

The Floating Candle

Not *long* after Christmas I was contacted by friends who had heard on Thames Valley Radio FM that there was to be a production of the above named play, and what did I know about it? At the time I knew nothing, but after a few enquiries I managed to find the following.

On passing through Shipton, Mr. Tony Hull of Carterton saw the Cospatrick Memorial on Shipton Village Green, he stopped to have a closer look. He then made a few local contacts, and, with the help of Margaret Ware, he began researching the background to the memorial's existence. From his research Mr. Hull wrote his play *The Floating Candle* about the Cospatrick and its connection with Shipton. In an effort to get his play produced he spoke on Thames Valley Radio FM, and approached the Wychwood Players hoping that they would produce his play. After reading the script, and after much discussion, the Wychwood Players turned down the offer due to technical problems and cost of production. So, there is a play waiting to be produced, but the bare bones of the story can be told here.

During the 1870s, with harsh working and living conditions in this area, many families were encouraged to emigrate by the local National Agricultural Labourers' Union and agents from New Zealand. Many locals set out on the long and dangerous journey of three months or more to their new homeland. On arrival some emigrants found the life in New Zealand very hard going, while others sent back glowing reports which probably encouraged others to follow.



On 11th September 1874 seventeen of **the Hedges** and Townsend families from Shipton joined the other emigrants on the Cospatrick as she set sail for New Zealand. In the South Atlantic the wooden ship caught fire and sank, leaving no survivors from the 429 emigrants on board. By means of public subscription the present obelisk-type memorial was erected in 1877 to the memory of the seventeen Shipton emigrants who died in the tragedy. Their names are recorded on the triangular panels beneath the obelisk. Beneath the panels there is a lion's head with a spout in its mouth from which there gushed a constant stream of water which fell into the stone drinking trough which surrounds the base, for use by thirsty animals.

The gushing water gave rise to the local name of 'The Fountain'.

In the 1930s the names, which were incised into the stone work had become almost indecipherable. Through the generosity of the then Parish and County Councillor, Mr. J.H. Turner, four new engraved brass plates were fixed to the memorial, and that is how it stands to-day, although the water has ceased to flow.

For a more detailed account of the story of the Cospatrick please see the article by Margaret Ware in Volume 14 of *Wychwoods History*, the Journal of The Wychwoods Local History Society.

John Rawlins.