

# St Swithin's Walcot

A Personal View of the Monuments  
in St Swithin's Church



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beauty and the lightness of the  
building."***



## A Personal View of the Monuments in St Swithin's Church

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This personal view of the monuments and the background to them is based on a talk given in the church to the History of Bath Research Group in May 2019. I am grateful to the group for encouraging me to do this.

I first visited St Swithin's church in the autumn of 2009. It had recently been re-opened after a programme of complete refurbishment and I was struck at once by the beauty and lightness of the building. So struck in fact that I started attending services the next Sunday and in due course became a Christian in response to the teaching I heard here.

Sitting in the church week by week I got to look around at the monuments and wonder why they were so dirty and illegible. The reason was very simple – the refurbishment had cost an enormous sum, almost all of which was financed by church members, and there was nothing left over for cleaning the monuments. Indeed some people would have preferred to get rid of them altogether, as was done at Wells Cathedral in the 19th Century!

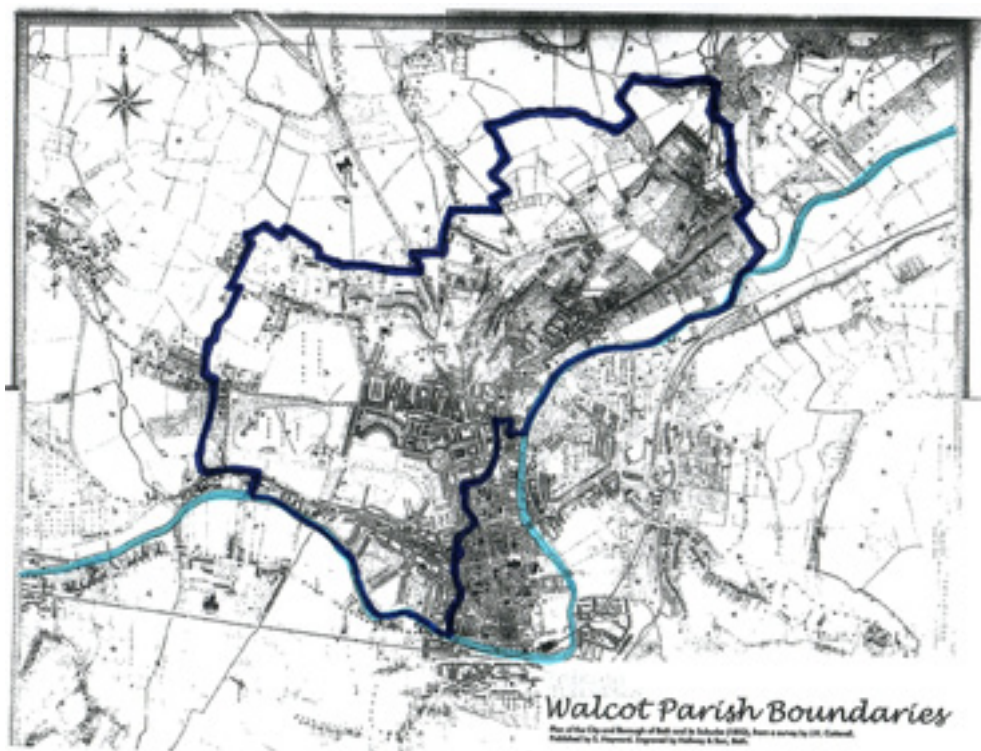
I puzzled for a long time as to why somebody didn't do something about these dusty old monuments, and eventually began to see that that somebody was me. A small volunteer team came together and we took three years to clean the 160-odd monuments in the main part of the church. A lot of questions arose as we went along and this note tries to present some of the answers.

## Walcot Parish

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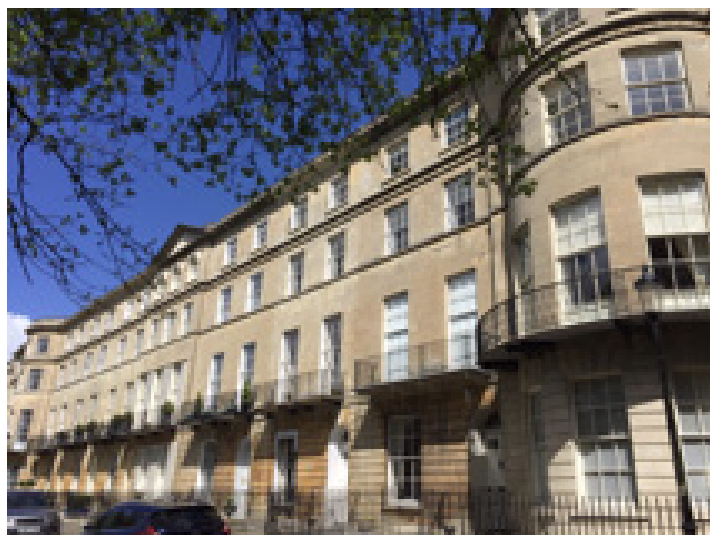
To understand why there are so many monuments in this church, we need to consider the growth of Walcot parish. I think of the relationship of Walcot to Bath as like that of Middlesex to London and Westminster – that huge area to the north and west, ripe for development, as this map from 1852 illustrates. When Bath became ultra-fashionable as a place of resort for the rich and famous, a new town developed, and most of this was built within our parish.

The little area within the loop of the river contained the city-centre parishes. The bigger area within the dark boundary is Walcot parish before it was split up. At the beginning of the 18th Century it was mostly agricultural, but 100 years later many of the best-known Georgian icons had been built within the parish, particularly in the Lower Lansdown area and along the London Road.



1. The original boundaries of Walcot parish. Extracted from *Talking Buildings, Walcot Parish*, by Bath Preservation Trust, courtesy of BPT.





2. Clockwise from top left: Somerset Place, Royal Victoria Park, Sion Hill Place, Grosvenor Place.

St Swithin's church itself had to be expanded several times to cope with the increasing number of parishioners and visitors. The present building, at least the third on the site, was begun in the 1770s, but was only four windows long at the start. The building was extended to its present six windows in the 1780s and two of the oldest monuments, the large ones with profile heads to Paul Bertrand and Jerry Pierce, were taken down and re-erected in their present positions.



**3.** *John Palmer's original 4-bay design for St Swithin's.  
Somerset Heritage Centre.*





## Burials

The expanding population created a rising demand for burials. It was fashionable in the early 18th Century, if you could afford it, to be buried within the church itself. Looking at the present crypt, it's hard to believe that the floor consisted entirely of graves with stone ledger slabs. This early 19th Century plan shows how crowded they were. West (the end towards the Paragon) is at the top. I've highlighted in the detail on the right "Austen 1805" alongside the numeral 2. This is Jane Austen's father, and I believe the corner with his grave is under the present-day toilets. .



4. Plan of burials in St Swithin's crypt. Somerset Heritage Centre.

Not everyone wanted or could afford to be buried inside, so graves were dug outside in the spaces beside the church: what is now the north garden towards London Road, and then the south garden towards the city.

From 1808 more space for burials was acquired across Walcot Street, and our mortuary chapel was built there by James Wilson in 1842. At the same period he built the mausoleum beside the Paragon. What are now nice grassy spaces were not always so attractive. I believe these burial grounds were originally thick with tombs, as can be seen in the old St Mary's churchyard in Bathwick Street.



5. Exterior and interior of St Swithin's mausoleum.



6. Old St Mary's graveyard, Bathwick Street and St Swithin's north garden.

A reaction against burials in city centre graveyards, let alone in churches themselves, set in sharply from the 1820s. Reasons of sanitation and aesthetics came to the forefront, as Dickens satirises in *Bleak House* (published from 1852, though set around 1830):

*...and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed, to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have have not departed....Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination, and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed, to receive Christian burial...with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life – here they lower our dear brother down a foot or two: here, they sow him in corruption...*



It is clear that these crypts and graveyards were not seen as somewhere to come and remember your loved ones. Instead the fashion arose for garden cemeteries on distant locations with attractive planting, where one could spend a pleasant time remembering the departed. The pioneer of the garden cemetery movement, John Julius Loudon, wrote in 1843,

*“Churchyards and cemeteries are not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches to cultivate the intellect, but they serve as historical records”.*



**7.** *Lansdown cemetery, with Beckford's tower in the background.*

Pere Lachaise in Paris and Kensal Green in London are two of the best known. Here in Bath St Swithin's acquired the Lansdown site from William Beckford's daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, in 1847. This airy location with beautiful views over the Somerset countryside was a complete contrast to the confined burial grounds in the city.

## Cleaning the Monuments

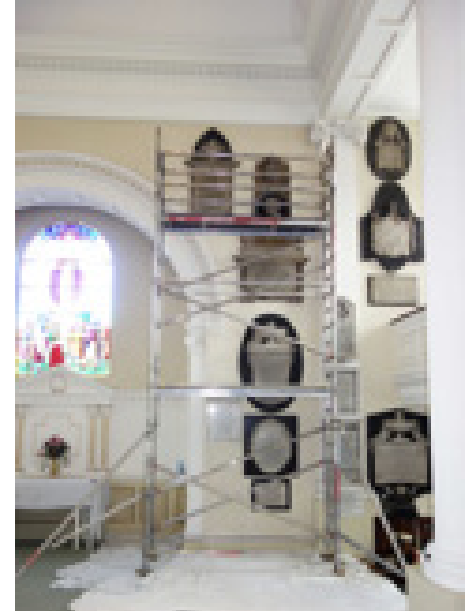
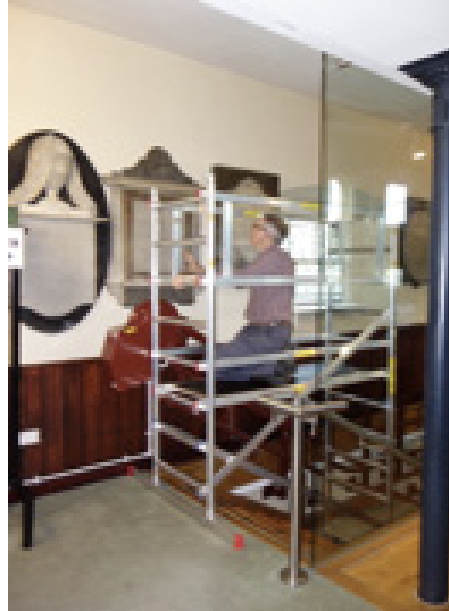
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The team began with some specialist training from Sally Strachey Historic Conservation and we started work at the back of the gallery, thinking that even if we weren't very successful, the results wouldn't be too noticeable there.

After a bit of practice we settled into a routine:

- Step 1. Brush all over the monument with a soft brush, capturing all debris.
- Step 2. Tap all round with a wooden batten to check for loose parts and refix where necessary. There were more of these repairs than I'd bargained for, some quite substantial.
- Step 3. Clean thoroughly with a cotton wool swab and/or a toothbrush using V&A Mixture (Acetone, White Spirit, Non-ionic detergent – it dries quickly and leaves no residue).
- Step 4. Reletter the inscription where necessary with acrylic pen.
- Step 5. Finish the whole monument with microcrystalline wax, to facilitate future dusting.

To get a good result, you had to work at eye-level, which meant deploying a range of access equipment.



**8.** Access equipment for cleaning the monuments.





After a few months, results were fairly encouraging, and I calculated it would be feasible to clean all the monuments in the church. But the stone was not coming completely clean. Many of the monuments had a persistent grey film, which was not coming off.

More advice from SSHC and from Restorative Techniques, a specialist supplier in Bristol, encouraged us to try an EDTA-based gel. In most cases, this floated off the grey film, and left the monuments transformed. You can see this process in action on Jenny Prideaux's monument:



**8.** *In course of cleaning with the gel method.*

The gel method replaced the use of V&A mixture, but otherwise the routine was much the same. I also repainted or revarnished the back slab where the original finish was patchy. For three monuments we recast missing details from plaster of Paris, with consent from the Archdeacon of Bath. The monuments at the east end of the church were all done this way, and I think the results speak for themselves.

I finished by renovating the font. Being made of limestone, brass and timber, this required a different set of techniques.

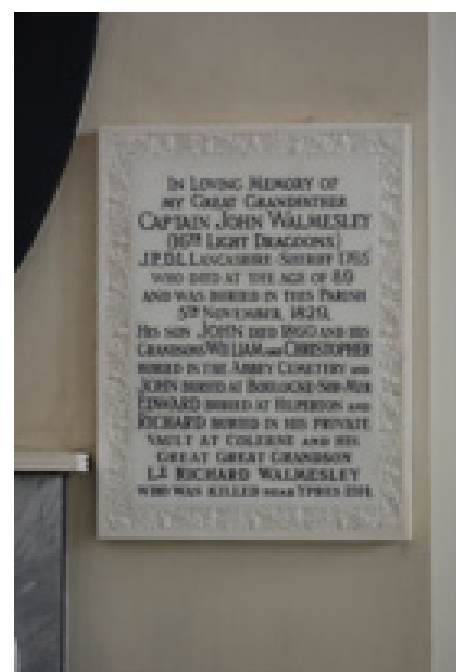
10. Before and after: Joseph and Katharine Fraine



11. Before and after: Jerry Pierce



12. Before and after: Captain John Walmesley and other members of the Walmesley family





## People

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Who were the people memorialised? I thought at first that most were fashionable visitors who had come to Bath for the sake of their health, and then expired here. This applies to a few, but we can find a more specific Bath connection for most of them, and Philip Bendall's report (see link on our website) is very helpful on their origins. A rough summary of their backgrounds where I could find it is as follows:

23 Army, 8 Naval officers

24 Clergy

20 Gentry

14 Worked/lived in India, 11 in West Indies

8 Bath businesspeople

7 Lawyers

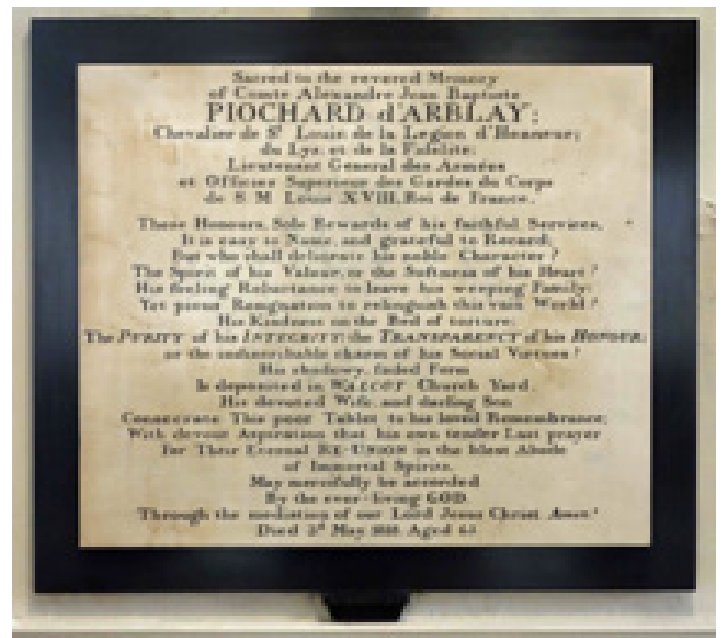
5 MPs

4 Writers, artists

Some people may fall into more than one category, and I haven't captured everybody, but it is easy to see that these were just the sort of well-off, middle-class people who appear in Jane Austen's novels. As she lived part of her life in Bath, I like to think she may have known some of them!

It's a matter of judgement who are the most important people memorialised, but I suppose the best known is the novelist and diarist **Fanny Burney**, who came a generation ahead of Jane Austen, but is less well-known today. There are in fact five Burney family monuments in the church, to herself and her husband, a French royalist general who fought against Napoleon, and her son by him; her half sister Sarah Harriotte, also a novelist, and Ralph Broome, the husband of her other sister Charlotte, and the younger Ralph Broome, their son. The younger Broome has a touching epitaph by the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, on the consolations of dying young, which is well worth reading.





13. Fanny Burney, her son and her husband, Piochard d'Arblay



14. Sarah Harriette Burney and the Broomes, father and son

Our best known officer is **Sir Edward Berry**, who lived in Gay Street. He was one of Nelson's most trusted captains and the only commander in the fleet to be awarded three gold medals, which are depicted on the monument.



15. Edward Berry and his three gold medals, one restored.

A Swiss friend of the church, Donatella Gelati, has written a most informative book about Berry, which you can read on our website. He was known for having a very impetuous temperament, as shown by Nelson's remark on seeing Berry's ship coming into the line before Trafalgar: *'Here comes that fool Berry. Now we'll have a battle!'*

A few months earlier in March 1805 he was the subject of an entertaining legal action at the Norfolk Assizes, as reported in the Norfolk Chronicle:

*Richard Rant v Sir Edward Berry, Kt. This was an action brought to recover of the defendant a compensation in damages for an assault. – The defendant is the occupier of a mansion-house and premises belonging to the plaintiff at Catton, and the latter thought proper to charge the defendant with acting in an ungentleman-like manner, by riding across the fields of the plaintiff, although he had given him permission to do so, on his hiring the premises; the consequence of that and other insulting language was, the defendant, in the heat of the moment, collared the plaintiff, and threatened if ever he made use of such language again to him, that he would horsewhip him. – It appeared by the evidence of the plaintiff's steward, who was the only witness, that the defendant...*



*...had not done any damage to the land, and that the plaintiff had not received any personal injury from the assault, and as that was occasioned by the improper language of the plaintiff, the Jury (which was a special one), under the direction of his Lordship, found a verdict for the plaintiff with one shilling damages.*

Another character I find interesting is **Governor Pownall**. From Cambridge he joined the Board of Trade, which looked after colonial affairs, and got himself posted to New York. He travelled widely and became friendly with Benjamin Franklin. He later became Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey and Governor of Massachusetts Bay. He wrote about the administration of the colonies and supported the side of the colonists in their struggles with the government here. On return to England he was elected to Parliament and voted in favour of the famous motion in 1780 that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished. In later life he became a bit of an antiquarian and wrote a pamphlet about a recently-excavated find at the Roman baths. I restored the crest after an illustration of the American Heraldry Society.



16. Thomas Pownall      Uthoff Family

A tragic story attaches to the **Uthoff** monument in the south gallery. Henry Uthoff was a London merchant, originally from Bremen, who went bankrupt and appears to have retired to Rivers Street in Bath. The following is compiled from three newspaper accounts from July 1790, and none of it is apparent from the monument itself.

*On Monday se'nnight died at Bath, Miss Uthoff, sister to the Rev. Mr Uthoff of Huntingfield and niece to Sir Gerard Vanneck, Bart. Her death was occasioned by the following melancholy accident:-*

*Coming in cold from a walk the preceding evening, a fire had been ordered to be lighted, where her favourite little dog jumped up to be caressed, and on stooping down to fondle him, her dress, which was muslin, caught fire. Her sister who was in the room, instantly endeavoured to extinguish the flames by rolling her in the carpet but without effect, and ran into the street, screaming out that her sister would be burnt to death.*

*By this time Miss Uthoff had got into the passage, where the draft of air meeting her, she was entirely in a blaze, when a gentleman ran over the opposite side of the way, and threw his coat upon her, otherwise she must have been consumed to ashes on the spot. In endeavouring to save herself the fingers of her left hand were entirely burnt off, and she was very much disfigured.*

*On being carried upstairs she blessed God that she retained her senses; but notwithstanding every medical assistance, she expired the next morning, in great agony.*

*She was a young lady of very amiable manners, and is most sincerely lamented.*

**William Maxwell**, who lived in Bennet Street, has the rather nightmarish car-of-Juggernaut monument in the north gallery.



17. Revd William Maxwell DD

He is described in James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson as "the Rev Dr Maxwell of Falkland in Ireland, sometime assistant preacher at the Temple, and for many years a social friend of Johnson, who spoke of him with a very special regard." Maxwell even affected to dress like Johnson. He furnished Boswell with a great series of anecdotes about the doctor, which run to 8 pages in my edition of the Life, including these two well-known ones:

*Being asked by a young nobleman what was become of the gallantry and military spirit of the old English nobility, he replied, 'Why, my Lord, I'll tell you what has become of it: it is gone into the city to look for a fortune.'*

And then:

*A gentleman who had been very unhappy in marriage, married immediately after his wife died; Johnson said, it was the triumph of hope over experience.*

The architect of St Swithin's, **John Palmer**, has a rather modest monument in the south gallery. As soon as he'd finished this church, he was appointed City Architect. His church works included St James's, Christchurch, and the Canon pub (formerly a Unitarian church); and his streets, New Bond St, St James' Square, Lansdown Crescent, Kensington Place, Burlington St and Green Park. He also completed the Pump Room. What an amazing contribution that was to Georgian Bath! He lived in Charles Street.





The **Fitzgerald** monument is well worth studying – it took about a fortnight just to re-inscribe it! It records a very sad naval accident off the coast of South Africa, on the sea-route to India. The story is recounted in an official letter from Admiral Gore, who witnessed the death of his own son as well as that of Lieut Fitzgerald and the others mentioned:

*“Melville, off Cape L’Aguillas, 5th May, 1835.*

*“Sir, - It has become my painful duty to request you to state to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty the death of Lieutenant James Lewis Fitzgerald and Lieutenant John Gore (flag-lieutenant), together with eight seamen (as per margin), belonging to HMS ship bearing my flag, the circumstances of which as follows: -*

*“On the 30th of April, being about thirty-eight leagues to the eastward of Algoa Bay, the weather towards sunset confirmed the appearance during the day of approaching storm, and rendered it necessary to reef the courses &c &c, in doing which Henry Phillips fell from the fore-yard overboard. Lieutenant Gore saw he could not swim and (having had the happiness of saving a man’s life, and confident of his powers, hoping to do so again), he leaped overboard while the boats were lowering. Two cutters were sent as expeditiously as possible, Lieutenant Fitzgerald in one, Lieutenant Hammond in the other; their search was decreed to be fruitless, though continued until dark. Lieutenant Hammond’s boat returned safe, Lieutenant Fitzgerald’s was within hail of the ship, when a heavy squall and one of those hollow destructive seas, so peculiar in this latitude, broke directly into her, and neither the boat nor any thing belonging to her was picked up. It was then impenetrably dark, and the gale continued until next day at noon.*

*“I have the honour to be, sir,  
“Your most obedient humble servant,  
John Gore, Vice-Admiral.”*

Admiral Gore never got over the death of his only son and oldest child, and he died the next year in Datchet at the age of 64.

**Other interesting biographical details** are contained in the monograph about Thomas Hustler of Acklam Hall by Stephen Bird and in the notes on other naval officers by Donatella Gelati, both of which are posted on the monuments section of the church website.

## Style of the Monuments

Our monuments form a fairly homogeneous group. They are quite modest in size, though many are works of high quality. Most date from a shortish period, 1750-1850, but there is a striking stylistic development over these years.

The oldest group, from the mid-18th Century, includes several monuments in a heavy, multi-coloured, rather architectural style. I think of this as a Roman effect. Paul Bertrand was a fashionable jeweller or toy-maker, with a shop in Terrace Walk. The Briscos lived in Monmouth Place. Richard Barker was one of the first cohort of Royal Marines Officers in 1755.



19. Paul Bertrand, Ann Brisco, Richard Barker

Perhaps because Robert Adam only designed one building in Bath, Pulteney Bridge, we have only one neoclassical monument from the 1790s. This is to William Hoare, the celebrated portrait painter, who lived in Edgar Buildings, and was unfortunately eclipsed when Thomas Gainsborough arrived in the city. The design is exuberant and the materials are still multi-coloured, including yellow marble and green scagliola infill on the tapered flutes to the sides of the tablet.



20. William Hoare RA.

Around this time we move on to a purer classical style of white on black. This became the norm, and I suspect it was employed to protect the white marble tablet, which can be discoloured and degraded by damp, from moisture in the church walls by means of an impervious slate backslab. There are far fewer like this in Bath Abbey, perhaps because the walls there are less prone to damp.



21. Revd James Sparrow Sr, Maria Langham, Dame Barbara Seton.





SACRED  
TO THE BELOVED MEMORY OF  
THE REV. JAMES LUNT M. A.  
PREBENDARY OF WELLS  
AND FOR EIGHT YEARS  
RECTOR OF WALCOT  
TO WHOM THE ERECTION OF  
THE NEW WALCOT PAROCHIAL  
SCHOOLS IS LARGELY DUE  
HE ENTERED INTO REST  
MARCH 30<sup>TH</sup> 1900  
AGED 52  
HE ENDURED AS SEEING HIM  
WHO IS INVISIBLE



23. *Revd Joseph Lunt and 1914-19 war memorial, surnames G-W*

## Symbols

These are funerary monuments in a Christian church, and it's natural to ask what religious sentiments are being conveyed. My view is that during this period faith in God was taken for granted by most people, so the absence of a specific symbol or text should not be a considered significant.

As regards Christian sentiments, Jenny Prideaux's monument is a good place to start. It shows two fashionably dressed ladies, one gazing down sadly on a funerary urn and the other holding a cross and looking heaven-ward. Mrs Prideaux of Sydney Place was a wealthy widow, who gave a great deal of money to good causes during her life and at her death. I think the message here is that we should not be sad at her passing (she was 83 after all). She is relying for salvation not on her good works, but in her faith in Christ. St Paul teaches us, and Martin Luther was particularly strong on this, that it is only through our faith and the grace of God that we can be saved.

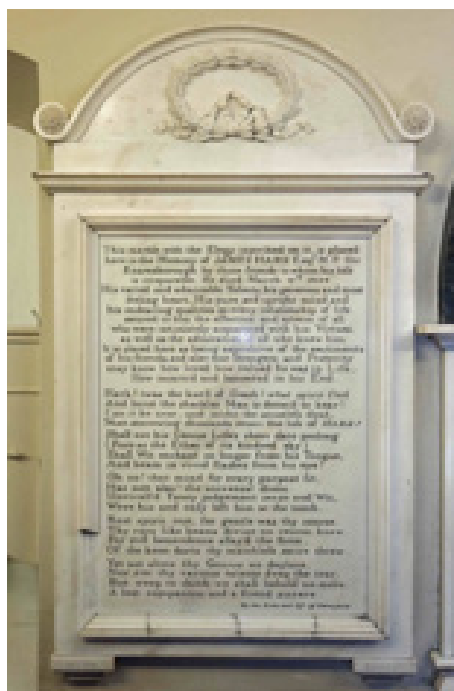


24. Jenny Prideaux, Anna Hardcastle and Revd John Sibley

It's clear that many of these monuments depict funerary objects, whether a symbolic tomb, sarcophagus or even pyramid, as with Paul Bertrand and Jerry Pierce at the front, or more commonly an urn. I find the latter a bit puzzling, as cremation was not common in Georgian times, though a rare example was the poet Shelley, who had drowned at sea in 1822, and was cremated near Viareggio in accordance with quarantine regulations.

Some of the urns sport a little flame, as with Anna Hardcastle, which is seen as a symbol of resurrection, as is discarded drapery (eg Rector John Sibley) perhaps by analogy with the grave clothes found in Jesus's empty tomb.

A wreath (eg James Hare, a politician and diplomat manqué) symbolises victory over death. There are many crosses. Drooping foliage is common, like Maria Bride's weeping willow, and there are symbols of mortality, like the lyre with broken strings, hourglass with wings and blank scroll for William Potter, our organist, who lived in Ballance Street and died in 1805, leaving a wife and three small children.



25. James Hare, Maria Bride and William Potter.



The detail of some monuments reflects the person's career, eg General Agnew's monument with its extraordinary profusion of armaments, and Sir Edward Berry's with its crests and three gold medals.



**26.** Maj-Gen Patrick Agnew, Vice-Adm Sir William Berry and George Monkland

There are finally two monuments close together, George Monkland and Sarah Busk both with a serpent swallowing its tail, a symbol of eternity. Monkland lived in Belmont and was a supporter of many local charities.



## Monumental Masons

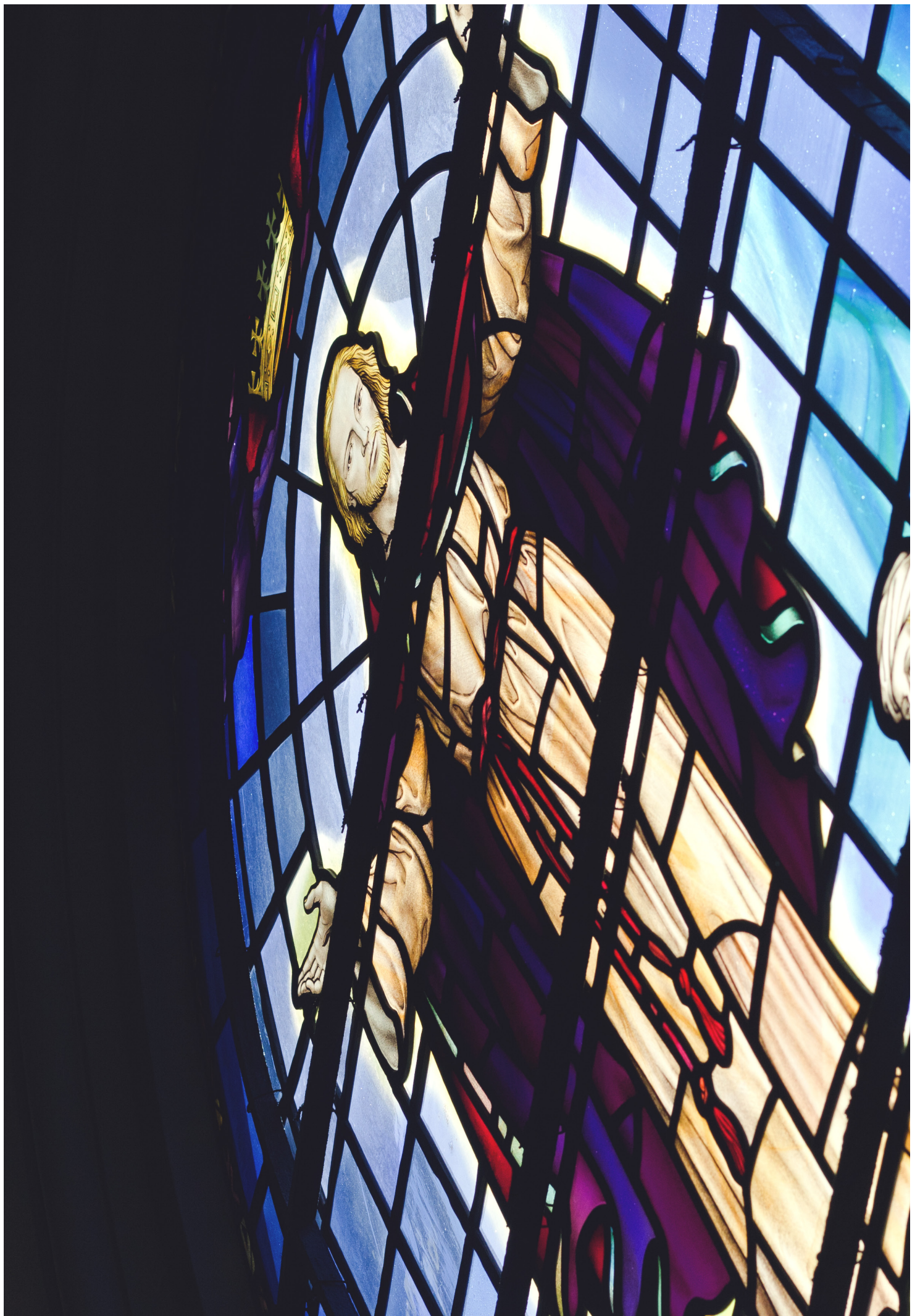
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Of the 163 monuments in the church, some 120 are signed with the name of the mason's firm that made them, usually on the bracket beneath the monument or on one of the lower corners. 22 separate firms can be identified, of which the most prolific are:

Name	Number	Date Range
King	44	1775-1882
Reeves	37	1798-1847
Lancashire	7	1779-1824
White	7	1825-1872
Viner	6	1771-1844
Harris	3	1820-1835

Kim Jordan is preparing out a special survey of the monumental masons who made such an important contribution to Georgian Bath, with chimney pieces and occasional statutory as well as church monuments. He tells there are more signed monuments in St Swithin's even than in Bath Abbey. When his report is complete, I hope we shall be able to post it on the website alongside this paper.

Many of these firms had a stone yard in Walcot parish, from Lansdown to Snow Hill to the Upper Bristol Road, and their work went all over the west of England and even to the colonies.





## More Recent Times

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You might ask why there are no modern memorials in the church, apart from Francis Murphy, who was Rector in the 1920s and 30s, and Rowland and Alice Dymock, members of the church, both dating from the 1950s. We had of course pretty much run out of space, but I think the main reason is that a revulsion set in after the First World War, when it was felt that so many loved ones had died unnecessarily and profitlessly. It no longer seemed appropriate to celebrate the departed with the kind of grandiosity that had been natural in the 18th and 19th Centuries, and I think the new spirit is captured by the blankness of the Cenotaph in Whitehall. The greatly increased use of cremation after World War II may also be a factor. The consequence is that we have a fairly homogeneous collection of monuments, the styles of which accord well with the interior of this Georgian building. I hope you agree that we were right to try and bring them back to life.

**Henry Brown, June 2019**



## Annex 1: Suggested Further Reading

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The Parish Church of St Swithin Walcot, A Brief History. Jane Root 1992. A general history of the parish and the church.

Pevsner Architectural Guides, Bath. Michael Forsyth with Stephen Bird 2003. Comprehensive survey of the buildings in Bath, including St Swithin's church.

Talking Buildings, Walcot Parish. Bath Preservation Trust. Short guide to the development of the parish.

Church monuments in Romantic England. Nicholas Penny 1977. A very attractive review of the development of church monuments covering very much the period of the monuments in St Swithin's.

The Victorian Celebration of Death. James Stevens Curl, 2000. A fascinating and entertaining explanation of the trend away from burials in churches towards the use of remote garden cemeteries.

Bertrand's Toyshop in Bath, Luxury Retailing 1685-1765. Vanessa Brett, 2014. Life and times of Paul Bertrand, whose monument is in the church, focusing particularly on commercial life in the city centre.



## Annex 2: Sources of Information

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### Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton

Walcot Parish records:

- Double rate for rebuilding church 1765
- Vestry minutes 1775-1870
- Pew rent books 1802-1842
- Burial registers
- Plans of burial plots
- Miscellaneous plans and elevations of the church

### Bath Record Office, Guildhall, Bath

- Bath Directories 1800-1842
- Bath Rate books 1766-1782
- Walcot Poor Rate Book 1775
- Bath Ancestors

### Other sources

- [britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)
- [findmypast.co.uk](http://findmypast.co.uk)
- [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)



