

CAPTAIN VANCOUVER'S GRAVE*

The soldier who "hails from British Columbia" and who recently sent back to his home town paper a report that the grave of Captain George Vancouver, the great explorer whose name has been rightly immortalised in Canada, was in a state of neglect, must have made a very superficial observation; for, instead of any evidence of lack of attention, I found on going out to Petersham recently, that his grave stood out clearly among a cluster of overgrown and indistinct mounds in the more ancient part of the burying ground which surrounds the very quaint little parish church of St. Peter's.

It was the Agent-General for British Columbia in London, Mr. F. C. Wade, K. C., who had drawn my attention to the soldier's letter, for he was considerably concerned about the charge, not only because of his feeling of responsibility to British Columbia, but from his inherent sense of literary values. Any neglect of the author of "Vancouver's Voyage" Mr. Wade was ready to denounce as vandalism.

He made, therefore, immediately a pilgrimage to the historic place and found, no occasion for the outburst, though suggesting that I should go out and see for myself. This I have just done. Granted, there were no huge granite or marble atrocities over the spot where Vancouver was buried, only a perfectly plain white headstone curved at the top and bearing the unpretentious legend which the greatness of the man could well afford, and entirely in keeping with the custom of the Royal Navy to which he belonged:

Captain George Vancouver
Died in the Year 1798
Aged 40

The remarkable thing, to my mind, was the fact that while most of the inscriptions on the near-by tombs were almost obliterated by time, the lettering on Vancouver's was quite perfect, indicating the very reverse of neglect, and that the original stone must have been replaced in more recent years by his admirers in Petersham, of whom there seem to have been many devoted ones.

Had the soldier taken the trouble to step inside the dear little red brick church, he would have seen prominently placed, beside

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one of a belted earl, a beautiful white memorial tablet, upon which, in black lettering, he might have read:

In the Cemetary Adjoining the Church
Were Interred in the Year 1798
The Mortal Remains of
Captain George Vancouver, R. N.
Whose Valuable and Enterprising Voyage
of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean
and Round the World, During Five years
of Laborious Survey, added Greatly to
the Geographical Knowledge of His
Countrymen.
To the Memory of that Celebrated Navigator
This Monumental Tablet is Erected
By the Hudson's Bay Company
March, 1841

Nor was the interior tablet the only testimony to the unflinching way in which Vancouver's memory has been revered in that part of the world where lie his bones. Outside the church, and facing the road along which many people pass to and from Twickenham Ferry, where the Thames crossing has been made in a tiny boat, in the idyllic fashion, for centuries, was a notice board on which was printed, in old-fashioned type, and surmounted by a woodcut of the church, the following interesting particulars of the history of St. Peter's:

The church dates from before the Norman Conquest, being mentioned in Domesday Book. The present structure (originally a Cell of the Abbey of Chertsey) dates from the 15th Century. It was enlarged in 1790 and again in 1840, and is a remarkable example of the Georgian period, and a great archaeological curiosity. It contains several interesting monuments and is celebrated as the burial-place of Captain George Vancouver, the Discoverer of British Columbia and Vancouver's Island, now the headquarters of the Canadian Pacific Trade. The Churchyard is renowned for its natural beauty and contains the remains of many literary, scientific, and social celebrities.

Vancouver's grave was beside a brick wall, the wall overgrown with ivy, and near the head of the grave was a small hemlock tree whose boughs drooped so that their dark green lace, when the sun was low, just touched with a fleck of shadow the white marble headstone. Outside the wall was a large plane-tree, whose leaves are so like the Canadian maple, while velvety trees sheltered his grave from east winds, and a weeping willow crouched in its shadow

perennially mourning. At the outer corner of the churchyard stood a Lombardy poplar on guard, perhaps to warn any unsleeping ghosts of the approach of humans.

I think Vancouver must have loved that little, quiet corner. I know that in his life he loved the neighboring gentle slope, a beautiful tree-dotted part of Richmond Hill, for it was while standing upon its highest ridge one day in the year of his death that he exclaimed, "In all my travels I never clapt eyes on a more beautiful spot than this. Here would I live and here would I die."

Professor George Davidson, of the University of California, who was engaged for more than forty years on the United States coast geodetic survey, paid Captain Vancouver a compliment which the historian, Edmond S. Meany, claims is "a monument greater than the naming of an island, more enduring than an engraved slab of marble. The whole world will always honour Vancouver for his brilliant achievements in the science of geography."

Davidson's comment, to which Meany refers, was, "I have gone over every foot of the work done by Vancouver on the coast and I wish to say he was a great, big man."

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