

## Burial Records

### Domestic Records 135

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#### 1. Introduction

Records of burials can be extremely difficult to trace. Registers are held in many different locations and there is no comprehensive index to them. Before the 1850's the vast majority of burials were recorded in the parish registers of the Church of England, although some nonconformist chapels also had their own burial grounds. After that, the situation becomes much more complex, with the advent of private and civic cemeteries.

#### 2. Burial Indexes

The National Burial Index (NBI), compiled by the Federation of Family History Societies (FFHS), contains 13.1 million entries, extracted from over 8,000 burial registers for England and Wales. This index is by no means comprehensive and is most useful for the early part of the nineteenth century (ie about 1800-1840). Although the covering dates are 1538 to 2000, there are very few entries from the twentieth century. Geographical coverage also varies greatly, with many entries for some counties such as Warwickshire, none at all for others, such as Sussex, and comparatively few for London. The index can be consulted at The National Archives, Kew. Most of the burials that are on the NBI, and some that are not, are indexed on the [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)

The National Archives holds a microfiche copy of the City of London Burial Index 1813-1853, compiled mainly from registers which can be seen on microfilm at [Guildhall Library](#), Aldermanbury, London EC2P 2EJ. Over 300,000 London burials are indexed in Boyd's London Burials 1538-1853, available on the British Origins subscription website at [www.britishorigins.com](http://www.britishorigins.com). The collection of Non-parochial Registers in series [RG 4](#) also includes some burial registers. A list of those that have name indexes can be found in 'Nonconformist Register Transcripts and Indexes'. Copies of this are in the Open Reading Room. **Burials in series RG 4 are now indexed online at [www.BMDRegisters.co.uk](http://www.BMDRegisters.co.uk), with images.** Access is free at The National Archives, Kew. A small number of burials overseas are in the Miscellaneous Overseas Collection series RG 32, 33 and 35, mostly indexed in RG 43. The major source for overseas burials, however, is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website at [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org).

#### 3. What information do I need to carry out a search?

If you cannot find the burial you are looking for in any of the indexes mentioned above, you will need to search individual burial registers. Before 1853 the most likely place of burial would be the parish churchyard. Later burials may be much harder to trace since there may have been several churchyards and cemeteries in a relatively small area. First you will need to have a good idea of where and when the person died. If the death took place after 1 July 1837, you should find this information on their death certificate. If the person left a will, this can help you identify their place of death or residence, and there are many more indexes to wills than to burials. In some cases, a will even includes instructions regarding the testator's own burial. Newspaper obituaries and death notices can also be helpful.

Some indexes of gravestone, or monumental, inscriptions, have been made, and there is a good collection at the Society of Genealogists' Library, 14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA. Further information can also be found in Stuart Raymond's 'Monumental Inscriptions on the Web' a copy of which is in the Reference Area.

#### 4. How do I start a search?

If the death took place before the mid-1850's, you should start by looking in the relevant parish burial registers. Most Church of England registers are deposited in county record offices, although later ones

may still be held at the church. Staff in the Open Reading Room will be able to help you locate the relevant registers.

An Act of Parliament in 1853 enabled local authorities to purchase and use land for the purpose of burial. So although many burials continued to take place in local parish churchyards (particularly in rural areas) the situation in large towns and cities became much more complicated. You will need to consult maps of the area to find out which cemeteries and churchyards were situated closest to the person's home address. Cemetery and crematorium records are generally held and maintained by local authorities. Their addresses can usually be found on the relevant local authority's website, and in local phone books. Contact details for over 1000 burial grounds and crematoria can also be found at [www.bereavement-services.org](http://www.bereavement-services.org).

If your ancestor lived and died in the Greater London area you should consult Clifford Webb, *Greater London Cemeteries and Crematoria* (6th edition, Society of Genealogists, 1999).

## 5. Other Sources

Different religious denominations often have their own burial grounds, in particular Jews and Roman Catholics. The records of these are normally kept at the burial ground concerned. The National Archives also has a good collection of nonconformist burial registers, mainly from the period before the start of Civil Registration in 1837. These are in record series [RG 4](#) and [RG 8](#) and are available on microfilm. Burials in series [RG 4](#) are now indexed online at [www.BMDRegisters.co.uk](http://www.BMDRegisters.co.uk), with images. Access is free at The National Archives. Later nonconformist burial registers are likely to be found in the relevant county record office, or at the church or chapel in question. Records of Quaker burials are on microfilm at the The National Archives, Kew in series [RG 6](#), they are also available from a [Family History Centre](#). If there was no nearby burial ground for their particular denomination, burials of nonconformists are likely to be found in the local Anglican parish churchyard.

## 6. Major Burial Registers at The National Archives

*Note:* [RG 4](#) are now indexed online at [www.BMDRegisters.co.uk](http://www.BMDRegisters.co.uk). Access is free onsite at The National Archives

Burial Ground	Dates covered	Microfilm Reference	Indexes on film or in book format
Bethnal Green Protestant Dissenters' Burying Ground (Gibraltar Row)	1793-1837	<a href="#">RG 8/305-314</a>	In book format at TNA
Bunhill Fields Burial Ground	1713-1854	<a href="#">RG 4/3974-4001</a> <a href="#">RG 4/4288-4291</a> <a href="#">RG 4/4633</a>	On microfilm film <a href="#">RG 4/4652-4657</a>
Golden Lane Cemetery (Bunhill Burial Ground)	1833-1853	<a href="#">RG 8/35-38</a>	Yes
Victoria Park Cemetery, Hackney	1853-1876	<a href="#">RG 8/42-51</a>	Registers arranged alphabetically
South London Burial Ground, Walworth	1819-1837	<a href="#">RG 4/4362</a>	No
Southwark New Burial Ground, London	1821-1854	<a href="#">RG 8/73-74</a>	No
Spa Fields, Clerkenwell	1778-1849	<a href="#">RG 4/4316-4322</a> <a href="#">RG 4/4366-4367</a>	No
Necropolis Burial Ground, Everton, Liverpool	1825-1837	<a href="#">RG 4/3121</a>	Some years indexed by the Friends of TNA
Royal Hospital Greenwich, Burials	1705-1864	<a href="#">RG 4/1669-1676</a> <a href="#">RG 8/16-18</a>	No
Royal Hospital Chelsea, Burials	1692-1856	<a href="#">RG 4/4330-4332</a> <a href="#">RG 4/4387</a>	No

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The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU

Tel: +44 (0)20 8876 3444 Fax: +44 (0)20 8392 5286

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