

Genealogy

September 2019 Report Symbols on Gravestones

We first looked at some photographs of gravestones provided by members of the group. The symbols on a Commonwealth War Graves Headstone are familiar – a cross symbolising that the dead soldier was a Christian and a regimental crest to signify the unit to which he belonged. A skull, with or without crossed bones as adopted for the ‘Jolly Roger’, was intended as a reminder to the observer of his own mortality, an hour-glass as a reminder that his time on earth is running out. However flower designs which one might have thought were just decoration also had their own significance. This was the subject of a video of a talk by Joy Neighbors at RootsTech2019 *“The Silent Language of the Stones: Reading Gravestones through Symbols and Carvings”*.



On this gravestone from 1896, which I encountered in my research just before writing this report, the clasped hand with the thumb on the outside is supposed to be helping the other partner into heaven. The shirt cuff and jacket are supposed to represent the man, the other hand is the woman. Thus this is a husband who died before his wife. (I don't know how this interpretation should be read in conjunction with the message just above

the clasped hands saying 'Farewell'). In fact William died after his wife so the symbology is totally misleading!

A comparison of the US based video and an English source show major differences in interpretation and I would be very reluctant to place any genealogical reliance on any grave stone symbols; for example an anchor may represent a sailor – or an individual anchored in their faith.

The topic at the October meeting will be “How to cite your sources” – the next part of the Genealogy Proof Standard. The meeting will be, as usual, on the first Thursday of the month, that is October 3rd, at 2:00 pm at Enterprise House in the Dales Room.

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