

Being remembered

How old is the oldest memorial in Acle churchyard and (for a bonus point) whom does it commemorate?

The oldest surviving *headstone* commemorates Robert Denny, buried 1707. But the oldest *memorial* is the north porch, bequeathed by Robert Bataly to be erected over his grave in 1487. If a memorial is about how and for how long we are remembered (is it?) Robert Bataly's was pretty effective.

We don't know who wrote the words of Job, or when, but, despite not being inscribed in stone, they have survived even longer (2,500+ years). They are remembered because they have been valued by people of faith and incorporated into the Jewish and subsequently Christian scriptures. Whether and how we want to be remembered may relate to concerns we have about whether our lives are or have been of value.

This is the day when many of us say of those who died in two World Wars, *We will remember them*. What do we mean by that? Although we remember them by name, 80, or over 100 years on, they are no longer remembered personally. Although, ironically, the names of those who died in the First World War are perhaps better preserved than those of their contemporaries who lived out their natural span. As Isaac Watts paraphrased Psalm 90, *Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away*. The desire to remember on Remembrance Sunday isn't about personal recollection, but a desire that what they did shouldn't be forgotten. It's about putting a value on their sacrifice and affording them a dignity that they probably weren't able to receive at the time. More generally, it's an act of resistance, not of mortality, but of war's implication that individual human lives are expendable and therefore of little value: we beg to differ. That will in turn relate to how we view conflict and those who serve in the armed forces today.

Many from the past are remembered because it's considered that they have something to say to us in our time: think, for example, of our calendar of saints (apostles, martyrs, holy men and women, theologians, social campaigners and the rest) – *beseeking [God] to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of [his] heavenly kingdom*.

Robert Bataly may well have been thinking of his eternal destiny when he bequeathed St. Edmund's its porch: God might take notice; and, in the religious thought of the time, if people responded to his piety (as depicted in the spandrel) and prayed for his soul, it might reduce his stay in purgatory. That wouldn't be our thinking; but there will still be some correlation between how others see us and how God sees. There will be people who have noticed when we have demonstrated the love of God or some other aspect of Christ in our lives. And even if not, God sees what is done in secret, as much as what is done to public acclaim. What matters eternally is not how people remember us on earth, but how God calls us to mind.

Job's desire for his words to endure was not for human appreciation, but so that God might take note of them, *on the latter day*, if not before. The Sadducees asked Jesus a question about relationships on earth (marriage) carrying over into the resurrection – a resurrection they didn't believe in. Jesus turned their attention – and ours – from a human relationship into relationship with God. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live because they are alive in the sight of God – unto whom all are alive. What other kind of life is there?