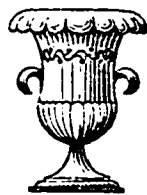


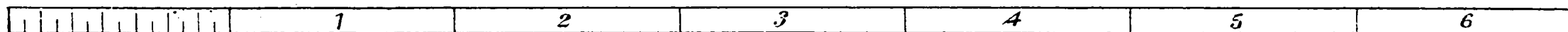
OUR OLD BURIAL GROUNDS.

“ A church-yard ——
Besprinkled o’er with green and countless graves,
And mossy tombs of unambitious pomp,
Decaying into dust again.” R. MONTGOMERY.

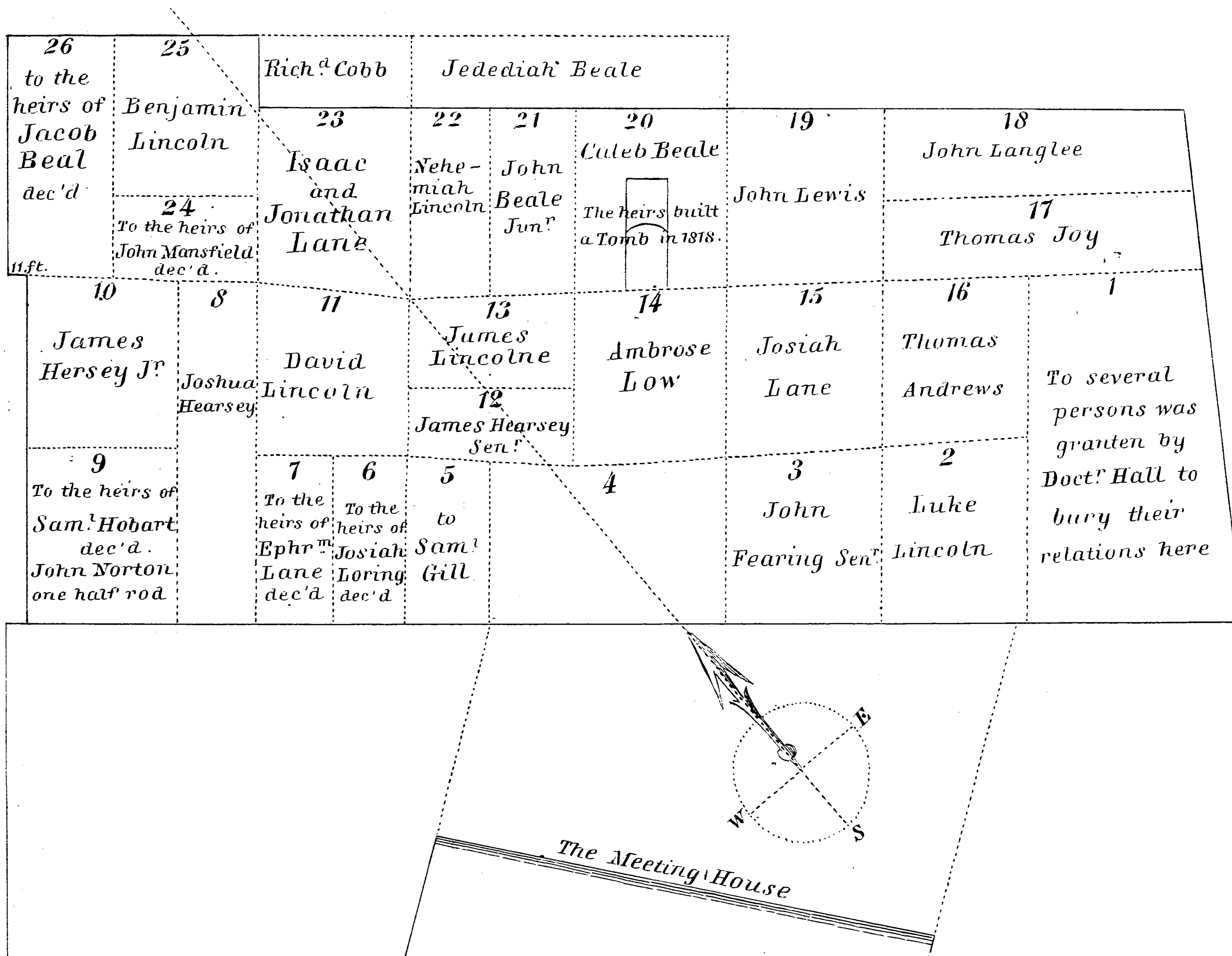


HINGHAM:
PUBLISHED FOR THE CEMETERY FAIR,
Held Wednesday, Aug. 17, 1842.

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A Plan of the **BURYING PLACE** sold by **JOSHUA TUCKER** to persons herein named.



OUR OLD BURIAL GROUNDS.

TO ONE who remembers the condition of our principal burial-ground, ten, or even five years since, it cannot but be a source of pleasant reflection to observe how great a change has been wrought in it in so short a time. The spot once so dreary and desolate, and in which neglect and decay held undisputed dominion, has become the object of the fostering care of the whole village. Nature and art are made to vie with each other in adding new beauty to the place, which was, till recently, never visited except by the mournful procession following some new tenant to the grave, or—in melancholy contrast—a troop of reckless school-boys who found it a convenient play-ground.

It was a cow-pasture in my younger days. The boys from the neighboring school fought over again with snow-balls, in the old fort, the Indian battles, and played push-pin upon the flat tomb-stones. The merry laugh and joyous shout echoed among the tombs in the pleasant summer evenings; and the earth gave back a hollow sound to the light and rapid tread of gay and thoughtless youth as they ran, in their games, over the graves of past generations. Heaps of broken coffins lay under the dilapidated fences, and mingled with them were fragments of shrouds and grave-clothes, and decaying bones. There were no associations of awe, none even of solemnity, connected with the place; and the reverence for the dead, which seems to be almost an instinct of humanity, was with us so far forgotten, that their final resting-place received but little care and less respect.

The absence of a superstitious dread of church-yards is not a subject of regret. But it is well to cultivate

and indulge the natural feeling of solemnity and self-abasement that creeps over us when we stand upon the little mounds covering the heaps of dust that once were living men and women, clothed in strength and beauty, loved as brothers or sisters, or filling the tender offices of parents; actuated by selfish or generous sentiments; struggling with poverty, or "bearing blushing honors thick upon them;" harassed with little evils, or striving hopelessly with many sorrows. The mortal tenements of immortal spirits have returned here to their original elements; the great and honored, the obscure and despised, here, at least, are equal, and have yielded the same implicit obedience to the law—"dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." It is a fitting place then to reflect upon the littleness of our ambition; our petty strifes for wealth and power; our sordid cares and vain pursuits; how trifling are our lives; how fleeting life itself.

We must, like all nature, submit to that change which men call death: why childishly grieve for that which is inevitable? Believing that it is the body only which perisheth, and that those have gone before us have found a happier home; why should we drop a single tear upon the lifeless remains where decay has already begun its work? But when there lies before us the form of one whom we have loved and cherished, one in whose being our own seemed merged, and feel that the beating of that heart is stilled, that the moving power of that beautiful mechanism has departed; that here only is a mass of lifeless clay; that the intellect and affections that gave to it a beauty above all else of earth animate it no longer; we shrink and tremble at the mysterious presence of Almighty power; we remember the loved looks and tones of the living; that in joy and in sorrow he has been one with us; that the kindest feelings of the heart, the noblest thought, the self-denying actions, have been, for long years, lavished upon us; that now, the material bond that bound us together is broken; that the dark and heavy earth shall cover him from our sight for ever; and our stoicism and cold philosophy give way before the strong instincts of our nature, and we cry like David over the body of his child, "Would to God that I had died for thee!"

A feeling of respect and reverence for the dead is as natural as a love for the living: in all ages and countries

their obsequies have been attended with some peculiar rites, and a regard established by custom, but arising from the deepest and purest feelings of the heart, has been paid to the place of their interment. The most stupendous works of ancient art are thought by many to have been erected solely as mausoleums. The Greeks and Romans paid the last honors, or the last tribute of affection to their friends or relatives, with ceremonies intricate, and puerile they may seem to us, but which had nevertheless a deep and solemn meaning, as they originated in the peculiar, and in many of its characteristics, the beautiful mythology of the age. They lavished their wealth and their arts upon the tombs of the dead, or the urns that contained their ashes; and the latter people deemed a century's wandering upon the banks of the river Styx to be the lot of him for whom no pious hand performed the last duty that man requires of his brother man. The Aborigines of North America buried with their friends, provisions and equipments for their support in the long journey to the happy hunting grounds; and they sometimes placed the living infant upon the bosom of its dead mother, esteeming it unnatural to separate the helpless being from its kindest protector; and wishing perhaps to solace her by the companionship of her child. The Chinese burn nightly little tapers before the images of their ancestors, and the graves of their friends, as memorials of respect, and scatter over the latter, bits of gilt and silvered papers, as emblems of grateful offerings to the departed spirits. So in every stage of human society do we find the same proof existing that the reverence for the dead, and the consequent sanctity that invests their burial place, is not dependent solely on any conventional customs, but is deep-seated in the nature of man. Men have always felt the difficulty of considering abstractly the spirit, the attributes, the character of the dead, apart from the body that served, for a time, to dimly shadow them. And though calling ourselves a christian and civilized people, possessing what is believed to be the revealed word of God, and knowing that the spirit is immortal; it does not therefore follow, that we shall differ from the savage and the heathen in the impulsive outbreak of natural feeling that would lead us to hallow the spot where rests the cold unconscious dust of a parent or a child, a brother or a sister. When indeed we have arrived at that state of perfection to which

the teachings of Jesus may carry us, we may look upon the body only as the sepulchre of the spirit, and forget the mortal that has put on immortality; but till that time comes, we must and shall be governed by this touching proof of human frailty. It is fitting then that everything revolting to the senses should be removed from our grave-yards; that they should be divested as far as may be of all associations that would tend to render the thought of death unpleasant, and force us to forget the lesson that it teaches. A solemn serenity should reign over the place; a soothing influence should hover about it, to still the vain ambition and turbulent passions of the living man.

It has been deemed sufficient, in years that have past, to give to the dead a decent burial, and raising a stone to mark the spot where they lie, to leave the imagination to dwell upon it as a great charnel-house, in which there could be nothing that might appeal to our better nature, to our love of beauty, to our sympathies; where all were destined

“To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot.”

But new feelings and sentiments have taken the place of our former coldness and indifference. We no longer shun the church-yard as a place of gloom, but seek it rather as a spot sacred indeed to the memory of the departed, to whose manes we would offer as incense the perfume of flowers, and the music of the waving trees. In many places in New England, spots are selected for burial-grounds with an especial reference to their natural beauty, and no efforts are spared to add to it by the embellishments of art. It is true that in cities attention has long been bestowed in ornamenting grounds already in use, so far as it could be in the contracted space the living could spare, but in the country they have been left in a state of sad neglect; and as their nearness to the church, and the cheapness of the land, (consequent from its barrenness,) seem to have been the only points considered in their location, they are often entirely incapable of improvement. Where that has been the case, new grounds have been chosen. We too might have found many places of great natural beauty, that, with little expense, might have been made far more attractive than our present yard, but at a sacrifice, to a native of Hingham, of many associations connected with the past.

The beautiful and extensive prospect the hill commands is its only natural advantage. But the want of all others serves to render the more conspicuous the great change that has been brought about by the taste and untiring diligence of the gentlemen who compose the committee ; who have had to contend with a barren soil, to create out of disorder, order and beauty, where all had been left to chance and neglect. And the interest the community have taken in their labors, is evident from the improvements made at the expense of individuals. Instead of dilapidated fences, hedge-rows and neat pickets enclose the ground. Roads and winding-paths are laid out in every direction. Old tombs are repairing and repaired. Marble and granite monuments are erected ; and conspicuous above them all, rises the simple and appropriate shaft to the memory of the first settlers of the town. Trees are planted singly and in rows, that in time the now bleak and barren hill may become a pleasant grove ; and flowers are blooming upon the graves of parents and of children. The whole aspect of the place is changed. The young, who may have no melancholy associations with the spot, respect now both it and the feelings of others too much to indulge there in boyish games or boisterous gayety ; while for those, to whom every new visit is but a renewal of grief, there is nothing on the hill itself that may not be suggestive rather of cheerful thought, than of the discordant reflections which in its former condition almost necessarily occurred to all.

Our town is one of the oldest in the state ; and although few records remain of the character of its first settlers, we know that they were driven by the same persecutions from their native land, and encountered similar perils and hardships with the other pilgrims to this "wilderness of straits." It is well for us to cherish their memory, and to reverence the "places that know them no more." They and their children built, in less than half a century from their arrival, the second church, which still stands, and I trust will stand so long as Time will spare it ; and some of those who first worshipped there, rest in its shadow. The history of the church is familiar to every one. A slight sketch of some of the objects of interest connected with the Past in the churchyard, may not perhaps be deemed unworthy of perusal.

We learn from Hobart's Diary, that the first meeting was held in the new meeting-house in January, 1682.

Although the old house was taken down about that time, there is no reason for supposing that the people changed their burial-ground at the same time they did their place of worship. Upon the oldest stone in the yard we now use is the following inscription :

Here lyes buried
y^e body of Capt. John
Thaxter, aged 61 years,
died y^e 14th, 1686-7.

But this stone no doubt came from the old burial-ground, and was used there as a head-stone. Mr. Caleb Bates found it some years since under a corn-barn upon the premises of the late Mr. Jairus Leavitt; the late Mr. Henry Thaxter had it removed to the top of the Thaxter tomb, which was built by Samuel, the son of this Capt. John, in 1732. It there remained till quite recently, when Mr. A. W. Thaxter had it inserted in a free-stone slab, and reërected upon his own lot. It is now placed beyond the reach of ordinary accident; the only one of the old monuments from the first church-yard that is so.

Hobart's Diary says: "March 14, 1687, Capt. John Thaxter died suddenly in his barn." He was the son of Thomas Thaxter, to whom land was granted in 1638, and was nine years old when the town was settled.

There was till recently another stone, a heavy slab, in this yard, that occupied probably a conspicuous place in the old one. It was taken thence many years ago by the late Mr. Elisha Cushing to the Plain, to be placed upon a tomb there, but for some reason was not used for that purpose. It was afterward given by some other member of the Cushing family to the late Mr. Thomas Andrews, on whose tomb it has since remained, until recently removed to make room for the erection of a marble monument. It is now a hearth-stone in the Hingham Dye-house, having been purchased by the proprietors of that establishment for that purpose. The inscription upon it is nearly illegible; and in its present situation nothing can be made out but the name and date.

Engraven upon this tablet were the names of Daniel Cushing and Lidiah his wife. They came to this country in 1638, in the same ship, ("the shipp called the Diligent of Ipswich,") and were married in 1644. Her maiden name was Gilman. Mr. Caleb Bates tells me that in his younger days, he has heard repeated an epi-

taph that was also inscribed upon the stone, but is now obliterated. He only remembers that the first two lines were in reference to their coming together "to this land," and here they "joined hand in hand." It ended, perhaps, with the pious anticipation of spending an eternity together.

It is not impossible that the remains of Matthew Cushing and his wife Nazereth rested under this stone also. But whether this be so or not, it is certain that Justice Cushing, who died in 1700, and his wife, who died in 1688, were buried beneath it. It is somewhat surprising, that none of their numerous descendants have preserved this memento from destruction.

A head-stone now in possession of the widow of the late Captain Laban Hersey, is probably the oldest in Hingham, and records the death of one who died only thirty-seven years after the first settlement of the town in 1635. It was used many years ago as a door-step at the house now occupied by Mr. Siders, near the old burial-ground. Mr. Thomas Barnes, a descendant of him whose death it commemorates, finding it there, had it removed to where it now lies. The inscription upon it is perfectly distinct, excepting the day of the month, which appears to have been effaced by a blow. It is as follows :

Thomas Barnes
aged 70 years
died (29th) day of
November, 1672.

He was the ancestor of all among us who bear his name. Land was granted to him in 1637. Ought not a conspicuous place to be given to this monument in our Cemetery?

There is no stone or monument in the yard to the memory of any one individual of the first settlers, excepting that generally known as the "Ministers' tomb" in which are the remains of the Rev. Peter Hobart, who was no doubt originally interred in the old church-yard. Dr. Gay built this tomb, (now belonging to his descendants here) probably about the middle of the last century and had removed to it the remains of Mr. Hobart, those of his successor, the Rev. John Norton, and of his son Captain John Norton. The inscription was placed upon it, I presume, by the direction of Colonel Jotham Gay, a son of the Doctor, and not by the Doctor himself, as is

usually supposed. It is nearly illegible; perhaps entirely so to one unaccustomed to read it. It is as follows:

IN MEMORY OF
Rev. Peter Hobart, who died January
20th, 1679, in the 75th year of his
age, and 53d of his ministry, 9 years
of which he spent in Hingham,
Great Britain, and 44 in Hingham,
Massachusetts.

ALSO,
Rev. John Norton, who died October
3d, 1716, in the 66th year of his age,
and 38th of his ministry.
And Capt. John Norton his son, who
died August 5th, 1721, in the 41st
year of his age.

ALSO,
Rev. Ebenezer Gay, D. D. and Jerusha
his wife. She died August 19th, 1783,
in the 85th year of her age. He died
March 18th, 1787, in the 91st year of
his age, and 69th of his ministry.

There is a slight inaccuracy in the number of the years of Mr. Hobart's ministry, as it was a few days short of forty-three years and five months.

These three clergymen were successively Pastors of the first church during a period of about a century and a half. Mr. Hobart, however, had, in the early part of his ministry, a colleague, Mr. Robert Peck, who was "ordained clerk" November 28th, 1638. As he remained here but a short period, and little is known of him, it may not be considered irrelevant to add, in this connection, what is said of him by Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia*:

"This light, (Robert Peck,) having been by the persecuting prelates put under a bushel, was, by the good Providence of Heaven, fetched away into New England, about 1638, when the good people of our Hingham did rejoice in the light for a season. But within two or three years the invitation of his friends at Hingham in England persuaded him to a return unto them; when being, though a great person for stature, yet a greater for spirit, he was greatly serviceable for the good of the church."

We find in Hobart's Diary that "October 27th, 1641, Mr. Peck sailed for England." He was here, then, two years and eleven months.

As Daniel Cushing was buried in the old church-yard as late as 1700, there can hardly be a doubt that the hill

was not used as a place of interment at that time. We have no other means of ascertaining when it was so used than the dates upon the head-stones; and this must be attended with some uncertainty, as many doubtless were buried and no monument raised over them to mark the spot where they were laid. The oldest that I find was erected to the memory of Ephraim Marsh, who died in January, 1708. There are one or two others dated the same year; and with occasional intervals in those immediately succeeding the dates occur thenceforward regularly. If this conjecture is correct, the burial-ground has been such for one hundred and thirty-three years; and the old church-yard was not deserted for twenty-six years after the meeting-house was taken down.

That part of the yard directly behind and nearest to the meeting-house was the first used, in accordance with the custom brought from England, of burying the dead under the walls of the church. There may be found the oldest stones, and upon some of them are the names, now extinct among us, of Chubbuck, Hawke, Buck, and Langlee. Land was granted to Thomas Chubbuck in 1635; to Matthew Hawke in 1638; and to James Buck the same year. The name of Langlee (Langley, Langle, or Longley) occurs a few years later in the records. These stones were, no doubt, erected to some of their immediate descendants. The parents of Madam Derby were buried here. She was of the last-mentioned family; but her remains were deposited in the Gay tomb. In the same part of the yard may be found others of the names of the first settlers, of whom we have living representatives.

But we gain from the town records more certain information. In 1635, five acres of land were granted to Thomas Gill, on the east side of Batchelor (now Main) street, which probably included the whole of the present burial-ground. By the deed in the Appendix,* it seems that this hill afterward belonged to Dr. Hall, and was sold by him to Joshua Tucker, who conveyed a portion of it to certain persons, to be used as a burial-ground. This is the earliest authentic information that can be had respecting it. By the map of the land annexed to the deed, it seems, however, that a certain portion, — the southernmost corner, — had been previously granted by Dr. Hall to several persons, in which to bury their rela-

* See Appendix, Note A.

tions. In this spot is found the oldest head-stone, that of Ephraim Marsh, 1708, before mentioned.

It is certain, then, that the hill was the accustomed burial-ground as early as 1718; but the grave-stones are, I think, the more certain guide, which would make it so some years earlier. Indeed, if deeds are the only testimony admitted, the ground granted by Joshua Tucker is the only burial-ground the people of this part of the town have had till Mr. Thaxter gave them one; and although this is in truth the fact, we should not therefore decide at what date the remainder of the hill was used as a place of interment.

There is not, to my knowledge, any record or tradition that will fix the exact time when the people at the west end of the town found it convenient to have a burial-ground of their own; nor is it a matter of much moment, as some, and perhaps all the bodies interred in the first yard, were removed, many years since, to the one now used. The former, now occupied as a garden, is a few rods south-west of the latter, and is remembered by the older people, who have all their lives resided in that neighborhood, as a dreaded spot in their childhood, because an Indian was buried there; one of a family, perhaps, that lived a century ago, in a wigwam near Bear swamp.

The yard is a small one, and has little of interest in it, except to the friends of those buried there. The oldest stone is dated eighty-nine years ago. I give it verbatim for its singularity.

Here lyes the body
of young Samuel
worn out with study
into dust it fell. who
did in knowledge and in
uirtue shine a learned
scholar and a good diuine
he departed this life
in hopeful prrospect
of a better in y^e 21st of
May 1752 ætatis
XXII. Samuel French
Bachelor of Arts.

But a better epitaph has been told me by an old lady who was not born till nearly twenty years after his death. She well remembers his room, which, with affectionate care, was long kept in the condition in which he left it, and was called by the children of the household, "Uncle

Sam's Study."—He resided with his father, in the only two-story house now standing on the Weymouth road beyond Fort Hill. Another old person relates this anecdote of him. Too modest to preach his first sermon in his native town, he accepted an invitation to do so in an obscure parish in Scituate. On returning in the evening, he met Dr. Shute, (then a young man,) who inquired how he had succeeded in his duties of the day? His reply was, "I did not wait to see." "Such modesty," added the narrator, "is not common in our day."

The following is also well worthy of being recorded, both for the epitaph, and because it preserves the memory of a worthy couple, who lived together as man and wife for more than half a century—died within a few hours of each other—and were buried in the same grave:

In memory of Mr.
Thomas Waterman and
Mrs. Mary his wife.

She died December
y^e 20 1781
in the 72 year
of her age.

He died December
y^e 21 1781
in the 80 year
of his age.

Our peaceful graves shall keep
Our bones till that sweet day,
We wake from our long sleep,
And leave our beds of clay.

There is also a group of stones having upon them the name of Ward. Upon that of the one who last died is the following epitaph, that tells us in "mournful numbers," in more than one sense, that he was the last of his race:

Alas the last of all
This family are gone
All by consumptive
Sickness were cut down.

They were probably the descendants of Samuel Ward, to whom land was granted 1637.

The burial-ground upon Little Plain has been much neglected; indeed with the exception of fencing it in, nothing apparently has been done to it for many years, other than to bury the dead there, and place over them a slate or marble monument, according to the fashion of the day. The tombs are, some of them, in ruins, and many of the head-stones are so sunken in the ground as to render it impossible to tell to whose memory, or

when, they were erected. Some of them perhaps are very old, as the yard was probably used in the seventeenth century; but we must wait until the improvements* now contemplated, are effected, ere we can read upon its monuments the history of those who have there returned to dust.

I find but two stones dated earlier than 1700, but both are in good preservation. The oldest was erected to the memory of Deacon John Leavitt, who died November 20th, 1691, aged 83. He was the first of the name who came to Hingham, and a grant of land was made to him in 1636. There is a tradition respecting him, mentioned by Mr. Lincoln in his history, in the Leavitt family, that he was an indented apprentice in England, but ran away from his master, and escaped to this country. He had a son Israel, and the other stone was erected doubtless to commemorate him, as it bears the name of Israel Leavitt, who died Dec. 26th, 1699, aged 48 years.†

The grave-yard upon High street at Great Plain is in remarkably good order, but is susceptible of much improvement by the addition of more trees and shrubbery. It bears the marks of greater antiquity than any other in town; some of the graves, which I presume are the oldest, have, at the head and foot, rough blocks of granite, and on the grave itself a slab of the same stone is laid—a peculiarity that does not exist in either of the other yards. Upon the head-stones inscriptions are engraved in the rudest manner, of none of which can I make any thing, except upon one the date 1689. The

* Since the above was written, the improvements alluded to have been commenced, and much has already been done. The republication of these articles for the Ladies' Fair not having been contemplated till a late day, the writer had no opportunity of visiting the yard, to procure any additional information from the reërected monuments.

† It was asserted by a writer in the Patriot, that "Israel Leavitt died in Hingham, December 24th, 1690." The grave-stone, in the absence of other evidence, is more to be relied on than the bare assertion of any living man; according to that, Israel Leavitt died December 26th, 1699, though the last 9 appears to be a 0, except upon close scrutiny. If however he died at the age of 45 years, it may be that neither date (1690 or 1699) is correct, as according to Hobart's Diary, he was baptized in the year 1648. He must therefore have died in 1696, supposing him to have been baptized in the first year of his life.

following are the inscriptions upon the head-stones of a man and wife, the last, the oldest in the yard :

Here lyeth
buried y^e body
of George
Russell
aged 99 years
died y^e 26th
of May
1694.

Here lyeth
buried y^e body
of Jane Russell
wife to George
Russell aged
about 83 years
died February
23d 1688.

This, doubtless, is the same George Russell, to whom land was granted in Hingham, in 1636, and who, Mr. Deane says in the "Family Sketches" in his History of Scituate, bought in 1646, the house, land and mill now known as Stockbridge's Mill in that town, but afterward returned to Hingham. Deane, however, supposes that he died before 1668, because his youngest son was put under guardianship in that year. He had two wives; the first came with him probably from England; by her he had two sons, the eldest of whom was slain in the bloody battle of Rehoboth, the most diastrous in Philip's War, being one of the company of eighteen from Scituate, of whom fifteen were killed.

As this George Russell died in 1694, at the age of ninety-nine, he was born in 1595, two hundred and forty-six years ago. He was a boy ten years of age before a permanent settlement was made in Virginia; and a man of twenty-five when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth; but before he died, flourishing colonies were established on the whole Atlantic coast, from Maine to South Carolina. During his life Queen Elizabeth reigned in England, and James succeeding her, united the crowns of England and Scotland. His son Charles I. was de-throned and beheaded by his subjects, and Oliver Cromwell commenced and finished his important mission. Richard Cromwell held for a brief space in his feeble hands, the reins of power, but made way for the re-establishment of monarchy in the person of the dissolute Charles II. The bigoted James II. succeeded his brother, and was driven—by the second revolution in the same century—to abdicate the throne; when the Prince and Princess of Orange were proclaimed King and Queen of Great Britain. Perhaps there is not in the United States another stone that commemorates a man born so long ago, and who lived during so eventful a period of history.

George Russell married the Widow James in Hingham, in 1639. By her he had three daughters, the eldest of whom, Mary, was married to John Jacob, in 1661. He died September 18th, 1693, aged 63 years, she on the 2d of October, 1691, aged 52 years, and both were buried near her parents. He was the son of Nicholas Jacob, an early settler in the town. "John Jacob slain by the Indians near his father's house" in 1676, was the son of this John by a former wife, and the brother of the first of the name who settled in Scituate. Deane mistakes the son for the father.

There is another aged stone, the inscription upon which is as follows:

Mary Iacob y^e
 davcher of Ioseph
 Iacob aged
 8 years 6 mo
 6 dayes dyed
 March y^e 22
 1694—5—

and another to the memory of Samuel Jacob, who died in 1695, "aged nere 24 years."

There is another grave-yard upon Liberty Plain, which, from the dates upon the monuments, appears to have been used nearly a century. One stone in it deserves to be mentioned, both for the inscription and the emblematical embellishments. We read upon it that

Here lies y^e body of
 Mrs. Sarah Pratt who died
 October 1761 in y^e 101
 year of her age.
 Latterly y^e wife of Lieut.
 John Pratt. But formerly
 y^e wife of Mr. Stephen
 Garnett by him she had
 a numerous Posterity
 Running to y^e 5 Genera-
 tion in November
 are 187—

Above the inscription is engraven the face of a female, surrounded by as many smaller ones as the allotted space would contain, to represent the aged Mrs. Pratt and her one hundred and eighty-seven descendants.

And now that the existence of these old time-worn monuments, and all the information that can be gathered respecting them, is put upon record; the question may be asked, "*Cui Bono?*" who can care when these

old people died and where they were buried? To such cavillers one is almost tempted to answer with Miss Sedgwick's friend "I hate use;" for we cannot, if we would, bring to the test of utility every feeling of our nature. If a folly, it is at least a fashionable one, to be proud of our ancient church, the oldest in the United States, or to scrape the moss from the few monuments left us of those who built it, or those who

"Ere they framed
The lofty vault to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood
Amidst the cool and silence, knelt down
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks
And supplication."

A love for the past is not incompatible with hope for the future and interest in the present; and any thing that may induce to increased respect and regard for the characters of the noble men and women who pitched their tents in the wilderness, two centuries ago, can do no harm: had we had more of it, we might still be able to stand upon their graves.

In Plymouth we should naturally expect to find the oldest monuments to the dead, both because it was the first settlement, and because the hill where many of the earliest immigrants were interred is still a burial ground; but "it excites some surprise," says the venerable historian of that town, "that sixty years should have elapsed before a grave-stone was erected to the memory of the deceased Pilgrims; but it is probably to be ascribed to their poverty and want of artists." The oldest stone found upon "Burying Hill" records the death of Edward Gray, Gent. who "departed this life the last of June, 1681." The head-stone erected to the memory of Thomas Barnes in 1672, is then nine years older than the oldest in Plymouth. Probably there are very few, if any, in the whole United States more ancient than this. But the Pilgrims at Plymouth lie where they were buried — the Fathers of Hingham, where are they?

Long after the people ceased to bury their dead in the old church-yard, and within the memory of many now living, some of the monuments that were erected to the first settlers, still remained; many of them are said to be now in existence as the foundation to the chimney of a neighboring house; * and from time to time during the

* Mr. John Norton's.

last century and a half, they have been scattered, probably, in different directions, and used for such purposes as their shape and quality suggested. Within the last fifty years there were persons in the community desirous of their entire removal, deeming them, perhaps, unsightly objects in a public highway, or useless rubbish that cumbered the ground. But the older people, less fastidious in their taste, or possessing more filial piety than their children, would not consent that this connecting link between them and their ancestors should be thus rudely broken. Their wishes and feelings, however, were disregarded, and in one night the head-stones were taken from the graves and piled up in heaps. Since then they have found their way under divers corn-barns, and have been turned to good account as hearth-stones and door-steps.

The present generation have finished the work. The hill where the first church stood is levelled; the plough has broken the rest of those who gathered there to worship; men struck the spade and the pick-axe into the skeletons of their own ancestors, and mended the highways with their dust;—and the few poor remains that were gathered together were buried in one promiscuous heap in a spot where the living men had perilled life and limb that their descendants might sit in peace “under the shade of their own vine and their own fig tree,” with none to “molest and make afraid.” If this deed was necessary to save six rods of travel, at least a space should have been enclosed to mark the spot where

“The rude forefathers of the hamlet slept.”

Struggling with the hardships necessarily attending their condition, the early settlers had little time to spare from toil to cultivate refinement in art, manners or customs; and perhaps the stern simplicity of Puritanism forbade them to indulge in the vanity of costly monuments, or to soften in any measure the dark forbidding aspect of death by associating with it a love for the beautiful in Nature. In the house of God they stood surrounded by the graves of their kindred, but no religious cheerfulness dispersed the melancholy gloom of the church-yard, or filled it with proofs of the care and abiding affection of the living. They had no

“Tall birch sighing in the burying-place,
Or willow trailing low its boughs to hide
The gleaming marble;”

and the cinque-foil in the early spring, and golden-rod in autumn, then perhaps, as now, alone adorned their graves. The rich and poor, the great man of the little village and the humble laborer, were laid side by side, and the simple record, upon a plain blue stone, of the age and time of death of the quiet sleeper in the earth beneath, told of all the same brief story that they lived and died. Sometimes indeed, the ruder forms of letters, or an ornamental border surrounding the inscription would seem to point out more than ordinary poverty or riches; but the general sameness of the language and monuments show that the artificial distinctions of society were forgotten in the church-yard.

Many were buried, and no monuments placed over them; and on the few simple head-stones of the earliest date no epitaphs are found; a rude and quaint sculpture alone typifies the hope of immortality,—a death's-head with wings, allusive to the happy flight to other realms when death shall have released the spirit, or the final resurrection of the body at a future day. By changing the grim skull to a human face, the next generation typified the transmutation of mortality to cherubims and seraphims; at least we should not doubt that such was the meaning of the emblem, were not a sexual character given to it by adorning the head, if to the memory of a male, with a tie-wig, if to a female, with a mob-cap; leaving it a question whether the artist intended to represent angels so bedecked, or men and women in their Sunday clothes, with wings by way of ornament. Urns, weeping willows, and rose-buds have succeeded in their turn; but of late a purer taste has neglected all emblems as superfluous, or as at best but a feeble effort to express the inexpressible.

Epitaphs seem to have been in use here about a century; but the feeling that should give rise to them would "be more honored in the breach than in the observance" of the custom. There is a power in the spontaneous language of pure and deep feeling that always commands respect; but when the simplicity of natural affection is lost sight of in the wish to say a striking thing, or to clothe in new words a self-evident truth written in all nature, or to utter the precept which the grave speaks so plainly, we are far more apt to smile than weep. An appeal is made to the understanding rather than to the heart, and all feel that doggrel-rhyme, bad grammer, or sickly sen-

sibility are fair subjects of criticism, even in the church-yard. We need nothing to remind us of the virtues of departed friends, or any other preacher than their graves, when standing over them; and a stranger would forget the sanctity of the place where there is much to amuse. Moreover, the maxim, "*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*," is never forgotten, and we cannot help feeling that half the epitaphs, at least, are lies. If we read upon a grave-stone the name and age of him who moulders beneath it, and the time of death, the lesson that it teaches is complete, and no addition can be made that will not mar it, except there be great beauty of language, with an appeal to the sympathy of the living that *will* be answered. There are very few epitaphs of this character in our yards, and indeed few that in any point of view would be called good; most are indifferent, and some are positively ridiculous. I have copied a portion of them, as they seem to deserve a place in a description of our burying-grounds. For obvious reasons, they are taken from the older stones.

Among them all I find but one in Latin, the rather trite adage,

"Sic transit gloria mundi:"

and but two or three from the Bible; one only of which seems appropriate. It is upon the head-stone of a very old man:

Our Fathers where are they?
And the Prophets — can they live for ever?

The following has been a great favorite, as it is found, I think, in every yard in town; the truth contained in it, and the excellence of the advice cannot be disputed:

Come think of me as you pass by,
As you are now so once was I,
As I am now so you must be —
Prepare for Death and follow me.

The next, with slight alterations, is also found in different places:

My loving friends as you pass by,
On my cold grave pray cast an eye.
Your sun like mine may set at noon,
Your soul be called for very soon;
In this dark place your couch may be —
Prepare for death and follow me.

The idea is the same in both; but the bold figure of a *noon* sun-set in the last far surpasses the odd succession of Present, Past, and Future in the second and third lines

of the first. The next two are fair specimens of the style laudatory :

Beneath these clods here lies confined,
The man who 's pious, just, and kind ;
And as we trust will one day rise,
To shine in glory in the skies.

In Faith she dy'd, in dust she lies,
But Faith foresees that dust shall rise
When Jesus calls, while Hope assumes,
And boasts her joy amid the tombs.

The following is in the spirit of Him who said, " Father, not my will, but thine be done ;" but tame and inexpressive when compared with those simple words :

Our sixth dear child here moulders in the dust,
But yet God's mercy may we not distrust.

This has at least the merit of originality :

Our life is ever on the wing,
And death is ever nigh ;
The moment when we life begin,
We all begin to die.

The inscription under which the following is found does not mention the death of an infant. We cannot help smiling at the strong asseveration, and the manner in which an incident—so touching when simply told—is related :

Her husband's joy, her friends' delight —
But now she 's gone beyond their sight ;
And true it is when I do say,
Her suckling child doth with her lay.

One would hardly be deemed hypercritical who pronounced the next to be a superfluous scripture :

This grave stone as you see,
Stands here a monument for me.
The God of Nature which spoke at first
Has turned my body into dust.

On the two following, (found in different yards,) the last might be adduced in proof of the first :

Death's steps are swift,
And yet no noise he makes ;
His hand unseen,
And yet most surely takes.

Adieu my friends and do not weep for me,—
I was abed asleep as you may be ;
But Death did come and give the fatal stroke,
And in this world I never more awoke.

The following lines from an Elegy of Pope, are engraven

upon the head-stone at the grave of a boy ; it would have been more striking had there been no other inscription :

How loved, how honored once avails thee not,
To whom related, or by whom begot ;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'T is all THOU art, 't is all the PROUD shall be.

This selection of epitaphs, including some of the best and some of the worst, is as fair, and perhaps as interesting as any that can be made.

It has been my purpose, in this description, to speak chiefly of the past ; to describe those monuments noteworthy for their age, or any circumstances connected with their history, or that of the individuals whom they commemorate. When we consider that many of our people are lineal descendants of the little band who, tradition says, gathered round their pastor, Peter Hobart, at their first landing, under the shadow of an old oak, and broke the silence of the wilderness with prayer, is it not surprising that so much apathy has existed in the present generation in regard to the only monuments left us of those pilgrims—their graves ? The Turk curses his enemy with the anathema, “ may the graves of your ancestors be defiled ! ” The half civilized Mahometan could hardly be *compelled* to do what we have voluntarily done. We can no longer point to the graves of our progenitors here ; and a stranger would seek in vain in our burial places for the monuments of those of later generations whose memory we ought to honor. An almost obliterated inscription is the only memorial to the three first clergymen, the first of whom is noted in the civil History of his Times, and the last in the History of the Church. We have erected no monument over the remains of Gen. Lincoln, beloved for his private virtues and honored for his public services : and the last resting place of Madam Derby to whose bounty so many are indebted, is scarcely known. These things are not much to the credit of our town, but hardly excite surprise when we recollect that we owe it to the munificence of a single individual that the church-yard where these persons were interred has ceased to be private property. Should this narration, tedious and uninteresting as it may be, conduce to the preservation of any of the few old monuments that are left, or contribute in any degree, however slight, to do away with the apathy that still exists among us, an object worth striving for will be accomplished.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

To all people to whom these Presents shall come GREETING :

Know yee that I, Joshua Tucker of Hingham in the County of Suffolk in New England, yeoman, for and in Consideration of the sum of Ten Shillings per Rod in currant Money of New England to me in hand at I before the Ensealing and Delivery of these presents well and truly paid by Each of the Persons hereafter named to whom I have measured and set out several parcells of Land for a Burying place in ye Southward Corner of my Lot, which I lately purchased of Doctor Hall neer the Meeting House in Said Hingham; the said Burying-place being bounded toward the South-East with the Land of Samuel Thaxter, as the fence now Standeth, South-west with the Common behind the Meeting-house as the fence now Standeth, and North-East and North-west with the Residue of my Said Lot, the Receipt whereof at the Rate of Ten Shilling Per Rod, as aforesaid to full Satisfaction I do hereby Acknowledge and of every part and parcell thereof do clearly acquit and Discharge All and every of the Said Persons and each of their Heirs forever, by these presents have sold and confirmed unto all and each of the said persons hereafter named and mentioned and to each of their Heirs and Assigns forever all the said Parcells of Land as measured and set out be the same more or less, marked, inscribed, and bounded, as in the Platt annexed may more Plainly appear; Viz. To Luke Lincoln the Second containing one Rod, To John Fearing senior the third containing one Rod, the fifth to Samuel Gill one half Rod, To the heirs of Josiah Loring deceased the sixth being one half Rod, the seventh to the heirs of Ephraim Lane deceased one half Rod, the Eighth to Joshua Hersey one Rod, the Ninth to the heirs of Samuel Hobart deceased one half Rod, the Tenth to James Hearsey Jun. one Rod, the Eleventh to David Lincoln one Rod, the Twelvth to James Hearsey Senior one half Rod, the Thirteenth to James Lincoln one half Rod, the Fourteenth to Ambrose Low one Rod, the Fifteenth to Josiah Lane one Rod, the Sixteenth to Lieut. Thomas Andrews one Rod, Seventh to Thomas Joy one Rod, Eighteenth to John Langley one Rod, the Nineteenth to John Lewis one Rod, To Caleb Beal the Twentieth one Rod, the Twenty-first to John Beal Jun. one half Rod, the Twenty-second to Nehemiah Lincoln one half Rod, the Twenty-third to Isaac and Jonathan Lane one Rod, the Twenty-fourth to the heirs of John Mansfield deceased one half Rod, the Twenty-fifth to Benjamin Lincoln one Rod, the Twenty-sixth to the heirs of Jacob Beal deceased contains one Rod, —Together with all the Estate, Right, Title, Interest, Use, Property and Possession of me the said Joshua Tucker of in or to the Said hereby Granted and Bargained Premises and every part and parcell thereof with all the Fences Members Rights and priviledges thereof belonging or appertaining—To have and to hold all the aforesaid

Parcells of Land containing as aforesaid as Measured and set out be the same more or less—numbered inscribed and bounded in the Platt as aforesaid with all and Singular the Rights profits and privileges thereto belonging or appertaining unto all and Every of the Persons as before Named and Mentioned and to every of their Heirs and assigns for ever and I the Said Joshua Tucker at the Time of this present Grant, Bargain and Sale and untill the Signing and Sealing of these presents am the True and Lawful Owner of the said hereby granted premises having in myself full power, good right and lawful Authority to Sell, Convey, Confirm the same as aforesaid and I the Said Joshua Tucker and my Heirs, Executors, Administrators, at all times forever hereafter Shall and will Warrant, Maintain, and Defend all the above granted premises with all their Appertenances, unto all and Each of the persons as before named and mentioned and to every of their Heirs and Assigns against the Lawful Claims and Demands of all persons whatever. In witness I the Said Joshua Tucker have hereunto set my Hand and Seal the Seventeenth Day June, Anno. Domi. 1718.

Signed Sealed and Delivered

in presence of us.

JOHN THAXTER,
ELIZABETH NORTON.

JOSHUA TUCKER, { L. S. }