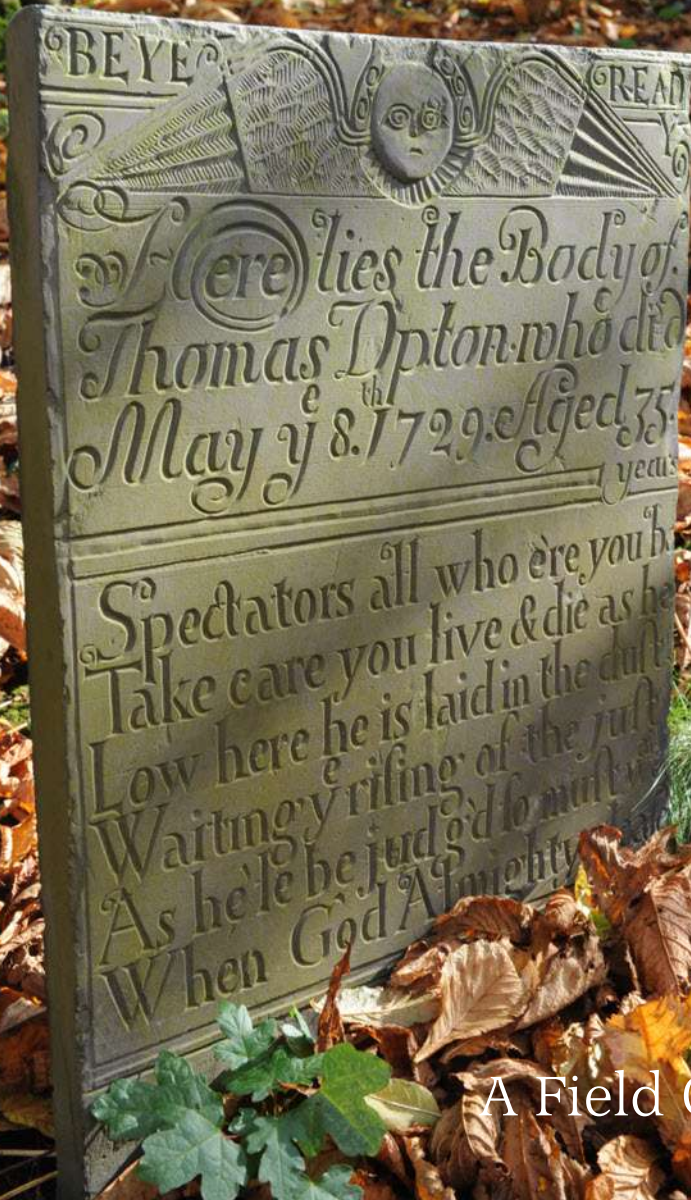


Belvoir Angels



A Field Guide

Langar cum Barnstone Heritage Group

The Langar cum Barnstone Heritage Group was formed in 2009 as a result of the *Langar cum Barnstone Parish Plan 2008*. The aim of the group is to record protect, preserve and publicise the history of the two Nottinghamshire villages of Langar and Barnstone.

Belvoir Angels: A Field Guide

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Front Cover: Flawborough, Notts

Title Page: Langar, Notts

Rear Cover: Angel, Grimston, Leics (top left)
Modern Angel, Hose, Leics (top right)
Grave, Eaton, Leics (centre)
Angel, Old Dalby, Leics (bottom)

Belvoir Angels

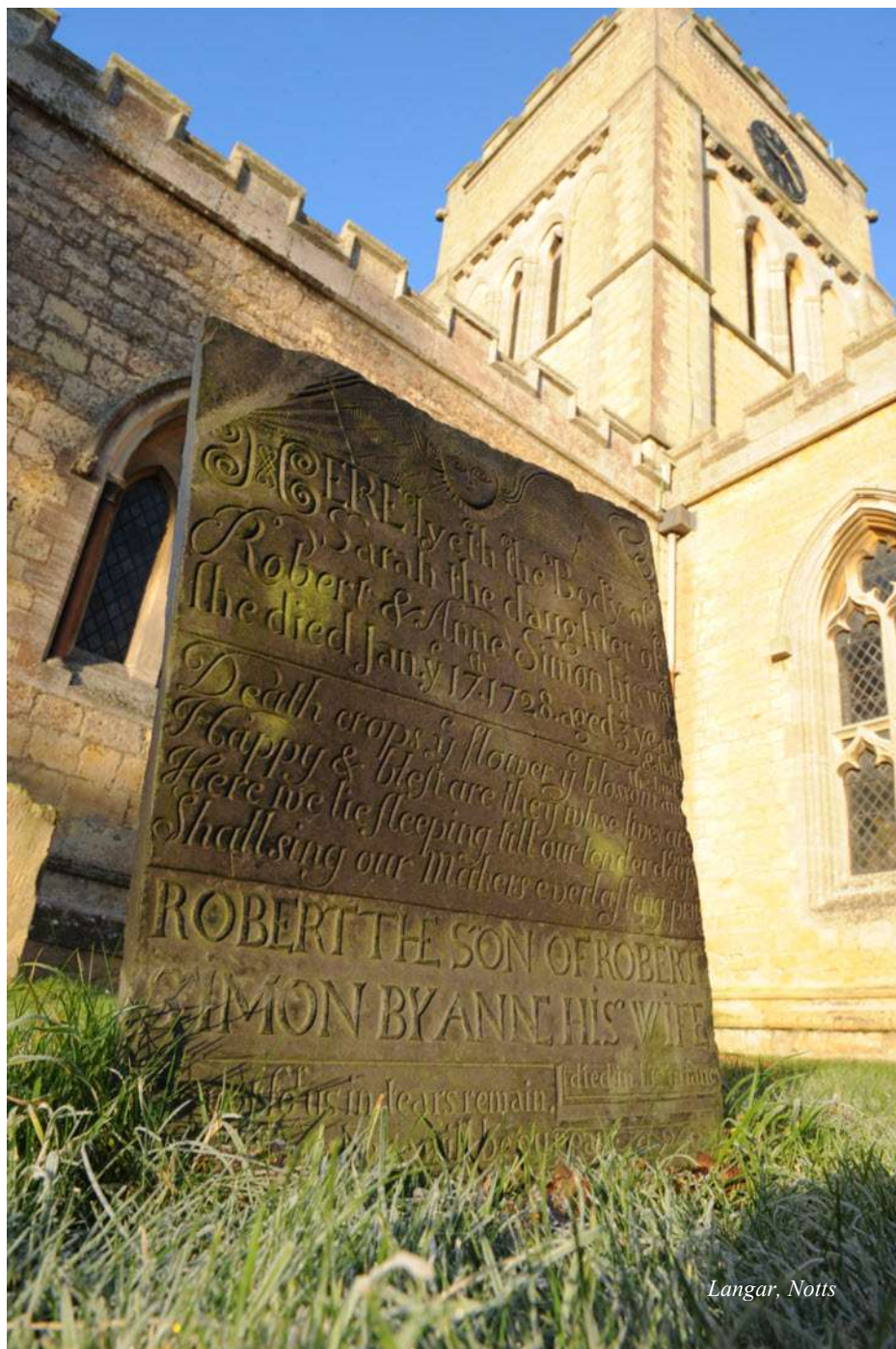
A Field Guide



Discover the Treasures of The Vale of Belvoir

Langar cum Barnstone Heritage Group

Hickling Local History Group



Langar, Notts

Chapter One

What is a Belvoir Angel?

The Belvoir Angel is a gravestone made from Swithland Slate which bears the image of an “angel” and dates from around 1680 until 1760 and is found within the churchyards of South Nottinghamshire and the adjoining areas of Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, more commonly known as the Vale of Belvoir. Approximately 335 examples are to be found in the area bounded by Twyford, Leics. to the south, Westborough, Lincs. to the north, Ropsley, Lincs. to the east and Whitwick, Leics. to the west.



Ab Kettleby, Leics (above)

The “angel” is not a true angel but a representation of the soul of the deceased ascending to heaven and generally conforms to the stereotype of being a face with curly hair, a neck ruff and two wings. However, there are variations on this as will be seen in the examples in Chapter 3.

Who made them is conjectural. As the largest concentration of Belvoir Angels is to be found in the adjacent villages of Nether Broughton in Leicestershire, Hickling and Upper Broughton, both in Nottinghamshire, it is thought by some that the masons responsible worked in one or other of these villages. Unfortunately they did not sign their work and few stones show anything that could be taken for a mason's mark so it is likely to remain a mystery as to who the craftsmen were.

To date the only signed stones found by the author have been those of William Charles and his son, William Charles Junior of Wymeswold in Leicestershire. Although these feature angels they are more stylish than those on the majority of the gravestones. An example is shown below.

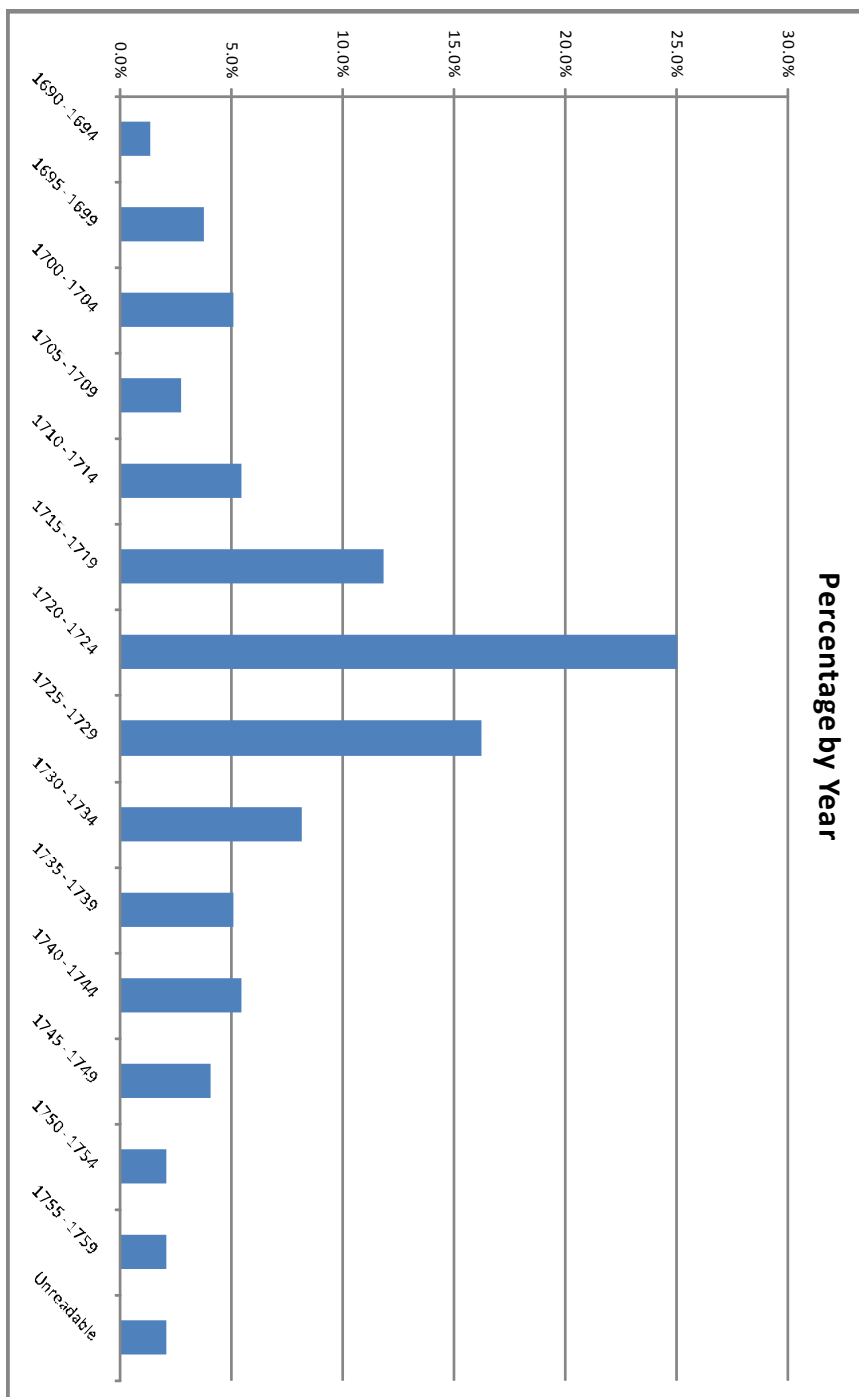


Wymeswold, Leics., (left)

Another possibility is that the stones were carved in or around the slate quarries at Swithland in Leicestershire. William Heafford and John Hind, who had been apprenticed to Heafford, were prolific engravers of Swithland Slate but no examples of their work bearing Belvoir Angels have been found. Indeed the quality of Hind's work is so fine it is hard to imagine that he was a producer of such a vernacular item.

The paucity of Belvoir Angels in or around the Swithland area would also indicate that the source of decorated stones was not the slate quarries but that slate was shipped elsewhere to be worked by the mason or masons.

The chart on the following page shows the distribution of the Angels by year. As can be seen over half are from the period 1715 to 1729.



Chapter Two

Swithland Slate

The Belvoir Angel gravestones are made of a stone known as Swithland slate from the Charnwood Forest area of Leicestershire. This was formed from sediments deposited in the seas in the Cambrian Period over 500 million years ago. Over time these sediments were subjected to great pressure producing a rock known as a greywacke which will split easily into thin sections. It is named after the village of Swithland in Leicestershire where it has been mined from at least Roman times for use as roof tiles, walling, milestones, gatepost as well as gravestones.



A former slate quarry at The Brand near Swithland, (above)

The quarries from which the stone was extracted were in and around the area of Swithland Wood and The Brand. These went out of use when quarrying ceased in the late 19th century when cheaper Welsh slate flooded the market. The Welsh slate had the advantage of being much easier to split into lighter, thinner sections and the growth of the railways made transport of the Welsh product into areas previously dominated by Swithland slate much easier and economically viable. Today the abandoned quarries are water-filled relics within the beautiful Charnwood Forest.

Differentiation between a Swithland slate gravestone and one made of Welsh slate is easy. The Swithland slate, being more difficult to split, is usually found with one smooth face used for engraving and a rough rear face, see overleaf. The Welsh slate is more likely to be smooth on both faces as well as being larger and more neatly finished on both the top and sides.



The rear of a Swithland slate gravestone, (left)



A Swithland slate stone at Nether Broughton showing how little of the stone was actually worked.(left)

Early Swithland Slate Gravestones

Gravestones made from Swithland slate are first known from the middle of the 17th century. As can be seen from the illustrated examples these were crude in style and usually include a only a few details on the person commemorated and, at best, a little simple decoration. Spelling errors and reversed letters are common indicating a low level of literacy among the masons involved. They do, however, have a charm of their own..



*Newtown Linford, (left
and below right and left)*



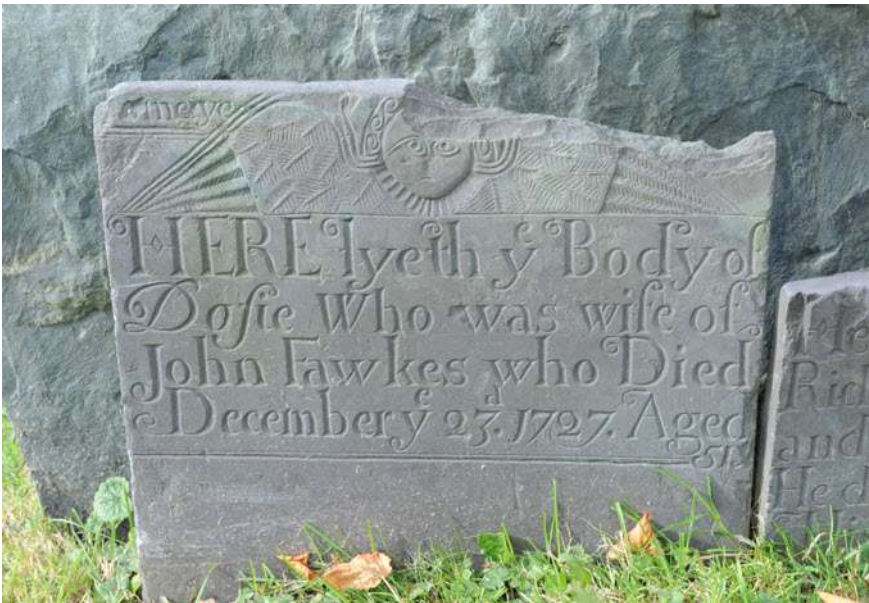
Swithland, (left and below)



Chapter 3

Creating the Design

The decoration of gravestone was achieved by either by being incised, that is cut into the surface, or by being left in relief. In the latter case the stone is cut away to leave the letters and design proud of the surface. A mix of both styles on one stone is not uncommon.



An incised stone, Hickling, Leics. (above)

Both methods would be time-consuming requiring several days work by a mason. As this would be costly it is evidence that the families commissioning these stones were reasonably wealthy. This is a reflection of the change in the make up of English



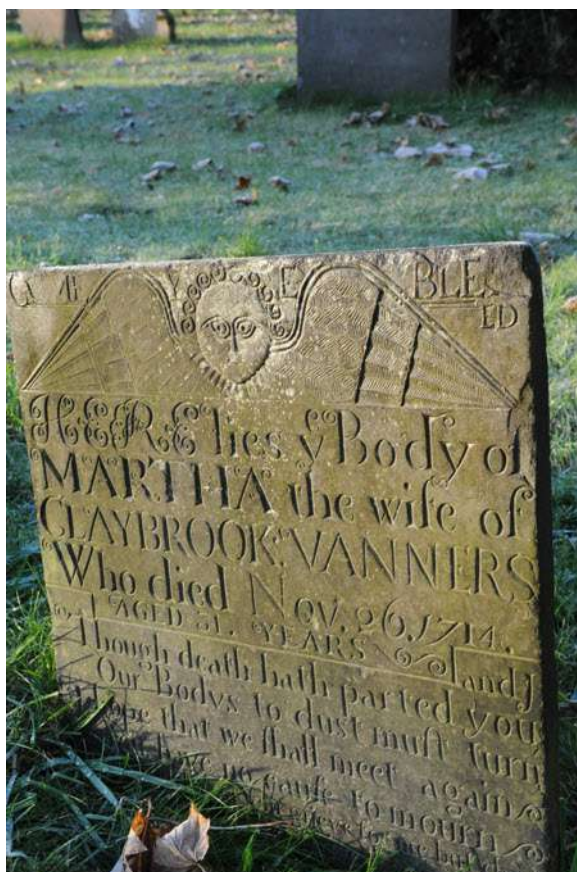
A stone carved in relief, Hickling, Leics. (above)



A stone both incised and in relief, Langar (right)

society following the Civil War with the growth of a Middle Class. This class was made up of tradesmen, financiers, landowners and skilled artisans who had joined the gentry in wishing to demonstrate their new found position by flaunting their wealth. What better way to do it than through the permanence of a slate gravestone.

An example of this is the gravestone for Martha Vanners to be found in the churchyard of St Andrew's, Langar, Notts. Martha was the wife of Claybrook Vanners, an inn-keeper and brewer in the village.



Common Angel Designs

At least thirty three distinct designs of Belvoir Angels have been identified but the majority of graves are marked with one of three common designs.

The Single Angel

Graves marked with a single angel are amongst the earliest dating from 1690 with the majority being dated from the years between 1715 and 1725. By 1740 they had fallen out of fashion. They are also more typical of the area south of the Vale of Belvoir, particularly in and around the northern suburbs of Leicester.



Langar, Notts. (above)



Birstall, Leics.(above)



Thurmaston, Leics. (above)

Angel with Scrolls

This design is more widespread and dates from 1720 through to 1759 with the majority dated 1720 to 1730.



Langar, Notts (above)

A variation on this design includes small hearts above the “shoulders” of the angel.



Hickling, Notts (above)

Hour Glass and Cross Bones

This is another early design which dates from the 1690's through to the 1720's



Granby, Notts (above)



Hoby, Leics (above)

More Complex Designs

These are combinations of angels, hearts, scrolls and text, most dating from the 1720's onwards.



Langar, Notts (left)



*Colston Bassett, St Mary,
Notts (left)*



Long Clawson, Leics (right)



Plungar, Leics (left)

Chapter 4

Epitaphs

The majority of the gravestones bear some kind of epitaph. These usually relate to the passing of time, the loss of the bereaved or the circumstances of the death. Intimations of mortality are common and William Simon's grave to be found at St Andrew's, Langar, Notts. (below) is typical of many.



*HERE lies ye Body of
William Simon senior son
Of William Simon by
Barbra his wife He died ye 8th
Day of May 1713. aged 50 y.*

*"Reader stand still and lend a tear
Upon the dust that sleepeth here
And whilst thou readst ye slate of me
Think on the glass yt. runs for thee."*

Violent Deaths

Not all deaths were the result of natural causes. The two graves shown below are examples of young men meeting tragic and violent deaths.

The first is Edward Purdey of Old Dalby, Leics.. It would appear that he had stopped off at the local inn but, when it came to settle his bill he was short of the total amount. In response the landlady threatened to put a curse on him, but Edward only laughed at her. Outraged by this she set her dogs upon him and he was savaged to death!



*“Through a women I received the
wound
Which quickly brought my body to
ye ground
Its sure in time she will have her
due
The murdering hand God’s venge-
ance will pursue
The debt I ow’d that caused all the
strife
Was very small to cost me my sweet
life
She threatened to give me a mark
and made
Her cause look very dark”*

William Hubberd of Rearsby, Leics. was a young victim of knife crime having been stabbed to death



*"A Fatall Knife His Mortall Body slew
The murthering hand Gods vengeance
will pursue
From shades terrene tho justice took
her flight
Shall not ye Judge of all ye earth do
Right
With dolefull Sighs & sad heart rend-
ing groans
Each age and Sex his innocence Be-
moans"*

Death in Childbirth

References to Benoni is an indication that a mother died in or shortly after childbirth. Below is an example to be found in the churchyard of St Mary's, Colston Bassett, Notts..



*Mary, wife of Thomas Church,
d. 18 June 1757, aged 38.*

*"Hard pangs of labour gave Benoni birth,
The Child of Sorrow caused ye Mother's
death."*

Disease

The use of the phrase “Pale Death” indicates that the person died of tuberculosis as seen in Marget Neal’s grave to be found in Hickling Churchyard.



Political Epitaphs

It is perhaps not surprising to find that with growth of political activity and radical thinking in the 17th and 18th centuries epitaphs with a moral or even political tone are to be found.

There are two examples of an epitaph bemoaning the class structure of 18th century society to be found. These are at St Peter's, Redmile, Leics and St Luke's, Hickling, Notts. The wording differs slightly between the two but the message is identical.



James Handley's gravestone at St Peter's, Redmile, Leics (above)

*"This world it is a city full of crooked streets
Death is a market place where all men meet.
If life were Marchandice that men could buy
Rich men would ever live and poor men die."*



A slight variation on the verse is to be found on John Smith's gravestone of 1725 in the churchyard of St Luke's, Hickling, Notts. (above).

Tokens of Undying Love

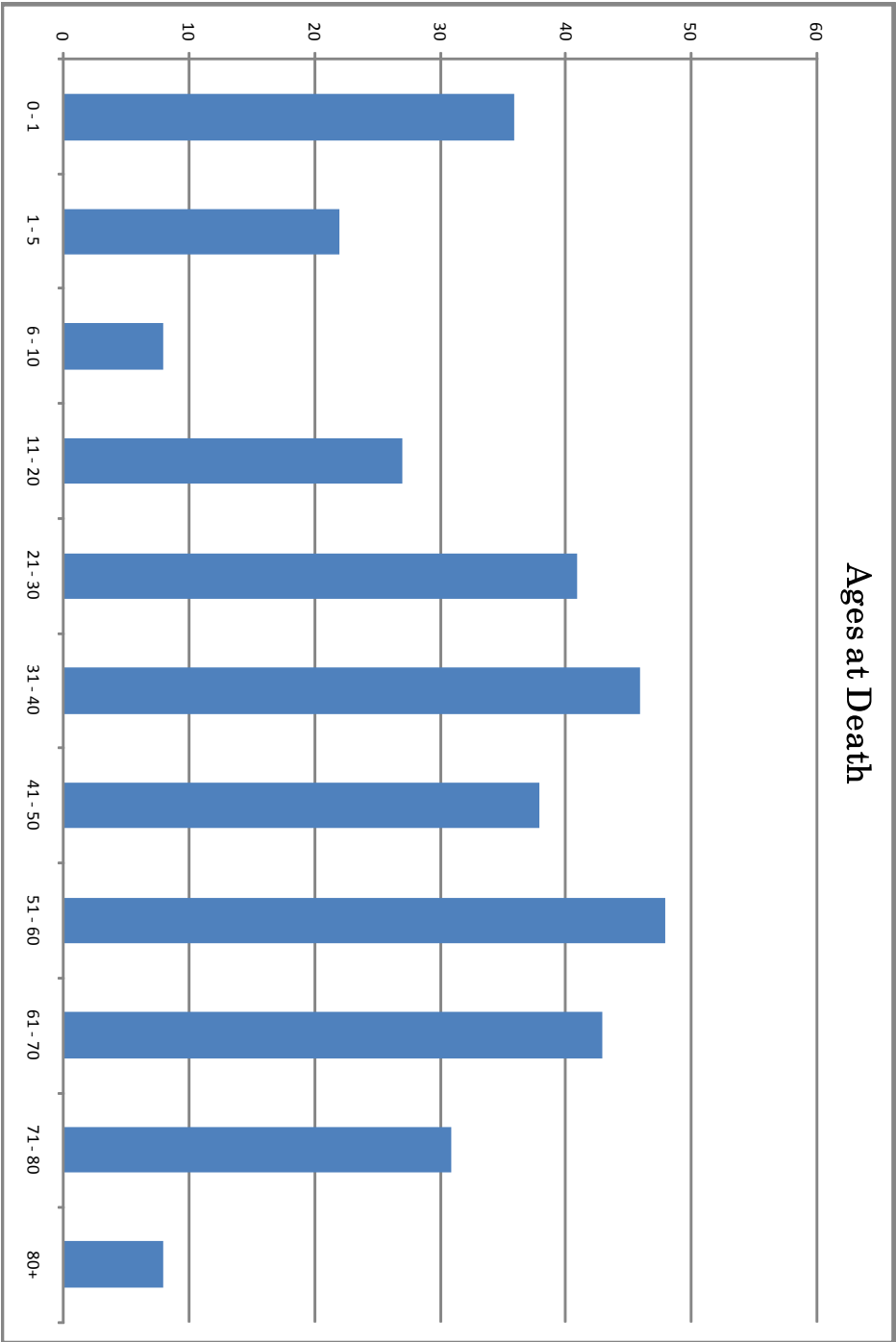
Several stone have epitaphs reflecting the love and affection held by husband and wife for each other. They can also provide a clue as to the character of the individual. The stone illustrated overleaf is that of Anne Hemsley and is to be found at St Luke's, Upper Broughton, Notts.. The epitaph appears below..

*The Dame yt resteth here nigh this tomb
Had Rachels face & Leahs fruitful womb
Abigails wisdom Lydias faithfull heart
Marthas just care & Marys better part
To grieve for her alas it is in vain
For your great loss is her eternal gain
Her peace we hope is made in the God before
She went from here & shall be seen no more*

Life Expectancy

By studying the ages at death marked on the graves it is possible to gain a picture of the life expectancy for the class of people who could afford to erect a gravestone. As can be seen from the graph on page 27 infant mortality was high but a surprising high percentage lived to a very old age, even by modern standards.





Gazetteer

Belvoir Angels were to be found in all of the following churchyards during the Autumn of 2008. Please note there is no public access to Hickling, St Luke and that the graves at Dishley Old Church were identified during excavations by the Vaughan Society and are now presumed covered by turf.

Nottinghamshire

Churchyard	Nos of Angels	Oldest Date	Youngest Date
Bingham, St Mary & All Saints	3	1704	1721
Bunny, St Mary	1	1721	1721
Colston Bassett, St Mary	7	1710	1757
East Bridgford, St Peter	2	1707	1712
Elton on the Hill, St Michael	1	1728	1728
Flawborough, St Peter	10	1715	1729
Granby, All Saints	22	1718	1728
Hickling, St Luke	32	1702	1755
Keyworth, St Mary Magdalene	1	1693	1693
Kinoulton, St Wilfrid	10	1692	1723
Langar, St Andrew	9	1713	1732
Nottingham, St Nicholas	1	1703	1703
Owthorpe, St Margaret	6	1712	1732
Plumtree, St Mary the Virgin	2	1720	1721
Staunton, St Mary	5	1720	1725
Tythby, Holy Trinity	2	1723	1723
Upper Broughton, St Luke	25	1704	1755
Whetton, St John of Beverley	10	1706	1733
Widmerpool, St Peter	2	1730	1732

Lincolnshire

Churchyard	Nos of Angels	Oldest Date	Youngest Date
Branston, All Saints	2	1712	1721
Denton, St Andrew	3	1700	1720
Grantham, St Wulfram	3	1708	1714
Ropsley	1	1730	1730
Sedgebrook, St Lawrence	1	1704	1704
Stainby	1	1719	1719
Westborough	1	1726	1726
Woolsthorpe Old Churchyard	3	1710	1730

Leicestershire

Churchyard	Nos of Angels	Oldest Date	Youngest Date
Ab Kettleby, St James	9	1697	1722
Beeby, St Margaret	1	1712	1712
Birstall, St James the Great	2	1736	1736
Bottesford, St Mary	1	1719	1719
Brooksby, St Michael & All Angels	1	1727	1727
Burton Lazars, St James	4	1719	1742
Coston	1	1728	1728
Croxton Kerrial, St Botolph & St John the Baptist	1	1719	1719
Dishley, Old Churchyard	2	1720	1720
Eastwell, St Michael	1	1744	1744
Eaton, St Denys	5	1714	1728
Gaddesby, St Luke	5	1702	1749
Goadby Marwood, St Denys	1	1701	1701
Grimston, St John the Baptist	4	1668	1735
Harby, St Mary the Virgin	6	1716	1727
Harston	1	1709	1709
Hoby, All Saints	2	1711	1727
Hose, St Michael & All Angels	1	2005	2005
Kirby Bellars, St Peter	2	1717	1723
Little Dalby, St James	1	1716	1716
Long Clawson, St Remigius	13	1709	1753
Melton Mowbray, St Mary	3	1681	1726
Muston, St John the Baptist	1	1698	1698
Nether Broughton, St Mary the Virgin	34	1718	1757
Old Dalby, St John the Baptist	11	1694	1743
Plungar, St Helen	2	1720	1729
Prestwold, St Andrew	3	1703	1733
Queniborough, St Mary	2	1728	1736
Quorn, St Bartholomew	5	1702	1738
Ragdale, All Saints	1	1719	1719
Ratcliffe on the Wreake, St Botolph	1	1695	1695
Rearsby, St Michael & All Angels	3	1711	1722
Redmile, St Peter	3	1690	1699
Saxelbye, St Peter	4	1696	1732
Scalford, St Egelwin	1	1733	1733
Scraptoft, All Saints	1	1699	1699
Seagrave, All Saints	2	1695	1699
Syston, St Peter & St Paul	2	1716	1716
Thurmaston, St Michael & All Angels	1	1719	1719
Twyford, St Andrew	1	1710	1710
Walton on the Wolds, St Mary	1	1718	1718
Wartnaby, St Michael	5	1720	1757
Whitwick, St John the Baptist	1	1724	1724
Wymeswold, St Mary	8	1717	1732



Price: