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13

WELSH CULTURAL IDENTITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PEMBROKESHIRE

The pedimented headstone as a graveyard monument

Harold Mytum

Gravestones are items of material culture which are particularly valuable as an analytical tool in the consideration of cultural identity. With relative chronological and geographical precision with regard to date of construction and place of erection, they provide material which can be used to examine trends through both time and space. Their association with named individuals allows some social context to be inferred, and their placement within a burial ground of particular denomination means that the active use of material culture can be compared in different ideological groups.

Extensive study of a sample of north and central Pembrokeshire, in which all burial grounds of Anglican and non-conformist denominations were recorded from twelve Anglican parishes, forms the basic database for this study. It is augmented by full burial-ground recording at other selected sites in north Pembrokeshire, and rapid survey of many other burial grounds in the region where information on pedimented headstones and other selected monument types was collected (Fig. 13.1). This is the largest regional survey of graveyard monuments in Britain, and is being placed in a wider archaeological context by field research on a number of deserted settlement types in the region where other aspects of regional material culture are being investigated (Mytum 1988). Some aspects of the research, particularly with regard to mariners' memorials (Kilminster and Mytum 1987; Mytum 1990) and language choices in the inscriptions (Mytum 1994, 1998), have already been published; and this chapter in contrast concentrates on a particular monument form which is a characteristic feature of the region.

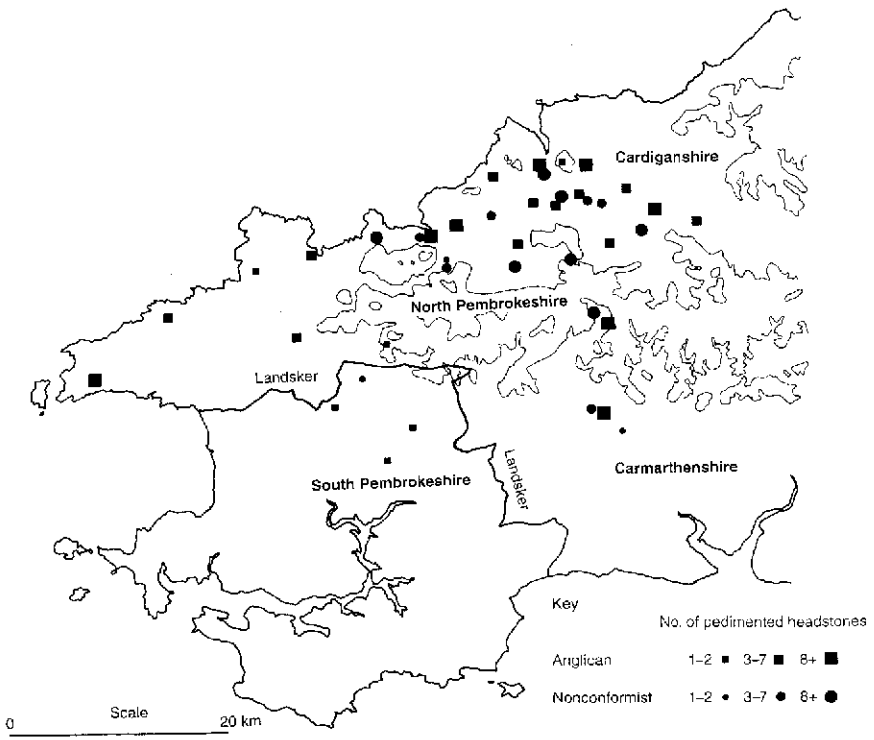

Figure 13.1 Map showing location of Pembrokeshire, Landsker line, and area of highest concentration of pedimented monuments

PEMBROKESHIRE CONTEXT

Pembrokeshire lies in the south-western extreme of Wales, with an English-speaking population in the south and a Welsh-speaking one in the north. This cultural division can be traced back to at least the Norman settlement of the south of the county, with the Welsh retaining greater control in the north. In the early modern period the cultural division was clearly identifiable (Owen 1963), and even as many aspects of behaviour and material culture became more uniform in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, language differences were still pronounced. The line which divides the English- and Welsh-speaking areas represents one of the most longlasting and stable cultural divisions in Britain (John 1972; Pryce 1978; Williams 1935), though the use of the term 'Landsker' for this divide appears to have been an early twentieth-century phenomenon (Awbery 1991). The Landsker as a linguistic divide has been examined archaeologically through graveyard monuments, where some material culture as well as linguistic differences have been noted (Mytum 1994, 1998).

During the nineteenth century English was the official language of record, even in the Welsh-speaking area of north Pembrokeshire, and it was also widely spoken by the middle classes at least in their business dealings (Jones 1993). The gentry were English-speaking and Anglican by religious persuasion throughout the area, though some families were supportive of nonconformity and gave land for chapels and occasionally entertained visiting preachers. The Anglican tradition remained dominant in the south, but was widely challenged in the north by various nonconformist groups. Although many chapels obtained burial land either adjacent to or at a little distance from the places of worship, this was often only achieved well into the nineteenth century, and many chapels never had their own burial areas. Nonconformists therefore were buried in the Anglican churchyards and the presence of a memorial in such a location cannot always be taken to indicate an Anglican. However, only nonconformists were interred in the chapel burial grounds and so these can be more firmly associated with a particular religious persuasion.

Ethnographic evidence from the early twentieth century which relates to at least the latter period of use for pedimented memorials indicates the active social use of burial grounds and memorials (Jenkins 1971). They were used to educate the younger members of the community in family histories, partly in terms of the information they directly contained but also as triggers for memories and other associated information. The pedimented memorials were not only large and complex, but could also contain more information about the deceased and their relationships and roles than less elaborate monuments. Thus the choice of such a monument gave the opportunity to make statements about the deceased and the associated family in material and textual terms which would continue in use for decades, and would be relevant not only to the immediate grieving family but to a wider circle of residents in the community.

The pedimented headstones are the most elaborate external memorials of their time in this region, being made from many pieces of cut and carved slate. They occur only in north Pembrokeshire in large numbers, with some in the neighbouring Welsh-speaking south Cardiganshire and north-west Carmarthenshire, and with few in the English-speaking areas to the south. A variant using different materials and less complex decoration occasionally occurs in the surrounding areas, and may be seen as a related but less favoured choice. Some of the slate pedimented stones are found with white marble panels for the inscriptions, but most are made solely from mid to dark grey local slate.

This chapter will examine the stylistic elements of the pedimented headstone, the degree of standardization and variability of such elements, and their combination into complex monuments. Reasons for the choice of the pedimented monument form, and for the great amount of minor variation, will also be explored. The area over which the study takes place is in the core of the distribution in north-east Pembrokeshire, with some reference to selected examples from more peripheral areas (Fig. 13.1). The context in which this

style developed, flourished and declined during the nineteenth century will be examined, and the role of the pedimented headstones in defining and reinforcing cultural identity will be assessed.

PEDIMENTED MONUMENTS: THE DETAILS OF CONSTRUCTION

A terminology adapted from Classical architectural definitions has been applied to the numerous elements which can be considered the attributes of the pedimented monument (Fig. 13.2). Each of these elements is made of at least one piece of slate, though some such as the lower cornice and architrave were sometimes made of several separate elements placed one on top of another to produce complex moulded features. All the elements occur in more than one form; these are not discussed in detail here, but examination of the photographs in this chapter shows how the various forms of column shaft or pilaster made

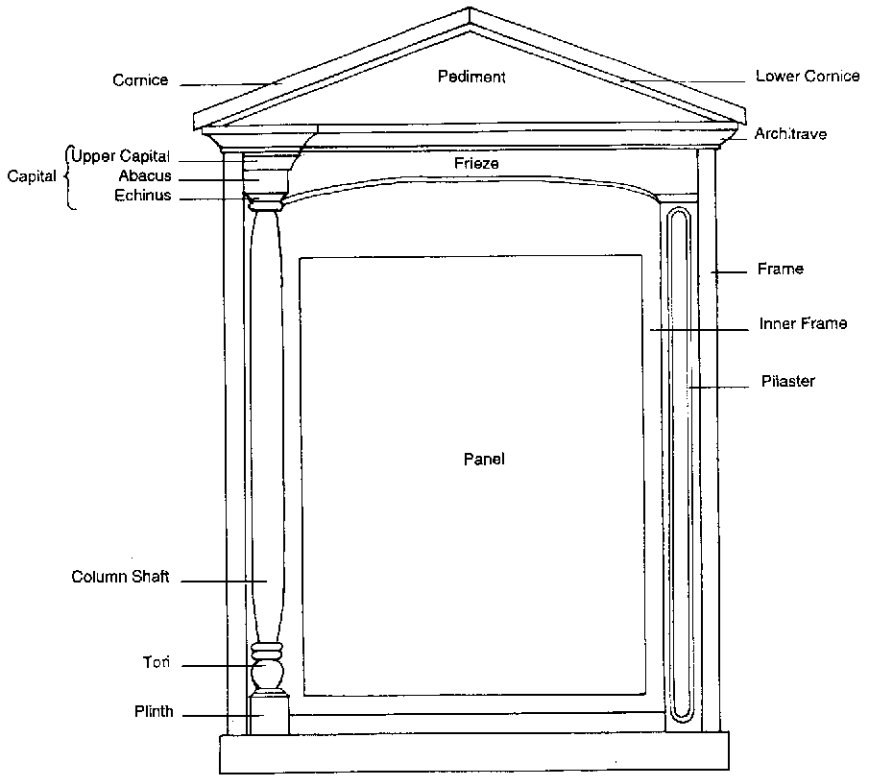

Figure 13.2 Pedimented gravestone with principal elements identified

monuments appear significantly different from each other even though they were all within the pedimented headstone tradition.

The pedimented headstone was normally made from local slate, which affected construction and design. It was in part the laminar nature of the material which meant that so many separate elements were necessary to form a pedimented headstone; in a material such as limestone, more relief carving would have been possible. Indeed, the nearest parallels to the pedimented stones found in south Pembrokeshire have very heavy solid frames and pediments in part because they are not made in slate. These sandstone and limestone examples could have been made in a slighter design, like the slate ones, but the slate headstones could not have been made bulkier.

The pedimented headstone was a form of graveyard memorial which, though unusual in the detail of its form, was perfectly normal in its function of marking a grave plot and giving details of the deceased by way of an inscription. The arrangement of the inscribed text on the panel, with introductory phrases and biblical verses at the end of the text (Mytum 1994, 1998), is as used on other monuments of the period. What is unusual is the complexity of construction and that, despite numerous variants, the appearance of the pedimented headstone as a class is always distinct. It is in terms of both size and shape very different from all other monuments in Pembrokeshire burial grounds, and there are no headstones which reflect any merging into other forms.

Decorative motifs are placed only within the pediment (which is sometimes used instead for the first word of the inscription, or is left blank), and consisted of a single motif such as anchor, shield or IHS. Limited stylized decoration in the corners of the panel does occur in the Carmarthenshire stones; but only in the very latest examples of the Pembrokeshire examples, when also the number of elements used to make the monument had decreased, was foliage carved more extensively around the inscription on the panel. In the last decades of manufacture the rules which helped to mark out the pedimented headstone were breaking down as its value as a distinct form was being lost. Nevertheless, even at this stage the shape and size of the monument remained the clearly distinguishing features.

Today, the pedimented headstone often stands on its own, and in the majority of cases some or all elements of the headstone itself are missing. With the rotting of wooden pegs and rusting of iron pegs and clamps, the various slate elements have split or come apart. In some burial grounds all elements have been tidied away, in others they have been placed against the rectangular upright panel bearing the inscription (which always survives till last). The progressive degradation of monuments means that for various stages of analysis the sample size varies, and this should be noted with regard to Tables 13.1 and 13.2 in this chapter. Whilst discussion here focuses on the pedimented headstone, in many cases (and perhaps originally all cases) the headstone was just the most substantial part of a larger monument which included a coffin stone or a boxed coffin-shaped structure in front of the headstone. There was also a footstone, and in some cases iron railings

set in a kerb marking the extent of the plot. Graves where the full package survive are now extremely rare, with that of William Morgan (died 1879) at Newport being one such well preserved case (Fig. 13.3).

THE ORIGINS OF THE STYLE

Prior to the development of the pedimented monument, external higher-status monuments were normally flat ledger stones or chest tombs. Relatively few headstones were present, and such headstones as did occur in north Pembrokeshire tended to be relatively small and plain with round-topped, shouldered forms predominating; some were decorated with cherubs, but not in the

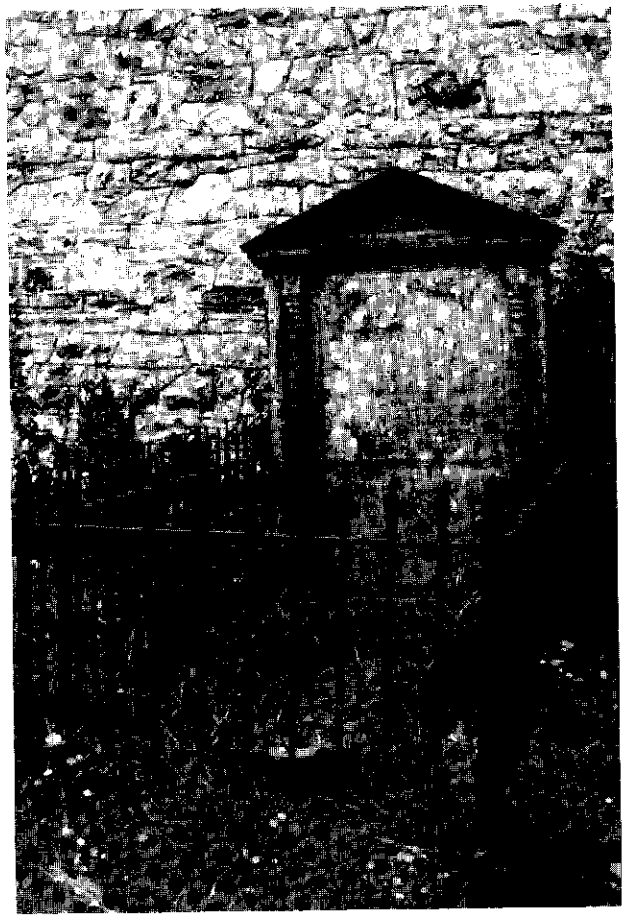

Figure 13.3 Pedimented monument with coffin, kerb and railings, Newport

frequency found just to the north-east in Cardiganshire (Chater 1976, 1977). The frequency of chest tombs is now difficult to assess as some have been dismantled, with only the top slab bearing the inscriptions being retained, giving the appearance of a ledger stone. However, a fine selection of chest tombs survives at Nevern, and these can be compared with the more isolated surviving intact examples elsewhere; ledger stones also occur widely though never in great numbers. Ledgers effectively covered the bodies and marked the burial place of the family, and allowed ample room for inscriptions on the large flat surface. Chest tombs also gave scope for limited decoration on the sides, though most in this region were of simple brick or more usually stone construction with no elaboration.

At a time when most graves were unmarked in any permanent way, the identity of the family plot and the integrity of remains were emphasized by the type of memorial (which covered the grave completely) and the frequent use of such introductory phrases as 'Underneath this stone' and 'Here lies buried the mortal remains'. For the more affluent and significant members of the population, ledgers and chest tombs therefore effectively fulfilled a symbolic and social role until others began to erect headstones over their graves. The need and ability to identify plots permanently with memorials would seem to have become more socially widespread during the early decades of the nineteenth century, and the low-level monuments were then no longer such dominant features of the churchyard as they could be obscured by headstones. To maintain enhanced visibility, larger upright monuments were required. There were two identified responses to this: the pedimented stones on the one hand, and the obelisk or draped urn on the other. The former were much larger than any other headstone forms, but were made of slate and occasionally included white marble; the latter were very tall if slim, and made of granite in various colours. The pedimented stones largely occur in the Anglican graveyards, with the obelisks and draped urns dominant in the nonconformist burial grounds. This is in itself a phenomenon of some significance, but will be the subject of a separate study; here attention is only given to the choice of a pedimented headstone.

The earliest identified pedimented headstones in north Pembrokeshire are two which commemorate individuals who died in the 1820s, found at St David's and St Dogmael's; but given the overall distribution from the 1830s it is likely that Newport was a key centre from the beginning, and it is only by chance that no earlier stones survive there. It is from the 1830s that the style becomes popular (Fig. 13.4), with the concentration clearly at the small town of Newport. The graveyard serving the large rural parish of Nevern has four from this decade; the two earliest (William Williams, died 1831, and Mary Nicholas, died 1833) are both of a very simple form, with only a cornice and frame. The town of Newport has nine examples, the earliest three all commemorating deaths in 1834. Many of the stones from the 1830s also show similar simple forms, though an integral upper capital and abacus is present on several. Others would seem to have had a solid piece of stone shaped like a low elongated pyramid set on

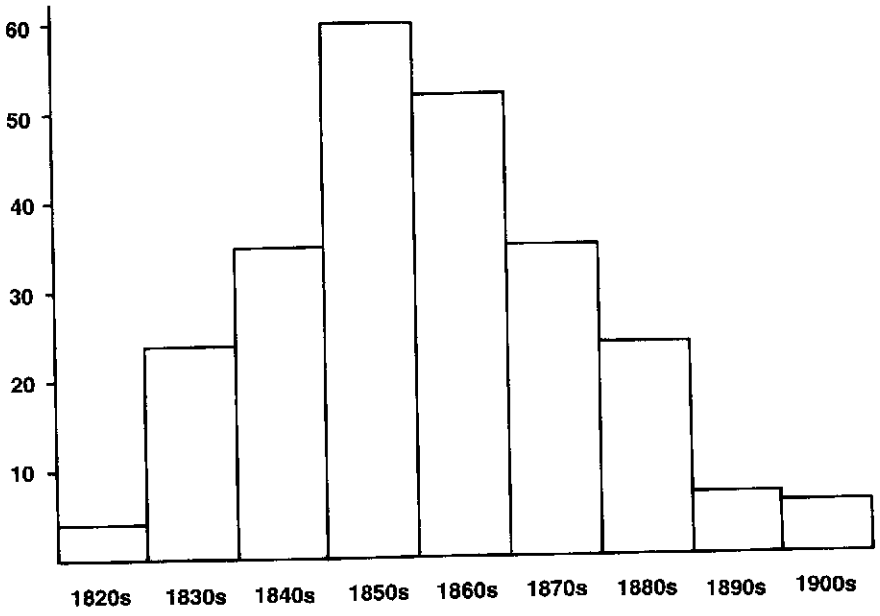

Figure 13.4 Histogram showing popularity of pedimented monuments over time

the architrave, or even nothing above the architrave at all. Yet others display more complex forms, but these may in fact have been commissioned and erected in the following decade when the full range of forms has appeared. Two stones commemorating deaths in the 1830s can be found in the English-speaking region of Pembrokeshire within the study area. That of Thomas Llewellyn (died 1838) at Ambleston and another at Wiston are both probably from families in the north and are the only examples at these sites for any decade.

The more complex pedimented headstones resemble doorways on some contemporary farmhouses and townhouses in centres such as Newport, and this may have been significant. However, the earlier simpler forms are less architectural and so the reasons for the origin of the style are unclear. Once developed, however, the fusion of architectural features from domestic architecture and those from funerary monuments may have been a natural one, as it is likely that the same craftsmen would have been involved in both. The symbolism of the doorway to the afterlife may have been deliberate and evocative, or it may have been used to provide a frame for the person commemorated in text, the equivalent of the person standing at the door of their house. The fact that many inscriptions for all types of headstone often state the house at which the deceased lived provides another context in which the indentification of the memorial with an architectural setting may have been relevant.

Table 13.1 Pedimented headstones by death of first person commemorated. Selected burial grounds with at least five dated pedimented headstones only

	Anglican				*Nonconformist*					
	DV	*NP*	*NV*	*DG*	*PO*	*BL*	*NT*	*RH*	*CI*	*DN*
1820–9	1			1						
1830–9	3	9	4	2						
1840–9	4	10	2	5	2					
1850–9	9	14	1		3	3	2	1		
1860–9	2	7		2	2	1	2	2	2	7
1870–9	1	4	1		4	1		2	3	4
1880–9		3	1	1		3	2			3
1890–9	1			2					1	1
1900–9				2						2
Total	21	47	9	15	11	8	6	5	6	17

Notes: DV, St David's Cathedral; NP, St Mary's Newport; NV, St Brynach's Nevern; DG, St Dogmael's; PO, Pontglasier Baptist; BL, Blaenfos Baptist; NT, Newport Independent Ebenezer; RH, Rhydymaen Pennel Cemais Baptist; CI, Cilgerran Pennel Baptist; DN, Dinas Methodist.

DIFFUSION OF THE STYLE

The pedimented headstone was rapidly accepted as an upper-middle-class external form of memorial in the region around Newport from the 1830s (Table 13.1). Whilst the town remained the focus of use, as nonconformist burial grounds were established the popularity of the form spread to surrounding areas, notably the Baptist burial grounds at Pontglasier and Blaenfos, and from 1860 the Methodist cemetery at Dinas. It is likely that a number of the earlier Newport stones are those of nonconformists from the region. Whilst the opening of the Newport Independent Ebenezer Chapel burial ground did not lead to a drop in the numbers of pedimented headstones being erected in the Anglican churchyard of St Mary's, numbers do tail off from the 1860s when many more nonconformist burial grounds are in use. The apparent shift from Anglican to nonconformist locations does not necessarily represent a shift in the popularity of the headstone form, but rather the widening of choice in burial location during the nineteenth century.

Whilst it is clear that denomination was not a key factor in the choice of a pedimented headstone (even though it would seem that it was so in the selection of alternatives such as granite obelisks and urns), social group would seem to have been more significant. It was not normal in this region to place the occupation of the deceased on a memorial (with the exception of master mariners), but quite a number of pedimented headstones contain such information. Prosperous businessmen, notably the numerous master mariners but also ship-builders, a druggist and shopkeeper, were the major patrons at Newport. Also represented were the professional classes such as a customs officer and

a postmaster. At the inland rural parish of Nevern the social composition is unsurprisingly different, with various members of the local gentry family, the Bowens, commemorated on a series of pedimented memorials set into a wall which formed part of their extensive family plot, prosperous farmers, and one other member of the gentry (John Owen, Esquire, of Newport). Elsewhere in north Pembrokeshire the monuments display the names of farmers, master mariners and the professional classes, though in much smaller numbers which do not make viable any more detailed analysis on a site-by-site basis.

The people commemorated on pedimented headstones represent the highest levels of society resident in the region. The only significant gentry family in north Pembrokeshire was that of the Bowens of Llyngwair Manor between Newport and Nevern, who remain distinct and underline this by having a family plot set into the hillslope to the north-east of St Brynach's Church at Nevern. This complex structure incorporates a series of pedimented headstones set in a retaining wall like doorways, but the vast range of individuals recorded on them make the date of their erection difficult to ascertain. Many of those commemorated on the panels of these pedimented features have individual small freestanding grave markers within the marked plot and, for the most important, also internal wall memorials in the church. They were the most powerful and socially significant family in the region during the nineteenth century, so their use of the pedimented style at all is of some interest, even if not used by them for freestanding headstones.

In Welsh-speaking north Pembrokeshire the pedimented monument can be seen as a feature used by an emerging middle-class population of administrators, farmers, merchants and master mariners to mark their position in society. This also defined them through a strong regional style with which even the gentry were happy to be associated, albeit in a distinctive manner. Newport, with its successful maritime trade and large community of master mariners and allied trades (Kilminster and Mytum 1987), was the main centre for pedimented headstones, with up to 30 per cent of memorials commemorating those who died in the 1830s being of this type. The smaller maritime centre of Dinas also had substantial numbers, as did St Dogmael's, though relatively recent reorganization of the graveyard there has meant that most pedimented headstones have lost most of the elements apart from the inscribed panel. The region over which the style was popular was small; by the time Fishguard to the west and Cardigan to the east are reached, there are very few pedimented stones despite the size and prosperity of these ports; inland the distribution in north-west Carmarthenshire reaches to around Newcastle Emlyn.

The large and relatively prosperous rural parish of Nevern immediately to the east of Newport also had sufficient demand to have a significant number of pedimented headstones, though its socio-economic composition explains the proportionately much lower peak of 13 per cent of monuments, again in the 1830s. Most other rural parishes have few pedimented monuments because of their small populations, and small numbers of prosperous farmers. The rural

concentration at Nevern may also be linked to production. Only a few memorials of any type are signed in the region during the nineteenth century, but those pedimented headstones with a maker's name or initials and place indicate Nevern as a centre of production. From the 1830s come three pedimented stones at Newport with the initials D.LL., in one case with Nevern being also mentioned. From the 1840s W.LL. takes over, again at Nevern, and a total of eight pedimented stones attributable to this mason run to the 1870s. It is likely that this represents a family business over two generations, and the father may have introduced pedimented stones to the area. Further documentary work will be necessary to trace these masons, and indeed others occasionally inscribed, such as J. Reynolds who carved three Dinas stones during the 1860s. Other masons have been noted on the Carmarthenshire stones.

CONTEXT OF STYLISTIC CHOICES IN PEDIMENTED HEADSTONES

The context of choice can be considered on two levels: the first concerns the time and space over which pedimented headstones were in use, and the second the more specific decisions regarding particular monuments in particular burial grounds (which in the absence of much supporting documentary evidence can only be effectively examined when monuments are grouped together, particularly in family plots). The overall distribution of monuments through time and space needs to be considered with two caveats in mind. The first is that there has been varying degrees of clearance and tidying up at graveyards, with the result that in some places only the most intact monuments have been left undisturbed, with others being partially dismantled so that only the panel survives; this restricts the amount of detailed information regarding the original style of many pedimented headstones. It is possible on the basis of size, proportions and the presence of peg holes and differential weathering on such stones to be certain that they were originally pedimented, but often little detail of the original appearance can be reconstructed. The second caveat is that the date of the first person commemorated may not be a good indication of the date of the monument. In some cases it may be erected several decades after the death of the deceased first mentioned on the stone.

Taking the full sample of pedimented headstones, there can be little doubt regarding the time-span over which the form was popular. There was a significant boom in the 1830s, with popularity remaining quite high to the 1880s. It should be noted that Dinas was opened in 1860, and in that first decade showed a level of popularity similiar to that at Newport, a pattern which was then continued for subsequent decades. Other nonconformist burial grounds also show narrower time ranges and there is probably less diffusion from Newport and Nevern than appears to be the case because the opening dates for many

Table 13.2 Selected design attributes by decade at Newport and selected other sites

	Newport			*Others*		
	Columns	*Pilasters*	*Neither*	*Columns*	*Pilasters*	*Neither*
1820–9					1	
1830–9	4		4	2		4
1840–9	3	4		1	3	
1850–9		12		2	5	2
1860–9		7		4	6	
1870–9	1	4		7	5	
1880–9	2	2		4	2	
1890–9				1	1	
1900 -9				2		
Total	10	29	4	23	23	6

Notes: 'Neither' indicates definite negative evidence; in many cases partial survival has not allowed attributes to be assigned.

burial grounds were during the mid-nineteenth century. The north coast pattern visible on the general distribution map (Fig. 13.1) is made even more clear when the actual numbers are considered (Table 13.1). The pedimented headstones should be considered as a unified regional phenomenon developing over decades and involving several masons.

Variability within the monument class can be seen to remain remarkably consistent over both time and space (Table 13.2). From the 1830s columns and pilasters both occur, though the latter become dominant from the 1840s at Newport. Columns remain more popular elsewhere, and from the 1870s become the most frequent choice. Within both pilasters and columns there are many variations, particularly in the latter, so visual differentiation could be easily made at this level of detail and visibility in the burial ground.

The patterns over time and space outlined above gave considerable choice in pedimented headstone design at any time from the 1830s. There was a clear desire for difference within the similarity, as can be seen with the pair of headstones to William and Sarah Mendus at Dinas (Fig. 13.5). Here we see at a general level a high degree of similarity, but on closer examination there are key differences. It is likely that the sort of monument – a pedimented headstone – had been deemed a suitable memorial before William's death but it is less likely that details were agreed. In the case of Sarah's monument again it is likely that she had made some arrangement to reserve the adjacent plot and to be buried there, rather than on top of her husband and so commemorated with an additional inscription on his stone (the normal arrangement). Who decided the details of this inscription is not known; the deceased may have left detailed instructions, or the surviving family may have decided. Whoever made the decision, however, the chosen form of words was both a common

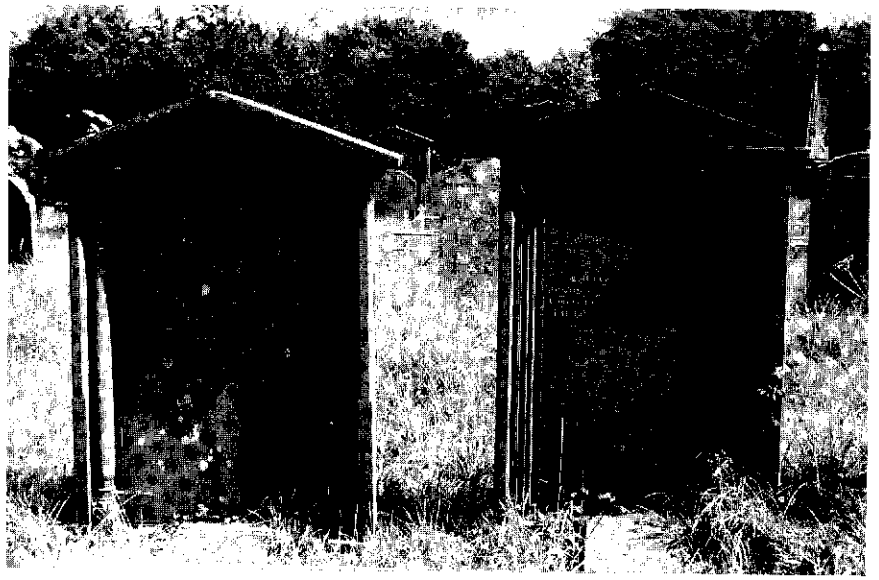

Figure 13.5 Pair of pedimented headstones to William and Sarah Mendus

phrase (though not the only one), and socially defined Sarah in relation to her already dead husband and his occupation: being relict of William Mendus, master mariner.

Given that two stones were to be erected side by side, it is instructive to consider their similarities and differences. Both have pedimented headstones of very similar dimensions and overall form. However, William's headstone has columns and the text begins in the pediment; Sarah's has pilasters and a flower motif in the pediment. William's bears a verse in Welsh; Sarah's has one in English. There are elements of differencing here which may be partly due to gender (the use of flowers as a decorative motif), partly due simply to the desire to be different (pilasters as opposed to columns) and partly to convey a different cultural emphasis (English rather than Welsh). It is not likely, given the time factor, that wider changing fashions were responsible (see Table 13.2).

Pairs of pedimented monuments can also be shown to emphasize unity through style. An excellent example of this is provided by the adjacent monuments of Elizabeth and John Hughes in Newport, which are almost identical; it is only at a very fine level of detail on the mouldings and lettering styles that differences can be seen (Fig. 13.6). It can be assumed that these monuments were meant to look similar not only from a distance but at close range. Indeed, this degree of variability may indicate what was considered to all intents and purposes identical by both client and mason, particularly as the second

Figure 13.6 Pair of pedimented headstones to Elizabeth and John Hughes, Newport

Figure 13.7 The Havard family plot, Newport

monument would have been made in the workshop at a distance from the original standing in the churchyard. The unity of the couple is emphasized here, perhaps even the more so for their being commemorated on two stones: the repetition is more forceful than an inscription which merely adds the later death.

Larger family plots, such as that of the Havards at Newport, demonstrate clearly that more complex patterns of decision could be made over the course of the whole period during which pedimented stones were in fashion. While often chosen, they were not always; the desire to avoid identical stones within one walled plot meant that other forms were on occasion selected (Fig. 13.7). The relationships of those within the walled plot and the numerous other Havards scattered about the churchyard (some marked also by pedimented headstones) will be the subject of further research; family members are still resident and leading figures in the community.

CONCLUSION

The pedimented headstones of north Pembrokeshire allowed definition of social identity at a number of levels, from conveying membership of the middle class or gentry classes to separating oneself to whatever degree from other members of the family. The choices made seem to have been meaningful, and to have been based on a sophisticated awareness of variations in form of the pedimented headstone. With this variability allowing individual or group identity to be expressed at a fine level of detail, the finished product was socially active at many levels.

Further analysis of the pedimented monument is still required with regard to typology and production, commissioning and distribution. Already, however, this complex memorial type has yielded much information regarding the definition, creation and maintenance of social identities in nineteenth-century west Wales.

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Part V

OLD FAMILIAR PLACES