

## BOOK REVIEW

### MEMORIALS BY ARTISTS

By Harriet Fraser (1990)

A review by Henry Stapleton, Dean of Carlisle

It is usually the few who are thought of as able to commission a work of art. Such an opportunity is beyond the experience of the many. However, a Churchyard Memorial can be, indeed ideally should be, a work of art. The bereaved are nowadays under great pressure to buy a stone "off the rack", but for a not considerably larger sum it is possible to commission an artist or sculptor to carve a stone of an individual design.

One of the main deterrents is that a client does not know how to set about it. While one hopes that the Churchyards Handbook may be the definitive book on churchyards, something smaller and handier is needed for this particular aspect. Here, in a delightfully printed book Mrs Fraser has provided ideas for memorials, though I am sure she would agree that a bird bath or folly is not appropriate in a churchyard.

The text outlines the possibilities of design, of material and of wording, and names of artists. The illustrations provide a "back-up". When producing the second edition of the Churchyards Handbook, Peter Burman and I were under pressure to produce a sort of copy book of accepted designs. We resisted this as churchyards are infinite in variety, and we wanted to promote as much freedom (within limits) as possible. However, in this book is a selection of memorials which should provide inspiration to both the commissioner and the designer.

Of particular interest to me are the variations for the cremated remains tablet. These stone squares have sadly become a stepping-stone to the crazy-paving appearance of some churchyards. The circular alternative with incorporated inscription seems an ideal solution. Here, too, are suggestions for epitaphs, and the principles of their composition – honour the dead, comfort the living and inform posterity. There are ideas, too, for varying the excessive repetition of "in loving memory". Elaborate inscriptions seem nowadays to be transferred to the In Memoriam columns of the local newspaper. The combination of numerals and letters for the day and the month is not easy artistically. I applaud the simple use of the year of birth and death. I do not think we are yet in a position to accept the asterisk for birth and the ampersand for death, as on continental gravestones.

I warmly commend this book. It will, I hope, be available to inspire better designs in the churchyard and further the principles so ably inspired by the late lamented Chancellor Graham Routledge, where the suggested rules specifically state "Applications for specially designed and appropriate memorials will be sympathetically considered by the Chancellor."