

30<sup>th</sup> June 2024

## Epitaphs

**"Shall I be gone long?  
For ever and a day.  
To whom there belong?  
Ask the stone to say.  
Ask my song."**

Cecil Day-Lewis, *Epitaph*, written by himself and inscribed on his gravestone

The word "epitaph" comes from the Greek word *epitaphios* for "funeral oration", from *Epi-* meaning "at" or "over", and *Taphos*, "a tomb". It came to mean, therefore, what is written on a tombstone, grave-marker, or headstone. In my peregrinations around cemeteries over the years I've found that most epitaphs are traditional and familiar: "In loving memory"; "Always loved, never forgotten"; "Forever cherished"; "Until we meet again"; along with many others in similar vein. But there are some which are more out-of-the-ordinary, and that's particularly true for celebrities.

For the explorer Ernest Shackleton, it's a quote from Robert Browning: "I hold that a man should strive to the uttermost for his life's set prize." For the legendary crooner, Dean Martin, it was a line from one of his signature songs: "Everybody loves somebody sometime." And though the wording on his tombstone is different, the epitaph Winston Churchill wrote for himself was: "I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."

I wrote recently about The Gudeman o' Ballengeich, the name King James V of Scotland took for himself as we went about his kingdom in disguise. And I suggested I would be happy if "Gudeman" was written on my gravestone as my own epitaph. That's not "set in stone" for me (sorry, please pardon the pun) as my thoughts on this are inclined to change from time to time. But it's worth thinking about, isn't it? What would *we* like our epitaph to be? It's not an arrogant or self-absorbed thought process. It's about self-awareness and considering what's important in our lives. How would we *really* want to be remembered?

Why not give it some thought? You can decide whether to keep it to yourself or share it with people who matter to you. And, you never know, *they* might have some interesting thoughts on your epitaph too.

### **A prayer for today**

*To meet my Maker? What would God have to say about me, I wonder?*

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