

ELLIS - SEXTON - MORET

On the cross on this grave the Latin words 'O CRUX, AVE, SPES UNICA' appear.

We are fortunate to have received the following information from Sister Eustochium of St. Cecilia's Abbey in Ryde

There is a slight spelling mistake in the text. The correct version is "O Crux, ave, spes unica" and it means "Hail, O Cross, [our] only hope". It is the first line of the sixth verse of the hymn "Vexilla Regis prodeunt" ("The royal banners forward go) which was written by St Venantius Fortunatus (530-609) at the request of St Radegund (518-587) when a relic of the True Cross sent by Emperor Justin II of Constantinople was being taken in solemn procession on 19 November 569 to the Abbey of Ste Croix, Poitiers, which St Radegund had founded. The hymn became popular with Crusaders and so spread all over Europe. In the Latin liturgy such as we have at St Cecilia's it is sung at Vespers from Palm Sunday to the Wednesday of Holy Week, and at Vespers on 14 September, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. I think it also used to be sung during the Solemn Liturgy on Good Friday, when the Blessed Sacrament was brought from the Altar of Repose to the main altar, prior to Holy Communion, but this is now done in silence. When the liturgy was in Latin everywhere it would have been very well known, which is why this beautiful line from it became a popular pious ejaculation. When we sing the hymn we always kneel for this verse, to show reverence for the Cross on which hung the Saviour of the world, the "price of our salvation" as the hymn says.

Source - Sister Eustochium of St. Cecilia's Abbey in Ryde