

# A WALK AROUND ST. MARY'S CHURCHYARD



Created by the  
Denham Community  
History Project

**T**o wander around St Mary's Churchyard is to take a stroll through the history of Denham's people, the famous, the celebrated and those remembered by their families and through their stones, so many of whom were so much a part of the village community.

Fronting the church and immediately visible to every passer-by is Denham's memorial to its fallen. Sculpted by Denham's own Francis Bacon from Portland Stone, the memorial was unveiled and dedicated on 5 October 1919. It carries the names of 42 fatal casualties of war, names still known amongst Denham residents including three members of the Tillard family whose name was taken for the Way and Tillard Recreation Ground and Cricket Pitch to the south of Ashmead Lane..



Cross to the gate on the west side of the church and take the path headed towards the vestry. It was this path that American novelist James Salter recalled as he wrote of his search for a memorial to his friend, Broadway theatre producer Ethel Linder Reiner sometime owner of Hills House. Passing other memorials he wrote: "Newer than these, destined to be less visited, was a marble plaque in the wall beside the cottage garage". The plaque is hard to read now but tracing the letters with the fingers reveals its memorial.

Continue past the north wall of the vestry to



come upon the gravestone of the seven members of the Marshall family cruelly murdered in their Cheapside home on 22nd May 1870. Further along on the other side of the path can be found the family graves of the Patons including those of Denham's

much-loved village doctor Ian Paton and Madelene his wife. Behind them can be found the grave of Sir James Martin C.B.E Engineer, Inventor and joint founder of the Martin Baker Aircraft Company. Famously known for his invention of the life-saving aircraft seat, Sir James is rather less well known for his invention of the fish fryer.

Close by is the obelisk marking the grave of the Reverend R.H. Lathbury, Rector of St. Mary's and the most diligent chronicler of Denham's history up to the turn of the 20th century. His remarkable "The History of Denham, Bucks", just 100 copies of which were published in 1904, still provides much of the source material for research into the history of the village.



Across the grass lying flat is the large stone marking the graves of Terence Conyngham Plunket 6th Baron Plunket and his wife Dorothe both killed in a plane crash when on their



way to visit William Randolph Hearst in California in 1938.

Return to the path and head north again passing the graves of the Ways, owners of Denham Place and Denham's leading family for nearly 200 years until 1920. On then past the 11 official war graves, memorials to men killed in the first and second world wars, Rifleman Tipping, Aircraftman Runcieman, RAF Sergeant Frank Martin and others all lost far too young.

Carry on to find the grave of two of Denham's most famous recent residents, Sir John and Lady Mills. Pause for a moment in front of the stone to remember this great man of British cinema, then turn through 180 degrees and take a few paces east to come upon the memorial stone of Baroness Sidonie Nádherná von Borutín. Once known as Baroness the Beautiful, Sidonie was, between the two world wars, a famed Bohemian hostess of literary salons and correspondent with poets and writers. Impoverished first by the Nazi confiscation of her family home and subsequently by the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, Sidonie fled to Britain in the late 1940s dying tragically in 1950. She lay buried in St. Mary's Churchyard until 1999 when her remains were returned to her former home at Janowitz castle and her fame was restored. Her stone in Denham is still respectfully attended by a village resident.



Stroll further then into the open field to wander amongst the graves of more recent residents, all of whom have made their contributions to the community in many different ways. Amongst these stones is also the grave of Lady Cynthia ("Cimmie") Mosley, Labour Member of Parliament and first wife of

Sir Oswald Mosley. Cimmie died tragically in 1933 as her husband continued his now infamous political journey from socialism to fascism. Her



stone, now surrounded by the graves of those more recently lost, is modest. The inscription it bears has none of the strutting vanity of Sir Oswald's later images. It reads simply "My Beloved. A little space was allowed her to show at least a heroic purpose and to attest a high design"

Now return along the path to the east side of the church. Along each low wall are 8 other plaques, many of them recalling Denham residents fondly remembered.

Turn then back towards the south wall of the church to find the grave of Sir Robert, First Baron, Vansittart. "Van", as he was known, was a senior diplomat, prime ministerial adviser and one of the few people at the heart of government who fully recognised the threat posed by Hitler's Nazis in the early 1930s. He was also second cousin to T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) and a published poet, novelist and playwright.

Close by the church wall behind the graves of the Mortens of Savay Farm can be found one of the churchyard's most enigmatic stones. Now



broken it lies flat, its inscription worn and moss covered. It marks the grave of Captain John Wing. At its head is the skull and bones, the reminder of mortality, which has led many to the belief that an infamous pirate rests here. There is evidence of the burial of a John Wing in Denham in 1742, but the date of this record does not match the stone. Captain Wing's piratical infamy is almost certainly a myth - but the enigma remains.

There are many more names written in stone some now worn and no longer readable, famous, perhaps in a few cases even infamous, some whose deeds were once celebrated but now considered less worthy of praise. Amongst them are names of gardeners, cowmen, agricultural workers, traders, people from business, managers, teachers, nurses and charity workers, many unsung, far less than they deserved, and many lovingly remembered by relatives still living. To see their names on a wander through St. Mary's historic churchyard is a tribute to them all.



For an Audio Version of this leaflet scan here, or go to [denhamhistory.online/walks](https://denhamhistory.online/walks)

**For much more about the history of Denham Village, visit the website of the Denham Community History Project at [denhamhistory.online](https://denhamhistory.online)**

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