

NATHANIEL COTTON GRAVES

Restoration of churchyard memorials to members of the Cotton family

The extensive churchyard provides the setting of the grade II* listed church of St Peter. The closed churchyard is maintained by St Albans City & District Council and is well-used both as urban green space and for commemoration, worship and outreach. The historic churchyard has been restored and revitalised over recent years to create a Living Churchyard, offering a space for reflection and a place where wildlife can flourish.

Background - Nathaniel Cotton

Nathaniel Cotton was an 18th century doctor and poet. He was a pioneer in the humane treatment of mental health patients, establishing his own asylum in College Street where a Blue Plaque has recently been erected. Among his patients was the Berkhamsted-born poet and Anglican hymn writer William Cowper. The Conservation 50 group, in partnership with St Peter's Church, has begun a project to raise awareness and funds to restore the graves of Nathaniel Cotton and other members of his family in St Peter's Churchyard and to add information about him. The group has contacted one of Mr Cotton's descendants who is supportive of the project and also has support from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.



Grave restoration

The Cotton family graves near the south-east corner of the church are marked by simple inscribed stone slabs which are not separately listed. The memorial to Nathaniel Cotton is the centre one of three. All the stones are covered in lichens and the one at the southern end of the group has a crack across one corner, which is filled with moss and grass. The proposals are:

1. Carefully clean the inscribed part of the memorial to Nathaniel Cotton to make the inscription more legible.
2. If needed, arrange for the inscription to be re-cut by hand by a memorial stonemason or letter cutter.
3. Repair and re-set the southernmost stone and, if needed, the other two stones, removing moss and weeds but not lichen.
4. Create an 18 inch border around the memorial, which will be filled with gravel, to protect the stones from mower damage.
5. Establish a low metal railing to protect the proposed gravel border.
6. Install a memorial plaque including a quote from William Cowper praising the work of Nathaniel Cotton.