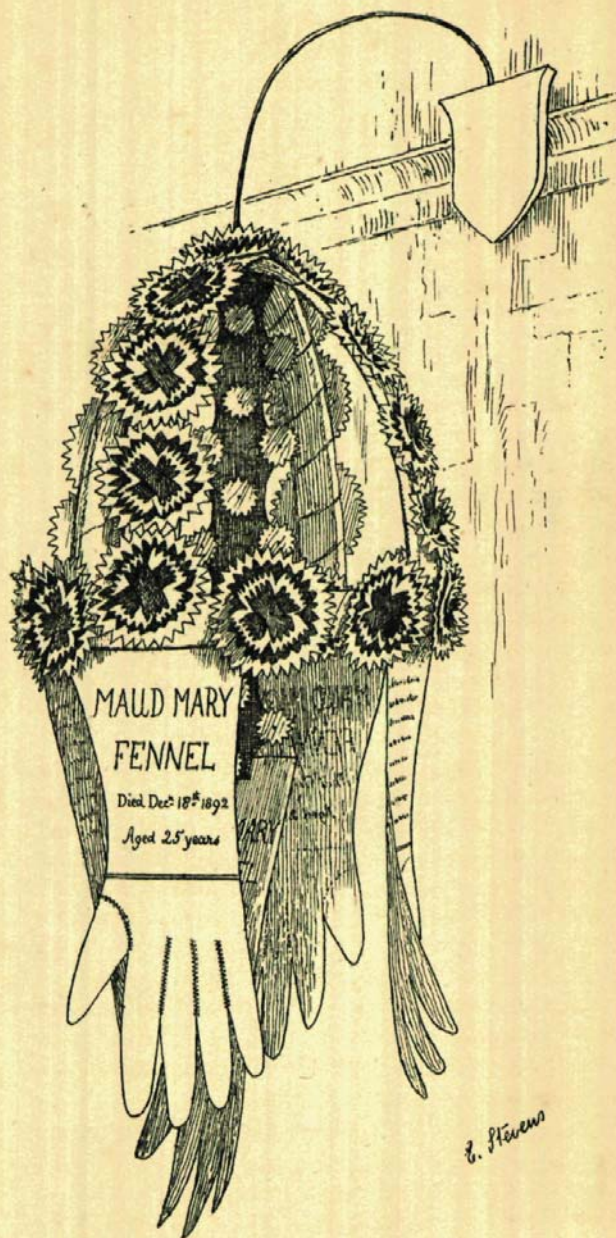


HANTS FIELD CLUB AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

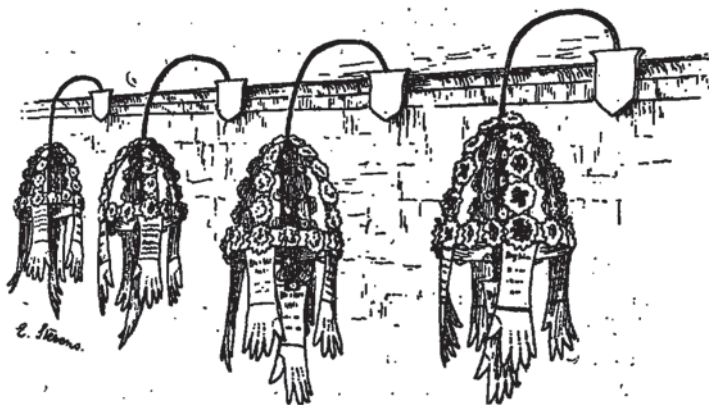


FUNERAL GARLANDS.
ABBOTTS ANN CHURCH, HANTS.

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FUNERAL GARLANDS AT ABBOTT'S ANN.

BY THE REV. G. W. MINNS, L.L.B., F.S.A.



"Now the low beams with paper garlands hung
In memory of some village youth or maid."

The church at Abbott's Ann was visited by the Hants Field Club and Archæological Society in June, 1899. The sacred edifice, of the Early Georgian period, is said to have been built by Thomas Pitt, Governor of Madras (ob. 1726), possessor of the famous Pitt diamond, whose son Robert was the father of the first Lord Chatham and grandfather of the famous William Pitt. The building has no architectural features worthy of note, but is of great interest as containing a number of Virgin Crowns or Funeral Garlands affixed to the wall plate as above shewn, high up, on either side of the nave, and the parish is remarkable for the survival of some curious customs connected therewith.

It is still the practice at Abbotts Ann on the decease of a young member of the church, whose reputation is unblemished, to provide a garland similar to that given in the accompanying illustration, drawn by Miss Stevens from a photograph by Mr. W. J. Gradidge, of Andover. This

garland, which was taken down for the purpose, measures about 15 inches in height and the hoop 10 inches in diameter. The four outer gloves have written on one side only, the name and age of the deceased with the date of death alternating with verses from a favourite hymn. The central one has the name, etc. on one side and poetry on the other.

The garland of which we give an illustration is like the others composed of a thin flexible frame of wood, arranged in the form of a crown, covered with paper and ornamented with paper rosettes.

The custom in connection with these garlands as at present practised at Abbott's Ann, we are informed by the rector, the Rev. J. B. Fenwick, is as follows. Two girls habited in white dresses with white hoods walk before the coffin and carry such a garland on a small rod to the church and the grave. After the funeral it is placed near the west end of the church, so that all who enter on the following Sunday pass under it and it is finally attached to the wall plate by a light iron rod affixed to a small escutcheon, bearing the name and date of the person commemorated. From the hoop depend cut papers in the form of gloves as above described, suggesting a challenge to impugn the character of the deceased. Of such garlands thirty-nine are here suspended in the church, and some have fallen through age and decay. Of those that remain the earliest bears the date 1750, and the most recent commemorates Sarah Jane Dance, aged 25, 1896. Most of the garlands are in memory of young women, but the other sex is not excluded, some bear mens' names, among them may be noted John Redman, aged 19, 1823 and James Perratt, aged 33, 1842. The present church was built in 1716, and some garlands of earlier date taken from the old church formerly existed in a cupboard in the vestry, but have now disappeared.

This curious and poetical custom prevailed elsewhere in Hampshire. Gilbert White in his *Antiquities of Selborne*, describing the parish church says:—"I remember when its beams were hung with garlands in honour of young women of the parish reported to have died virgins, and recollect to have seen the clerk's wife cutting in white paper the

resemblance of gloves and ribbons to be twisted into knots and roses to decorate these memorials of chastity." He also tells us that in the church of the adjoining parish of Farringdon, where he officiated as curate for a quarter of a century, many garlands of this sort still remained.

Such garlands were formerly to be seen in many of the churches in Derbyshire, and in 1853, an inhabitant of Ilkeston records that more than fifty of these mementos hung over the piers. On the testimony of Anna Seward (ob. 1809), whose lines stand at the head of this article, the custom existed in her native village of Eyam. Dr. Cox¹ tells us there are at present only three churches in the country where they are found. At Ashford-in-the-Water five such garlands, much dilapidated, remain suspended from the roof of the north aisle. At Matlock six, almost falling to pieces, are preserved in the vestry, others that were fairly sound were sold to a private collector. At South Winfield, the only Derbyshire Church in which an example is found suspended, one is preserved which was carried at the funeral of Ann Kendall, who died in 1745.²

The *Golden Penny* of June 30, 1900, contains a note and illustration by Mr. G. H. Archer, of "Virgins' Garlands" at Minsterly, in Shropshire, which are thus described:—"At the west end of the church hang these curious objects, seven in number. A romantic tradition gives the history of these wreaths. They are said to be to the memory of women who, having been betrothed in their youth, have lost their intended husbands by death before they were united, but remained faithful to their early loves and led a single life for

¹ The Churches of Derbyshire, by Dr. Cox, 1875.

² On reading a notice of the funeral garland at South Winfield, says Dr. Cox, a correspondent of the *Derbyshire Times* communicates some particulars of the person in whose memory it hung. It was carried at the funeral of Ann Kendall, who having loved not wisely but too well, died May 14th, 1745, of a broken heart. Her seducer was shortly afterwards passing the churchyard and the bells commenced tolling, which so startled his horse that it fell and threw the rider, whose neck was broken by the fall. The writer gives details and adds to my knowledge there has been one attempt to remove the garland, money having been offered for its purchase, but I am glad to say it was rejected.

the sake of the loved and lost. The wreaths and gloves are hung upon a stave bearing at the end a heart-shaped escutcheon on which the initials and date are inscribed. The first of the seven wreaths bears the date 1554, and the last that of 1751. Some years ago the wreaths were removed from their original positions and grouped together in the corner where they now hang." We question the earlier date but their purpose was doubtless the same as at Abbott's Ann where these memorials exist in much greater number than can be found elsewhere, and the continued observance of the practices connected therewith is probably unique.

The existence of similar customs may be traced to very early times. The Romans and other heathens upon the occasion of funerals used the cypress, which, it is believed, being once cut never flourish again, whereas Christians employed flowers, an emblem of purity and cheerful hope. In the primitive church it was usual to place crowns of flowers at the heads of deceased virgins, and in after ages the same feeling has obtained over the Christian world. The custom is alluded to by many of the Fathers and old writers.

There is a passage in Shakespere, where meddlesome commentators have perverted the text which is illustrated by a knowledge of the use of funeral garlands. The words are found in the play of Hamlet (Act v., sc. i.) where the priests enter in funeral procession with the corpse of Ophelia, and one says:—

"She should in ground unsanctified have lodged
Till the last trumpet; for charitable prayers,
Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her;
Yet here she is allowed her virgin *crants*,
Her maiden strewments and the bringing home
Of bell and burial."

Such is the reading of the quarto of 1603 but the editors of the folios changed *crants* to "rites," and Warburton suggests "chants." The word is from the German, *kranz*, a garland, and although puzzling to Malone and other commentators would be perfectly intelligible to Shakespere's audience. The editors of Hamlet (*Clarendon Press Series*) tell us that no other instance has been found of this word in English, but Dr. Murray shows it was employed before the time of Shakespere and gives a quotation from Robert

Green's *A Quip for an upstart Courtier*, 1592. That these garlands were originally composed of natural flowers we may fairly conclude, and Sir Thomas Browne in his *Miscellany Tracts* discourses on *Garlands and Coronary or Garland Plants*, of which he gives a catalogue.¹ The use of artificial flowers according to the Rev. Mackenzie Walcott did not take place till the commencement of the last century.²

It is pleasing to find that this beautiful custom connected with funeral garlands lingers in the county of Hants. The simple tribute of affection is greatly to be preferred to the modern excessive expenditure on flowers at funerals, not to mention the hideous custom of placing upon graves glass shades containing artificial flowers and memorial cards. The introduction of these unsightly objects robs our churchyards of their peaceful charm, causing them to resemble the untidy and far less beautiful cemeteries of the continent. The unsuitable character of these tawdry memorials and the inconvenience which arises in connection with them call for a prohibitory fee or some restraining action at the present time. Without wishing to interfere with a desire which is prompted by the affection of sorrowing hearts to mark the graves of their loved ones, it might be suggested that some other kind of memorial of more suitable and less perishable character could be obtained at very little increased cost.

In pleasing contrast with modern tasteless grave ornaments of foreign origin, we would compare the simple garlands here described, wrought by loving hands, hanging in their place, at Abbott's Ann, memorials of the departed, suggesting quiet and holy thoughts. We cordially endorse the wish expressed by Miss Seward in the poem already referred to, in which she describes the village church of Eyam at the close of the eighteenth century,

"Long may these wreaths funereal spread,
Simple memorials of the dead."

¹ *Sir Thomas Browne's Works*, Vol. iii., p. 203. Bohn's ed.

² *Notes and Queries*. 5th Series, i., 12.