

The Georgians in
Stone – Monument
Conservation with
Carolling,
Minifilms and
More



Background

St John the Baptist churchyard in Bishops Castle, Shropshire has an unusually large number of listed Georgian monuments, 12 in total. The P.C.C. received funding from the Heritage Fund, the Georgian Group and Bishops Castle Town Council to conserve these monuments and to tell the story of the town as seen through the churchyard to local people and visitors.



Aim

We set out to find out more about the people whose lives are commemorated by these beautiful monuments and also, more about Bishops Castle at the time. Why are there so many listed monuments? This is an ancient churchyard, probably Norman; it is full of flowers, birds, amphibians and fungi as well as many other species. As well as the built heritage and social history, we investigated the biodiversity of the churchyard too. We involved people in discovering more about the churchyard, with different people leading on areas that were of interest to them. We then sought a range of ways to engage more people and tell the stories that had been discovered.

Action

Find out more

A group of amateur historians from the Bishops Castle Heritage Resource Centre (BCHRC) were asked to investigate Georgian Bishops Castle, as well as the individuals commemorated on the listed monuments. They dug deep into the archives in Shrewsbury and beyond, including visiting the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool to research one of the graves which is to an unknown 'Native of Africa' who died in 1801. Their research was exhibited in the Town Hall.



Identifying wildflowers, a fungal foray, hunts for frogs, toads and newts as well as moth trapping have given us a good idea of the importance of the churchyard for wildlife. A range of people took part in these events and the church took part in Churches Count on Nature during Love Your Burial Ground Week.

Pass on the learning

Bishops Castle has a Town Guide group who lead tours on a weekly basis in the spring and summer. The town guides met the stone conservators Kieran Elliott and Susan Ryder at work to learn more about the monuments and their conservation. They also met with the historical researchers to learn more about the Georgian period and received training from an interpretation expert in how to tell a story in an engaging way. Bernard one of the town guides 'I could do an entire town tour in the church and churchyard now'



Make it fun

At Christmas time a well-known, local folk singer John Kirkpatrick, leads a large group of people to sing traditional carols and wassails - Castle Carols. All are welcome and its great fun. John was commissioned to write songs about the churchyard and the Georgian times and to teach these songs to the Castle Carollers and anyone else who wanted to join in. Other local singing groups also got involved. Most of the practices took place on Zoom. John also taught the songs to a group of children in the local secondary school until lockdown prevented this. A young film maker from Bishops Castle – Duncan Burns, recorded John singing his songs and created videos for some of them.

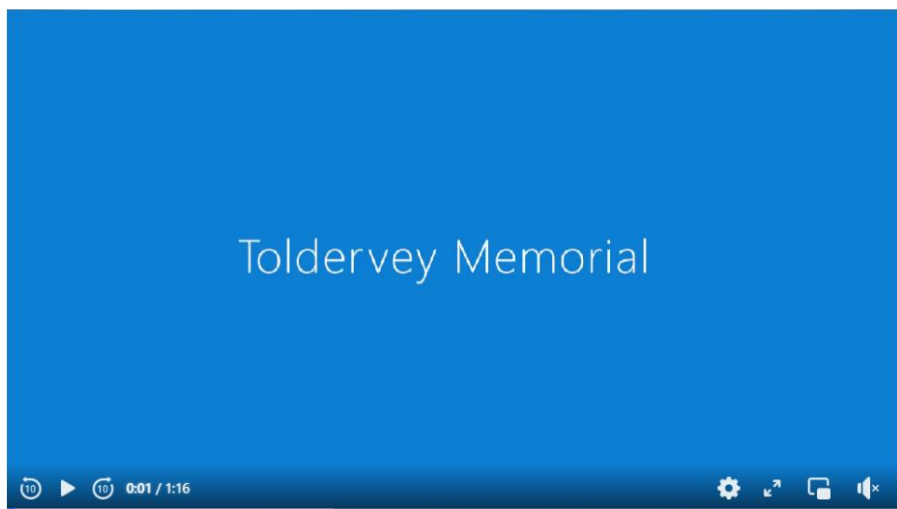


[Bishops Castle Georgians in Stone Celebration, May 15th 2021: John Kirkpatrick songs \(part 1\) - YouTube](#)



[Bishops Castle Georgians in Stone Celebration - 'I'll Carve Your Name' - YouTube](#)

The stone conservators – Kieran Elliott and Sue Ryder, made a few short videos for their own social media, showing the work on individual monuments via photographs put to music. This brought the conservation work to life with the potential to reach another new audience, those interested in heritage conservation.



<https://fb.watch/eVTxJBAiGf/>

Encourage new visitors

Many people visit Bishops Castle and are looking for things to do particularly in poor weather. Through this project we designed, printed and uploaded two churchyard trails, one for adults and one for children. We also installed a new church notice board with a panel about the Georgian project. The leaflets draw people into the churchyard as they pick them up in the Town Hall and Information Centre whilst the panel gives information to those walking past who may not have seen the leaflet or are not able to download onto a smartphone [adult text \(bchrc.co.uk\)](http://bchrc.co.uk) , [kids text \(bchrc.co.uk\)](http://bchrc.co.uk). Together they give a glimpse of the fascinating history of the town, the beautifully restored monuments and also the importance of the churchyard for wildlife.

We ran two events, both of which were online due to the Covid pandemic; a History Day with national speakers and a celebration event aimed at families. Extracts of both are on the [BCHRC YouTube channel](#). Whilst it was disappointing to have online events when live ones had been planned, we used that opportunity to engage a wider audience geographically. John Kirkpatrick has an international following and people engaged from all over the country and beyond.



CELEBRATION DAY
Saturday 15th May 2021
4.00pm to 7.30pm

A celebratory day with music from **John Kirkpatrick MBE, Castle Carols and Friends, Noxwode Baroque Ensemble, The Marches Choir**, conductor **Alistair Auld** and local election drama from **SWSHAS**
Suitable for people of all ages

FREE ONLINE EVENT
This celebratory event marks the close of a grant-funded project to restore unique Georgian tombs found in Bishops Castle churchyard. As well as performances the event includes a virtual churchyard tour by the town guides.
To book your place please email: info@cfga.org.uk subject 'Georgian Celebration' and a Zoom link for the event will be forwarded to you.
Children's Georgian craft activity bags available to collect from church porch from 11 am – Make a tricorne hat, decorate a Georgian fan and take part in an art trail with your family.

Find out more on our Facebook page @GeorgiansInStone
Interested in participating in songs on the day? Visit: castlecarols.com/georgians

Let's keep burial grounds beautiful!



Costs

The whole Georgians in Stone project cost over £60,000 of which most was the actual conservation of the monuments. The research, songs, minifilms, town guide training, leaflets, notice boards and events cost approximately £16,000. By including such a wide range of ways of involving people the P.C.C. was able to secure grants for the full cost of the project. This would not have been the case without the 'people' part of the project.

Conclusion

Using a range of ways of engaging people seems to be working. The written word is important, in the form of leaflets, notices and downloads, but the spoken word and singing have proved very popular. Enthusing and informing the Town Guides gives a legacy of face-to-face engagement which is known to be an excellent way of inspiring people.

Having two main events, the more academic History Day and the family focussed Final Celebration worked well. We used two professional actors to provide the continuity for the Final Celebration, using humour as their main approach. A great deal of information about the Georgian period was communicated through jokes and sketches.

The leaflet and notice board were carefully designed and are attractive and unusual. There seems to be a good uptake of the leaflets from dispensers, probably in part because they look different and engaging. People can be seen walking around the churchyard, leaflet in hand, particularly during the summer months when tourists are visiting.

Involving a well-known person in John Kirkpatrick who already ran a pop-up singing group, the Castle Carols, worked well in terms of publicity and engagement. The video of I'll Carve Your Name quickly reached over 500 views and 40 to 50 people joined in the online song learning sessions.

We were fortunate in our choice of stone conservators, Kieran and Sue were generous with their time and happy to explain their work to the Town Guides and others. Hearing about the work directly from crafts people with this level of skill and knowledge brings it to life.

