

Keepers of Memory

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- First sentence must have three words
- Must include a first
- Must include a candle

These walls remember.

Each time a visitor lights a candle, we gather their prayer and store it forever.

We gather fear and calm, sorrow and joy, hate and love, discontent and calm. We gather from visitors who cry and from visitors who celebrate. And in our gathering, we provide release.

We are cold and hard and smooth and damp and dark and solid and strong. We are caretakers, surrounding visitors who take time to pause and reflect. We are a curtain of memories, shielding visitors from the turmoil of outside, providing space to pause and reflect.

We remember the first candle that burned here, centuries ago. Lit to mourn a knight slain in his quest to protect holy pilgrims. A white mantle with a red cross covered his rough-hewn coffin. The mourners chanted, 'Not unto us, Oh Lord, Not unto us. But unto Thy Name give glory'.

That knight was buried within our care, his resting place secure under the stones where feet have trodden ever since.

Those early candles bore the scent of animal fat and left trails of soot down our sides. They burned quickly and dimly, providing the only light that reached us.

At first we were rounded, formed to honour the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem even though our soil was hundreds of miles distant from that place. In those days we joined a tower where the knights withdrew to safety when under attack.

As years passed we transformed from round to rectangle. Templar gave way to Hospitaller, Hospitaller gave way to Catholic, Catholic gave way to Protestant.

But even in our newer, rectangular form, enough original pieces remain to gather and hold the memories. Our chancel arch, with its sandstone-carved green man, Templar sword, fish and snake, has watched over visitors since the beginning.

Some years, we gather memories too quickly. Those years bring waves of torment, faster than we can absorb. Too fast when the black death swept across the hills. Too fast when the coughing sickness entered homes. Too fast when the bombs fell on distant lands and visitors lit candles for dead they could not bury. In those years, the memories seem to drip from our cracks.

Now, we gather memories slowly. We watch over the departed who lie east-west in the grass beyond. The hillsides are quiet and few live in these parts. Those who do live here, live longer and visit rarely.

Today's candles bring no scent and no smoke. They provide fragments of light, lost amid the glare of powerful globes perched high in the rafters. Some seem endless, powered by battery, not flame.

But still we collect memories, the most recent just a moment ago. A candle lit by a father who outlived his firstborn son. He endured a hurt that no parent should be asked to face. As always, we listened. We understood. We absorbed his memory. He departed calm.

Whatever the sorrow. Whatever the joy. We gather and remember.