

HS2 archaeologists seek citizen scientists to unlock the stories of St James's Burial Ground

Caroline Barrie-Smith, Head of Audience Engagement at MOLA, describes a new MOLA Headland project, which is looking for volunteers to help unlock the stories of St James's Burial Ground in Euston.



RIGHT Excavating one of the more than 40,000 burials from St James's Burial Ground. © MOLA

Archaeologists from MOLA Headland Infrastructure are inviting people to take part in a huge citizen science project aimed at digitising over 57,000 burial records that hold key details about life in 18th- and 19th-century London.

The records relate to over 40,000 burials, carefully removed from St James's Burial Ground, where excavations were carried out as part of the HS2 archaeology project in 2018–19. The excavation was the largest of its kind ever undertaken in the UK, and has provided an unprecedented opportunity to understand what daily life was like at a key time in London's history during the Industrial Revolution.

With excavations complete, archaeologists now want to combine their findings with details contained in the burial ground records, to delve even deeper into the site's history. The aim is to create a searchable, digital archive that will allow a better understanding than ever before of the people buried at St James's, by revealing crucial details about their lives and opening the doors to further research.

Using Zooniverse – an online public platform bringing together millions of people across the world in an international research community – participants can search directly for the 'Stories of St James's Burial

Ground' project and decipher handwritten burial records, logging key details like names, addresses and causes of death. With your help, we can begin to understand the everyday details of who these people were and how they lived, contributing to an unprecedented record of Georgian and Victorian urban life in London. You will join a global team of researchers, collaborating with world-class archaeologists, and bringing your own unique and valuable perspectives to the project.

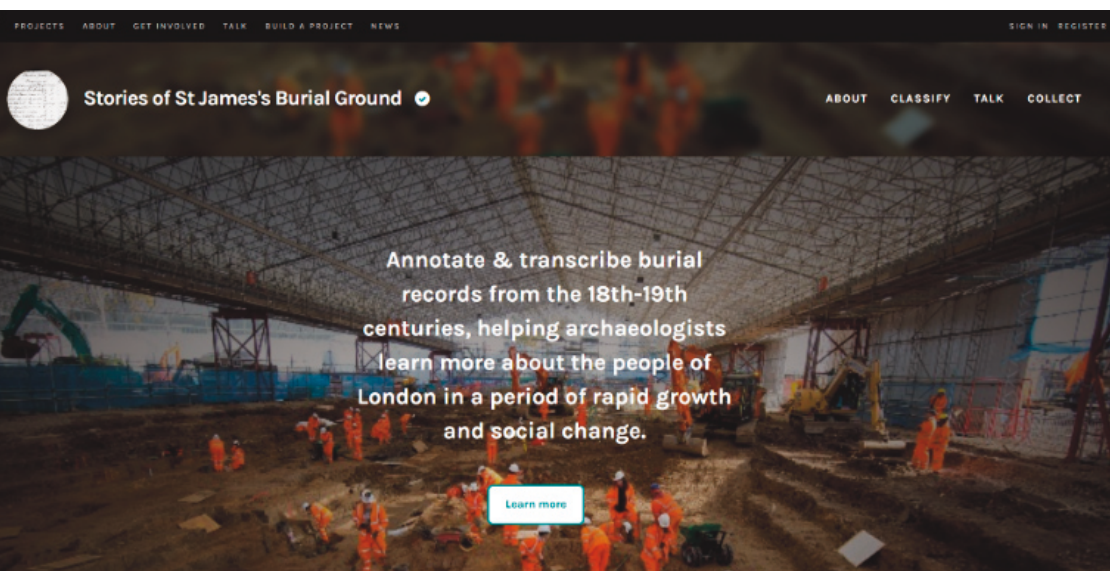
No previous experience is required: just a willingness to learn new computer skills and do some problem solving. There is no minimum time commitment either – you can choose to do as much or as little as you like. We are asking citizen science volunteers to help with two key tasks. These are:

- 1) **Transcribing records:** Looking at scanned pages from burial records and responding to a series of questions. The information we are looking for has been broken up into separate workflows. Not all of it will be on every record, but it all helps to build a clearer picture of the people buried at St James's.
- 2) **Highlighting unique notations or markings:** Identifying arrows, crossings out, corrections or unusual entries included in the record.

Robert Hartle, a MOLA Senior Archaeologist, who worked on the excavation, said:

The people buried in St James's burial ground include individuals from all walks of life: men, women and children, paupers and nobility, artists and musicians, soldiers and sailors, inventors and industrialists. For me, the archaeology is only the beginning. The large number of identifiable individuals at St James's (via surviving name plates or burial records) gives us an unprecedented chance

BELOW The home page of our Zooniverse platform – 'Stories of St James's Burial Ground' – ready and waiting for your input.



to unlock avenues for further research, to match the physical remains of peoples and their burials with the historical record of the lives they led.

The stories of St James's Burial Ground so far...

Already, burial records have proved to be invaluable to the team of archaeologists, allowing key biographical details to be retrieved. Here are just a few of the people whose stories have been brought to light...

Elizabeth Montgomery

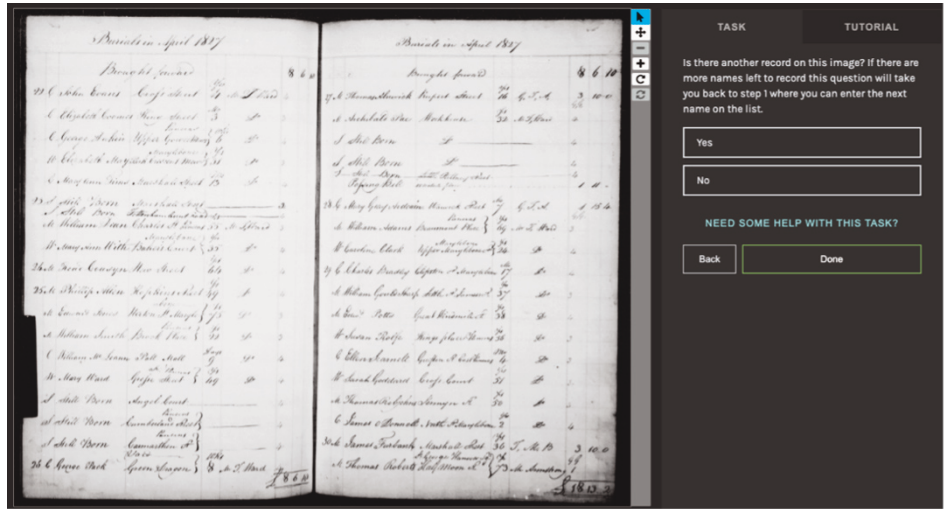
During the excavations, a unique coffin was found. Made from wood wrapped with lead, it was an unusual shape and size, and had decorations unlike any the team had seen before. By looking at burial records, newspaper articles and wills, archaeologists were able not only to explain the coffin's unusual shape, but also to identify its owner.

Elizabeth Montgomery died on 28 May 1833 in Dieppe, France, aged 40. Her unusual coffin was probably made by a French coffin maker, rather than by a London craftsman. In her will, Elizabeth wrote that she wished to be buried in London alongside her 'dearest' late husband, Reverend George Montgomery, if she died abroad. Thanks to a note in *The Times* newspaper on 11 June 1833, we know that she got her wish. Her coffin was brought to an address in Cavendish Square, Marylebone, and from there to St James's for burial. Her will also mentions a collection of miniature portraits. One of these precious miniatures was placed in her coffin, where it was found by the archaeological team nearly 200 years later, re-inforcing the primary newspaper source. It is unclear who it shows – perhaps her beloved George?

Matthias Tomick

Archaeological evidence has highlighted discrepancies in the burial records, showing the value of pairing historic primary sources and archaeological data.

Matthias Tomick of 'Broad Street, Carnaby Market' was buried in 1794, following his death aged 66 'of a decline'. An additional note on his burial entry records his height as 7ft 10in. However, when archaeologists excavated Tomick's burial, they found that he was between 6ft 6in and 6ft 8in tall. This discrepancy may have been miscommunication, rather than



ABOVE The 'Stories of St James's Burial Ground' Zooniverse platform with a burial record page in action © MOLA

exaggeration. Matthias' family requested a grave 7ft 10in long, so perhaps they genuinely, if incorrectly, believed this to be his height. Either way, Matthias ended up with an 8ft 10in grave, much longer than was needed as his coffin measured 7ft 1in.

Frederick James and Jane Elizabeth Havell

Burial records allowed the team to identify the final resting places of Frederick and Jane Havell. Frederick James Havell came from a family of artists. Originally a steel engraver in line and mezzotint, Havell, together with his brother William and fellow engraver James Tibbits Willmore, experimented with early photographic techniques, presenting their Cliché Verre process at the Royal Society in London in 1839. Sadly, later that year he was admitted to, and then died at, Bethlem Hospital with 'the occurrence of insanity'. His condition may well have been caused by erethism, also known as 'mad hatter syndrome', because of prolonged exposure to mercury vapours from photographic experiments.

Jane Elizabeth Havell, his wife, died six years later and was buried in the same grave with a picture frame placed face-down on her chest. No picture survived in the glass and wood frame, but this personal object is a poignant reminder of her family connections.

BELOW LEFT The will of Elizabeth Montgomery, in which she instructs her executor: 'should I die at Dieppe or in England that he will have my body transported to London in order that it may be laid by the side of my dearest Montgomery' © The National Archives

BELOW Miniature portrait found with Elizabeth Montgomery © MOLA

