

# St Mark's Episcopal Church Portobello



## The graveyard: a brief guide

St Marks Episcopal Church  
287 Portobello High Street  
Edinburgh, EH15 2AR

[www.stmarksportobello.org](http://www.stmarksportobello.org)  
rector@stmarksportobello.org  
Office Tel: 0131 629 1219  
Scottish Charity No: 017137



## Today ... creation of Sacred Space

The graveyard is still used for burials today, and ashes are also buried in the land.

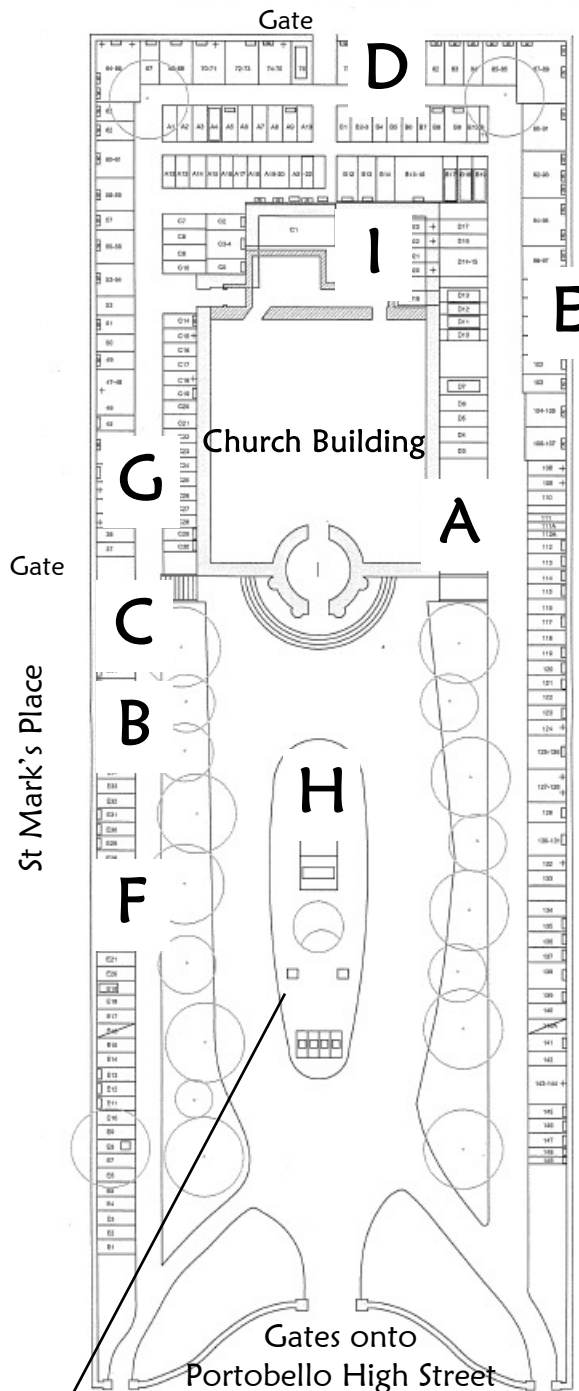
In 2014-2015 we renovated the boundary wall, which had fallen into serious disrepair. It had been patched over the years with cement, but this accelerated the decay and led to serious damage to the stones used.

The work replaced the cement mortar with more traditional lime mortar which enables the wall to 'breathe' and to evaporate the water without damaging the softer sandstone.

This work has made the graveyard safe and fully accessible again, and it is being developed as a green and sacred space for the people of Portobello. Members of the community have been involved in researching the lives of those buried in the grounds.

Our aim is to create a space to aid reflection and meditation open at all times of the day. As a first step in this, in 2014, the congregation painted slates depicting the last week of Jesus' life which are currently around the graveyard. In 2016 we joined the Peace Pole Movement, creating a space for us to remember and commit to peace in our world. There is a small garden of Memory behind the church.

The graveyard is used for services, for socials, for fun and relaxation. The children attending the Holiday Clubs in the summers, plan and plant the garden by the gateway.



Central area: including the graves of the Halyburtons (who built the church), some of the past rectors and is also the place where ashes are buried.

Recent repairs generously supported  
by the Heritage Lottery Fund,  
Allchurches Trust Ltd, Pilgrim Trust,  
Scottish Episcopal Church  
Dunderdale Trust.



# The history of the graveyard ....

## Memories, honour, reflection and quiet space through 200 years



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St Marks church is set within a tree lined burial ground, enclosed by a boundary wall. The Vestry was granted the right to open a burial ground in 1828 after a long period of litigation instigated by the owner of a neighbouring villa. The resulting combination of a church placed in line with a gateway and with the

churchyard in a formal arrangement is unusual in Scotland and unique in Edinburgh.

The first recorded interment, on 20th December 1828, was that of Miss Frances Nicholson aged 80, who had donated the first communion vessels to the church. Her grave is now lost.

In the early eighteenth century there was a large influx of military and naval officers into Portobello. Many were Episcopalians and St Mark's soon became favoured by them. This is reflected in the high number of early monuments dedicated to officers and their families. This continued into the 19th century, with a large proportion of retired naval and army officers and colonial civil servants.

Lairs were either purchased or leased for periods of 14 years after which the vestry was entitled to make further use of any lair upon which the lease had not been renewed "and to cause all tombstones, monuments or tablets placed thereon to be removed".

Purchasers were bound to "enclose their respective Lots with Boundary & Division Walls...At least six feet in depth below the surface". These walls were removed during the 1970s to make maintenance easier.

Early management of the burial ground appears to have been chaotic. The first lair plan was lost and a new plan made in 1859, however problems soon arose when lairs



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Graves associated with people in living memory, including a past organist

James Elliott, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Trelawney Regiment of Militia, Jamaica



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Colonel John Wright of the East India Company who died in 1842; his wife, Elizabeth Innes, died 1840 and three children who died between 1833 and 1836.

Joseph Huey, assistant Surgeon in the 14th Kings Light Dragoons, died 1838



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**Commonwealth War Grave:** Flight Sergeant HI Sandison, Navigator (Bomber) Royal Air Force, 13 February 1946 aged 21



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Memorial to Col Robert Mark Halyburton, of 7th Royal Fusiliers, who was one of the founders of the church. He is buried in Dorset.

The large slab memorial in front marks the graves of Henry and James Stent, twins who died in 1834, aged 10 and 12 months



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in the area immediately behind the church, which were believed to be vacant were found to be occupied.

The problem proved so great that the Vestry prohibited all further internments in December 1862 except in two distinct areas.

Further problems arose at the end of the nineteenth century when the chancel was added to the church. The unusual construction which can be seen today arose from the need to span the structure over occupied lairs beneath.

The burial ground continues to be used to this day.

### Other notable records constructed from memorials and death records of the church:

- Rice Forsyth, proprietor of the popular line of stage coaches to Edinburgh, and all his family. The Forsyth family memorial is on the wall at the south west corner of the graveyard. The family also owned what became the Royal Hotel at the top of Bath Street. This was the terminus for the Forsyth coaches.
- Samuel Johnston, aged 28, died from the effects of injuries received on the Leith and Dalkeith Railway, 1845.
- John Henderson, of Glasgow, workman in search of employment, died of consumption in 1837, interred by the Glassmakers Guild.
- Emma Gooding, from Bristol, died aged 34, in childbirth, "Interred free as her husband is perfectly destitute with six young children."
- Widow McKenzie, aged 80, from "the house" [poorhouse] a parish pauper
- Charles Neilson, described as a Post Boy to his uncle, Postmaster Edinburgh, drowned by the sea on the night of February 12th, returning from Prestonpans.
- The seven children of Robert Farmer, labourer, Easter Duddingston, born at 12 to 18 month intervals and all dead within a few months of birth.



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