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Etna and Filmer and Mason Cast Iron 'Gravestones' recovered from a rubbish heap at Wisborough Green, Sussex.

CAST IRON GRAVESTONES

Gravestones and Industrial Archaeology. What is the connection and how can it be justified within this discipline? They earn their place in I.A much as street furniture, letterboxes and milestones do; they are the product of an industry, but are not an industry in themselves, and have in the past been very much under-researched and under-recorded. We have only been able to trace three articles which deal with the subject in any detail[1]. The term 'iron gravestone' is used on purpose as grave memorial does not have quite the meaning intended.

Our interest in iron gravestones started in 1984 at the graveyard of the disused church of Tynham in Dorset. We realised that the cross next to us, carrying the inscription 'Alice Maud Cooper aged 4 months, Dec. 24 1904', was also marked 'Denning and Co. Card 8'. So began our interest in churchyards and foundries. To date we have recorded more than 1500 examples of 200 different patterns of metal headstones and identified over twenty foundries which produced them. This, however, represents only a small sample of the total and is but an introduction to the subject.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the mutilation and destruction of religious monuments during the Commonwealth, more plaques and memorials were placed inside churches to commemorate the death of the very rich and important. It was not until the late 17th century that headstones as we know them began to be used, and then only to record the gentry or rich merchants.

The stones were usually inscribed with the person's name, age and date of death and often included 'wife or child of .....' By the mid-1700s, the headstones had become more elaborate, sometimes with a skull and cross-bones above the inscription. This later gave way to cherubs and symbols of time passing, such as hourglasses and scythes, while musical instruments and trade tools were also represented.

By the start of the 19th century, it was common for the middle classes to mark their graves, and in the Victorian era the headstone became most elaborate, in keeping with the style of the times. The not-so-rich, who could not afford the cost of such engraving, erected much smaller stones bearing just initials and the year, enough for the grave to be identified and often to prevent overburial.

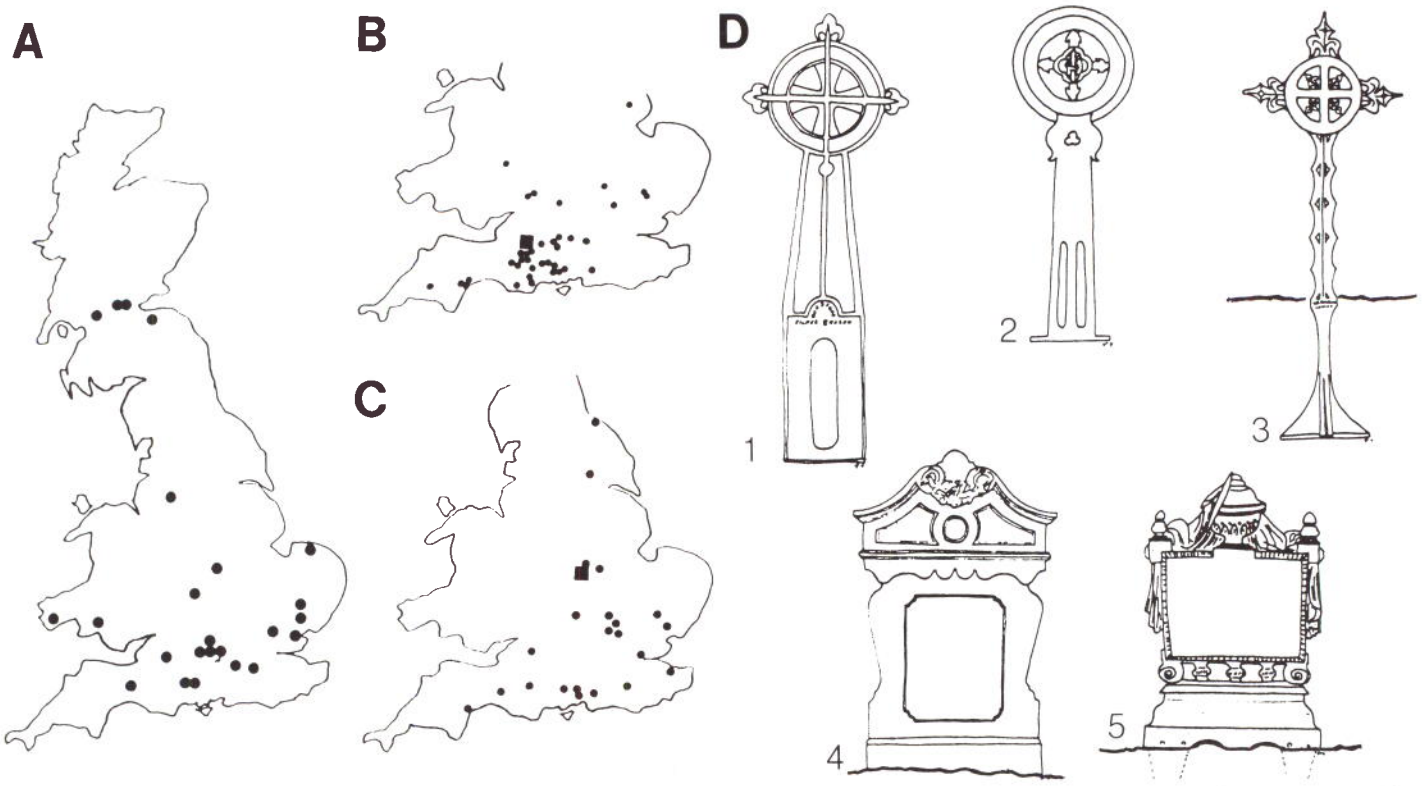
During the latter half of the 19th century, a number of small foundries, who had been producing agricultural implements and their spare parts, and which were often associated with an ironmongery business, looked around for other outlets for their skills. They began to produce fireplaces, draincovers and other items which were saleable—and from there, it was but a step to cast-iron headstones. Manufacture was soon taken up by the larger foundries such as Watson Gow in Glasgow and spread throughout the country.

The iron gravestones range from a simple cross to quite elaborate memorials, with the name of the deceased, their date of death and age cast into them. Cheaper stock items were available, either completely plain, or with 'R.I.P', 'I.H.S.' or some other short message cast into them; the name and details could then be painted on as required. This enabled them to be produced quite cheaply and they were often to be found many miles from their foundry of origin.

FOUNDRIES AND SUPPLIERS

Sixteen cast crosses made by Dennings, an agricultural foundry at Chard in Somerset, were found over 500 miles away near Ballachulish on the west coast of Scotland. These have the makers name (Denning & Co Chard) and model (No.6) cast on them and are dated between 1876 and 1901. This foundry produced 13 different models in three sizes, the largest being eight feet tall. They are most common in Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Hampshire, Wilts and Sussex. The remains of this foundry were pulled down in 1986.

Tony Yoward with his gravestone, cast at the Walsingham Foundry in Norfolk.



A Locations of known suppliers of cast iron gravestones; **B** Locations of gravestones cast by Haddens of Warminster; **C** Locations of gravestones cast by Johnsons of Leicester; **D** Some cast iron gravestones: 1, Filmer and Mason of Guildford, model no. 1 (height 4′), 2, Hadens of Warminster, model no. 3 (cost 16/6 in 1860s, weight 56 lbs), 3, Johnsons of Leicester, model no. 3 (height 5′ 6″), 4, Siste Viator, model 384 (approx. 2′ x 3′ 6″), 5, Typical Etna of Glasgow, found from Cornwall to Essex, approx. 1′ 6″ x 2′ 4″.

The products of the Etna foundry (Watson Gow & Co.) in Glasgow may be found all over the country, and to date we have found more than twenty different models made by this firm. This was a large foundry in the Gorbels and later in Falkirk, producing items ranging from stove and water pipes to sugar coolers and other plantation castings, bullion safes and lamp-posts[2]. Some of their designs were registered and examples have been found in the patent office records at the PRO at Kew. Their designs were also copied by other foundries in other parts of the country, presumably under licence. (Wards of Long Melford, Stone and Turner of Dorking and Baker of Compton are known to have cast Etna designs.) The Etna foundry was taken over by the Grangemouth Iron Company in 1929. The Falkirk Iron Co. also produced memorials and a 1920 catalogue shows one measuring 28″ by 30″ for 24 shillings[3]. One of these is in Bothkennar Churchyard and another at Marlborough in Wiltshire. Also manufacturing them in Scotland were Smith and Wellstood of Bonnybridge.

Hadens of Warminster were an ironmongers who were bought by Cordens in 1892 and are still in business under that name but not making cast iron memorials. They produce at least 20 models and examples of nearly all of these have been found from Devon to Shropshire[4] and across to Essex. In 1860 their memorials ranged from a simple 18″ cross at 1/6d to a large 700lb cross costing £9. In a testimonial, a clergyman describes them as 'artistic, elegant, and everlasting; but withal economical, ecclesiastical, and very easily kept in their place'! Some remains of casting pits were removed from the rear of the ironmongers shop about 1960[5]. Two other ironmongers in Warminster sold cast iron gravestones, Lanning and Dutch. The latter is buried beneath a cast iron coffin-shaped grave cover (80″ x 21″) in Warminster churchyard. Cast iron grave-covers were also produced by William Cottis and Sons, Archimedian Ironworks, Epping and the founder and his wife were buried beneath one of these memorials. The firm was founded in 1858 and continued as a family concern until they sold out in 1962[6].

The Hedges and King agricultural foundry at Bucklebury, Berkshire[7], obtained power from a water wheel in the river alongside, and this still remains although the buildings are now residences. They produced large iron slabs resembling gravestones in size and shape, and a cross in circle design, the latest date found being 1939, but these have only been found in the area near Bucklebury.

Filmer and Mason were ironmongers in Guildford and their foundry was where the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre now stands. Eight models by this manufacturer have been seen in Surrey, Hampshire, Hertfordshire and Sussex; in Cocking Churchyard there are more than twenty examples and three are on view in the Amberley Chalk Pits Museum. They also produced agricultural and domestic products, and castings for the Portsmouth railway[8].

An ironmonger in Leicester, W.F.Johnson, must have had a good sales system as their products are seen in graveyards from Yorkshire to Essex and across to Dorset. Eight variations have been recorded, some of them over five feet tall. It does seem likely that Johnson's products were made by the Wright's foundry and some of the patterns by Perry and Sons, both of Leicester. Pattisons of Leicester were founders but only one of their memorials has been found so far and that is at Foxton[9].

The Atlas Works at Earls Colne near Colchester is a working foundry, part of Christy Hunt Engineering, and their large pattern shop still contains one for a gravestone. The retired patternmaker who made them lives nearby. A number of cast iron gravestones made from this pattern are in the churchyard at Earls Colne where the most recent date is 1948 and at Aldham the dates range between 1903 and 1926[10]. Walter Gascoine moved from Northampton in 1881 and set up the 'Test Valley Ironworks' at Romsey, making farm and mill machinery as well as grave markers which sold locally at 5/-[11]. There are over 150 in the local cemetery to this day. These were produced in two sizes, the smaller being eighteen inches wide and the larger twenty six.

Long Melford churchyard contains over 150 cast iron memorials, some of them are Etna models. Five patterns with 'D Ward Melford' cast into them are identical with the Etna ones, but had been made by the local foundry. Other foundries, such as Bakers of Compton, also made Etna models but with their own name cast into them so it seems a fair assumption that they used the same pattern under licence.

One of the Norfolk foundries still working is at Great Walsingham. This was started in 1809 by the Cornish family, and they made various castings for the agricultural industry. War casualties ended the male line in 1919; it was sold to the Wright family and continued trading as a foundry until the 1932 depression. In 1938 it was purchased by Barnhams, and renamed 'The Walsingham Foundry Co.' and continues to this day. On a recent visit we were shown the original wooden and the iron patterns, and they have made a metal headstone costing £30, plus VAT, with 'Tony Yoward' on it, but no date. (Mary gave it to me for a Christmas present!) Also we were shown the box of letters which are added to the pattern and held in place with beeswax in order to make the impression.

We had not been able to trace the manufacturer who always put 'Siste Viator' (meaning 'Journeys End') on the back of their products. Luckily they also registered the design, and a recent visit to the PRO at Kew revealed them as J. M. Bennett and Sons of Manchester[12]. Ten models by this maker have so far been traced.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A cross standing 30″ above the ground could be purchased for under 10/- in 1860, and the cost had decreased slightly by the turn of the century. The name, age and date of death could be cast into the memorial for two pence per letter, or painted on for much less. An example of the price of a stone memorial for the

SUPPLIERS OF CAST IRON GRAVESTONES

NAME	LOCATION	BUSINESS	DISTRIB.	MODELS
J Angell	Guildford	foundry	local	1
Barrett, Exall, Andrews	Reading	foundry	local	1
J M Bennett & Sons (siste viator)	Manchester	foundry	wide	10
Bryant	Redlynch, Hants.	foundry	local	1
Baker	Compton, Berks.	foundry	local	1
Denning & Co.	Chard, Somerset	foundry	wide	15
B Dutch	Warminster	ironmonger	local	2
Cornish	Walsingham		local	1 (4)
Cotterell	Hungerford	foundry	local	1
William Cottis & Sons	Epping	foundry	local	1
Falkirk Iron Co.	Falkirk	foundry	wide	4
Filmer & Mason	Guildford	ironmonger & foundry	wide	8
Hadens	Warminster	ironmonger	S England	21
Hedges (later Kings)	Bucklebury	foundry	local	2
Hockey & Co.	Chard, Somerset	foundry	local	1
Hunt, Atlas Works	Earls Colne	foundry	local	1
W F Johnson W Lanning	Leicester	ironmonger	wide	9
Maldon Iron Co.	Warminster	ironmonger	local	2
Mushet Iron Co.	Maldon	foundry	local	1 (2)
E Pattison & Co.	Dalkeith	foundry	local	1
Thomas Phillips	Leicester	foundry	local	1
John Smith	Wiseman's Bridge	foundry	local	1
Smith & Wellstood	Swansea	foundry	local	1
Stone & Turner	Stratford-on-Avon	foundry	wide	1
Test Valley Iron Wks. L Ward	Bonnybridge	foundry	local	1
Watson Gow & Co.	Dorking	foundry	local	1
	Romsey	foundry	local	2
	Long Melford	foundry	local	5
	Glasgow	foundry	wide	22

[NB: This list gives records up to November 1987]

same period would have been £3 to £4 for the stone, and letters four and a half pence each[13]. Railways obviously played their part in the distribution of cast iron gravestones, as these could weigh anything from 30 to 300 lb each; rail would have been the cheapest and most convenient method of transporting them.

Dates on the iron gravestones range from the 1850s to as late as the 1950s in East Anglia and the Westcountry, where small foundries kept working much later than those in other parts. The use of cast iron for headstones seems to have been a short term fashion in many places as the dates occur within a few years of each other, and then no more.

It is evident that these memorials were sold by mail order, with catalogues being sent all over the country by some of the foundries, although very few of them still exist. They were even exported to the Colonies, because Hadens of Warminster quote 'packing and freight to London Docks' and 'Memorials and Inscriptions are galvanized, as recommended for Tropical Climates, at an extra cost of one-third on Catalogue prices'. In a recent television programme on the building of the Panama Canal, the French workers graves were marked by cast iron crosses. It seems likely that catalogues were sent to the clergy, as cast iron gravestones often occur in an isolated churchyard while other nearby parishes have none. If the undertakers had been selling them, they would have been in neighbouring burial grounds as they usually serviced several churches in the area.

Most examples have been found in country churchyards, especially the 'out-of-the-way' ones where the stones have remained untouched. Where churchyards have been cleared, which seemed to be the vogue in the 1960s, and unfortunately still is, the stone memorials have been stood against the wall, and the metal ones have completely disappeared or occasionally one may find them in the rubbish dump. At Chard in Somerset twenty three were unearthed this way. The gravediggers were most interested in their history and have reinstated them in the cemetery, although not in their original positions, while at Wisborough Green in Sussex we unearthed thirteen but their future is not yet secure.

An explanation for the scarcity in town and city cemeteries and churchyards is most likely due to 'Warship Weeks' during World War 2, when railings and many other iron artifacts were removed to assist the war effort. One is often told by an old inhabitant that 'there used to be a lot in there before the war'.

Iron was used in the 17th and 18th centuries in the form of grave slabs or 'ledgers' to mark the burial of wealthy people, often ironmasters. Examples can be found in the East Sussex Wealden Iron area, such as Wadhurst where there are thirty one grave slabs dating from 1617 to 1799. Some of these are very similar to firebacks and would have been made by pouring into a sand impression. Firebacks are still being made by this method at the Rye Foundry in Sussex. A 1610 cast iron grave slab which had been used as a fireback for many years can be seen at Withyham Church. This was a grave slab produced as a fireback; perhaps the purchasers could not read the inscription![14] At Burrington in Herefordshire are seven grave slabs in the churchyard dated from 1619 to 1754, cast at Bringewood Forge on the River Teme. The largest is 41" x 84", the ore being obtained from nearby Clee Hill.

Slabs may also be seen at Madeley in Shropshire, one of which is dated 1770 recording the death of Walter Parker, Ironfounder of Coalbrookdale. Another is an altar tomb, made completely from iron, dated 1785. There is a row of cast iron grave-covers recording the death of nine 'who were killed by the unhooking of the chains by which they were ascending the shaft of Brickkiln Leason Crewstone Pit in this parish at the end of their days labour on Tuesday 27th September 1864', their ages ranging from 12 to 52. The most recent iron memorial is a simple cross of 1906.

At Blaenavon are five slabs on altar tombs which are late 18th and early 19th century[15]. Even the front door-step and the font at the church are made of cast iron.

It would seem that the main reasons for the use of these metal headstones were:

1. The cost was low, perhaps a tenth of the price of a masonry one. This is why they are often in memory of the very young, the very old or women who have died at childbearing age, at a time when money would be very difficult.
2. Details could be added quickly and at very little expense, enabling them to be available shortly after burial.
3. It was normal in Victorian times to mark the grave in some way. It also prevented over-burials.
4. The foundries were looking for new types of work in order to expand, and to replace trade lost because of the depression in agriculture in the 1870s.
5. The railways were able to transport them to almost any part of Britain, quickly and cheaply.
6. Catalogues were printed cheaply and widely distributed by post.
7. It became fashionable to use cast iron gravestones in some areas.

As there are thousands of graveyards or cemeteries, it seems we are going to be very busy for many years in order to record the foundries, memorials, their distribution and the social history associated with them. It would be greatly appreciated if anyone finding a metal headstone could record the town and map reference, the shape of the memorial (cross, cross in circle, plate, etc.), its width, the date, name and age of the person,the position in the churchyard or cemetery and also record the foundry if its mark is visible.

A talk to the verger or vicar can often ensure the safety of the memorial, by pointing out that it has no real value except as scrap, but is irreplaceable and definitely a piece of industrial and social history.

May we thank the many people who have become interested in cast iron gravestones and have been good enough to visit many graveyards from Scotland to Cornwall to supply us with information. To them all, our grateful thanks.

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REFERENCES

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(2) Thanks to Professor John Butt for details of the Etna Foundry.
(3) Details of the Falkirk Iron Foundry and a Catalogue page supplied by the Falkirk Museum.
(4) Thanks to Ron Martin of SIAS for finding and photographing these and many more.
(5) Details of Haden's from Jack Field at Warminster Museum.
(6) Details supplied by John Cottis.
(7) Reading Library and *The History of Bucklebury* by Arthur Humphries, 1932
Kenneth Major for photographs of Bucklebury, and details of Cottrells and of Bakers.
(8) Filmer and Mason details from the Surrey Times Coronation Supplement, 1902, Guildford Library and Matthew Alexander at the Guildford Museum.
(9) Details of W F Johnson and Co. and E Pattison and Co. from Peter Neaverson.
(10) Atlas Foundry, Earls Colne; the details were from John Silman, SUIAG who continues to find more gravestones and their foundries.
(11) *Old Romsey at Work* published LTWAS.
(12) PRO, Kew. BT-51-46-92834
(13) Prices from J C Langford, monumental masons of Fareham.
(14) Many details of pre-industrial revolution grave slabs from Rosalind Willatts.
(15) Details from Pam Moore.

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