Ribbesford Churchyard Database

Introduction

In the late 1980s, the Bewdley Historical Research Group (BHRG) undertook the formidable task of recording and cataloguing the inscriptions from all gravestones located in Ribbesford Churchyard. To ease the task of cataloguing, the BHRG divided the churchyard into 13 sections or regions (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N). These regions are shown in Figure 1; with detail shown in Figures 2 and 3. A single entry in the catalogue corresponded to a particular gravestone in the churchyard, with the entire inscription where possible being recorded.

So that the catalogue could be used more effectively to locate graves, and to ensure that future generations would benefit from this valuable resource the BHRG catalogue was converted into electronic format.
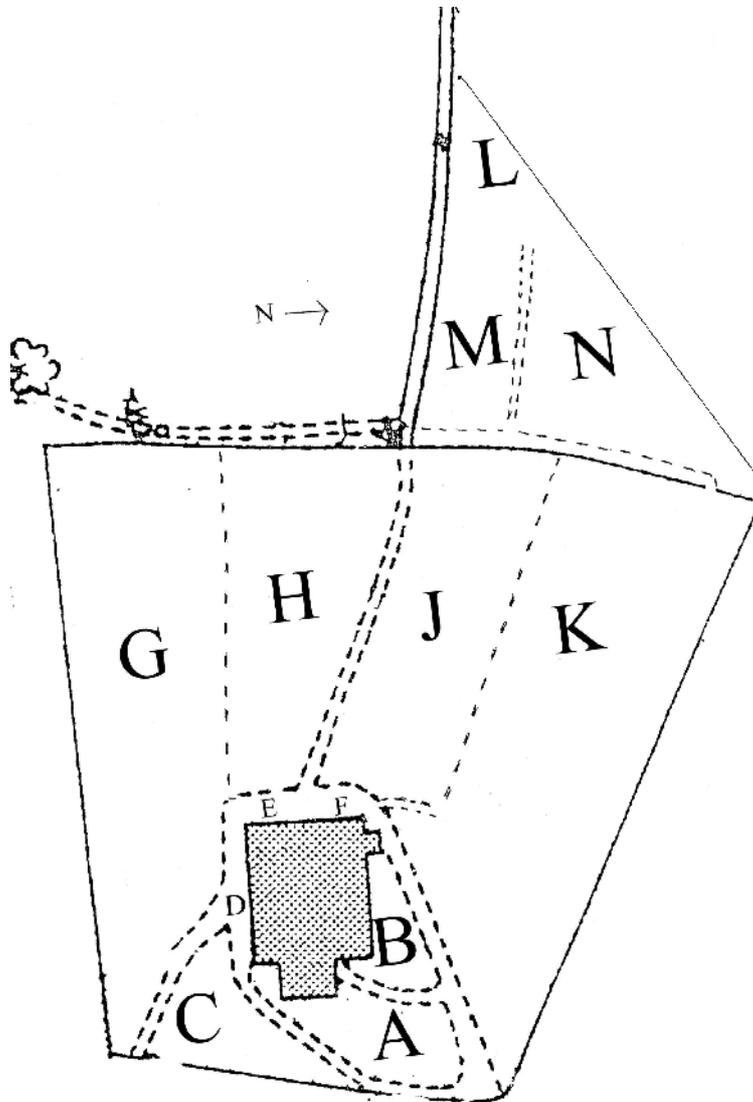

Figure 1: Ribbesford Churchyard showing the different regions. The dotted lines indicating the edges of the region are only an approximate guide.
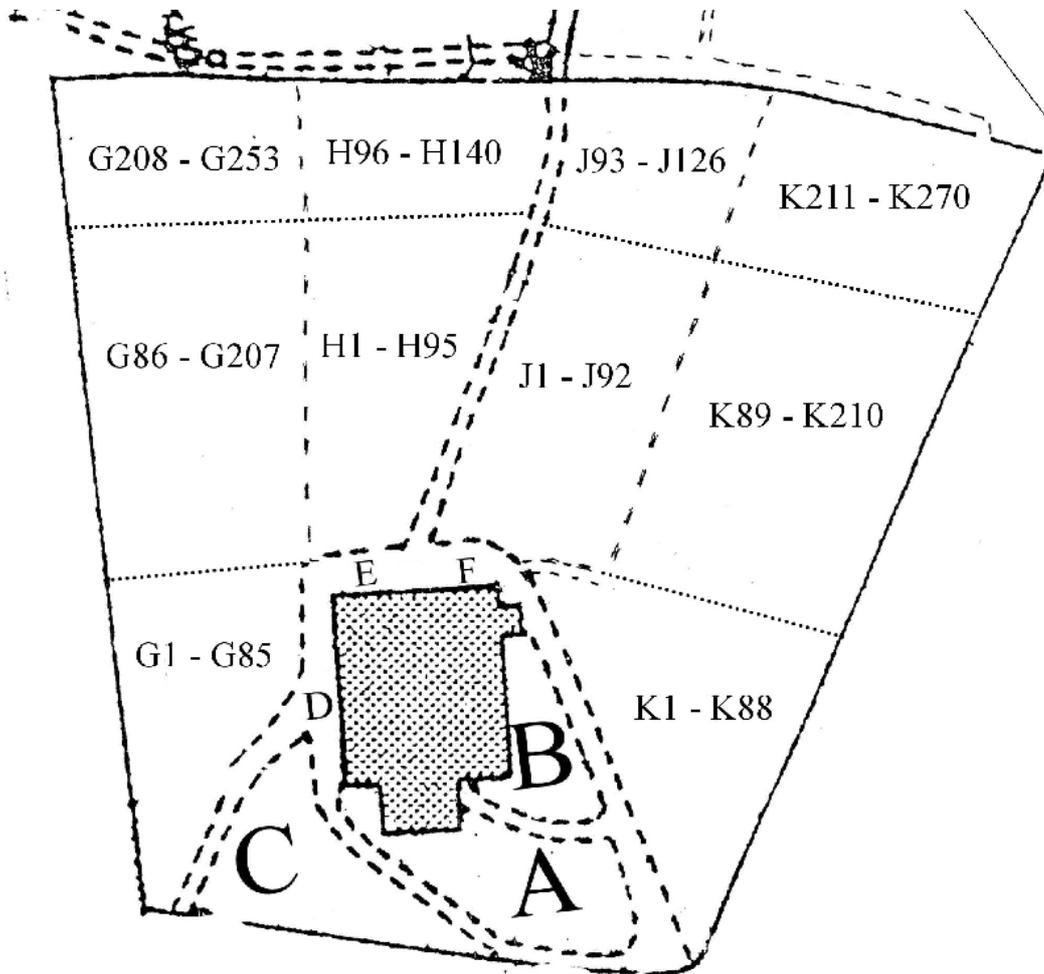
Figure 2: Ribbesford Churchyard showing the sub-divisions of the larger regions (G, H, J, K), with the dotted lines showing start and ending of each sub-division (very approximately).
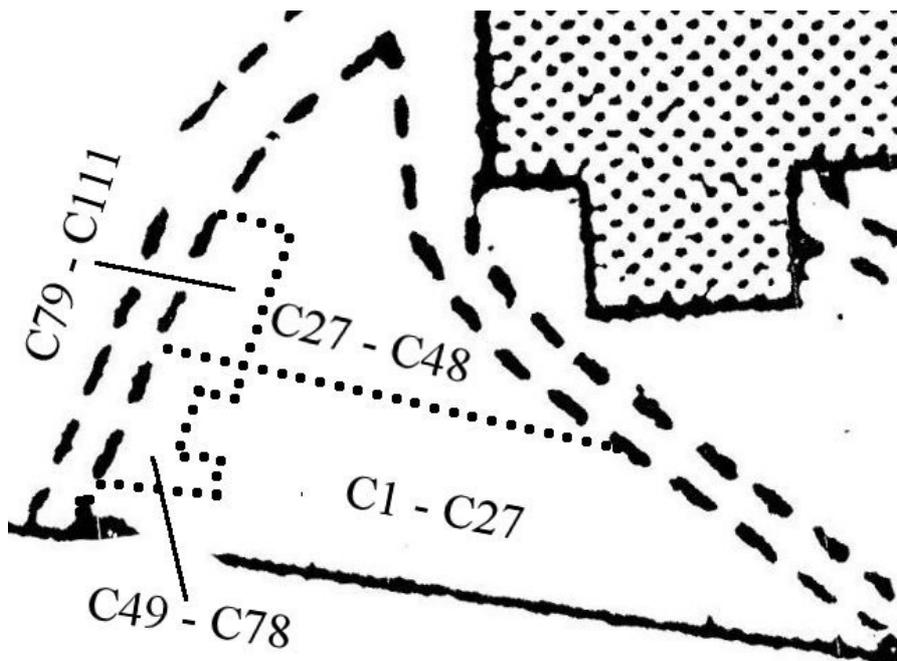

Figure 3: Ribbesford Churchyard showing the sub-divisions of Region C.

In general, the gravestones are numbered in rows from left to right and moving up the churchyard (see Figure 2). However, for regions A and B the numbering goes from right to left, and in the top most part of the churchyard (regions L, M and N) the numbering goes down the churchyard. This is summarised in Table 1, and depicted in Figure 4.

Region	No. of Graves	Direction	Position of 1st Gravestone
A	42	Right to Left; Upwards	Bottom Right
B	11	Right to Left; Upwards	Bottom Left
C	78	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
D	15	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
E	7	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
F	4	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
G	253	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
H	140	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
J	126	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
K	270	Left to Right; Upwards	Bottom Left
L	25	Left to Right; Downwards	Top Left
M	36	Left to Right; Downwards	Top Left
N	108	Left to Right; Downwards	Top Left
Interior_N	16	Left to Right; Downwards	Top Left
Interior_E	13	Right to Left; Downwards	Top Right
Interior_S	14	Right to Left; Downwards	Top Right
Interior_W	13	Right to Left; Downwards	Top Right

Table 1: Summary of each region and the direction of gravestone numbering. The number of gravestones in each region when the BHRG catalogue was compiled.

Figure 4: A portion of Ribbesford churchyard (in detail) with representative graves to indicate the numbering system.

Description of the Electronic Database

The electronic database has been compiled from the BHRG catalogue and subsequent funeral registers. Unlike the BHRG catalogue where an entry comprised of the entire inscription for each gravestone, the database recorded an entry for each person buried. Consequently, for family graves (where more than one person is buried in a single grave) multiple entries will exist in the database.

So that the effort required was reduced to manageable levels only specific details were extracted from the BHRG catalogue. These comprised of the following: an unique gravestone reference ID (*Region* and *Number*); the *Forename(s)* and *Surname* of the deceased, the *Date* they died; their *Age*; and where applicable the BHRG catalogue *Page Number* (to allow for cross referencing between the BHRG catalogue and the database). In addition, any notable comments about individual gravestones were added (e.g. a military grave). The first few entries of the electronic database are shown as an example in Table 2.

Region	Forename(s)	Surname	Date of Death	Age at Death	BHRG Catalogue Page No.	Notes
A-1	Doris	Bishop	09 Sep 1972	71	1	
A-1	Wilfred	Bishop	13 Jan 1963	72	1	

Table 2: Example of the electronic catalogue.

For burials after the compilation of the BHRG catalogue (i.e. post ~1988), data has been collected from the burial registers and a suitable gravestone reference ID has been determined. If this is a new gravestone then a lettering scheme is added to the reference ID. For example, should a new gravestone have been added and lies between grave A-15 and A-16, then the reference ID for the new gravestone would be A-15a. Alternatively, if the burial occurred in an existing grave then the reference ID is re-used.

There are a number of gravestones and monumental inscriptions inside the church. These are noted in the database as Interior_N, Interior_E, Interior_S and Interior_W, where the letter refers to the compass bearing. So for example, Interior_N are inscriptions on the North Wall; note the porch is on the north side of the church.

Some points to note:
- Question marks in the database indicate where the inscription is illegible.
- Gravestones indicating an interment of ashes tend to be located close to the church (i.e. Regions A, B, C, D, E and F).

- The majority of graves within the churchyard are made from sandstone and unfortunately this has meant that the inscriptions on some graves have become illegible due to weathering. The BHRG catalogue noted that '*it must be appreciated that the accuracy of this transcription cannot be guaranteed in view of the problems which arise in dealing with old gravestones*'.

- Graves that are unmarked (i.e. have no stone) will not be in the BHRG catalogue and hence not in the database;

How to locate a Gravestone

In order to locate a grave in the churchyard it is recommended that the following steps are used:

1. Find the person in the catalogue (ordered by surname);
2. Make a note of the Region and Number (e.g. M-5);
3. Locate the Region on the churchyard Plan (see Figures 1, 2 and 3);
4. Determine the direction of numbering for the region (see Table 1);

Should you be unable to find the gravestone that you are looking for then determine the reference ID of a nearby gravestone (by looking up the person's surname in the database) and move accordingly. For example, if a nearby gravestone has a catalogue number much higher than the gravestone you are seeking then you are too far up the churchyard. If a nearby gravestone has a different region then you are in the wrong part of the churchyard. Please feel free to take the database into the churchyard.

War Graves

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (http://www.cwgc.org) identifies Ribbesford churchyard as an official War Graves cemetery; the cemetery number is 39444. There are seven war graves at Ribbesford; all of men whom were wounded in action during the First World War and sent back to England for medical treatment. Further details of these military personnel can be found on the parish website (http://www.bewdleyparish.org.uk/parish/genealogy.html).

Region	Name and Rank	Date of Death	Age
K-169	Private Frederick Harvey Brown	26 Nov 1915	26
K-244	Private Thomas William Chadbourne	7 Apr 1921	21
K-147	Gunner H. Davies	1 Dec 1918	-
G-133	Private Jack Insull	11 Nov 1918	19
A-11	Lance Corporal Ernest Henry Moles	3 Jan 1917	39
K-99	Private Gilbert Pennington	28 Sep 1917	30
K-126	Corporal Henry Charles Postins	19 Sep 1920	35

Health and Safety

Large sections of Ribbesford churchyard are on a steep slope and much of the ground is uneven. Appropriate footwear and care should be taken when wandering amongst the gravestones, particularly when the grass is wet and is likely to be slippery

Aerial Photography

The use of aerial photography (as provided by Google Maps) was investigated as a potential source of data. Whilst some graves could be identified, it was considered that the digital resolution was not sufficient in order to identify all graves. However, the regions have been overlaid upon an aerial photograph to assist in identifying where regions are located in the churchyard (Figure 5).

Acknowledgements

The compilation of this electronic database could not have occurred without the work of the BHRG who first compiled the catalogue, and the large amount of time spent by Nick Gould, and Martin and Britta Flegg.

Figure 5: Regions of the Churchyard overlaid on an aerial photograph.