



THE HENRIETTA STREET BAPTIST CHAPEL, BLOOMSBURY, AND ITS CONGREGATION: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT WAKEFIELD STREET, LONDON, WC1

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SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring took place on underpinning and the ground reduction of the site of the former Henrietta Street Baptist chapel (1821–c.1871) prior to development. Burials were uncovered, aligned north-west–south-east, respecting the walls of the building, set in brick-lined graves and vaults. These date principally from the 1820s to 1850s and were interred beneath the chapel. After the chapel closed in c.1871 it was converted to secular use, until it was destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. This destruction disturbed many of the burials. Few of the recorded burials were intact and over half of them were less than 50% complete. As well as the bomb damage, some of the graves may have been partly or completely cleared at other times. Sixty-four full and partially articulated human skeletons (48 adults and 16 sub-adults) were recorded. Ages ranged from a single infant aged 7–11 years to seven adults aged 46. The sex of only 20 of the adults could be determined. The low number of sub-adults is probably due to disturbance and truncation. However, the population provides a useful addition to the growing corpus of information on London's Nonconformist population in the 19th century, particularly as the osteological evidence can be compared with the burial register that survives for the years 1828–37.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological investigations were carried out on the development of a vacant site, now 8, 9 and 10 Wakefield Street, London, WC1, in the London Borough of Camden during 2011 by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA). Two trial pits were monitored in July 2010. In January–March 2011, pits were dug to enable the underpinning of the southern site boundary wall and this phase of work revealed the presence of burials. These were associated with Henrietta Street Baptist chapel, built on the site in 1821 and destroyed during the Second World War.

The discovery of the burials meant that the lowering of the ground level across the site in March–April 2011 was archaeologically monitored. All work was carried out in compliance with the regulations laid out in the 1857 Burial Act and under the terms of the Licence for the Removal of Human Remains issued by the Ministry of Justice.

The basic unit of reference in the site archive and this report is the context number. This is a unique number given to each archaeological feature or stratum representing a single action (such as a burial *etc.*). All context numbers appear in the text in square brackets, thus: [10].



Fig 1. Site location

SITE LOCATION

The site was located on the east side of Wakefield Street (National Grid Reference TQ 30365 82440), immediately north of St George's Gardens, the former burial ground for St George, Bloomsbury, who used the northern part, and St George the Martyr, who used the southern part (Fig 1).

The site covered an area of 285 square metres, while ground level varied between 22.35m OD to the west and 22.01m OD to the east. The site finds and records, catalogued under the site code WKF10 in the Museum of London archive, are deposited in the London Archaeological Archive and Resource Centre. However, a requirement of the burial licence was that the human remains be reinterred.

EXCAVATION SUMMARY

The drift geology of the site comprises Pleistocene Thames Lynch Hill Terrace gravels, which overlie Eocene London Clay, but neither of these formations were identified during fieldwork. The drift geology appeared to have been disturbed, though a silty clay (probably Brickearth)

encountered at between 19.85 and 20.29m OD was probably a natural deposit. A map of 1801 (Thompson) shows the site as a 'gravel pit field' and next to a brickfield; brickmaking and related quarrying was taking place locally as early 1623 (*Survey of London vol 24, 70–9*). These activities almost certainly account for the extensive geological disturbance found on the site.

Evidence for other uses of the site before the construction of the chapel was limited to a brick-lined soak-away or well, which had been filled in when the southern wall of the chapel building was built.

The Baptist chapel

The watching-brief revealed parts of the brick foundations of the south wall, the east wall and some internal features, such as column bases, of the 1821 chapel. The probable position of the chapel building (Fig 2) can be conjectured by combining these observations with a survey of the property made in 1911, when it housed the Regent Square Institute.¹ A brick-lined box drain ran c.2.5–3m to the north of the southern wall of the chapel.

Burials within the chapel

Burial practices at the Henrietta Street chapel were consistent with contemporary sites. As is normal for the 19th century, the bodies were interred within wooden coffins in a supine and extended position. Although some metal coffin fittings survived, the coffins themselves were usually little more than organic stains and this, together with the considerable disturbance, meant that no details of their construction could be determined. Of the coffin furniture recovered, the small number of coffin handles were all iron and of a plain type typical of the early 19th century. No coffin breastplates survived in a readable condition, so no individuals could be identified. Finds from the grave fills included 19th-century buttons.

Sixty-three graves were recorded within the chapel (Fig 2). There were 64 contexts of partially and fully articulated human remains, and five contexts of disarticulated bone recovered from underpinning pits. The graves were generally badly disturbed and over half of the burials were less than 50% complete. In particular, a number of very partial and incomplete burials, of which only the smaller bones of the extremities and the fibulae remained, suggested that many of the graves had been subject to previous clearance. Quite when this occurred is unknown but it most likely related to the wartime damage to the building and its subsequent demolition.

The majority of the burials were contained in brick-lined graves, which butted up to each other, but a row of more substantial brick vaults, with brick or stone floors, lay in the north-east corner of the chapel. All were within the footprint of, and orthogonal to, the chapel building; they were predominantly aligned in rows down each side of the chapel with the graves at right-angles to its axis, though some at the south-east corner of the building were aligned with the axis. A series of sub-adult graves found close to the box drain suggested that all available space was utilised for burial.

THE BAPTIST CHAPEL AND ITS CONGREGATION

Small Baptist chapels or places of worship

were established all over London during the early 19th century, and Bloomsbury was no exception. Most were Strict Baptist causes (strict Calvinists with membership and communion only open to those who met their criteria, which would include believer's baptism). Chapels multiplied as causes split over theological disagreements.

The Baptist membership that became the Henrietta Street chapel was formed in a large lecture room at Burton Street on 17 September 1817 by people who had separated from the congregation in Keppel Street, which itself had originated from Grafton Street, Soho. Their first pastor was William Belcher, formerly of Worcester. Shortly afterwards, a second group led by John Edwards separated from the congregation in Little Wild Street (now Keeley Street, off Kingsway, Holborn), and joined the Burton Street cause, Edwards filling the office of assistant to Mr Belcher (Ivimey 1830, 399–400). This larger congregation required bigger premises and a new, freehold, place of worship was commissioned. At the time the chapel was built, Wakefield Street was known as Compton Place and was not fully developed, so the chapel took its name from Henrietta Street, now Handel Street, opposite (Fig 3). It opened on Wednesday 3 October 1821. Three sermons were preached that day, at 11am, 3.30pm and 6.30pm, with collections taken to assist in defraying the construction expenses (*The Baptist Magazine* 1821, 450).

However, soon after the building was finished, Edwards and those who had left Wild Street with him, returned to Burton Street. In 1825 Belcher resigned and in July 1828, the Rev Thomas Thomas, previously of the Stepney Academy, became the pastor of the Henrietta Street chapel (*The Baptist Magazine* 1828, 428). The chapel and its congregation seem to have prospered under Thomas. By 1836, when he was succeeded by the Rev W A Salter, the number of members had grown from 47 to 204; while the debt was reduced from £1500 to £800 even though the chapel was considerably enlarged and improved (*The Baptist Magazine* 1836, 595–6). The chapel had joined the London Baptist Association in 1834. Initially the Association was divided into four districts, with Henrietta Street linked with Eagle Street and Salters' Hall (*The Baptist Magazine* 1834, 347–8).

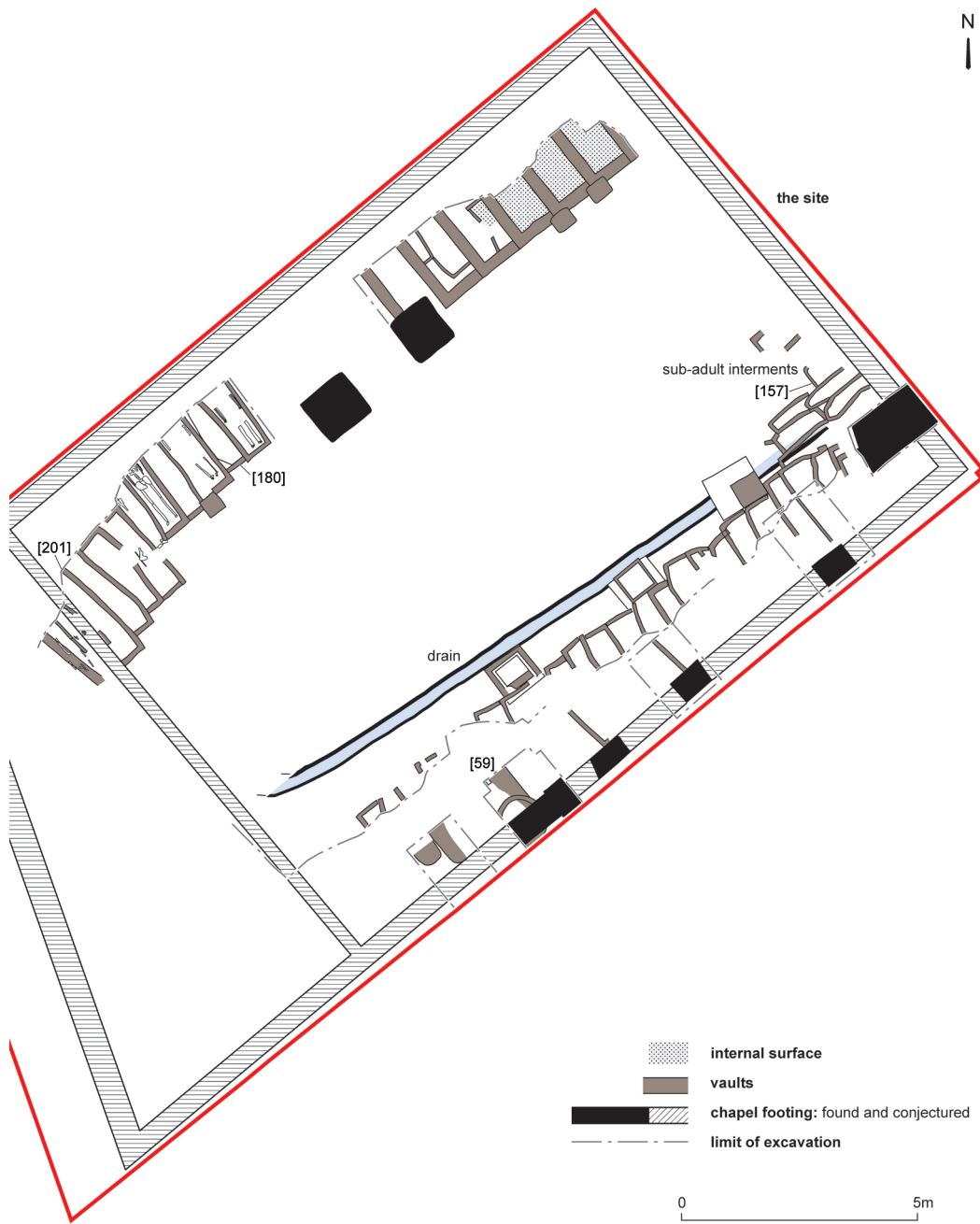


Fig 2. The archaeological features recorded on site, in relation to the observed and conjectured location of the chapel walls. The graves containing the individuals referred to in the osteological discussion are shown numbered.

The Baptist Magazine lists ministers and collections for the Henrietta Street chapel for every year up to 1871, after which it is not mentioned. However, it can still be found

in the Post Office London Directory up to 1912. The Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1871 has the building labelled 'Baptist Chapel Sittings for 450', but by the 2nd



Fig 3. The Henrietta Street church in a watercolour of 1859 (Heal Collection C VI 16; reproduced by permission of the Camden Local Studies and Archive Centre)

edition of 1894–6 the building is labelled ‘Institute’. The former chapel was destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. The site was cleared and, apart from some small garages built during the 1960s, remained open ground until the recent development.

A burial register for the Henrietta Street chapel survives in the National Archives (TNA: PRO, RG 4/4338). Nonconformist registers were taken into the custody of the Registrar-General under the Non-Parochial Registers Act of 1840. They had previously been inspected and authenticated by a Royal Commission appointed in 1837 ‘to enquire into the state, custody and authenticity of registers kept in churches and chapels other than those of the Established Church’ (Rowlands & Rowlands 1998, 49). These burial registers only record burials that took place at the premises to which they refer — they do not include members of the congregation or parish who were buried elsewhere.

The Henrietta Street register covers the period 1828–37: its first entry is the burial of Henry John Gunning of Bedford Street,

Tottenham Court Road on 27 December 1827, its final one that of James Samuel Garner of Whittlebury Street, St Pancras on 7 July 1837. This represents the last entry before the submission of the register, not the final burial at the site, but no other registers are known to survive. It is not known for how long the chapel continued to be used for burials, but it would have been closed for burial no later than 1854, by an Order of Council under the terms of the Burial Act of 1853.

In the register, 246 entries give the sex of the individual: of these 122 are male and 124 female. The age at death is given for 243 of the entries, of whom 121 are male and 122 female. These data can be compared with two similarly dated registers of over 5,500 burials from Islington (New Bunhill Fields, Islington Green (IGN96) (Miles & Griggs 1997) and City Bunhill (GDA06) (Connell & Miles 2010)). The age at death curve for Henrietta Street (Fig 4) more closely matches that of the New Bunhill Fields, Islington Green population, who were a generally wealthier group than those found at City Bunhill. A

comparison of the age at death of men and women at Henrietta Street is shown in Fig 5.

When the addresses at death for those buried are examined, it can be seen that the spread is wide. The register gives an address for 245 individuals, of whom 33.9% (83/245) came from within a 500m radius of the chapel: an additional 28.1% (67/245) lived

within 1000m. Obviously, the remainder came from further away, the most remote being from Holloway (4.3km), Walworth (4.8km), Hampstead (5.1km) and Peckham (7.4km) — these are likely to be due to personal connections with the chapel or with people already interred within it.

An impression of the distribution of the

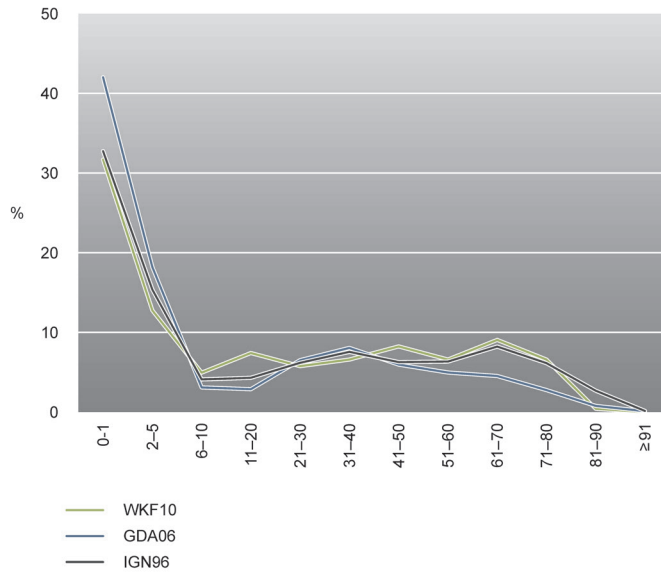


Fig 4. Age at death from the burial registers for Henrietta Street (WKF10), compared with City Bunhill (GDA06) and New Bunhill Fields, Islington Green (IGN96)

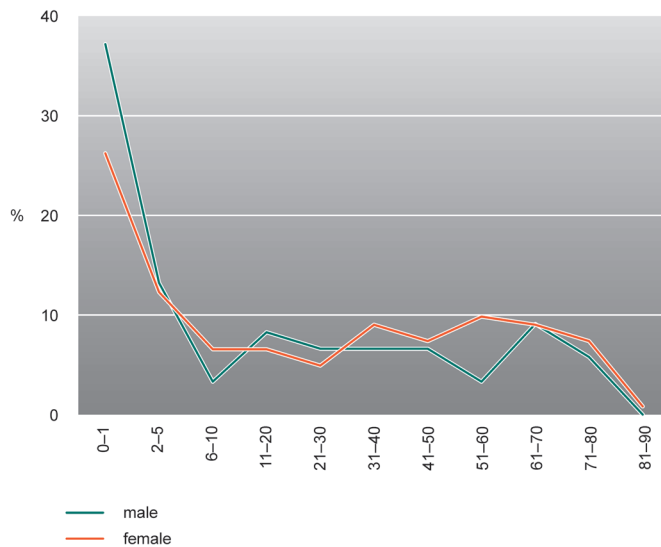


Fig 5. Age at death from the burial registers for Henrietta Street, comparing males with females

nearer addresses in west central London can be gained from Fig 6, which shows 209 of the 245 superimposed on Horwood's map of 1813. There are a number of other Baptist

chapels in the area listed in the 1841 Post Office Directory (Fig 7); the chapels at Little Wild Street and St Clement's Lane also had burial vaults.



Fig 6. Address at death from the burial registers for Henrietta Street overlaid on Horwood's map of 1813



Fig 7. Baptist churches and chapels within the vicinity of Henrietta Street, from the 1841 Post Office London Directory overlaid on Horwood's map of 1813

THE SKELETAL SAMPLE

Excavations over the last 10–15 years have begun to redress the paucity of archaeological evidence for Nonconformist populations. Recent work in London includes excavations at Bow Baptist church (Henderson *et al* 2013, 33–52), the General Baptist Ministry at Glasshouse Yard (Daykin 2007) and the Quaker Burial Ground at London Road, Kingston-upon-Thames (Bashford & Pollard 1998). In the wider geographical area, archaeological investigations include the 18th-century Baptist chapel at West Butts, Poole, Hemingford Grey, Cambridgeshire and Kings Lynn (McKinley 2008; Clough 2007; Boston 2005). However, the analysis of the burials at the Henrietta Street chapel has presented an opportunity to gain important insights into what is still an archaeologically under-represented segment of the population of 19th-century London and provided demographic and pathological information that could be compared with other assemblages from the same period.

While overall bone condition was found to be good, as noted previously many burials were disturbed. In many cases only the smaller bones of the appendages (hands and feet) or

the fibulae (lower limb) remained. Two sub-adult burials consisted principally of unfused epiphyses (joint surfaces). The presence of partial and incomplete individuals (Fig 8) limited the data that could be obtained from the bone.

Sixty-four contexts of fully and partially articulated human skeletons were identified (Table 1). The assemblage comprised 48 adults and 16 sub-adults. A higher number of males (12/48: 25.0%) compared to females (8/48: 16.7%) is probably the result of the high number of adults for whom sex could not be determined (28/48: 58.3%). The ages of those buried ranged from a single infant aged 7–11 years to seven adults aged ≥ 46 years. The majority of adults died aged 36–45 years, corresponding to the mortality figures recorded in the London Bills of Mortality for the post-medieval period (Roberts & Cox 2003, 204). An absence of suitable skeletal elements and limitations in osteological ageing methods would have affected the overall demographic profile of the assemblage that only represented a small proportion of the original buried population.

The number of sub-adult burials is low for the period and almost certainly demonstrates the fact that some graves had been

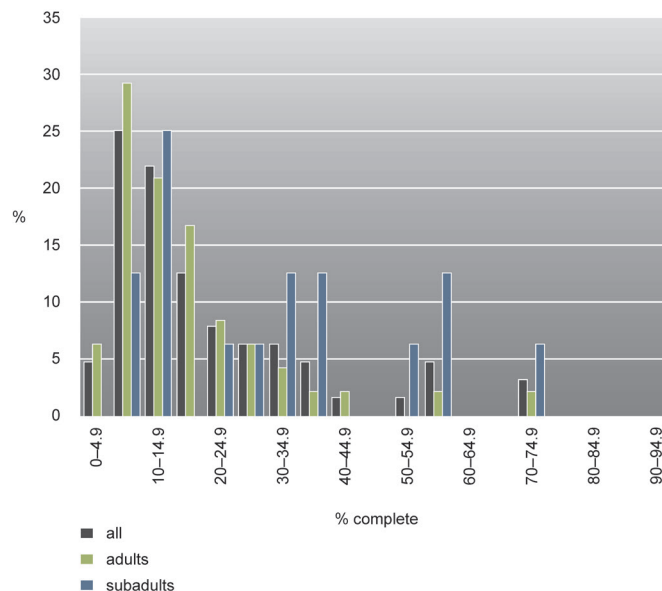


Fig 8. Skeletal completeness from WKF10

Table 1. Demographic distribution from the site

Sex	Age (years unless stated)												
	Perinatal	1-6 months	7-11 months	1-5	6-11	12-17	18-25	26-35	36-45	≥46	Adult	Sub-adult	Total
Sub-adult	-	-	1	8	2	4						1	16
Male	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	5
?Male	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	3	-	7
Intermediate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
?Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	5	-	8
Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Undetermined	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	3	20	-	28
Total	0	0	1	8	2	4	0	3	10	7	28	1	64

completely removed in the past. Immature bone can potentially be expected to survive as well as adult bone (Lewis 2007, 37). Contemporary burial grounds often reveal a high level of child mortality. The majority of all those excavated at SS Mary and Michael, Whitechapel were ≤18 years old (Henderson *et al* 2013, 100) and almost half of those buried at Bow Baptist church were sub-adult (Henderson *et al* 2013, 103). At Wakefield Street, nine of the identified sub-adults had died before their fifth birthday: this can be compared with the c.40% of childhood deaths at the age of five or under recorded in the London Bills of Mortality in the early 19th century (Roberts & Cox 2003, 303-4).

Traces of iron, the remnants of coffin studs and fittings, were found adhering to the cortical surfaces of bones from most contexts. Three burials displayed localised green staining from contact with copper-alloy objects within the grave. Four contexts had localised purple discolouration. Similar purple or pink staining has been observed in other post-medieval skeletal assemblages. Six infants under the age of five years at death from SS Mary and Michael, Whitechapel displayed pink staining on endocranial surfaces (Henderson *et al* 2013, 16). This may indicate the early stages of chemical breakdown of the bone and has previously been associated with yeast colonisation

(Molleson & Cox 1993, 13).

As urbanisation and industrialisation transformed London in the 18th and 19th centuries, the city's rapidly expanding population placed ever increasing pressure on resources and led to overcrowded living conditions, raised pollution levels and poor sanitation, all of which adversely affected the lives and health of its inhabitants (Roberts & Cox 2003, 358). The overall physical characteristics of adult stature, skeletal indices and the presence of non-metric traits from the burials at the site were comparable to those recorded in contemporary, early 19th-century populations. This was also true of the range of pathological bone conditions encountered, including evidence of developmental and congenital disorders, metabolic and infectious disease and trauma (Roberts & Cox 2003, 308). Degenerative spinal joint disorders and dental disease were the most prevalent pathological bone conditions observed. The presence of osteoarthritis in the adult population suggested an ageing population. Dental health was also poor. Surviving teeth revealed evidence of cavities, mineralised plaque deposits, gum disease and loss of teeth during life indicative of a lack of dental hygiene and a cariogenic diet that contained starchy, carbohydrate based foods (Roberts & Cox 2003, 303-4).

Significant individuals within the burial population

Several individuals exhibited evidence of traumatic injuries that suggested some form of physical exertion from a young age, or accidents in the workplace or home. Male [229], aged 36–45 years, had a stature of 164.7cm. (The largely complete remains of this individual were reconstructed from skeletal material found in an underpinning pit and the original burial location is unknown and not shown on Fig 2.) Severe trauma, possibly from a fall from a height had resulted in multiple injuries. A displaced but well healed fracture was present in the joint of the right scapula (shoulder). Such an injury may result from a high energy force causing the humeral head to impact on the glenoid socket (Gross & Keenan 2010). A further fracture was present in an unside rib shaft. The end of the right scapula acromion process had been avulsed and a spur of bone on the right humeral shaft may have represented an injury to the brachialis muscle. The eleventh thoracic vertebra of the lower spine was wedge shaped, the result of a compression fracture. New bone had formed in response, attempting to fuse with the vertebrae above and below. Secondary osteoarthritis was present throughout the upper spine and had resulted in the bony union of the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae. In the lower limbs, an abnormal joint surface had formed between the calcanei and navicular bones of the feet. This may have resulted from a developmental abnormality occurring in childhood or possibly through traumatic injury and may have hindered normal walking (Resnick 2002, 4593).

Further evidence of traumatic injury was seen in adult [178] (Fig 2, grave [180]) who presented a Colle's fracture of the left wrist. There was dorsal deformity and a region of porous bone to the left distal radius and avulsion of the ulna styloid process. This common fracture type results from a fall onto an outstretched hand and may have been responsible for the widespread and severe degenerative osteoarthritis present in the joints of the hands (McRae 2003, 314). Extensive joint changes at the base of both thumbs was likely the result of bilateral Bennett's fractures or subluxation caused by

a punch or fall onto the thumb (*ibid*, 338). A high frequency of Bennett's fractures was recorded at New Bunhill Fields burial ground, Southwark (Miles with Connell 2012, 81). Degenerative joint disease was also present throughout the spine.

Robust individual [199] (Fig 2, grave [201]), possibly male and aged ≥ 46 years, was 168.6cm tall and presented well developed muscle insertion points throughout the body. Osteoarthritis affected the right femoral head and widespread layers of new bone growth to the upper shaft suggested the presence of a long-standing, chronic infection. A sub-circular lesion in the bone may have underlain a soft tissue lesion or cyst and an erosive lesion in the thoracic vertebrae of the lower spine may have resulted from the early stages of tuberculosis.

Of particular note was a large ossified mass measuring 46.3mm in maximum diameter and weighing 23.3g found associated with male [54] (Fig 2, grave [59]), aged ≥ 46 years (Fig 9). Roughly rounded in shape, with a porous honeycomb-like internal structure, it may be a urinary calculus (bladder or kidney stone). These stones can obstruct the flow of urine and can lead to bleeding or infection (Aufderheide & Rodriguez Martin 1998, 284, 332). Bladder stones are more common in males and those eating a vegetarian diet while kidney stones have a higher prevalence in affluent and industrialised populations (Roberts & Cox 2003, 354). A high protein content in the diet and the adulteration of ingredients (such as the addition of chalk to flour in order to whiten it) may have been contributory factors (Picard 1997, 89). However, evidence of such stones remains rare in the archaeological record and Roberts and Cox (2003) report only eight identified cases covering the entire span from the prehistoric to post-medieval periods in Britain. Surgery to remove a bladder stone — lithotomy — was a long established practice, dating back to at least the 1st century AD (Porter 1997, 278). However, as with all surgery before the introduction of antibiotics or anaesthetics, mortality was high. Many deaths resulted from shock or a lack of surgical expertise leading to infection (Richardson 1988, 40). As techniques advanced the procedure became quick — it could be carried out in less than a minute — saving the patient from

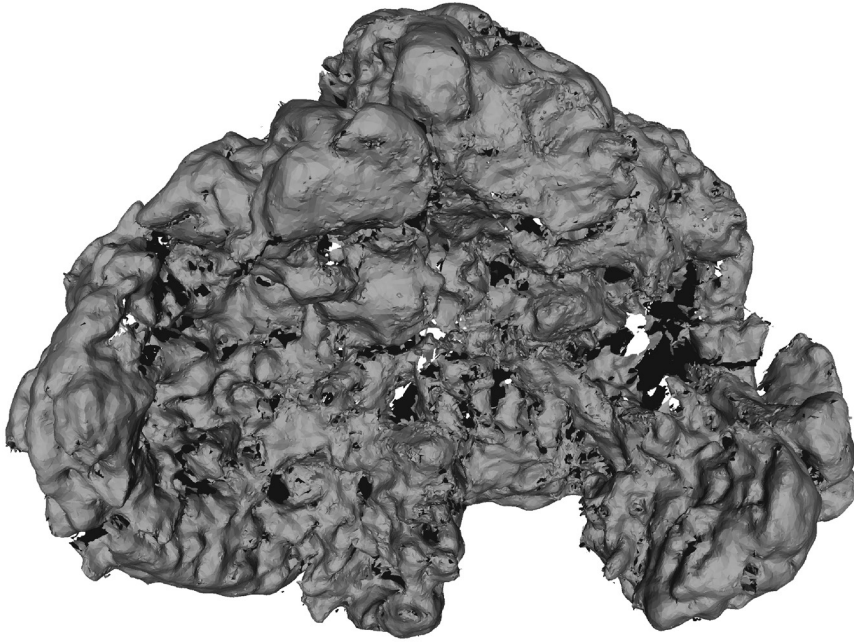


Fig 9. Laser scan of ossified mass, measuring 46.3mm maximum diameter and weighing 23.3g, found with male [54] aged ≥ 46 years

exhaustion and blood loss, and death rates fell (Richardson 1988, 40). However, it is likely that an individual would only seek medical treatment as a last resort, when the severe pain of the stone pressing on the bladder became unbearable (Moore 2005, 103). Samuel Pepys underwent an operation to remove a tennis ball sized stone in 1658 at the age of 25. He celebrated the anniversary of his operation, though whether to commemorate his relief from pain or his surviving the operation is not known (Moore 2005, 104).

In the non-adult sample, sub-adult [156] (Fig 2, grave [157]) aged 6–11 years had severe enamel defects to the mid-crowns of the erupting permanent incisors and to the biting surfaces of the first molar teeth of the upper jaw revealing the underlying dentine. This enamel hypoplasia implied a period of systemic stress suffered during early development (Lewis 2000, 46).

Further indicators of stress in the sub-adult sample were apparent in the form of pitted lesions to the roofs of the eye sockets (cribra orbitalia), new bone growth to the cortical

bone surfaces (periostitis) and pitted bone lesions to the internal surfaces of the skull (endocranial lesions). Malnutrition, dietary deficiency and illness may have had an impact on normal childhood growth and development (Larsen 1997, 29–56).

Bone changes including bowed limbs and flared bone ends diagnostic of vitamin D deficiency rickets were present in four individuals aged 1–5 years. This metabolic disease is usually acquired during childhood between the ages of six months and three years. While some vitamin D is obtained through diet, the majority is absorbed through direct sunlight exposure (Mays 1999, 32). Rickets is a condition often seen in 18th- and 19th-century archaeological assemblages throughout London. It occurred irrespective of socio-economic status or class: for example, high rates of incidence have been recorded as much amongst the more affluent population from St Marylebone (Miles *et al* 2008, 152) as from the poorer inhabitants of London's East End (Henderson *et al* 2013, 259). Rickets is more

a reflection of the growing and changing city and of custom. Crowded living conditions and keeping sickly children indoors would have contributed to reduced levels of sunlight exposure.

DISCUSSION

Burial vaults below Church of England parish churches are quite common, but the presence of burials within the body of a Nonconformist chapel, while not unknown, was comparatively rare in early 19th-century London. Of the 39 Baptist chapels listed in the 1841 Post Office Directory, only three are noted in Mrs Basil Holmes's survey of London burial grounds (Holmes 1896) as having interments within the building, mainly in purpose built vaults. While this survey is clearly not definitive, as Henrietta Street is not included, it does give a good indication of the overall prevalence of this phenomenon.

In a normal funerary context, burial within a relatively expensive brick-lined grave or a vault would indicate that the individuals concerned were reasonably wealthy. At Bow Baptist church, for example, the fee for an adult burial was 16s, whilst that for a brick-lined grave was £5 5s, with every subsequent interment in the grave charged at £1 10s, rising to £15 for a family vault and £2 for later burials in it. Similarly, a simple adult burial in the Baptist ground in Worship Street cost £1 1s: a brick grave cost £9 9s (Cauch 1840). As there was no space for a burial ground around the Henrietta Street chapel, the costs of vault interment may not have been so high here. Although Henrietta Street is not included in Cauch's *Funeral Guide*, Little Wild Street chapel, which also had no burial ground, is. There, an adult burial cost £1 19s 6d in the vault, with a higher cost of £4 4s for burial in a lead coffin. If it is assumed that a similar price structure was in place at Henrietta Street, then it is still a significantly higher fee than was charged at other Nonconformist burial grounds, such as Bunhill Fields and City Bunhill (Connell & Miles 2010, 25), which charged less than £1 for burial. It is likely that there were some members of the Henrietta Street congregation who would have taken the cheaper option and been buried in one of these grounds.

The cluster of sub-adult interments found in the south-east part of the site may well reflect a deliberate policy, rather than being the result of chance survival. For example, at Bow Baptist church both the archaeological excavations and the analysis of documentary sources showed that burial plots there were set aside for children (Henderson *et al* 2013, 41; table 11; table 12; fig 51). Generally, Baptists do not baptise young children and infants, as they are not yet able to claim the faith for themselves (Brackney 2001).

The overall picture presented by the Henrietta Street buried population is that there is little difference apparent in the skeletal remains regarding health, disease and lifestyle when compared to other populations from 19th-century London. Whether rich or poor and irrespective of different religion, all, to some extent were exposed to the same threats of disease, illness and injury that came with life in the city.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MOLA would like to thank Grant Lipton of Great Marlborough Estates for supporting the excavation and analysis of the site. Robert Kendall of Paragon LLP commissioned the work. Kim Stabler of English Heritage's Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service monitored the archaeological programme and provided useful advice and comment.

Faith Bowers, church historian of Bloomsbury Central Baptist church, kindly provided background information on the diverse Baptist causes in early 19th-century London.

Thanks are also due to the MOLA field team and other staff. Isca Howell and Michael Tetreau supervised the archaeological work on site. Louise Davies managed the fieldwork. The post-excavation and publication phase of work was managed by Julian Hill, who also acted as editor for this article. Judit Peresztegi was responsible for the illustrations.

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NOTES

¹ St Pancras Borough Council Drainage Plan No. 14924, 10 July 1911. The drawing is a drainage plan of the Regent Square Institute, Wakefield Street, it is part of the microfiche drainage plan collection in Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre.

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