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Prepared Written by Henrietta Goodwin
Researcher, Christ Church

THE CARTER TOMBS

Appendix

Two hundred and fifty three years ago on the 4th of August, 1732, Robert "King" Carter Esq., builder of Christ Church, died and was buried inside the church yard by the east wall of the colonial church, ~~by~~ ^{beside} his two wives. The three ornate tabletop tombs stand today restored, marking the graves of ^{Robert Carter,} probably the wealthiest man of his time in Virginia; ~~and~~ of Judith Armistead, his first wife; and Betty Landon Willis, his second wife.

A fourth flat tomb is the grave of Mary Carter, wife of Charles Carter of "Clare".
In his will "King" Carter prepared for his burial and ordered "my body to be laid in the yard of Christ Church near and upon the right hand of my wives, a decent funeral to be kept, at my interment, a monument or tomb stone to be sent for to be erected over my grave of about the value of my last wives Tomb stone, with a proper Inscription at the discretion of my son John or of my other executors in case of his mortality".

For about a century these graves lay undisturbed. But in 1838 Bishop William Meade wrote in a report to the Convention of the Episcopal Church that "While the tomb of the husband is entire, those of the wives appear to have been riven by lightning, and are separating and falling to pieces".

Over the years vandals wrought havoc with the tombs ~~and~~, according to a letter written by the Rev. Henry Landon Derby, Rector, in 1894, ^{and} carried away many souvenirs, leaving a mass of scattered fragments about the churchyard. For thirty years it was a place of desolation. But in 1927 a group of prominent Virginians, under the leadership of Carter descendants and the then Bishop of Virginia, the Rt. Rev. William Cabell Brown, D.C., formed a committee for the restoration of the tombs. Funds were raised and the tombs reconstructed from the scattered fragments using concrete and stone-like fillers.

In 1960 after the formation of the Foundation for Historic Christ Church Inc., further work on the top slabs was needed to keep them from separating and decaying, using epoxy resin and copper dowels to hold them together. The decaying continued until 1980 when the tops were replaced with Culpeper black granite, and the lettering and coats of arms were recarved in the same style as the original. The low slab top of Mary Carter's grave was also replaced.

Before making the replicas to replace the tomb tops of the three tabletop tombs, it was necessary to interpret the carvings on the old tops which had been pieced together in 1927 with repairs of cement and ~~stone~~ ^{STONE} and then recarved in many places. To ~~be~~ ^{MAKE} sure of the accuracy of the Latin ^{inscriptions} on Robert's tomb, and the English on Judith's and Betty's tombs, it was necessary to compare the ^{inscriptions} with ~~the~~ ^{those} ones that Bishop Meade had ^{and} recorded in ^{his} the 1838 report to the Convention, ~~which he had seen~~ before the vandals had desecrated the tombs. ~~When it was sure that the spelling was accurate,~~ ^{It was also necessary to establish} the accuracy of the translation of the Latin inscription on Robert's tomb. At least four translations ^{had been} were found, one with an entire sentence left out, two with wrong death dates, and all ^{somewhat in meaning,} differing ~~in many ways giving different meanings.~~ In order to have a more literal, complete, accurate, and understandable translation into English of the entire Latin inscription, help was sought from two ^{classical} scholars, ~~in the classics.~~ The first was Mr. Anthony W. Preston, a retired professor and head of the Classics Department, Bishops University, Lennoxville, Quebec, who graciously sent ^{us} a scholarly literal translation with an eighteenth century flavor, and who suggested that it be ~~vetted~~ ^{examined} locally, since he did not know Virginia colonial history in detail. The second

Before the desecration of the tombs

scholar was Mr. C. Jackson Simmons, a local attorney and a student of the classics in England, who with the Latin inscription and Mr. Preston's work before him, provided a translation true to the meaning of the Latin, changing Mr. Preston's words only for better understanding to the ^{modern} ~~American~~ visitor. The Board of Directors of the Foundation has accepted and adopted as the approved translation the one affixed on a plaque at the base of the tombs.

The coats of arms on the three tabletop tombs were rubbed and reconstructed (with the advice and aid of the colonial historian at the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission) by the research staff of the Volunteers.

[As an appendix, add the inscriptions from all the tombs, and the English translation of Robert's tomb.]

Today we see the marble and limestone restored tombs and replicas of the tomb tops of Robert Carter and his two wives. The handsome ^m ~~tob~~s, among the most imposing of the colonial era, are decorated with cherubic heads and acanthus leaves, designs which were featured on ^w ~~may~~ grand tombs of that time. The tomb of Robert Carter shows at its eastern end a skull and crossbones, a familiar churchyard ornament in his day with its reminder of death, in the midst of life, awaiting all mortals.