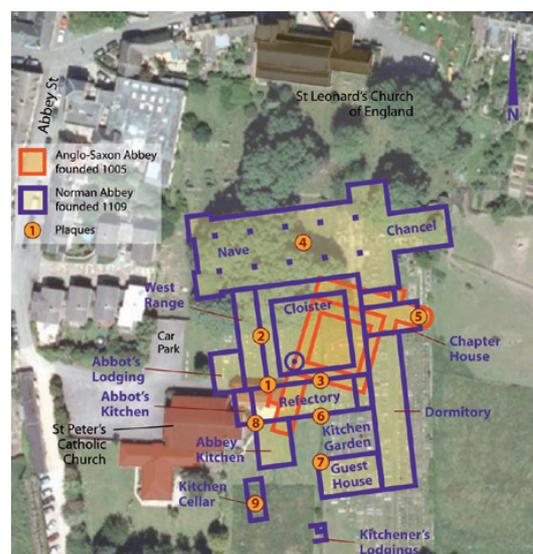


ST LEONARD'S CHURCHYARD

This note is not necessarily endorsed by Eynsham Parish Council or the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

St Leonard's churchyard lies immediately to the south of the church and adjoining the grounds of St Peter's church. An extension on more open ground to the south-east was opened in 1929 – though the 'new' grounds date back to the days of Eynsham Abbey and beyond. In 1989 Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit excavated the entire length of the extension, as reported in Eynsham Record 7 1990, finding evidence of the Norman and medieval abbey and of earlier Anglo-Saxon occupation.

A hand-written register of graves in the 'older' part of the churchyard was compiled in 1909, totalling 999 entries, with numbered metal marker plates on the ground to correspond. There is only one surviving marker still on its original grave.



Eynsham's monumental inscriptions were fully documented in 2000-2001 by Oxfordshire Family History Association, as reported in Eynsham Record 20 2003 pages 14-17. The transcripts and images are now available on CD, with navigation by means of a clickable plan of the churchyard.

The oldest readable stone found in the graveyard (as distinct from the church itself) dates from February 4 1648 and commemorates someone with the initials 'RC.'

The best-known *missing* stone is the medieval table tomb illustrated by JC Buckler and discussed in Eynsham Record 23 2006, which supplied the 'foliated cross' adopted as a logo by Eynsham Roundabout, Eynsham Medical Centre and more recently the lower Bartholomew Room door.



The Parish Council has arranged for the grass to be cut since 1985, recovering part of the costs from funeral fees paid to the church governing body (PCC). These arrangements did not include the gravestones – many of which are sadly in need of attention, totally overgrown by ivy and shattered by emerging saplings. A professional survey of the churchyard in May 2006 found 45 trees, of which four were a potential risk, and advised remedial work on one third of the remainder. This is a matter of ongoing concern.

Existing maintenance arrangements came under review in 2009, following legal advice that a parish council is not empowered to maintain an open burial ground – which may come as a surprise to a number of other councils around the country. In August 2009 Eynsham Parish Council notified the PCC that it would cease to take responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard with immediate effect but would carry on the grass cutting until the end of September. Detailed provisions for machinery etc were proposed by the Finance Committee in January 2010.

It is unclear how long the churchyard may remain open to new burials: estimates of available space range from 2 to 5 years. In March 2009 the PCC agreed to investigate the procedure for re-using the graves and to keep the PC updated; and the Parish Council to continue looking into funding for works required. The new housing development off Bitterell does include funding for £30,000 for improvement / extension of "cemetery or other community facilities" in the neighbourhood of the site – though efforts to find new land in an appropriate location have been unsuccessful to date.