

## The Legend of Fig Tree Tomb

The Fig Tree Tomb was a popular tourist attraction in Victorian times. Legend claims that the person buried there was an atheist, who had asked that something be buried in the tomb that could germinate if there was life after death.

The existence of God was proved by a fig tree that grew up from the tomb, dislodging the lid. This strange sight drew visitors to the graveyard, to hear the story and take a twig as a souvenir. The fig tree has long since gone, but the tomb and the legend remains.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the UK and help build a resilient heritage economy.

From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. Across the East of England we have awarded over £370 million to more than 3,300 projects since 1994.

**Website:** [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)

St Mary's Church is a vibrant Anglican community in the heart of Watford. The Church organises a wide range of services, concerts and other events.

**Website:** [www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)

Additional funding and support for this project was provided by Watford Borough Council and Watford Museum.

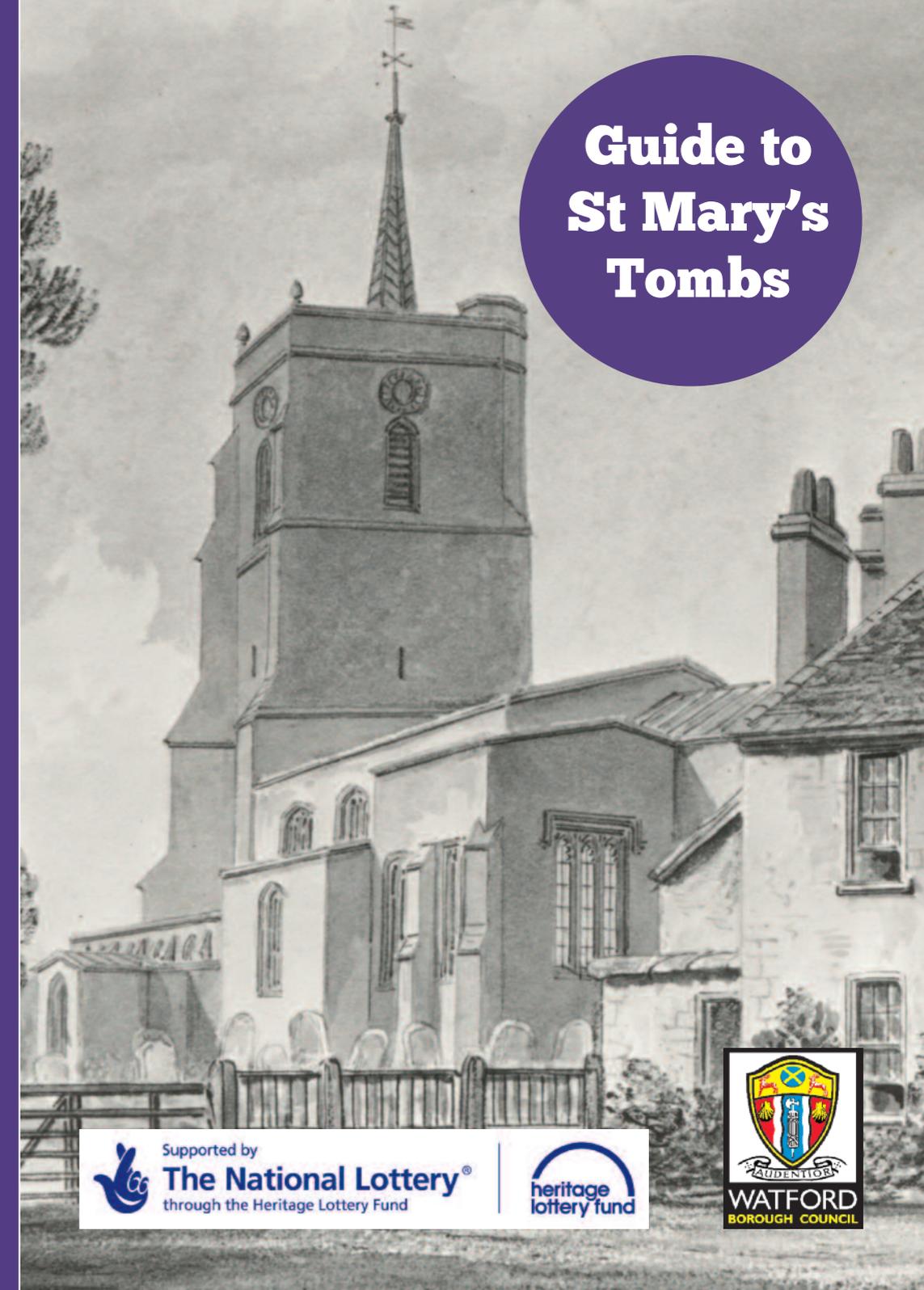
For further information on the history of the memorial structures and the restoration project, please visit the Museum's website. If you are interested in getting involved in future events relating to the green space in St Mary's, please contact the Museum.

**Telephone:** 01923 232297

**Email:** [info@watfordmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@watfordmuseum.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.watfordmuseum.org.uk](http://www.watfordmuseum.org.uk)

## Guide to St Mary's Tombs



Supported by  
**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>  
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“A wooded vista” - St Mary's Churchyard in 1951



# St Mary's - History

**S**t Mary's Church is Grade I listed and is the oldest building in the Borough of Watford, making it the primary focus of the town's ecclesiastical history. There is evidence that there was a church here in the 12th century.

Situated prominently within the graveyard are thirteen memorials. Nine of these are nationally listed chest tombs and one is locally listed. Of the rest, two tombs have been reconstructed from piles of stones, and one is a nationally listed headstone. Of these tombs it has been possible to identify from their inscriptions the names of most of the families.

The social history associated with the memorials is important because they relate to a number of significant residents of the Parish of Watford who were influential in the development of the town as an industrial centre.

These include the Dyson family, founders of the brewery that evolved into the Benskins brewery; the Clutterbuck family, one of whom wrote the "History of Hertfordshire", and the Finch family who were associated with Frogmore House.



## George Edward Doney

The headstone dated 1809 is that of George Edward Doney - a loyal servant to the Earl of Essex who lived at Cassiobury House in Watford.



He was born in Gambia and sold into slavery. He later earned his freedom and came to Watford as a free man.

This headstone is of national significance and represents a notable aspect of the social history of the town.

### IN MEMORY OF GEORGE E.D DONEY

A Native of Virginia (who died 44 Years discharged the duties of a faithful honest servant to the Earls of Essex) he died 3rd September, 1809

Poor Edward blest the pirate Bark which bore His captive Infancy from Gambia's shore To where in willing servitude he won Those blest rewards for every duty done Kindness and praise the wages of the Heart. None else to HIM could joy or pride impart And gave him, born a Pagan and a slave, A Freeman's Charter, and a Christain's grave.

# Our Restoration Work

**T**he primary methods of decay responsible for undermining churchyard monuments are vegetation, subsidence and decaying iron fixings widely used as structural ties in churchyard monuments.



Ivy and other types of creepers can overtake entire monuments. As growth occurs, sections may be pushed apart and cause damage to footings and foundations. The typical characteristics of a graveyard, incorporating large underground caverns, leave the grounds very susceptible to movement and subsidence. This can cause side panels to twist and warp and joints to weaken. The iron fixings used decay over time as they are exposed to changes in weather and temperature. As they rust and corrode they expand, which lacing pressure on joints. In some cases this causes areas of stone to crack and separate.

Any conservation or restoration treatment includes a thorough examination of the object(s) and a condition report is produced highlighting the main problems and concerns and making recommendations for treatment.

The conservation and restoration treatments included a thorough examination of the objects and a condition report was produced that highlighted the main challenges and solutions.

**A team from Sally Strachey Historic Conservation undertook the restoration work and used the following processes:**

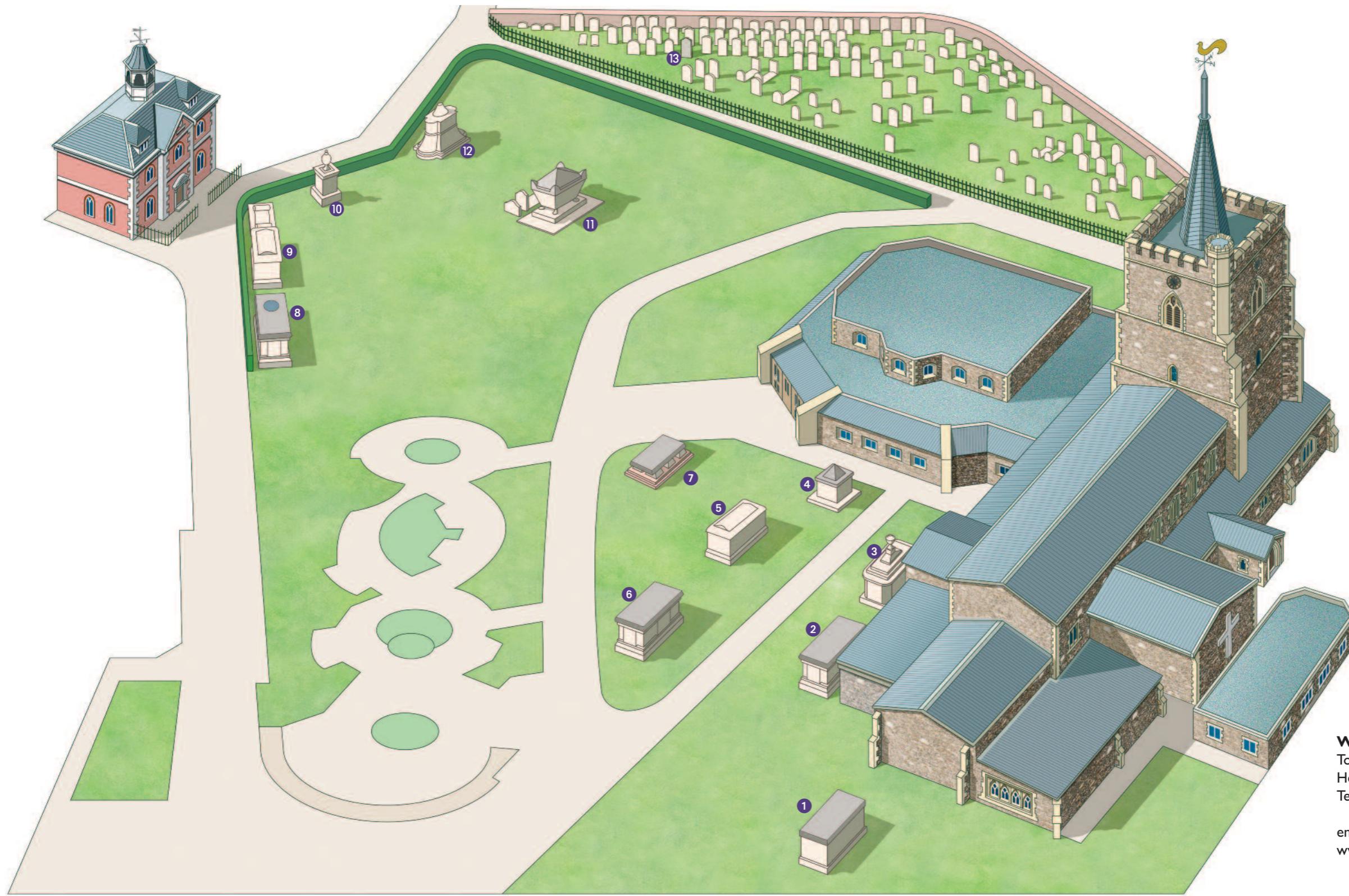
- Removal of damaging vegetation;
- Dismantling of unsafe structures;
- Removal of all iron fixings;
- Rebuilding on firm footings;
- Installing new core material;
- Rebuilding monuments with stainless steel fixings;
- Careful cleaning of surfaces;
- Repairing surface detail with lime mortars to improve legibility;
- Re-pointing with lime mortars, in some cases adding a final protective lime shelter-coat.

Great care and attention to detail was used throughout, particularly where monuments were being dismantled and rebuilt.



Top photo: Before restoration work began. Main photo: After restoration work finished.

# THE TOMBS



- ① **Shipton/Finch Tomb**
- ② **The "Fig Tree" Tomb**
- ③ **Fawcett Tomb**
- ④ **Harty Tomb**
- ⑤ **Dundas Tomb**
- ⑥ **Deacon/Stracy Tomb**
- ⑦ **Firth Tomb**
- ⑧ **Morrison Tomb**
- ⑨ **Dyson Tomb**
- ⑩ **Holliday Tomb**
- ⑪ **Dalton/Guest Tomb**
- ⑫ **Clutterbuck Tomb**
- ⑬ **George Edward Doney's grave**

**Watford Borough Council**  
Town Hall, Watford  
Hertfordshire, WD17 3EX  
Telephone: 01923 226400

[enquiries@watford.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@watford.gov.uk)  
[www.watford.gov.uk](http://www.watford.gov.uk)

**Watford Museum**  
194 High Street, Watford  
Hertfordshire, WD17 2DT  
Telephone: 01923 232297

[info@watfordmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@watfordmuseum.org.uk)  
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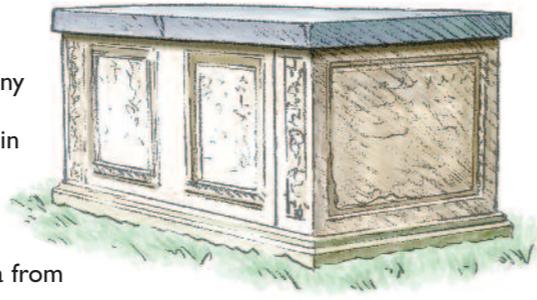
## 1 Shipton/Finch Tomb



The Shiptons and Finches buried here represent the earliest burials found in any of the chest tombs, with Isaac Finch Junior dying in 1725, six years before his father.

The Finches can be traced in the Watford area from as early as the 17th century, and in particular in the 18th and

19th centuries when they are connected with Frogmore House in the Lower High Street (itself the subject of a restoration project).



## 2 The "Fig Tree" Tomb

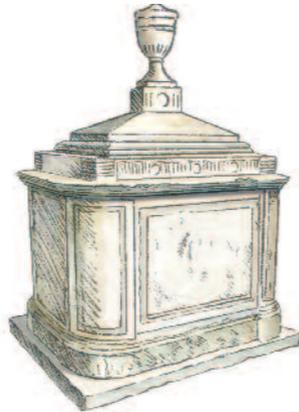
A tomb of Portland stone, though sadly the inscription was carved on slate which was no longer legible, even in the time of the local 19th century historians.



## 3 Fawcett Tomb

The Fawcett Tomb contains the body of John Fawcett and his wife Mary. John is described as "late of this town" but little is known about him.

There was an "apothecary" (a dispensing chemist) named John Fawcett listed in the 1792 trade directory who might be the one buried here.



## 4 Harty Tomb

The Harty tomb contains the remains of William Harty, a resident of the town, who died in 1794 aged 70. Also buried here is his son, William, who is described as "late of Kingston, Jamaica".

Other members of the family are also buried here. Prior to the restoration project, the front inscription on the tomb was barely visible and the tomb itself had been completely covered by plants and bushes.



## 5 Dundas Tomb

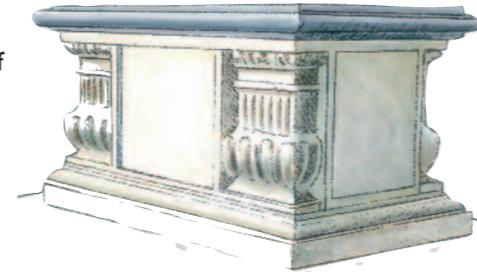
The Dundas tomb contains the late James Dundas and his wife Christian who lived locally in Rickmansworth. James was the commander of the ship 'Earl Fitzwilliam' in the service of the East India Company, one of several people from Watford who served in India. Also present is their eldest daughter Heriott Dundas who died aged just nine in 1786.



## 6 Deacon/Stracy Tomb

The name Deacon may be familiar to the people of Watford as the road name 'Deacons Hill', which runs between Wiggshall Road and Eastbury Road, is named after the Deacon family who for many generations lived in Watford.

The Deacons intermarried with many local families including the Stracys, some of whose descendants are also buried here.



## 7 Firth Tomb

Although the original inscription for this tomb has not been traced, the name 'William Firth' is visible on the ledger stone when wet.



## 8 Morrison Tomb

From its inscription, we have identified that the bodies buried in the Morrison Tomb are that of Elizabeth, who died in 1772, and Ralph Morrison, who died in 1780.

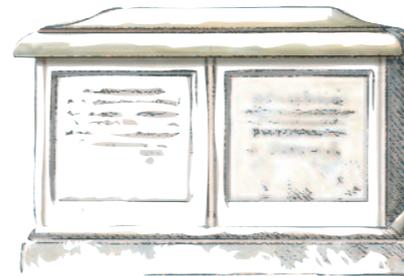
Unlike other tombs in the Churchyard, this has part of its inscription in Latin. There is, no known connection with the Morrisons at Cassiobury House.



## 9 Dyson Tomb

John Dyson, brewer, who is buried here, saw the potential of a site in the Lower High Street, now 194 High Street. He bought the house that was already there and built a new brewery on the land behind it. His son John continued the business but when he died the house and the business was sold to Joseph Benskin whose children continued to run and expand the brewery.

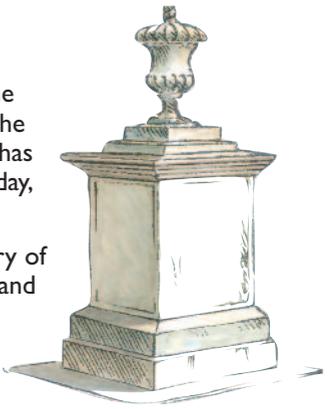
The house is now Watford Museum. The other members of the Dyson family buried here are from another branch of the family and farmed at Tolpits in West Watford.



## 10 Holliday Tomb

While preparing for the start of the restoration project, the conservation team removed the overgrown shrubbery in the Churchyard and discovered a significant pile of stone. This has since been identified as the tomb of members of the Holliday, Sparrow and Baily families.

The complete inscriptions can be found in Cussans "History of Hertfordshire". They are all described as being of London, and died between 1779 and 1851, but it is not known why they were buried here. The tomb has now been entirely rebuilt.



## 11 Dalton/Guest Tomb

A directory for 1832 suggests that Christopher Dalton, who is buried here, was the miller at the town's mill in the Lower High Street.

However, by 1850 he was listed as "Christopher Dalton Esquire" which suggests that he may have gone up in the world socially. Certainly he married the daughter of John Guest from the City of London. John is buried here also, with his wife and daughter. The family may have given their name to Dalton House in the High Street.

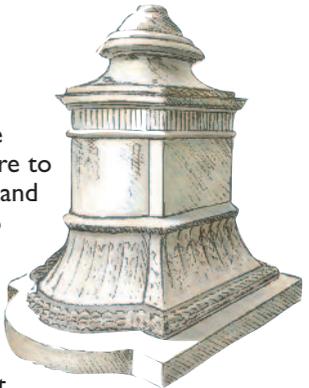


## 12 Clutterbuck Tomb



The first Clutterbuck we know of was Thomas the Elder who came to Watford from Gloucestershire to work as a land agent for the Earl of Essex. He and his wife are buried here, as well as his son, also named Thomas, who built this memorial to his wife Sarah. They had twelve children, described on the tomb as "Twelve pledges of their mutual affection".

As one of these children had eleven children there were a lot of Clutterbucks in the area. One of them, Robert the Elder who lived at Watford House, wrote a "History of Hertfordshire".



## 13 George Edward Doney's grave

In a separate part of the Churchyard is the grave of George Edward Doney, a freed slave who originally came from Gambia and who worked for 44 years as a servant in the home of the 5th Earl of Essex.

