

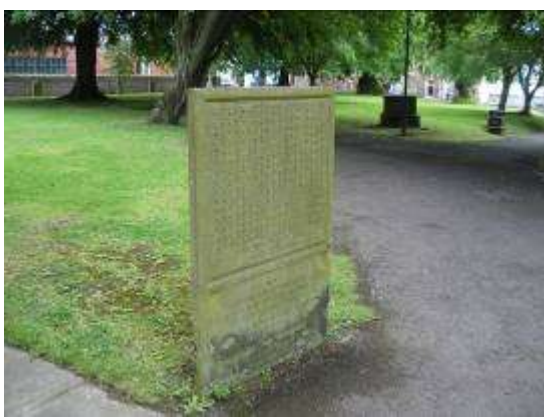
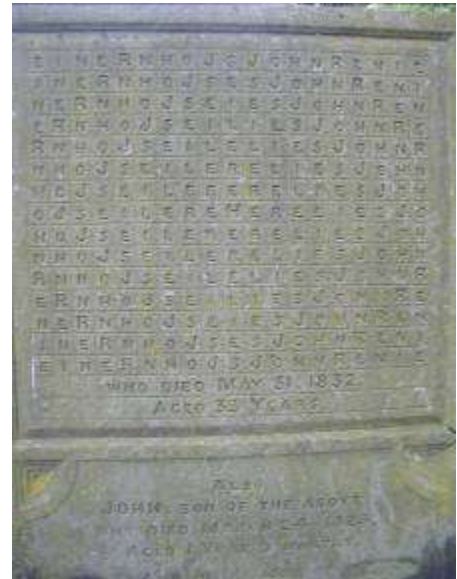
More meanderings from the Wye Valley

following Neil's holiday in Monmouthshire

Monmouth – The Parish and Priory Church of St. Mary

Whilst not exactly isolated, Monmouth lies in the borderland between England and Wales, and as such presents an ambivalence to the visitor, wondering which way it leans, and fearful of its violent history.

The Churchyard at the Parish Church has been cleared of most of the headstones, but we found one which was very puzzling! The headstone is over the grave of John Renie who died 31st May in 1832, aged 33. It appears as a word puzzle, rather like something you might find in a children's activity book.



Many have tried to find in it some cryptic message, but it doesn't seem necessary.

The Renie family hailed from Scotland where they were cattle-drovers, and then in Monmouth, they became auctioneers. The Headstone is said by some to be a device by which the late Mr Renie hoped to thwart the Devil of his prey by hiding his name. However, the name can be seen many times as one searched the squares. Another case of a

sense of humour overcoming the anxiety of death, perhaps? There are 15 rows of 19 letters, a total of 285 letters, which convey the simple message "Here lies John Renie" some 46,000 times!

Raglan - Parish Church of Saint Cadoc



I was interested to see this repaired headstone in St. Cadoc's churchyard in Raglan. The repair is a bit "in-your-face" and hopefully the white areas where adhesive has been applied will acclimatise in due course? The headstone has one of those charming home-made quatrains:

He is gone to the grave we will not weep
for one who enjoys such peaceful sleep
His woes are o'er his pain is done
His cares are ended, his course is run

Thomas Jones died on May 21st 1913

And here is hope for those whose church attendance demands attention to long sermons. In the olden days, they must have had less to drink that we today. Not the same level of need for toilets, was there? ut in today's isolated and ancient churches, the need for a portable toilet is now well-established especially for the aging congregations. In more than one place I heard of plans to install one.



In Raglan, the congregation no longer needs to sit cross-legged as the call of nature is heard (or felt?) loudly above the gentle words of the sermon. There is now a loo in the churchyard, just outside the porch and shielded from too much public attention by the rather tasteful bamboo screen. Not sure what English Heritage on the other side of the border would make of it!

Here is a churchyard being managed in a way that is sympathetic to wildlife, and helps visitors not to be too upset if they come and find some areas which have been left overgrown.



In Raglan churchyard I found the grave of Major G. E. Hamer Lewis, OBE, Croix de Guerre. I could discover little about the man but the decoration was instituted in 1915 to commemorate individual mentions in despatches and was awarded to all French military personnel, regardless of rank and also to officers and men of Allied Forces for an individual feat of arms mentioned in a despatch. He must have been a brave man!

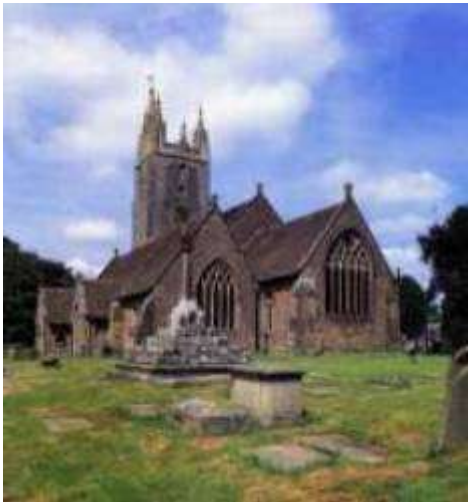


I don't know what the Iron Duke would have made of this, but in St. Cadoc's, there were quite a lot of Wellington boots being used as very alternative plant pots.

In the porch there was a whole row of them, from the traditional black or green welly to the child's flowery welly type. It does make an interesting talking point, and I suppose, the plants and flowers must flourish, or they wouldn't be used in this fashion? Perhaps it depends on the state of the feet of the former wearer? I suspect that the Vicar has a good sense of humour?



All Saints, Newland – The Cathedral of the Forest



In the northern part of the Wye Valley, one weaves in and out of England and Wales frequently. Sometimes there are road signs announcing which country you are in, others, not. One sure way of checking is to note whether or not the road signs and directions are in both languages. If you can read Welsh (Araf means slow) then you are in Wales for sure.

In the expansive churchyard are many graves and two sets of buildings. One is an old school which is now a dwelling, possibly the rectory? The others are a terrace of three or four houses, opening onto the churchyard in a manner I haven't seen before.

I was feeling very inquisitive but on this occasion, my normal "cheek" failed me and I didn't knock on the door and ask for an explanation.

Inside the church, which is undergoing massive restoration, we found an amusing note pinned in the door, advising visitors which telephone numbers to ring if they ever managed to find themselves locked inside. The building is very large with different discrete areas, and the possibility of the verger locking a visitor inside was clearly real.

We also discovered this charming monument to Christopher Bond a Gentleman of the parish who must have attracted to a lot of admiration, according to the rhyming tribute which reads:

Vnder this Stone interr'd doth lie
The mirrour of true Charitie,
To God, his Friends, & Country dear
The poores Supporter, farr & near.
His day's hee spent in Peace & quiet
He neuer gave himfelfe to riot
A Vertue Strange in thofe his days
When it was fcorn'd and Vice had praise
He lived long and did Survive
Fully the Years of Seventy Five
And at he last expired his date
April 8th in J668

Christopher Bond Gent.



Virtue scorned and Vice had praise? Things don't change much in the course of 400 years, do they?

Neil Richardson