

Who's Who in St. Michael's Churchyard

Discover over 200 years of history amongst the gravestones and monuments in the churchyard of St Michael's Church, Brierley Hill



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WELCOME TO A TOUR OF ST MICHAEL'S CHURCHYARD

This trail was inspired by the 'Graves by Night' tours provided by Tim Sunter in 2023, where the public were invited into the graveyard for a tour of the people who shaped the history of Brierley Hill. When you follow this trail, it is not just a journey through a graveyard but also one through the history of Brierley Hill, and forms one of a number of self-guided trails you can do within the borough, including the Brierley Hill Architectural Heritage Trail and Brierley Hill Geological Heritage Trail delivered through the Brierley Hill High Street Heritage Action Zone. Find out more about these trails at <https://discover.dudley.gov.uk/downloads/>

INTRODUCTION

Take a moment to look around you. How many people do you think are buried here? Counting the entries in the church's burial registers it shows that up to the end of 1934 there were 24,340 burials. Additional interments in the last ninety years would suggest that somewhere in the region of 25,000 people have their "long homes" here.

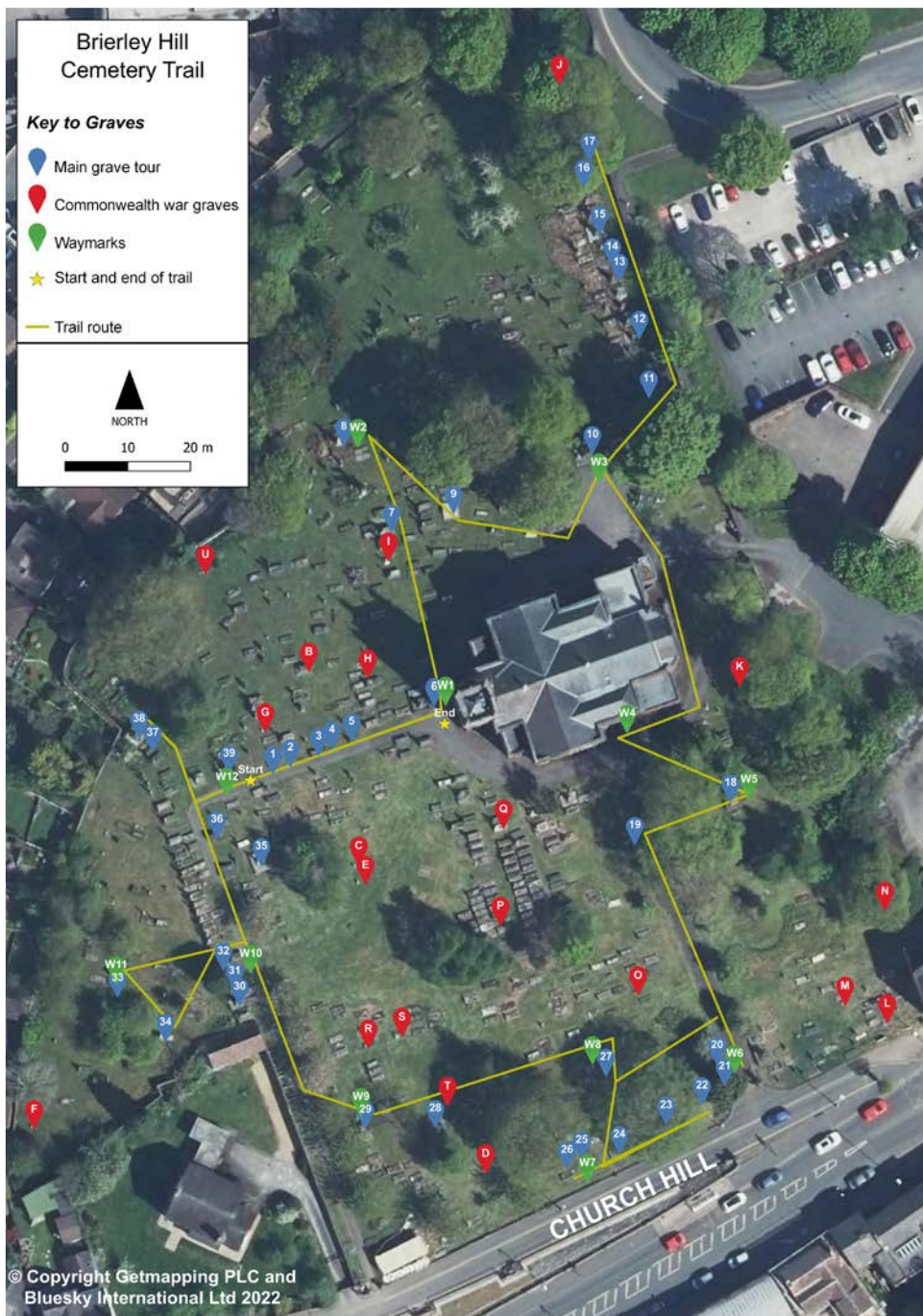
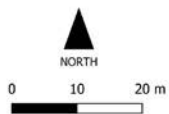
Many people were too poor to afford a lasting monument. The graves you can see tend to be for the wealthier or higher social status individuals. No record was kept of where burials took place, although a survey was undertaken in 1979 of what graves were visible at that time. Sadly, many of those graves have since disappeared.

Brierley Hill is part of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark. As you work your way through this tour you will find that much of the wealth of the town came from what is beneath your feet: clay, coal, iron and minerals used in our historic industries.

Brierley Hill Cemetery Trail

Key to Graves

-  Main grave tour
-  Commonwealth war graves
-  Waymarks
-  Start and end of trail
-  Trail route



1 MILLWARD - THE SURPRISED MEN

The trail starts adjacent to the graves of Benjamin Millward and Samuel Millward, born at the Delph. Benjamin was recorded in 1861 as an ironworks labourer at the Darby and Pargeter Colliery, and his son Samuel was a stocktaker at an iron works, both died within a few months of each other.

Reading the epitaph, one concludes that the death of Benjamin Millward came as something of a surprise "... for ye know neither the day nor the hour...".

Benjamin's son Samuel's death a few months later seems to be more of a surprise: *"Reader! Always suppose thy death is nigh and seek to be prepared to die."*

Which brings us to the reason this grave is first on the tour, it is a good health and safety reminder. With 25,000 people buried here, the vast majority in unmarked graves, the ground is very uneven. Graves can be trip hazards, so it is important to keep your eye on the ground whilst walking around. Let the Millward epitaph be a warning and take care!



2 MORGAN HUGHES - THE ORATOR

The grave is situated along the main path, leading away from the church in the direction of the rectory. It is unusual in two respects: the inscription and the slate it is made of. The inscription reads:

Here rests in peace Morgan Hughes / A native of Ysbytty Ystwyth / And a pupil of Lewis Evans / Headmaster of Ystrad Meurig School / Who died on the 5th day of July 1863 / At Brierley Hill House where he received / Every Kindness and attention / Aged 19 years

Morgan Hughes came from a family of lead miners in a small village not too far from Aberystwyth. The 1851 census lists his mother as a widow, and by 1861 Morgan, aged 16 was also working in the lead mines.

But Morgan also had a gift: he was a very fine orator. So much so that at one Eisteddfod he gave an impromptu speech on adolescence in the presence of over 600 people, totally eclipsing all other competitors and winning several prizes. As a result of this brilliance he was offered a place at Ystrad Meuring Grammar School by its headmaster, Rev. Lewis Adams.

Alas, the distressing circumstances of his mother mean that Morgan had to return to working below ground, mining. Fortunately, a friend, who happened to be a brother of the surveyor of Aberystwyth, found him a situation in Brierley Hill. Sadly, after a very short time in the town he was attacked with brain fever and died after a few hours from the illness.

The Morgan Hughes gravestone is one of only two slate graves in the churchyard. It is reasonable to assume the choice of material was made to reflect his Welsh origins.

2A MISSING HEADSTONES - THE COAL MINERS

Many graves have gone missing over the years. Along this particular stretch, on the right of the path, leading from the west door towards the rectory, lay a tombstone which recorded a mining tragedy when four men lost their lives on 23rd August, 1815:

The coal pit rope asunder broke / And fell and dead we lay / Our sudden ends warns you my friends / Work while it is day."

The grave was still standing in 1965, when Brierley Hill librarian W. H. Woodward wrote a history of the church to celebrate its 200th anniversary, but the inscription

was illegible. Woodward quotes from the burials register that the names of the miners were: Cornelius Turner, 27; David Turner, 22; John Thompson, 21; and Thomas Dimmock 18.

3 WILLIAM MILLS - THE POLICEMAN



William Mills (died 1907) was the Chief Superintendent of Police in Brierley Hill for a quarter of a century (1851-76). When he arrived in the town there were pits next to where the ASDA supermarket now stands.

In August 1858 a terrible railway disaster occurred in Brierley Hill and Mills went to the aid of the victims and helped secure the site. A coupling on a holiday excursion train broke near Brierley Hill/Round Oak Stations. The second half of the train rolled back down the track towards Brettell Lane and crashed into a following train. At least 12 people were killed.

Mill's tomb is a chest tomb and would have been erected at considerable cost. There are a number of these in the churchyard. The bodies are still buried beneath the ground you'll be pleased to hear.

3A MISSING HEADSTONES - THE THREE HANGED MEN

Three men are reputed to be interred in the churchyard who were hanged. One of those was "Joe Merry", real name Joseph Pearson who would steal from richer people and could often be heard returning home cheerfully in the morning, saying: "...they could afford it." His life of crime caught up with him. He was convicted of stealing 40s and was sentenced to be hanged by the neck until dead!

Several sources refer to an epitaph, written by himself, which appeared on his grave stone: *"Mourn not for me my children dear / I am not dead, but lie sleeping here; / Pray for my enemies; be not with them at strife / For they were resolved to take away my life."* The grave was still standing in 1865 but has now disappeared.

4 MEESE CHILDREN

At the top of this sandstone headstone is a beautiful carved rose. Look carefully and you will see that the bud at the right-hand side is broken. A second bud, bottom centre, is also broken.



Many of the headstones in the churchyard have images of flowers on them. The flowers have meanings attached to them. In this case, the cut flower is symbolic of the shortness of life, a rose is for love and family, and, if you read down the head-stone the broken buds represent the loss of two children.

5 THOMAS AND ELIZABETH MEESE

Thomas was the uncle of Jane and Thomas Noah. His brother was Noah Meese whose grave is in the northern section of the churchyard. Noah was one of the founders of the Glasgow Iron Works. This Thomas may have been the Thomas Meese who built the first gas works in Brierley Hill. He sold the business to Westwood & Wright which became one of the biggest producers of gas holders in Britain. He is also reputed to have built the first iron house. This was sold to a resident at Compton in Kinver. To this day a house called "Iron House" is at the top of Compton Road.

6 W.H. SMITH

William Henry Smith, a licensee, married into the Elwell family, owners of the Delph Brewery. He was one of the founders of what became Smith & Williams brewery in 1897. The Town Brewery, now the site of the fire station produced a number award-winning ales including 1st Prize and Silver Medal at the 1920 Brewer's Exhibition. The brewery was bought out by Julia Hanson & Son in 1934. At that time Smith & Williams owned sixty premises including *The Stewpony*, the *Old White Hart* at Kinver, and the *Old New Inn* in Brierley Hill.

As well as serving on the local board of Guardians, Smith was a member of Brierley Hill UDC for 17 years, chairing the Council between 1910-1911 and 1915-1916. During the Great War, Smith headed the local Tribunal, deciding who might be ex-empt from call up. He was a keen pigeon flyer and presented the

W.H.Smith trophy to be raced for by local flyers. He died of a heart attack during a finance meeting in 1918.

Waypoint 1 - *At WH Smith grave look north, and you'll see some old tree stumps and an obelisk, you will pass a sequence of four crosses, the grey one on the end is our next stop.*



7 ALF TANDY

Landlord of the Miners Arms on Dudley Road. Alf Tandy achieved minor fame for a remarkable act of kindness. In 1912, in pursuit of a minimum wage, miners went on strike. Industry relied on coal, so the knock-on effect was considerable. To help families who were struggling to buy food Tandy advertised that he would give away soup and bread from his pub. Crowds of people turned up, carrying jars, jam pots and other implements in which soup could be poured. So many arrived that the trams were held up. 500 loaves and a 125 gallons of soup were distributed, gaining Alf a special place in locals' hearts.

In June 1980, the Black Country Bugle published a picture of Alf Tandy's Soup Kitchen with the caption reading "...a publican who is still remembered for his kind heart during those 'Hungry Days in Brierley Hill...'"

Waypoint 2 - *An obelisk signifying the Harris family grave*

8 HARRIS FAMILY



This memorial is an obelisk, something that became fashionable in churchyards in Victorian times after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in Egypt.

In 1852, Peter Harris with George Pearson founded the Harris & Pearson brick-works in Brettell Lane. The Grade II listed office building is still there, thanks

to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund

<https://www.harrisandpearson.info/> . Harris's son carried on the business after his death. The Harris family

were philanthropic and the daughters who lived at The Elms (which stood on what is the site of the Civic Hall Green today) were very generous. Two Alms-houses in Brettell Lane were donated by the Harris family.

Many women and children worked in brick making. In 1864, Mr. I. H. White inspecting local brickyards, noted a girl of 12 working in a chain of 10 girls, emptying a kiln of 17,000 bricks. The bricks were being tossed two a time from one person to another, each brick weighed 7.5 pounds. Mr White estimated that in a normal working day the girl would handle 36 tons and make 11,333 complete turns of her body.

9 FISHER FAMILY

Frederick Pearson Fisher was a popular family doctor, working from Talbot House in Brierley Hill. The Fisher family lived at The Level in Brierley Hill. During the Great War, Fred served in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and was awarded the Military Cross, his citation read: *"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion*



to duty. On learning that the enemy had projected gas into one of our deep mine galleries, he descended to the bottom of the main shaft and established an aid post there. He then advanced with his party into the gassed area and rescued several miners. He remained at his post without relief for fourteen hours and saved many lives." Fisher Street is named after the family.

Military cross

Waypoint 3 - Car park adjacent to the Marsh family vault

10 MARSH FAMILY

In 1867, Alfred Marsh founded a pork business in Brierley Hill High Street. Aided by his wife, Clara, the business became the largest bacon processing plant in the United Kingdom and, indeed, Europe. By 1924 the factory, located in the car park at the rear of the Moor Centre was slaughtering 4,000 to 5,000 pigs a week (10 to 12 per minute) and had 75,000 hams in various stages of curing. In one day, a man could salt 1,200 to



1,400 hams. Around 2,000 British farmers regularly sent their pigs to Brierley Hill from all over the country, including Northern Ireland. On Alfred's death, his son, A. Ernest

Marsh took over the business, and much of its success was down to him. Ernest was chairman of the district council for nine years until 1926 and donated Marsh Park to the town. He had a special interest in housing development and planning, and by 1937, 3,000 council houses had been built. Ernest also helped the Earl of Dudley found Dudley Zoo and was its first chairman.

Go to YouTube listen to '*I Don't Want to Be a Scratching*' (Brierley Hill Song Book)

11 ARTHUR AND ALICE GIBBONS

Two graves adjacent to each other, the right hand one missing its top, belong to Alice and Arthur Gibbons. The Gibbons family made an extraordinary contribution to education in the town. Arthur was head teacher of Brockmoor School for more than 30 years, whilst also becoming the first principal of the art school in Brierley Hill. He was one of the designers of the terracotta figures to be seen adorning the former

Technical Institute and Library in Bell Street. His sister Alice was head of Bent Street Girls school for 20 years, whilst a second sister, Sarah (grave 17), was head of a Pensnett School. Two brothers, Francis & Owen were famous for their artistic skills and went on to found Gibbons & Hinton tile works (see grave 17).



12 JAMES WRIGHT AND BEATRICE PASHLEY

James Wright was the owner of the Delph Bottle works. In 1893 a leak of molten glass from a furnace was discovered. Usual practice in those pre-Health and Safety days was to go beneath the furnace and throw water on the lead. The glass would then solidify and seal the breach. On this occasion, two men, Albert Ryder and Enoch Oliver undertook the task. Tragically a firebrick fell loose and the molten glass at 1,370°C (2,500°F) cascaded onto the men. Their charred remains were recovered two to three hours later. Oliver is buried in an unmarked grave in this churchyard. Wright came in for criticism for insensitive comments he made at the funeral hoping that other workers would work to fill the two victims' places. In his defence, he also made the biggest contribution to the distress fund set up to aid the Ryder and Oliver families.

On the left-hand side of the monument is a family memorial to Beatrice Pashley Wright, James's daughter. The memorial describes how she died in 1929 *"from illness following devoted service in Russia and Poland throughout the Great War."* Beatrice had converted to Catholicism in 1908 and had become a nun. She served in Lemberg (now Lviv in Ukraine) and during various sieges took shelter in the city's catacombs, from which they had to creep out at night to get water from public fountains. Beatrice became Mother Superior at the Convent of The Holy Family of Nazareth, Enfield, Middlesex.

13 HOLCROFT FAMILY

Sir Charles Holcroft (1831-1917), Iron and coal master and benefactor of Birmingham University. He was the son of Thomas Holcroft of Brierley Hill. In his youth he lived at Corbyn's Hall and in later life until his death lived at the "The Shrubbery" Kingswinford.

Holcroft took a great interest in geology and assembled an extraordinary collection of fossils. He was a member of the Governors of the University of Birmingham to which he made significant endowments. On his death his fossil collection was donated to the Lapworth Museum. Holcroft left almost £1.5 million on his death (equivalent to £87 million in 2024). Holcroft Road in Stourbridge is named after the family. See site 9 in the Brierley Hill Geological Heritage Trail.

14 DRINKWATER COLE

On Brierley Hill High Street is a historic fountain "Presented to the town by the first Local Board 1868". It is perhaps a very fitting that the first chair of the Board which installed the first water fountain in Brierley Hill was one Drinkwater Cole! Cole replaced Richard Williams as manager of the Brierley Works, owned by Messrs. John Bradley & Co. For many years he was churchwarden and elected chair of the first local government board in 1867. See site 1 of the Brierley Hill Architectural Heritage Trail for more information about it.

15 CALEB ROBERTS

Roberts went into partnership with his father-in-law, E.Cooper. On the death of his father, who owned a timber works adjacent to the Nine Locks in the Delph, Roberts took over the works in partnership with his father-in-law, E.E. Roberts. Roberts and Cooper vigorously expanded their business over the next 40 years, taking over ironworks in Brettell Lane, The Leys, Bromley and Great Bridge. A further diversification into brick working is illustrated by the stones along the front of the church, which are stamped with the company's name. In January 1915, the company purchased a



captured German ship, Nauta, in order to aid their overseas timber trade. The ship was renamed "S.S. Brierley Hill". Sadly, the Brierley Hill was torpedoed and sank in late 1916. Always regarded as a 'hands on' owner, Caleb was killed in an accident at his works in 1918 when a boiler fell on him.

16 HIGGS & SONS

The son of an inn keeper, the host of The Golden Lion in High Street, Joseph Higgs was articled as a solicitor in 1875. He founded the solicitors Higgs & Sons which is still very much part of Brierley Hill - presently employing well over 200 people. Higgs married twice, first to Eliza, the daughter of Thomas Higgs of the Delph, and then to the daughter of Drinkwater Cole (Grave 14). Three of his sons became solicitors themselves. His was remembered at the time of his death for taking "Pearsall v Brierley Hill Local Board" all the way to the House of Lords. This established case law re compensation for highway works which was followed nationally for many years. He also organised the purchase of mining rights from the Earl of Dudley to prevent further homes collapsing in the East Ward of the town. At the on-set of the Great War, Higgs made Belgian refugees welcome at his home in Dudley Road.

17 WILLIAM & SARAH HINTON

The pale green dull surfaced stone is Westmoreland. In 1871 William Hinton was living in lodging at Chapel Street, Pensnett. Also lodging there was Sarah Gibbons, sister of Arthur and Alice (grave 11). They married in 1876. Along with the rest of the Gibbons family the Hintons made an extraordinary contribution to education in the town. William was the head teacher of Moor Street School for 32 years, and Sarah taught at Pensnett and became head mistress of the girls Board School in the district. Following retirement, William continued to chair the Kingswinford Board of Managers. In 1885 Hinton went into partnership with



his brother-in-law, Frank and Owen Givens and formed an art tile factory at Buckpool. Owen was formerly the curator of the Royal Architectural Museum in London and Francis was the art director at Doulton's Royal Pottery Lambeth. Gibbons, Hinton & Co. became one of the leading innovators and manufacturers of decorative tiles. Examples of the work can be seen in the foyers of the former Library and Technical Institute, Bell Street.

Gibbons & Hinton tiles

Waypoint 4

Chest tomb on southern wall of the church. To its left is the church's oldest gravestone, that of the Green family.



Waypoint 5

Clulow grave

18 THOMAS CLULOW

Born in Tipton, Thomas Clulow moved to Brierley Hill at the age of 3. He was a Lime Master, lime being a crucial ingredient in the smelting of iron, causing the separation of the pure iron from the slag. The slag would be skimmed off, broken up and could be used to build walls. The wall in front of the War memorial adjacent to the church is one example. Clulow's gift to Brierley Hill was a journal (now available to borrow in the library) which describes the history of the town. Recording the social history of town, he had a fondness for nicknames and tells of "Mad Jack", a silly and trouble-some man who climbed onto the roof of the church and couldn't get down; "Nanny Diddle", a tall paralytic beggar; "Humpy Socker", a vendor of nuts who imbibed the 'wet'; "Molly Moggy", Bell Street scandal monger; "Blind Joe" from Dudley who moved with a stick; and "Petticoat Billy", always dressed as a woman. Clulow's son, John W., also interred here, became a well-known local solicitor.

19 FRANKLIN AND CLARK

Samuel Franklin was curate of St Michael's from 1858 until his death. He is one of only two curates who are buried in the churchyard. Christian tradition has it that

burials are made with feet facing the East, ready to greet the son of God on the day of resurrection. Clergy are buried in the opposite direction ready to greet their flock on that glorious day! The adjacent grave contains the remains of three children of David and Ann Clark. Ash Tree School, also known as Geary's (who Clulow refers to as "Old Nibble Stick") was situated just behind St Mary's Catholic Church in the High Street. With no National Health Service, dubious medical practices, a reliance on wells and high levels of pollution, the child death rate in the town was, to put it mildly, horrendous.

Waypoint 6 - *the main entrance to the church adjacent to the Corbett and Stevens graves*

20 JOSEPH STEVENS

This grave has an urn on the top which symbolises the soul. Joseph Stephens was one of the founders of the world-famous Stevens & Williams, later known as the Royal Brierley, Glassworks. See graves 25 and 26 for more information on this remarkable company and read site 25 in the Brierley Hill Architectural Trail.

21 CORBETT FAMILY - THE SALT KING

Joseph and Hannah Corbett ran a canal transport business at the Delph in Brierley Hill. Their son, John, often piloted the vessels and studied his books as the barges made their way along the canals. As the railway arrived in the town, Corbett moved to the Leys Foundry, and then to the British Alkali Co., salt manufacturers at Stoke Prior, near Droitwich. With the engineering skills he had picked up, he identified inefficiencies in the manufacturing process for salt. Buying the company in 1857 his innovations drove production from 26,000 to 200,000 tonnes annually. He gained the title "The Salt King". As a philanthropist, Corbett donated the Corbett Hospital to Stourbridge, improved wages and living conditions for his workers, including new homes and a school, and substantially funded the renovation of this church where his parents are buried. He became an M.P. for Droitwich and built Château Impney as his home (now a hotel). Corbett Road and Corbett Crescent are local roads named after him.

Iron Railings - *Look carefully at the Brecknell grave behind you. Brecknell was wheelwright who worked in Mill Street. You will see the remnants of some iron railings which used to surround the grave. These were removed during the Second World War to contribute*

towards the war effort. However, maybe the work was too hard as only the railings on this side of the church have been removed. Those to the North of the church remain in place.

22 RICHARD WILLIAMS

Employed as an agent in an ironworks, Richard Williams managed the Brierley Foundry on behalf of Foster, Rastrick & Company of Stourbridge - the makers of the early railway engines Agenora and The Stourbridge Lion (the first steam train to run in America). He lived at Brierley House, which was at the top of Moor Street. The 47 Acre Brierley Estate covered the area we now know as the Hawbush Estate, including Fisher Street, Addison Road and Waldron Avenue. The house itself stood approximately where Cooper Avenue is and had extensive outbuildings, lawns, pleasure grounds and gardens. It was Richard Williams who employed Morgan Hughes (see grave 2).

23 ROBERT DRAKE

Brierley Hill grew from industries sited along Brettell Lane, so prior to the Brierley Hill Local Board and the Urban District Council, the local government was known as 'The Brettell Lane District of Highways'. At annual vestry meetings in St Michaels, a surveyor (and rate collector) was appointed. For many years this was Robert Drake, which makes him perhaps Brierley Hill's first public servant.

24 JOHN PALMER

John Palmer is recorded in the 1851 and 1861 Census as living with his family in Kinver and is listed as a "roller of ironwork." By 1871 he and his family were living at Albion Street, Brierley Hill and near other relatives.

Waypoint 7 - *boundary wall of churchyard, next to Church Hill*

25 JOSEPH SILVERS

The graves of Joseph Stevens, Joseph Silvers and William Cox Stevens, between them tell the story of the creation of one of the most famous glass companies in the world: Stevens and Williams, or Royal Brierley.

Glass making was established in Moor Street in 1786 under the name of *Honeybourne*. In 1848 Josephs Silvers and Williams purchased the works and

continued to make glass. William Stevens, son of Joseph Stevens, married the daughter of Joseph Silvers, Maria (his cousin).

Samuel Cox Williams married the daughter of Joseph Silvers, Ellen, and when she died he married Ellen's elder sister Eliza. Stevens and Williams gave their name to the firm and in 1870 moved to their North Street site. The glass company continued to flourish and grow. It employed two internationally famous glass designers: Frederick Carder and John Northwood. Carder eventually emigrated to America and founded the Steuben Glass Works. Northwood achieved fame for recreating the Portland Vase and reintroducing cameo glass to the UK. A statue of him stands at one of the entrances to the Merry Hill Centre. It is hard not to exaggerate the significance of Royal Brierley in the history of glass. See also graves 20 and 26.



Stevens & Williams wine glasses



26 COX-WILLIAMS

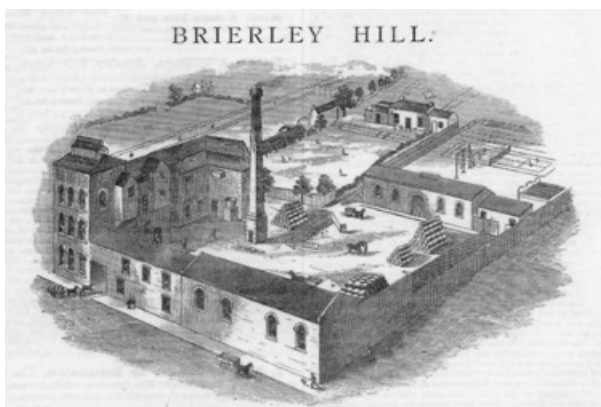
See Graves 20 and 25

Waypoint 8 - *Slightly up from the churchyard wall a large grave surmounted by a urn. The Higgs grave*

27 HIGGS OF THE DUKE OF WILLIAM

The most common names on gravestones in St Michael's are Higgs and Cartwright. This branch of the Higgs family were

maltsters and licensees of the Duke William in Delph Road. Thomas Higg's daughter married Joseph Higgs. Next door to the Duke William was the Delph Brewery which was run by the Elwell family, one of whom married W.H. Smith (Grave 6) and another Frederick Warren (Grave 29). The brewery was taken over by the North Worcestershire and then Kidderminster Breweries. It suffered from subsidence and was demolished in the early 1900s. Living nearby on Delph Road was Rev. Robert Harris who was fond of taking a walk before his Sunday morning service through the Delph, and would call for a glass of beer at a "wobble shop" - the first house by the Delph brewery. It was an age of practical joking, and one Sunday morning some of the customers put back the grandfather clock an hour. As a result, Parson Harris met his flock coming away from church as he reached the top of Rock's Hill. No service that morning. County Express dated 13 April 1917.



The Delph Brewery was a substantial business.

28 DUNN - THE FARMER

A reminder that not all of Brierley Hill was industrial. Rowland Dunn was a farmer living in Amblecote Road. The 1851 census has him living with his mother, Hannah who owned 20 acres of land, in Mount Pleasant. It is possible that the land farmed by Rowland was on the site of what is now the Blue Ball housing estate.

Pass the fallen grave of Harden Cooksey who was, as his grave states, the churchwarden at this church for many years. If you listen carefully, you may hear him turning in his grave at the mention of a church scandal! "In 1804,

the Churchwardens questioned Brierley Hill Chapel's bill for sacramental wine, it included three bottles of rum. Mr. Phillips, the Clerk of the Chapel, admitted that the rum was for his own use and was reprimanded for such misconduct. Not surprisingly, the Vestry refused to accept any more wine bills for Brierley Hill unless the wine was ordered by one or more churchwardens!"

Waypoint 9 - *Warren grave - a large grave as you approach the rectory*

29 FREDERICK WARREN

Born into a family of decorators in Church Street, Brierley Hill, Frederick married George Elwell's other daughter, Agnes in 1883. Soon after he was made licencee of The Golden Eagle in High Street (1884-1888) prior to moving the Old Whimsey Inn, Church Street - one of the chain of Elwell establishments in 1888. George Elwell died in 1908 and left The Plough Inn (located opposite this churchyard) and brewery and £3,000 to his daughter Agnes. W. H. Smith and Frederick Warren were forgiven 'certain moneys advanced on mortgages'. From 1899 to his death in 1912, Frederick ran the Plough brewery. He also



owned The Talbot in Brettell Lane and The Boat in Brockmoor.

Waypoint 10 - *Make your way towards the rectory garden wall, turn right and up the hill on your left. You'll see a white statue with an angel on top adjacent to a holly tree, that's a next stopping point.*

30 CHARLES HORTON SNR. & JNR.

Charles Horton (senior) was not a native of Brierley Hill but came to the town as an apprentice. He later built a business on his own account, becoming one of the largest and best-known builders in the neighbourhood. Many of the buildings he constructed have, alas, disappeared and included Brierley Hill Town Hall (on the site of the present day library), Moor Street and Hill Street Board Schools, Dudley Great Western Railway Station and a large hotel at Droitwich (which became the subject of legal action against



John Corbett). At the time of his death, he was working on Brierley Hill Post Office, which is still standing. His son, also interred here, built the former Library and Technical Institute, and carried out, at cost, the major improvements to St Michael's in 1899, including encasing the tower.

31 THE GORDON FAMILY

John Gordon was the Chartermaster, or "Butty", of the Robin Hood Colliery, Merry Hill. Chartermasters were contractors who ran collieries on behalf of the mine owners, employing the miners and getting paid according to the tonnage produced. He was active in Church affairs and a window in the church is dedicated to him by his wife Drusilla.



Drusilla continued her husband's work at the Robin Hood Colliery following his death. John's brother, Joseph, became the chief reporter of the County Express. He was a member of the UDC for 30 years, commanded Brierley Hill Special Constabulary from 1911 to 1928 and for many years was the honorary secretary of the local fire brigade. Gordon Crescent is named after the family.

32 EBENEZER COOPER

The son of a boot and shoemaker in Dudley Road. At the age of 9 he went to work at Oak Farm Iron Works in Kingswinford, walking there and back every day. He later worked at several iron works including ten years at Noah Hingley and son, Harts Hill. He commenced business on his own account in 1870, leading Hingley to claim he *"would never pay another ironworker*

enough to become a competitor." Cooper established Roberts and Cooper with Caleb Roberts (Grave 15), his son in law, expanding from timber merchants into ironworks in partnership with his brother-in-law Samuel Newton (Grave 38). In later years, Cooper lived at the Limes in Pearson Street, later to become the Labour Club. He claimed family connections to the Chartist Thomas Cooper, also a shoemaker who often visited his father in Dudley Road.

Waypoint 11 - Turning left by the side of the Cooper Monument, move to the western extension. Look for the glossy black bricks

33 GEORGE LOVATT - THE BRIERLEY HILL GIANT

George Lovatt is also known as the Brierley Hill Giant. He is alleged to have weighed anything between 40 and 60 stones, depending on which source you read. By all accounts he was a kind and gentle man. Writing in the parish magazine following his funeral the vicar wrote: "... as Britain's, heaviest man, he had a fame which I have no doubt he would willingly have surrendered, with much of his weight, had this been possible. Those who knew him best give testimony to his cheery disposition under most trying circumstances. His funeral presented many problems, for the estimated weight of his coffin was between 7 and 8 cwt. Everybody concerned worked together, so the unprecedented task was carried out with ability and reverence. I am grateful also, to the undertaker and his staff (and not least to the very efficient foreman responsible for the derrick), and to the Police for their excellent work in controlling the



huge crowds in the streets. I was sorry to have to order that the Church Yard gates should be closed to the public, I had no alternative. Over a big area of ground, it would have been impossible for any number of police to control the crowd, and the consequent damage to graves, and possibly headstones, would have been considerable."

34 ANTHONY BOOTH V.C.

Anthony Booth was a recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest accolade in the armed forces. The London Gazette citation for this award read: "For his gallant



conduct on 12th March 1879, during the Zulu attack on the Intombi River, in having, when considerably outnumbered by the enemy, rallied a few men on the south bank of the river, and covered the retreat of fifty soldiers and others a distance of three miles. The Officer commanding 80th Regiment reports that, had it not been for the coolness displayed by this Non-commissioned Officer, not one man would have escaped."

A native of Nottingham, Booth came to live in Brierley Hill following his military service. On his death bed he converted to Catholicism. His funeral took place at St Mary's Church late on a snowy December day, and by the time the coffin left the church the party had to move in darkness through the snow to his final resting place here. Only lighted tapers lit the way. Three volleys of a firing party rang out. Before the party moved away, the accompanying band played "Soldiers of the Queen" and marched to the local drill hall.

35 T.H. BAKER AND PHILLIS AND FRANK HIGGS - JEWELLERS

Thomas Henry Baker, a watchmaker, was originally from Calne, Wiltshire. He set up his jewellery business on High Street, Brierley Hill on 6th of October 1888. His daughters, Phillis and Cecily joined the business in 1910. Retiring in 1912, Baker sold the business to Frank Higgs and, in 1915 Phillis and Frank married. Frank joined the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) in the Great War, leaving Phillis to run the shop. Business boomed, but an economic depression followed the war. At one stage, Frank and Phillis even had to pawn their 22ct gold wedding rings to keep the business afloat. Their wedding rings were replaced for just 1s. 6d with gold plated ones in order to keep respectability. Fortunately, the business survived and thrived over the following decades and even today continues as a well-known retail outlet.



36 GUTTERY FAMILY

John Guttery was a carpenter and builder who lived in Mill Street, Brierley Hill. He was known as "The Irish Cooper" and wore his hair in long curls down his back. The family were Congregationalists, but at the age of 12 his son Thomas attended Bent Street Primitive Methodist Church. At the age of 17 years he became a preacher. He was to achieve fame in the Primitive Methodist world, spending time in Canada, Sunderland, London, and Southport. Thomas achieved fame for his oratory in the pulpit and, as a Liberal, in politics. He died in 1895.

Thomas's son, Arthur T., continued his father's work, and became so well known that in a forward to his biography, the Prime Minister of the day, David Lloyd George wrote: *"The tragic and premature death of Mr. Guttery came as a heavy loss, not only to his own denomination but to the Free Churches of England, in which, by his strength of character and his outstanding personality, he held a distinctive position. Our friendship, which I greatly valued extended over many years. I believed he owed his wide public influence in a large part to his natural gift of oratory. As a platform speaker he could grip the attention and arouse the enthusiasm of large audiences. As an ally, he counted as a great asset; as an opponent no one could afford to disregard him. The services he rendered the religious and social life of this country were inestimable. His voice was like that of a Prophet's - an inspiration for great causes - and rang like a trumpet call for the furtherance of national righteousness and justice."*

37 HENRY PARRY

Following the death of his father in a railway accident at Round Oak, Henry attended the school of David Clark. At the age of 15 or 16 he entered work for the Earl of Dudley and became secretary to Frederick Smith Shenstone, Chief Agent to the Earl of Dudley. In the mid 1870s, Henry progressed to become the manager of the New Level Ironworks (the site is now occupied by the Merry Hill Centre). When the Earl's Round Oak work commenced the manufacture of steel, Parry figured out the method of transporting molten iron up the hill to the works to be converted into steel. He was a founder of the Brierley Hill camera



club and this portrait of him was taken on the club's first outing to the Sheep Walks. He was elected to Brierley Hill UDC in 1904 and it was he who suggested that negotiations should be opened with Kingswinford RDC to create a sewerage works at the farm at Round Hill. He was also chair of the Brierley Hill Higher Education Committee.

38 SAMUEL NEWTON

Samuel Newton purchased the former British Iron Company works in Brierley Hill when it was dismantled and removed to Corngreaves. His partners in the purchase were his brother-in-law, Ebenezer Cooper (Grave 32), and Caleb Roberts (Grave 15). Roberts and Cooper had intended to extend their timber works with the provision of a sawmill on the site. However, Samuel had arranged a partnership in a rolling mill and consequently the business carried on as the Nine Locks Iron Works. Eventually, Roberts and Cooper moved on to own other ironwork businesses and the partnership was dissolved. Newton continued with the business as Samuel Newton and Sons. Newton a staunch methodist attended Banks Street and Mount Pleasant methodist churches.

Waypoint 12 - *The right turn on the path back towards the tower, note the grave of Amos Westwood - a brickmaker. You are looking for the large grave surrounded by railings.*

39 JOSIAH BECKLEY

The Beckley family ran a grocery provisions business. But if you look around the back of the monument you will see a memorial to Josiah Beckley who was Brierley Hill's town surveyor for 32 years. Beckley made huge improvements to the town, including a sewage system he had installed in Moor Street, including filter beds. He is also recognised for 23 undedicated streets where he organised a channelled sewage system for property owners. He was also responsible for the paving of the High Street and rectifying various level as well as landscaping the Church Hill (war memorial) gardens. Here he created and covered the gardens with trees, shrubs and an ornamental wall. Other achievements including paving many of the side streets, tree planting schemes from Silver End to Round Oak and the design and installation of the drinking fountains in the town and improvements to the town hall with the introduction of a library, local board room, reading rooms and caretaker's accommodation. He is pictured below standing on the bonfire, the building of which he supervised for Queen Victoria's jubilee.



Josiah Beckley (on the ladder)

Head back towards the main entrance of the church, as you face it, look to the right of the door where you will see a stone baptismal font with a carved inscription on its outside rim 'TO THE GLORY OF GOD IN MEMORY OF THE FALLEN HEROES 1914-1919'.



The font was commissioned to commemorate the Delph men who served in WW1. It originally stood in the Good Shepherd Mission Church, Delph.

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES

There are 21 in total, visit this webpage for more information:

<https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/43802/brierley-hill-st-michael-churchyard/>

This trail was funded through the Brierley Hill High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)

For further information about this initiative administered by Historic England and Dudley MBC visit:

www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk/brierley-hill-projects

Thanks to all those at St Michael's Church for their magnificent support.