

# The origin of the graveyard headstone: some 17th-century examples in Bedfordshire

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*A group of headstones from Wrestlingworth and Potton, Bedfordshire, belong to the second half of the 17th century. They demonstrate the presence of skilled carvers creating external memorials in a range of styles that can be seen to develop over time, with seven distinct types identified at the two graveyards. The competence in carving, and the range of motifs and letter styles, indicates that external commemoration based around professional carvers was established in this region at least by the time of the Restoration. All the stones are decorated, and the earliest display contemporary domestic motifs. From the 1670s, mortality symbols are introduced, suggesting the application of appropriate symbolism to this type of commission. By the end of the 17th century a well-developed local style with mortality symbols in high relief can be identified, and at this time cherubs make their first appearance.*

Post-reformation external grave markers of stone are extremely rare, and even the numbers that survive from the 17th century appear to be small. Problems of identifying early stones are caused by two main factors. The most obvious problem is erosion that has often removed the inscriptions so that possible early memorials cannot be securely dated. Where stones decay it is possible that illegible and broken stones have been cleared away as the graveyard was reused, and so even fragmentary remains are lost. Erosion is certainly a problem in many areas, yet even in those with high quality, easily available, local stone such as slate often have very few early memorials. Thus, erosion cannot fully explain the limited numbers of memorials from this period, and indeed much of the 18th century (Mytum forthcoming).

The other main difficulty affecting identification is that stones may sink into the ground. Many early stones are partially buried and so their form and date can be difficult to ascertain. That stones would sink was recognised when some were made, however. Burgess (1963, 120) notes blocks used as markers in Yorkshire and County Durham may be additionally inscribed on the top, and some 18th - century examples from Leicestershire also have some text on the top of the stone to ensure identification even when only a small stump is visible. Some memorials may now indeed be completely buried, though surprisingly few have been recovered from later grave-digging. It is unclear how far the partial burial of monuments is caused by actual downward movement of the stone, or because the soil level has risen with the build-up in the graveyard by intensive burial and the bringing in of soil to separate layers of graves.

A further methodological problem relates to actual date of production, rather than date of death for the person commemorated. Particularly when memorials are first introduced, there was a tendency for older graves to be marked with a memorial where none had been present

before. This phenomenon, termed back-dating in North America (Slater *et al* 1978), has been noted where particular carvers can be identified, and where documentary sources such as bills and probate records indicate the date of production as compared with the date of death. This phenomenon has also been noted in 18th-century Ireland, where in some regions the date of erection is placed on the stone (Mytum 2002). This may therefore be a factor in the Bedfordshire stones, though with dates as early as 1655, and the coherence of the sequence that can be identified, it is likely that any delay was normally only a matter of years at most, rather than decades.

## *Previous research*

The 17th-century external monuments that have been identified occur in a range of forms, and these have been briefly noted in Britain, Ireland and the eastern coastal states of North America (Mytum 2004a). Discussion of churchyard tombs is excluded here, though to what extent medieval styles continued needs more research than it has yet received.

Frederick Burgess (1963, 115-20) does not clearly differentiate between 17th- and 18th- century memorial traditions, but acknowledges that few monuments survive from the 16th and early 17th centuries. He suggests that markers of this period may have been of wood, or that external commemoration lapsed. Given that very few small-scale medieval monuments survive (Stocker 1986) it would seem that limited use of permanent external memorials continued after the Reformation, and that the rise in use of such markers only becomes widespread during the 18th century (Mytum forthcoming). The only region with surviving early wooden memorials is south-east England, especially Sussex (Burgess 1963, 118), where grave-rail monuments have been noted at a number of sites. There is

little reason to assume, however, that the grave-rail monuments of this area were ever more widespread, and other wooden forms, whilst not unknown, seem to be very rare; none are from the 17th or early 18th century.

The most frequently identified early stone form is the discoid, and Burgess (1963, 149) notes these from many parts of England. The texts on such memorials are brief, occasionally with name and date of death, often only with initials and year. The text could be incised or in false relief. Other memorials with circular heads have been noted in Derbyshire, where initials and year are typical. Thick slab-like monuments, shaped and carved on both sides, are noted from Northern England (Burgess 1963, 118) but these have not yet attracted detailed study. Other thick headstones have been identified in Kent and eastern Surrey, with the use of mortality symbols and, sometimes, longer inscriptions (Benes 1977, 185; Hart 1939). Weathering of Kentish ragstone means that fewer than 10 per cent of the monuments ascribed to the late 16th- and early 17th-century on stylistic grounds are legible, but they can be clearly dated to a period of about a century, beginning around 1670 (Benes 1977, 185). Burgess (1963, 118) notes that in the late 17th century opposed S-scrolls may be carved on the top of the stone, with C-scrolls being found in Norfolk; these are relevant to the Bedfordshire examples described here, from earlier in the century.

In Scotland, early 17th-century headstones have been recorded by Betty Willsher at a number of sites (Willsher and Hunter 1978; Willsher 1985). The earliest headstone commemorates a death in 1623, and is a rustic work with incised text and decoration. Many later 17th-century memorials are more accomplished, however, and show use of architectural forms and decorative motifs. Elite external wall monuments and ledgers were widely produced in the 17th century, and the headstones show some of the same motifs and styles. There is a greater variation in design content, composition, and carving style in Scotland than elsewhere, with a frequent mixture of folk art and more cosmopolitan features.

The Irish evidence for 17th-century memorials is extremely scattered, and demonstrates a wide variety of forms. Often 17th-century monuments appear to reuse architectural fragments, an easy source being the ruined medieval church that usually sits in the centre of graveyards of this period. In Ulster, the presence of Scottish settlers on the Plantations led to the development of a 17th-century memorial tradition that was also espoused by those Irish elites that still survived (McCormick 1983; Roulston 1998). Whilst some headstones were erected, many of the monuments were ledgers, often slightly raised up above the ground though now often sunk back down onto or beneath the turf. Memorials could be plain, with competent though rarely elegant lettering, but many included arms and sometimes other symbolism and decoration, though this



Fig 1: A - Type 1a, Wrestlingworth 13



Fig 1: B - Type 1b, Wrestlingworth 12



Fig 1: C - Type 1c, Wrestlingworth 6

became more common in the early 18th century (Mytum 2004b; 2004c).

Most scholars (Ariès 1981; Burgess 1963; Graham 1958) have merely noted or assumed that external monuments continue forms found inside, with ledgers and tombs translated more or less intact from interior to exterior contexts, and that wall monuments are converted into headstones. The reasons for the start of external monumental commemoration is unexplored or seen as possible through increased prosperity. The only detailed explanation for the development of external monuments has been presented by Sarah Tarlow (1998, 1999). The evidence presented is from Orkney, which has fine internal memorials such as those in St Magnus Cathedral, but has a few 17th-century small, simple external stones carved with initials and year (Tarlow 1999, 107). Moreover, the earliest stones are crudely executed and home-made. Tarlow argues that these show no inspiration based on the internal monuments in form, have limited and different forms of text, and no decoration or symbolism, and so are not inspired by internal memorials. Whilst this may explain the Orkney stones, it is not an argument that can be upheld everywhere. Tarlow is concerned to demonstrate that emulation was not a relevant factor with these simple stones, and that changing attitudes to family and bereavement were more important, though most evidence for these factors applies to later memorials when a larger proportion of the population was commemorated. The Bedfordshire examples clearly demonstrate a different pattern of development, occurring in numbers significantly earlier and with far more sophistication. The origins of graveyard burial in many parts of Britain may need different explanations than those offered for Orkney. This one assemblage cannot on its own provide sufficient to substantiate alternative models, though it is sufficient to indicate some trends and possible lines of enquiry.

### The Bedfordshire stones

Most of the 17th-century memorials under discussion can be found in the churchyards of two adjacent parishes, Potton and Wrestlingworth, where 23 memorials have been studied. Examination of other graveyards within a five-mile radius has only identified two other certain 17th-century stones, one at Tempsford (1681), the other at Old Warden (1699); a few other eroded memorials have also been noted that, on their form, may be early. Seven different monument types can be identified at Potton and Wrestlingworth, and these form a chronological sequence.

#### Type 1

All the early headstones can be placed together both typologically and chronologically. Their dimensions vary (though height can be difficult to estimate if some have sunk) but all are relatively small (Fig 1).

#### Type 1a

The earliest forms can be found at Wrestlingworth, where four almost exactly identical memorials, 2, 15, 11 and 13, can be seen. All belong to a period of three years, and may have been made at the same time. Each has merely two initials with the year inscribed beneath (Fig 1A). All have the same second letter C and they are dated 1655, 1656, and two for 1657. The letters and numerals are carved in a confident and effective manner, with 1 always short, the 6 rising to a greater height and the 5 and 7 extending below. The top of the headstone in each case is carved with a similar arrangement, though no one stone retains all parts of the design in perfect condition. Three C-scrolls are used to create the shape; an inverted C is placed in the centre to form a slightly flattened semicircle, with the C scrolls on each side creating a complex outline for the monument. In the centre of the design the surface of the stone is cut back to leave a small rosette in relief, with the panel on which the lettering is placed defined horizontally by this deeper carving.

Consultation of the parish burial records, which survive for this period, gives some likely individuals commemorated on these stones. LC 1655 probably represents '*Lewis Tomazin, alias Clark, an old batchelor*' who was buried 26th February 1654/5. JC 1656 matches '*Jn Clark alias Tomasin, M.A.*', buried on 23rd September. The other two monuments belong to a different family. HC 1657 no doubt represents '*Henry Cullick, a dutiful, wise and modest man*' who was buried on August 24th of that year, but AC 1657 does not match any entry for that year in the burial registers. It probably was a marker for Ann Cullick, wife of Henry, who died in December 1652; the date may therefore indicate when the monument was erected, presumably at the same time as that of her husband.

#### Type 1b

A very similar Wrestlingworth stone, 12, was also erected with a death date of 1657; this has Type 1a carving at the top of the stone, which survives in remarkable condition, but there is a longer inscription (Fig 1B). This consists of two lines of text using upper and lower case, with the date placed centrally on a third line. As with the memorials of Type 1a, the lettering is confident, flowing and competent, though not now easy to read. The burial register for 14th August 1657 records '*Richard Thistlethwaite, B.A.*' which is what the inscription claims, and the university qualification was clearly of significance.

#### Type 1c

Wrestlingworth 6 is another stone with a similar profile to those already described, though more weathered. Here, however, the profile on each side is formed from S-scrolls and the central scroll is retained as an inverted C-scroll,

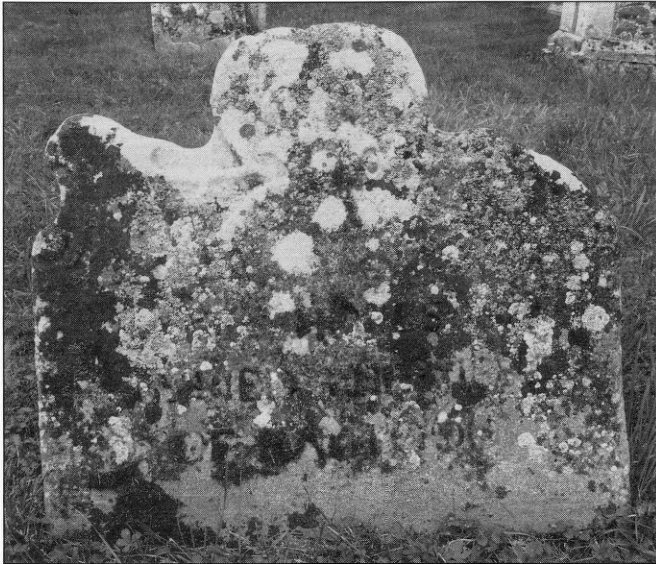


Fig 2: A - Type 2, Wrestlingworth 10

though but no detailing survives. The surface within the top of the stone is cut back but there is no central rosette and instead two capital initials, separated by a small lozenge, and with the date 1660 below, is inscribed across this space (Table 1C). This may indicate the date of erection of the memorial, and is reminiscent of date stones found on buildings of the time. No text beneath can be identified; it may have been left blank or it was lightly incised and is no longer visible. Two candidates have been identified in the burial register: Jn Canon buried January 5th and Jn 'son and heir of Jn Clark, a boy', buried March 2nd. The latter is the more likely candidate, given the other monuments erected by the Clark family.

**Type 2**

One example of an early headstone with a different profile has been noted with Wrestlingworth 10, though weathering and the presence of lichen prevents certain identification of the design elements (Fig 2A). Despite erosion, particularly on the top right of the stone, it is clear that C-scrolls were carved on the shoulders of the headstone, and in the centre is an ovoid shape, defined partly by the outline and partly by cutting back the surface of the stone. This may contain a palmette decoration, but it is possible that it is some other motif. The lower boundary of the headstone design is defined by a horizontal line, below which were inscribed three lines of text, with a date of 1666. In this inscription the text is all neatly presented in capitals with simple serifs. James Hobbs is described as 'gent.' in the burial register that also recorded the burial date as 1st May.

**Type 3**

Two headstones, both dated 1676, belong to a style that would seem to have developed out of Type 1, but incorporated two important new features. The profile of Wrestlingworth 3 appears as a simpler sinuous outline (Fig



Fig 2: B - Type 3, Wrestlingworth 3



Fig 2: C - Type 3, Wrestlingworth 9

2B), whilst Wrestlingworth 9 was created by a central palmette flanked by flamboyant S-scrolls (Fig 2C). The horizontal line separating the top of the headstone from the rest was retained, but in one case two single long bones are shown sloping towards the apex of the stone, and in the other crossed bones are carved centrally. Mortality symbolism is thus firmly indicated on these memorials. In



Fig 3: A - Type 4a, Wrestlingworth 7



Fig 3: C - Type 5, Potton 422



Fig 3: B - Type 4b, Wrestlingworth 8

both cases the inscription below is incised on a recessed text panel. On Wrestlingworth 3 this is the shape of a shield, on Wrestlingworth 9 a heart. Within the shield the initials are separated by a lozenge with just the year inscribed below; all the characters are carved competently but simply. Within the heart, the initials lie within each side of the upper portion, and no separating lozenge was required. The three lines of text beneath is all in capitals, though with more flourishes and greater confidence than on the shield example. LC represents 'Lewis Clark, alias Tomasin, youth', buried on 7th July, and this explains the term junior on the stone.

#### Type 4

This type provides examples of a more complex design than those previously attempted. The outline is a complex Baroque shape, with clear scrolls only visible at the shoulders

of the headstones.

#### Type 4a

Wrestlingworth 7 is a headstone of 1676 that continues the mortality symbolism of the human long bones, with a pair of large examples crossed in centre (Fig 3A). The inscription beneath is in a deeply recessed panel, divided from the design above by slightly raised moulding. The text continues the tradition seen in Type 3, with two initials separated by a central lozenge with the date and then the year incised in elegant but not elaborate capitals in two lines below. The inscription is set in a text panel with clear pilasters each side, though in this example they are plain.

#### Type 4b

A development of the Type 4 can be seen with Wrestlingworth 8, 1678. The mortality symbol - here a winged skull - is placed within a tympanum of the recessed text panel, separated from the upper part of the stone by a clear moulding (Fig 3B). This is the first definite skull recorded in this group, and it is a fully realistic rendering, missing its lower jaw, and placed face-on. Further mortality symbols are carved in the upper portion of the headstone, the familiar single long bones on either side but also with a horizontal hourglass placed centrally. This is again the first use here of this symbol, as are the drapes that surround it. The pilasters either side of the text panel are decorated with lozenges carved in low relief. This headstone is sufficiently exposed for the horizontal base of the text panel to be visible, forming a foundation on which the pilasters stand. Only the upper portion of the text panel is used, with the name of the deceased on the first line, and the month, day and year on the second. This is neatly laid out and a further text may have been anticipated below, as in many other cases the year was placed on a third line. The Ann Hobbs commemorated on this memorial is described as 'widow' in the burial register, and had been the wife of James Hobbs recorded on the Type 2 monument.



Fig 4: A - Type 6, Potton 414

#### Type 5

The earliest identified headstone at Potton, 422, has a relatively smooth profile, though with deeply carved decoration (Fig 3C). This consists of what may be an acanthus leaf in the centre, flanked by C-scrolls. Further scrolls border the stone; this is an important innovation that characterises all late 17th- century memorials of Types 5 and 6. Within each C-scroll is an anatomically accurate rendering of a side view of a skull, less the lower jaw, with long bones crossed at an oblique angle between them. The inscription records two members of the Halfhyde family, the first dying in 1675/6. The second commemoration begins on a new line and is a later addition that has been confirmed by temporary exposure of the lower part of the stone, though not visible on the published photograph.

#### Type 6

These late 17th- century products occur at both Wrestlingworth and Potton, and continue into the early decades of the 18th century. The variety of monuments with death dates in the 17th century are described here but a detailed typological subdivision will await full analysis of all the memorials of this type, though it is noteworthy that Potton 414 probably was the same profile as the Type 4 stones before erosion took its toll (Fig 4A). All the monuments continue with the border scrolls noted in Type 5, though the nature of the scrolls and the depth of carving varies. The standard form of inscription is in capitals, symmetrically laid out on the stones. At Potton, the side view skulls continue until 1691, and can occur with other mortality symbols. These may be cross bones behind the

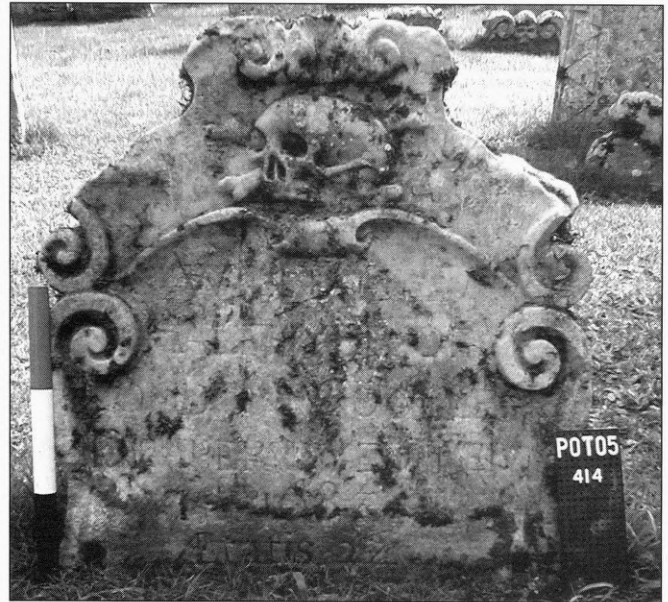


Fig 4: B - Type 6, Potton 389



Fig 4: C - Type 6, Potton 390

skull (414, 389, dated 1685 and 1691), (Fig 4B) or with a range of symbols. The most elaborate, 390 of 1683, shows a crossed coffin and long bone on one side of the skull, and a shovel and hourglass on the other (Fig 4C). Of particular importance, however, is the design element that only survives on the upper left hand side of the stone; a winged cherub makes its first appearance, a precursor of what was to follow. The cherub had already appeared on internal memorials earlier in the century, as with the monument to Sir Simon Baskerville (died 1641) in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral, London (Ludwig 1966, 241, plate 126).



Fig 5: A - Type 6, Wrestlingworth 5



Fig 5: C - Type 6, Potton 388



Fig 5: B - Type 6, Wrestlingworth 1

The face-on skull motif already seen at Wrestlingworth (Fig 3B) is the only type used at that site, though normally without the wings. Placed centrally at the top of the stone and lacking their lower jaws, the skulls stare out at the reader of the inscriptions that are now longer and giving more biographical information. The skulls appear to be topped with a laurel wreath, though this is often poorly preserved and may not have always been present. The 1687 Wrestlingworth 5 has obliquely crossed long bones as on the Type 5 stone from Potton, and beneath these is placed a coffin (Fig 5A). Wrestlingworth 1 and some early 18th-

century stones have the single long bones to augment the design (Fig 5B).

Face-on skulls replace the side view at Potton from 1694, and as at Wrestlingworth the first is one, 388, is with wings, though here augmented with coffin and hourglass (Fig 5C). Later examples have no supplementary symbols (Fig 6A). It is noteworthy that the coffins on Potton 390, 388, and Wrestlingworth 5 are all of the gable-lidded single-break form (Litten 1991; 1999). This is the rarest extant form in vaults, but is depicted on illustrations and some monuments; Litten (1985, 11) mentions that nine three-dimensional examples are known, but these would all have been on internal monuments. The Bedfordshire examples illustrate how well preserved external memorials can greatly increase the known distribution of this form. Litten (1985,12) also considers that by the late 17th century surviving coffins are of the flat-lidded single-break type, but these depictions, dated 1683, 1694 and 1687 respectively, suggest that either these were still current at the end of the 17th century in this region, or that the headstone depictions are derived from old illustrations.

### Type 7

One headstone, Potton 335, stands as a transitional form to monument styles that develop during the early 18th century, though the death date on the headstone is 1695. A central cherub is flanked by drapery that extends down the sides of the stone, and across the bottom, framing a slightly curved text panel (Fig 6B). Mortality symbols are not absent, however, as full relief skulls, each similar in size to the

central cherub head, stare out from the shoulders of the stone. It is possible that this monument was actually carved in the early 18th century; at least one related design occurs in the first decade of the 18th century, but the change of fashion may have started at the end of the 17th century and so this stone may have been erected before 1700.

### *Changes in textual content and style*

The textual content of the memorials changes during the half century represented by these memorials. The earliest stones give only initials and year (Wrestlingworth 2, 15, 11, 13), the exception being Wrestlingworth 12 with a longer text that states Richard Thistlethwaite's status as Bachelor of Arts (Table 1, Fig 1B), a status also recorded in the burial register. Wrestlingworth 10 is the first with a text in English, here giving the exact day of burial, not that of death. Thereafter the short inscriptions with initials or name give a full date (Wrestlingworth 9, 3, 7, 8). Most memorial texts are in English, with only Wrestlingworth 12 and 5 containing Latin; at Potton stone 414 uses the one Latin word, '*aetatis*' for aged, something also seen on coffin lids.

Biographical details begin to appear with the earliest Potton stone, 422, 1676, where the age is given; the later inscription gives even more information, but is 18th century. From the 1680s the additional details such as family relationships (wife, son, daughter) and status (gentleman, London woollen draper) become common. Three children of Richard and Katherine Atkinson are given individual memorials stones where their familial relationship is stated (Potton 390, 389, 388); all died in adulthood. There are only two stones from Wrestlingworth from this period, but it is notable that both exhibit conservative tendencies, one (1) being with initials and full date, the other (5) is of some length but is in Latin.

All the memorials commemorated just one individual until sometime after 1676; the only memorial with two 17th-century commemorations is that of Potton 335 with both deaths in 1695; here a husband and wife are recorded, the man named first even though he died second. As both deaths were less than two months apart the stone would almost certainly have been produced after both were deceased, and this may be why both were placed on the same memorial. Wrestlingworth 5 commemorates Mary Bristow (Maria in the Latin on the stone). The Bishop's Transcripts note that she was married to Timothy, and this helped confirm the reading of the inscription. No convincing correlations can be made for Martha, Sara and Maria also remembered on the last part of the inscription. Of those 17th-century deaths commemorated on the memorials that can be assigned a gender, nine were male and five were female, or eight if all the names on Wrestlingworth 5 are included. The youngest death commemorated where age was stated was 22 years.

The only introductory phrase used is that of '*Here lyeth ye body of*' and this appears from 1683. It is clear that the pattern



Fig 6: A - Type 6, Potton 381



Fig 6: B - Type 7, Potton 335



| Graveyard      | Monument No | Year of death | Monument Type | Width mm | Thickness mm | Inscription  |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|----------|--------------|--|
| Wrestlingworth | 2           | 1655          | 1a            | 530      | 75           | L C / 1655   |
| Wrestlingworth | 15          | 1656          | 1a            | 540      | 80           | J C / 1656   |
| Wrestlingworth | 11          | 1657          | 1a            | 390      | 60           | A C / 1657   |
| Wrestlingworth | 13          | 1657          | 1a            | 520      | 70           | H C / 1657   |
| Wrestlingworth | 12          | 1657          | 1b            | 520      | 90           | Ricardus . Thistle / Thwaite . Bacal . Artium / 1657   |
| Wrestlingworth | 6           | 1660          | 1c            | 430      | 70           | I C / 1660   |
| Wrestlingworth | 10          | 1666          | 2             | 590      | 70           | JAMES HOBBS WAS / BYRIED THE FIRST / OF MAY 1666   |
| Wrestlingworth | 9           | 1676          | 3             | 500      | 70           | L C / IVNIER / JULY . 7 / 1676   |
| Wrestlingworth | 3           | 1676          | 3             | 440      | 60           | ME / MAY 6 / 1676  |
| Wrestlingworth | 7           | 1676          | 4a            | 550      | 60           | E B / SEPT 6 / 1676  |
| Potton         | 422         | 1676          | 5             | 730      | 95           | FRANCIS HALFHUDE AG / ED 22 YEARS DIED / FEB: Y <sup>c</sup> / 1 <sup>st</sup> 1676 <sup>s</sup> . / SARAH RELICT. OF ED:MD / HALFHUDE GENT: & DAUGHTER / OF W <sup>MD</sup> EDLIn GENT: OF NORTHCHURCH / DIED NOV: Y <sup>c</sup> 3 <sup>rd</sup> / 1708. IN Y <sup>c</sup> 78 YEAR OF HER / AGE. |
| Wrestlingworth | 8           | 1678          | 4b            | 620      | 60           | ANN HOBBS / OCT. 5 1678  |
| Potton         | 383         | 1680          | 6             | 610      | 100          | SARAH / Y <sup>c</sup> WIFE OF / ALEXANDER / ATKINSON GENT / DIED AUGUST Y <sup>c</sup> / 26 <sup>th</sup> 1680. IN Y <sup>c</sup> / 48 <sup>th</sup> YEAR OF / HER AGE  |
| Potton         | 390         | 1683          | 6             | 600      | 80           | HERE LYETH Y <sup>c</sup> . / BODY OF JOHN Y <sup>c</sup> / SON OF RICH : & KATHERINE / ATKINSON WHO DIED Y <sup>c</sup> / 2 <sup>nd</sup> OF MARCH 1683 / AGED 24 YEARS   |
| Potton         | 414         | 1685          | 6             | 540      | 90           | WILLIAM / HALFHUDE OF / LONDON WOOLLEN / DRAPER DYED FEB: / y <sup>c</sup> 15 <sup>th</sup> 1685 <sup>s</sup> / Ætatis 24  |
| Wrestlingworth | 5           | 1687          | 6             | 670      | 100          | Maria Bristow Uxor Timoth <sup>hi</sup> / Feby 26 1687 deinta est . / Qualais erat vivas est poscas audire Una / Martha domi domino Sara Maria Deo   |
| Wrestlingworth | 1           | 1690          | 6             | 600      | 110          | ?M ?B / MAY 21st 1690  |
| Potton         | 389         | 1691          | 6             | 600      | 85           | HERE LYETH Y <sup>c</sup> BOD <sup>y</sup> / OF ROSE Y <sup>c</sup> DAUGHTER / OF RICH: & KATHER: / ATKINSON WHO DIED / DECMB: Y <sup>c</sup> 25 <sup>th</sup> 1691 / AGED 33 YEARS  |
| Potton         | 388         | 1694          | 6             | 80       | 80           | HERE LYETH Y <sup>c</sup> BOD <sup>y</sup> / OF RICHARD Y <sup>c</sup> SON / OF RICH: & KATHERIN / ATKINSON WHO DIED / 2 <sup>nd</sup> OF AUGUST 1694 / AGED 30  |
| Potton         | 335         | 1695          | 7             | 590      | 100          | HERE LYETH / WILLIAM CHAMBERS / WHO DIED NOVEM <sup>ber</sup> / THE 8 1695 / HERE LIETH SVSAN / ChamBERS / who DieD / SEPTEMBER Y <sup>c</sup> 22 <sup>nd</sup> / 1695   |
| Potton         | 381         | 1699          | 6             | 600      | 100          | ALEXANDER / ATKINSON / GENT: DIED DE= / =CEMBER Y <sup>c</sup> 27 <sup>th</sup> / 1699. IN Y <sup>c</sup> 80 <sup>th</sup> / YEAR OF HIS / AGE   |
| Potton         | 384         | 1699          | 6             | 590      | 90           | HERE LYETH Y <sup>c</sup> / BODY OF ALEXANDER <sup>R</sup> / Y <sup>c</sup> SON OF RICHARD / & KATHERIN ATKINSON / WHO DIED 22 <sup>nd</sup> OF APRIL / 1699 AGED 26 YEARS   |

Table 1: Monument details

of inscriptions evolved during the period represented by this sample. Texts expanded from simple and not widely understood initials and years where the identification would only be known to those who remembered the individual, to fuller, more widely intelligible biographical entries that situate the deceased within a kinship pattern, and often claim a status for males with the use of the word 'gent'. The late example of initials and date, Wrestlingworth 1, identify another Mary Bristow, again married to Timothy; the date on the monument is the same as the burial register, so it commemorates the interment date of May 21st not the death.

The Wrestlingworth texts were generally carefully and symmetrically laid out, without two commonly found characteristics of early stones: irregular positioning of words on the face of the stone, or words split between lines. The use of different sized letters to complete words is also common at this time, and is present in the longer inscription on Wrestlingworth 5. In contrast, words split between lines and small superscript letters are to be seen more frequently at Potton which, together with the differences in style of within Type 6, may suggest different carvers. Thus, Potton 422 has 'aged' split between the first and second line of text, and 'December' is divided on Potton 335. Abbreviations include the shortening of Alexander with a superscript (Potton 384), and November, Body, and Daughter also end with

superscripts (Potton 422, 389, 388). The first line of Potton 335 was poorly planned, with lower case letters being used at the end of this line because the drapery decoration impeded the carving of full sized capitals. Despite a generally high quality of carving and lettering, some problems arose either through insufficient planning or because it was not considered necessary to produce a uniform text.

Calculating changes in size of memorials over time is difficult when many are partially buried. It would seem from observation, however, that headstones gradually became larger over time. Whilst height cannot be accurately measured for many of these stones, the other dimensions of width and thickness can be. Scatter diagrams for both show considerable variation (Figs 7A, B), causing the correlation with the trend line marked on the graph to be low in both cases. However, there is a high correlation for each of these variables with time, and with each other, strongly suggesting that during the 17th century there was a gradual increase in size of headstone. This both reflected and allowed increased texts on the memorials, and also gave room for the more elaborate carving on the later examples.

### The context of production

Unlike the Orkney stones, these Bedfordshire memorials demonstrate a competence and ease with working of stone to

definitely indicate professional carvers at work. Given the small number of memorials (even allowing for losses) this can only have been a small part of their repertoire, and they presumably worked on domestic architecture most of the time. This probably means that one factor in the presence of stone grave markers in the 17th century was the availability of skilled workmen linked to other forms of investment apart from memorials. Ludwig (1966, 241) suggests that the rebuilding programme undertaken by Wren following the Great Fire of London in 1666 would have drawn into London many craftsmen who would not otherwise have experienced the metropolitan styles. This, he suggests, may have fed back to the provinces and affected gravestone production forms. Whilst this is possible, the Bedfordshire stones suggest that at least this far from London the use of contemporary stylistic features could be present from the 1650s. Also, availability of carvers is only one factor in the explanation of memorials; clearly there was also a demand for such monuments, and the reasons for this are still uncertain.

In many regions early headstones of the 17th and 18th century show either rustic imitations of high culture or exhibit a range of folk art that in some cases can be paralleled on locally produced items such as furniture (Brears 1981) or embroidery (Gabel 2002). The inspiration for the Bedfordshire headstone designs can be linked more directly to contemporary high art and architecture, and are accomplished with considerable understanding of conventions and with some skill in carving. It would seem that this level of competence extended across the East Midlands and into East Anglia, though with Swithland slate it was only in the early 18th century that sophistication in lettering begins (Herbert 1944). Most regions have not been

studied in detail, but examples such as that of 1690 from Bury St Edmunds (Ludwig 1966, plate 135A) indicate that deeply carved English baroque was being widely produced by the end of the 17th century (Burgess 1963, 120). In the Boston area of Massachusetts, the latter part of the 17th century sees the development of the extremely competent and prolific Lamson workshop (Ludwig 1966; Tucker 1993), demonstrating that competent producers were not confined to Britain.

The adoption of external monuments may reflect changes in the growing middle classes, as also briefly hinted by Willsher (1985), but what these might be would require much larger samples of stones, preferably with relevant contextual information, to explore this trend. It is noteworthy that the only occupation mentioned on the memorials is the '*London woollen draper*' on Potton 414; the only occupation on the early 18th-century memorials at Balrothery, Co. Dublin, was a linen draper (Mytum 2004c). Many 17th- and 18th-century Scottish headstones display trade symbols (Willsher and Hunter 1978). Early external monuments may therefore reflect an emerging middle class identity and newly forming cultural behaviour regarding commemoration.

Whilst linked, the stones at Wrestlingworth and Potton do show some variation, suggesting local differences in producers or the wishes of clients. Whilst the presence of the earliest stones only at Wrestlingworth may have been due to survival – Potton graveyard is much more full and many of the early stones have been moved – it is still likely that some examples of the 1650s and 1660s would have survived at Potton given the number of memorials present from the 1670s. When memorials do appear at Potton the side view skull is dominant, and the scrolled edges are present from

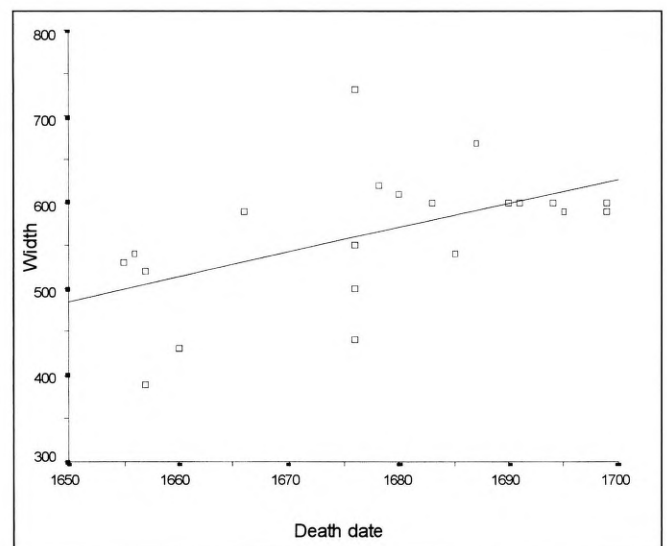
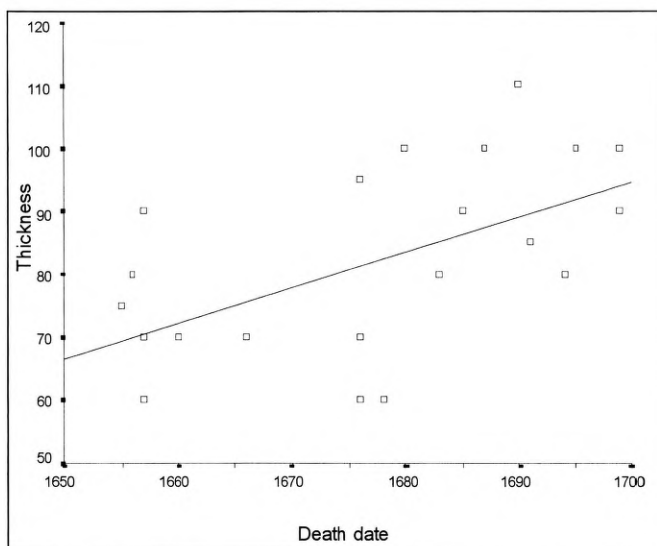


Fig 7: A - Scatterplot of headstone thickness over time  
 B - Scatterplot of headstone width over time

the beginning of this site sequence. The side scrolls only appear at Wrestlingworth from 1687, and they are never as substantial in character as those at Potton. In contrast, the face-on skull only appears at Potton from 1694, replacing the use of the side-on skull. With such small samples it is not possible to identify particular carvers, but it is clear that the two adjacent parishes had their own distinctiveness within a shared culture of external commemoration.

### Conclusions

The external memorials at Wrestlingworth and Potton reveal a variety of forms that were in use during the 17th century. They form part of a wider tradition of external commemoration that has as yet received little attention, borrowing from architecture and internal memorials for forms, decorative elements and symbolic motifs. Some 17th-century headstones may even translate whole compositions from internal memorials; many very late 17th- and early 18th-century headstones are similar to the Sir Simon Baskerville's wall tablet, with its coat of arms at the base omitted (Ludwig 1966, plate 126). The Type 4 design mirrors wall tablets with a similar architectural pediment, a central rectangular text panel, and pilasters to the sides. The shield text panel of one of the Type 3 stones is reminiscent of the cartouches on some internal memorials; this feature is also present on a 1681 stone from nearby Tempsford, though the top of this headstone is simpler in design. This all indicates influence from monumental sculpture and internal memorials in these headstones.

There are a few features, however, which indicate a more rustic taste and suggest innovation by those commissioning or carving external monuments. The Type 3 stone Wrestlingworth 9 has its text panel in the form of a heart (Fig 2C), noted on other contemporary memorials in West Yorkshire (Brears 1981) and seen on funeral biscuit moulds and also provincial furniture. Moreover, the single and crossed long bones are rarely carved with the quality seen for the skulls and other mortality symbols. Compared to most other 17th-century headstones in Britain, Ireland or North America, however, the Wrestlingworth and Potton products are sophisticated.

The headstone can be considered an external memorial form that removed the commemorative tablet from the church wall (internal or external) and placed it in the open spaces of the graveyard, as suggested by Ariès (1981) and Graham (1958). In some regions this allowed the use of both front and back of the stone, but in these early Bedfordshire examples more heavily influenced by metropolitan taste, this was not done. That such forms were reworked in this new context does not make these merely poorly executed, inexpensive imitations of internal monuments, however. Although inspiration came from internal memorials this does

not have to imply emulation in the sense of slavish copying as best as resources would allow; in this respect the Tarlow (1998, 1999) argument is applicable. Rather, these headstones represent a new form of commemoration that is being developed within the open air, and with its own potential social and ideological meanings. These monuments would not compete with the internal ones; in the 17th century they were created by and for completely different audiences, possibly drawn from the mercantile and tenant farmer class. Nevertheless, the competence and coherence of the early stones at Wrestlingworth (Fig 1) suggests a clear vision of what was required of this new genre. Even from the first decade there are full commemorative texts as well as initials and dates. Whilst initials and dates disappear at these graveyards during the period under study, even these simple inscriptions are well executed compared with many carved on furniture or buildings. In other areas, including Orkney, stones with this level of information are only produced in the 18th century, and other regions such as Leicestershire show a change from crudely carved 17th-century memorials to finely cut and calligraphically ambitious products in the early 18th century (Herbert 1944; Mytum 2004d). No such early, unsophisticated, phase survives at Wrestlingworth and Potton, and clearly the concept of a permanent memorial, combining well set out text within an architectural and symbolically laden frame, is present there throughout the second half of the 17th century.

These monuments, created at a time of great turmoil within the community and the church, indicate that the form and function of external headstone memorials became developed during the later 17th century in some regions. It is fortunate that the combination of initial commissioning of memorials, the presence of resilient yet readily carved freestone, and subsequent site management, have combined to provide an important case study of early headstone forms and symbolic repertoires.

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The authors would be very grateful for details of any other 17th-century or earlier post-medieval external graveyard memorials of any type. Email [hcm1@york.ac.uk](mailto:hcm1@york.ac.uk) with details; digital images are welcome.