Father Time. Note the horses. Many of Wood’s headstones show his fondness for depicting animals in a rural setting.

Kneeton churchyard, Nottinghamshire. 1815 headstone carved by Thomas Wood of Bingham. Death strikes in a domestic setting as a woman lies in bed in a room with carefully-depicted furniture. The text below the dying figure reads “How fleeting human Life”.

Quorn Baptist Chapel graveyard. 1804 headstone by Pollard. This scene shows Death aiming his dart and snuffing a candle. This imagery was probably inspired by an engraving in Quarles (112).

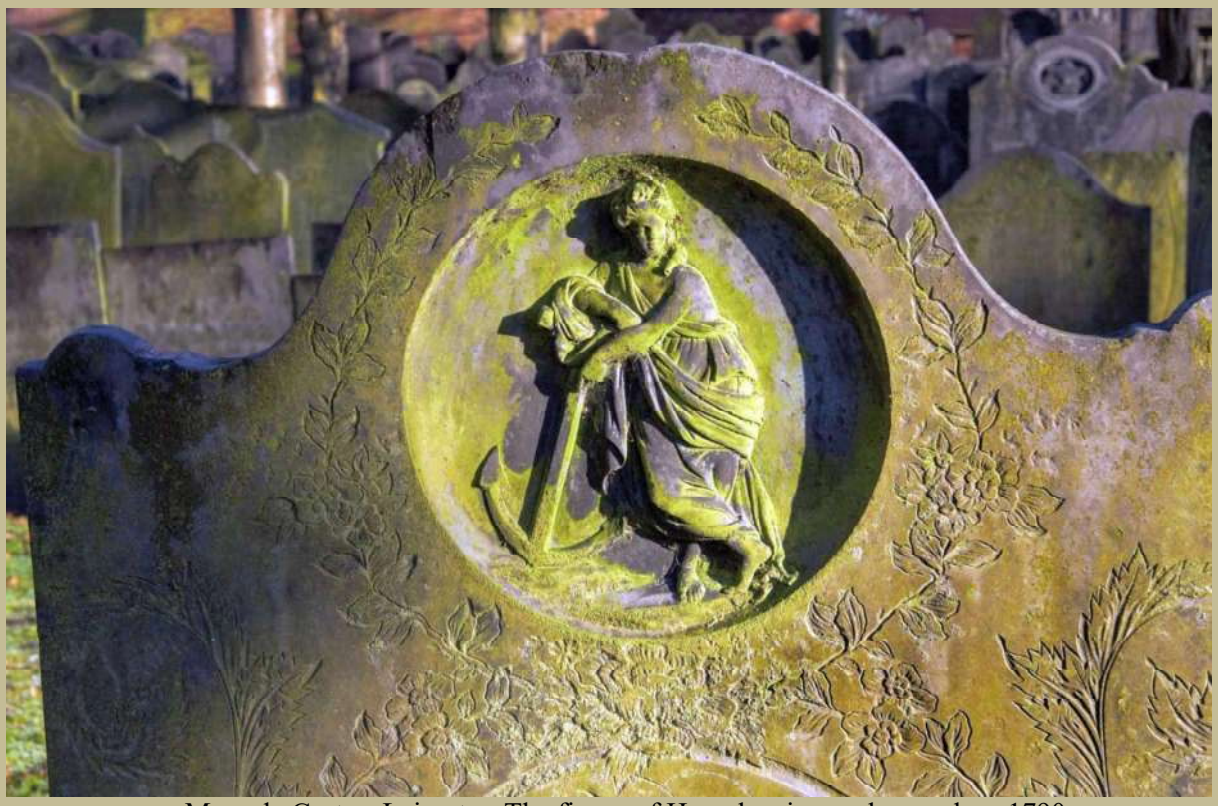
Passion Symbolism

A small group of headstones to be seen in the villages of Burton Overy, King's Norton and Little Stretton (close to each other), together with Wistow, Foston and Lowesby, depict symbols of the Fall of Man and the Passion.

Little Stretton churchyard, Leicestershire. One of a small number of headstones carrying the same sort of mortality and Passion symbolism, this is dated 1768. Here, unlike at nearby King's Norton, the Chalice is shown collecting drops of Christ's blood. The other Passion symbols depicted are the Cross, the lance which pierced Christ's flesh, the sponge soaked with vinegar, and one of the nails used to crucify Christ. Lightning bolts from above. The carved symbols are very similar in all of the local examples.

King’s Norton churchyard, Leicestershire. Mortality symbols (left) and symbols of the Passion (right).

Faith, Hope and Charity



Mary de Castro, Leicester. The figure of Hope leaning on her anchor, 1790.

Thrussington churchyard, Leicestershire. A depiction of Hope with her anchor, along with other common Swithland imagery and Biblical quotations. Headstone (1787/1789) signed by Hind (Note q).

The three Theological Virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, are depicted on some later C18th Swithland Slate headstones. **Hope** is personified as a woman holding onto an anchor, relating to the quotation from Hebrews Chapter 6, Verse 19:

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..."

Charity is depicted as a mother nursing her children. Both of these Virtues may be seen in St Mary de Castro churchyard in the centre of Leicester.

The third Theological Virtue, **Faith**, can also be seen in this Leicester churchyard as well as at Wanlip (86).

St Mary de Castro, Leicester. Late C18th headstone showing Charity as a nursing mother (Note q).

Resurrection Imagery

There are numerous depictions on Swithland Slate headstones of the call to Judgement showing the dead rising from the grave to the sound of trumpets. The somewhat free quotation from Robert Blair's poem "The Grave" was clearly a source of inspiration for the imagery carved by Hind on a headstone (1741/1755) at Blaby (44). The uniformity of design and date of poem (1743) suggest that the headstone was carved after the later death. From 1781 comes the well-known headstone at Rothley (45 upper) carved by Hind of Swithland.

In the early C19th, Thomas Wood of Bingham carved the headstone to be seen in the churchyard of his native village (45 lower). It shows the Resurrection taking place amid one of the idyllic pastoral landscapes for which he is celebrated.

Blaby churchyard, Leicestershire, 1741/1755. A complex headstone signed by Hind (? of Whetstone: see Note g), with Resurrection imagery and a freely-adapted quotation from Robert Blair's poem "The Grave", first published in 1743. Top left (with holes) is a chain censer, top right, an aureole.

Rothley churchyard, Leicestershire (1781). 1781/1791 headstone to Ann and William Hunt with a Resurrection scene, carved by Hind of Swithland. The collapsing church is that of Swithland (showing the Danvers chapel, altered since Hind's time: see Note m).

Bingham churchyard, Nottinghamshire. 1801/1811/1812 Resurrection by Thomas Wood of Bingham.

St Mary de Castro, Leicester (1788). 1780/1788. A skeleton rises from a tomb, pointing to the Cross. The Biblical quotation is from 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Quorn Baptist Chapel graveyard. 1803 slate probably by Benjamin Pollard. A figure rises from the tomb, pointing to Heaven. The tomb carries a Biblical quotation, from 1 Corinthians 15:57.

Serpent and Ouroboros

Snakes in the form of both the Serpent and the ouroboros are commonly found on C18th Swithland Slate headstones. The Serpent in the Garden of Eden, instrumental in the Fall of Man, is often shown entwining the Tree of Knowledge:

King's Norton churchyard, Leicestershire. The Serpent entwining the Tree of Knowledge.

It was also depicted representing evil subject to the triumph of good, as here:

Langar churchyard, Nottinghamshire. The victory of faith over evil in the form of the Cross surmounted by the Crown of Life triumphant over the Serpent (complete with carefully carved teeth and tongue). A similar, but not identical, rendering can be seen at Denton, Lincolnshire. The winged cherubs amongst clouds represent Heaven. This imagery may well have been inspired by an illustration in George Withers' "Emblemes" of 1635 (109). The likely influence of this book can be seen on some other headstones too, though such models were never simply slavishly copied.

The ouroboros is an ancient symbol of eternity taking the form of a snake devouring its own tail, conveying the idea of the never-ending. It was used on church monuments earlier than it appears on Swithland Slate headstones but the likely influence on the Swithland Slate carvers was probably its depiction in English emblem book imagery. English emblem books, though dating from the C17th, were widely and for long popular and other examples of their influence are noted in this study. The ouroboros can be seen on a Gaddesby headstone (68), where one encircles an hourglass and another encircles the tools of the sexton. Sometimes an ouroboros encircles a globe (examples can be seen at Radcliffe on Trent and Granby [49], both in Nottinghamshire and both carved by R. Brown of Whatton), or an urn, as at Anstey in Leicestershire (49).

Granby, Nottinghamshire (1783). Ouroboros encircling globe. “The great Globe shall dissolve But Eternity hath no End” is partly a quote from Shakespeare’s “The Tempest”.

Anstey churchyard, Leicestershire, 1782. A closed urn, symbolic of death and encircled by an ouroboros, symbol of eternity, surmounts a flaming globe with Biblical quote “The Earth etc shall be burnt up” (from 2 Peter 3:10). The urn is inscribed “Eternity how long! Life how short!”

The Urn

The urn was an ancient Greek motif which was popularised in the C18th by the work of Stuart and Revett, the Adam brothers and William Pain, amongst others. It is both decorative and specifically, when it appears as a closed urn on a headstone, a symbol of death. The urn grew in popularity on Swithland Slate headstones in the later C18th and it became the chief symbol depicted on such headstones by the earlier C19th and would remain the most usual symbol depicted (101, 102, 103, 154). The urn appears in a host of forms, both carved in relief and incised.

Prestwold churchyard, Leicestershire. An urn with snake handles, a common theme treated in many ways on Swithland headstones (see also 51, 154).