

How Interesting!

During 2011, Magna will publish notes about twelve notable and interesting graves and headstones, in and around Holy Cross Church and environs, written by Neil Richardson.

For February, we look into the work of the William King

Holy Cross Churchyard has been an oasis of peace and calm for hundreds of years. Headstones from four centuries appear, higgledy-piggledy around the church and present those who walk through or past with a salutary reminder of how brief life is and how much we ought to cherish the life we have, while we have it!



The appearance of the Holy Cross churchyard has been a matter of pride for many years and during my time as Incumbent I have known six individuals who have taken a lead role in keeping the grass cut and making the graveyard a place of beauty for all to enjoy.

But one of the headstones in the church tells the tale of William King who before he died in 1863 was “upwards of 60 years the gardener of this parish.” He was born in 1779 and started work as gardener around about the age of 21. Now that is service! You can see that he was also a keen bee-keeper from the hive on his headstone!

None of the modern equivalents can match that record, of course, but they have all brought their own particular style to the job. Running a churchyard is something that is difficult to organise with a team of volunteers. People have always promised to look after this area or cut back that hedge or trim those roses, but in reality, things get forgotten

and overlooked and what is needed is a single mind, an individual who will work with the volunteers but be willing to pick up the pieces and make sure it all happens.

My first such person was Mr Butterfield. Albert was an old gentleman who toiled in the churchyard for many years. He proudly showed me the beech tree he planted some years earlier when his wife died. Another now stands within sight of the first, representing the lives of two stalwart Holy Crossers! Mr Butterfield died soon after my arrival and John Gabriel took up the work, but within a short space of time he moved to Yorkshire. So, next came Chris Cullum. Chris was an energetic man with more than a little of the buccaneer about him. I remember one Easter Day meeting some women in the garden. They were up in arms. Chris had been pollarding the lime trees and had decided to burn the cuttings but he chose, without realising it, the centre of the Garden of Remembrance where we bury cremated human remains. He never heard the end of that one. Chris moved to Folkestone to start a career as a fisherman, so, next came Ken Wylde. Now Ken was a former professional soldier and a very effective and efficient person. In fact, he had been awarded the Military Medal for his part in one of the conflicts of the later 20th century. He treated the garden in a military manner and the grass was never allowed to grow many millimetres before being mown down in anger.

Greenford is the sort of place people leave a lot, so after Ken moved to another part of the country, in stepped Roy Claridge. Roy was a very committed worker and made a huge effort to create the unique atmosphere which is our churchyard. Again, lots of people made promises to help – and some kept them – but the bulk of the work fell on Roy and he eventually felt the strain, going on as gardener long after his retirement from real work. That brings me on to the present day and Malcolm Ede, who is also the church honorary treasurer. Malcolm maintains the high standards which we have become accustomed to and continues to make the churchyard a place of beauty and peace in a noisy and busy suburb.