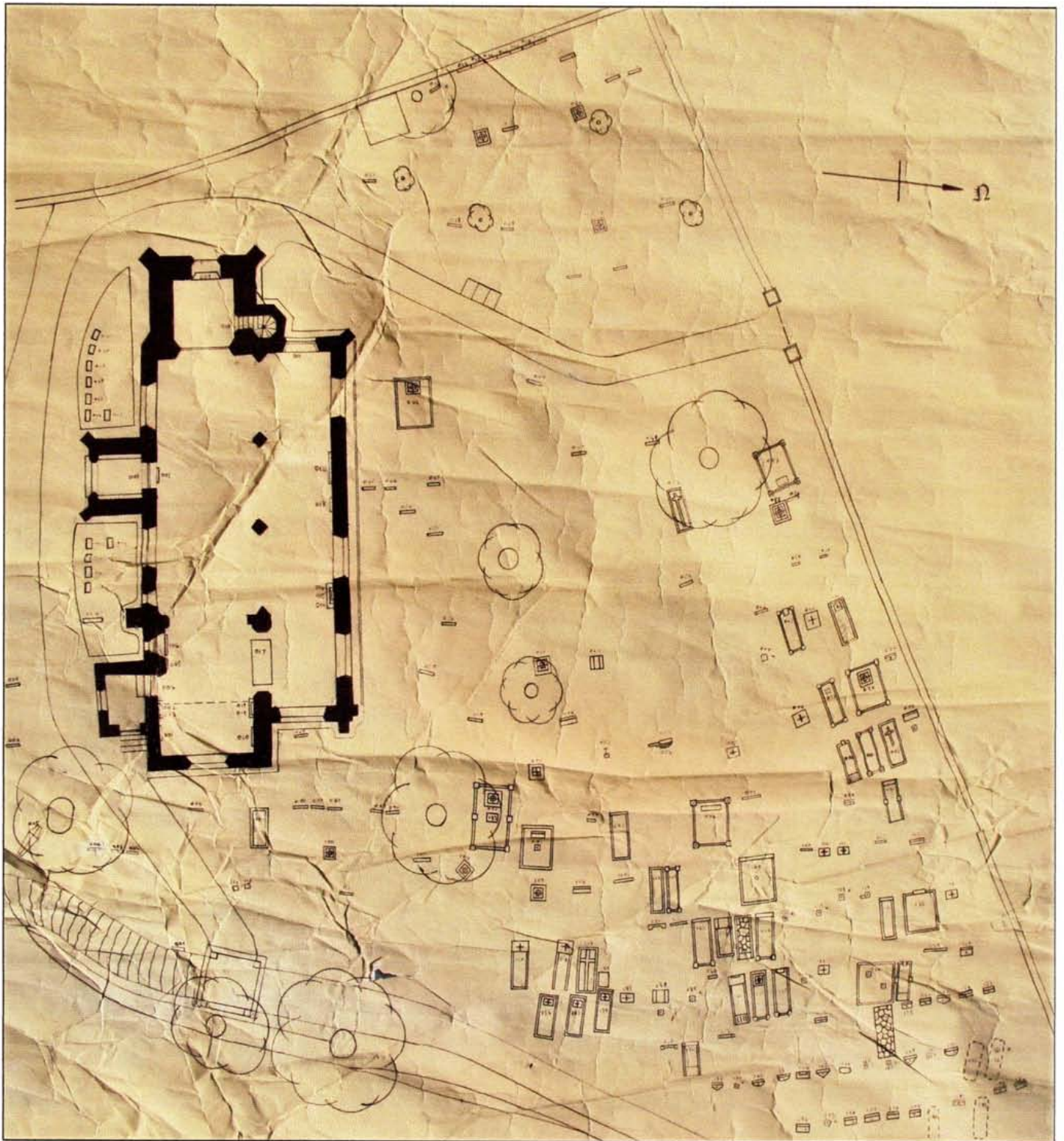


# **THE GRAVEYARD**

**ST. MARY'S  
OFFWELL**

## THE CHURCHYARD, ST. MARY'S, OFFWELL



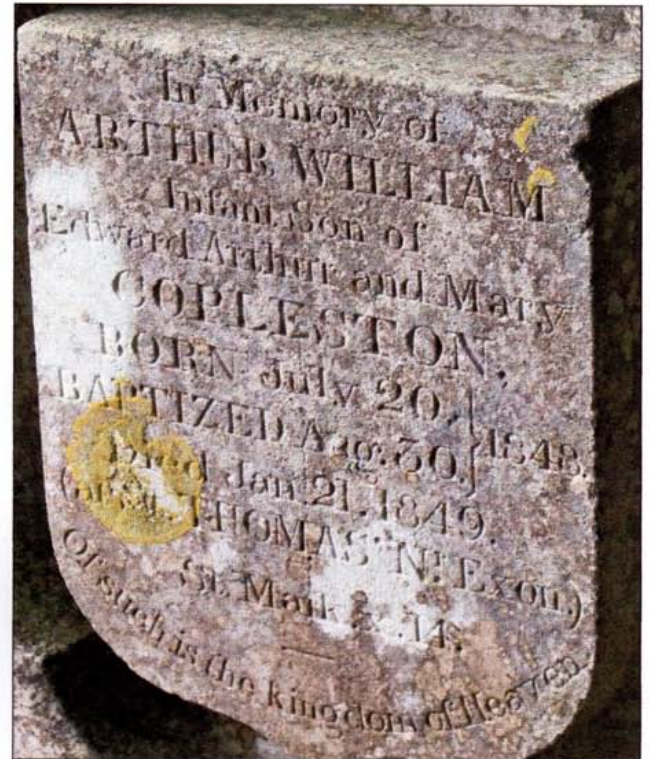
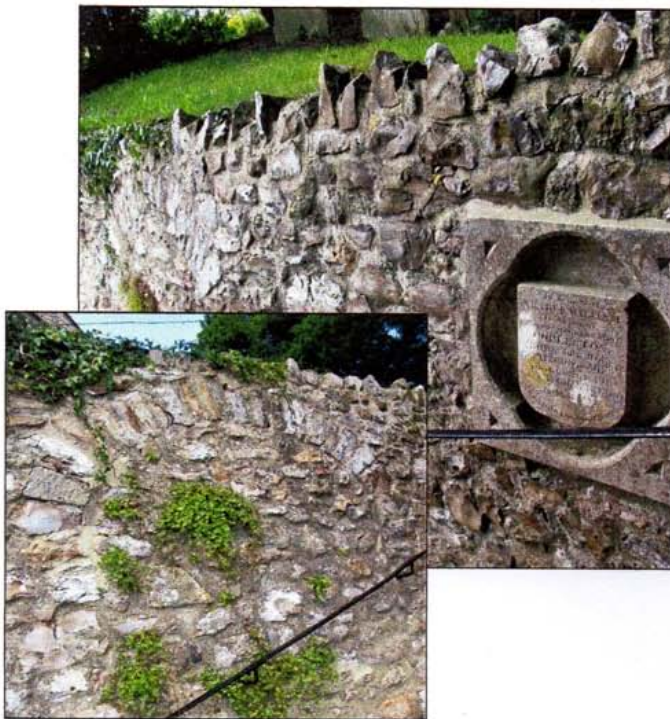
The map of St. Mary's churchyard was produced in 1988 by the Council for Christian Care. Grants were awarded to chart all the Devon graveyards; community orders (or the equivalent) were obtained and young offenders painstakingly logged and charted every grave and headstone.



The graves with stone crosses lying to the North and East of the churchyard, beside the large Yew Tree, belong to the Copleston family, the most celebrated of whom was **Edward Copleston** (1776-1849), Bishop of Llandaff and Dean of St. Paul's.

The Coplestons were rectors without a break from 1773–1954 and seven generations of the family are buried in Offwell. Between the years 1804 and 1959 forty Coplestons were buried in St. Mary's churchyard with several family members being buried in the same grave alongside family retainers.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century **John Bradford Copleston** (Bishop Copleston's father) had a vault constructed near the great Yew tree where he and other members of the family were to be buried. The vault was entered through an arched doorway visibly enclosed by masonry on the outside of the church steps. The rector was to see one of his daughters, (Ann, aged 22) and two of his grandchildren ( Arthur William, aged 6 and Ellen, aged 7 months) laid to rest in this vault before joining them himself in 1831. His wife, **Margaret**, would follow in 1839.



In his memoirs Bishop Copleston writes about the death of his parents:

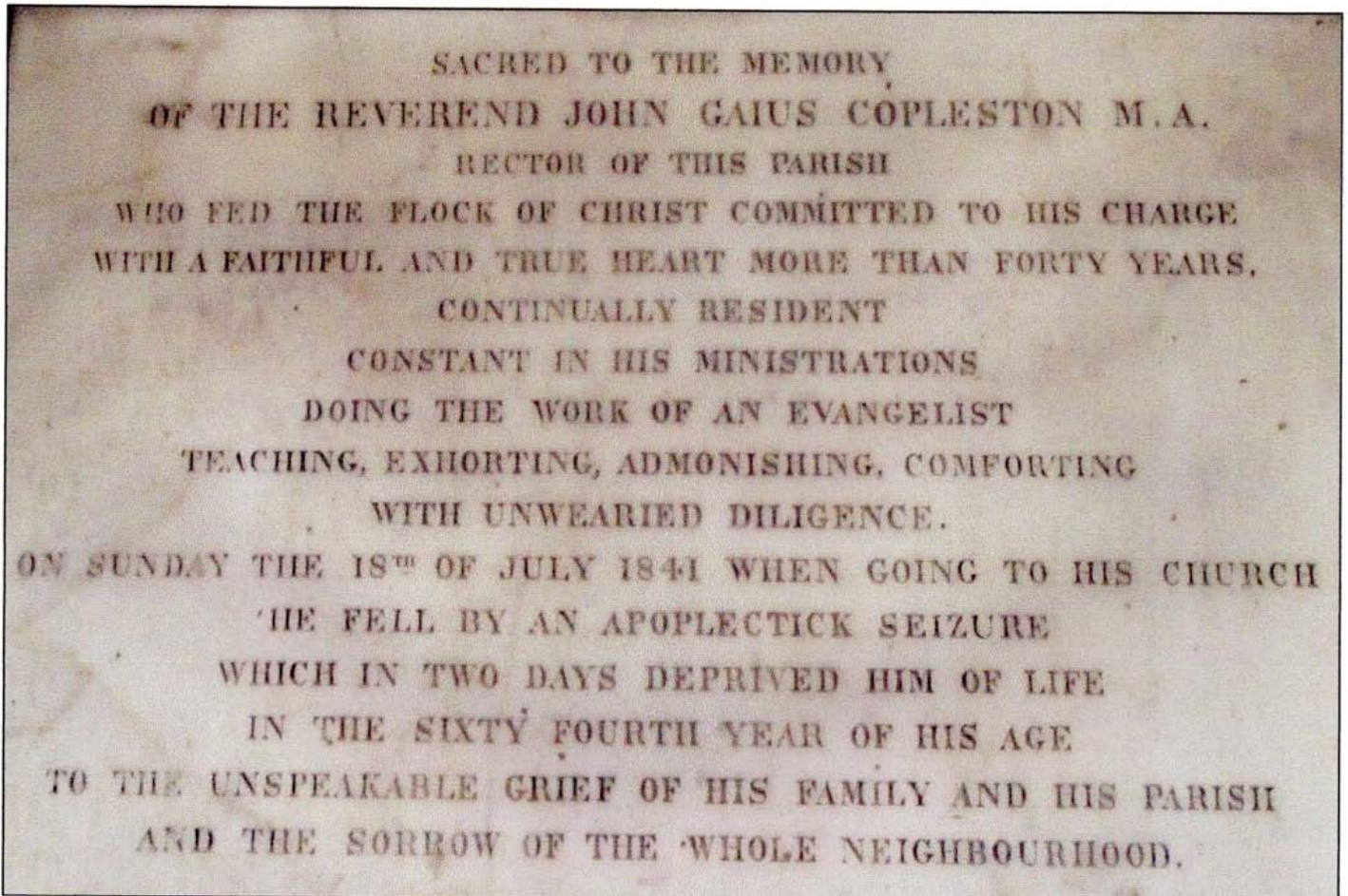
*15<sup>TH</sup> April 1831*

*“Attended the remains of my dear and honoured father from Exeter to Offwell, my brother and his two eldest sons being in the same coach. I saw the coffin deposited in a vault made by my father himself about twenty years ago. Having performed this pious office with great solemnity, we passed the remainder of the day at the parsonage. On the following Sunday Mr. Lewis preached a very appropriate sermon, and there was a large attendance in the church.”*

*3<sup>rd</sup> January 1839*

*“My dear and honoured mother expired this morning between four and five. She died without pain and had passed several days in a state of dozing – pious and affectionate to the last but the intellectual powers quite decayed. She was in her 92<sup>nd</sup> year.”*

The Bishop's brother, **John Gaius Copleston**, was buried in the family vault in 1841. On 18<sup>th</sup> July *'he was stricken by an attack of an apoplexy while on his way to church'*. He died two days later. Having served as rector in Offwell for 37 years the wording on his memorial plaque in St. Mary's bears witness to the affection felt for a Rector who remained devoted to his small parish, without seeking promotion elsewhere.



Bishop Copleston writes the following in his memoirs:

*27<sup>th</sup> July 1841, Offwell*

*"Yesterday we attended the remains of my dear brother to the grave. All the parishioners, without exception I believe, attended also and testified by their tears, and by most unequivocal evidence of heartfelt sorrow, how sensible they were of their loss, and how sincerely they loved and esteemed him. Nine of his children (one being in India) were present. Two or three of my nieces will, I hope, be domiciled with me when I am in the country."*

**Bishop Edward Copleston's** last fifteen years were often accompanied by an internal disorder which left him prostrate for days on end. In August 1839 he writes that *'death itself would have been welcome'* such was his distress; he was to live a further ten years. Bishop Copleston died at Hardwick, his diocesan home, on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 1849, at the age of seventy-three, after an illness of some weeks during which *'the shadows of approaching night continued to fall deeper and deeper'*. He was buried in the sanctuary of the Lady Chapel at Llandaff Cathedral on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1849 *'restored and fitted up as a parish church. There, at the altar end, and between the graves of Bishop William de Breas and his much-loved friend, the late Dean Bruce Knight, were the remains of the Bishop placed'*.

Bishop Copleston was the last person to be laid to rest within the walls of Llandaff Cathedral.



During the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the two dominant families in the parish were the **Collins'** and the **Raddons**, of whom the Collins' were of superior status and wealth. The entrance to the Collins' vault lies beneath the arch that divides the chancel from the north aisle (beneath the organ); the family using the east end of the north aisle effectively as a private chapel.

**Thomas Raddon**, rector of Offwell Parish from 1571-1597, was probably Offwell's first married priest and the Raddon family continued to flourish in Offwell for many centuries. In 1824 a Benjamin Davey was noted painting the names of church donors *'on a table to put in church'*. The table itself was made by a Richard Raddon. In 1851 the church gates were repaired and the ironwork was carried out by a Mr. Raddon.

In the following year Richard Raddon was paid 10s. 6d. for *'making two windows for the tower'*. Following the alteration of the pews in 1865 *'the name Raddon, once so prominent in the parish was relegated to the eleventh pew from the front in the north aisle, where Mr. Raddon and Mr. Cox shared a pew'*.

This gravestone for a Joseph Raddon is beside the north wall of St. Mary's where the original north entrance to the church once stood.



In **1898 heating** was installed in the church for the first time and this meant cutting into the Collins' and Copleston vaults beneath the church. (You can see the grille above the fire hole just inside the South Porch entrance.) One of the men employed to dig the trench, Mr. W. Northam, later told Colonel Ramsden (churchwarden) that many skeletons were found beneath the nave.

This early 1900 postcard clearly shows the stove chimney on the north wall.



Descendants of the **Small** family still live in the village. They were referred to as 'travellers' in church records and the family plot lies next to the north wall of the church. The headstones are for James Small, 1916, and Mary Small 1928.

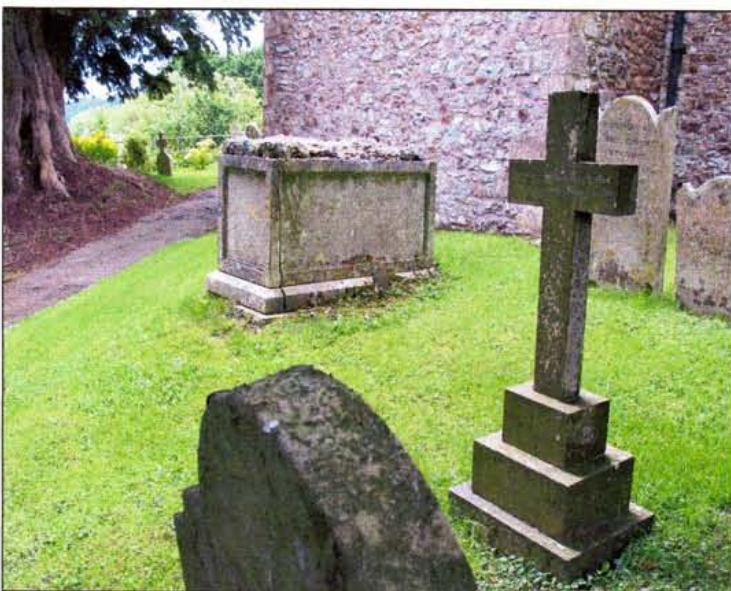




**Emmanuel Dommett** (born in 1739) was a local landowner, a trustee of the parish lands in Offwell and an important benefactor. At the end of his life he gave £120 to the trustees to be used for charitable purposes in Offwell and that Trust exists to this day. Income earned from timber production was used for the education of the poor and the remainder of Emmanuel Dommett's gift was to be used to build a house for the village school master or mistress. While the provision of the school is largely credited to the Copleston family, who built the school house, the project was instigated by, and initially funded by, their faithful churchwarden, Emmanuel Dommett.

Despite Emmanuel Dommett's long service (he remained church warden well into his 80's) and his contributions to church and parish the family's involvement with church affairs apparently ceased after his death.

The Dommett table top tomb is made from Beer stone. Rain water contains a weak carbonic acid and has, over the years, caused the stone to crumble away.





This massive stone is the oldest marked grave in the churchyard. It is in memory of **Martha Pavey**, wife of Leonard Pavey who died 14<sup>th</sup> January 1794, aged 68, and **Leonard Pavey** who died on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1813, aged 88. In 2018, Elana Pavey joined the church choir when she was just 11 years old.

Pre the 1800's farm labourers were buried in **woollen shrouds** and families would pay a fine if they chose wooden caskets instead.

For centuries the woollen trade had been important to the wealth and prosperity of England but with the introduction of new materials and foreign imports some people thought that the industry was under threat. In 1678 an Act of Parliament was passed to try and maintain the demand for domestically produced wool. The Act required that when a corpse was buried it should only be dressed in a shroud or garments made of wool.

*“No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague) shall be buried in any shift, sheet, or shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver, or in any stuff, or thing, other than what is made of sheep's wool only.”*

**Leonard and Martha** were both born in Yarcombe which is where Pavey ancestors originate from as far back as the 1500's. Leonard was the fifth in line of Leonard Paveys. His father was a carpenter and in 1749 there is a record of a Leonard Pavey becoming master to an apprentice in Thorncombe where Leonard and Martha were married on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1752. The record reads: 'Leonard Pavey (or Pazezy) and Martha Northam married April 13. Sojourners in this Parish'. Leonard was in Thorncombe either because he was a carpenter there or his father was. 'Sojourners' implies that they were not legally settled in the parish and therefore not entitled to poor relief at the expense of the parish. (Thorncombe was part of Devon until 1844 when it became part of Dorset.) Leonard and Martha had three children who were all baptized in Thorncombe. It is not known when the family moved to Offwell Parish but in Leonard's burial records it notes that he was living in Wilmington and one of Leonard's sons, Samuel, had children baptized in Offwell between 1777 and 1788. Land tax records also have Samuel still living in Offwell in 1798.

The wording on the Pavey headstone is as follows:

To the Memory of *Martha*, wife of Leonard Pavey  
Of this Parish who died January 14 1794 Aged 68

Go suffering saint from every woe release  
And sooth thy sorrows on *Emmanuel's* breast  
Go where no pain no pining care can find  
Place in thy heart or harbour in thy mind  
Go where thy foe insidious darts shall cease  
To wound thy comforts or distract thy peace  
Long in the furnace of affliction tir'd  
For long its thorn oppress'd thy tender side  
Long did thy hope await the shaft of death  
And that arrived as meekness found thy breast

Also of LEONARD husband of the above  
MARTHA PAVEY who died July 24<sup>th</sup> 1813 Aged 88

The **Bagwell** family (see gravestone below) were descendants of Norsemen, great seafarers who settled near Colyton. During the Monmouth Rebellion many Bagwells were hung, drawn and quartered. Others were deported to the West Indies and the story goes that one escaped and made his way back to East Devon. In the late 18<sup>th</sup>, early 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Bagwells at Bagwell Cottage were associated with smuggling – our sheltered valley leading up from the sea providing good shelter from the revenue men. The most famous Devon smuggler, Jack Rattenbury, retired to Offwell and lived at Batts Close.



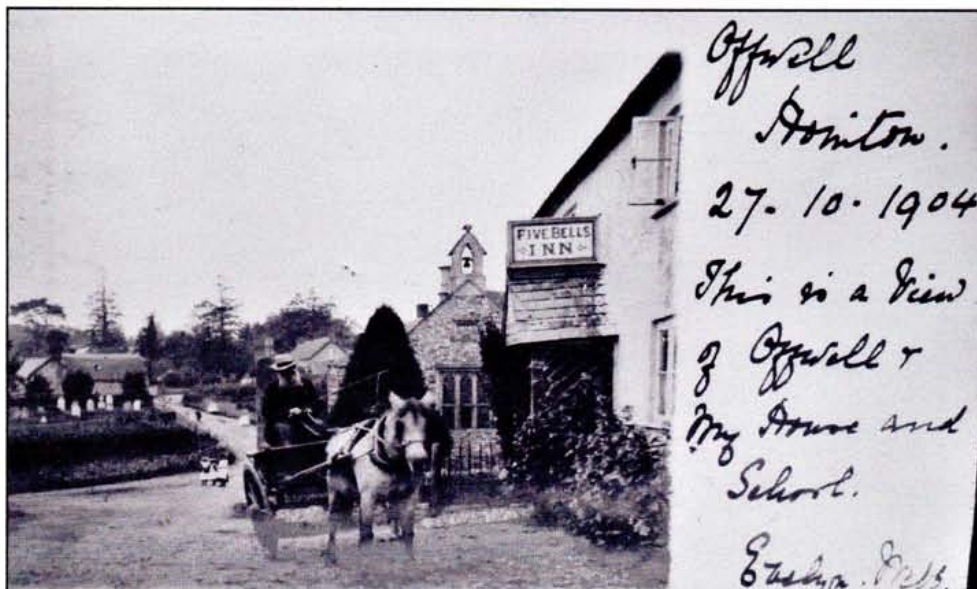
The **Aplins**, **Farmers** and **Summers** all have family graves in the churchyard - the church lectern was made by W.H. Farmer, churchwarden, in 1936. During the industrial revolution when farming work became scarce Ely Summers walked from his home in East Devon to South Wales, to find work in the coalmines. But the majority of the families up to that time would have been born, baptised, married and buried in Offwell. Sunday worship was compulsory and there were three services to attend. Many young women walked up the aisle to their wedding already pregnant as it was important that any woman who wished to marry could provide a family so proof of fertility came before probity. Mortality rates were extremely high and there are headstones for babies as young as one week old. Few people reached the age of 50 and wives would die before their husbands, worn out by childbirth.

By **1825** concern had been expressed about an accumulation of soil (from the digging of graves) near the church wall on the north side. The archdeacon ordered that this should be removed and the ground level lowered; this was evidently treated with sensitivity since **John Gaius Copleston** recalled that his parishioners were invited to see the graves identified and reformed 'in due order'. The surplus earth was placed around the ailing Yew tree, which subsequently revived.



In **1833** a government sanitary inspector deemed that the churchyard was becoming overcrowded and needed to be enlarged. This led to the demolition of the old '**Five Bells**' Inn which had been bought by Bishop Copleston some 50 years earlier and where vestry meetings were often held until **John Gay Copleston** decided (in 1854) that this was 'unfit'.

There are two or three publicans buried in the churchyard (including **John and Bessie Northam**) plus a carter who was knocked down and killed by his own horse and cart.



In the 1960's and the 1970's **falling tombstones** were removed and the graveyard 'tidied up'. The headstones were rested against the wall of No.1 The Square. The exact location of the graves is not known.



**Flying Officer Lorne Currie** died in May, 1941, aged 36. He started his service career in the Royal Navy at 16 years of age, later resigning his commission to settle in Kenya. He joined the RAF at the outbreak of World War Two and later volunteered for Bomber Command. It was while he was under training that he tragically walked into the spinning propeller of his Wellington Bomber and was killed. He left a widow and two children.

His Commonwealth War Grave is still maintained by the CWG Commission. In front of the War Grave are the graves of family members.



**Dr. John Crichton 'Stuart' McDouall,  
O.B.E. 1878-1941.**

Dr. McDouall, of the West African Medical Service, moved to Offwell in 1934 with his wife and four children. After Dr. McDouall's death in 1941 his wife, Marguerite, continued to live at the Old Rectory until her death in 1950. In 2017 one of Dr. McDouall's grandsons, Stuart McDouall, came to Offwell to replace a sundial on his grand-father's grave - the original sundial, from the Rectory garden, having been stolen.



Stuart McDouall remembers his father telling him that in his early teens *'he fashioned two brass canons, 9cm in length with a 6mm bore, on his father's lathe, and mounted them in wood and Meccano carriages. He made his own gun-powder and with Lewis, his younger brother, fired them from opposite ends of the attic. On one occasion Lewis showed a cousin how to fire one and they put a ball-bearing through the window of a neighbour's house. I still have one of that pair of canons.'*



**David George Griffiths 1867-  
1957**

There is one **wooden headstone** in the graveyard, still in perfect condition. Wood was a popular material to use during the Georgian and Victorian era, and almost certainly before, in Great Britain and elsewhere. Some could be very ornate, although few survive beyond 50-100 years due to natural decomposition.

**Louisa May Stanley**, died 13<sup>th</sup> September 1977, aged 71  
 The Stanley family lived at Higher Lodge in Offwell and in September 1939 Leonard Haddon was an evacuee billeted with the family. He arrived on 1st September 1939 and with a fellow evacuee from the same school was escorted to Higher Lodge by a young village boy. Leonard spent a little over two years with the Stanleys and throughout his life he continued to visit the grave of Louisa May Stanley *'who for two years and two months was my Mum'*.

In 2017 he wrote:

*'The time spent there helped to form my future life. I was ten years old when I arrived. I was totally part of the family life and the Stanley's treated me no differently than their own son; I came to love them. Even the passing of 76 years has not dimmed the memories of my good fortune in receiving the love and affection I had from this family'*.



On John and Bessie Northam's headstone is the following epitaph:

*'A long life hath but a few days  
 But a good name endureth for ever'*