



# Friends of West Norwood CEMETERY

5 August 2021

## Grave Searches - The South Metropolitan (West Norwood) Cemetery

### Introduction

This document aims to help find information on people thought to be buried in the cemetery. It also touches on cremations. The Cemetery Office is not open to the public at present, and the staff have limited time available to answer queries. It should be remembered that Lambeth Council unlawfully destroyed over 20,000 memorials including those on common graves during the 1970s/80s and the chances of finding a memorial over a grave are now not great.

The first burial took place on 12 December 1837. There are now over 46,500 graves, most being private (family) purchased graves,<sup>1</sup> but there are some 10–15,000 public (common) unpurchased graves.<sup>2</sup> Some plots have been used for the interment of cremated remains.

The cemetery is divided into 129 squares and all graves have a unique number (in the series 1–46,586), hence the grave number and square number together give the location of the grave.

The cemetery is split between consecrated (approximately 75%) and unconsecrated areas, a factor that might be helpful when searching records.<sup>3</sup> The Hellenic Necropolis falls within the unconsecrated area.<sup>4</sup>

There are Catacombs beneath the Episcopalian and Dissenters' Chapels that are numbered separately, but interments are recorded in the Grave Register (see paragraph 3 below).<sup>5,6</sup> Cremation records are held in a separate Register.

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<sup>1</sup> For graves purchased from the South Metropolitan Cemetery Company (to 1965) an exclusive right of burial in perpetuity exists. After 1965 most graves have been purchased with limited tenure.

<sup>2</sup> No rights attach to these graves and most are now unmarked.

<sup>3</sup> The designation of squares is as follows:

Consecrated: 1–7, 13, 15–22, 30–36, 44–49, 58–65, 70–80, 82–114, 116–118, 120–129;

Unconsecrated: 9–13, 25–28, 39–42, 52–56;

With both consecrated & unconsecrated areas: 8, 14, 23–24, 29, 37, 43, 50–51, 57, 66–69, 81, 115, 119 (check individual grave locations within these squares).

<sup>4</sup> The Hellenic Necropolis is a separate burial ground in parts of squares 27–29 & 41–43, with burials subject to the rites of the Greek Orthodox tradition. Its graves are numbered chronologically as per the main cemetery sequence. The Greek Cathedral Trustees also maintained a supplementary numbering system. It appears that the original sequence (1–77) was replaced in about 1875 and certain graves renumbered in a series 1–350.

<sup>5</sup> The site of the Dissenters' Chapel (Non-Conformist - unconsecrated) is now occupied by the Crematorium. There is no access to the Catacombs that remain.

<sup>6</sup> The Episcopalian Chapel, now demolished, was in the Anglican tradition and the land was – and remains – consecrated. The Catacombs beneath are currently not open to the public on account of health and safety issues.

## Cemetery Records

The following physical records are available:

1. The **Burial Register**, a day-by-day record of each burial with details of the deceased (address and age) and of the grave and purchaser. The original volumes up to 1961 are held at Lambeth Archives,<sup>7</sup> where a microfilm copy is freely available for visitors to use. Volumes from the 1990s onwards are held at the Cemetery Office.<sup>8</sup> Grave numbers and square numbers can be found from this register. It is unclear where volumes for that intervening period are to be found.
2. The **Alphabetical Name Index\*** to the Burial Register (including to the apparently missing volumes thereof). Grave numbers only are listed.
3. The **Grave Register\***, a chronological record of the purchase of and burials in each numbered grave with square number.<sup>9</sup>
4. Large scale **Plans\*** show most of the numbered graves in each square. These are helpful in grave searching, but are not entirely accurate.<sup>10</sup>
5. The **Cremation Register\***, a day-by-day record of each cremation with details of the deceased (address and age) and of disposal of ashes.

\* The originals are held at the Cemetery Office.

Several on-line resources are also available (mostly on payment):

### *Deceased Online*

The burial and cremation records for the cemetery have been scanned and digitized and made searchable by Deceased Online: <https://www.deceasedonline.com/>. According to their website they hold records for the whole of the London Borough of Lambeth:

West Norwood Cemetery: 165,000 burial records 1837–2005

West Norwood Crematorium: 38,000 cremation records 1915–2004

Lambeth Cemetery: 259,000 burial records 1858–2016

Lambeth Crematorium: 52,000 cremation records 1958–2012

Streatham Cemetery: 118,000 burial records 1893–2014

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<sup>7</sup> At Minet Library, 52 Knatchbull Road, London SE5 9QY email: [archives@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:archives@lambeth.gov.uk) phone: 020 7926 6076

<sup>8</sup> The Cemetery Office, Norwood Road, London SE27 9JU email: [bereavementservices@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:bereavementservices@lambeth.gov.uk) phone: 020 7926 7999

<sup>9</sup> Additionally, each entry usually contains summary details of the purchaser, plot size, type (Area, Border, Common, Open, Private), depth of grave, amount paid and whether in the consecrated or unconsecrated areas (most of those details are also in the Burial Register entry). Details of later transfers in plot ownership are also recorded as well as extent, where applicable, of maintenance in perpetuity arrangements made with the South Metropolitan Cemetery Company. Other endorsements can include references to war damage 1940–44, criminal damage/vandalism and removals (both exhumations and of memorials).

<sup>10</sup> Grave locations from about 1970 are simply approximations. Since 2000 it has not been possible to arrange fresh burials because no accurate plans exist to show definitively where space might be available. Some graves on which monuments were completely destroyed in 1940–44 do not appear as the plots were resold and new numbers given.

A simple search on Deceased Online for first and last names of a person (this has to be accurate), optionally with a date range, may be made at no charge. If the person is found, a result will appear with the date of burial or cremation, and for the place it will say simply Lambeth, which could mean any of the above locations. Registration and purchase of a voucher or a subscription allows access to an advanced search, still free, the result specifying which cemetery. The following pieces of information are then available at various prices, using the vouchers purchased:

- For a burial, the grave number and square number, and list of people buried in the grave;
- For a burial, a scan of the original handwritten entry in the Burial Register, or at dates from the 1960s–1980s (for which the Burial Register volumes seem to be missing) a scan instead of the original handwritten entry in the Burial Name Index;
- For a burial, a so-called map of the grave location, which is merely a diagram having insufficient detail and hence of no help in finding a grave on the ground;
- For a cremation, a scan of the original handwritten entry in the Cremation Register.

However, the following things appear not to be provided by Deceased Online:

- For a grave, a scan of the original handwritten entry in the Grave Register, which can sometimes provide extra information;<sup>9</sup>
- For a grave, a scan of the large scale plan of the relevant numbered square showing the numbered graves in it, which is essential for finding a grave on the ground.

### *Ancestry*

This website sometimes provides burial information. Mostly this is in the form of a link to the Alphabetical Name Index and/or Schedule of Reuse (see below). Also searchable are records of Bishop's Transcripts.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Schedule of Reused Graves*

Lambeth Council illegally sold the unoccupied space in up to 1,200 private graves, 1979–1998. These graves were renumbered as new. The Grave Register was not endorsed to indicate where this occurred, or to give the new plot number. The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Southwark ordered the Council to provide certified details of graves where unused space was sold illegally ('reused graves'), and to make them freely available on the Lambeth website. The database is searchable either by the name of the deceased, or by grave number:

<https://beta.lambeth.gov.uk/bereavement-services/our-cemeteries-and-crematoria/west-norwood-cemetery/cemetery-grave-database>.

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<sup>11</sup> From originals held up to 1918 at the London Metropolitan Archives, under reference DW/T/0899-0969, which resemble left hand side pages of the Burial Register, and thus do not provide grave and square numbers (see: [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma); email: [ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk); phone: 020 7332 3820).

## **Lambeth Archives**

Lambeth Archives hold a number of records relating to the cemetery under collection reference IV/100/AD\_/. An appointment is necessary to visit: <https://beta.lambeth.gov.uk/libraries-0/lambeth-archives>; email: [archives@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:archives@lambeth.gov.uk); phone: 020 7926 6076.

There are four possible sources:

### *The Burial Register (up to 1961)*

To view the Burial Register microfilms, when booking an appointment you should specify the purpose of your visit, and book a microfilm reader.

### *The Schedule of Reuse*

The full list, certified by Frank Quigg, in 2000, is deposited at Lambeth Archives under reference IV/100/AD2/. If a grave is identified in this category by either descendants of the original purchaser, or the second purchaser, a process exists for resolving issues arising.

### *Collection of Memorial Inscriptions*

There is an alphabetical handwritten card collection of more than 20,000 inscriptions recorded by the late Eric Smith FSA during the late 1960s and 1970s for memorials extant at that time. It is available to view on microfiche, for which you need to book a microfiche reader.

### *Photographs*

Lambeth Council gave an undertaking to the Consistory Court to produce evidence of records (mostly photographs) made of memorials that were destroyed during wholesale clearance operations.<sup>12</sup> Currently, those records cannot be found. Separately, Lambeth Archives holds a collection (not catalogued) of photographs of memorials in the cemetery under reference IV/100/AD8/.

## **Friends of West Norwood Cemetery (FOWNC)**

FOWNC holds biographical and other details of some, but by no means all, of those buried or otherwise commemorated in the cemetery, and we help where we can with enquires as to surviving monuments, especially enquiries from outside London. Contact [secretary@fownc.org](mailto:secretary@fownc.org) or [chairman@fownc.org](mailto:chairman@fownc.org) for further information or advice as necessary.

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<sup>12</sup> In evidence to the Consistory Court in 1993 Lambeth maintained, falsely, that records had been made of all memorials about to be destroyed and the surviving photographs were placed in six lever-arch files that should have been lodged at Lambeth Archives.