



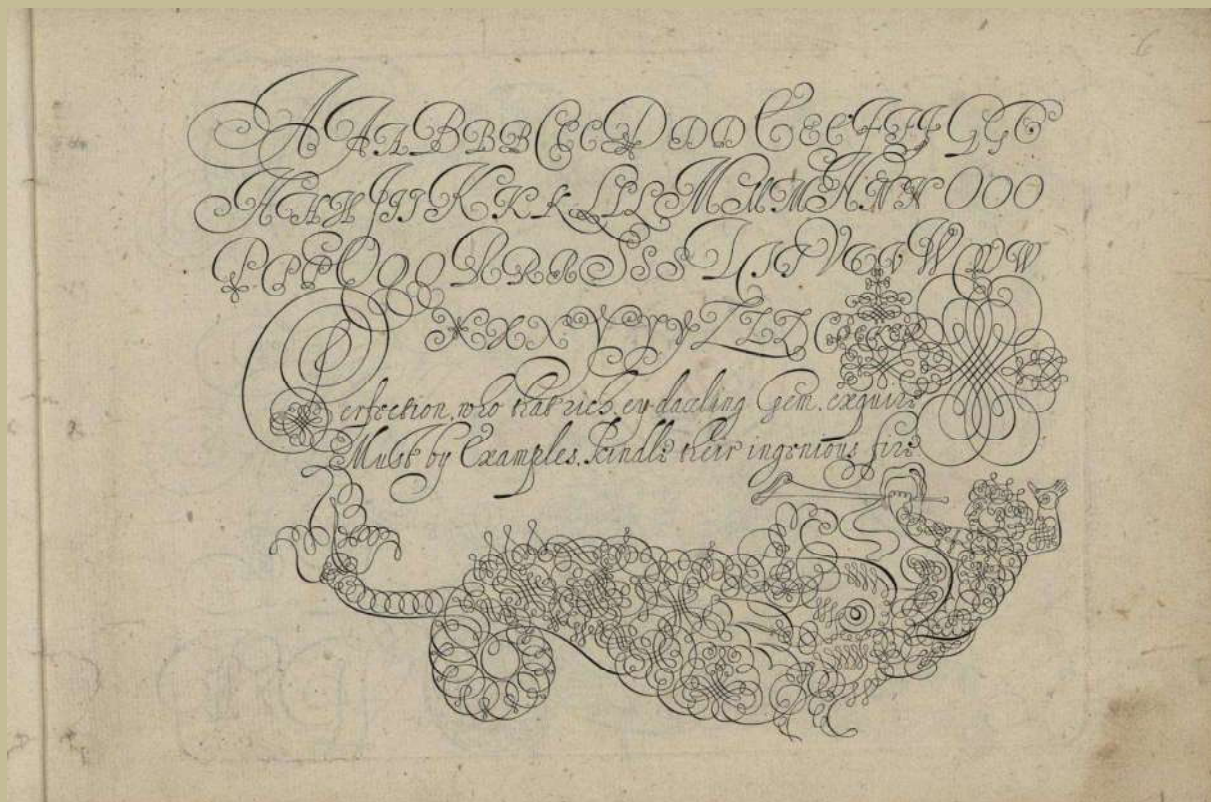
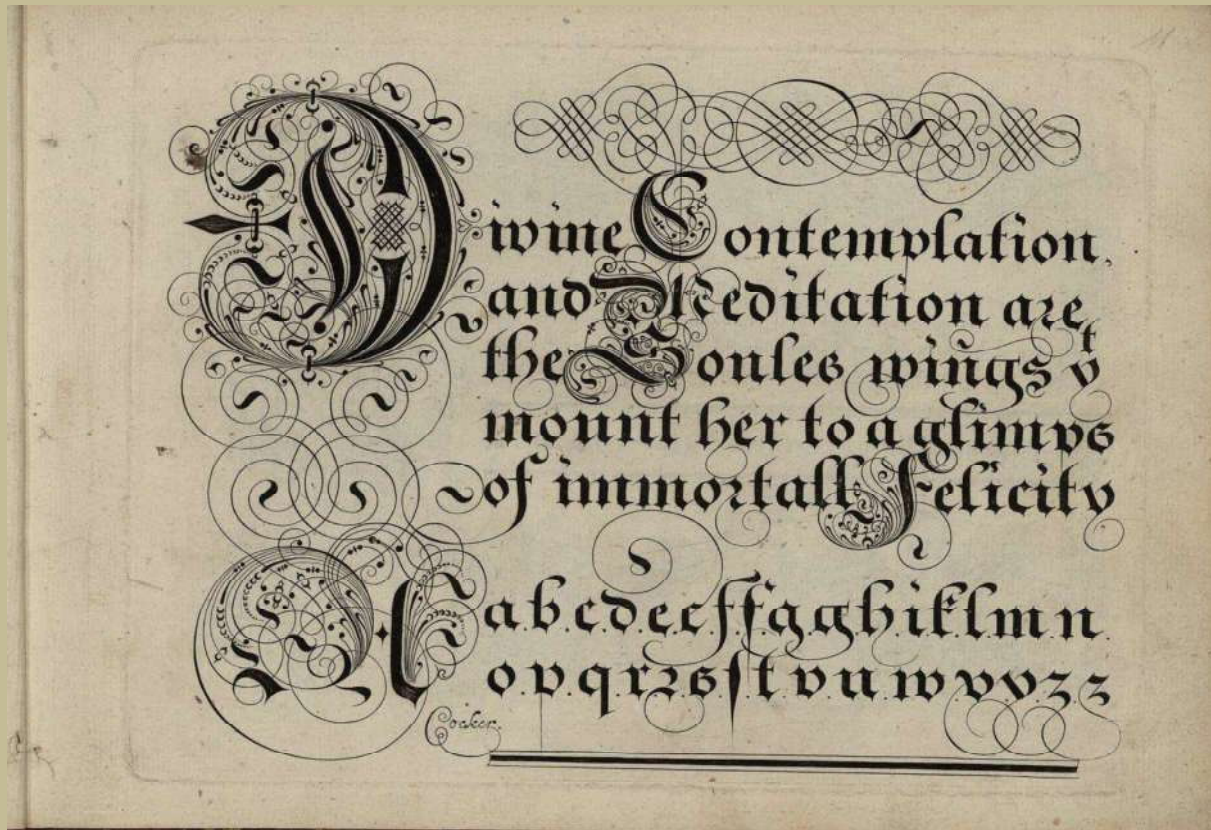
George Withers "Emblemes": An ouroboros.



Illustration to Francis Quarles: "Emblems and Hieroglyphics". Hieroglyphick VI (in an edition published in London in 1773). This plate, showing the figure of Death aiming his dart and snuffing out a candle flame (symbolic of extinguishing life) is a possible source for the headstone carved by Benjamin Pollard, seen in (39). (University of Illinois Library [[archive.org](http://archive.org) website]).



Below: Three examples of calligraphy from Edward Cocker's "The Pen's Transcendencie" of 1657.







Below: Two examples of late C17th calligraphy by John Seddon.

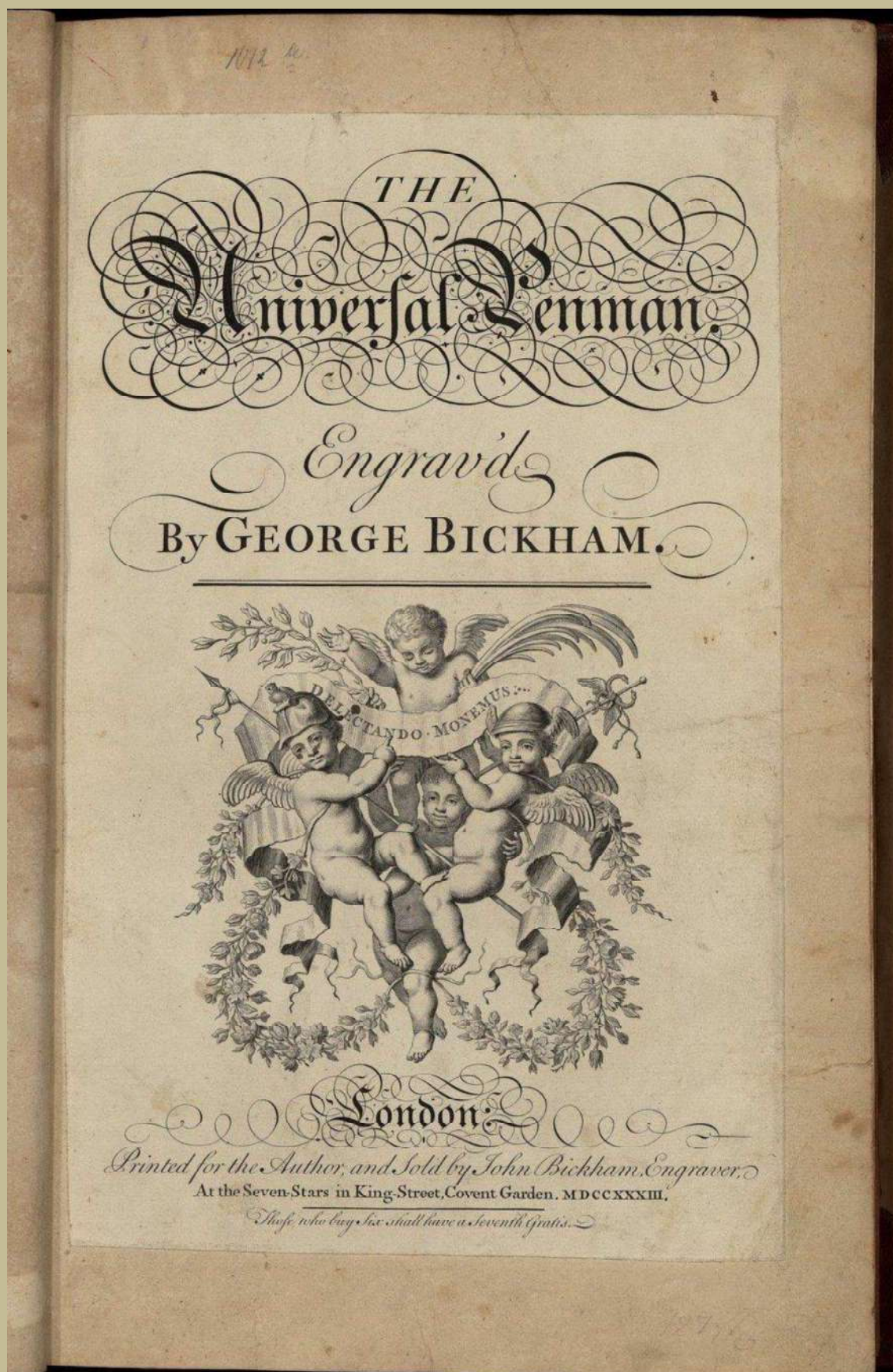






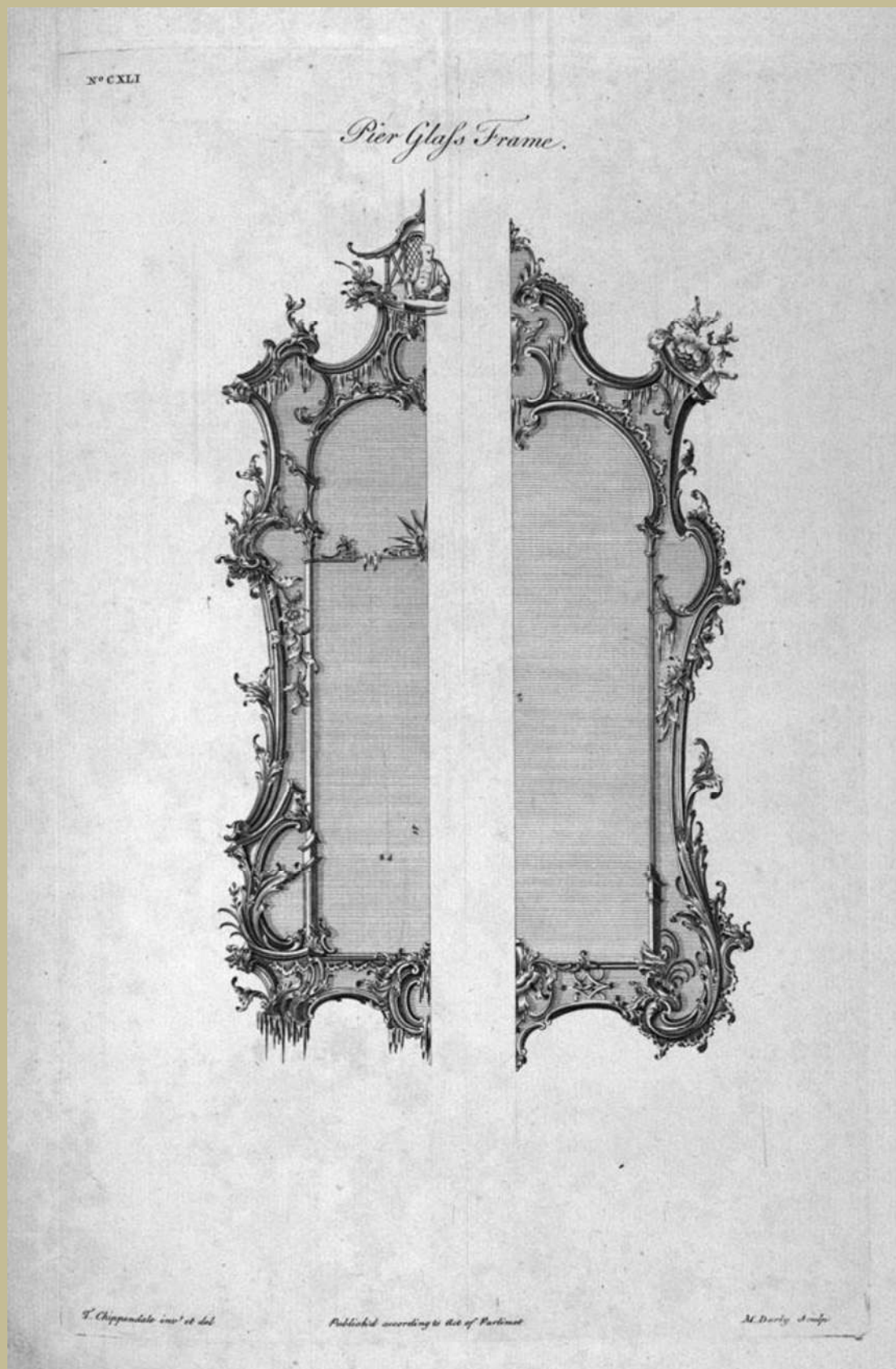
Stanford on Soar churchyard, Nottinghamshire. According to Maurice Barley, this is the earliest occurrence of a winged hourglass on a Swithland Slate headstone. Signed by William Charles (a Wymeswold carver, presumably the older William Charles, who died in 1736\*) and dual-dated 1729/30, it shows the influence of the sort of calligraphy produced by Cocker and Seddon. (\*Wymeswold Parish Registers are available on the Wolds Historical Organisation website).





In addition to its calligraphy Bickham's works contains illustrations which may have inspired some headstone designs.





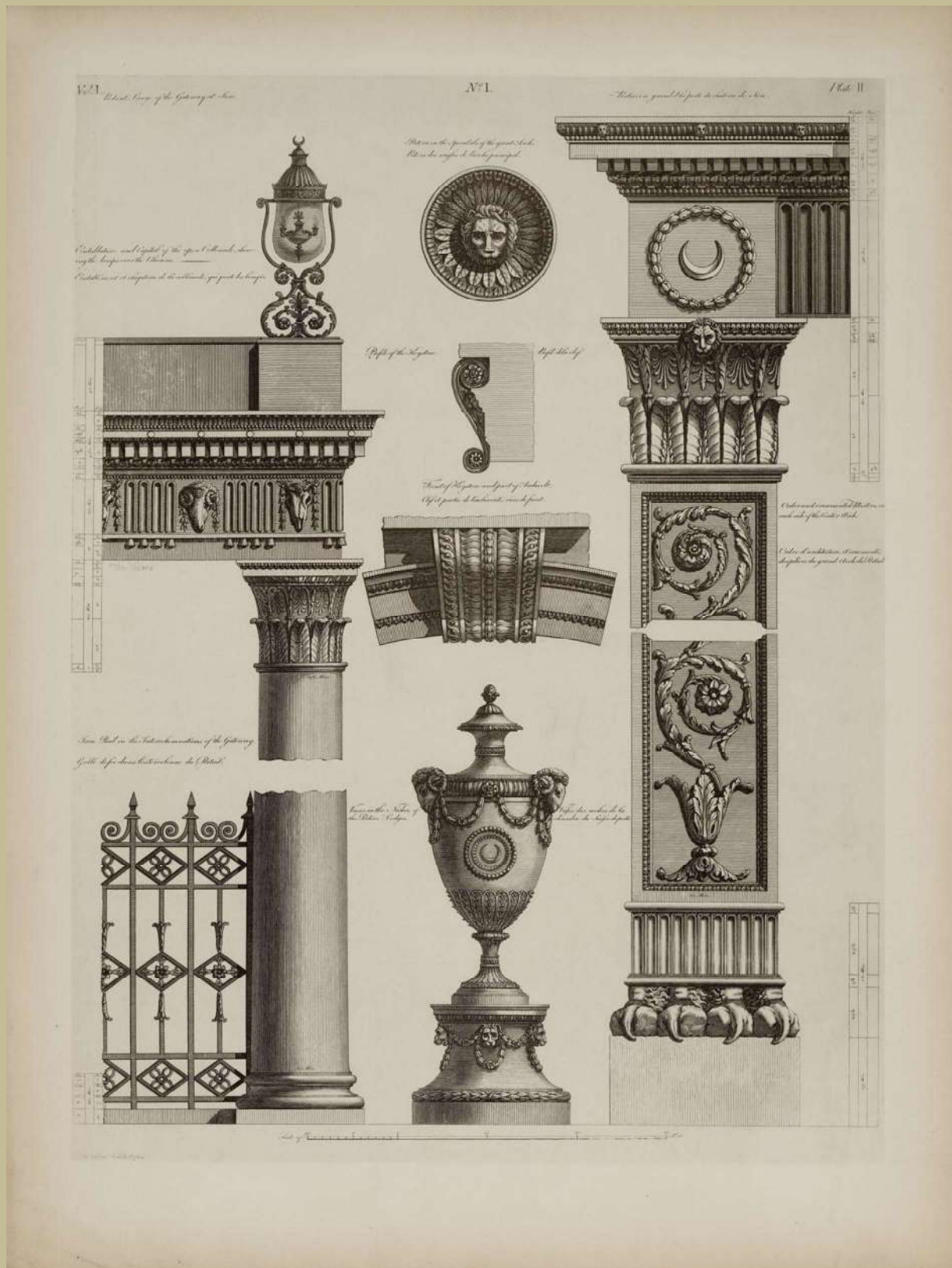
This sort of design may have been a source of inspiration for the Rococo frame designs on Swithland Slate headstones: a plate from Thomas Chippendale's 1754 book "The Gentleman and Cabinet-Makers Director".





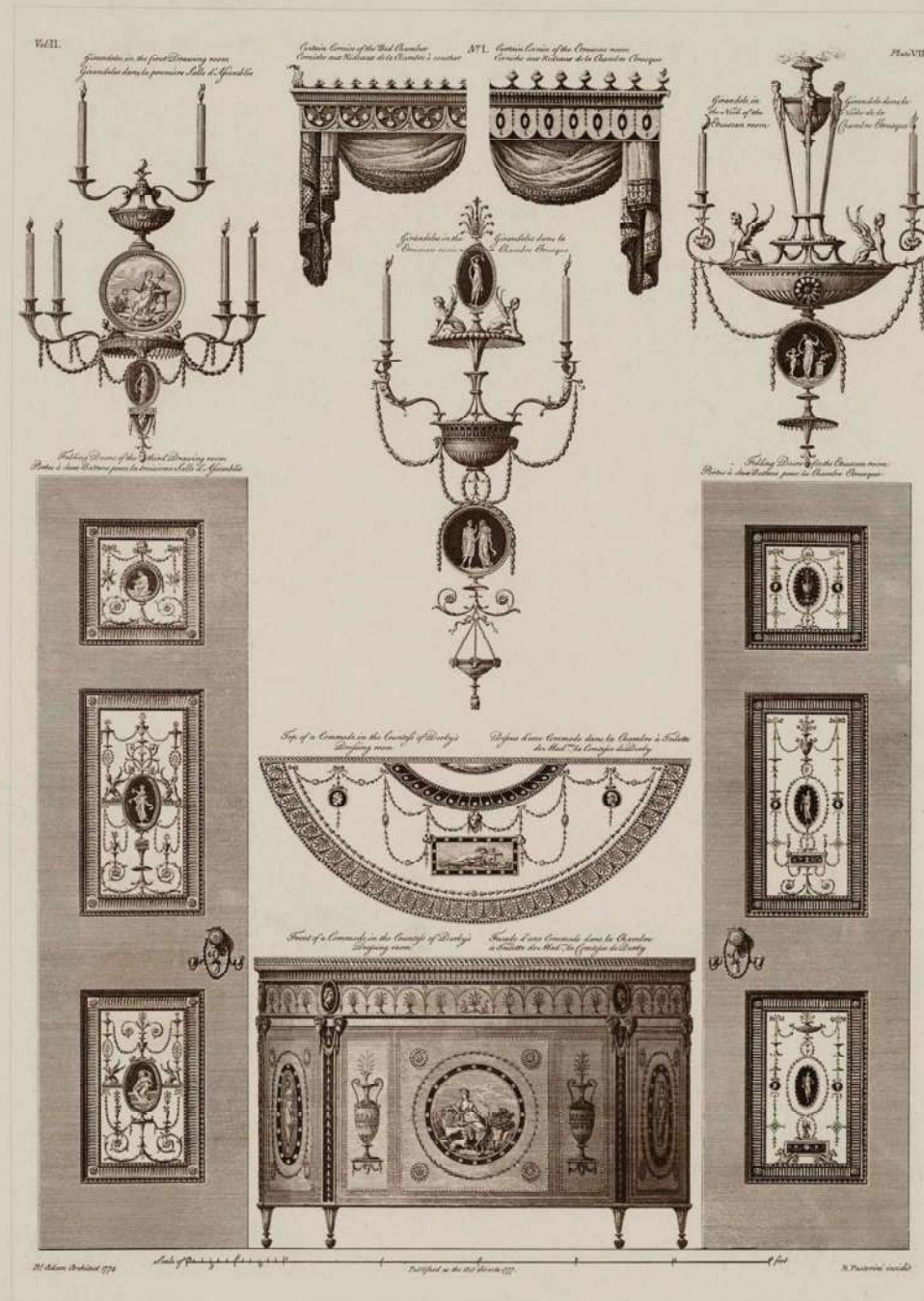
Thomas Johnson's 1761 book of Rococo furniture designs may have inspired some slate carvers.





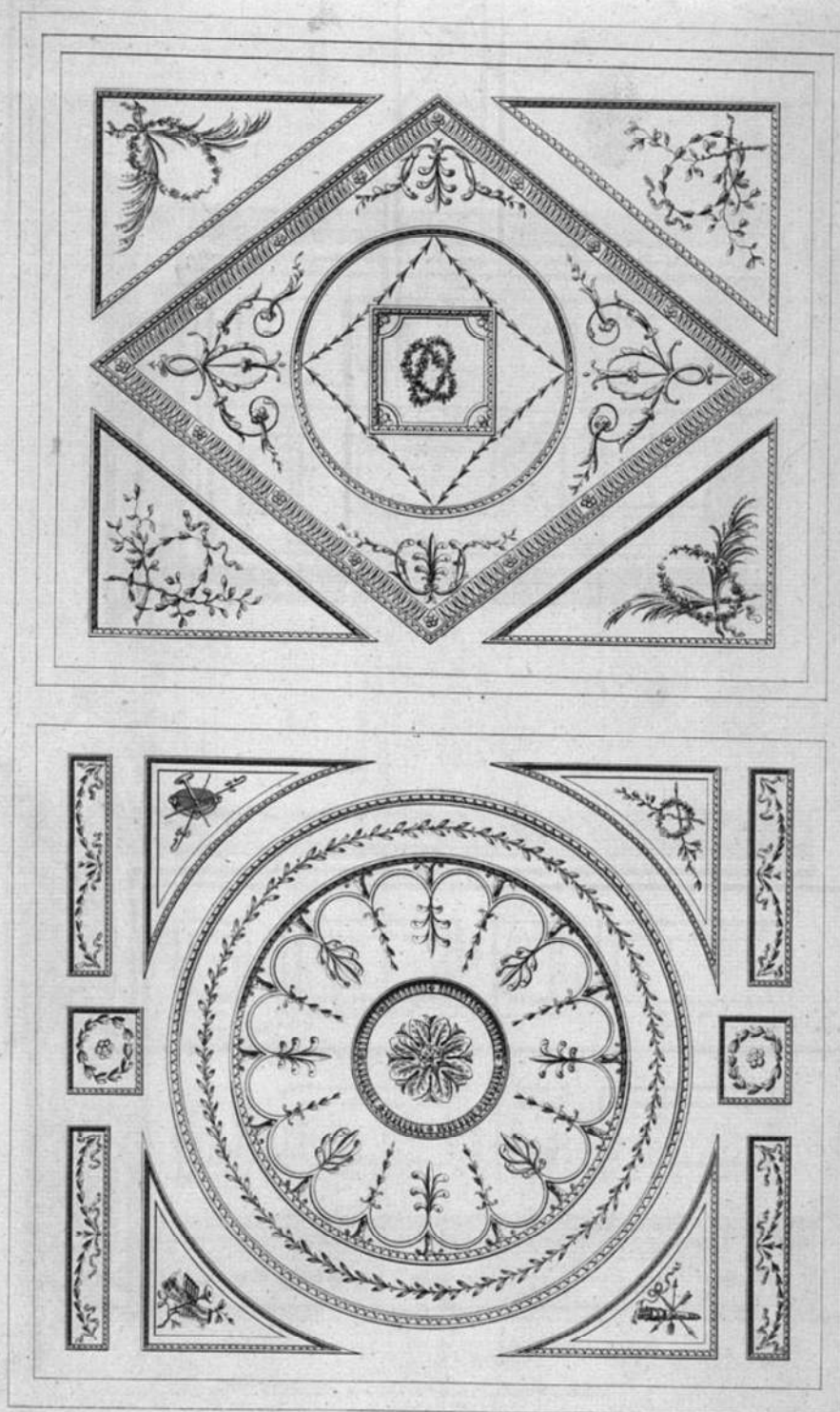
Neoclassical designs of Robert Adam. A rams' head urn appears on the fine 1776/1782 headstone at Wanlip, probably carved by Hind.





Neoclassical designs of Robert Adam. (This and the preceding plate are from "The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam" published 1778/1779).





*Published as the Art directs, Jan<sup>y</sup> 1748 by L. & J. Taylor, N<sup>o</sup> 58. Holborn.*

Plate XXIX from William Pain ("Pain's British Palladio").

## 7) Notes

(a) Nichols wrote “The slates also, on account of their good quality, are taken to great distances.” and “...when engraved by a skilful hand, produce letters, etc., superior to any other sort of stone which is used for the same purpose.” (John Nichols “The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester”, Vol. III, Part II, 1804). Swithland headstones can be seen at Bunhill Fields nonconformist burial ground, London (the grade II listed headstone of Sarah Wheatly, 1790, by “J. Winfield, Wimeswold, Leicestershire”, see 158) and at Bexley, Kent (St Mary’s churchyard: military musician Henry Bailey, aged 20, of 1797). Burgess refers to a William Charles headstone at St Nicholas, Deptford, London, to Ann Bonner, 1763, for which I have found no further details or photograph. The Bexley headstone is not one that I have found referred to in any literature (I came across a photograph on the internet, though the fact that it is a Charnwood slate was not clear to the photographer. One wonders how many more so far unrecognised Swithland headstones may yet be found in the churchyards of south-east England). This headstone is something of a puzzle. With a characteristically rough back, it has a carving of an angel blowing the Last Trump, very similar to examples which can be found on some other Swithland headstones, especially in Nottinghamshire. Yet the lettering, with similarities to that seen in a mid C18th headstone at Swithland (141 lower), and the wording of the superscription, “Here lieth”, seem curiously old-fashioned for the date.

On the subject of the transportation of the slate, during the C18th the overwhelming majority of headstones (or blank slates intended to be carved into headstones) must have been carried by road. It is probably not insignificant that many of the churchyards of Nottinghamshire where Swithland headstones from the late C17th through the C18th are to be found in greatest numbers, lie not very far from the route of the Fosse Way Roman road (as does Wymeswold). It is also noteworthy that the trade directories which list some of the masons mentioned in this history, also give details of (wagon) carriers, who could often be contacted at inns in villages or towns. Burgess makes much of the use of water transport, but this could have played no role in the carriage of those headstones found in south Leicestershire and Northamptonshire which were carved before the beginning of the 1800’s: the waterway connecting Charnwood with this area did not open until early in the C19th.

(b) Sacheverell Sitwell in his introduction to Katherine Esdaile’s “English Church Monuments 1510-1840” published in 1946.

(c) Geography and geology combine to make Leicestershire the most important county in England for igneous rock quarrying, due to the presence of deposits of the right sort of rock closest to the parts of the country with the biggest demand for such stone. Most of this comes from the Precambrian rock quarries of Charnwood together with the huge quarrying operation of the Ordovician Mountsorrel granite just to the east of Charnwood. In the C18th and earlier C19th it was Swithland Slate which was the Charnwood stone in demand in the wider area.



(d) There was also a sizeable pit, now water-filled, which can be glimpsed through foliage over the stone wall opposite the road leading up Brand Hill towards Woodhouse Eaves. The “slate” formerly quarried in Woodhouse Eaves (at Great Hill quarry, below the church) and at nearby Hangingstones, is of Precambrian age and is not a true slate. It was not used for headstones or as roofing slate, but was used for some buildings, e.g. the almshouses in Woodhouse Eaves.

The will of John Glen of Swithland, of 1621 (P.C.C. wills, National Archives, PROB 11/138/192), describes him as “slategetter” (i.e. slate quarryman) so it is clear that slate was being extracted around that time. In 1804 John Nichols (ibid) wrote “Blue slates are raised near Swithland...where an immense excavation has, within the last 50 years, been made” (3). Nichols gives information on the quarrying operation, mentioning the large number of workmen employed and the use of gunpowder for blasting. A sunken, slate-built blast shelter can still be seen in the grounds of The Brand. The slate blocks thus produced were sawn by hand. (In fact when seen under a brilliant blue winter sky a Swithland Slate roof looks very much a rich blue-grey. Incidentally, the original name for this area was the Swithland Brand and it is believed to have been one of several locations around Charnwood Forest where free-roaming cattle were rounded up for branding or marking with the owner’s sign).

(e) Francis Shenton, slater of Mountsorrel, was advertising Welsh slate for sale in 1795, soon after the opening of the Soar Navigation. One early instance of the use of Welsh slate for a headstone with a Leicestershire link, is the slate carved by Pollard and Shenton of Leicester, erected to Leicester's celebrated son, the 52 stone Daniel Lambert, in St Martin's churchyard extension at Stamford, Lincs.\* (Lambert had died suddenly whilst staying in Stamford in 1809). The headstone is more noteworthy for its unusual recounting of some of his prodigious bodily dimensions, than for its rather uninspired craftsmanship. Shenton was presumably Francis Shenton of Mountsorrel, who had gone into partnership with Thomas Benjamin Pollard of neighbouring Quorn (see Note j).

(\* ref. RCHME, Stamford: “Churchyards and their monuments”)

(f) Some (small and early) headstones were carved (and therefore smoothed) on both sides. When we reach the C19th, the backs of headstones appear generally more smoothed off than in the previous century, but this does not mean that a slate lacking a *very* rough back is ipso facto a Welsh slate. Certainly no Welsh slate was imported into the area until after the coming of the canals (1790’s) and even then it took some time to establish itself. In some ways as diagnostic of a Swithland Slate headstone are the characteristic tooling marks seen on many examples, usually as a background around carved symbols. These marks are well seen in e.g. 37, 39 lower, 97 and 103. On the other hand, they are also absent from a large number of headstones (e.g. 31 lower, 33 and 38 lower) which most certainly *are* carved from Swithland Slate. (It has been suggested that such marks might have been intended to provide a “key” for paint or gesso which has since disappeared though the Herrick slates (157), if their present state is a true reflection of their original decoration, would suggest that this may not be the case with Swithland Slate). In the case of slate from the Groby quarry, headstones signed “Groby Quarry” (sometimes “Rudkin, Groby Quarry”) were still being carved well after the mid C19th (some can be seen at Newtown Linford, for example). What can be said almost categorically is that *all of the very finest slate headstones from the finest period of*

*headstone carving in the area under consideration were carved, without doubt, from Charnwood slate.*

(g) As well as their interest in the Swithland pits, the Hinds were also involved in the quarrying of slate at Groby according to surviving documents of 1768 and 1787 (Grey Manuscripts, L.R.O.). Henry Hind, who died in 1801 and whose fine headstone (also to his wife, who died in 1787) is in Swithland churchyard, left a will (National Archives, PROB 11/1361/231) in which he is described as “Slate Merchant”. John Nichols (in the volume of his “Leicestershire” which was published in 1804 but had been long in the writing) referred to “...Mr Hind, a gentleman well known for his ingenious devices on these Slate stones.” As with the Pollard family (Note j), it is not always easy to know which family member carved which headstone. A headstone at Blaby, of 1756, is signed “Hind Whetstone”, whilst another there, signed simply “Hind”, has stylistic similarities which suggest it may be by the same hand (44). (Whetstone parish adjoins Blaby). All Saint’s churchyard, Leicester, has a 1754 headstone signed “H. Hind” (61). The 1775 headstone at Wanlip is signed “H. Hind Swithland” (87), whilst the carver of a 1784 headstone at Kirby Muxloe (51, 91) signs “Hind Junr”. Many other headstones are simply signed “Hind”, e.g. at Thrussington, 1787 (42). David Ramsey quotes an advertisement placed by Henry Hind in the Leicester and Nottingham Journal (22 July 1775), seeking “A Carver, that can work in stone and Wood; and a MASON, that has been used to work in Marble or Hard Stone. A Good Hand in either of the above Branches, may have constant Employ with HENRY HIND of SWITHLAND.” This and numerous similar advertisements suggest that the signature “Hind” may actually represent a “trademark” in some instances, or at least that not every “Hind” headstone was entirely the work of a member of the Hind family.

(h) Another example of very painstaking workmanship can be seen on Hind’s 1781 headstone at Rothley (45) where the headstones depicted in the churchyard setting of the Resurrection are inscribed with minute texts such as “All must die” and even the tiny door handle and keyhole of the south door to the Danvers chapel are engraved.

(i) There is in fact documentary evidence to prove that at least some of the carvers had connections with the book trade and possessed books of their own (besides the Bible which they no doubt all possessed and were very familiar with), making it highly likely that some of them probably had access to a range of up-to-date publications, including the sort of material which it is suggested may have influenced their designs. Anthony and John Birks’ “Arithmetical Collections and Improvements...” was published in London in 1766. It contains a list of subscribers and this includes writing-masters, schoolmasters, merchants and manufacturers. It also includes, amongst other masons, “Mr John Stavely (sic), of Melton-Mowbray, stone-cutter”; and “Mr Henry Hind, jun. of the Slate-quarries, Swithland”. When John Throsby’s “Select Views in Leicestershire” was published in 1789 the list of subscribers included “Mr Firmadge, Leicester” and “Mr Hind, Swithland”. These individuals must have been in touch with events in the book trade to the extent of being approached on the matter of whether they wished to subscribe to these books.



(j) The Pollard family of carvers were Baptists. Benjamin Pollard (born in Swithland in 1754), who died in 1818, had begun his working life in the slate pits at Brand Hill and was later both minister in Quorn and had a mason's shop there. (Information from [www.quornmuseum.com](http://www.quornmuseum.com)). Benjamin Pollard's will (National Archives, PROB 11/1608/231) informs us that he left his "Stone Working Tools, Implements and Stock in Trade" to his only son Thomas Benjamin. It also makes it clear that Benjamin Pollard's daughter Catherine had married Samuel Hull. (The marriage had taken place in Quorn in 1808, the groom coming from Derby). The will further informs us that Thomas Benjamin had been lent money to enter into a business partnership with Shenton and Hull (though a headstone of 1810 in the "Great Meeting" graveyard in Leicester is signed "Pollard and Shenton", suggesting that this was the first incarnation of the firm).

"Pollard, Quorn" (or sometimes Quorndon) would seem to be another way in which Benjamin Pollard signed. (In Seagrave churchyard a headstone of 1790 reads "Quorndon", the full version of his village's name). This may simply be the way that he signed a work which was being sent to a place outside the immediate area where he would have been well-known. He was clearly a different individual from Pollard of Swithland, who was also carving headstones around this time (e.g. 166) and into the 1830's too (103). Some documents of 1825 (in the Herrick Manuscripts collection of L.R.O.\*) relating to property refer to "John Pollard, stonemason of Swithland". (Earlier in the C19th century, a John Pollard of Swithland had served for a time as a Baptist minister at Burton on Trent. It is not clear whether this was the same individual as the mason John Pollard, but it is quite possible. This information is given in "The History of the English General Baptists" by Adam Taylor, 1818). At the time of his will of 1832, (written the day before he died but proved in 1834; National Archives, PROB 11/1829/172) Thomas Benjamin Pollard had a workshop in St Margaret's Parish, Leicester. The Leicester firm of Shenton, Hull and Pollard, stone-masons of London Road, is listed in the 1815 Leicester Directory. By the 1820's, headstones are signed just "Hull and Pollard". After Thomas Benjamin's death, Samuel Hull carried on as a monumental mason. (\*The Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland).

Some Pollards from both Quorn and Swithland are buried in the graveyard of Quorn Baptist Chapel. This easy-to-overlook graveyard contains a number of fine headstones, some of considerable interest, but unfortunately not generally displayed to best advantage, due to space constraints.

They are ranged around the periphery of the chapel land and a few are almost hidden behind sheds or bushes. Behind the chapel (itself a fine C18th building) are headstones signed by Pollard; B.P. (Benjamin Pollard); Pollard of Quorn; Pollard of Swithland; T.P. (presumably Thomas Pollard when working alone), and H and P (the firm of Hull and Pollard). There is a very interesting headstone of 1804 (39 lower), signed "Pollard", which carries a scene reminiscent of Wood of Bingham, but with rather better-carved figures. Overhead, clouds and an Eye of Heaven, another emblem book motif (Quarles, Emblem XIV, 1773 ed., see also 28 lower). In the centre, a seated figure with a book and beside them, an elegant table with more books, and on top of these, a candle. At right, Death, depicted as a skeleton, aims his dart

with one hand, at the seated figure, whilst with the other hand, he lowers a snuffer over the candle. On the left of the scene, a pyramidal tomb, inscribed “Tho’ thou slay me yet will I trust in my GOD” (based on Job 13:15), surmounted by a Crown of Life. At the foot of the tomb, a globe inscribed “Vanity”. This headstone (and a few more here) is of a rather unusual mauve colour, reminiscent of the colouring of a very fine Hind slate of very nearly the same date in Swithland churchyard. There are numerous well-carved, beautifully-decorated slates here and a number have quite unusually-shaped tops (see also his work at Ragdale: 97, 136 lower). Rev. Benjamin Pollard is commemorated on a panel which seems once to have formed part of a (now lost) tomb type of monument. Also commemorated on this is his son Thomas Benjamin. Some other Swithland Pollards were buried in Woodhouse Eaves Baptist chapel graveyard. (Swithland had no Baptist chapel of its own). Frederick Burgess was mistaken in identifying the Benjamin Pollard buried in Newtown Linford in 1826, as Benjamin Pollard the Quorn carver (though he was very likely a relation).

The craft of mason is one which seems, unsurprisingly, to have been passed down in families. William Charles was the name of a father and son who carved in Wymeswold (and a Winfield married into the family). The Hind family are well known and there were many others too. Three of the headstones illustrated here are signed by Kirks. That of 1830 (St Mary de Castro) is signed by Saml. Kirk. A headstone of 1744 at Stoughton signed by W. Kirk (19) must have been carved by a different W. Kirk from the mason who signed W. Kirk, Narboro’ on a headstone of 1816 also in St Mary de Castro (59) and who carved a similar figure of 1821 in the same churchyard.

(k) The “Universal British Directory” of 1794 lists “Wm Firmadge, Stone-mason, High-str.” William Firmadge junior was signing work in 1784. He had been baptised in St Martin’s church, Leicester, in 1755. His father William was presumably the carver of the Burton Overly headstones seen in (148). Both are buried at Scraftoft, Leics. (155). William Firmadge junior carved the Father Time headstone of 1799 (36). He worked as a monumental mason, and carved the fine marble wall tablet in Scraftoft church to his wife Anne (d. 1793) and three daughters. He was also variously described as builder, plasterer, surveyor and architect. Firmadge was a prominent member of Leicester Corporation, serving as Mayor in 1809-10. He had been made a freeman of Leicester in 1778. (Information from the Henry Moore Foundation website). See also Note (r).

(l) Very similar imagery can be seen on a Swithland Slate headstone in the churchyard at Shilton, Warwickshire. (See also Note q).

(m) The Danvers chapel, which identifies this as Swithland church, was demolished in the Victorian period. Hind depicts Swithland church with a spire crashing down. This is artistic licence because the view of the church in Nichols (Plate CXXXVIII) shows that (as now) there was no spire. Clearly Hind wanted to increase the drama of his scene by showing the masonry split asunder and the weathercock tumbling down. Note the highly detailed carving.

(n) This headstone is unfortunately not in situ, but close against a wall in a dark spot. I had to use flash to illuminate it. Close by there is a fine depiction on a 1784 headstone signed by



“Firmadge junior”, of an angel offering the Crown of Life to a seated woman. This headstone is simply propped against a wall of the chapel. The headstones of this chapel (almost none now well-displayed) were surveyed by Alfred Henry Paget in 1904 and the resulting book published after his death in 1912 as “The Epitaphs in the Graveyard and Chapel of the Great Meeting, Leicester”. Neither of these headstones showed evidence of gilding but it is clear that at the time of Paget’s 1904 study at least some Swithland headstones here did show the remains of gilding on some of the lettering. The examples he mentions are chiefly from the first quarter of the C19th and it is not possible to know how widespread this fashion was. Further evidence of gilding comes from a passage in a 1911 book, “Memorials of Old Leicestershire”, edited by Alice Dryden: “The ornament produced by the old carvers, though one is bound to admit that the lettering often runs into exuberance, is admirable, and is in most cases picked out and emphasised in gold leaf, and it remains after a hundred and fifty or two hundred years astonishingly fresh and rich”. The headstones referred to here were in St Martin’s and St Nicolas’ churchyards in Leicester, and it may be that (as at the Great Meeting graveyard) gilding was a fashion for headstones of the more prosperous citizens of the county town. It seems unlikely that later C17th or early C18th slates in were routinely gilded in this way, though lack of evidence of remaining gilding is not categorical proof that it never existed. There are also some examples of highly elaborate gilded calligraphy at Cropwell Bishop, Nottinghamshire and of gilded and painted slates (with heraldic carvings) in the Herrick Chapel of St Martin’s church, now Leicester Cathedral (157), but these examples are *inside* churches.

(o) Coincidentally, 1760 was the year of Thomas Wood’s birth and 1800 was the mid-point of his long life. He was buried in the churchyard of his native Bingham in 1841. His epitaph informs us that “He was well known for more than half a century as an ingenious carver of Tomb and Grave Stones”.

(p) Richard Weston’s “Leicester Directory” of 1798 lists “Bell & Son Engravers (& Schoolmasters) High-street.”

(q) The well-executed Charity on a headstone in St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester, date (and signature, if any) now below soil level, is almost identical to a finely carved image of Charity on a headstone at Burton Lazars, Leicestershire, dated 1781 and signed by Staveley of neighbouring Melton Mowbray.

It is often possible to recognise similarities in carvings on Swithland headstones which are very likely not the work of the same mason. A headstone at Anstey, Leicestershire with Father Time (37 upper) is similar to a depiction at Shilton, Warwickshire (136 upper). Also at Shilton is another headstone with some striking similarities to another at Anstey. (This village is not to be confused with the village of Ansty close to Shilton). Both headstones are shown on page 135. The scene of Hope with her anchor at Thrussington (42) is very similar to one at Leire (both in Leicestershire). The very accomplished Father Time at St Mary de Castro, Leicester (36 lower), by William Firmadge, is very similar to, but better executed than, the figure carved on a headstone at Nailstone.

At Welford, Northamptonshire, is a headstone showing Father Time and Hope standing either side of an urn, a scene not identical to that seen at Belgrave (57) and elsewhere, but surely too similar for the resemblance to be coincidental. Many more examples can be seen. Whilst some similar headstones may well have originated in the same workshop, many probably did not.

Where there is a noticeable difference in quality between otherwise similar depictions several possible explanations suggest themselves. The less accomplished headstones might have been carved by a less skilled mason from the same workshop, but this seems unlikely in the case of some especially crude carvings: would a good mason have wanted his business to be represented by the unrefined workmanship of a novice? A mason may also have seen and copied his model in a churchyard. It seems most likely, however, that carvers of very similar designs were actually using a pattern book as their source. Perhaps unsurprisingly, no such books seem to have survived.

The well-known headstone at Rothley (45), bearing a scene of the Resurrection, seems to reinforce the case for believing in the existence of some form of (now lost) pattern book(s). Hind's scene can also be seen on a (poorly-preserved) headstone at Sileby, Leicestershire and on another at Attenborough in Nottinghamshire. The latter is more crudely-carved than the Rothley Resurrection and the church is given Gothic windows rather than the Classical windows of the Rothley depiction. The Sileby depiction is, as far as one can tell, certainly not as competent as the Rothley carving. In particular there is a lack of perspective in the depiction of the east end of the church and both the banner-holding arm of the angel and the trumpet are clumsily-executed. There is also a lack of dynamism in the depiction of the collapsing tower compared to the Rothley version. But unlike the Gothic windows of the Attenborough headstone, the Sileby relief does show the round-headed windows of the church seen in the Rothley carving, though Hind's finely-depicted Palladian east window is represented instead by a pair of round-headed windows.

The best-carved depiction is the Hind version, modelled on the church of his home village (with dramatic modification: see Note m). The Sileby headstone would therefore seem to be a less competent copy, whilst still showing the Classical windows of Hind's depiction. The Attenborough carving would seem to be inspired by the same model, but the carver did not copy the Classical form of the windows. It seems unlikely therefore that this headstone was made in Hind's workshop: had it been then surely the church windows would show the Classical form. Likewise, if the Sileby headstone originated in Hind's workshop, this would imply that his business was happy to supply rather second-rate work.

Nichols refers to "...Mr Hind, a gentleman well known for his ingenious devices on these Slate stones". Taken in conjunction with the preceding points, it is tempting to think that as well as selling the slate to his mason clients, Hind may also have supplied (for a fee, one assumes) drawings on which some masons elsewhere based some of their work.

It would also be interesting to know the connection, for example, between the use of the quotation from Shakespeare's "The Tempest" by R. Brown of Whatton, on a 1783 headstone in Nottinghamshire (49 upper) and its use by J. Winfield of Wymeswold on the Wheatly headstone of 1790 at Bunhill Fields, London (158). And what was the connection between these headstones and the Hind-carved headstone of 1782 at Anstey, Leicestershire (49 lower) on the same theme but quoting the Bible rather than Shakespeare?

(r) The late C18th and earlier C19th saw the carving of more naturalistic human figures in the work of some masons: besides William Firmadage's "Father Time" they are well represented by the elegantly draped female figures, for example 43; 59; 60 upper and 139.



## 8) More Examples Illustrated



Langar, Nottinghamshire. A headstone by Wood of Bingham. Note the rabbits amongst the grass. Wood showed a special fondness for depicting the natural world (see also 134 lower).



Thrussington churchyard, Leicestershire. 1727 headstone carved by W. Charles (signed on the top).





Radcliffe on Trent, Nottinghamshire. A fine mid C18th headstone almost certainly carved by James Sparrow of Radcliffe, many of whose slates can be seen here in the churchyard of his home village.



St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester, 1792: an extreme case of a burial being commemorated in stone long after death. Wife Sarah died in 1737, her husband George in 1792 (contrast with 98).





Anstey, Leicestershire (1741). This headstone carries mortality symbolism and a scallop shell, the latter an uncommon symbol on Swithland headstones (but see also 148 lower).



Anstey churchyard, Leicestershire (1720/1739). Headstone of the latter date with mortality symbols, winged cherub heads and flaming candle. Note the carving of the sun, an unusual symbol on Swithland gravestones.





Melton Mowbray churchyard, Leicestershire, 1762. Trumpets sound from Heavenly clouds as a pyramid crashes down and a winged skull rises from a tomb. The tumbling crown and falling pyramid are probably intended to represent the end of earthly status at the call to Judgement. More usually a crown on a Swithland Slate headstone represents the Crown of Life (below).



Whetstone churchyard, Leicestershire. Angels blowing trumpets hold the Crown of Life, 1774.





Sileby, Leicestershire, (1724/1745). Flaming torch, winged hourglass and caduceus (incorrectly depicted lacking wings: see 61).



Rothwell, Northamptonshire. A winged cherub head carved by Samuel Turner, 1750 (see 73).





A detail of one of the slate panels on the Danvers Monument in Swithland churchyard, 1745, carved by one of the Hind family. Plough horses.



Granby, Nottinghamshire. Detail of a headstone carved by Wood of Bingham.





Anstey, Leicestershire, 1762 (above) and Shilton, Warwickshire, 1780 (below), one of two very similar headstones here, the other of 1769. The later Shilton headstone was almost certainly inspired by the earlier, which would appear to have derived its imagery and design from the same source as the Anstey headstone. Another headstone at Shilton (136) is also close to one at Anstey, Leicestershire.







Shilton, Warwickshire (1768). Compare the imagery and design with an Anstey headstone (37).



Ragdale, Leicestershire. 1797 headstone signed by Pollard of Quorn, showing his penchant for experimenting with differently shaped tops. Note also the winged cherub heads holding the drapery.





Whissendine, Rutland. Mortality symbolism including a rather comical Serpent with, presumably, fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.



Granby, Nottinghamshire. Detail of a headstone by Thomas Wood of Bingham.





Hoby, Leicestershire. A globe and serpent. The serpent appears to be an ouroboros treated decoratively (i.e. incorrectly) since it is shown partially uncurled.



A detail of William Firmadge's 1799 Father Time, St Mary de Castro, Leicester.





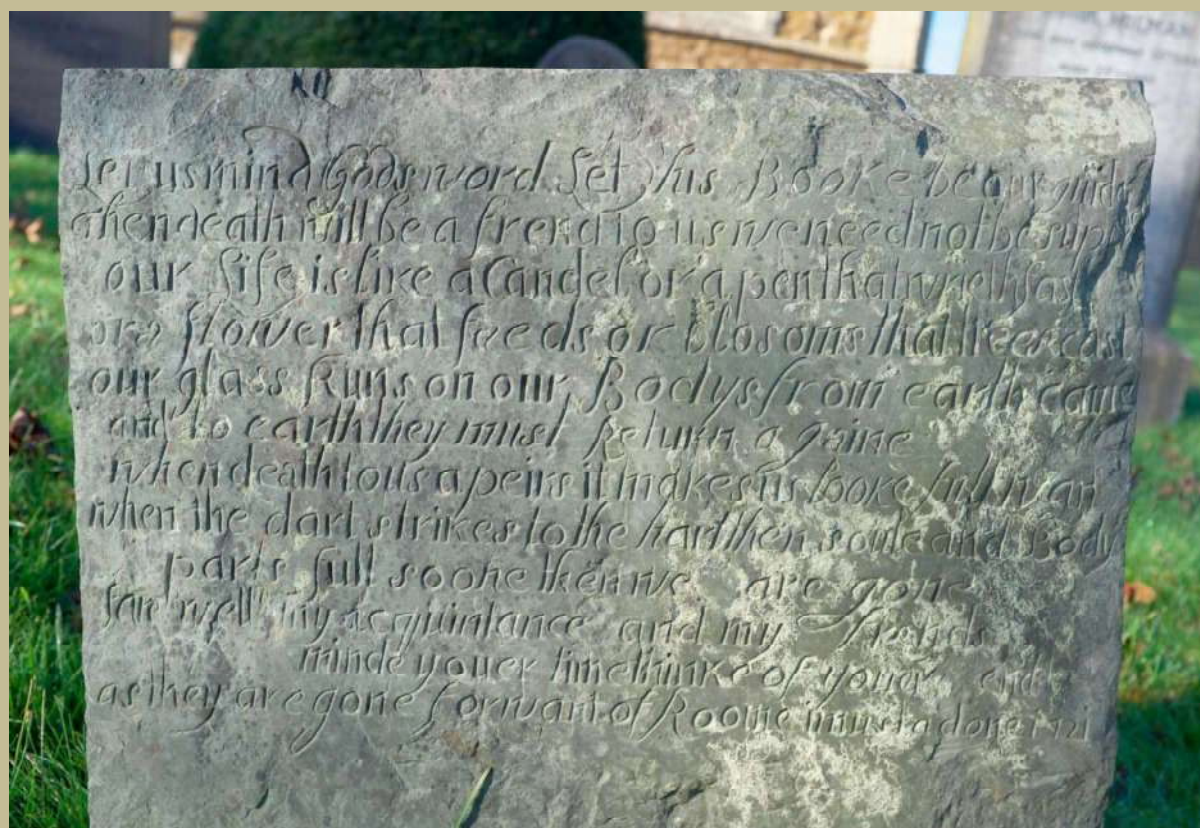
Billesdon churchyard, Leicestershire. Two elegantly draped female figures Above, Mourning (1791). The draped shield carries the final verse (gender-adapted) of Thomas Gray's "Elegy". Below, Hope.







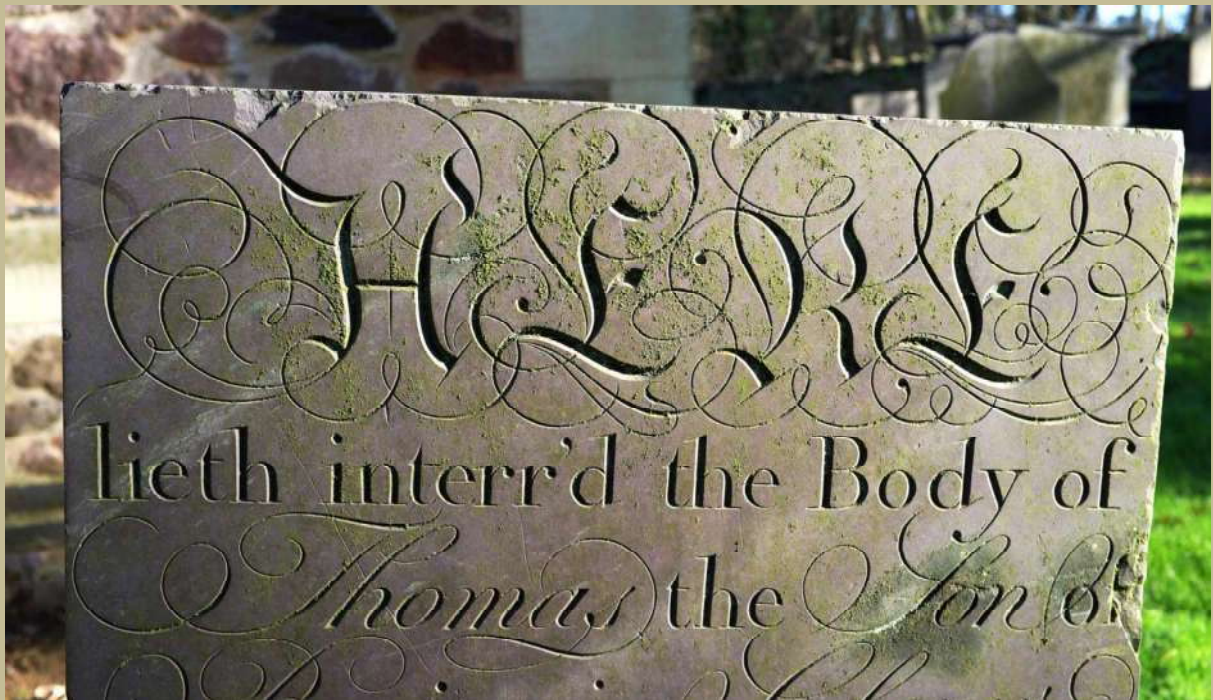
Burton Overy, Leicestershire. The two faces of a curiously rustic headstone of 1721, carved on both sides with a very long epitaph relating the death of two individuals who appear to have drowned (possibly in a well). Note the naive symbols.







Blaby, Leicestershire. Detail of 1718 headstone. Note the “tulip” embellishment of the “H”, reminiscent of those found on a group of near-contemporary slates in south Leicestershire and north Northamptonshire

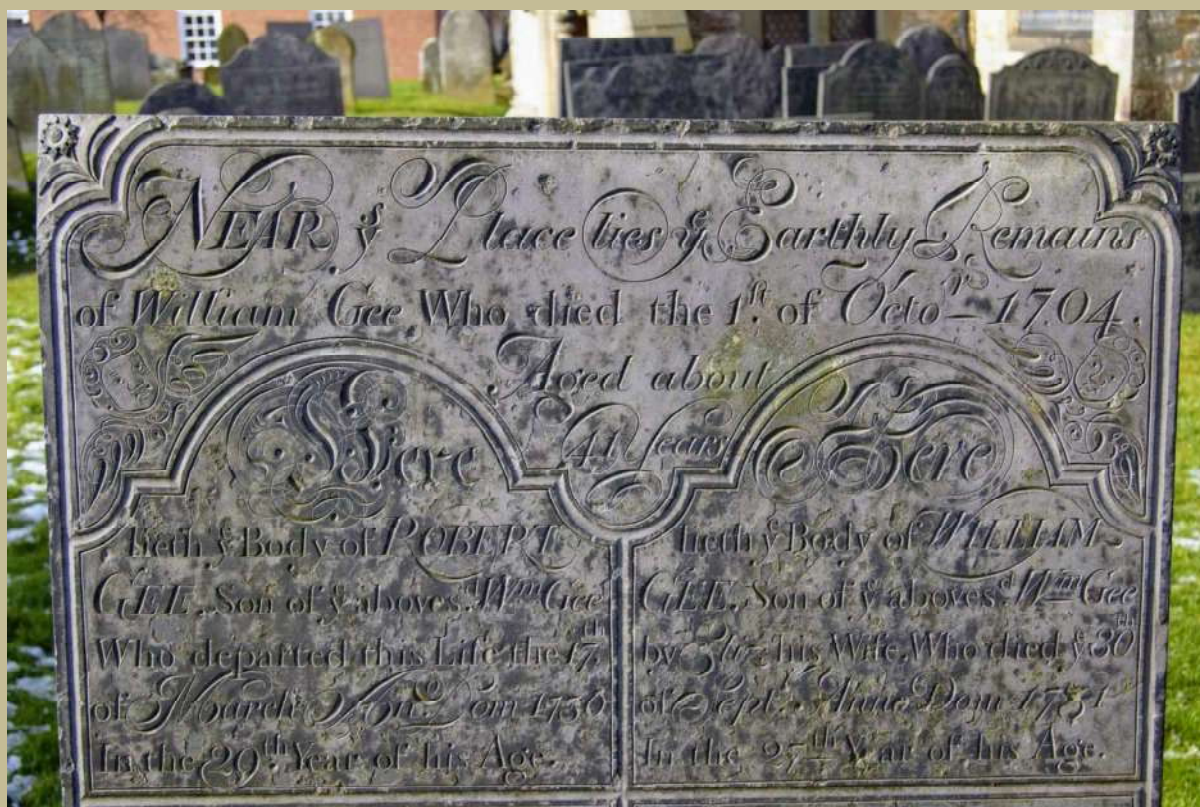


Swithland, Leicestershire, 1746. This lettering was probably inspired by “German script” seen in the “Universal Penman”, which probably also inspired the carver of the headstone at Hoby (78).



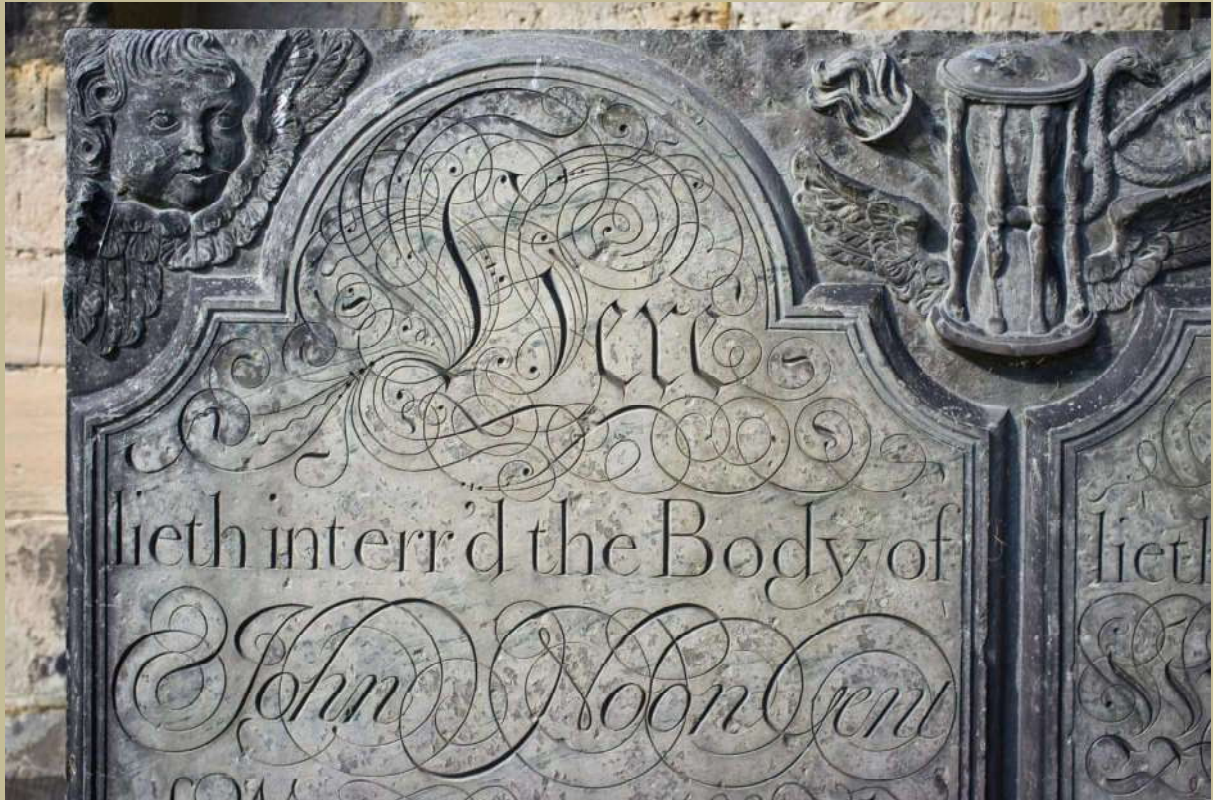


St Mary de Castro, Leicester

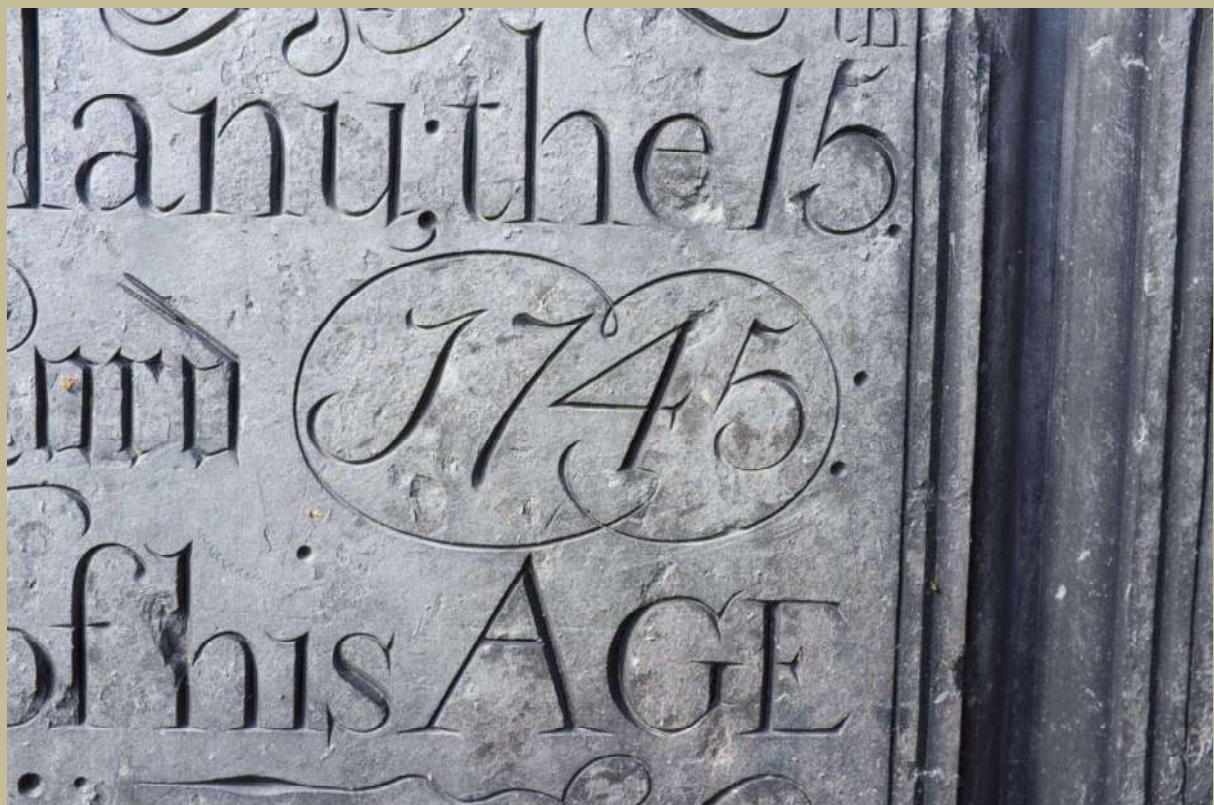


Wymeswold, Leicestershire

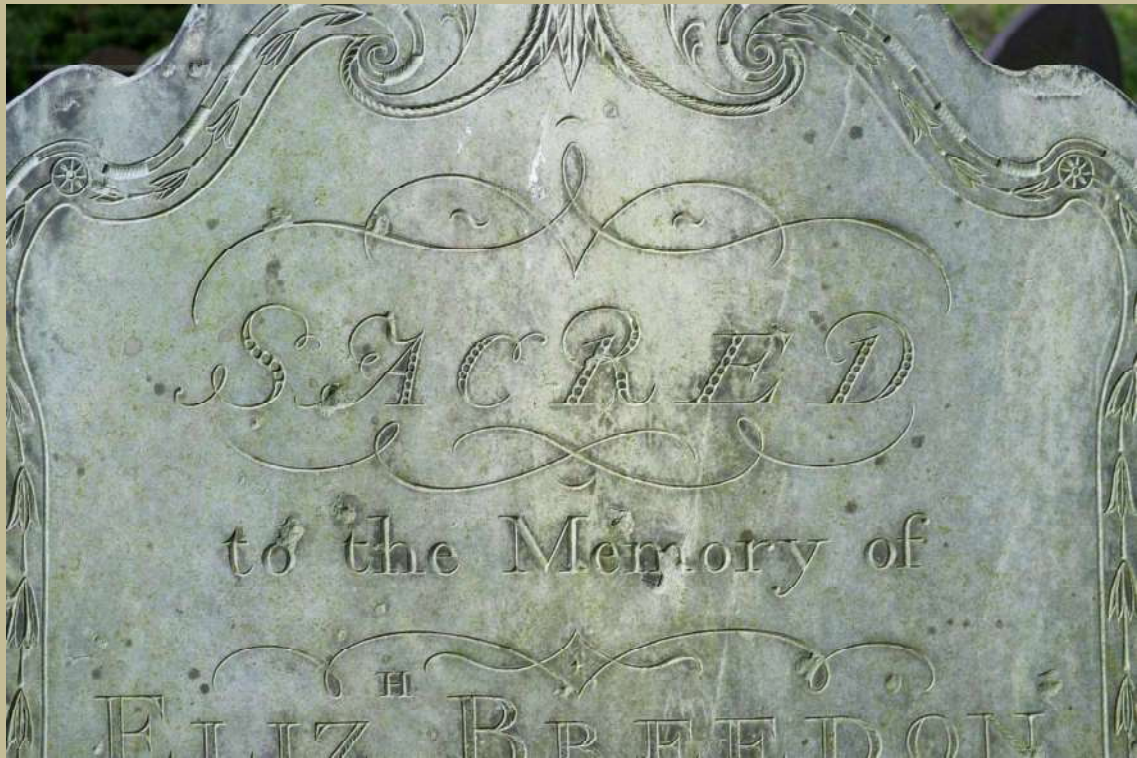




Sileby, Leicestershire. (above and below). Two example of the calligraphy on the 1721/1745 headstone at Sileby. It is fortunate that this, probably the finest headstone in the churchyard, is one of the few here which is well-positioned. Compare the superscription with (19) of around the same date.



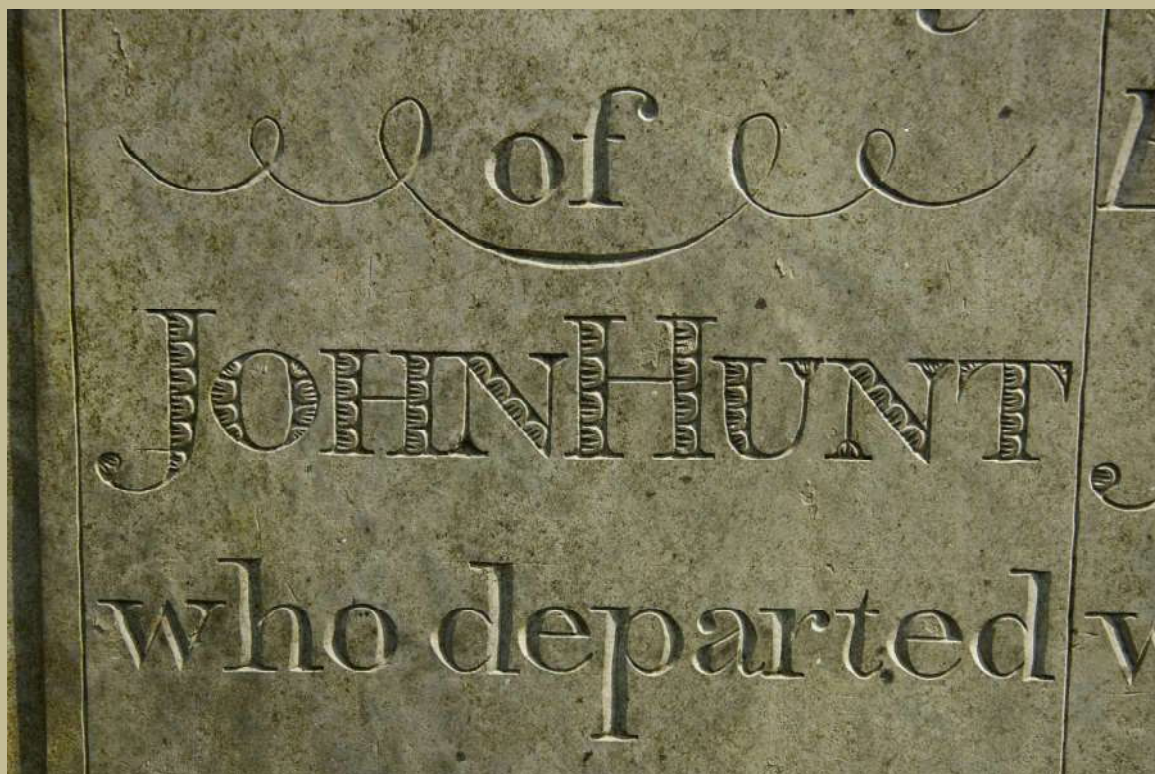




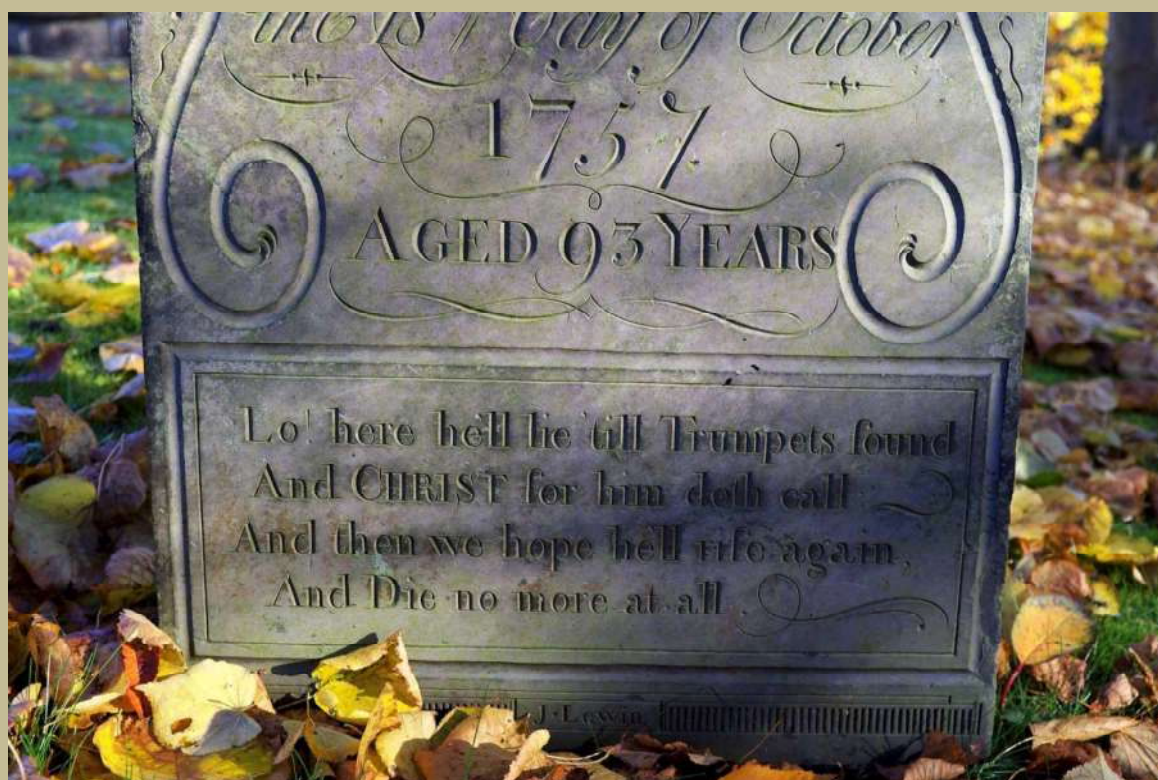
Woodhouse, Leicestershire. Two examples of the sort of lettering with decorative treatment of the thick strokes, which became commonly used on Swithland Slate headstones towards the end of the C18th and into the C19th. Above, 1803 (unsigned); below, 1827, signed by Pollard of Swithland.





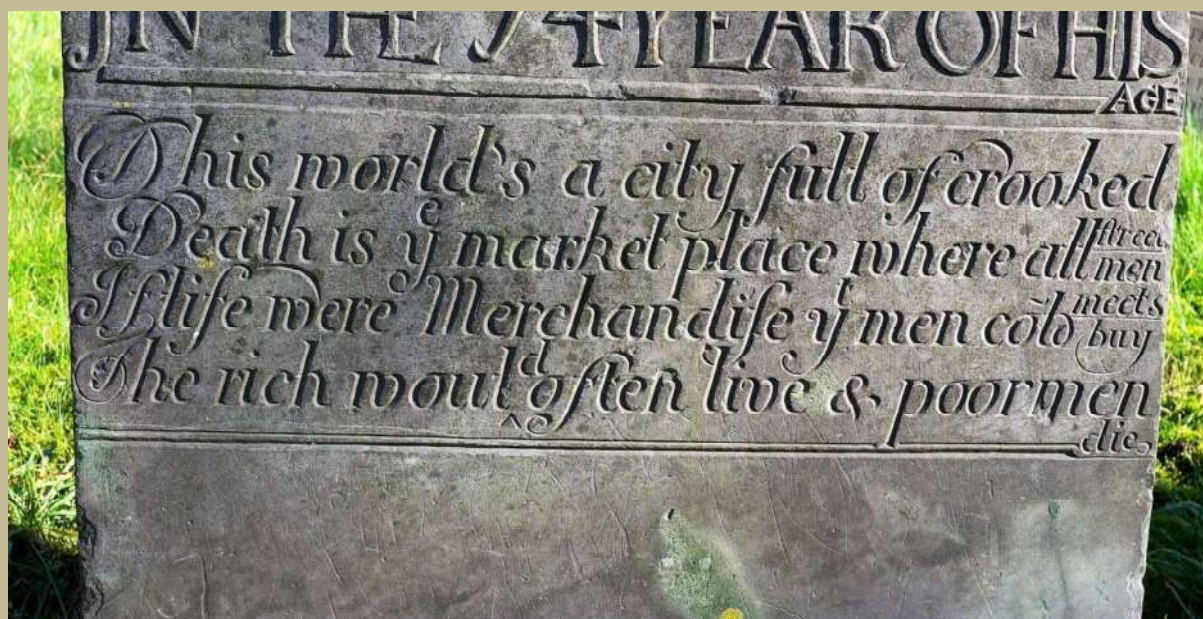


Sproxton, Leicestershire. This sort of lettering (and 144 lower) with decorative “infilling” was based on Modern type face with its exaggerated thick and thin strokes. Similar decorative treatment appeared a little earlier in the later C18th on the brass plaques which Cotswold monumental craftsmen fixed to their headstones. (Such brasses were favoured because carved lettering weathered poorly on the limestone used for such headstones. Swithland Slate posed no such problems).

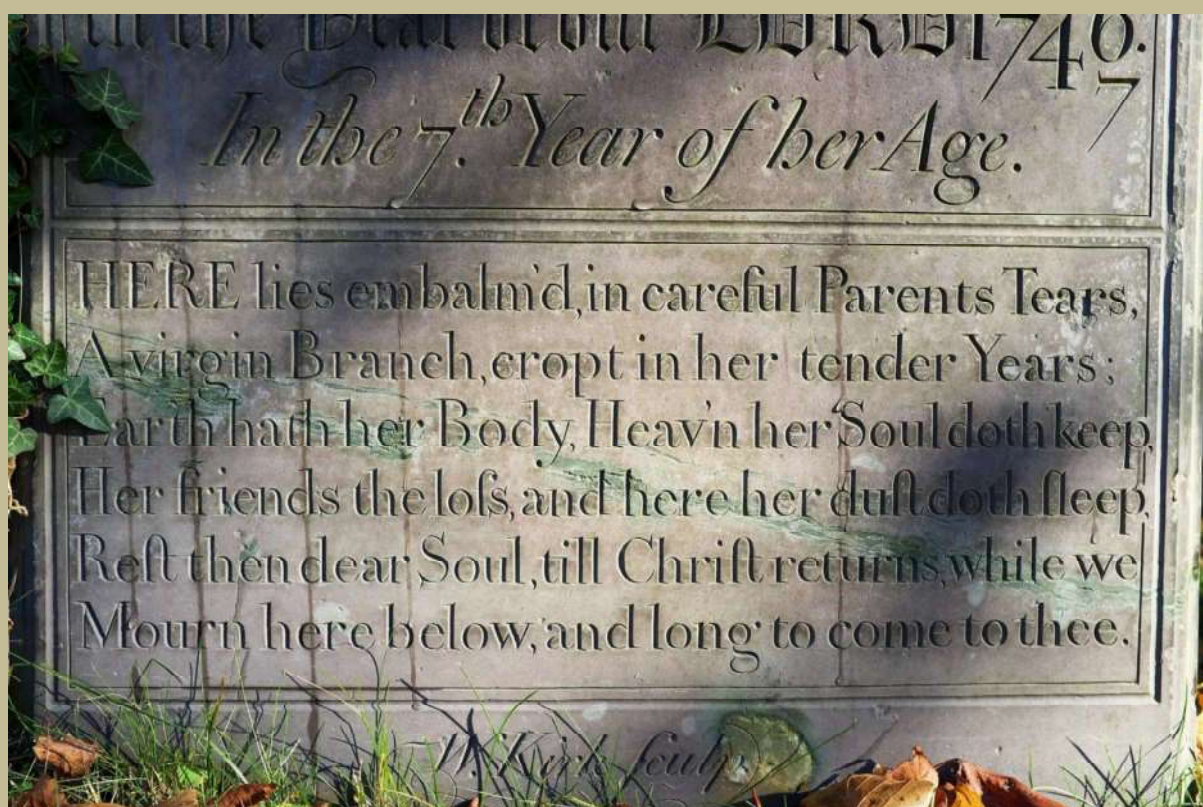


Stoughton churchyard, Leicestershire. 1757 headstone signed J. Lewin.



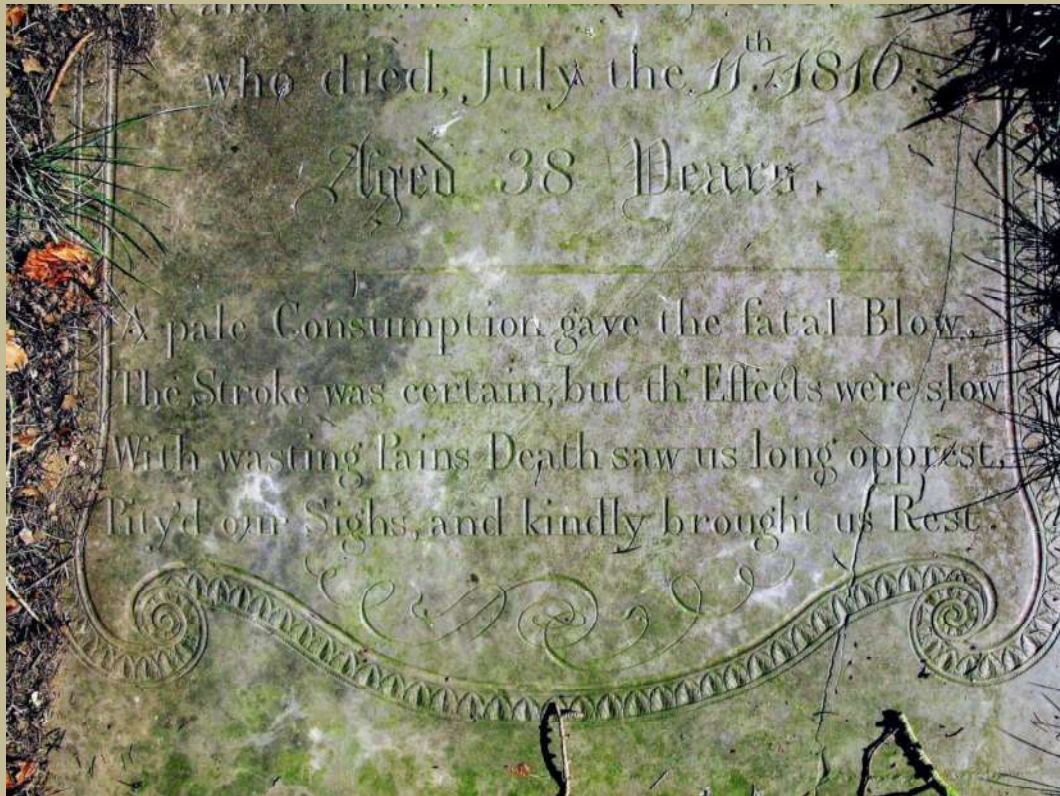


Hickling, Nottinghamshire. This epitaph is very similar to one found elsewhere in the country.



Stoughton, Leicestershire. The melting frost here adds appropriate “tears” to this epitaph.





Shenton, Leicestershire. Headstone of 1809/1816 (almost certainly carved by Pollard of Swithland) with an epitaph widely used in the country, reminding us of the scourge of tuberculosis.



Great Easton, Leicestershire. 1799/1818 headstone. Swithland slate headstones are comparatively rare in this churchyard near to the Rutland border. To the right is an C18th Ketton oolite headstone.





Manton churchyard, Rutland. These fine headstones carved from the locally-quarried Ketton stone give an idea of the sort of work being produced in the region contemporaneously with the work of the Swithland slate carvers. Contrast the less florid calligraphy and the general absence of the complex symbolism and imagery of many Swithland headstones.



Burton Overy churchyard, Leicestershire. 1758, 1754, 1767 headstones signed "Firmadge" (Note k).





Blaby churchyard, Leicestershire.

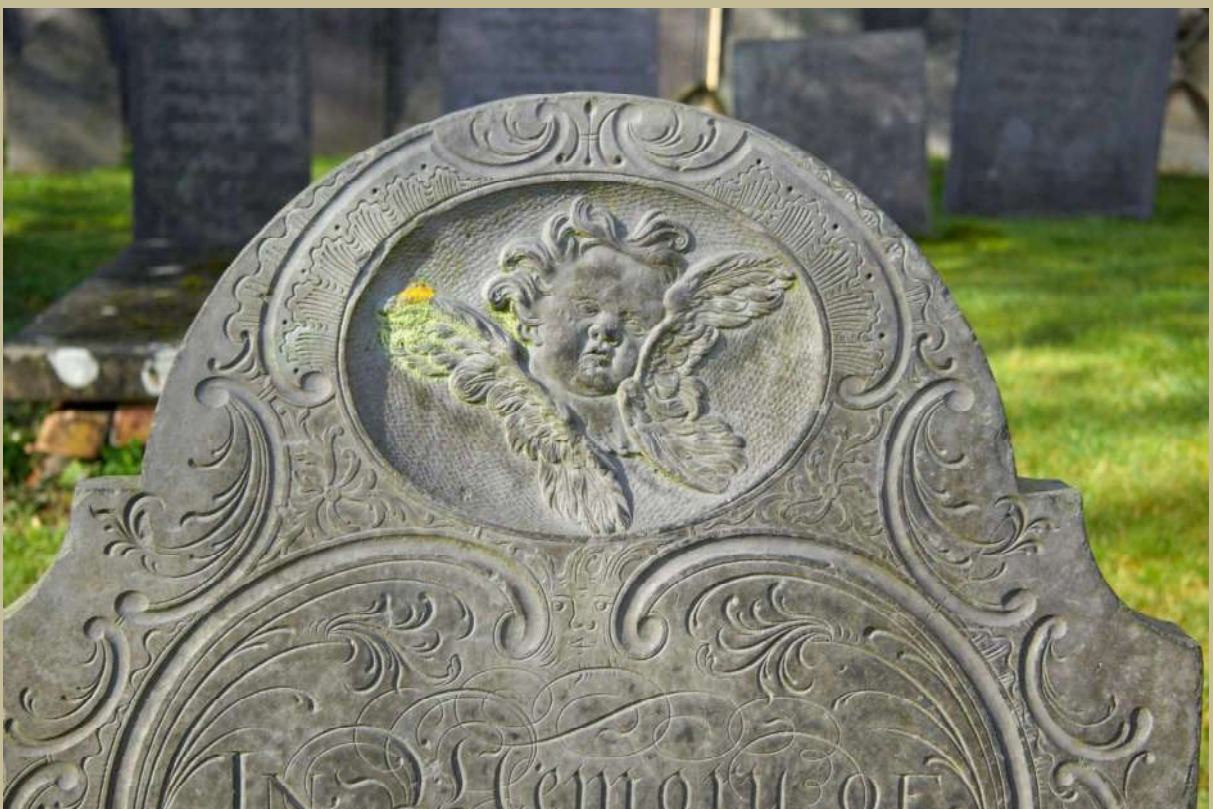


Anstey churchyard, Leicestershire. The sun is warming the melting frost on these headstones.





Whatton, Nottinghamshire



Whatton, Nottinghamshire. Note the face engraved just below the oval panel.





Swithland, Leicestershire. Slate tombs of the Hind family, 1801 (see also 54 lower) and 1820. Much of the slate in the churchyard is of a distinctive colour and very high quality (see also 20, 101, 103).



A Swithland Slate roof, showing the varying texture and colour and how the slates diminish in size towards the ridge. The Hinds supplied slate not just for headstones but for roofing and for more specialised uses such as chimney pieces, sundials and cheese presses.





Gumley, Leicestershire. Neoclassical decoration of the 1790's.



Scraptoft, Leicestershire, 1788/1797.





Kirby Bellars, Leicestershire



Radcliffe on Trent, Nottinghamshire



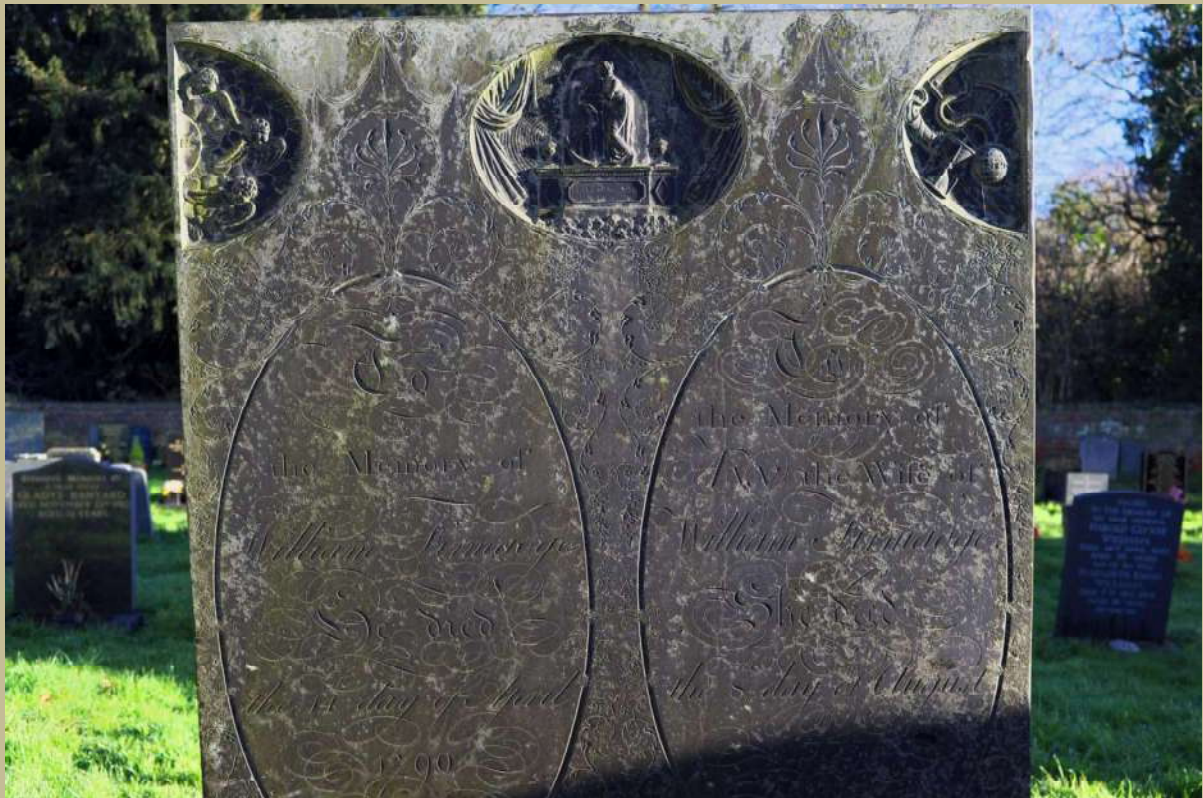


Tilton, Leicestershire. An interesting variant of the urn with snake handles.



Quorn, Leicestershire





Scraptoft, Leicestershire (1790). Headstone carved by William Firmadage to his parents Ann, (died 1777) and William, (died 1790). Neoclassical decoration, with angels (top left), mortality symbols (top right) and a central oval with a figure of Hope. She stands upon a Classical tomb, whilst behind is a Gothic arch. The Latin inscription on the tomb translates as “Our hope is in Heaven”.





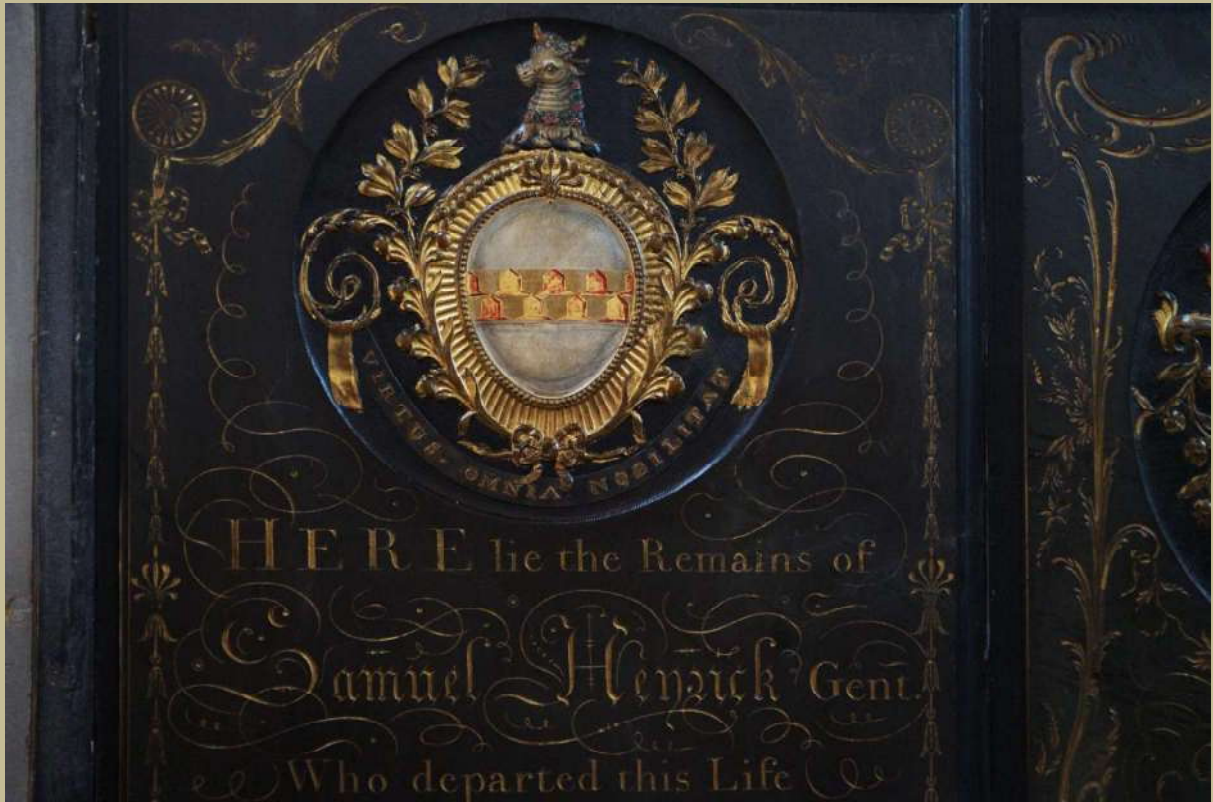


Kibworth, Leicestershire.



Swithland, Leicestershire. These two headstones, carved by Pollard of Swithland, carry identical designs (see 101). The headstone on the right, of 1807, is thicker and far rougher than the 1816 headstone at left, yet both are certainly Swithland Slate, and identical in colour and texture on the carved side.





Details of two gilded and painted slates (the above of 1774) to members of the Herrick (Heyrick) family in what was then St Martin's parish church (now Leicester Cathedral). It is impossible to know how commonly headstones in country churchyards were either gilded or painted, or both.







A far-travelled Swithland Slate headstone in Bunhill Fields nonconformist burial ground, London. The 1790 headstone of Sarah Wheatly signed “J. Winfield Wimeswould Leicestershire”, bearing typical Swithland symbolism. (Photo by Edwardx: Wikimedia Commons).





St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester, looking east.

This churchyard contains a large number of headstones, the vast majority facing west. Most headstones seem to face west, though some churchyards have a majority of (what seem to be undisturbed) headstones facing east (Wymeswold is one). Bodies were buried with the feet towards the east, so that when the dead were resurrected, they would rise up facing east. A headstone, placed at the head end of a grave and inscribed on the west-facing side, would therefore mean that a viewer would not be standing over the deceased when they read a headstone. Those headstones which depict graves in a churchyard setting (45) show the dead facing east as they rise (a standard English parish church has the tower placed at the west end).

In the foreground are three later C18th headstones of the Bankart family (wool staplers), including William Firmadge's "Father Time" headstone of 1799. This headstone is one of a very small number of English examples (mostly of Swithland Slate) to be seen in the Farber Gravestone Collection of photographs (available online). Interestingly, the photographic technique used in those examples used a mirror to reflect light, which therefore lights the details from the opposite side to natural sunlight.

Because burials in this churchyard were prohibited in the early Victorian period (when municipal cemeteries situated away from densely-inhabited urban areas, became the norm) it is free of the later memorials of marble and granite which are to be found in many later-used country churchyards. And because the parish authorities here have shown an enlightened attitude, it is also still possible to see most of the headstones here aligned as intended, and not ranged around the periphery of the plot or even used as walling or paving. (Examples which spring to mind are Sileby and Loughborough, both ill-treated decades ago to make mowing easier, surely no longer an issue with the use of strimmers). It is certainly the most rewarding churchyard in Leicester for the study of Swithland Slate headstones.





Wymeswold churchyard, Leicestershire. A frost-covered headstone of 1733 carved by William Charles of Wymeswold.



Medbourne, Leicestershire. An algae-covered headstone with unusual decoration.



## 9) Works Consulted

The geological background is covered in Annette McGrath's "The Rock Quarries of Charnwood Forest", published in the "Mercian Geologist", 2006 16 (4), available to download as a PDF.

[http://www.emgs.org.uk/files/mercian\\_vol13on/Mercian%20Geologist%20volume%2016%202004-2007/Mercian%202007%20v16%20p241%20Charnwood%20quarries,%20McGrath.pdf](http://www.emgs.org.uk/files/mercian_vol13on/Mercian%20Geologist%20volume%2016%202004-2007/Mercian%202007%20v16%20p241%20Charnwood%20quarries,%20McGrath.pdf)

Alan McWhirr's "The Roman Swithland Slate Industry" gives details of early use of the slate and also shows that it was carried quite far even at that period:

[https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/1988/1988%20\(62\)%201-8%20McWhirr.pdf](https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/1988/1988%20(62)%201-8%20McWhirr.pdf)

There are some interesting references in D.A. Ramsey's "Slate Quarrying at Groby and Swithland etc":

<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/p15407coll7/id/154>

The first study of Swithland Slate with reference to headstone carving would seem to have been Alfred Herbert's "Swithland Slate Headstones". It provides some interesting information on the quarries, but is rather limited in its scope. It is available as a PDF download:

<https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/SwithlandPagesfromsmvolumeXXIIpart2-3.pdf>

Considerably more useful is Frederick Burgess's "English Churchyard Memorials" (1963, reprinted 2004 Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press) which covers headstones from all parts of England, but devotes quite a lot of space to Swithland Slate. It looks at the subjects of calligraphy and imagery and their sources, which Herbert almost entirely ignored. There is also a list of carvers and a listing of churchyards which are rewarding to visit. There are however some noticeable omissions from this list, for example Anstey, Blaby, Kirby Muxloe, Little Dalby and Wanlip spring to mind.

Brian Kemp's "English Church Monuments" (London, 1980) is useful background reading on symbolism and with information about church monuments coeval with the Swithland headstones.

The calligraphy in "The Pen's Transcendencie..." of Edward Cocker can be seen online at the Bibliotheque Nationale:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k94009620/f6.image.r=.langEN>



and examples from John Seddon's "The Penman's Paradise" can be seen on the same website:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9400963d/f2.image.r=john%20seddon.langEN>

George Bickham's "Universal Penman" is not available online (apart from a few pages) but is published as a re-print by Dover Books.

The English Emblem Books which I have looked at and from which I have included a few images, are available on the Penn State University Library website: <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/english-emblem-book-project/emblem-books>

Some of the published works of Robert Adam, Thomas Johnson, Thomas Chippendale and others, are available on the University of Wisconsin website: <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/DLDecArts/Browse.html>

There is some information on Samuel Turner of Market Harborough in "Harborough Slate Engravers" by J. C. Davies (T.L.A.H.S. LXI 1987): [https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/1987/1987%20\(61\)%2024-33%20Davies.pdf](https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/1987/1987%20(61)%2024-33%20Davies.pdf)



St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester, looking west.



## A Note on Signatures and the Dating of Headstones

The earliest headstones were not signed. Signatures became more common as the C18th progressed, but there are a surprising number of headstones from later in the C18th which seem to carry no signature, even such a remarkable work as (88). Where I give the name of a mason, it is visible on the slate or, in a few cases it may no longer be visible (since a headstone may have sunk further into the soil) but was visible to Frederick Burgess some decades ago. The latter is the case, for example, with William Firmadge's excellent "Father Time" in St Mary de Castro churchyard, Leicester.

Where exact dates are given for a headstone, they are the date of death of the individual(s) commemorated on that headstone. In the absence of contrary evidence this is assumed to have been the approximate date of carving, but this may not always have been the case. There is an example of a very clearly dated headstone (115 lower) signed by William Charles, but it is very unusual in this respect. The date of death was 30<sup>th</sup> January 1729/30 (i.e. January of the historical year 1730). William Charles dated his work 1729/30, so it must have been made before the new year (1730/31) began on March 25<sup>th</sup> (i.e. within two months of the date of death).

Where two (or more) individuals who died some years apart are commemorated on the same headstone it is often possible to work out the likely date of carving. If the lettering styles and details of two inscriptions on one slate are identical, the headstone was very probably all carved following the later death (e.g. 36). If they are different it is likely that the headstone was carved after the earlier death and added to following the later death. Sometimes this is very clearly the case, because (as previously noted) the later death was inscribed by a carver with a different signature. (Where the date of initial carving of a headstone with more than one date seems clear, that date is given in brackets in the photo caption, or that date is underlined).

Headstones with one inscription panel blank (originally intended to carry the details of death of a still-living spouse, but never completed) would have been otherwise fully carved. In fact it is quite likely, in the case of some of the more prolific carvers, that headstones complete apart from inscriptions, were prepared and ready for sale, so that a headstone could be completed quite quickly once the mason was supplied with the details for the inscription.

Bearing these points in mind it seems to me that the well-known Hunt headstone at Rothley carved by Hind of Swithland (45) with its Resurrection scene should be dated to 1781 rather than the 1794 date ascribed to it by Burgess. The death of Ann Hunt in 1781 is inscribed in an earlier, more florid style of lettering different from that in which the death of her husband William was inscribed in 1791. This later lettering is of a style (with decorative infilling) which became popular around the last decade of the C18th, and can be seen used by Hind on a headstone at Stanford on Soar, Nottinghamshire also carved in 1791.



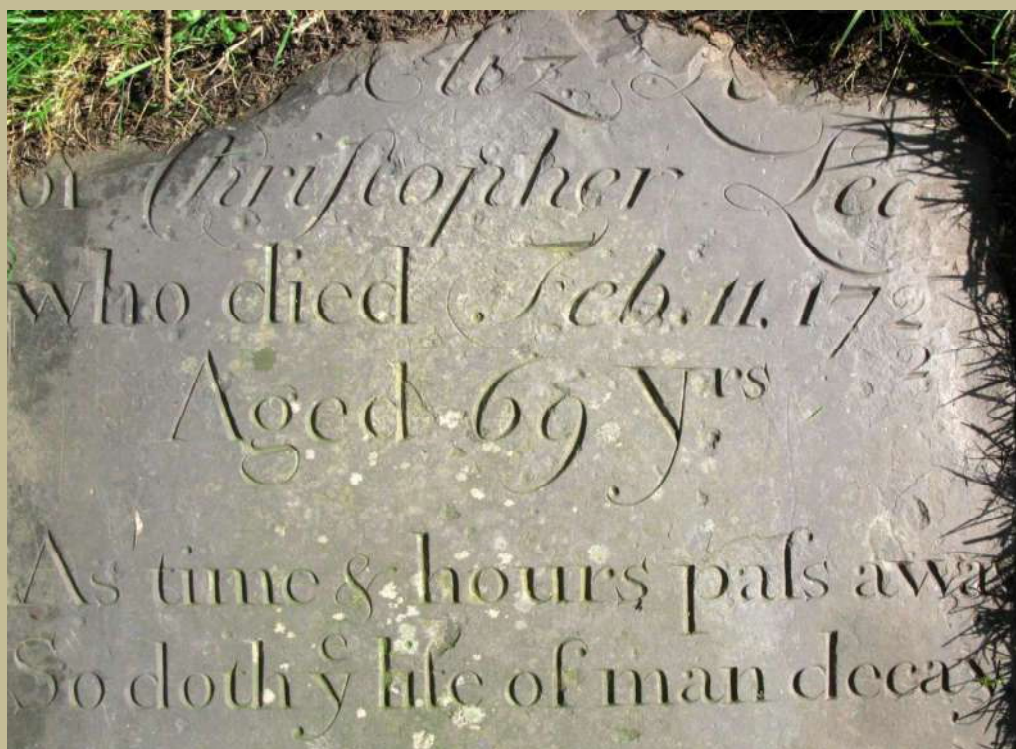
## *Postscript*

As well as being of interest as works of often very accomplished craftsmanship, Swithland Slate headstones are also the gravestones of people who once lived.

When my notice was first drawn to these headstones (as an offshoot of my interest in church monuments), I had absolutely no idea that my family had any old slate headstones. It was only when I heard from a relative who had been researching the family history a few years ago, that I learned of the existence of some at Shenton, Leicestershire. I thought that they might possibly be made of Swithland Slate. On visiting Shenton churchyard, I could not at first find them, but eventually spotted some nearly-buried slates. Removing a thick layer of sharp cedar needles, I was amazed to discover seven slates, the oldest of 1722 and one, of 1814/1817, actually signed by Pollard of Swithland (probably all lying flat since the rebuilding of the church in Victorian times). I have since discovered that my family were farmers here for several centuries. Researching more of the family history subsequently, I now have a greater quantity of documentary evidence relating to my great, great, great, great grandfather William Lea, than for almost any other relative: baptism, marriage, baptisms of children, farming records and maps, burial and P.C.C. will (and even his signature as a churchwarden). And a fine Swithland Slate headstone. Furthermore, the headstone (probably also carved by Pollard) of William's two spinster daughters (147) clearly reveals that both died of consumption, a fact which would now be quite unknown had their headstone (with a common epitaph) not survived, since their deaths pre-dated the introduction of the death certificate carrying information on the cause of death.

The earliest family headstone, of 1722, is that of my great, great, great, great, great, great grandmother Elizabeth Lea. It is slightly damaged at the top but nevertheless very legible (far more legible than a family headstone of 1899 made of limestone). The verse is especially interesting, because it carries the precise wording which appears on at least two surviving C17th or C18th pocket sundials. These were a sort of primitive "watch" popular with country folk, and it seems quite possible that Elizabeth owned such a device carrying this verse and was fond enough of the wording to have it carved on her headstone.





Shenton churchyard, Leicestershire. Headstone of Elizabeth wife of Christopher Lea, died 1721/22 (i.e. 1722, the parish register confirms the date). The headstone is to Elizabeth alone, not Christopher (proved by an entry in Nichols). “As time & hours pass away, So doth ye life of man decay” is found as a pocket sundial motto. Elizabeth Lea was the grandmother of William and Richard.

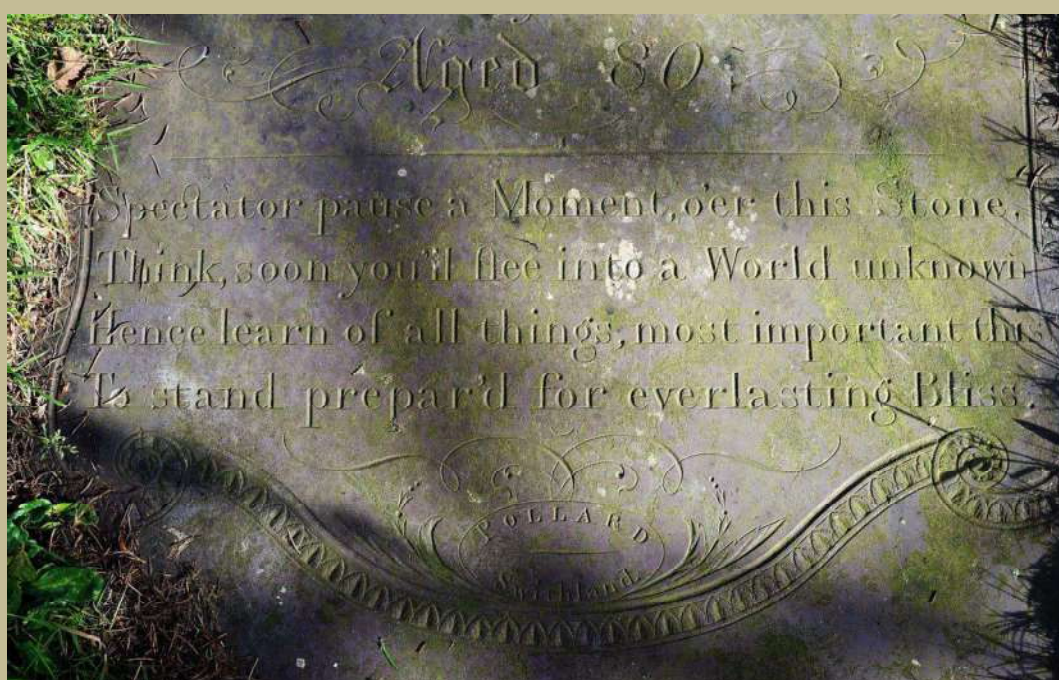


Shenton churchyard, Leicestershire. Headstone of William Lea died 1814 and Ann Lea, died 1817. The precise wording of the superscription on this headstone: “Beneath in peaceful Slumbers rest the remains of...” seems to be very unusual. (“Sacred to the Memory of” or a similar reference to “memory” was the most usual wording at this time).





Shenton churchyard, Leicestershire. Headstone of William Lea died 1814 and Ann Lea, died 1817. The 1820 headstone of William's cousin Richard Lea (53) is almost contemporary with this slate.



Shenton churchyard, Leicestershire. Headstone of William Lea died 1814 and Ann Lea, died 1817, signed by Pollard of Swithland. The epitaph is in the same spirit as many from the C18th.

There were more than fifty family burials recorded here during the course of some 320 years, but only eight headstones are known of, seven of which can still be found. A large slate of 1828, referred to in a late C19th book, may still lie beneath the grass.



There must be a good deal which many with an interest in family history could learn from the large number of legible Swithland headstones still in existence. The written information to be found on Swithland Slate headstones is not unique: it is the generally exceptional nature of its preservation which makes them especially valuable to the family historian. It would certainly be worthwhile for a family historian who knows of a recorded burial which occurred during the relevant period of time and in a churchyard where Swithland Slate headstones were used, to inspect the headstones there.



Swithland churchyard, Leicestershire

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