

St John sub Castro Church, Lewes

Chris Swarbrooke Records

These notes were written by Chris to accompany his records

General Introduction

Work began in October 1999 to survey, record, photograph and transcribe the tombstones situated within the church and yard of St John Sub Castro by a group of trainees from the East Sussex Archaeology & Museums Project (ESAMP) based at Ann of Cleve House in Lewes.

Also as part of this work both the Baptismal Registers and the Burial Registers were transcribed so that data found on the tombstones could be cross referenced with both of these Registers.

Initially the enthusiasm was very high, but as the weeks went into months and the months went into years, just two volunteers were left to carry on and finish the work.

Now, 5 years later, we are beginning to see the fruits of all that work which we hope will aid both Family and Local Historians.

Wherever possible, the information in the Burial Register has been cross referenced with information found on the Tombstones, plus unclear or incomplete transcriptions have been entered under more than one name / alias.

Work completed by Christopher G Swarbrooke & Susan Crooks in 2005.

About the Church and Yard

The present church, built in 1839 was constructed in a North – South direction whilst the Old church was in an East – West direction with a nave that dated back to the Saxon era. It was the oldest part of any church still standing in Lewes and built about the time of King Alfred. On the outside wall of the old nave was a unique plaque in Latin dedicated to Prince Magnus of the Royal House of Denmark who became an anchorite here in Lewes. This medieval Lombardic inscription was later incorporated in the East Wall of the New Church. The rest of the old church was built on the Saxon foundations in medieval times. The area of the churchyard formed an entrenched angle in the town's medieval defences and is believed to be part of the Earthworks of a Roman fort built to guard the old river crossing.

Most of the remaining churches in Lewes date from medieval times, when most of the timbered Saxon chapels and churches that existed were replaced. Originally there were ten Saxon churches inside the town walls and four outside the walls.

A note about Calendars

Up till 1752, England was using the Old Style Julian Calendar, whilst the Continent was using the New Style Gregorian Calendar.

Old Style Calendar started on 25th March each year not the 1st Jan – “which is why a baby can be born in October, be baptised in November but die in February of the same year”.

Chesterfields Act of 1751 corrected this as follows:

1750 commenced 25 March 1750 – ended 24 March 1750/1

1751 commenced 25 March 1751 – ended 31 December 1751

1752 commenced 1 January 1752 – 31st December 1752

NB—In 1752 the 2nd of September was followed by the 14th of September. (11 days of September Missed) to bring us in line with the rest of the continent.

General note

These transcribed records not intended to be a substitute for the original entries. Whilst every care is taken when transcribing, researchers are advised to consult the originals for verification.

The following notes were added in September 2021 after making the records available online.

Acknowledgements

Chris Swarbrooke passed away in January 2021, and the electronic files documenting his researches have kindly been made available to St John sub Castro (now part of Trinity Church Lewes) by his family. We are most grateful to them, and to Chris, for this invaluable contribution to the church's history.

A note about Memorials and Inscriptions

Chris Swarbrooke took photos of all the gravestones and memorials in the churchyard and in the church. These can be viewed in the file 'Memorial Images', and appears to be a complete record. Chris also transcribed the inscriptions on very many of the gravestones - but apparently not all of them, because there are gaps in the file. Where the inscriptions are available however, the images have been added, so both can be seen together in the file 'Memorial Inscriptions & Images' In order to use these files, you need to know a Memorial number, and this can be obtained from the relevant 'Burial' file.

Remember that many burials did not have a memorial, and were therefore unmarked graves.

Additional notes

Chris Swarbrooke originally published the results of his researches in hard copy format, copies of which were made available to interested parties at the time.

Any queries in connection with these records may be addressed to admin@sjsc-history.org

Some Church Memorials may have been repositioned or removed during 2017 alterations.

Stuart Billington
October 2021