## St.Michael's Burial Ground

Sulhamstead Bannister's early history is not at all clear. At some point in its history (before the 13th Century) the manor was owned by the Bannister family, passed through several hands until being acquired by the Thoyts of Sulhamstead House in1774, and then to the Watsons in 1910.

This quiet corner of the parish is the burial ground associated with the United benefice of Sulhamstead Abbots and Bannister with Ufton Nervet. Today, there is only one functioning church out of three, at St Mary's Sulhamstead Abbots. Ufton St Peter's is now a community centre called The Spire, and Sulhamstead Bannister is apparently now without a church. However, just behind the War Memorial are the remains of the "old" church, dedicated to St Michael, rebuilt by the Thoyts in 1815, and replaced by the "new" church which was opened in 1914. The "old" church was demolished shortly after the "new" church was completed, and only the foundations now remain. The "new" church lasted only a relatively short time and was demolished in 1966. Only the porch now remains. Cherry trees donated by the Parish Council to commemorate those who died in the Covid pandemic, now flourish in what was the nave.

The"old" church had two bells, cast in 1587 and 1637. These were transferred to the "new" church in 1914. When this too was demolished, one of the bells was again transferred to St Mary's Sulhamstead Abbots, where it is now the service bell. The other, surprisingly has found its way to the Cathedral of St Andrew in Juba in South Sudan, where it performs the same function. An unexpected connection for the burial ground in Sulhamstead Bannister

The War memorial, which stands at what would have been the entrance to the "old" church is unusual in two respects. The list of names commemorates those who served in the First War, as well as those who died. At the bottom is the name of Dorothea Shepherd, whose name was added later as she had been a nurse on the Western Front, was invalided out, and died in 1928 from the effects of her war service. Not many First War memorials bear the names of women.

The burial ground now holds the graves and ashes of our relatives and friends, and is a place for quiet reflection. A footpath passes through the burial ground, which just beyond the boundary meets up with St James' Way, the Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela. Seats in the burial ground offer a few moments of peace and quiet in a busy day.

The Parish Council has generously undertaken to assist in the upkeep of this very important place, which holds the memories of our departed. Anyone who resides in the parish is entitled to burial in St Michael's, which of course, consecrated ground.

## St. James' Way

Many will have heard of the Pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. The pilgrimage was a major achievement om mediaeval times, along with pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem. If you had been living in England at the time, then the Pilgrimage would have started at Reading Abbey.

This ancient pilgrimage has been revived in recent time by the Confraternity of St James, which has established St James' Way, taking the pilgrim from Reading Abbey to Southampton, where the pilgrim takes ship to Santander, and re-joins the Camino in Spain.

The Confraternity has waymarked the Route with blue and yellow markers labelled "Camino Ingles", and these can be found throughout the parish. St Mary's Sulhamstead Abbots is the first stop of pilgrims on the Camino Ingles, and their Camino Passport is stamped here. Currently between 20-30 pilgrims pass through the parish every year, and every effort is made to welcome each one. It is perhaps salutary to remember that in centuries past, hundreds of pilgrims will have walked through Sulhamstead on their way to Santiago. A difficult and perilous journey in those days. An unexpected link with a surprising history.

Revd Dr Anthony Peabody