

Rame Churchyard Tales



True stories of some of the fascinating people
commemorated in the churchyard of St. Germanus at Rame

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All proceeds from the sale of this booklet go to support the ancient and beautiful Rame Church

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Schematic plan of Churchyard – locating mentioned graves, etc.

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CHURCHYARD TALES No 1.

Many of the folk buried in Rame Churchyard were ordinary local people who led unremarkable lives. But dotted around are headstones to some who stood out because of their courage and achievements.

One such local hero was **Richard Eddey** who, on the night of November 23rd 1824, saved four lives during a fierce storm. It is recorded that on that night 22 boats were wrecked off Plymouth and these included the ketch *Coromandel*. The lookout and helmsman were swept overboard and drowned leaving the Captain, two crew and a passenger trapped in darkness in the cabin of the overturned vessel which began to fill with water.

Richard Eddey, observing their plight, launched his boat off Cawsand Beach with his brother John, son Thomas, and his father in law Henry Spriddell and two others. Facing great risks in the tempestuous seas, they rescued the four terrified and exhausted survivors who had faced certain death.

The *Coromandel's* master wrote to Trinity House stating that without the assistance of **Richard Eddey** and his crew endangering their own lives, the occupants of the stricken vessel would have perished.

The inhabitants of Stoke Damarel, near Devonport, also wrote to Trinity House praising their actions. The National Institution for the Preservation of Lives from Shipwreck (the forerunner of today's Royal National Lifeboat Institution) awarded **Richard** a silver medal and £14 for him and his crew. A silver medal was second only to the gold medal as the highest award for outstanding courage and seamanship in the act of saving life at sea.

Ten years later, on January 13th 1834, a Prussian barque, *Konigsberg*, carrying timber bound for Lisbon was driven ashore in Whitsand Bay, west of Rame Head, during a fierce gale. **Richard Eddey**, his eldest son also named Richard, and his sons Thomas and Samuel and his two sons in law Richard Chappel and Richard Jope, plus six other local men, launched two boats.

They reached the barque at 1.00a.m. and despite the violent seas and darkness stayed with the stricken vessel throughout the night until daybreak. Eventually the entire crew were rescued and part of the cargo was saved but the *Konigsberg* broke up.

The Shipwreck Institution awarded a second medal to Richard Eddey and a further £14.10s to be distributed among his family and crew.



Richard's grave lies next to Rame Church gate on the left as you enter.

CHURCHYARD TALES No 2

There's a lopsided tombstone decorated with a ship's anchor at the west end of Rame Church. It records the death of John T. Morman, but he's not buried there.

His father and sister, John and Martha Morman, are interred in the grave and clearly John senior wanted to immortalise both his children who predeceased him. His son's remains lie scattered under the sea thousands of miles away in Chile.

Able Seaman John Morman was one of the crew of H.M.S. Doterel killed when it exploded on April 26th 1881 while waiting to take on coal at Sandy Point, Punta Arenas near the Straits of Magellan. Less than 20 of the 156 men on board survived. One of them was John Ford, a caulkers mate from Millbrook. Months later he was ultimately responsible for uncovering why the explosion happened.

H.M.S. Doterel was a new screw sloop built at Chatham Dockyard in Kent. An Inquiry decided in September 1881 that the disaster was caused by a coal gas explosion and no blame attached to the crew. But fate intervened. On November 22nd 1881 there was an explosion on board H.M.S. Triumph which by a strange coincidence was also just off the coast of Chile, but several hundred miles from where the Doterel sank. Three crew died and several were severely burnt.

This, it was decided, was an unfortunate accident caused by a sailor opening a paint storage cabinet while holding a burning candle, which ignited fumes from a new chemical called xerotine siccativ.

Some time later, John Ford was on board H.M.S. Indus at Devonport watching a man painting a chest and he recognised a distinct smell. On enquiring he was told the odour came from xerotine siccativ, the paint additive that had caused the explosion on H.M.S. Triumph.

Ford contacted the authorities and told them that the night before H.M.S. Doterel exploded two seamen found an unmarked jar of liquid below decks, which cracked when they moved it causing the liquid to leak. It gave off the same smell.

The jar was put into a can and thrown overboard but the chemical had seeped into the bilges and ran under the forward magazine. The men were told to clean it up and another seaman, carpenter Baird, claimed he had seen them take a candle below and he was sure this caused the explosion on H.M.S. Doterel.

As a result of this testimony the Admiralty carried out tests, which found that xerotiv siccativ was highly explosive and by January 1882 its use was discontinued. Thanks to John Ford the cause of the H.M.S. Doterel explosion was finally discovered.

A memorial plaque in Punta Arenas listing the 142 victims is cared for by the ex-pat community in Chile.

John Morman's sister, Martha, died on April 29th 1870 aged 19. His father died on March 25th 1882 - a couple of months after the cause of the disaster was established. The census taken on board H.M.S. Doterel on the night of April 3rd 1881 records John Morman as being born at Maker.

The Morman family originated from North Molton, Devon in 1564 and still have descendants living locally, including the author.

CHURCHYARD TALES No. 3



It's nearly 45 years since local heroine Susan Harris lost her life while saving a child from drowning. She has never been forgotten.

Susan lived with her parents, Marion and Charlie, and her sister Lynda, in the Old Rectory at Rame and held the key to lock and unlock the church – a duty she inherited from her grandmother Mrs. Gladys Vaughan - until she went off to college to train as a teacher.

It is particularly fitting, therefore, to include her story in our churchyard tales series. Her ashes are buried in the seaward side of the graveyard, behind the church which she loved and where she had planned to marry her fiancé the following autumn.

The spot is marked with an inscribed stone, which reads:

Susan Elizabeth Harris
who gave her life to save another
16th March 1966
aged 20 years

A student at St. Michael College, Salisbury, she was cycling along the city's Town Path just after 4 p.m. on Wednesday March 16th 1966. She heard that someone had fallen into the turbulent River Nadder at the Old Mill, Harnham, near Salisbury. She swam out and reached the nine year old boy grabbing hold of him but both were dragged under in the strong currents.

The boy was eventually pulled out by a 14 year old lad and survived, but Susan's body was not recovered from the weir pool until the following day by naval frogmen.

Nationwide Press coverage of the incident and subsequent inquest recorded that she told the boy "hold on to me." Susan swam a short way pulling him out of immediate danger before both were sucked under.

The only clue to Susan's identity were her suede jacket containing her name, her shoes, watch and bicycle which the police discovered nearby.

Susan was regarded as a strong swimmer "learning off the cliffs near her home" reported the Daily Express.

Her sacrifice was recognised in the London Gazette by the award of the Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct and a posthumous in memoriam testimonial awarded by the Royal Humane Society signed by its Patron the Duke of Gloucester.

The funeral service took place at her college chapel attended by family, fellow students and the Mayor and Mayoress of Salisbury. A memorial window was later installed in the end of The Old Deanery which at the time was part of the college buildings. This overlooked the college lawns and water meadows close to Susan's room.

When the college closed in 1978, the window was moved to above the cathedral entrance. It was paid for by students and the design, chosen by Susan's friends, was by John Hutton - famous for his glass engravings on the Great West Screen of Coventry Cathedral.

In April 2008 the Susan Harris Memorial Bench and Plaque was unveiled at the site of the tragedy in the presence of nearly 50 college friends and family. A copy of the plaque hangs at the back of Rame Church.

Susan's savings were used by her mother every year to pay for a child who wouldn't normally have a holiday to enjoy one in Cornwall. This was arranged through the Cornwall Children's Officer. In addition the Susan Harris Award was given each year to three children in the 9 – 10 year age group at Mount Tamar School, Plymouth, for "trying and bringing happiness." Susan had done her teaching practice there.

I am grateful to Susan's fiancé and her best friend, Victor and Helen Flute, for providing much of the above information.

CHURCHYARD TALES No 4.

On the southern seaward side of Rame Church stands a striking Celtic cross which is thought to mark the only private grave to contain an epitaph by **Rudyard Kipling**. It's the final resting place of his friend Barclay Harper Walton who died on October 12th 1931.

Nothing is known for sure about how or when they became acquainted, but certainly by 1903, as 56 letters from Kipling to Walton are in the Colt Collection at the Library of Congress in America. Other correspondence may have been lost or remains undiscovered.

Walton was a stockbroker with Ricardo and Co. of London. Several letters to him from Kipling seek advice about investments so maybe that's how they first came into contact.

Walton was a keen sailor and had homes both in Cawsand and London. Every summer he spent cruising on his 50 ton steam yacht, Bantam, using Cawsand as his base. It has been suggested he even sailed around the world on her.

Walton often supplied fresh fish to Kipling and there are many notes from him thanking Walton for the red mullet, cod, hake, etc. Sometimes Walton would put into Newhaven – the closest harbour to where Kipling lived in his 17th century house called Batemans in Sussex. On at least three occasions – 1903, 1906 and 1907 – Walton was a guest at Kipling's house. In July 1905 evidence suggests Kipling visited Cawsand and sailed on the Bantam. Four years later Kipling returned to Cawsand with his son John and spent five days there in August.

Kipling wrote in a letter to Walton: “what a wonderful land there is in Cawsand” and the following August returned with his wife, daughter Elsie and son John. Some of his sailing trips from Cawsand inspired his poetry.

On returning home Kipling wrote to Walton describing his family's stay as “a glorious time... which the children will never forget.”

When Walton died in 1931, The Times reported his estate to be valued at £93,000. As he appeared to have no family, major bequests were left to the South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital and the R.N.L.I.

Kipling was asked to write “something suitable” for Walton's gravestone and he agreed on the understanding that it would be anonymous with neither his name nor initials included.

The author would like to record her gratitude to Professor Thomas Pinney for permission to quote from his article which appeared in the Kipling Journal in December 2004 and provided most of the background to this tale. In his writing Professor Pinney points out that although Kipling is known for creating many inscriptions for monuments put up by the War Graves Commission (on which he served from its inception) and for epitaphs on other shrines and monuments both here and abroad, “I do not think he wrote many private inscriptions, such as that for Walton. I know of no other.”

So why did he distinguish Walton in this way? Professor Pinney's guess is that it was to do with the memory of Kipling's son John, tragically killed in the First World War and the shared experience of halcyon days before that terrible conflict.

Kipling once wrote to Walton: "you if anyone have a genius for friendship" and the epitaph on his tombstone echoes this: "Never failed his friends."

The grave inscription reads:

To the Memory of
BARCLAY HARPER WALTON
Benefactor of the village of Cawsand and of many charitable institutions
Who passed away 12.10.31 deeply regretted by many.

"This was a man who did not seek his ends
In trivial honours, but, content to be
Himself in all things, never failed his friends
And least of all his lifelong friend the sea."

The author is also indebted to **The Kipling Society** for their help and anyone interested in joining can contact the secretary Jane Keskar as follows: 0207 286 0194 or at jmkeskar@btinternet.com



CHURCHYARD TALE NO. 5

The large, flat fallen tombstone just to the right before the entrance porch to Rame Church records the final resting place of members of the **EDWARDS FAMILY**.



They were the 18th century squires of Rame and had a chequered history. Two of the most prominent **EDWARDS** were grandfather and grandson both named **Stephen**. On the south wall of the church is a plaque to grandfather's memory.

He was a local hero because he had been responsible for organising the rescue of the three Eddystone lighthouse keepers on **December 2nd 1755** when the wooden tower had burnt down. Stephen's heroism that night led to his death.

His **grandson Stephen** was renowned for less chivalrous reasons. He was the last Squire of Rame and was heavily involved in smuggling, for which he was imprisoned, and it led to his bankruptcy in 1819. According to local legend, his coffin was carried across the fields for burial to prevent his creditors from seizing the corpse and laying claim to his estate.

So what were the traumatic events that led to his downfall? On the moonless night of **January 30th 1788** the smuggling vessel 'Revenge' anchored off **Kingsand**. The boat, full of kegs of spirit, was owned and captained by Harry Carter – one of the notorious smuggling family from Prussia Cove on the Lizard. The kegs were man-handled up the shore and stored in the cellars of several village houses – four of them were on the Green opposite **The Rising Sun Inn**.

However, not all the cargo made it ashore as two well-armed navy patrol boats arrived on the scene. Carter cut the anchor cable and tried to escape but the navy opened fire and disabled the sails and the 'Revenge' drifted towards Kingsand beach. Some of the smugglers jumped overboard and tried to escape, the rest were captured by the Navy when they took control of the vessel.

Around noon the next day an excise officer arrived with a warrant to search houses in Kingsand and with the power to seize any contraband discovered. The inhabitants of Cawsand and Kingsand were abuzz with what had happened the previous night. When a huge cache of spirits was eventually discovered a mob of over a 100 villagers turned out and pelted the customs officers with stones and bottles. They took refuge in **The Rising Sun** where all the windows were smashed by missiles thrown by the mob which had now increased to 200. Among those taking part was **Stephen Edwards**.

He was arrested along with other local men and eventually seven of them stood trial at the Old Bailey. Smuggling trials did not take place locally as the jury were generally sympathetic to the defendants – if not engaged in smuggling themselves!

Stephen Edwards' trial took place on **June 8th 1791** and he was charged, with another man, "of unlawful and violent assault on the customs officer and another man in the execution of their duty, also for obstructing and opposing the same officer." **Edwards** was further charged with assaulting the customs officer who led the rescue party. The first offence was very serious and carried the death sentence but the celebrated **Mr. Garrow** (of recent TV fame) interceded and it was reduced to a misdemeanour.

The customs officer gave evidence that when he reached The Green at Kingsand, leading the party to rescue his colleagues taking refuge in **The Rising Sun**, he saw **Stephen Edwards**, described in court as “a gentleman”, brandishing a cutlass and he assumed that he was the ringleader. He attempted to arrest Edwards who resisted violently and in the scuffle the mob came to **Edwards’** aid enabling him to escape.

Edwards was found guilty and sentenced to three years in jail. He never recovered from the ordeal, or his financial loss as a major shareholder in the smuggling venture in which sixty kegs of spirits were seized that night by the authorities.

The **Edwards family** were also involved in the building of pilchard cellars at Polhawn – under the cliffs near the Napoleonic Polhawn Fort. **Stephen Edwards’** home, Rame Place (now the local guest house named **Rame Barton**) was sold to the Edgcumbe Family and he ended his days at Pier Cellars where his family was involved in fish processing, dying in 1825.



Above; Rame Barton Guest House which you pass on your way back down the lane from the church.

Left; The Rising Sun Public House which is in Kingsand.

I am very grateful to **Tony Carne** for allowing me to use his research and articles describing in detail the events outlined above.

"These stories are part of a series called Churchyard Tales and include some of the remarkable folk buried or commemorated at the 13th century church of St. Germanus, Rame Head.

"Acknowledgment is given to the Eddey family who provided much of the information on their ancestor.

"If you are interested in supporting the Friends of Rame Church please contact Margaret Parker on 01752 823958 or at mjrp1942@aol.com"

CHURCHYARD TALES No. 6.

JOHN ROBERT WARRE EKINS is commemorated by both a stained glass window and a gravestone bearing his name. The window is set in the east wall of the north transept of Rame Church and the saintly figure, in the central panel, emblematic of St. George, has a representation of John’s face.

John was the son of the Vicar of Rame (before the parish joined with Maker after World War 11) and died aged 18 of spinal meningitis in 1917 whilst serving with the Royal Flying Corps – the precursor of the R.A.F. At the top of the window wings are depicted, which were the emblem of the Royal Flying Corps, along with the motto “per Ardua ad Astra” – “By Struggle to the Stars.”

He is buried in a large rectangular family plot to the south of the churchyard, dominated by a huge Celtic cross.

Despite his early death, John Ekins led a short but remarkable life. He was a close friend of Noel Coward who often came to stay at Rame vicarage. John, who was a year older than Noel, was a child actor. In 1916 he played the role of Crispian in “Where the Rainbow Ends – in which Noel also took part. In addition he acted in the melodrama “The Best of Luck” with the renowned actress Madge Titheridge in London’s Drury Lane.

John Ekins and Noel Coward remained close friends until John’s death that coincidentally was from the same disease that killed Noel’s elder brother. In his autobiography, “Present Indicative” published in 1937, Noel Coward acknowledges this friendship with John.

[REDACTED]

John Ekins’ sister Christine married Donald Horatio Nelson in September 1918 but tragedy for the Ekins’ family did not end with John’s death. Christine died in childbirth in July 1920 at the age of 28 and is buried with her brother. However, her baby daughter, Mary, survived and it is thought lived at the rectory with her grandparents. She became a nun.

Her father, Donald, is also buried in the Ekins' family grave. He died in 1966 aged 83 and the display board inside the church, listing the Vicars of Rame, was given in his memory.

The third Ekins' child, a daughter Audrey, died in 1921 from T.B. at the age of 27, so the Vicar and his wife lost all three of their children in the space of four years.

In May 1947 the Bishop of Truro granted a Faculty allowing the erection of the bronze memorial tablet under the east window in the north transept in memory of the Vicar, Canon Robert Charles Warre Ekins.



John Ekins, Esme Wynne & Noel Coward.



Window central panel with John Ekins' face

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Des Taylor of Abingdon, Oxfordshire, for his help in providing much of this information and the photograph for this Churchyard Tale.

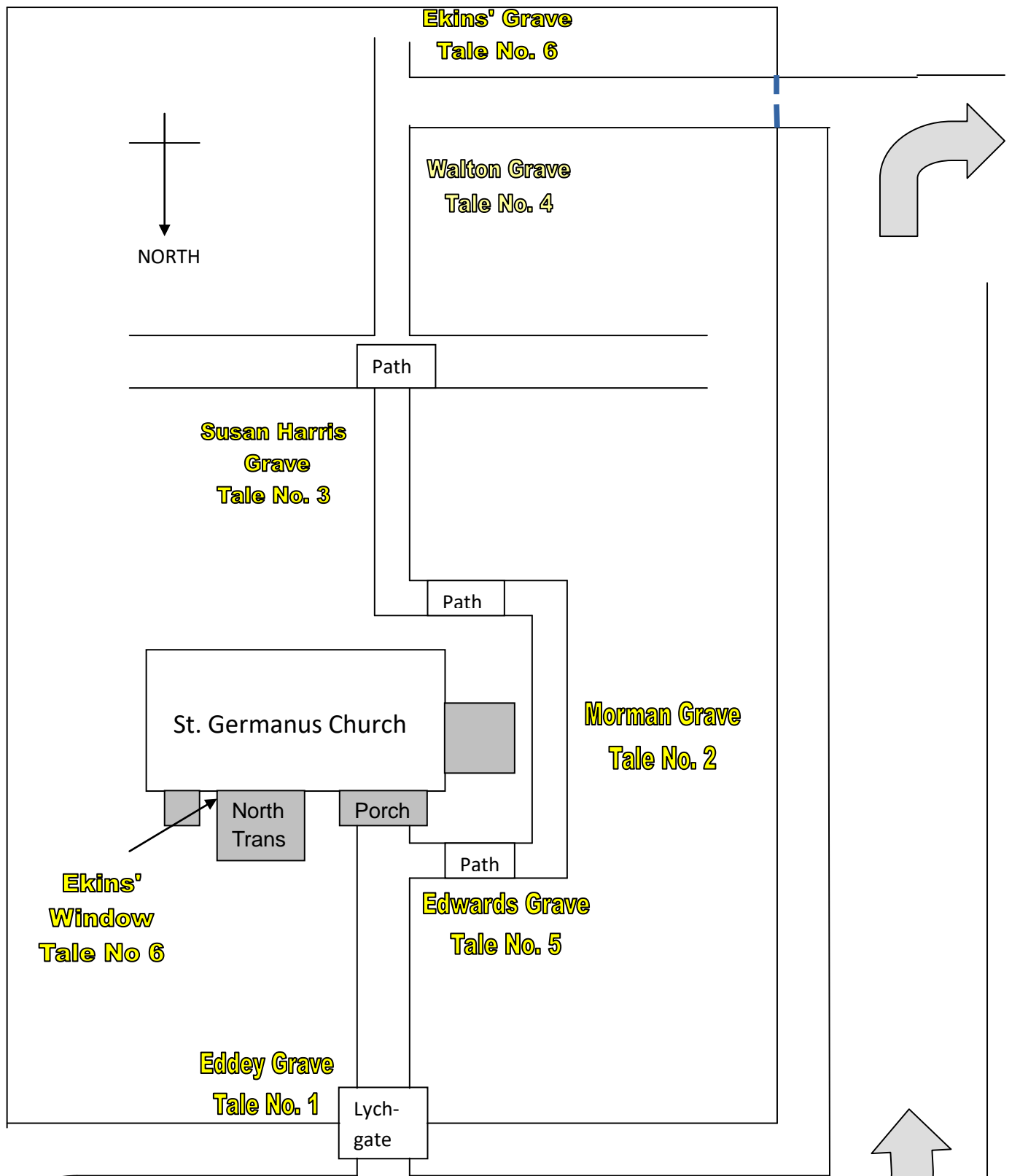


Redacted areas have been deleted, respecting original author's copyright etc.



Copies of these tales are available for sale at the rear of Rame Church, near the hand-pumped organ.

Schematic Plan of the Churchyard at St. Germanus, Rame - showing location of the graves included in 'Churchyard Tales'.



Lane to Rame Head & Coast Watch Lookout

