

Gravestones and Memorial Inscriptions

It is amazing what you can find on a gravestone or Memorial Inscription (MI); from the name of a spouse to other relatives to maybe even an account of how the person died. If you look at the grave of Sarah Catt in St Mildred's Churchyard in Tenterden, Kent, the names of all of her children, including an errant son, are mentioned! A great source of information!

Below are some steps that you can take to use gravestones and MIs to further your research.

- ❖ Check if the graveyard that you are planning to visit has a burial map – a plan of where all the graves are and who is interred there. Also, be aware that, although Non-Conformists might be buried in a Churchyard, they are usually in a separate area and only very rarely will there be a headstone.
- ❖ If you are going to have a wander round a graveyard, looking at the memorials, then the best time of year to do this is late autumn through to early spring. There is nothing worse than trying to cope with high grass and brambles when you are trying to peer at what has been written on a gravestone!
- ❖ Get a feel for the graveyard by looking at the dates on the gravestones. You may find that they have been laid out in date order, which may then help you find the grave that you are looking for. You may also note that graves with the same surname are in plots close to each other. The gravestone of Thomas Bailey at St Peter's in Theberton, Suffolk is right by the door of the Church and, dated 1759, is one of the oldest there. Those of his wife and daughters are close by.
- ❖ Sadly, not all gravestones are legible, especially if they were made of sandstone where frost can cause the face of the stone to lift and fall off, rendering it impossible to read. Therefore, please be careful when touching such stones.
- ❖ Whilst it is fine to gently brush away dirt and gravel so that you can read an inscription, please be aware that in the UK, lichens that are growing on the gravestones might be protected by law and therefore must not be disturbed.
- ❖ If you intend photographing a headstone, try to do it when the sun is shining on it at an oblique angle rather than straight upon it. The shadows made from the lettering will show up better.
- ❖ It may be that the Church Burial Register or the MIs themselves have been transcribed or indexed. Many Family History Societies are working their way around the graveyards and cemeteries to record the stones and in the summer months, quite often you can see School parties also undertaking the task.

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If you are having problems in finding a particular grave or are too far away to pop in and have a look, someone else might be able to help you. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and post details of your ancestor and where you think their grave might be. The members will do their utmost to help you find them!

If you would like to discover more about Gravestones and MIs, listed below are some products that will certainly help you along your way and all of them are available from [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com). Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details.

- 1631 Ancient Funeral Monuments Ref: ARB-0470
- Researching Scottish Graveyards Ref: SAFHS-17
- Gravestones, Tombs and Memorials Ref: CSB-2026

Also, Parish Chest has a complete section dedicated to Memorial Inscriptions, which is broken down by county and country. Take a look on [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com) to find the area in which you are searching.