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Book Reviews



NEW BUNHILL FIELDS BURIAL GROUND, SOUTHWARK: EXCAVATIONS AT GLOBE ACADEMY, 2008. By Adrian Miles with Brian Connell. Pp. xii and 115, Illus 93. Museum of London Archaeology (Archaeology Study Series, **24**), 2012. Price: £15.00. ISBN 978 190758 609 5.

New Bunhill Fields was a private venture established around 1821 to provide burial places for the burgeoning population of Southwark, and it continued in use until it closed in 1853. Whilst many Anglicans continued to be interred in parish burial grounds, nonconformists worshipped in their own chapels and desired burial locations not controlled by the established church with its particular theology and liturgy with which they disagreed. These dissenters provided a ready market for entrepreneurs who could establish a burial ground where the costs of interment could produce a steady income. Documentary sources make clear that New Bunhill Fields was intensively used, to the point where it was a health risk because of the numbers of cadavers interred daily. A chapel on the site provided a crypt beneath but this was little better, and many coffins seem to have been housed there at additional cost, but only for a matter of months before being disposed of elsewhere: presumably in an earth grave outside.

Following various phases of evaluation, an extensive archaeological investigation by MoLAS took place in 2008, with 10 % of the total burial ground examined, and a further 20 % cleared by a commercial non-archaeological exhumation company, though with some archaeological observation and recovery of coffin furniture. The discoveries revealed a portion of the burial ground largely used in the 1830s but with individuals buried right up to the last year of its operation. The excavations excluded the chapel location, but instead revealed earth burials in stacks up to fourteen-deep, though this could only be achieved with small child coffins close to the surface. The colour plans demonstrate the distribution by date as indicated by those with legible coffin plates, and by age and sex: also informed by skeletal analysis. The pie charts of dates of coffin plates recovered during the non-archaeological exhumation gives a slightly coarse-grained but still very valuable wider picture and with a much larger sample (figure 33, p. 33).

Only a few new coffin furniture designs were identified, which may suggest that the London repertoire for this date is becoming relatively clear, but some are outstandingly preserved. Moreover, the survival of a small number of funerary textiles and evidence of inclusion of vegetation within coffins is noteworthy. Other significant finds include coins or medallions with seven interments, and plates inside four coffins. The plates are particularly unusual; one was of pewter placed face-down on a sub-adult's pelvis, whilst one ceramic plate was in the small coffin of an infant. The other two plates came from the one coffin: a refined earthenware willow pattern transfer-print and a New Hall painted

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porcelain which may have had salt on it, linked to a popular custom rarely visible archaeologically. The osteological results were largely as expected, though with two notable pathologies: a rare case of nasopharyngeal carcinoma and only the second-ever archaeological identification of osteogenesis imperfecta. In addition, four children and four adults show signs of post-mortem examination.

This monograph makes an important contribution to the growing literature on London's nineteenth-century burial archaeology. The authors, and what is now MoLA, should be congratulated on its production.

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