

# London Burials

a guide for genealogists

# Today's talk

- A brief history
- Where was your ancestor buried?
- Resources

# A brief history

- Medieval times: typical burial in parish churchyard
  - body wrapped in shroud,
  - grave unmarked (or simple cross),
  - grave re-used after a period,
  - bones removed to Charnel House
  - ground in graveyard gradually rose.

# Exceptions: Plague

- Plague pits – high volume of deaths
- Examples:
  - 1348 - Charterhouse Square dug for victims of the Black Death
  - 1665 - plague pits at St Brides Fleet Street, St Botolph Aldgate, St Dunstons in the East, Lower Thames Street

# First cemetery

- First cemetery (i.e. a burial ground not next to a church) was New Ground (or new Churchyard), outside Bishopsgate
- Established 1569 on land belonging to Bethlem Hospital.
- Available to parishes who needed extra burial space

# 17th Century

- Great fire (1666) destroyed most city churches (within the walls)
- But left the churchyards... more room for burials if the church not rebuilt
- Even so, London's parish churchyards filled up during c17
- Time for new burial grounds...

# Growth of burial grounds

- Started by non-conformists – Bunhill Fields
- Many commercial grounds established in 1800s (*the Magnificent Seven*):
  - Kensal Green (1833)
  - Norwood (1837)
  - Highgate (1839)
  - Nunhead, Abney Park, Brompton (1840)
  - Tower Hamlets (1841)

# Vaults

- Many churches built with vaults under them
- Wealthy could buy the right to be buried in these vaults
- Great for parish revenue
- But...thought to be a health hazard
- Closed to further burials by law in the 1850s

# The City acts...

- By 1840s London churchyards were very overcrowded
- Burial Act 1852 closed them to further burials
- More big cemeteries followed...
- The biggest of them all was Brookwood, with its own railway service:
  - Daily trains left the Necropolis Station near Waterloo
  - two stations in the cemetery, North (non-conformists) and South (Anglican)

# Where were they?

<http://www.londonforfree.net/maps/cemeteriesmap.shtml>

# So where was your ancestor buried?

- As always – “it depends”
- After the Magnificent Seven, Londoners tended to be buried as follows:
  - those of North London in Highgate Cemetery
  - those of East London in Tower Hamlets, Victoria Park and Brookwood Cemeteries
  - those of South London in Norwood and Nunhead Cemeteries
  - those of West London in Kensal Green Cemetery.

# So where was your ancestor buried? (2)

- BUT... there are lots of exceptions:
  - Economic status mattered – affluent could get into St Marylebone
  - Different cemeteries won the right to bury the poor on an annual competitive tender
  - military personnel tended to be buried at Chelsea Hospital (army) or East Greenwich hospital (navy)
  - and there were many other large cemeteries opened as well as the M7

# Some resources

- London burial registers [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
- London Burials Index [www.originsnetwork.com](http://www.originsnetwork.com)
- National Burial Index [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)
- Photos of the Magnificent Seven [http://  
neilbartlett.tripod.com/darkdestiny/index.html](http://neilbartlett.tripod.com/darkdestiny/index.html)
- Lots of good information, maps and pictures [http://  
www.londonburials.co.uk/](http://www.londonburials.co.uk/)
- Excellent discussion about London burials, including addresses and email contacts [http://  
www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php/topic,403466.0.html](http://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php/topic,403466.0.html)