



**PLOT 119, ZONE 17
BUNHILL FIELDS BURIAL GROUND
CITY ROAD
EC1**

London Borough of Islington

An archaeological watching brief



September 2019

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by the City of London City Surveyor's Department, Heritage Property Section, in order to record the results of a watching brief carried out in Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. The work was not subject to planning regulations.

A burial vault against the east wall of the cemetery was opened during a programme of conservation work. The ground around the entrance to the vault was unstable and required remedial work. The entrance was excavated and it was discovered that the vault was filled with soil to within a metre of the vaulted ceiling. The soil was left in place and the vault was recorded as far as was possible.

The tomb was built in the 18th century for the Pontie family.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Plot No 119, Zone 17, Bunhill Fields hereafter called 'the site'. The site is located in the north east section of Bunhill Fields, and is adjacent to City Road to the east and the Honourable Artillery Company to the south (Fig 1, Fig 2). The centre of the site is at OS National Grid Reference 532772 182270. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is 18.6m OD. The site code is BFV04.

1.2 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by the Senior Heritage Estate Officer in the City Surveyor's Department City of London Corporation, and produced by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 2001). The repair work did not require planning consent and the watching brief was not part of the planning process.

The purpose of the watching brief was to determine whether archaeological remains or features were present on the site and, if so, to record the nature and extent of such remains.

The purpose of the present report is to analyse the results of the excavation and to suggest what further work, including analysis or publication (if any), should now take place.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the work were to record the construction and condition of the vault and, if possible, to determine who its occupants were.

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002.

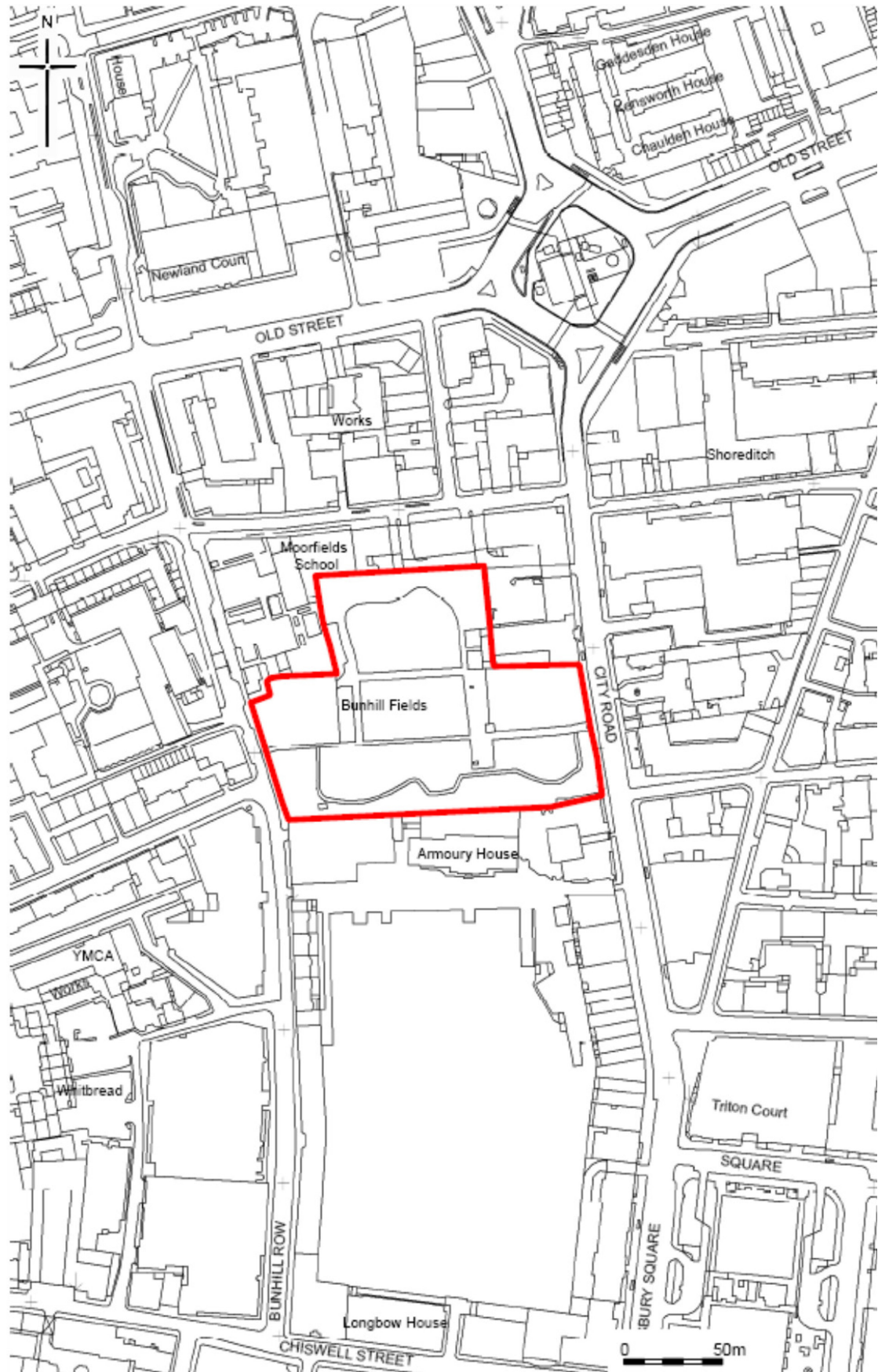


Fig 1 Site location plan

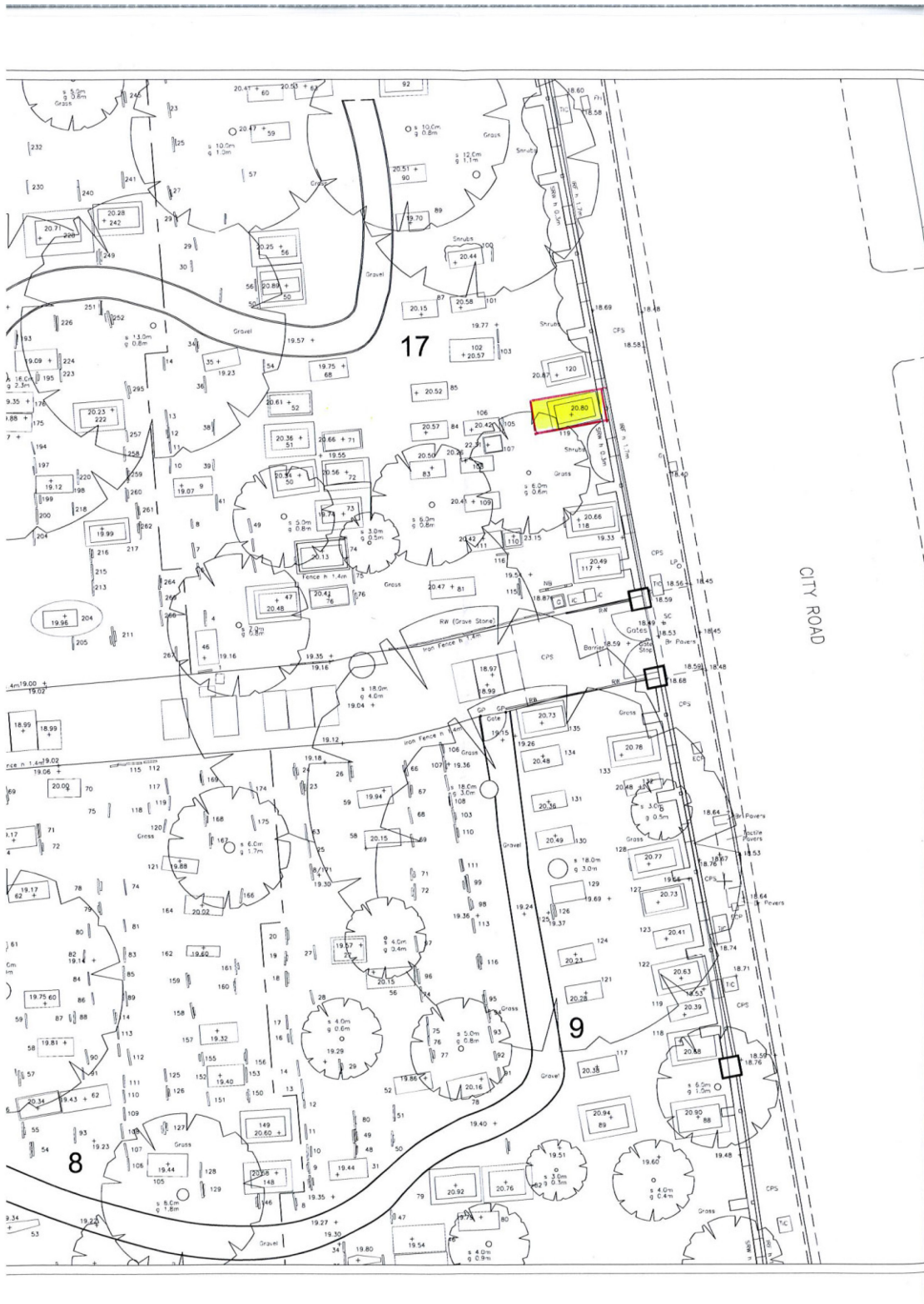


Fig 2 Location of tomb 119 in Zone 17 (from City Surveyors Dept. plan C12XR006L/E01)

2 Topographical and historical background

The site is within of the Borough of Islington, c. 300m to the north of the medieval City boundary and bordering the road emerging from Moorgate, now City Road. Prior to the 16th century the site was adjacent to Moorgate marshes, a relatively flat area of poorly drained ground north of the city wall.

The ground occupied now by Bunhill Fields was part of an estate comprising three large fields in the Manor of Finsbury, which were included in the prebendal estate attached to the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's cathedral. In the 14th century the land was leased to the Mayor and Alderman of the City who, by the 16th century, were permitting its use as a repository for bones from the charnel house of the old cathedral. It is likely that the name Bunhill derives from a corruption of Bonehill, following its use by St Paul's. In September 1665, the land was set aside by the Corporation of London as a burial ground for the victims of the Great Plague, although it was never used for this purpose. An enclosing brick wall was built in October 1665 for £140 and gates were erected, probably the following year.

The ground became a general place of burial, in particular with the Nonconformist congregations. By the time of its closure on 29 December 1853, some 123,000 burials were known to have taken place in the ground.

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief was done in accordance with the *MOLA Archaeological Site Manual* (Museum of London, 1994).

The entrance to the tomb was excavated by the contractors, Nimbus Conservation. They exposed the stone slab which covered the entrance to the vault. The slab was lifted to a vertical position against the west side of the entranceway and further soil was removed from beneath it in order to gain working space and safe access. The vault was examined by the MOLA archaeologist and found to be filled with soil and other debris to a height of less than 1m beneath the vaulted ceiling.

The location of the tomb was taken from the detailed survey of Bunhill Fields carried out in 2005 in conjunction with MoLAS. The heights of archaeological remains were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum on the top of the table tomb, at a value of 20.87m OD.

Where relevant, plans and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The site records can be found under the site code BFV04 in the Museum of London archive (LAARC).

3.2 Results of the watching brief

For the location of the vault within the burial ground, see Fig 2.

3.2.1 Description

A void had opened up at the west end of the base of table tomb 119 in Zone 17, and an attempt to fill it with soil had failed. The contractors therefore decided to open up the entrance to the tomb in order to discover the reason for the void and to consolidate the ground. A small trench measuring 1.2m n-s and 1.1m e-w was excavated to a depth of c. 1.1m by the contractors. A MOLA archaeologist was in attendance.

The entrance to the tomb consisted of a square brick structure which supported a large stone slab measuring 0.98m x 0.98m and 90mm thick, at an angle sloping down away from the tomb (Fig 4). On lifting the slab it was clear that the weight had caused the whole entrance structure to slump to the west, producing a crack in the brickwork on both sides, close to the tomb. Tree roots had grown through the cracks and aggravated the collapse. Further excavation revealed that at least one brick step was present, integral to the entrance brickwork, leading down into the tomb. Excavation stopped at 18.55m OD when it was clear that no further removal of soil was necessary to conduct the repairs.

The bricks throughout the tomb and entrance were of a standard type. They were hard red bricks measuring 90mm x 60mm x 220mm. The bonding agent was a hard pale cream/grey coarse lime mortar.

Access was gained to the tomb itself, but it was decided that no spoil should be removed. The tomb was full to a level approximately 0.6 – 0.7m below the interior crown of the vault (Fig 5). A small sondage was excavated on each side to determine the springing level of the vaulting.

The interior of the tomb proved to be of a fairly standard design. The entranceway was central at the west end, giving access to a square vaulted chamber measuring 2.15m x 2.15m (7ft by 7ft in imperial measurement). The depth was not established. The brick vaulting was constructed with alternating courses of headers and stretchers, neatly pointed and finished. There was no east end to the vault as it was constructed against the wall and foundations of the churchyard wall adjoining City Road. However, little attempt had been made to close and seal the east end above the stepped foundation to the churchyard wall. Apart from a brick column which supported the churchyard railings (Fig 6), there was an aperture of up to 0.2m into which some rubble had been inserted, but with little to bond it. Consequently the top of the east end showed open gaps in places.

3.2.2 General comments on the condition of the tomb below ground

The brickwork of the vault interior was in good condition and no cracking or subsidence was observed. The west end of the vaulting had lost two or three bricks at the crown over the entrance, which did not appear to have affected the structural integrity of the vault. However, coupled with the partial slumping of the entranceway, this was what had caused the void to open up at ground level. It is likely that the void originally appeared due to the subsiding entrance and was exacerbated by animal activity, particularly that of foxes. The tomb had clearly been used as an animal den and the skull of a cat was found on the surface of the soil inside. The interior was additionally littered with cans and other rubbish, and leaves had also piled up, probably through the gaps at both ends of the tomb.

3.2.3 The tomb above ground

The structure above ground was a standard design of table tomb. Its base comprised a stone slab laid on brickwork built on top of the vault to create a level platform. Above this was a four-sided stone tomb with ornate corners and panels on the long sides. It was covered by a single slab, which had been lifted off during the current conservation works in order to carry out repairs. There was an additional n-s brick support across the interior centre under the slab. At the time of the recording work, the tomb above ground was covered up with plastic sheeting.

If there had been an inscription in the past, either on the top of the slab or on the sides, it had been eroded away by weathering. It was therefore not possible to determine the identity of the family buried within the vault from direct evidence. However, the cemetery attendant possesses a plan dating to the 1970s on which the names of many of the burials at Bunhill Fields are written, presumably taken from a previous graveyard survey. Tomb 119 in Zone 17 is recorded on the plan as simply 'Pontie', with no other names, initials or dates.



Fig 3 Tomb 119, covered in plastic, looking north. The top slab has been removed.



Fig 4 The entrance to tomb 119, looking south. Note the crack in the south wall (opposite) and the missing bricks of the vault crown (to the left).



Fig 5 The interior of tomb 119, looking east



Fig 6 The rear of tomb 119, showing the graveyard wall foundations and the brick column which supports railings, looking east

3.2.4 Documentary research

The Pontie Family

Based on the graveyard plan, it can be surmised that the vault contains the burial, recorded in the Bunhill Fields Burial Register in 1757, of a family called Pontie. There are a number of records referring to the Pontie family, including christening, marriage and burial registers, tax records and wills.

The Register of Burials at Bunhill Fields Burial Ground, City Road, London from 1754 to 1761 has this reference on 21st January 1757: '*Mr Peter Pontie from Flowerdeluse Street, for the ground to bild [sic] a vault seven foot by seven for him 10=10=00*' (Public Records Office TNA Reference RG4 / Piece 3982 / Folio 91).

The primary burial in the vault is therefore presumed to be Peter Pontie, a weaver, for whom the vault was constructed. The dimension of 7ft (2.15m) square matches the interior measurement of tomb 119 exactly. Peter Pontie was registered as being buried on 21st January 1757, which suggests that the vault was built for him prior to this date and that the note in the register refers to the date of payment for the work at the rate of £10 10s, roughly £895 today (according to the National Archives currency converter). 'Flowerdeluse Street' refers to Fleur-de-lys Street, which still exists today and runs between Commercial Road and Norton Folgate. The area around Shoreditch and Spitalfields was heavily settled by Huguenots at the end of the 17th century, many of whom were weavers (Huguenot Society website), and Peter Pontie was almost certainly of Huguenot stock. Both his and his wife's wills mention the Huguenot founded French Church (see below).

The first potential reference for Peter Pontie was a marriage register for St Dunstan's and All Saints Church, Stepney, wherein it states that Peter 'Point' of Bethnal Green and Anne Lebeal, Widow, were married on August 6th 1704. Whether this is the correct couple is not completely certain. The spelling of Peter's surname is different but this is often the case in 18th-century records. This would make Peter Pontie at least in his mid 70s when he died, and his wife Anne a similar age on her death in 1761.

A Norton Folgate tax record for 1746 lists Peter Pontie as having paid £1 in tax.

Peter Pontie's will, made 2nd August 1755

A copy of Peter's will (PROB 11/827/294) was obtained from the National Archives website. In the following section the parts in italics are direct quotes, complete with the original spelling (NB Anne Pontie's name with an 'e' in her will, but without in Peter's will. The former will be used here except in direct quotes).

The will begins '*I Peter Pontie of fflower De Luce Street in the Liberty of Norton ffolgate in the County of Middlesex' Weaver.....*' It seems Peter Pontie died a wealthy man. First he left money for his funeral expenses to be paid. He left to '*my loving wife Ann Pontie all my household goods and furniture, plate, jewells, rings, linnen and wearing apparel*'. He evidently possessed a few hundred pounds separately from the bulk of his wealth, which he left to his daughter Elizabeth Pontie and his second daughter '*Mary Wife of Peter Marplay*' as, effectively, sums which could be accesses quickly. He also leaves Abraham Delamare £10 for his trouble as a named executor. The other two executors are his wife Anne and his son Peter.

The main substance of his estate consisted of *'two thousand one hundred pounds three per cent Annuities'* in the Bank of England, worth about £178,000 today (National Archives currency converter). He left his wife Anne the interest from this to live on until her death, after which the money was to be divided into thirds between the three children Peter, Elizabeth and Mary and their issue. However, there are a number of bequests which would occur if the thirds were not paid because the children predeceased Anne without issue. The beneficiaries in this case were to be *'the ffrench Hospital in the Parish of St Luke.... The Treasurer of the Bread House in Barber's Yard Browns Lane in the Parish of Christ Church commonly called la Soupe.... The London Hospital or Infirmary at present in Goodman's ffields....the Deacons of the ffrench Church in Threadneedle Street for the use of the Poor of the said Church upon condition that they give unto my Brother John Pontie five shillings per week during his natural life... and the Elders of the ffrench Church in Brown's Lane aforesaid common called La Partente upon condition that they give unto my said Brother five shillings per week during his natural life*

The will was proved in London on the 27th January 1757

Anne Pontie's will made 9th April 1761

A copy of Anne Pontie's will (PROB 11/868/179) was also obtained from the National Archives website. Anne made her final will on the 9th April 1761 and it was proved on 10th August 1761, indicating that the date of her death was probably early August 1761.

She left the bulk of her estate to her daughter Elizabeth, who was unmarried at the time, including the household goods which Peter had bequeathed to her. Interestingly she had £200 in 3% annuities at the Bank of England, which she must have saved out of the original interest from Peter's estate. However, at some stage she had borrowed £300 from Elizabeth Pontie, which she stipulates should be immediately paid back on her decease.

Her executors were Elizabeth Pontie and *'my friend Mr John Lee of Primrose Street Printer'*, to both of whom she also left £200. Her other daughter Mary Malplay also benefitted with interest from £200, £30 of which was to be used on Mary's death to pay for her funeral.

Other beneficiaries include *'the Elders of the ffrench Church in Brown's Lane Spittalfields commonly called La Partente'*, an echo of Peter's will. A cousin Mary Charlotte Blanchet, was to receive 4s a week for her natural life *'to be paid monthly or oftener if my Executors shall think proper'*. and her husband Benjamin Blanchett [sic] would continue to receive it after her death. One Daniel Le Doux *'now in the ffrench Hospital in the Parish of St Luke'* was to receive £18 per week, paid monthly. After these people had died the residue was to go *'unto such poor persons of my Relations and those who have worked for my family'* at the discretion of daughter Elizabeth.

Anne evidently could not write, either because she was not educated or because of ill-health, as she signed her name on the will with a mark. This was common at this period, especially for women who were less likely to be schooled.

Other members of the family

John Pontie, Peter's brother mentioned in his will, was also a weaver. In tax records for Stepney, Mile End and New Town he is listed as living in Spicer Street (North), Stepney in 1767. It is possible that he was also buried in the vault.

There is a record of a John Pontie's marriage to Sarah Allsey in 1758 at St. Leonards, Shoreditch, although it is not likely that this is Peter Pontie's brother, given their ages. It may be a nephew. A record of christenings in St Dunstan's Church Stepney in 1779 shows : '*Sept 5th. Phillip son of John Pontie [weaver] and Sarah, 17 days old*'. This is potentially the same couple but occurs nearly 20 years later. Again, this branch of the family may also have been buried in the family vault.

The following table shows four further individuals from the burial registers who may well be part of the same family, and may also be buried in the vault, but have not been researched here. Sarah and John could be the same couple mentioned in the marriage registers of 1758.

Surname	Christian name	Date died	Place of Burial
Pontie	Sarah	1805	London
Pontie	John	1806	London
Pontie	Mary Jane	1827	London
Pontie	Philip	1835	London

4 Significance of the data

The tomb itself is of a standard design with no rare or unique features, and is of no more than local significance, but as part of Bunhill Fields burial ground it may be considered to have regional significance.

5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the watching brief will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form (OASIS), to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

The site archive containing original records and finds will be stored with the Museum of London within 6 months of the end of the excavation.

A short note on the results of the watching brief will appear in the annual round up of the *London Archaeologist*.

6 Acknowledgements

MOLA would like to thank Julian Kverndal, Senior Heritage Estate Officer, City Surveyor's Department, City of London Corporation for commissioning and providing funding for the archaeological work. Thanks also to the contractors, Nimbus Conservation, in particular the site manager Pablo, for their assistance and enthusiasm, and the interest they showed in MOLA's work. Thanks also to Tommy Mannion, the Bunhill Fields attendant, for his advice and access to his map.

The author would like to thank Michael Smith, the Project Manager for MOLA. Huge thanks are also due to Sarah Ritchie who conducted the majority of the documentary research. Photographic technological back-up was provided by Margaret Cox.

7 Bibliography

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8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

OASIS ID: molas1-147784

Project details

Project name	Bunhill Fields Cemetery refurbishment
Short description of the project	A burial vault against the east wall of the burial ground was opened during a programme of conservation work. The entrance to the vault was damaged and required remedial work. The entrance was excavated and it was discovered that the vault was filled with soil to within a metre of the vaulted ceiling. The soil was left in place and the vault was recorded as far as was possible. No burials were observed.
Project dates	Start: 10-04-2013 End: 10-04-2013
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	BFV04 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Site status	Conservation Area
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	NONCONFORMIST CEMETERY Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Conservation/ restoration

Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON ISLINGTON FINSBURY Bunhill Fields cemetery
Postcode	EC1
Study area	6.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 32772 82270 51 0 51 31 23 N 000 05 09 W Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	MOLA
Project brief	City of London

originator	
Project design originator	MOLA
Project director/manager	Michael Smith
Project supervisor	Robin Wroe-Brown
Type of sponsor/funding body	Corporation of London
Name of sponsor/funding body	City Surveyors Department

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	Yes
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Report"

Project bibliography 1

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