

Two of the most common in Selby's cemetery are Celtic crosses and obelisks.

Celtic crosses

These monuments are crosses with a circle or 'annulus' around the intersection, often decorated with woven lines, and other geometric forms.

This design is said to derive from the influence of Irish saints Patrick, Columba or Declan. Irish missionaries spread the use of this kind of cross around Europe, in the early Middle Ages even linking with the Norse form known as 'Odin's Cross'.

The circle may represent the disc of the sun rising behind the cross. Alternatively, the four spaces created between the ring and the cross, refer to the stages of the day: morning, noon, evening and midnight or the four ancient 'elements' of earth, air, water and fire.

Whatever the symbolism, it may seem odd that medieval Irish art is found in a



Victorian Yorkshire churchyard.

The 'Celtic Revival' movement of the mid-19th century decreed decorative interlinked chains and knots to be more stylish.

The symbolism of a never-ending thread intertwining in all directions celebrated many-faceted lives. The thought that the influence of such a life would go on beyond the death of the person concerned was an attractive proposition for those erecting memorials.



Obelisks

The simplest obelisks are pointed columns, with a history and symbolism going back to the ancient Egyptians. The principle was that the angled stone either represented the sun's rays descending to illuminate the grave of the particular person, or was pointing upwards to their heavenly home.



The "Mariners, Merchants and Monuments" project stemmed from the desire of Selby Town Council to promote a greater interest in, and use of, resources linked to Selby Cemetery. This would lead to an increase in understanding of how life was lived in Selby in the 19th century, and also encourage people to discover more about their own family histories.

Financial support came from National Lottery players and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Students from Selby High School used the cemetery as a stimulus for their own local history studies, and the work was supported by the Selby & District Family History Group.

The support of Selby Town Council, Selby High School, the Selby & District Family History Group, and the Heritage Lottery Fund is gratefully acknowledged. Further information about the project, online versions of this leaflet and other resource material can be found via www.selbytowncouncil.gov.uk, www.selbydistrictfamilyhistory.btck.co.uk or www.selby-high.org.uk

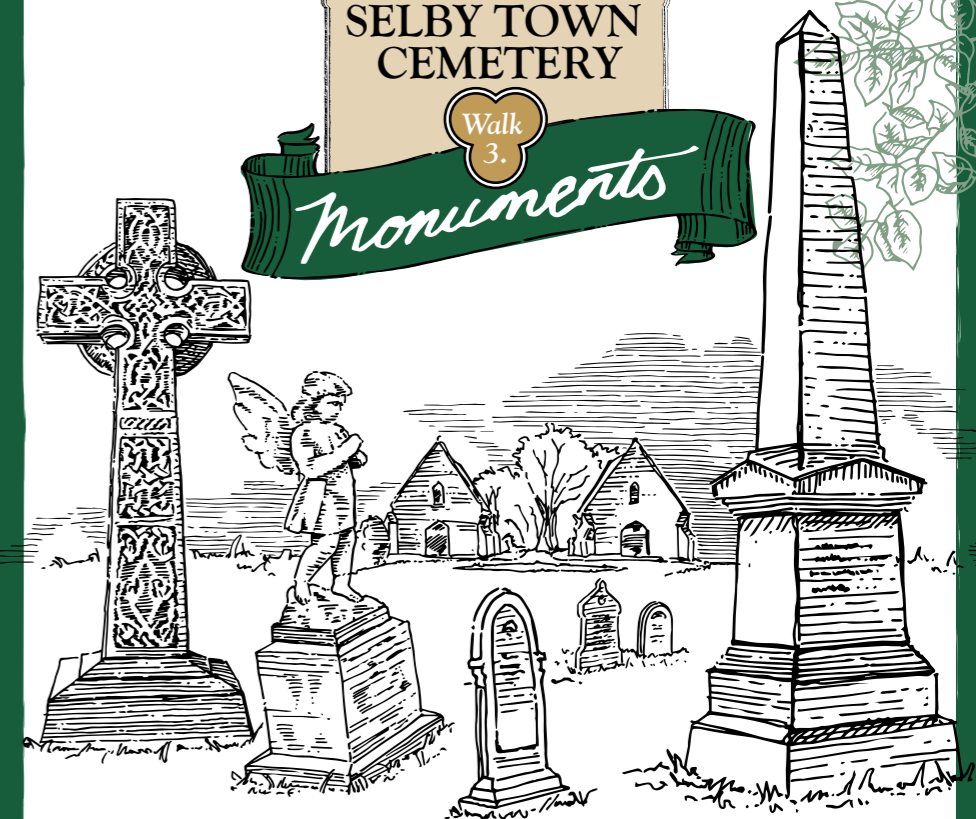


Mariners Merchants and Monuments

SELBY TOWN
CEMETERY

Walk
3.

Monuments



This leaflet only deals with monuments in the oldest part of the cemetery, where many burials took place well over a century ago at a time when religion played a much larger part in daily life than today. The symbols carved on headstones had commonly-understood spiritual meaning. A stroll in this area of the cemetery will show many stones with images: too many to individually mark on the map. Three stones in a unique style are shown on the map.

Anchor



This could mean that the person concerned was involved with ships or river trade, or perhaps a more personal meaning. Since anchors stop ships from drifting away, an anchor on a tombstone could show someone with a strong and steadfast character.

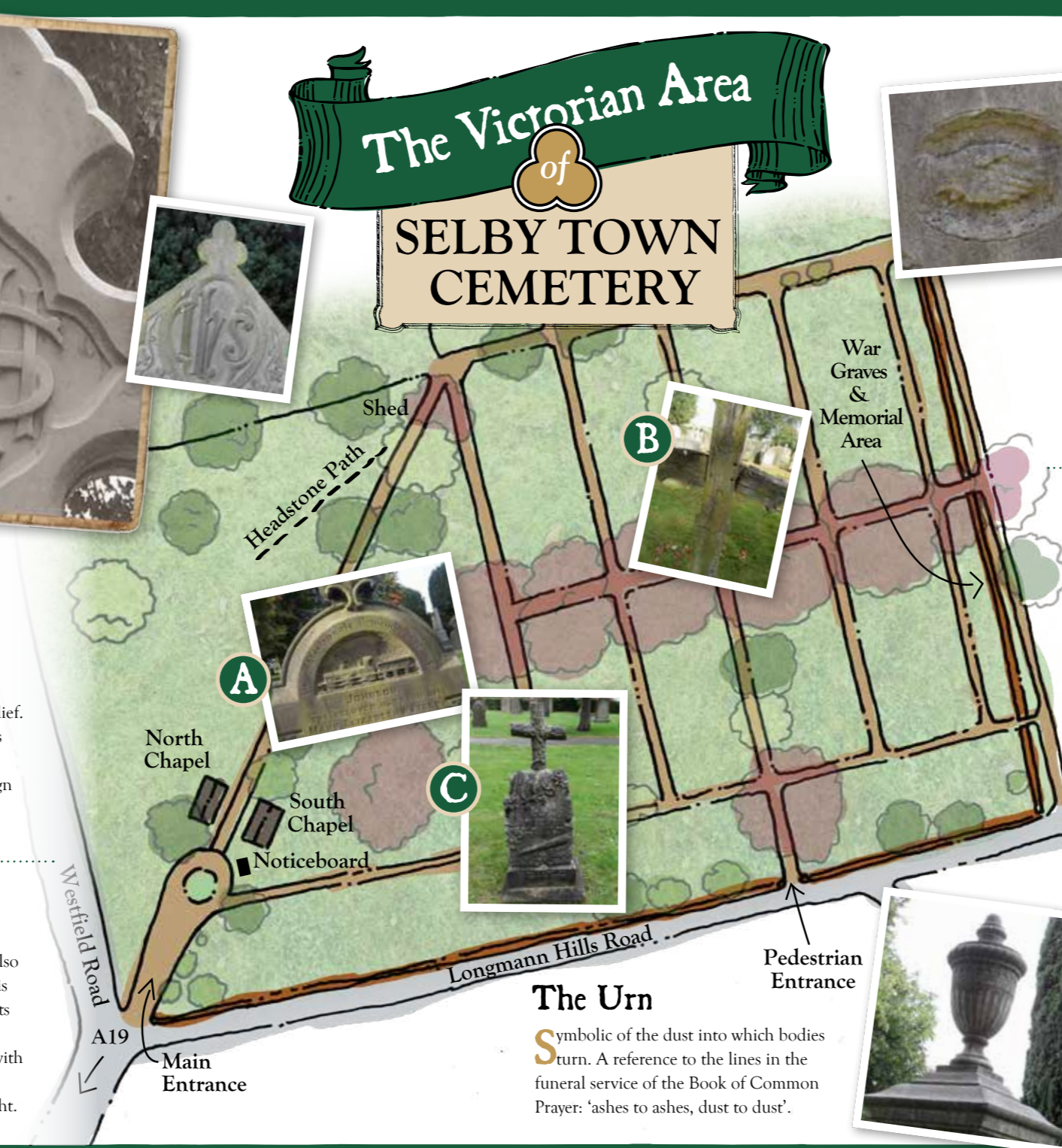
The 'IHS' sign

The letters 'IHS' being entwined together is a sign of Christian belief. The three letters stand for either Jesus Hominum Salvator (Jesus, saviour of mankind) or In Hoc Signo (By this sign (we shall overcome)).

Dove

A traditional symbol of peace and also of hope for the future. The dove is often shown with an olive branch in its beak, reminding us all of the story of Noah's Ark when the dove returned with an olive twig, showing that the floods had subsided and new land was in sight.

The Victorian Area of SELBY TOWN CEMETERY



Shaking hands

The idea of friendship after death, or one person reaching out from death to greet those still alive in the hope that the work of their life will continue. The shape and design of many memorials also has meaning.

Angels or cherubs

Both heavenly creatures welcoming the person buried into that state of grace. Often seen on a child's grave.

Books



Laurel wreath

The laurel wreath was traditionally given to the person who had won a sporting contest. A laurel wreath on a headstone might celebrate someone sporty or perhaps mark out someone who had had a full and varied life and so 'won' a peaceful rest.

These can either refer to the Bible with a brief message such as "in God we trust" or can be carved to imply that the person was well-read or intelligent or eager to share their learning with others.

The Urn

Symbolic of the dust into which bodies turn. A reference to the lines in the funeral service of the Book of Common Prayer: 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.

