The Dead and Disease in Southwark in the Long-Eighteenth Century

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This thesis examines disease concerns surrounding the dead in long-eighteenth century Britain. It analyses corpse disposal practices in a case study area, Southwark, and juxtaposes these with theories of corpse sanitation in British published material more broadly. The thesis finds a sustained undercurrent of concern about the health effects of corpse putrefaction which was not restricted to narrow medical contexts but also informed popular disposal practices. This finding challenges an existing consensus that corpse putrefaction constituted a practical unpleasantry at lay level and a periodic, relatively inconsequential concern of population health authorities over the long-eighteenth century.

Disease concerns and sanitation practices have been studied only minimally in the historiography of British corpse disposal, and scholarship on the long-eighteenth century is especially sparse. Most accounts begin at 1830, when Victorian legislators began attempting to 'reform' burial practices in response to cholera; those considering earlier periods have primarily discussed early modern plague burial regulations and their immediate impact for traditional practices. This thesis approaches corpse disposal sanitation as a theory and practice independent of central legislation. It builds on scholarship on early modern attitudes toward death, eighteenth-century British medicine, and English local government by tracing the development of British medical-scientific thought on disease and the dead body over the period between plague and cholera, and examining the manner in which lay communities in a case study region disposed of the dead as both a social and medical issue.

Abstract

This thesis examines disease concerns surrounding the dead in Britain in the long-eighteenth century. It analyses corpse disposal practices in a case study area, Southwark, and juxtaposes these with theories of corpse sanitation in British published material more broadly. The thesis finds a sustained undercurrent of concern about the health effects of corpse putrefaction which was not restricted to narrow medical contexts but also informed popular disposal practices. This finding challenges an existing consensus that corpse putrefaction constituted a practical unpleasantry at lay level and a periodic, relatively inconsequential concern of population health authorities over the long-eighteenth century.

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The thesis considers two main types of sources. It analyses, on the one hand, published British medical-scientific texts on disease and population health. These texts have been widely studied, and the thesis contributes to existing scholarship by assessing eighteenth-century writers' accounts of the dead body in particular. In conjunction with this, the thesis draws on a collection of archival

sources relating to corpse disposal practices in four parishes in the north of Southwark: Christ Church; St Saviour; St Thomas'; and St George the Martyr. The parishes have been chosen due to the availability and accessibility of relevant source material; their demography and environmental topography over the period, which rendered them especially susceptible to corpse disposal issues; and their reputation by the 1840s, according to influential commentators, as amongst the worst-performing Metropolitan parishes for corpse disposal sanitation. Their parish records are examined for evidence of health concerns surrounding the dead, and the origins and outcomes of these concerns are analysed in detail. The main archival sources used are therefore various, and include vestry minute books and burial registers, which record the disposal activities of parish authorities as well as parishioners; public petitions; Surrey Quarter Sessions records, for evidence on disposals of criminals and sanitation complaints delivered to Surrey magistrates; antiquarian accounts describing disposal provision; and newspapers.

The first two chapters concentrate on long-term trends. Chapter One examines medical-scientific thought on the dead and disease in Britain during the long-eighteenth century. It draws from approximately 40 texts published by British writers to demonstrate, firstly, the prominence and endurance of the claim that dead bodies generated infectious diseases. The chapter describes the basic mechanism by which the dead were thought to harm the living, putrefaction, and illustrates its importance throughout the century. It then turns to trace the development of this thought from a natural philosophy in the late-seventeenth century to an empirical 'science' by the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter One thus frames the thesis by outlining the threat as it was understood by intellectual authorities during the eighteenth century and discussing the changing role of medical science in its management.

Chapter Two introduces and provides an overview of the case study area, while Chapter Three describes the organisation of burial practice there over the period under study. Chapter Three approaches eighteenth-century burial provision as a local political affair, dictated largely by parish

officers, rate-paying inhabitants, and other attendees of vestry meetings. Through their vestry records, the chapter shows the types of concerns that figured in decision-making about burial practice, including health and other issues. It also describes the legal and administrative mechanisms within which burial authorities operated. Overall, the chapter assesses the appearance and prevalence of disease concerns surrounding the dead in eighteenth-century Southwark, and outlines the political and legal infrastructure through which burial could be managed as a population health issue.

Chapters Four through Seven constitute a series of case studies on specific burial sanitation measures in Southwark. These case studies have been selected through a process of close reading of vestry minutes of the four Southwark parishes for the whole period, and the identification of moments of heightened concern about disease in relation to burials. The subsequent case studies of these instances allow for a narrower chronological focus, with more thematic and detailed discussions of health anxieties surrounding the dead in the eighteenth century. In this vein, each case study explores a different aspect of the problem, as it was understood by Southwark's inhabitants. They discuss, in order, the origins and nature of disease concerns surrounding the dead; languages used to describe the health risks posed by corpses; the role of medical practitioners and professionals in local burial regulations; and the attitudes of communities towards their own systems of burial sanitation. These themes help us to understand the terms in which disease and the dead were viewed in the eighteenth century. As well as considering different themes, each case study focuses on a different parish and a different period. In this manner, an account of change over time is developed against a background of continuities.

The thesis builds upon research in several fields. Foremost, it develops a large literature on nineteenth-century 'burial reform'. The first major cholera outbreak of 1831-2 prompted a period of political and professional scrutiny into the public health implications of British burial practices. A series of 'Burial Acts' were passed over the following decades, mandating the closure of inner-

city burial grounds amongst other measures. Historians have regarded this as a transformative era for the history of death in Britain, associating nineteenth-century disease concerns with profound changes in death practice and attitudes towards death itself. This thesis tells a longer history of 'burial reform' centred on the activities of eighteenth-century localities. It shows how urban inhabitants in the century before 'reform' anticipated the health dangers presented by their dead, designing sanitation measures which prefigured later legislative intervention. It also traces the development in Britain of the medical-scientific theories which underpinned the Burial Acts, generally attributed to French and Italian treatises of the late-eighteenth century. Overall, it outlines the social, political, and medical frameworks upon which the 'burial reform' campaigns were necessarily built.

This research also touches on histories of medicine, public health, and eighteenth-century English local government. It engages with a large scholarship on organic putrefaction as a disease mechanism and a social concern in early modern Britain, showing the implications of this history for attitudes toward the dead and death practice. In investigating local responses to these perceived dangers, it also draws parallels with the findings of historians of 'public health' and local government in the eighteenth century. This understudied population health problem often – and increasingly – elicited extensive debates and complex improvements at local level. The thesis shows that these responses were related to broader cultural changes including, for instance, humanitarian reform movements of the late-eighteenth century. The research also contributes to histories of urbanisation and eighteenth-century London. It includes a general overview of Southwark, its geography and society, which traces the borough's urbanisation between 1690 and 1830. In describing local responses to health and the dead, the thesis offers a unique window into parish life and parish politics in an urbanising area during the long-eighteenth century.

Lastly, the research addresses histories of death in Britain more broadly. One of its main aims has been to establish a method of accessing health concerns surrounding the dead in early modern

localities. It demonstrates that these concerns, which are not often visible to cultural historians of death, can be made more visible in local political settings when they became a point of contention. It also shows how contemporary intellectual thought can provide a metric for identifying and making sense of these concerns. Overall, its findings accord with a recent turn away from metanarratives of 'death denial' and 'medicalisation' in the cultural history of death at large, and it argues that integration of histories of death and medicine can provide a fruitful avenue forward for historians.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 10

1. Disease and the Dead in British Medical-Scientific Thought 31

2. Southwark in the Long-Eighteenth Century 87

3. Southwark's Burial Provision 113

4. 'Infection' concerns at St Thomas' Parish and Hospital, 1709 152

5. The Corpse as Annoyance: Hanging bodies at St George's Fields 173

6. 'Medical Men' and Putrid Fever at St Saviour's Great Vault, 1793-94 201

7. Self-government and Sanitary Legislation at Christ Church, 1815-17 229

Conclusion 260

Bibliography 268

Appendix 281

1. List of Illustrations 281
2. Table of Petitions for Increased Burial Provision, c.1690-1830 282

Introduction

In the mid-nineteenth century, the United Kingdom Parliament passed a series of Acts for the regulation of burial grounds in England and Scotland. This legislation was brought about in response to a flurry of petitions and investigations into British burial practices, most famously the writings of English surgeon George Alfred Walker and public health lobbyist Edwin Chadwick.[1] Since the first major cholera outbreak of 1831-2, evidence had repeatedly been presented to Parliament that dead and decomposing bodies presented a danger to health. Urban populations seemed oblivious to the fact. Campaigners described how corpses were being left to lay out in homes for sometimes days on end, burials were taking place in crowded graveyards near to residential areas, and old graves were being disturbed and rotten bodies inadvertently exhumed during the creation of new burial sites. Pressure from lobbying groups increased and was finally paid heed to in 1850 by Lord John Russell's Whig ministry. For many historians, the resultant legislation marked a momentous turning point in British death history. Henceforward, routine burial practice would be dictated not only by the conventions of Church and the desires of family, but also by the State and its population health machinery.

The first 'Metropolitan Interments Act' (1850) was the most complex and ambitious of all successive Burial Acts. The Interments Act brought all burial grounds in London, Westminster, Southwark and around seventy additional parishes across Kent, Surrey and Middlesex under the control of the recently established General Board of Health, entitling the area 'The Metropolitan Burial District'.[2] Under this new law, the Board of Health could, amongst other powers, open or close any burial ground in this district, enlarge its existing burial spaces, hire and fire staff for its grounds such as grave-diggers and wardens, and call for the exhumation and reburial of any

[1] George Alfred Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards* (London, 1839); Edwin Chadwick, *A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* (London, 1843).
[2] 'The Metropolitan Interments Act' (5 Aug 1850).

corpse interred in the District's existing burial spaces. This law also vested the Board of Health with broad powers to 'make regulations from time to time as to burial grounds and the interments therein', including regulations pertaining to 'the depth and formation of graves and places of interment', 'the nature of coffins to be received in the burial grounds', 'the time and mode of removing bodies', and, in a deliberately vague clause, regulations for the control of 'all matters connected with the good order of such burial grounds'.[3]

Between 1852 and 1859, this Act was modified five times. Repeated alterations were due not to reservations or hesitancy on the part of policy-makers, but to a consensus that the 1850 legislation had not gone far enough. The first 1852 modification dictated that 'for the protection of the public health, burial in any part or parts of the metropolis, or in any burial grounds or places of burial in the metropolis, should be wholly discontinued'.[4] In 1853, the law was extended to all cities and towns across England, again prohibiting the opening of any new burial ground or further interments in existing grounds.[5] Under this modification, the powers to 'make regulations' pertaining to burial were devolved to new, local 'Burial Boards', committees of nine gentlemen to be elected by each parish's church vestry.[6] In 1855, the 'Burial Grounds (Scotland) Act' was passed, extending the existing laws to Scotland and once more prohibiting burials in populous areas.[7] Three further modifications to the laws then introduced successively harsher penalties for disobeying rules on burial prohibition, and developed a more comprehensive system of local Burial Boards to regulate corpse disposal.[8]

[3] 'Metropolitan Interments Act', s.18.
[4] 'An Act to Amend the Laws Concerning the Burial of the Dead in the Metropolis' (1 Jul 1852), s.2.
[5] 'An Act to Amend the Laws Concerning the Burial of the Dead in England beyond the Limits of the Metropolis' (20 Aug 1853).
[6] Ibid., s.7.
[7] 'Burial Grounds (Scotland) Act' (23 Jul 1855).
[8] 'An Act to Further Amend the Laws Concerning the Burial of the Dead in England' (14 Aug 1855); 'An Act to Amend the Burial Acts' (25 Aug 1857); 'An Act to More Effectively Prevent Danger to Public Health from Places of Burial' (25 Mar 1859).

The Burial Acts have their basis in a long and hitherto uncharted history. This is a history not of popular ignorance, pioneering reformers, and prescriptive statute, but of close-knit urban communities, and the beliefs and values of their inhabitants. For over a century preceding the era of 'burial reform', inhabitants of English parishes had been quietly dealing with the health dangers presented by their dead. They displayed a cognisance of the disease threats presented by corpses which, in the view of many historians, should not have existed at local level in this period. They designed reforms which prefigured later legislative measures, and they drew on a conception of the dead and disease which is alien to histories of 'burial reform'. The history of death in Britain cannot be comprehended without them, and their activities profoundly alter historians' understandings of premodern attitudes toward the dead.

These groups existed in the interval between two important periods for historians of British burial sanitation: the 'end' of plague and the onset of cholera. The attention of historians has been divided between these periods, with particular focus on the latter. The mid-seventeenth century had witnessed repeated and destructive plague outbreaks. Authorities responded by, amongst other measures, regulating burials of the plague dead for the protection of population health. These regulations, Vanessa Harding has found, had limited impact on corpse disposal practices at local level.[9] Interest in the statutory regulation of burial practice subsided with the decline of plague, and the following century and a half was a period of quietude on the part of Parliament. Abruptly, with the rise of cholera in the 1830s, anxieties were revived with vigour. The era of British 'burial reform' has occupied a significant, and ever-growing, literature. The legislation and its consequences for burial practice have been examined in detail by a number of scholars, including Deborah Wiggins, Thomas Laqueur, Mary-Elizabeth Hotz, Sarah

[9] Vanessa Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead in Early Modern London', in Justin Champion (ed.), *Epidemic Disease in London* (London, 1993), pp.53-61.

Hoglund, and, above all, Julie Rugg.[10] Such is the significance of nineteenth-century 'burial reform' that it has captured the attention of historians in other specialisms, and even other fields. It appears variously in discussions of the funeral industry, studies of death in eighteenth-century English literature, archaeologies of burial, and histories of criminal punishment, amongst others.[11] It features in pioneering histories of public health, including the works of George Rosen and James C. Riley.[12] It has been dedicated more than a page in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine* (2013), and there is scarcely a local history of burial spaces which avoids touching upon it.[13]

In all this attention to statute, the long-eighteenth century has been overlooked. Certainly, valuable work has been carried out on some aspects of burial sanitation in this period. This thesis expands on the research of Mark Jenner, whose study of an early churchyard pamphleteer

[10] Deborah Wiggins, 'The Burial Acts: Cemetery Reform in Great Britain, 1815-1914' (Ph.D. Thesis, Texas Tech University, 1991); Wiggins, 'The Burial Act of 1880, the Liberation Society and George Osborne Morgan', *Parliamentary History*, V.15, Is.2 (1996), pp.173-189; Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead* (Princeton, 2015), pp.215-265; Mary Elizabeth Hotz, 'Down Among the Dead: Edwin Chadwick's Burial Reform Discourse in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* V.29, No.1 (2001), pp.21-38; Sarah Hoglund, 'Hidden Agendas: The Secret to Early Nineteenth-Century British Burial Reform', in Albert Pionke, Denise Millstein (eds.), *Victorian Secrecy: Economies of Knowledge and Concealment* (London, 2010), pp.15-28; Julie Rugg, 'Nineteenth-Century Burial Reform in England: A Reappraisal', *Histoire, Médecine et Santé*, V.16 (2019), pp.79-95; Rugg, 'The Burial Laws Amendment Act and Strategies of Evasion in Rural North Yorkshire', *Northern History*, V.51, Is.1 (2014), pp.113-130; Rugg, 'Constructing the Grave: Competing Burial Ideals in Nineteenth-Century England', *Social History*, V.38, No.3 (2013), pp.328-345; Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation: 1760-1850', in Peter Jupp, Clare Gittings (ed.), *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester, 1999), pp.202-229; Rugg, 'The Rise of Cemetery Companies in Britain, 1820-53' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Stirling, 1992), pp.295-309. Most recently, Tristan Portier, 'Building the City of the Dead: Bath and Burial Reforms, 1820-1860', *Mortality*, V.30, Is.1 (2024), pp.1-19.

[11] See, for example: Sarah Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010), p.144; Tarlow, *The Golden and Ghoulish Age of the Gibbet in Britain* (London, 2017), p.50; David McAllister, *Imagining the Dead in British Literature and Culture, 1790-1848* (London, 2018), p.525; Wanda Henry, 'Women Searchers of the Dead in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century London', *Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine,* V.29, No.3 (2016), p.464; Annia Cherryson, *A Fine and Private Place: The Archaeology of Death and Burial in Post-medieval Britain and Ireland* (Leicester, 2012), p.43; Chris King, Duncan Sayer (eds.), *The Archaeology of Post-medieval Religion* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp.201-202.

[12] George Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (New York, 1958; repr. Baltimore, 2015), pp.120-121; James C. Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign to Avoid Disease* (Basingstoke, 1987), pp.102-110; see also Laurence Brockliss, Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early-Modern France* (Oxford, 1997), p.758.

[13] Julie-Marie Strange, 'Death', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine* (Oxford, 2013), pp.365-367. For local histories see, for example, Louise Loe, et. al, *Living and Dying in Southwark, 1587-1831* (Oxford, 2017), p.108; Julie Rugg, *Churchyard and Cemetery: Tradition and Modernity in Rural North Yorkshire* (Manchester, 2013); Keith Snell, 'Churchyard Closures, Rural Cemeteries and the Village Community in Leicestershire and Rutland, 1800-2010', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* V.63, No.4 (2012), p.757; Julie Rugg, Fiona Stirling, Andy Clayden, 'Churchyard and Cemetery in an English Industrial City: Sheffield, 1740-1900', *Urban History,* V.41, No.4 (2014), pp.636-637.

has already pointed to the need for consideration of the eighteenth century.[14] It builds, too, on the work of social historians of medicine such as Kevin Siena, Mary Dobson, Leona Skelton, and Andrew Wear. These historians have long argued that organic decomposition was considered a danger to health in the early modern period.[15] Detached as they are from the history of burial practice, however, they have touched only lightly on attitudes toward the dead, and their findings have generally been relegated to brief lines or footnotes in accounts of nineteenth-century 'reform'.[16] Still absent is a dedicated history of the dead and disease in the long-eighteenth century.

Any historian who does turn their attention to the long-eighteenth century finds immediately that approaches adopted in exploring the plague and cholera years cannot be applied here. This was not a period of great epidemics and concerted national responses. It was one of fragmented, peculiarly local burial provision with little or no central oversight. As Jonathan Barry has written of Bristol and Exeter, two cities could organise their burial spaces very differently.[17] Within a single city, moreover, there might exist a multitude of small parishes, each with its own burial arrangements and the freedom to make changes at its own discretion. This minute degree of local specificity in burial organisation has been demonstrated at Sheffield in the long-eighteenth

[14] Mark Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and De-Christianisation? Public Health and Church Burial in Eighteenth-century England', *The English Historical Review,* V.120, No.487 (2005), pp.615-632.
[15] Kevin Siena, *Rotten Bodies: Class and Contagion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, 2019); Mary Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1997); Leona Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560-1700* (London, 2016); Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.275-313.
[16] Of these historians, Siena has offered the most comprehensive discussion of the dead and disease generation. However, he concentrates on the attitudes of medical practitioners in the seventeenth century: Kevin Siena, 'Corpses Contagion and Courage: Fear and the Inspection of Bodies in Seventeenth-century London' in Francesco Paolo de Ceglia (ed.), *The Body of Evidence: Corpses and Proofs in Early Modern European Medicine* (Leiden, 2020), pp.149-174. Historians of attitudes toward death have tended to refer in passing to the evidence presented in Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation', while stressing that such evidence is unusual. See, for example, Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead*, p.144, and Natasha Mihailovic, 'The Dead in English Urban Society' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Exeter, 2011), p.277. See also the brief acknowledgement of social histories of smell and disease in Rugg, 'Nineteenth-century Burial Reform', p.8.
[17] Jonathan Barry, 'The Organisation of Burial Places in Post-Medieval Bristol and Exeter, c.1540-1850', *Urban History,* V.46, No.4 (2019), pp.597-616.

century.[18] Further still, within a given parish we might find different neighbourhoods, different classes of people, and even different individuals with their own distinctive ideas of best practice, although this remains to be shown. The long-eighteenth century may have been a period of quietude on the part of Parliament, but it was one of considerable activity and debate in English localities. Its history demands a local approach.

This period presents, moreover, its own distinctive methodological challenges. Historians of burial sanitation during epidemics have benefited from the existence of written guidelines distinguishing safe from unsafe practice. These guidelines have been used as a tool to test for disease concerns: Harding and Rugg, for example, have asked whether localities obeyed or disobeyed new statutes.[19] Parishes of the long-eighteenth century refuse to be tested by the same method. In the absence of legislation, it is not possible to juxtapose sanitation rules with their disposal practices. Nor can we reliably look at their practices and work backwards to conclusions about their attitudes. The meanings and purposes of these practices are, viewed on their own, unclear and often contested, and one body of evidence gives rise to two vastly different histories according to the predilections of the historians.[20]

A central aim of this research has been to establish a method of accessing health concerns surrounding the dead in this period. The outcome is a combination of two parallel histories. The first concentrates on developments in medical-scientific thought on the dead and disease, as expressed in publications by British writers spanning the last outbreak of plague in 1665-6 to the first outbreak of cholera in 1831-2. This intellectual background is a valuable new history in itself. It also, however, provides an effective yardstick with which to approach and understand

[18] Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield', pp.627-646.
[19] Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead'; Rugg, 'The Burial Laws'; Rugg, 'Constructing the Grave'.
[20] For an example of these differences in conflict, see the debate between Snell, 'Churchyard Closures', and Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield', on the symbolic meanings of nineteenth-century burial locations.

the concerns of parishes and their inhabitants. These concerns constitute the second history, and are the main focus of the thesis. The activities of parishes, their authorities, and their inhabitants are analysed in a sample region for the period 1690 to 1830. Their understandings of the dead and disease are reconstructed using, in the first instance, vestry records, which have been systematically examined for the period under study. These records provide the first outline of a history of attitudes. This outline is subsequently fleshed out using a broader range of parish and local archival sources. These include, but are not limited to, burial registers, newspapers, Quarter Sessions' and other legal records, the administrative accounts of local hospitals and prisons, Parliamentary petitions, wills, and contemporary maps and plans. While giving due consideration to the local specificity of burial provision itself, the thesis in this manner reconstructs attitudes and practices surrounding disease and the dead which were not necessarily locally-specific, and, indeed, evidence of their representativeness is indicated throughout.

The first section of the thesis introduces these two broad histories. It shows, firstly, how prominent medical-scientific writers approached and understood the health risks posed by the dead over the long-eighteenth century. Writers were not merely convinced of these health risks; they were preoccupied with them. The process of bodily decay was fundamental to accounts of disease and contagion in the eighteenth century. Permeating these publications was a deeply spiritual understanding of why life ends, and what happens afterwards. These ideas reveal how a claim with, famously, 'no basis in modern medical understandings' could endure over the long century between plague and cholera: how it withstood the vast changes in method that this

century brought, remaining so prominent that it is commonly considered as rejuvenated and even new to the mid-nineteenth century.[21]

Following this, the sample region is introduced: the eighteenth-century Borough of Southwark. Southwark is an ideal area for a study of burial sanitation in this period. Its parish records are extensive and readily accessible. Its topography and geographical location presented frequent obstacles to burial provision, as did its significant urban growth during this period. These issues were handled at local level by the vestry, the central unit of parochial government. Following Southwark's vestries through this period of urban change, the thesis describes the practical problems they faced, but also the social and cultural terms in which these problems were understood. The inhabitants who occupied vestry positions, and others who took part in decision-making processes, frequently dealt with legal, financial, and political obstacles in the maintenance of their burial spaces. Although these problems worsened as the century advanced, parishes displayed a striking and continued capacity for adaptation and improvement. In the process of enacting changes to burial provision, they consistently expressed concerns about, amongst other things, disease.

In the second section of the thesis, the expressions of concern about disease and the dead that were identified in vestry minutes are examined more closely as a series of case studies. Each case study explores a different aspect of the problem, as it was understood by Southwark's inhabitants. They consider, in order, the origins and nature of these health anxieties; languages used to describe the health risks posed by corpses; the role of medical practitioners and professionals in local burial regulations; and the attitudes of communities toward their own

[21] Rugg, 'Nineteenth-Century Burial Reform', p.8. Laqueur likewise stresses that 'there was no medical foundation' for the Burial Acts: Laqueur, *The Work*, p.216. Both authors draw from a large scientific literature on this 'myth', which particularly critiques recent legislative responses to mass deaths. See, for example, E. J. Kirkis, 'A Myth too Tough to Die: The Dead of Disasters Cause Epidemics', *American Journal of Infection Control*, V.34, Is.6 (2006), pp.331-334.

systems of burial sanitation. These themes help us to understand the terms in which disease and the dead were viewed in the eighteenth century. As well as considering different themes, each case study focuses on a different parish and a different period. In this manner, an account of change over time is developed against a background of continuities.

From this arises a long history of local innovation and adaptation. It is a history which begins, for both medical-scientific writers and Southwark's parishes, with anxieties about plague in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Concerns about the disease's generation through dead bodies did not disappear with the epidemic itself. They persisted and were revived in the early-eighteenth century in relation to Southwark's burial grounds. Over the course of the century these anxieties took on a new form, that of 'putrid fever', and they would continue in this shape to the era of cholera. Periods of heightened local anxiety about these two diseases sparked intermittent 'panics' surrounding the dead and burial spaces. Parishes responded by drawing on the political and legal systems available to them. Vestries delivered small-scale improvements, at times in collaboration with inhabitants and with the aid of local statute. The measures they adopted included expanding and attempting to close burial grounds, ventilating burial vaults and church interiors, and enforcing the use of lead-lined coffins. Though these changes were small in comparison to the grand reforms of the nineteenth century, the process of enacting them could be incredibly difficult. In the last decade of the eighteenth century, as the pressures of burial ground overcrowding began to mount, these improvements became more frequent, more arduous, and more drawn-out. Nonetheless, in the face of increasing practical hardship, localities clung tightly to their traditional system of burial organisation. They understood disposal of the dead, with all the dangers it brought, as a local affair to be handled by inhabitants. It was on these grounds that at least one Southwark vestry, and many others across England, refused to abide by sanitation statute of the mid-nineteenth century.

Yet, over the course of this period some important foundations for a centralised reform had been laid. From the 1720s, parishes appealed more frequently for statutory assistance in the regulation of their burial practice. They increasingly petitioned the House of Commons for local bills for the expansion of burial provision, describing risks to population health and drawing on the legal framework of 'nuisance' to justify their requests. A wave of these petitions, from Southwark and elsewhere in the last decade of the eighteenth century, was acknowledged in the passing of the first Burial Act (1816). At the zenith of public concern with 'putrid fever' in the late-eighteenth century, Southwark inhabitants also began to engage with medical practitioners in the delivery of local burial reforms. At the same time, prominent medical-scientific writers had started to call for change to British burial practice. By the 1830s, the political and medical principles on which the Burial Acts were founded had already taken firm root.

The findings of this research redress a dominant consensus amongst historians of death in Britain. It is virtually an axiom of the field that the dead first came to be widely regarded as a source of disease after 1830. The publications and lobbying efforts of nineteenth-century sanitarians have been described as 'pivotal in redefining the corpse as a source of contagion' in the British popular imagination.[22] For some historians, the Burial Acts embodied a changed understanding of the "ideal" death. The new 'sanitary burial ideal' demanded complete 'reform' of traditional death practice on the grounds of public health.[23] For others, it represented a profound new understanding of the dead body itself: in the mid-nineteenth century the dead took on 'a new and paradigmatic medical – not ritual – uncleanness'.[24] This was a 'transformation' which, for Thomas Laqueur, would 'never be undone', since 'we still seem to believe that the dead need to be hygienically disposed of in the interests of public health'.[25]

[22] Strange, 'Death', p.366.
[23] Rugg, 'Constructing the Grave', pp.79-95.
[24] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.237.
[25] Ibid., p.218.

This consensus has been used to prop up narratives across the history of death in Britain. In her 2016 study of women searchers of the dead in eighteenth and nineteenth-century London, Wanda Henry explained the rise of the undertaker and corresponding demise of the parish searcher as caused, in part, by a new public awareness of the health threats posed by the dead: 'after the arrival of cholera in London in 1832, physicians and others alerted the public to the health threat posed by city graveyards', causing 'greater reliance on undertakers for transportation' of corpses to new extramural cemeteries.[26] The dead and disease are here part of a gendered transition in which 'the role of the parish in the death business diminished' and 'women saw their opportunities decline'.[27] Prominent environmental historian Peter Thorsheim has attributed to contagion fears the development of 'a radically new understanding of the corpse and of burial', summarising that 'during the 1830s, several experts condemned the practice of burying human remains in densely populated areas'.[28] Thus followed the Burial Acts and, later, the conversion of London burial grounds into public gardens and recreational spaces which were thought to 'purify' the interred dead.[29] Sarah Tarlow's history of the 'gibbet', a device used to punish executed criminals in eighteenth-century England, notes in passing that, for onlookers, 'the continuing presence of a rotting corpse among the dense habitations of the living would surely have been considered unpleasant even before the hygienic reforms of the mid-nineteenth century would have condemned it as unsanitary'.[30] For David McAllister, the activities of Victorian sanitary reformers provide context for a 'reimagining' of the dead in modern British literature and culture: 'henceforth, the dead should only be imagined in ways

[26] Henry, 'Women Searchers', p.464.
[27] Ibid., p.465.
[28] Peter Thorsheim, 'The Corpse in the Garden: Burial, Health and the Environment in Nineteenth-century London', *Environmental History*, V.16, No.1 (2011), pp.41-42. A similar argument is made in Tim Brown, 'The Making of Urban Healtheries: The Transformation of Cemeteries and Burial Grounds in late-Victorian East London', *Journal of Historical Geography*, V.42 (2013), pp.12-23; and on the Irish context, Conor Dodd, 'Sermons in Stones: Glasnevin Cemetery and the Development of a Catholic Burial Space', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, V.28, No.4 (2023), pp.573-581.
[29] Thorsheim, 'Corpse in the Garden', pp.41-42; p.38.
[30] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, p.50.

which made the living happier, healthier, better educated, bolder and more efficiently productive'.[31] Jennifer Leaney has described how burial reformers 'gave scope for the valid expression of new interpretations of the meaning of death and dying' as 'abhorrent' and 'disgusting', a cultural shift which for the historian partially explains the rise of cremation in the late-nineteenth century.[32] Similarly, in their *Histories of Post-Mortem Contagion* (2018), Christos Lynteris and Nicholas Evans summarise that 'contagion or contamination (…) were not central to the experience or representation of epidemic corpses until the dawn of the nineteenth century'.[33] The dead body's emergence as an 'agent of contagion' in this period betrays, for the authors, 'a much broader reframing of the dead body as an epistemic thing'.[34]

In challenging this consensus, this thesis indirectly takes aim at the older approaches on which it has been based. Informed by sociological propositions that contemporary Western societies displayed a 'denial of death' or a 'death taboo', *Annales* historians including Phillipe Ariès and Michel Vovelle produced *longue-durée* cultural histories accounting for the development of this denial.[35] They traced the beginnings of burial sanitarianism to France and Italy in the late-eighteenth century. In their view, the regulation of burials on sanitary grounds was a project of the Enlightenment doctor, who embodied and advanced a series of changes in attitudes toward death already underway in Western societies. These included declining belief in the afterlife ('de-Christianisation'), a gradual loss of the Church's historic control over death rituals ('secularisation'), and medical and technological advancements which transformed death from a natural occurrence into a preventable injustice ('medicalisation'). In his seminal *La Mort et*

[31] McAllister, *Imagining the Dead*, p.525.
[32] Jennifer Leaney, 'Ashes to Ashes' in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London, 1989), p.135. Peter Jupp offers a similar account in Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death* (New York, 2006), pp.19-45.
[33] Christos Lynteris and Nicholas Evans (eds.), *Histories of Post-mortem Contagion: Infectious Corpses and Contested Burials* (Basingstoke, 2018), p.12.
[34] Ibid., p.12.
[35] Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la Mort* (Paris, 1977); Michel Vovelle, *La Mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours*, trans. H. Weaver (Paris, 1983).

l'Occident (1983), Vovelle argued that doctors and sanitarians had through public health legislation finally 'brought the dead onto their own terrain', transforming the corpse from a valuable metaphysical being with a continued social life into a dangerous vector of disease which must be 'exiled'.[36] For Richard Etlin, writing in 1984, public health legislation dictating the closure of graveyards had at last 'broke[n] the ancient relationship between the living and the dead', replacing 'the old religious values' with 'a profound concern with public hygiene'.[37] This approach to the history of the dead and disease complemented the work of influential scholars in adjacent fields at the time, including Michel Foucault, Irving Zola and Ivan Illich.[38] A reciprocal relationship developed between sociological and anthropological criticisms of medicine as an institution of social control and the history of death, with a chapter on this history – drawn expressly from the work of Ariès – coming to feature in Illich's famous *Medical Nemesis* (1974).[39] The view of burial reform as an example of Foucault's 'authoritarian medicalisation', a new view of the dead conceived by medical practitioners and perpetuated through legislation, was from this point cemented.[40]

In spite of decades of revisionism in the history of death, this view has persisted. The first dedicated body of literature on British burial reform carried with it crucial aspects of the *Annales'* agenda, but highlighted the peculiarities of the British case. Jim Morgan and Julie Rugg revealed

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[36] Vovelle, *La Mort*, p.461; p.464.
[37] Richard Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in Eighteenth-century Paris* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p.1
[38] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité I: La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris, 1976); Irving Kenneth Zola, 'In the Name of Health and Illness: On Some Socio-Political Consequences of Medical Influence', *Society for Science and Medicine*, V.9 (1975), pp.83-87; Zola, 'Medicine as an Institution of Social Control', *The Sociological Review*, V.20, Is.4 (1972), pp.487-504; Ivan Illich, *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (London, 1976; repr. London, 1990).
[39] Illich, *Limits to Medicine,* p.175. Illich states in a footnote that his chapter on the history of death 'leans heavily' on Ariès (p.175).
[40] Michel Foucault, 'The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century' (1976), in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, 1984), p.275. The author actually stressed in this essay that the 'centre' for his proposed politics 'should not be located only in the apparatuses of the state. (…) Health and sickness (…) are problematised in the eighteenth century through the initiatives of multiple social instances, in relation to which the state itself plays various different roles.' (p.274)

the role of religious sectarianism in setting a 'precedent' for sanitary burial practices.[41] 'Public tolerance' for burial ground overcrowding had long been 'remarkably high'; when, in the 1830s, the efforts of sanitary reformers 'broke the habit of finding this overcrowding acceptable', Parliament turned to the cemetery model of burial, already in use amongst Dissenters, for a sanitary solution.[42] Deborah Wiggins examined the Victorian political transformations reflected in burial reform, viewing this legislation as part of Britain's shift 'from a nation ruled by local governments to a country with national government policies for local issues'.[43] Mary-Elizabeth Hotz studied Chadwick's attack on the working-class funeral, identifying a Foucauldian 'burial reform discourse' at the crux of which was not health *per se* but a quest for 'political and socio-economic power'.[44] Although death history was gradually splintering, with the *long durée* approach criticised for its imprecision and replaced by studies much narrower in scope, nineteenth-century burial sanitarians were still slotted into long-view metanarratives of 'death denial' and 'modernisation' reminiscent of the Francophone literature.[45]

From the 2000s, extensive revisions in the history of death caused a broad turning away from metanarratives of secularisation and de-Christianisation, but medicalisation remained largely unscrutinised. The 'secularisation' debate which began in the history of religion in the late 1990s prompted historians of death to look beyond the institutional control of rituals and revisit 'belief'.[46] Previous literature had associated loss of Church control over burials with a 'de-

[41] Jim Morgan, 'The Burial Question in Leeds in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London, 1989), pp.95-104; see also Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation'.
[42] Rugg, 'The Rise of Cemetery Companies', pp.220-221.
[43] Wiggins, 'The Burial Acts', p.212.
[44] Hotz, 'Down Among the Dead', p.35.
[45] In 1999, Roy Porter criticised what he viewed as an over-reliance on the theories of Ariès in particular: see Roy Porter, 'The Hour of Philippe Ariès', *Mortality,* V.4, No.1 (1999), pp.83-90. Hannah Malone has since noted that the Anglophone interest in Ariès' work may be due to its having been translated into English, unlike Vovelle's major monograph *La Mort et l'Occident*. See Hannah Malone, 'New Life in the Modern Cultural History of Death', *The Historical Journal,* V.62, No.3 (2019), p.853.
[46] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London, 2001); Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939* (Oxford, 1999); John Seed, "Secular' and 'Religious': Historical Perspectives', *Social History,* V.39, No.1 (2014), pp.3-13; Simon Green, *Religion in the Age of*

Christianisation' in attitudes toward death and the dead; now, scholars highlighted evidence that religious and spiritual understandings of mortality continued long after legislative change. Thomas Kselman's *The De-Christianisation of Death in Modern France* (2003) provided a model for new scholarship.[47] Kselman argued that burial practices in France following public health reforms were by no means 'de-sacralised'.[48] Popular rituals adapted to the new demands of public health, and were in this manner 're-Christianised'.[49] Following revisionist approaches to the history of religion, Kselman emphasised not the disruptive effects of institutional reform, but the tenacity of spiritual conceptions of death in the face of practical challenges.

This emphasis on continuity of religious understandings filtered into the history of British burial reform. Julie Rugg, Fiona Stirling, and Andy Clayden examined burial provision at Sheffield from 1750 to 1900, highlighting the 'continuity and central role of the Church in England in the provision of space for interment'.[50] Elsewhere, Rugg pointed out that nineteenth-century sanitarians had failed to disrupt important popular rituals. She identified two conflicting burial 'ideals' which emerged in English culture around the mid-nineteenth century.[51] 'The sanitary grave', a design of burial reformers and medical authorities, 'ran entirely counter to an alternative "ideal": the burial of family members together, in the same grave'.[52] The latter had 'always been central to English burial tradition' and its use continued, Rugg demonstrates, long after its effective prohibition under burial reform legislation.[53] Thus, where sanitarians had offered up a

Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870–1920 (Cambridge, 1996). For a historiographical overview of this turn, see Jeremy Morris, 'Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion', *The Historical Journal*, V.55, No.1 (2012). The 'institutional' approach is often associated with sociologist Max Weber and his theory of 'disenchantment': Malone, 'New Life', pp.388-389.

47 Thomas Kselman, 'The Dechristianisation of Death in Modern France', in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge, 2003).

48 Ibid., p.145.

49 Ibid., p.154.

50 Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield', p.628.

51 Rugg, 'Constructing the Grave'.

52 Ibid., p.329.

53 Ibid., p.345.

clinical model for burial practice, families instead opted for a disposal which brought with it 'the prospect of reunion' and 'was the literal pre-figuration of a hoped-for eternity'.[54] Not only did religious conceptions of death and the dead therefore persist but, Rugg suggests, changes which might appear to be 'secularising' actually aided in the expression of religiosity, since 'the cemetery presented an unprecedented opportunity to express this cultural preference' for multiple interments.[55] In this new revisionist framework, the medical and the popular are again pitted against one another. Only the result is different: rather than a triumph of medicalisation, attention is drawn to its failures.

Few scholars still openly agree with *Annales* metanarratives of 'secularisation' and its associated 'de-Christianisation'. They actively pursue lines of research to challenge them, stressing the fluidity and tenacity of spiritual conceptions of death. Many share an appreciation that privately held, individual beliefs about death exist in a realm apart from organised practices. But this view has brought its own problems. Some have come to consider attitudes toward death and the dead as so multifaceted, so difficult to detect in formal outward signs, as to be impossible to study historically. Sarah Tarlow summarises that the 'key question "what did people really believe about the dead body?"' has now 'turned out to be unanswerable'.[56]

In light of this problem, some influential historians have recently turned to anthropology to make sense of attitudes and beliefs. In 2018, for instance, Rugg argued for 'a new metanarrative' drawn from anthropology and described as 'a cyclical theory of funerary practices'.[57] In this framework, funerary practices in westernised societies are determined by an 'essentialist search

[54] Rugg, 'Constructing the Grave', p.338.
[55] Ibid., p.345.
[56] Emma Lowman and Sarah Tarlow, *Harnessing the Power of the Criminal Corpse* (Basingstoke, 2018), pp.5-6.
[57] Julie Rugg, 'Consolation, Individuation and Consumption: Towards a Theory of Cyclicality in English Funerary Practice', *Journal of the Social History Society,* V.15, No.1 (2018), p.61.

for consolation' in the face of mortality.[58] This search is at times 'undermined' by such practical problems as mass death but, in the end, the need for consolation drives groups and individuals to adapt.[59] For this reason, 'change in funerary practice has been and will tend to be cyclical'.[60] Anthropological and psychoanalytical metanarratives also lay at the core of Thomas Laqueur's *The Work of the Dead* (2015). Laqueur argued that corpse disposal practices always reflect an innate human desire to 'care' for the deceased. This desire to care 'is not grounded in science, morality, or metaphysics but rather in deep structures of intuition and feeling'.[61] Its existence is not subject to 'time or space' – in other words, subject to history – but is a 'timeless truth'.[62] Adopting this view allows Laqueur to avoid examining attitudes toward death in historical terms, since he does not believe that these attitudes, being so incommensurable, 'can be studied historically' at all.[63]

Medical concerns, however, have continued to be addressed in familiar terms – as a design of nineteenth-century doctors which conflicted with and was imposed on popular attitudes. For Rugg, the 'practical problem' of large numbers of dead came to be described in scientific language in the mid-nineteenth century, and 'undoubtedly the science of graveyard "miasma" and public health was very much to the fore in public debate' at this point.[64] The historian remains attached, however, to the view that these concerns were not widely held. She argues that burial provision was eventually reformed not because health concerns were widely shared, but because overcrowding was widely regarded as an existential problem.[65] For Laqueur, campaigners were more successful in their pursuit of medicalisation. Between 1830 and 1850 in England the corpse's capacity for 'pollution, meaning ritual uncleanness, had been broadened

[58] Rugg, 'Consolation, Individuation and Consumption', p.61.
[59] Ibid., p.75.
[60] Ibid., p.63.
[61] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.11.
[62] Ibid., p.8.
[63] Ibid., p.xiii.
[64] Rugg, 'The Burial Laws', p.69.
[65] Ibid., p.69.

to mean an uncleanness that caused specific diseases'.[66] Following Hotz, he explains these new sanitary arguments as an effort to place the dead under state medical control, drawing from Foucault to suggest that 'Edwin Chadwick and George Alfred Walker were exemplary instruments of biopower'.[67]

Thus, where other metanarratives purporting to speak to one-dimensional understandings of death have been revised, a binary view of the 'medical' versus 'popular' or 'traditional' has proved very tenacious. No matter how elusive and remote this 'popular' attitude toward the dead is understood to be, many historians assert that until the mid-nineteenth century it can have possessed no medical element, no concern with disease. In Strange's words, although burial sanitarians had been 'pivotal in redefining the corpse as a source of contagion', this view of the dead could not persist because 'a populace may appreciate sanitation, but it is not the imaginative framework in which they locate death'.[68] Such claims betray a continued attachment to the concept of practitioner-driven medicalisation: disease and medical concerns are regarded as unnatural to death practice. This attachment is reflected in, and has itself justified, the dearth of scholarship on burial sanitation before the era of medical lobbying and legislative 'reform'.

It is the overarching conviction of this thesis that, in their preoccupation with legislative reform, historians have fundamentally misunderstood the attitudes and practices of those groups who governed burial over the preceding century. Thus, the activities of Southwark's parishes, their vestries, and their inhabitants, will throughout be situated in light of this existing literature. It will be shown that traditional death practices and medical concerns were closely intertwined in this period. They developed in unison and engaged with one another: medical-scientific writers reached to spiritual explanations for death and decay in their work on the dead and disease, and

[66] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.230.
[67] Ibid., p.237; Hotz, 'Down Among the Dead', p.35.
[68] Strange, 'Death', p.365.

localities reached to medical understandings – and even medical practitioners – in the regulation of their burial practice. Chapters will explore, too, why health concerns have escaped the notice of death historians who have examined this period. In describing the terms in which the problem was understood during the eighteenth century, they will establish new frameworks and put forward new bodies of evidence for future research. It will be shown that these localities approached and articulated the health risks posed by the dead in a very different manner to their nineteenth-century counterparts: they understood it through the eighteenth-century framework of environmental 'nuisance'; they considered it as a medical *and* a sentimental problem at the same time; they dealt with it quietly and reflexively, as and when it happened; and they often found in existing death rituals adequate methods for the prevention of disease. Rather than a binary opposition between the 'medical' and the 'popular', what emerges in death practices of the eighteenth century is a lack of distinct categories of this kind.[69]

Throughout this thesis, the terms 'medical' and 'popular' are used as categories for analysis – not because they represent clearly distinct or opposing bodies of thought, but because the existing literature has so frequently treated them as such. The aim here is to interrogate, rather than replicate, this binary. While the structure of the thesis may at times appear to entertain a division between 'medical' and 'popular' approaches to the dead body, it does so in order to destabilise it: Chapter One shows how medical-scientific thought was shaped by the same cultural and spiritual frameworks commonly ascribed to the 'popular', and the case studies reveal how localities adopted and adapted medical reasoning in their disposal practices. In this

[69] This lack of distinct categories echoes the findings of revisionist historians in regard to 'Enlightenment' science and religion more broadly. Some of these historians will feature in Chapter One, but other relevant publications include: Keith Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness in Early Modern England', in Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (eds.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.56-83; Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2008); Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment', in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1968; repr. Indianapolis, 2001), pp.179-218.

way, the thesis pushes these categories toward one another in order to expose the artificiality of their separation.

There are, of course, some limitations to this research. In regard to scope and chronology, this thesis concentrates on the health threat posed by the dead as it appeared in the long-eighteenth century. It does not therefore deal in any great detail with the activities of burial reform campaigners in the mid-nineteenth century; the literature on this subject is already extensive. It does, however, touch upon them insofar as it describes the social, political, and medical frameworks that their policies were necessarily built upon. Secondly, the parish records consulted in this thesis offer a window into popular attitudes surrounding health and the dead. They show how concerns and ideas which are not generally obvious to cultural historians of death can be made more visible in local political settings, when they became a point of contention. They do not, however, show the full extent of these concerns in English society, and nor do they provide an entirely unfiltered view of these concerns. Some areas of research interest which are necessarily left aside by this method are raised as implications in the conclusion.

Lastly, this is not a history of death ritual as typically understood. It is a social and political history of some of the more 'practical' aspects of corpse disposal, and less a history of the spiritual and existential concerns that figured in eighteenth-century death practice. In concentrating on the former, the thesis does not claim to challenge the existence of the latter. It instead illustrates how the history of death practice need not primarily be conceived as a branch of the histories of religion, emotion, or ritual. When approached as a social and medical issue, death practices can also speak to other aspects of eighteenth-century culture and society – this research touches, for example, on the history of public health, English local government, urbanisation, and the law, as well as the history of medicine. In this respect the thesis aims to

illustrate the utility of death history for other fields of historical research and, more so, to suggest that these fields can usefully inform histories of attitudes towards death.

Chapter One

Disease and the Dead in British Medical-Scientific Thought

> …as this momentous subject has hitherto, "mirabile dictu!" been passed over in total silence, as though insignificant or indifferent, by English writers of eminence, I have not hesitated, feeling the paramount importance of the question, to throw my mite into the public treasury…
>
> (George Alfred Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards* (London, 1839), 10-11.)

Perhaps because of grandiose statements such as this one, the publications of nineteenth-century London surgeon George Alfred Walker have absorbed the attention of many historians of British burial sanitation. These are amongst the final lines of the introduction to his famous pamphlet, *Gatherings from Graveyards* (1839), credited by contemporaries and many historians with awakening British public attention to the health dangers presented by overcrowded burial grounds.[70] Walker had trained as a surgeon at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London in the 1830s and completed his qualification at Paris in 1836. The following year, he returned to London carting 'a mass of startling statistics in regard to the organisation of [Parisian] cemeteries', then putting together his pamphlet on the health dangers of British inner-city churchyards.[71] The resultant work drew heavily from French and Italian medical authorities and was well-received in London.[72] In the view of many historians, Walker was amongst a small group of nineteenth-century sanitarians beginning to develop, for the first time in Britain, a 'science' of burial which evidenced, and proposed to resolve, a connection between rotting human corpses and epidemic disease.[73] These sanitarians demanded the closure of inner-city burial spaces on the grounds of population health, leading eventually to the 'Burial Act' legislation of the 1850s.

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[70] 'Sanatory Progress: Being the Fifth Report of the National Philanthropic Association', 2nd ed. (London, 1850), p.73.
[71] 'Mr. George Alfred Walker', *The Athenaeum*, Is.2959 (London, 12 Jul 1884), p.55.
[72] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp.118-146.
[73] Rugg, 'Nineteenth-century Burial Reform', pp.86-95; see also David Armstrong, 'Public Health Spaces and the Fabrication of Identity', *Sociology*, V.23, Is.3 (1997), pp.399-401.

This chapter investigates medical-scientific writing on the dead and disease in Britain during a period which has received comparably little attention amongst historians of burial sanitation. It examines approximately forty texts containing passages on corpses and disease which were published between 1665 and 1831 by British writers. Many of these texts have been discussed in previous studies of eighteenth-century environmental health, and the chapter re-examines them in conjunction with other selected works. The discussion aims to show how connections between disease, corpses and corpse disposal were understood by medical writers in the eighteenth century. By tracing these ideas across a range of texts, it seeks to illuminate the broader conceptual and medical frameworks within which such concerns were articulated. This not only provides essential context for the thesis as a whole but also helps to frame the more localised analysis that follows, particularly the ways in which debates around burial were taken up (or notably absent) at the parish and vestry level. In this way, the chapter establishes an intellectual context for examining how theoretical concerns voiced by medical authorities may have intersected with, or diverged from, practical responses within communities.

The first section of the chapter introduces this corpus of medical literature. It points to a strong and longstanding consensus that dead bodies generated contagious diseases, well before the beginnings of a distinctive 'burial reform' movement in the 1830s. The section discusses the prevailing medical theories that informed this consensus, and highlights continuities in thought over time. It shows that prominent medical-scientific writers had for over a century been debating, demonstrating, and advancing complex accounts of the manner in which human corpses transmitted diseases and generated epidemics. Throughout the period, bodily putrefaction remained the central mechanism believed to underpin this disease risk.

The second section examines how this corpus developed into a credible 'science' over the course of the century. It traces changes in how writers described, explained, and investigated the putrefaction of the dead, and situates these in the broader context of eighteenth-century British medical trends. Early writers understood this putrefaction in spiritual terms: as a God-given stage in the cycle of life, which gave rise to new life, and which necessarily generated disease through invisible, incorporeal processes. As the period advanced, and in line with broader trends in British medicine, this natural philosophy was gradually replaced by more empirical languages and methods. It was increasingly held that the diseases generated by dead bodies could be investigated experimentally, that previously incorporeal processes could now be witnessed and described, and that metaphysical explanations should not be included in medical literature on the topic. Nonetheless, as the section argues, this emerging 'science' remained underpinned by contemporary spiritual understandings of the end of life.

Differences in the nature of the source material between the long-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries help to explain why many of the published texts identified in this chapter have been overlooked by historians of burial sanitation. The nineteenth-century publications credited with developing the science of burial, including Walker's, are generally titled after their subject matter and deal with it exclusively. By contrast, no specialist canon on the dead and disease can be said to exist during the long-eighteenth century in Britain. Theories about the health dangers presented by corpses were, rather, littered across texts whose main subjects were disease and contagion. Whilst some of these discussions of corpses have been mentioned in passing by historians of medicine, their lack of specialisation has rendered them less visible to historians of burial and corpse sanitation. Attention to comments on corpses in these texts has thus been patchy in one literature and largely absent in the other, and this chapter in part aims to rectify this gap. The chapter demonstrates that these theories were no less prominent for their lack of signposting: on the contrary, the dead and disease were intimately bound in

medical-scientific thought from the beginning to the end of this period, with theories about corpses and their properties being deployed and developed nearly exclusively to explain epidemic outbreaks.

This chapter does not aim to present a comprehensive analysis of all potentially relevant material. This is partly for reasons of time, but also manageability. Instead, the discussion encompasses major works, measured primarily in terms of contemporary influence and recognition, which touch on the dead body and disease generation and transmission. The selection is not intended to be exhaustive, but it does include a number of the most well-known and widely circulated works that address these themes. A conscious effort has been made to represent a range of different types of publication – including medical treatises, journals, and didactic texts – in order to reflect the breadth of contemporary discourse. Texts were initially chosen on the basis of their historical influence and relevance, through consultation of secondary literature on environmental health, and this selection was subsequently tested and supplemented through targeted keyword searches of Gale Primary Sources manuscripts. Search terms included "dead," "death," or "body" and "disease," which helped to identify additional relevant material and confirmed the presence of recurring themes across a wider corpus.

Overall, this chapter challenges the notion that nineteenth-century burial reform and public health arguments marked a novel, clinical turn in attitudes toward the dead. It suggests that theories linking corpses and disease were well established before the mid-nineteenth century, and continued to be rooted as much in spiritual and metaphysical traditions as in emerging empirical science. Rather than representing a radical departure, figures like Walker were therefore reiterating and reframing older beliefs within new public health frameworks. The chapter thus contributes to a broader re-evaluation of medical modernisation, aligning with revisionist accounts that emphasise the gradual evolution of medical thought in Britain. In doing

so, it reframes burial sanitation not as a disruptive new science, but as the culmination of an enduring intellectual tradition.

Medical Literature on the Dead and Disease

A small but significant set of diseases were associated with dead bodies over the long-eighteenth century. The first of these in terms of both chronology and significance was bubonic plague. During the seventeenth century, new texts emerging in response to major plague outbreaks warned vehemently against contact with the bodies of the dead. Francis Herring, Nathaniel Hodges, Thomas Sydenham and John Pechey were amongst those whose publications on plague stressed a link between human corpses and epidemic outbreaks. All four men were practising licentiates of the Royal College of Physicians. Herring had studied medicine at Cambridge and in 1603 published his *Advertisements for this time of Pestilential Contagion*, which would be reprinted during the large plague outbreaks of 1625 and 1665. Released in the vernacular rather than Latin in hopes of a wide readership, the *Advertisements* offered guidance for urban authorities and inhabitants on limiting the spread of plague. Included in this guidance were theoretical and practical discussions of the corpse. For Herring, the causal association between dead bodies and plague was clear. All three editions of his *Advertisements* include the following line: 'all men with the least insight in philosophy know, that from the dead corps (…) certain vapours or exhalations are elevated, which (…) do undoubtedly taint, corrupt and poison their air with their ill quality'.[74] This claim remained an established consensus in the mid-century when Hodges and Sydenham studied medicine at Oxford. For Hodges, who had remained in London to witness the outbreak of 1665 first-hand, the risk of contagion from carcasses was similarly obvious. His *Loimologia* (1672), translated into English by John Quincy in 1720, stresses the infectious nature of the plague dead and points to various sources of disease, amongst which was the stench of human carcasses.[75] Likewise, Sydenham's *Observations Medicae* (1676) warned

[74] Francis Herring, *Advertisements for this Time of Pestilentiall Contagion* (London, 1665), p.xii.
[75] Nathaniel Hodges, *Loimologia: or an Historical Account of the Plague in London* (London, 1665), p.147; pp.234-235.

against contact with the bodies of the dead, arguing that disease and contagion during plague were propagated by corpses. These were not transitory warnings, forgotten as plague declined in the late-seventeenth century. Many of these early works discussing the dead and disease continued to be widely read for over a century: Herring's *Advertisements*, for instance, were reprinted as late as 1757. It was Sydenham, however, who remained the standout authority for many centuries in the study of disease, coming to be known colloquially as 'The English Hippocrates'. The *Observations* went through four Latin editions to 1685, four new English editions to 1850, and was reprinted repeatedly including by London's 'Sydenham Society' in the 1840s.[76] Sydenham's texts in particular formed the referential bedrock of a canon of literature which continued to link corpses with contagion throughout the long-eighteenth century.

A brief period of revival of plague panic in Britain during the Marseilles outbreak of 1720-22 saw Richard Mead, physician to and governor of St Thomas' Hospital in Southwark, contribute to the body of early literature espousing the idea that corpses generated epidemics. Mead's *Short Discourse Concerning Pestilentiall Contagion* (1720) was commissioned by the Privy Council to investigate measures to be taken in case of an outbreak in Britain. The treatise expanded upon a theory the writer had advocated in his earlier work on *Poisons* (1702): that, 'all authors do agree', 'one great cause of pestilential distempers to be dead bodies lying expos'd and rotting in the open air'.[77] The first pages of Mead's *Short Discourse* reiterated this point: 'the stinks of stagnating waters in hot water, putrid exhalations from the earth; and above all, the corruption of dead carcasses lying unburied, have occasioned infectious diseases.'[78] Both of these works were well-received, the earliest winning Mead sufficient attention to be elected to the Royal Society in 1703.[79] In his investigations for the *Short Discourse*, Mead worked with Scottish

[76] 'Editorial and Miscellaneous', *The Sydenham Society of London* (London, 1856), p.253.
[77] Richard Mead, *A Mechanical Account of Poisons* (London, 1702), p.164.
[78] Richard Mead, *A Short Discourse Concerning Pestilential Contagion* (London, 1720), p.3.
[79] Anita Guerrini, 'Mead, Richard (1673-1754), Physician and Collector of Books and Art', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sept 2004 [accessed 17 Sept 2022].

physician John Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot had published no considerable medical works at this time, and it is striking that his fame heightened with the publication of *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* in 1733.[80] This work included a mathematical theory of 'corpse air' in which Arbuthnot calculated the approximate volume of air surrounding a corpse – dead of epidemic disease or otherwise – which could be deemed an infection risk. After Arbuthnot's death, the *Essay on Air* was reprinted twice more to 1756 and again in 1851, with Latin and French editions also appearing in the mid-eighteenth century.[81] It was likely read by English physician Matthew Dobson, whose *Medical Commentary on Fixed Air* (1787) closely resembles Arbuthnot's essay. On the same grounds as Arbuthnot, Dobson complained explicitly that churchyards should not be located in crowded areas, and that existing graves should not be disturbed in the making of new ones. Prefiguring Walker's graphic critique of intra-mural burial, Dobson wrote that 'I have seen bodies yet green in death, forced from the grave, and exposed to the open day! Health, humanity and decency cry aloud against such barbaries'.[82]

The period after 1700 also witnessed the addition of 'typhus' and various iterations of 'putrid' or 'malignant' fevers to the list of diseases caused and spread by corpses. Mead's work on plague and the dead, along with that of Herring and Sydenham before him, assumed a new relevance after 1740 as an explosion of medical-scientific publishing coincided with the 'discovery' and categorisation of 'new' putrid diseases and particularly epidemic fever, which were considered related to and thought to precede plague. Strikingly, the texts of most major eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British writers on putrid fevers describe dead human bodies as generating and transmitting this disease type. Writers whose works on this topic are cited in this chapter include John Pringle, James Lind, Donald Monro, Edward Foster, William Grant, John

[80] Angus Ross, 'John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), Physician and Satirist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sept 2004 [accessed 17 Sept 2022].
[81] Reprinted 1751, 1756, 1851; in French in 1742 and in Latin in 1753. Ibid. [accessed 17 Sept 2022].
[82] Matthew Dobson, *A Medical Commentary on Fixed Air* (London, 1787), p.68.

Huxham, William Alexander, George Cheyne, John Gardiner and John Armstrong. This is a formidable list primarily of Scotsmen and Scottish-educated Englishmen, with Huxham being the only writer here who was neither Scottish nor had ever studied in Scotland.[83] All these figures agreed on one important point: as Pringle phrased it in 1750, wherever there are decomposing bodies there is fever, with 'more or less danger proportioned to the quantity of corrupted matter'.[84] By the early-nineteenth century, this claim was an orthodoxy amongst writers on fever. Indeed, it does not appear to have been explicitly disputed until 1811, when American botanist Edward Bancroft published his *Essay on Yellow Fever*, an exception which proves the rule. Refuting the arguments of Scottish surgeon Colin Chisholm, who had written on pestilential fevers generated by corpses in 1801, Bancroft complained that 'this opinion is become so familiar, that few persons hesitate to adopt it': 'there is however no necessary, or natural, connection between [fever] and nastiness or offensive smells', including those 'emitted by corrupting dead bodies'.[85] Bancroft does not appear to have disturbed the British consensus with his claims. In 1820, London's foremost fever expert John Armstrong attempted to 'prove' the connection by the scientific standards of the nineteenth century, his work in turn prompting the establishment of London's first General Cemetery Company for the burial of the dead outside city walls on sanitary grounds.[86]

Although the most extensive discussions of the dead and disease were contained in texts on specific disease types, there existed another subset of medical-scientific literature which addressed the topic. General texts on the preservation of health and on medical practice in the treatment of diseases, often aimed at more popular audiences, grew in number over the long-

[83] Walker's statement on the silence of '*English* writers of eminence' suggests some awareness of the number of Scotsmen writing on this subject.
[84] John Pringle, *Observations on the Nature and Cure of Hospital and Jayl Fevers* (London, 1750), p.51.
[85] Edward Nathaniel Bancroft, *An Essay on the Disease called Yellow Fever* (London, 1811), pp.102-103.
[86] Rugg, 'The Rise of Cemetery Companies', p.300. Rugg positions Armstrong's work as 'the first mention of interment as a sanitary issue' in Britain.

eighteenth century. William Buchan's famous *Domestic Medicine*, first published in 1769, contains two passages on the disease threat posed by dead bodies and particularly overcrowded churchyards: 'certain it is, that thousands of putrid carcases, so near the surface of the earth, in a place where the air stagnates, cannot fail to taint it; and that such air being breathed into the lungs, and mixed with the blood, must occasion disease'.[87] Physician John Fothergill similarly espoused the health dangers associated with overcrowded churchyards, warning in his *Rules for the Preservation of Health* (1762) that 'there is nothing more apt to poison the air with putrid steams and breed distempers, than burial places in crowded cities'.[88] Fothergill advocated for burial outside populated areas, noting that children were particularly apt to receive distempers from exposure to human corpses.[89] Fothergill and Buchan's texts are similar in nature to Herring's *Advertisements* and Mead's *Short Discourse*: all are intended to explain, in the vernacular for a wide audience, how epidemic diseases functioned and what methods should be taken to prevent them, and all four describe human corpses as generating contagion.

Writers across these plague, fever and didactic medical literatures agreed on a set of fundamental principles regarding the mechanism by which corpses affected living bodies. They broadly held that the decay of dead bodies released a dangerous element into the surrounding air which, when inhaled, infected the body and generated disease. Where a person had died of a specific disease, so too the 'poison' of this disease was released into the air from their corpse, and thus the disease was transmitted posthumously. This mechanism, and the vocabulary used to explain it, were tweaked and changed slightly as writers advocated their own theories of disease transmission. Nevertheless, the central argument, that the air around a rotting corpse was corrupted with disease-causing material, remained fundamental to texts published throughout the long-eighteenth century.

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[87] William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine* (London, 1769), p.49.
[88] John Fothergill, *Rules for the Preservation of Health* (London, 1762), p.37.
[89] Ibid., pp.15-16.

This mechanism could be complicated or simplified by a writer depending on the topic at hand and their assumed readership. For writers such as Buchan, discussing general rules on health and disease for a popular audience, the simple explanation sufficed: human carcasses could 'taint' the air, and 'such air being breathed into the lungs, and mixed with the blood' occasioned disease.[90] Writers addressing specialist audiences, and particularly those espousing their own theories, adopted specialist vocabularies and more complicated explanations. For instance, the early pages of Sydenham's *Observations Medicae* (1676) contain his account of 'acute' (non-chronic) diseases, the category to which 'epidemics' such as plague and pestilential fever belonged.[91] The writer held that such diseases were 'engendered through occult and inexplicable changes in the atmosphere' which 'taint the human frame'.[92] This atmospheric 'contamination' was, for Sydenham, the result of 'effluvia' arising from 'the bowels of the earth'.[93] Corpses played an important role as catalysts for atmospheric contamination in his view. In a discussion of pestilential fever and plague, Sydenham states that 'over and above (…) this constitution of the atmosphere and these general influences, there must be an additional determination in the form of a susception of the miasma.'[94] 'This means', he clarifies, 'the admission of the morbid principle from some pestiferous body'.[95] This could include the bodies of 'those who have sickened' or 'the corpses of those who have died'.[96] Together, then, a susceptible atmosphere and 'the presence of the stricken' comprise 'a fearful conflagration' which is the origin of epidemics.[97]

[90] Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, p.49.
[91] Sydenham, *Observations Medicae* (London, 1676), p.31.
[92] Ibid., p.31.
[93] Ibid., p.31.
[94] Ibid., p.100.
[95] Ibid., p.100.
[96] Ibid., p.100.
[97] Ibid., p.100.

Many of the specialist texts discussing corpses and disease also named and described the mechanical processes by which human corpses were thought to break down and release or generate their 'poisons'. The favoured explanatory concepts were 'fermentation' and, increasingly during the mid-eighteenth century, 'putrefaction'. These explanatory concepts existed outside their application to corpses; they were important pathological processes in medicine and science more broadly throughout this period.

The definition of fermentation which was popularised during the late-seventeenth century in Britain is well-illustrated by one of its earlier advocates, Thomas Willis. Willis was particularly interested in alchemy and formed part of an intellectual group known as the Oxford Physiologists, who advocated for experimentation and observation of matter as a means of understanding physiology. In his *Of Fermentation* (1659), Willis defines fermentation as the movement of particles of matter in the early stages of decomposition. For him, this process occurred in all natural bodies 'in which spirit, salt and sulphur are found' since these elements reacted with one another to produce decay.[98] The reaction could be hastened by excessive heat or moisture but was ultimately inevitable in all natural things. This mechanism could be 'seen', he writes, in 'the death of living bodies (…); and also in the corruption of them being dead, and in their reduction to a rottenness'.[99] During this process, the 'spirit' left the body, along with the salt and the sulphur, the latter of which produced the 'stinking smell' associated with organic rot.[100] The remaining 'watery parts' of the body 'flow forth, and the frame of the subject breaks, or falls down into earth or a *caput mortuum*' ('worthless remains').[101] Willis' definition of fermentation was widely accepted by the late-seventeenth century. Hodges, for instance, used the term in 1665 to explain post-mortem contagion during plague: fermentation of the dead

[98] Thomas Willis, *A Medical-Philosophical Discourse of Fermentation* (London, 1681), p.26.
[99] Ibid., p.26.
[100] Ibid., p.26
[101] Ibid., p.26. Translation from Jon Stone (ed.), *The Routledge Dictionary of Latin Quotations* (London, 2004), p.142.

body caused it to decompose, and from this 'the very carcasses' of the plague dead 'would weep out the morbid ferment' through the pores of the skin and from the eyes.[102]

When the doctrine of fermentation was deployed in medical science, it was generally understood as the precursor to another, more important process: putrefaction. Although Willis considered fermentation to be observable, in his own account it was still an essentially invisible chemical reaction from which observable decomposition was thought to result. Putrefaction, by contrast, referred to the decomposition itself: fermentation 'ends in putrefaction or rottenness'.[103] For most long-eighteenth century thinkers, putrefaction itself constituted a pathological mechanism, which arose from or was otherwise related to fermentation. Mead, for instance, viewed putrefaction as 'a kind of fermentation'.[104] Others viewed fermentation as a vegetable process and putrefaction as an animal process. Writing in the 1770s, Grant described the sharp and sour smell of putrefaction as 'peculiar to animal substances', and the acidic, often edible products of fermentation as peculiar to vegetable ones.[105] Thus for Grant 'putrefaction seems to be in animal, what fermentation is in vegetable substances'.[106] Fermentation and putrefaction would remain key terms for medical-scientists writing on corpse contagion through to the mid-nineteenth century, with Walker introducing his 'facts demonstrating the dangers of inhumation in populous areas' using the following line: 'fermentation is an action peculiar to vegetable and animal substances, which experience has shown would soon degenerate into putrefaction'.[107]

It is testament to the strength and endurance of 'putrefaction' as a pathological mechanism more broadly that these claims were repeated by medical authorities over a period of some two

[102] Hodges, *Loimologia*, p.109.
[103] Willis, *Fermentation*, p.28.
[104] Mead, *Short Discourse*, p.11.
[105] William Grant, *An Enquiry into the Nature, Rise and Progress of Fevers* (London, 1771), p.251.
[106] Ibid., p.251.
[107] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p.100.

hundred years. As Andrew Wear and Kevin Siena have written of the seventeenth century, dead bodies were amongst the most powerful and undeniable evidence of the dangers of organic decay. Wear summarises that 'from the Middle Ages through to the seventeenth century the experience of putrefaction was strong enough, and unpleasant enough, for it to come to be seen as one of the causes of the most destructive of illnesses'.[108] The 'experience' of corpse decomposition is an oft-cited testament to these risks: 'early modern society's experience of the putrefying dead bodies of animals and of people', which was far greater than that in 'modern developed societies', contributed to render putrefaction 'a crucial component in most accounts of disease'.[109] Siena's study of plague dissection in seventeenth-century London stresses experience in a similar manner, outlining that 'rotting food, infected wounds, and festering corpses all suggested that death and rot must be connected'.[110]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, too, it remained the case that in texts on the dead body and disease 'putrefaction' tended to hold more explanatory weight than 'fermentation'. This was particularly true amongst mid- and late-century writers, who tended not to use 'fermentation' at all. A passage in Dobson's *Medical Commentary on Fixed Air* (1787) introducing putrefaction captures the centrality of this mechanism for understandings of death and the dead: 'putrefaction is the great process appointed by the Creator, for the resolution of animal and vegetable substances into the elements from which they were first formed'.[111] For Dobson and many others, it was specifically putrefaction which generated and transmitted diseases from dead bodies, since it was through putrefaction that the body disintegrated and released its noxious elements into the air. As Dobson phrased it, 'during the resolution of bodies by putrefaction, a considerable proportion of their parts is volatilised; and the effluvia thus thrown

[108] Wear, *Knowledge and Practice*, p.136.
[109] Ibid., p.136.
[110] Siena, 'Corpses, Contagion and Courage', p.150.
[111] Dobson, *Fixed Air*, p.67.

off, are more or less pernicious, according to the circumstances which accompany the putrefactive process'.[112] Scottish physician George Cheyne had earlier described the same process as it related to dead bodies in his *Natural Method of Curing Diseases* (1742): pestilential diseases arose primarily from the 'dead carcasses of men, putrefying above ground by heat and moisture, and throwing their noxious particles (…) through the atmosphere'.[113]

In hindsight, this understanding of putrefaction raises an important question: whether the 'noxious particles' thrown off by dead bodies were carried in the body before death, or whether the process of putrefaction itself generated them. These two concepts can be simplified as disease 'transmission' and 'generation' from the corpse respectively. The distinction between them should have been important, since it bears on the types of corpses deemed an epidemic risk – those dead of a specific infectious disease, or all those dead and putrefying. Yet, writers were surprisingly opaque about this matter. The two concepts were regularly treated together, and rarely clearly distinguished. Writers described a combination of means by which the living could receive diseases from dead bodies: disease-causing agents carried within already-infected bodies could spread to the living after death; and 'bad' or 'impure' air associated with bodily putrefaction of any kind could negatively affect the living and generate diseases. In sum, for long eighteenth-century writers, all putrefying human bodies caused the noxious air which generated plagues, fevers and cholera, but the risk of infection was particularly acute where one of these diseases had been the cause of death.

Herring's *Directions* (1665) illustrates this idea as it related to plague. After 'conversion to God', the second 'preservative against the plague' concerns burial of the dead.[114] 'There should (in my opinion)', Herring writes, 'be provided a place of sepulture for the bodies *especially* of such as

[112] Dobson, *Fixed Air*, p.67.
[113] George Cheyne, *Natural Method of Curing Diseases* (London, 1742), p.101.
[114] Herring, *Advertisements*, p.xii.

die by the sickness, some good distance from the citie and suburbs'.[115] Herring emphasises the importance of proper disposal of the 'infected' dead, which he deems 'very dangerous for spreading the contagion'.[116] Yet, the guidance in this passage is directed at all dead bodies. 'All dead corpses' should, he suggests, 'be layd a convenient depth in the ground' to prevent the escape of corruptive material.[117] Thus bodies dead of plague should be dealt with 'especially' cautiously, but all corpse disposal warranted preventative measures against epidemic disease, since all corpses release 'certain vapours or exhalations' which 'taint, corrupt and poison the air'.[118]

More than a century later, military fever authority James Lind portrayed generation and transmission in a similar manner to Herring. Lind's *Essay on the Diseases Incidental to Europeans* (1768) discusses a malignant (contagious) fever outbreak at Naples in 1764.[119] Lind offers his own opinion on the conditions which led to the rapid spread of the infection: 'it will not appear surprising, that this malignant fever raged with uncommon violence, and was everywhere propagated, from the number of sick (…); the little care taken of them, and the negligence in burying the dead'.[120] Lind's word 'propagated' is significant here. He refers specifically to bodies dead of fever as spreading the infection, adding that 'the absurd custom of exposing bodies to view when carrying to the grave, might even add to the progress of the distemper'.[121] This account is recognisably contagionist. 'Propagation' implies an infectious agent, or 'seed' as it was commonly referred to, carried in the bodies of the fever dead and transmissible to the living. The passage is reminiscent of Herring's account of the 'infected' plague dead and their capacity to spread the contagion. Moreover, like Herring, Lind also emphasises the role played by bad

[115] Herring, *Advertisements*, p.xii [Italics added].
[116] Ibid., p.xii.
[117] Ibid., xii-xiii.
[118] Ibid., p.xii.
[119] James Lind, *Essay on the Diseases Incidental to Europeans in Hot Climates* (London, 1768).
[120] Ibid., p.180.
[121] Ibid., p.180.

air and the putrefaction of dead bodies in general. His *Essay* outlines the 'effects of unwholesome air on persons in health'.[122] 'Unwholesome air' means, for Lind, air 'abounding' with 'stench and putrefaction' such as that he describes finding in an unnamed British alms-house in the 1760s.[123] A 'low malignant fever' prevailed in this alms-house, and Lind relates that the apothecary in charge claimed to have 'treated this fever in the most approved way, and with such remedies as are prescribed by writers of character on infectious fevers', to no avail.[124] Upon entering the alms-house, Lind narrates, he found 'two or three dead bodies lying in the same chamber with the sick'.[125] New patients had been laid 'upon the beds of such as had died', and 'the chambers abounded with so much stench and putrefaction' that Lind thought it quite impossible to cure any person so long as they were kept in that air.[126] His opinion was that 'the filth and nastiness in that place (…) remained a constant source of infection'.[127] Lind asserts in a subsequent passage that diseases can proceed from 'the bad air of a country', stinking marshes and crowded environments.[128] These conditions cause a change in the air itself which renders it impure or 'putrid' and which, even in healthy people, can bring on a fever or cause a wound to turn gangrenous. In an unhealthy person such as those at the alms-house, an air corrupted by putrefying corpses was a sure cause of fatality; in fact, 'in the most malignant diseases, the immediate removal of the patient into a purer air is often the only method to preserve his life'.[129] In these descriptions of putrid air, Lind does not refer to any 'propagation', poison or infectious material transmitted via the air from one body to another. Instead, diseases have environmental causes, being generated in the living by a change in the air itself: the 'filth' and 'nastiness' attendant with putrefaction, rather than some alien disease agent released from the dead body, is the 'source of infection'.

[122] Lind, *Diseases Incidental to Europeans*, p.167.
[123] Ibid., p.168.
[124] Ibid., p.167.
[125] Ibid., p.167.
[126] Ibid., p.167.
[127] Ibid., p.168.
[128] Ibid., p.168.
[129] Ibid., p.176.

Other writers described the disease-causing agents associated with dead bodies as expressly generated by putrefaction. Arbuthnot's *Essay Concerning the Effects of Air* (1733) further illustrates how environmental and particle views of disease could be married in discussions of dead bodies. In a discussion of putrefaction and its effects on air, Arbuthnot explains that the onset of putrefaction generates putrescent matter in corpses. As the body decomposes after burial, these 'putrescent parts of carcasses buried under ground are carried off, tho' slowly, into the air'.[130] Thus, disease here arises not from vaguely 'impure' or 'corrupted' air as it did for Lind. Rather, the air around a burial ground is essentially impregnated with the dissipated parts of dead human bodies. These parts themselves, in their state of putrefaction, constitute the disease-causing agent and are transmissible between bodies.

The putrid exhalations arising from human bodies were most often referred to as 'effluvia' or 'miasma'. These two terms were used somewhat interchangeably, although, in general, 'effluvia' tended to be used in reference to the exhalations of human bodies and 'miasma' to other natural vapours. Arbuthnot, for instance, describes 'effluvia' as the vapours originating from human bodies whether living or dead.[131] John Gardiner distinguishes clearly between 'human effluvia' and 'marsh miasma'; both are 'noxious vapours' but one arises from the human body and the other from decomposing organic matter such as dead animals and insects.[132] The terms were sometimes used synonymously: Edward Foster's *Essay on Hospitals* (1768) refers to the 'contagious miasmata [arising] from the dead room', where corpses were stored, and elsewhere to the 'noxious, putrid effluvia' emitted 'from a corruption of the innumerable dead' buried in large towns.[133] Other writers preferred one term over the other. The Irish physician David

[130] John Arbuthnot, *Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (London, 1733), p.18.
[131] Ibid., p.17.
[132] John Gardiner, *Observations on the Animal Oeconony* (London, 1784), p.399.
[133] Edward Foster, *Essay on Hospitals* (London, 1768), p.31; pp.18-19.

MacBride, for instance, refers not to effluvia at all and uses 'miasmata' instead.[134] In his view, miasmata arose either from the human body or its environment, and it was these miasmata which generated and transmitted putrid diseases such as plagues and fevers. The miasmata were 'detached from bodies during putrefaction' and were 'oftentimes in reality' merely 'putrid vapours'.[135] By contrast, Scottish military physician Donald Monro refers only to effluvia: 'putrid effluvia' arose from 'dead bodies, dead horses, and other animals', from 'the privies and dung of horses', 'marshy ground, and corrupting stagnating water'.[136]

It is clear from these discussions that dead and living bodies were perceived as dangerous in a very similar manner: whether writers preferred 'effluvia' or 'miasma', they tended to state that living as well as dead bodies released noxious vapours. Understanding why this was the case requires some consideration of humoral theory. In his discussion of London's pestilential fever outbreaks over the late-seventeenth century, English physician John Pechey describes the movement of humors as the disease advanced. This fever was, he recounts Sydenham, caused by 'vicious particles' which became 'lodged in the blood' and could 'infect and corrupt' the body's humors.[137] Unless these corrupted humors 'be expelled', they 'will occasion many difficult symptoms'.[138] The body could attempt to 'evacuate' them itself, through vomiting and, as the disease advanced, diarrhoea. Pechey explains that 'when the diarrhoea is once begun, astringent medicines' did 'little or nothing' to help the patient.[139] He therefore prescribes a medicine of 'crocus metall' which induces the patient to vomit, expelling the corrupt humors before diarrhoea begins.[140] Ideas of humoral corruption and expulsion continued to influence understanding of fever into the late-eighteenth century. In 1750, John Huxham published his

[134] David MacBride, *Experimental Essays on Medical and Philosophical Subjects* (Dublin, 1767).
[135] MacBride, *Experimental Essays,* p.209.
[136] Donald Monro, *An Account of the Diseases which Were Most Frequent in the British Military Hospitals in Germany* (London, 1764), p.311.
[137] John Pechey, *Collections of Acute Diseases* (London, 1691), p.33; p.35.
[138] Ibid., p.36.
[139] Ibid., p.37.
[140] Ibid., p.37.

comprehensive *Essay on Fevers*, 'the result of a pretty large and long experience' and aimed at 'younger practitioners'.[141] Like Sydenham and Pechey, Huxham viewed fevers as caused by a 'corruption', and specifically a 'putrefaction', of the blood which could spread to other humors and, eventually, kill the patient.[142] For Huxham, this putrefaction of the blood occurred in a 'putrid malignant fever' 'arising from contagion'.[143] Yet, humoral putrefaction and its associated diseases could also occur spontaneously within the body, and contagion was not a pre-requisite for humoral imbalance. Huxham writes that the body's humors also 'naturally run into dissolution and putrefaction, unless prevented and corrected'.[144] This process could be hastened by a poor diet, such as one too high in 'flesh, fish, spices and water', which 'will soon' escalate humoral putrefaction to the extent that a putrid fever would result.[145] Starvation, too, caused humoral imbalances which led to putrefaction. 'Take the soundest person', Huxham illustrates, 'and deprive him of all liquid and solid aliment'.[146] His 'animal humors' will begin to putrefy 'till at length a fever, delerium &c. are brought on by their great irritation, which soon ends in universal putrefaction and death.'[147]

Whether transmitted by contagion or generated spontaneously in the body, once 'humoral putrescence' began it presented an epidemic risk. John Pringle, one of the most influential eighteenth-century writers on fevers in Britain, summarises the view in his *Observations on the Nature and Cure of Hospital and Jayl Fever* (1750): 'excrementious parts of the humors' are continually released from the human body as 'animal steams'.[148] These steams (effluvia) could accumulate in crowded environments, and when 'breathed in' would generate epidemic diseases

[141] John Huxham, *An Essay on Fevers* (London, 1750), p.iii.
[142] Ibid., pp.39-41.
[143] Ibid., p.54.
[144] Ibid., p.56.
[145] Ibid., p.56.
[146] Ibid., p.55.
[147] Ibid. p.55.
[148] Pringle, *Observations on Hospital and Jayl Fevers*, p.47.

spontaneously 'where there was no other distemper'.[149] Though Pringle's account was authoritative, this view of disease generation was well established by this time. Some sixty years earlier, Pechey, for instance, had proposed that excreted humors could even enter the body through the eyes. People with prominent eyes, he warns the popular reader in *Storehouse of Practical Physick*, possess 'a natural weakness', 'for prominent eyes are wont to be large and so fitter to receive humors' in the environment.[150]

Thus, the human body played a distinct, well-established role in the production and transmission of disease, as producer and recipient of 'effluvia' whether living or dead. The very sight and smell of putrefaction in the living, from the symptoms of pestilential disease to the daily noxious 'perspirations' of even the healthiest people, were sufficient evidence for British writers that human bodies themselves produced those particles and vapours through which diseases were generated and transmitted.[151] As William Grant described it, one only had to look down at oneself for the evidence: 'if any person will take the trouble to stand in the hot sun and look at his own shadow on a white-plastered wall, he will easily perceive that his whole body is a smoking dung-hill, with a vapour exhaling from every part of it.'[152]

At the core of these theories, then, was a conception of life as a state of bodily putrefaction which escalates in death. Grant explains in his *Observations* that that 'true', in other words, total, putrefaction is only found in dead human bodies. The 'morbid disposition of the humors, brought on by various causes' which characterises bodily putrefaction in the living 'cannot be called *truly* putrid before death', although in serious cases 'approaches it nearly as is consistent with life'.[153] Multiple writers before and after Grant summarised this common wisdom about

[149] Pringle, *Observations on Hospital and Jayl Fevers*, p.47.
[150] John Pechey, *The Storehouse of Physical Practice* (London, 1697), p.40.
[151] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p.109.
[152] William Grant, *An Essay on the Pestilential Fever of Sydenham* (London, 1775), p.7.
[153] William Grant, *Observations on the Nature and Cure of Fevers* (London, 1772), p.267.

the extreme dangers of corpse putrefaction. Mead's *Short Discourse*, published in 1720 and reprinted several times over the eighteenth century, explained that putrid exhalations of all kinds but '*above all*, the corruption of dead carcasses lying unburied, have occasioned infectious diseases'.[154] Arbuthnot's treatise on air repeats Mead's words almost verbatim: 'air replete with the steams of animals, *especially* such as are rotting, has occasioned infectious diseases'.[155] In 1839, George Alfred Walker published his influential pamphlet on the dangers of burials in populous areas, including a line which reiterated this, now centuries old, claim. 'Animal exhalations', Walker explains, 'and *especially* those which arise from a dead body, in the process of putrefaction, are very afflicting and very dangerous".[156]

The Development of a 'Science'

To this point, we have seen that many authoritative writers on disease and contagion throughout the long-eighteenth century were concerned with human corpses as a particularly threatening source of contagious disease. The fundamental medical-scientific principle underlying this contention remained the same throughout the literature: bodily rot corrupted the air around a corpse, and this air was a source of contagion. Although different writers used slightly different terminology, and some preferred to emphasise one complex detail over another, it is very difficult to detect any clear progression or development in these theories over time. Decline in the use of 'fermentation' and preference for 'putrefaction' by the late-eighteenth century, for instance, did not alter the core principle that rotting corpses were dangerous to health and, indeed, Walker would use both terms together in 1839.[157]

[154] Mead, *Short Discourse*, pp.3-4.
[155] Arbuthnot, *Effects of Air*, p.17.
[156] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p.105.
[157] Ibid., p.100.

Part of the difficulty in identifying any change is that many of these works mention corpses only fleetingly, providing little detailed discussion of the dead body and its properties. This almost certainly reflected or was symptomatic of the widespread and enduring acceptance of the health dangers of decay, as charted by Wear and Siena among others. Partly because these dangers were largely undisputed, the role of corpses in disease generation and transmission was rarely a topic of systematic investigation in its own right: rather, references to dead bodies cropped up, often by way of example or illustration, in discussions of general putrid disease mechanisms or specific diseases. Writers often worked backwards in this regard, first postulating a theory about a disease's generation or transmission through decay, and subsequently describing dead bodies as the central support for their argument. Claims about the danger of corpses were regularly presented as truisms, warranting no further enquiry.

Mead's *Mechanical Account of Poisons* illustrates this approach to the 'facts' about dead bodies. In a chapter on 'venomous exhalations', Mead explains the role of the stomach in contagions.[158] He first outlines his general disease mechanism, stating that the 'active particles' of a 'malignant distemper' are released by the dying and infect the air.[159] Mead then follows these particles on their journey. First, the infected air is inhaled, and the infection is thus transmitted to a person's 'spittle'.[160] 'Now the spittle', he continues, 'is continually swallowed down into the stomach'.[161] The stomach is 'a tender and sensible part' of the human body, and the infectious particles will 'lodge' there 'in the secretory ducts, whereupon the glands being obstructed, little tumours are by the afflux of their fluid raised here and there'.[162] These tumours 'break apart into small ulcers, and produce that dismal train of symptoms' which constitute disease.[163] This small passage on

[158] Mead, *Poisons*, p.143.
[159] Ibid., p.163.
[160] Ibid., p.164.
[161] Ibid., p.164.
[162] Ibid., p.164.
[163] Ibid., p.164.

the general process of contagions is followed by Mead's evidence base: human corpses. 'Here it may not be amiss to take notice', he adds in the following paragraph, 'that all authors do agree, one great cause of pestilential distempers, especially in armies and camps, to be dead bodies lying exposed and rotting in the open air'.[164] 'The reason' of this established knowledge is for Mead 'plain from what we have been advancing' about the role of the stomach.[165] The heat of the sun, 'acting on those unbury'd carcasses, and fermenting the juices, draws forth those active particles' of contagion which 'in great quantities' fill the atmosphere.[166] In turn, when the particles are 'inspired and let into the stomach', they 'do affect it in the manner already described'.[167]

Historians of medicine and sanitation have tended to repeat such fleeting mentions of corpses as evidence for the centrality of decay to early modern pathology. Mary Dobson, for instance, writes of seventeenth- and eighteenth- century England that 'streams of effluvia and noxious vapours were believed to arise from open sewers, churchyards, slaughterhouses, butchers' shops and lanes, dead flesh, burial grounds, cesspools and from every other sort of putrefaction'.[168] Emily Cockayne's *Hubbub* (2007) mentions churchyards only once, quoting the words of a late sixteenth-century physician: putrid air was that near to 'sinkes, dunghills, gutters, channels, kitchens, church-yards or standing waters'.[169] These brief references to burial grounds are faithful to the treatment of corpses by contemporary medical writers like Mead. Dead bodies are in his brief passage both pivotal and peripheral: they provide powerful evidence of the health dangers of rotting matter but, nonetheless, they constitute merely evidence for an *existing* theory rather than a sphere for the investigation and development of *new* theory.

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[164] Mead, *Poisons*, p.164.
[165] Ibid., p.164.
[166] Ibid., p.164.
[167] Ibid., p.164.
[168] Dobson, *Contours of Death*, p.16.
[169] Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health* (London, 1584), p.7, cited in Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600-1770* (London, 2007), p.206.

Explaining this approach as simply a consequence of early modern pathology leads us, however, into something of a paradox. The work of Christopher Hamlin and others would suggest that the Victorians were no less concerned with putrefaction than were Mead and his contemporaries.[170] With regard to Victorian literature on burial, historians have even suggested that it was a new or heightened concern with putrefaction leading medical theorists to write about dead bodies as much as they did.[171] Thus, a connection between corpse putrefaction and disease treated as self-evident in one period appears as an area of extensive enquiry in the other. Walker illustrates this change in his words, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that this 'momentous subject' had been 'passed over in total silence'. The claim was not an outright deception but an exaggeration: the surgeon was aware of existing literature on the health dangers of rotting bodies, and he makes occasional reference to Mead in his *Gatherings from Graveyards,* but his pamphlet was original in that its almost three-hundred pages treated this subject *exclusively*.

At one level, the relative proliferation of literature on the dead and disease after 1830 quite simply reflects the growth of public health as an ideology and practice. Indeed, for James Riley, the Victorian preoccupation with burial grounds derived from an intensifying 'ambition to control disease at its source', leading to a scheme of widespread 'environmental engineering' developed on the Continent from the mid-eighteenth century and imported to Britain in the nineteenth.[172] That medical men in this period successfully lobbied to 'draw the dead onto their own terrain', as Vovelle has phrased it, points to an aptitude for rhetoric and persuasion of the

[170] Christopher Hamlin, 'Providence and Putrefaction: Victorian Sanitarians and the Natural Theology of Health and Disease', *Victorian Studies* V.28 (1985), pp.381-411; Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983); Michael Brown, 'From Foetid Air to Filth: The Cultural Transformation of British Epidemiological Thought, c.1780-1848', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, V.82, No.3 (2008), pp.515-544.
[171] Hoglund, 'Hidden Agendas', pp.21-28.
[172] Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign*, p.89.

kind more recently described by Joan Tumblety and Catherine Kelly.[173] Historians might also follow Anthony Wohl, for example, in viewing these escalating campaigns as a necessary response to an escalating problem.[174] Unprecedented urban growth led to the failure of existing sanitary facilities, residential overpopulation, rising levels of atmospheric pollution, and severe burial ground overcrowding, all of which demanded intervention. Over the preceding century, and in the absence of any of these motivating factors, the health threat posed by dead bodies may have warranted nothing more than a passing comment.

Yet, it would be impossible to account for this difference without also considering the issue of intention – that is, the purpose of writers in investigating the dead body and disease and the purpose of the texts they produced. In 2019, Julie Rugg declared that Victorian burial sanitarians had devised a 'science of burial'.[175] This is a reasonable claim and a valuable starting-point for understanding change. Although Rugg does not offer an exact definition of 'science' in this context, she refers to a dedicated body of literature which investigated systematically and 'empirically' the relationship between corpses and population health, in doing so providing the grounds and justification for burial reforms. Based on the outline hitherto presented, no such systematic investigation can be said to have occurred prior to the 1830s. Nor, if we adopt Andrew Cunningham's timeline for the development of 'science' as a form of human activity, could it have done: 'science' proper was not 'invented' until the nineteenth century.[176] What necessarily preceded the 'science of burial' was a body of literature with the same subject matter but an altogether different purpose: a natural philosophy seeking to locate God in explanations for death, decay and disease, and devising its methods accordingly.

[173] Vovelle, *La Mort*, p.461; Joan Tumblety, Catherine Kelly, 'Medical Doctors and Persuasion: Introduction', *History* V.104, Is.399 (Wiley, 2019), pp.5-18.
[174] Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp.1-9.
[175] Rugg, *Burial Reform*, p.70.
[176] Andrew Cunningham, 'Getting the Game Right: Some plain words on the identity and invention of science', *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, V.19, No.3 (1988), p.385.

The broader intellectual context in which writers at the beginning of our period approached their subject matter requires some elaboration. A large historiography has charted how, from the seventeenth century onwards, British natural philosophers began to emphasise direct observation of the corporeal world as the only source of reliable knowledge. Yet, metaphysical explanations for human life persisted throughout and after this shift, supported by centuries of prior natural philosophy and Church teaching since medieval Christendom.[177] Adherence to the concept of a nonmaterial and God-given 'soul', for example, found expression in theoretical life-concepts such as animism, vitalism and even materialism.[178] In Britain from the seventeenth century, there developed a dominant strand of mechanical philosophy which investigated by various means the corporeal workings of the human body, its 'pipes and pulleys', while simultaneously steadfastly rejecting arguments that this was all there was to human existence.[179] In few areas of medical science could this adherence to metaphysical life-concepts have imposed clearer limits on observation than in the study of death and the dead. 'Mechanist' Robert Boyle posed, and answered, the question of death aptly in his landmark *Experiments Physico-Mechanicall* (1660):

> Q. When is it that we may truly say of a man that he is dead, or (which is the same) hath expired his soul? (…)
> A. It is hard to determine the point of time in which the soul is separated from the body. Proceed therefore to other experiments.[180]

These debates played out very clearly in explanations for putrefaction at the end of life. For many writers during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, putrefaction was not simply a mechanism for the generation of disease-causing material: it was the expulsion of the

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[177] Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (New York, 1998; repr., London, 2017), p.249.
[178] John Henry, 'The Matter of Souls: Medical Theory and Theology' in Roger French and Andrew Wear (ed.), *The Medical Revolution in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989); John Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 1984).
[179] Porter, *Greatest Benefit to Mankind*, p.249.
[180] Robert Boyle, *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, Touching the Air* (London, 1660), p.94.

body's life-force and a central process in the life-cycle fixed by God. Francis Bacon had laid down the idea in his *Sylva Sylvarum: A Natural History in Ten Centuries* (1635).[181] 'Putrefaction', Bacon summarises, 'is the work of spirits of bodies', meaning the immaterial forces which put matter into motion.[182] The body's 'spirit' is imprisoned in flesh, but throughout life it tries continually to break free, to 'congregate with the air, and enjoy the sunbeams'.[183] In its efforts to break free, the spirit damages the body, and 'there followeth putrefaction' or the dissolution of the body.[184] Thomas Willis, follower of Helmontian chemical theory, later described the same process in chemical terms. His *Medical-philosophical Discourse of Fermentation* (1659) considers observable decay as a chemical process which, as for Bacon, is triggered by the body's intangible spirit 'always endeavouring to fly away'.[185] Willis defines this spirit as 'aetherial particles of a more divine breathing, which our parent nature hath hid in this sublunary world, as it were the instruments of life and soul, of motion and sense'.[186] In this interpretive framework, the physical symptoms of decay in ageing and illness are caused by the agitation of the life-force, and they lead to death when the life-force escapes entirely. Willis describes the result at the end of life: 'the frame of the subject breaks, or falls down into earth or a caput mortuum' (worthless remains).[187]

This concept of a life-force expunged through putrefaction was also evidenced in the generation of life itself. Willis explains where the 'active principle' goes once it is 'thrust out of doors' in death, stating that it 'remains somewhere about the neighbourhood'.[188] Occasionally, this neighbourhood active principle organises itself so as to generate living creatures, such as worms, spontaneously in decomposing organic matter. This was a classical concept, described in detail

[181] Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, Or, A Natural History in Ten Centuries* (London, 1635; repr. London, 1670).
[182] Ibid., p.73.
[183] Ibid., p.73.
[184] Ibid., p.73.
[185] Willis, *Fermentation*, p.9.
[186] Ibid., p.3.
[187] Ibid., p.26.
[188] Ibid., p.27.

by Aristotle in *On Generation and Corruption*: 'all things which (…) are spontaneously generated, manifestly come into being in connection with putrefaction'.[189] Writers at the forefront of seventeenth-century scientific methods repeated this idea time and again. As well as Bacon and Willis, Isaac Newton would state in 1678 that 'nothing can be changed from what it is without putrefaction', this was 'nature's first action' from which all 'generation and nourishment' begins.[190]

This view created an interesting paradox in discussions of the dead and disease, wherein the principle of life itself functions as a poison under certain circumstances. In his 1720 comments on Hodges' *Loimologia*, English physician John Quincy explains how the 'poison' of plague is generated by the escape of the life-force through putrefaction. Quincy followed Willis in viewing the 'principle of vitality' as a spiritually-animated chemical mixture including salt.[191] When the body is 'agitated' or weakened, for instance by illness, it cannot contain its 'vital salt'.[192] Quincy explains that 'by an over-agitation' of the body, this vital salt is separated and 'floats in the air', and 'this we take to be the true contagious miasmata, that convey, propagate and continue a pestilence'.[193] Through fermentation and putrefaction, then, the very principle of life is released from the body to form a contagious poison. Quincy addresses this paradox, stating that 'nor will this seem strange to any who are accustomed to reflect, how many substances are changeable into a poisonous nature, which were before not only inoffensive, but useful to the purposes of life'.[194] Indeed, this argument was not deemed strange at the time. Sydenham's *Observations* similarly explains that infections are spread because 'according to the law of nature,

[189] *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton, 1984), 762a 9-15.
[190] Newton, *Correspondence*, V.3, p.207; p.211, cited in B. J. T. Dobbs, 'Newton's Alchemy and his Theory of Matter', *Isis*, V.73, No.4 (1982), p.519.
[191] John Quincy, 'An Essay on the Different Causes of Pestilential Diseases', in Nathaniel Hodges, *Loimologia* (London, 1672; repr. London, 1720), p.266.
[192] Ibid., p.266.
[193] Ibid., p.268.
[194] Ibid., p.269.

every active principle is busied in creating its like'.[195] 'So', he continues, 'one infected with a malignant disease infects another by an emission of spirits, which presently assimulate the humors to be infected to themselves'.[196] Arbuthnot in 1733 describes effluvia emitting from organic matter as 'volatile spirit' which rises and spreads since it is lighter than the atmosphere, and George Cheyne's *Natural Method* (1742) explains that plagues and pestilential distempers are generated when the 'animal salts' become agitated to 'tear and putrefy' the body, 'and so destroy animal life'.[197] The concept informed medical practice in epidemic diseases, too. Sydenham describes the emission of spirits, and resultant decay, in patients infected with fevers in his *Methodus Curandi Febres* (1666-68): 'the spirits of the blood are instantaneously dispelled: its tissue is dissolved'.[198] In his practice, the physician had thus 'endeavoured to restore and recall the deserting spirits to the stations they had fortook, by giving laudnum', but found that fresh air had been the better solution.[199]

These writers explicitly described observable putrefaction as triggered by nonmaterial, spiritual principles. The strength and appeal of this vitalist notion is quite apparent. Foremost, putrefaction offered an 'internally coherent' interpretive framework which accounted for a variety of bodily phenomena in one fell swoop.[200] Spontaneous generation, disease, death, and post-mortem change were all clearly connected with putrefaction, thus life itself must be transferred through putrefaction. The action of these 'spirits' was evidenced in plenty of observable phenomena, such as the tendency of putrefaction to spread once it begins. As Bacon had explained, and Sydenham later repeated, the intangible spirits expunged during putrefaction are released faster when they are 'excited', 'as when a rotten apple lyeth close to another apple

[195] Sydenham, *Observations*, p.203.
[196] Sydenham, *Observations*, p.203.
[197] Arbuthnot, *Effects of Air*, p.5; Cheyne, *Natural Method*, p.102.
[198] Thomas Sydenham, *Methodus Curandi Febres* (London, 1666-68), trans. R. G. Latham (Folkestone, 1987), p.181.
[199] Thomas Sydenham, *The Whole Works of Thomas Sydenham*, trans. John Pechey (London, 1690), p.130.
[200] Paul Slack, 'Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health', *Social Research*, V.55, No.3 (2023), p.3.

that is sound'.[201] Bacon illustrates this point with another, more pertinent, demonstration: 'this is also notably seen in church-yards, where they bury much; where the earth will consume the corps in far shorter time than other earth will'.[202] Such theories were well-established by this period. As Claire Crignon points out in her discussion of seventeenth-century 'empiricism', the idea of a 'divine' animating principle, inhabiting and acting upon matter, permeated much natural philosophy in the seventeenth century and owed a great deal to the earlier works of Paracelsus, amongst other influences.[203] Perhaps more than for any other reason, however, this framework appealed in explanations for putrefaction because it incorporated God into accounts of life, death and decay.

It is necessary to acknowledge here that, already in the late-seventeenth century, these writers were grappling with the types of methodological issues – surrounding observation and speculation – earlier outlined in brief. As John Yolton has outlined, the rise of materialist philosophies such as Epicureanism prompted many to consider, and accept, frankly the limitations of their own observation, advocating instead for a blend of demonstrative proofs and speculative natural philosophy.[204] Boyle explains the problem in great detail in his *Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy* (1663). 'In answer to' the Epicurean objection that life is purely corporeal, Boyle conceded that 'some faculties and operations of the reasonable soul in man, are of so peculiar and transcendent a kind, that as I have not yet found them solidly explicated by corporeal particles, so I expect not to see them in haste made out by such.'[205] Thus, as Crignon summarises, medicine must form 'part, or an application of natural philosophy', all the more so when death and the dead are under

[201] Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, p.87.
[202] Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, p.87.
[203] Claire Crignon, 'The Debate about Methodus Medendi During the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century in England', *Early Science and Medicine*, V.18, No.4 (2013), p.347.
[204] Yolton, *Thinking Matter*.
[205] Robert Boyle, *Some Considerations Touching the Usefulnesse of Experimental Naturall Philosophy* (London, 1663), pp.86-87.

discussion.[206] The Epicurean, could not, for instance, logically account for the end of life. 'If an Epicurean should be told' that a dead man 'became alive again', Boyle illustrates, 'he would reject such a relation as impossible'.[207] 'According to him, there can be no cause assigned, knowing and powerful enough' to confer life on this inanimate matter.[208] Yet, all life in the universe consisted of animated matter, and strict materialism therefore fails to account for 'motion'.[209] The aversion of Sydenham in particular to speculative philosophy has attracted the attention of many historians. He, by his own words, had 'been very careful to write nothing but what was the product of faithful observation', particularly through anatomy, and trusted that, after his death, it would appear to later writers that his views had been 'downright matter of fact'.[210] Pechey, a great admirer of Sydenham, agreed in 1696 that 'reason and argument are not the true tests of physick (…) when experience, the great baffler of speculation, can determine the matter'.[211] Nevertheless, for many writers it was the case that speculation done properly could determine truth. Cheyne, writing in 1742, explains why he feels confident to deduce immaterial processes from observations of matter. 'Few persons are qualified for making useful observations in physic; to this end a man must be well acquainted with natural philosophy' and 'have a genius and penetrating sagacity' to be able to 'make useful and decisive observations'.[212] We see Cheyne exercising his own sagacity in a passage on the generation of plagues: 'all epidemical distempers (…) are caused by animal salts weakened and diluted (…) and thus, by an easy and natural piece of philosophy, all epidemical infections, and pestilential distempers, are accounted for.'[213]

[206] Crignon, 'Methodus Medendi', p.348.
[207] Boyle, *Some Considerations*, p.88.
[208] Ibid., p.88.
[209] Ibid., p.87.
[210] Geoffrey Meynell, *Materials for a Biography of Dr Thomas Sydenham* (Folkestone, 1988), pp.64-65.
[211] John Pechey, *The Store-House of Physical Practice* (London, 1696), p.i.
[212] Cheyne, *Natural Method*, p.46.
[213] Ibid., p.104.

One solution to these tensions of method was realised in Mead's work on the dead and disease. Without explicitly rejecting them, Mead did away with overt musings on life-principles and largely abandoned the vocabulary of 'spirit' in accounting for decay. In this sense he carried Sydenham's ambitions for a wholly practical, rather than philosophical, system of medicine further than had Sydenham himself. His *Mechanical Account of Poisons*, earlier quoted, side-steps any requirement for a speculative explanation for decay by adopting a definition of life and death which concentrates on the material body: 'life, *so far as it respects the body*, is, in one word, the circulation of the blood'.[214] His text consists of a series of proofs that poisons act to produce a fermentation in the blood, disrupting its circulation and so causing disease and death. Occasionally, there are hints in Mead's work that he understands the blood to contain an animating principle – an 'animal spirit'.[215] Arguably, it would be unthinkable for Mead to deny this principle. Not only was he an admirer of Newton and Boyle, both of whom held that movement was added to matter by God, but Mead's understanding of circulation was ultimately indebted to the work of William Harvey, who had himself described spirit as residing in the blood.[216] For Mead, however, the nature of this spirit is of less interest than the mechanical processes of the blood which houses it: his aim is, in his own words, to discern 'the footsteps of mechanism in those surprising phenomena which are commonly ascribed to some occult or unknown principle'.[217] Thus he defines fermentations, which for him include putrefaction, as a 'change in the attraction, or cohesion', of the body's 'particles'.[218] That is to say, Mead approaches fermentation and thereby putrefaction as primarily material processes, with little reference to the agitated intangible spirit, rattling around and causing decay, which characterised earlier work.

[214] Mead, *Poisons*, p.149. Italics added.
[215] Ibid., p.xxxvi.
[216] Ibid., p.xxxvi.
[217] Ibid., p.i.
[218] Ibid., p.14.

Mead's educational background goes some way to explaining this approach. He had studied at the University of Leiden, never formally receiving a degree, alongside Dutch chemist Herman Boerhaave and under Scottish physician Archibald Pitcairne.[219] The influence of the latter, and by extension Newton, is particularly evident in Mead's work on poisons. Pitcairne had been an early advocate for the application of Newton's mathematics to medical science, on the grounds that mathematical reasoning could best illuminate mechanical principles.[220] Mead's *Mechanical Discourse* likewise espouses the utility of mathematics, predicting that soon 'mathematical learning will be the distinguishing mark of a physician from a quack'.[221] Pitcairne had also been a staunch critic of 'occult' assumptions, arguing that these had no place in medical understanding. His views on the subject are expressed in a collection of essays released in 1715, at which time he resided in Edinburgh. In an essay on the blood, Pitcairne advocates for a view of disease as an obstruction of circulation, attacking in particular Willis' theory of the emission of spirits through fermentation.[222] The problem, as Pitcairne saw it, was that such theories had been 'invented without foundation, built upon no phenomena, and known only by name'; they lacked material evidence and thus had 'introduced nothing new in physick, except words'.[223]

The same focus on material, particle phenomena as opposed to metaphysical principles is apparent in the work of John Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot produced the only text surveyed in this chapter which genuinely applied new mathematical principles to the study of the dead and disease. In a passage on the dangers of churchyards in populous areas, the physician points us

[219] Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Richard Mead's Communities of Belief in Eighteenth-Century London', in John Bossy and Simon Ditchfield (eds.), *Christianity and Community in the West: Essays for John Bossy* (Oxford, 2016), pp.249-250.
[220] Margaret DeLacy, *Contagionism Catches On: Medical Ideology in Britain, 1730-1800* (Cham, 2017), p.20; William Tammone, 'Science in Ferment: The Doctrine of Fermentation in Seventeenth-Century British Science and Medicine', (Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1996), pp.342-343; Anita Guerrini, 'Archibald Pitcairne and Newtonian Medicine', *Medical History,* V.31, No.1 (1987), pp.75-78.
[221] Mead, *Poisons*, p.vi.
[222] Archibald Pitcairne, *The Whole Works of Doctor Archibald Pitcairne, Published by Himself*, trans. George Sewell, M.D. (London, 1740), pp.175-176. Tammone notes that Pitcairne's criticisms of Willis were informed by the work of Giovanni Borelli. Both Pitcairne and Borelli argued that existing applications of the fermentation doctrine contradicted William Harvey's theory of circulation. See Tammone, 'Fermentation', pp.310-313.
[223] Pitcairne, *Whole Works*, p.198.

to calculation number eleven of his *Essay on Air* (1733), on the 'perspiration of man'. By Arbuthnot's estimate, 'the surface of the skin of a middle sized man is about 15 square feet, consequently the surface of the skins of 2904 such men would cover an acre of ground'.[224] The 'perspir'd matter' of this gruesome acre of skin would, Arbuthnot calculates, within thirty-four days produce 'over that acre an atmosphere of the steams of their bodies nearly 71 foot high'.[225] This atmosphere of steams raises the question for Arbuthnot 'whether it is not proper that all burying places should be without cities?'[226] The physician associated closely with Mead, having worked with him on the *Discourse Concerning Pestilential Contagion* (1720). Like Mead, he occasionally points to a metaphysics of decay without foregrounding it. For example, he notes on the subject of humidity that 'water and air produce volatility or putrefaction in bodies'.[227] Elsewhere, on the dangers of intramural burial, Arbuthnot elaborates that this 'volatility' of the body means more precisely 'volatile spirits' – agitated spirits – expelled through putrefaction.[228]

In his efforts to calculate mathematically the effects of putrefaction, Arbuthnot anticipated the methods of nineteenth-century sanitary reformers surprisingly closely. Edwin Chadwick would more than a century later publish his influential report on interments in towns, setting forth a series of 'well considered regulations' for burial grounds outside populous areas.[229] These never explicitly referenced Arbuthnot but were similarly based on mathematical calculations or, as Chadwick described it, 'data'. 'The proper distance of interment from houses', for instance, was 'calculable according to the number of interments': Chadwick's extensive workings reveal that 'the cemetery for a small population of from 500 to 1000 inhabitants' should 'be not less than 150 paces' from residential areas and should be built on elevated ground, 'as putrefactive gases'

[224] Arbuthnot, *Effects of Air*, p.11.
[225] Ibid., p.11.
[226] Ibid., p.18.
[227] Ibid., p.62.
[228] Ibid., p.18.
[229] Chadwick, *Interment in Towns*, p.135.

arising from human corpses 'are lighter than the atmosphere and ascend' – another point made explicitly by Arbuthnot.[230] Chadwick considered more 'factors' in his calculations than did Arbuthnot, including the direction of prevailing winds which might send the effluvia towards nearby towns. Their methods, however, are essentially the same: the extent of contaminated atmosphere can be worked out mathematically, and from here sanitary burial practices can be devised.

The development of a discernibly material 'science' of bodily decay and disease generation, nodding towards but not dealing in nonmaterial principles, escalated from the mid-century onwards. An increasing interest in observable rather than intangible processes is reflected in the gradual decline of research into fermentation as a pathological mechanism in this period, already detectable in Arbuthnot's *Essay on Air*. William Tammone has examined this decline in great detail, but worth highlighting particularly here are the criticisms made of the doctrine by natural philosopher Walter Charleton: these 'invisible ferments [are] supposed to reside in places where hitherto they have never been found'.[231] Fermentation, Tammone summarises, had 'no demonstrable existence' and for Charleton 'what does not appear to the senses, simply does not exist'.[232] One of the last texts in this literature to prioritise fermentation was that of George Cheyne – yet another Scotsman, mathematician and prior student of Archibald Pitcairne. Cheyne explains bodily decay and its generation of disease using fermentation in his *Natural Method of Curing Diseases* (1742). For Cheyne, as for Mead and Arbuthnot, particles and their mechanisms are a central focus: fermentation means 'a high exaltation, volatilification, and sublimation' of 'animal salts, and mineral steams' in decaying matter.[233] Cheyne describes the properties of these salts and steams in some detail, explaining that they are 'hard, porous and

[230] Chadwick, *Interment in Towns*, p.131; Arbuthnot, *Effects of Air*, p.18.
[231] Tammone, 'Fermentation', p.333.
[232] Ibid., p.333.
[233] Cheyne, *Natural Method*, p.102.

alkaline, but fitted with a light, caustic and aethereal oil, or sulphur, whereby their velocity and elasticity is increas'd, they become small, volatile and highly attractive'.[234] When inhaled by a healthy person, these particles infiltrate the body and 'by their effervescence rend, tear and putrify the solids, and break the cohesion of the fluids, and so destroy animal life'.[235]

On the face of it, Cheyne's seems like a purely materialist description of bodily decay and its products. It appears that an agitated immaterial spirit, ripping up the body and causing rot, has been replaced by agitated particles of salt moving in the same manner. Yet, elsewhere in the same text Cheyne uses salt and spirit interchangeably. On the definition of animal salts, he 'observe[s] three kinds or degrees of animal salts or spirits', including 'that which we call our common animal salt or spirit'.[236] This synonymous usage makes a great deal of sense to Cheyne. Without a 'self-active', 'self-motive' spirit imbued within them, the particles of 'salt' which cause decay would never be able to move in the first place.[237] Lester King has examined the relation between matter and spirit in Cheyne's accounts of gravity, and his characterisation of Cheyne's logic applies here also: the physician 'performs some neat acrobatics' to link scientific mechanisms with religion.[238] In his account of bodily decay Cheyne relies on, but is not overtly preoccupied with, the immaterial force which constitutes the soul. This force is put on the Earth by 'the Father and creator of spirit and matter' to be 'imprisoned [within] corporeal faculties' until its escape at death, and it is ultimately this force which generates all putrefaction.[239]

Mead, Arbuthnot and Cheyne located an intangible 'spirit' within material particles, in Cheyne's case particles of salt. The properties of these particles could henceforward be investigated and

[234] Cheyne, *Natural Method*, p.102.
[235] Ibid., p.102.
[236] Ibid., p.206.
[237] Ibid., p.10.
[238] Lester King, 'George Cheyne: Mirror of Eighteenth Century Medicine', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* V.48, No.4 (1974), p.521.
[239] Cheyne, *Natural Method*, pp.9-10.

described mechanically. In this way, writers investigated the corporeal qualities of spirit, outlining the mechanical laws this spirit must be subjected to when it inhabits matter. One of these qualities was pointed out by Cheyne and came to preoccupy John Pringle: the animal salts were 'hard, porous and *alkaline*'.[240] The claim that 'the putrefying principle', as Pringle called it, bore an alkaline quality could actually be tested through experimentation.[241] Thus, in the mid-eighteenth-century Pringle put forward an experimental account of putrefaction centred on testing this claim. His *Experiments on Substances Resisting Putrefaction* were released in the *Philosophical Transactions* in three articles published between 1749 and 1750. His first article notes in its opening lines that 'the manner how bodies are resolved by putrefaction, with the means of accelerating or preventing that process' had rarely been investigated 'in an experimental way'.[242] This was not, he briefly states, 'something to be wondered at considering how offensive such operations are'.[243] The physician worked around this delicacy by conducting his experiments on slabs of beef, rather than human corpses. His papers recount several experiments in which he isolates the 'alcaline salt' expelled from flesh in varying states of putrefaction and measures its quantity, finding that the most putrid substances, and those most dangerous to health, emitted in reality the smallest amount. In subsequent experiments he applies various alkaline substances to flesh to investigate how putrefaction is affected, including plants like chamomile, 'gums' such as mhyrr, and sea salt, finding that 'alcaline salts not only do not dispose animal substances to putrefaction (…) but even prevent it'.[244] Pringle then moves from flesh to experiments on the humors, for which he uses human blood, and finds that 'whatever is preservative of flesh will be generally antiseptic' for the humors too.[245] Lastly, using an experiment on egg yolk, he confirms the idea expressed by Bacon that putrefaction spreads

[240] Cheyne, *Natural Method*, p.102.
[241] John Pringle, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army* (London, 1752), p.380.
[242] John Pringle, 'Some Experiments on Substances Resisting Putrefaction', *Philosophical Transactions* V.46 (London, 1750), p.480.
[243] Ibid., p.480.
[244] Ibid., p.485.
[245] Ibid., p.551.

readily from one organic object to another, all the more so in a confined air where the 'putrid parts remain about the body (…) and excite it to corruption'.[246]

Pringle's fascination with the materiality of post-mortem decay is detectable throughout his work. His *Experiments on Substances Resisting Putrefaction* snowballed into two further papers, read in 1751-52, the latter of which concentrates on the general processes of animal putrefaction. This paper constituted the first attempt, certainly in this body of literature and perhaps in British medical science more broadly, to investigate the relationship between post-mortem change and disease experimentally. Pringle recounts, for instance, dropping 'some spirit of vitriol' (sulphuric acid) upon a putrid clot of human blood and noting that it acquired a strong smell.[247] From this he concludes, in a roundabout way, that 'the effluvia arising from corrupted substances consist chiefly of (…) sulphur' and salt.[248] As well as defining effluvia in exclusively chemical terms, Pringle offers a detailed discussion of the material process of corpse decomposition, large parts of it derived from an interview with the Scottish anatomist John Hunter. Hunter himself had 'never given a particular attention to this subject', despite performing 'an uncommon number of dissections', and he recounted 'to the best of his recollection' such observations as the quick putrefaction of the viscera, attributable to the 'putrid steams of the faeces'.[249]

Pringle displays little interest in the metaphysics of putrefaction. Discussions of immaterial 'spirits', 'active principles' or 'active particles' are entirely absent in his experimental work and its conclusions. It is telling of his attitudes on this point that he identifies decomposing carcasses with dangerous 'filth', an association not hitherto expressed in this literature and one famously leveraged by burial reformers in the following century.[250] His *Observations on the Diseases of the*

[246] Pringle, 'Some Experiments', p.555.
[247] Pringle, *Diseases of the Army*, p.368.
[248] Ibid., p.368.
[249] Ibid., p.374.
[250] See, for instance: Brown, 'From Foetid Air to Filth', pp.515-544.

Army (1752), to which these experiments were also appended, contains a discussion of the causes of fever epidemics in London, asserting that 'the common dirt of the streets does not seem to affect the health of the inhabitants'.[251] As he qualifies in a footnote,

> There is a material difference between dirt, and filth. The former which usually covers the middle of the streets of cities, is composed of earth, and is incapable of putrefaction; the latter which consists of dead vegetable and animal matters, when putrid, is the source of febrile diseases.[252]

This unsentimental characterisation of dead bodies should not be read as an outright denial of any metaphysics; Pringle omits to discuss this subject on methodological grounds. In this, he drew heavily from Herman Boerhaave. It has been mentioned that Boerhaave studied alongside Mead at Leiden; Pringle would later receive his MD here under Boerhaave's professorship before returning to Edinburgh. A full account of Boerhaave's method is beyond the scope of this chapter and has been offered by other historians. It is sufficient to repeat here Cunningham's summary of Boerhaave's approach to medicine: 'out with metaphysical speculations (…), in with observation, experiment and mathematics; in with sciences purged of their metaphysical accretions'.[253] Boerhaave's work would also be foundational to the Edinburgh medical school, formally established in 1726 and organised on the basis of Boerhaave's own theory of medicine. The broader influence of his thought on the Edinburgh school and on eighteenth-century medical theory more broadly was, as Cunningham and many others have observed, substantial.[254] It is apparent, too, in Pringle's aversion to speculative metaphysics as an explanation for putrefaction. His *Observations* contain one brief mention of something vaguely termed 'the vital principle': when 'miasma (consisting of the effluvia arising from putrid substances)' infects the body it corrupts the blood, preventing the heart from

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[251] Pringle, *Diseases of the Army*, p.295.
[252] Ibid., p.295
[253] Andrew Cunningham, 'Medicine to Calm the Mind: Boerhaave's Medical System, and why it was Adopted in Edinburgh', in Andrew Cunningham and Roger French (eds.), *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1990), p.57.
[254] See also David Hamilton, 'The Scottish Enlightenment and Clinical Medicine', in Derek Dow (ed.), *The Influence of Scottish Medicine* (Edinburgh, 1986); John C. Powers, *Inventing Chemistry* (Chicago, 2012), pp.15-17

'receiving enough of the vital principle'.[255] What exactly this vital principle is, how it relates to putrefaction, and what happens to it at the end of life are not questions addressed in Pringle's research. 'So much' of that subject, he explains, 'depends upon the action of parts which have laws peculiar to themselves and are imperfectly known,' therefore 'it seems better not to form an hypothesis at present, but to wait till further discoveries be made in the animal economy'.[256] Pringle emphasised instead those phenomena that were detectable to his senses, describing putrefaction as caused, quite straightforwardly, by an infection of putrid matter.[257] This is a circular explanation for putrefaction, in which no attention at all is afforded to its first cause.

Pringle's *Experiments* and *Observations* were widely read, and contributed to the body of evidence for later writers on the dead and disease.[258] They were sufficient, for example, to convince William Alexander, whose *Experimental Inquiry* (1771) was unusually sceptical about the frequency with which corpses generated diseases, but conceded that their capacity to do so 'seems nevertheless to have been confirmed by the experience of all ages'.[259] Elsewhere he remarks in stronger terms that 'we are assured by facts, that a putrefying dead animal, or part of it, can communicate a putrid disease to a living one', citing the works of Pringle, Mead and seventeenth-century German scholar Athanasius Kircher.[260] Notably, although the *Experimental Inquiry* is a collection of experiments on the causes of putrid diseases, and although their association with corpses is explicitly discussed, Alexander opts to 'leave this subject' with no

[255] Pringle, *Diseases of the Army*, pp.298-299
[256] Pringle, *Diseases of the Army*, p.166.
[257] Pringle toyed with the idea, previously put forward by Marci Anton Plenciz, that putrefaction was caused by microscopic insects and its associated diseases were caused by their evacuations, but he did not explicitly advocate for it on the grounds that it was not proven. See DeLacy, *Contagionism Catches On*, p.108.
[258] Donald Monro, for example, wrote of danger to military camps 'exposed to the corrupted steams of Dead Men' with reference to Pringle's *Observations*. See Monro, *British Military Hospitals*, p.58; pp.344-345.
[259] William Alexander, *An Experimental Inquiry Concerning the Causes which have been Generally Said to Occasion Putrid Diseases* (London, 1771), p.34.
[260] Ibid., p.46

further investigation or experimentation, perhaps dissuaded by the 'offensiveness' of the topic as described by Pringle.[261]

Over the following decades, many writers replaced divine, immaterial forces with an entirely new explanation for organic putrefaction: fixed air. Irish physician David MacBride helped to popularise the concept.[262] MacBride noticed that Pringle spoke glibly on the causes of putrefaction, and in response compiled his *Experimental Essays* (1767) offering 'a new theory for explaining the immediate cause of putrefaction'.[263] MacBride understood that there must be 'a principle in matter' which forms 'the cement, or bond of union, among the insensible particles' of bodies and which 'prevents their dissolution or decay'.[264] Putrefaction during life must occur 'from the loss of the above-mentioned principle', and in a dead body the principle must have entirely departed.[265] This seems like the beginnings of an argument for volatile 'spirit'. MacBride certainly suggests that this principle must have the capacity to move:

> It is plain, that the principle on which [bodily] cohesion immediately depends is of a volatile or fugitive nature, not fixed and inert, like earth; otherwise, the face of the globe would be covered with dead bodies.[266]

Through a series of experiments, however, MacBride demonstrated that this principle was 'fixed air', meaning essentially stagnant and inactive air. In disease or death, the air becomes mobile and 'flies off', causing the body's 'frame to be dissolved and [its] elementary particles dispersed'.[267] If a patient displayed symptoms of putrid diseases, then, the physician should seek to restore or restrain the fixed air in its position, much as Sydenham had endeavoured to 'restore the deserted Spirits (…) to the stations they had fortook'. Like Pringle, however, MacBride is cautious about discussing incorporeal active principles. He is careful to state that his subject

[261] Alexander, *Experimental Enquiry,* p.38.
[262] On MacBride popularising this theory see DeLacy, *Contagionism Catches On*, pp.101-102.
[263] MacBride, *Experimental Essays*, p.vi.
[264] Ibid., p.v.
[265] Ibid., p.vi.
[266] Ibid., p.22.
[267] Ibid., pp.22-23.

matter is 'the *immediate* cause of putrefaction' and is ambiguous on the question of its ultimate cause.

It is worth noting that experiments of the kind conducted – and stimulated – by MacBride provided indisputable evidence that decomposing carcasses poisoned the air. The doctrine itself was so established as to remain essentially untested, even by a sceptic like Alexander, but in investigating the *properties* of the effluvia chemists inadvertently recorded experiments demonstrating that the effluvia *existed*. This is well-illustrated by the work of English chemist Joseph Priestley. Priestley never wrote on the dangers of burial grounds specifically, but during the 1770s he investigated the properties of 'air infected with animal putrefaction'.[268] In order to test whether 'fixed air' released from dead bodies was indeed the effluvia responsible for contagion, Priestley conducted several experiments using dead mice. He explained these experiments in correspondence with his friend and colleague Dr Richard Price in 1771, later publishing them in his *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* (1775-84). Priestley had collected 'air generated solely from putrefying mice' over a period of 'some months', then placing live mice in this air and finding that they died 'in convulsions, (…) sometimes so suddenly, that they are irrecoverable after a single inspiration'.[269] This finding was not a surprise to Priestley: it was well known that 'animals die upon being put into air in which other animals have died'.[270] His aim was, rather, to discover the properties of this putrid air and 'the provision in nature for restoring' it to a healthy quality; to this end the majority of his published experiments investigate processes such as the reaction of putrid air to plant matter. Perhaps because they did not test but inadvertently demonstrated the theory, Priestley and the British

[268] Joseph Priestley, *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* (London, 1772), p.70.
[269] Ibid., p.71.
[270] Ibid., p.71.

chemists in general are omitted from Walker's (highly selective) list of 'experiments on which' the view that the dead generated diseases 'was first formed'.[271]

Continued ambiguity surrounding the first cause of putrefaction left scope for some writers to re-emphasise God's role in this vital process. For Matthew Dobson in his *Medical Commentary on Fixed Air* (1787), putrefaction remained a disease mechanism with deep theological significance. His explanation of decay summarises that 'every animal brings forth one of its own species, they live, they are nourished, and each retains its individual nature; they die, they decay, return to their elementary state, and are again employed as the constituent parts of other vegetables and other animals.'[272] Putrefaction is, for Dobson, central to this 'amazing circle of life and death', 'a circle in which Nature keeps her steady rounds, and moves agreeable to laws fixed by the Almighty'.[273] Dobson had been reading Newton as well as scripture, and he cites a passage from the *Opticks* immediately before his discussion of dangerous inner-city churchyards. Through putrefaction all 'corporeal things' are broken up and dispersed, Newton had stated.[274] Thus, it was obvious to Dobson that parts of corpses are 'thrown off' into the air during decomposition, and this process 'fixed by the Almighty' renders churchyards a primary 'source of noxious effluvia'.[275]

Dobson was one of many Edinburgh-educated physicians who during the late-eighteenth century explicitly called for sanitary precautions surrounding the dead, appealing to a natural philosophy with all the appearance of an empirical 'science' but, nevertheless, with God necessarily at its centre. Dobson's discussion of 'the amazing circle of life and death' is immediately followed by a rather lengthy criticism of churchyards 'formed in the midst of

[271] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp.100-106.
[272] Dobson, *Medical Commentary*, p.66.
[273] Ibid., p.66.
[274] Ibid., p.68.
[275] Ibid., p.68.

crowded towns', and he was not alone in making this comment.[276] Donald Monro, son of Leiden-educated physician Alexander Monro, had already recommended corpse disposal precautions for British military troops in his *Account of the Diseases which were Most Frequent in British Military Hospitals* (1764). These included the speedy burial of dead bodies surrounding camps to prevent the escape of 'putrid effluvia', the health risks of which he describes as demonstrated by Pringle.[277] Monro also suggested that in hospitals

> as soon as any patient dies, the Body should be removed to the Dead House; and any Bedding he lay on should be carried away immediately, and not used again till it has been smoked, well-aired, and washed.[278]

Edinburgh-educated William Buchan made similar recommendations in his *Domestic Medicine* (1769), a didactic work dedicated to Pringle. Buchan observed that 'it is very common in this country to have church-yards in the middle of populous cities', and 'whatever gave rise to this custom, it is a bad one' for the public health.[279] On vault burials, he argued that 'burying within churches is a practice still more detestable', since 'the air in churches is seldom good, and the effluvia from putrid carcasses must render it still worse'.[280] John Fothergill, another Edinburgh-educated physician, also recommended in his *Rules for the Preservation of Health* (1762) that members of the public avoid churchyards, and particularly those with small children since the air surrounding 'burial places in crowded cities [is] particularly unhealthy to infants'.[281] At the turn of the century, James Gregory and Colin Chisholm further criticised lacklustre health regulations surrounding corpses in hospitals. The former warned specifically of disease transmission during dissections, and the latter advocated burning the clothes of the dead and conveying their bodies 'to a dead house, some yards distant from the hospital'.[282]

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[276] Dobson, *Medical Commentary*, p.68. Dobson buried his own children, son John and daughter Elisa, in rural areas and was himself buried at Walcot parish Church, Bath.
[277] Monro, *British Military Hospitals*, p.372.
[278] Ibid., p.372.
[279] Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, p.93.
[280] Ibid., pp.93-94.
[281] Fothergill, *Rules*, p.37.
[282] James Gregory, *Memorial to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary* (Edinburgh, 1800), p.143; Colin Chisholm, *An Essay on the Malignant Pestilential Fever* (London, 1801), p.413.

Calls for sanitary regulations surrounding dead bodies had not hitherto appeared with such force and frequency in this body of literature, and they were not made on the same scale by English writers in this period. Certainly, Mead and Herring had described the risks of improper disposal practices such as digging shallow graves, and Arbuthnot had questioned whether churchyards should be located within populous areas. The English physician Edward Baynard had also advised readers to burn incense at funerals in his popular instructive poem, *Health* (1719): 'for life's a lamp, its oil well spent, leaves when't goes out, a fragrant scent'.[283] Yet, these gentle warnings differed from the forceful arguments of Edinburgh-educated physicians of the late-eighteenth century, with their extended critiques of inner-city burial, directions for the burning of dead patients' bedding and clothing, and graphic appeals against 'bodies thrust from the grave'. Without a comprehensive survey of all published material on this subject in England and Scotland over the period, it would be impossible to draw a distinctive comparison between the nations. Yet, it seems notable that John Huxham, influential English writer on putrid fevers and proponent of the theory that corpses generated disease, never drew attention in his work to corpse disposal practices themselves.

These explicit calls for sanitary precautions can readily be situated within broader trends in eighteenth-century Scottish medical methods and teaching. Several of these writers had, for instance, gained experience as practitioners in the armed forces, where putrid diseases were thought to be rife.[284] As David Hamilton has observed, the Boerhaavian system of teaching at Edinburgh differed from the English tradition in its extensive clinical – practical – training, as well as instruction by physicians across specialisms.[285] The 'product' of this system was 'a general

[283] Edward Baynard, *Health, a Poem* (London, 1719; repr. London, 1731), p.35.
[284] Erich Weidenhammer, 'Patronage and Enlightened Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century British Military: The Rise and Fall of Dr. John Pringle, 1707-1782', *Social History of Medicine,* V.29, No.1 (2015), pp.28-35.
[285] Hamilton, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', p.107.

practitioner (…) of immense value to the armed forces of the day'.[286] Direct experience of treating putrid fever patients in military settings had spurred Pringle to write his *Observations*, and for Monro and Chisholm military experience had further cemented the connection between fever epidemics and exposed dead bodies.[287] The fact that disposal rituals were at best haphazardly organised, at worst non-existent, in military contexts probably contributed to the willingness and capacity of these physicians to exert sanitary control here. Yet, the writing-up and *publication* of these directions, for disposal of the dead in both military and civilian contexts, is not easily explained by any facet of university teaching. The phenomenon more clearly reflects Edinburgh's burgeoning medical print culture in this period. Fiona Macdonald has noted that, as well as marking 'the zenith of medical achievement in eighteenth-century Britain', Edinburgh 'led the way in medical publishing' since 'using print (…) to improve medical practice became a way for physicians to enhance their professional status'.[288] Thus, once Pringle had re-fashioned received natural philosophy into an experimental 'science' of the dead and disease, a new wave of medical practitioners – with a utilitarian bent and a desire for publicity characteristic of this period – could legitimately 'draw the dead onto their own terrain', citing his work as their key authority.

It is important to state here that the Edinburgh writers on burial sanitation rarely called explicitly for legislative intervention. This is partly attributable to the fact that 'public health' was not incorporated into British medical teaching until after 1800, with the first lectures on the subject delivered at Edinburgh in the 1790s, under the title of 'medical police', by Professor of Physiology Andrew Duncan.[289] Duncan had been inspired by the Continental model of medical

[286] Hamilton, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', p.107.
[287] S. C. Craig, 'Sir John Pringle MD, Early Scottish Enlightenment Thought and the Origins of Modern Military Medicine', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies',* V.38, Is.1 (2015), p.104.
[288] Fiona Macdonald, 'Medicine', in S.W. Brown and W. Mc Dougall (eds), *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland: Enlightenment and Expansion, 1707–1800* (Edinburgh, 2011), pp.494-502, p.502.
[289] Brenda White, 'Scottish Doctors and the English Public Health', in Andrew Cunningham and Roger French (eds.), *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1986), p.81.

police; indeed, Brenda White has described the Edinburgh course as 'a direct European concept imported into Scotland' by Duncan.[290] One of his twelve 'medical police' lectures at Edinburgh was, according to an 1801 list of their titles, devoted to 'Burial of the Dead', including subsections on the 'proper period for funerals', 'situation of burying places' and 'method of conducting funerals'.[291] It is safe to assume, however, that Duncan also never advocated for legislative intervention in his medical teaching on burial grounds. As White has further observed, Edinburgh's version of medical police differed from the Continental in that it 'eschewed State intervention and advocated philanthropic provisions by doctors and laymen alike'.[292] A reluctance to advocate for state intervention is clear even earlier in Scottish texts on burial sanitation. This is particularly apparent if we compare an anonymously-authored *Treatise on the Preservation of Health*, published in London in 1776, with, for instance, Fothergill's 1762 warning that small children should avoid burial grounds. The author of the *Treatise* reflected more forcefully that

> …it is amazing our legislature have not yet thought of removing, or at least remedying, that great and principal cause of the existence of bad air, in this and every other metropolis (…) namely the numerous and crowded burial grounds in the cities of Westminster and London. (…) The backs and fronts of the houses of many thousands are so many enclosures or walls to infected churchyards, whose pestilential exhalations must immediately and continually ascend into them, and spread contagion amongst the imprudent and injured dwellers.[293]

One Edinburgh medical practitioner deviated from the Scottish aversion to state intervention in burial sanitation. John Roberton's *Treatise on Medical Police* (1809) advocated strongly for state-organised policing of population health, to the extent that, as Patrick Carroll has argued, 'everything for which [Edwin] Chadwick would later become famous was presented by Roberton as medical police'.[294] In light of this comment, it is unsurprising that we find in

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[290] White, 'Scottish Doctors', p.81.
[291] Andrew Duncan, *Heads of Lectures on the Institutions of Medicine* (Edinburgh, 1801), p.194.
[292] White, 'Scottish Doctors', p.81. See also Brenda White, 'Politics and Police: The Fate of John Roberton', *Medical History*, V.27, No.4 (1983), pp.407-422.
[293] Anon., *Hippocrates's Treatise on the Preservation of Health* (London, 1776), pp.10-11.
[294] Patrick Carroll, 'Medical Police and the History of Public Health', *Medical History*, V.46, No.4 (2002), p.479. For an extended assessment of Roberton's background and his work see White, 'Politics and Police'.

Roberton's *Treatise* an extended criticism of metropolitan burial provision. Roberton argued that 'the impropriety of allowing burying grounds to exist in the midst of cities' is 'evident', for 'the pernicious effects of the matters evolved from accumulated masses of putrefying bodies, are daily experienced'.[295] His following line is particularly striking: 'on that account, *no subject* has a *higher claim* than this to the attention of those who have management of the internal police of cities'.[296]

Although Roberton's is not a medical-scientific treatise *per se*, he does list a host of 'the most valuable' intellectual authorities whose work he regards as substantiating this claim, including Pringle, Lind, MacBride and William Alexander. Roberton accords with their conclusions on the health dangers of putrid matter, but notes that the *cause* of putrefaction remains unclear. Recounting MacBride's still-popular theory of 'fixed air', he assesses that 'the loss of fixed air is only a circumstance attending the putrefaction of bodies, and is by no means its cause'.[297] That it still remained difficult to discern a convincing scientific cause of putrefaction did not prevent Roberton from commenting on the pressing need for a burial ground 'medical police'. His *Treatise* appeals to the perceived authority of decades of natural philosophy more than to any 'evidence'; in his own words, 'as the objects of [natural philosophers] are truly philanthropic, the extension of the principles which they involve cannot be unpleasant to them'.[298]

The public health machinery that Roberton championed was alien to many of the writers discussed in this chapter. Nothing like it would be put in place in Britain for another half-century, and even then it would be contentious. But why? It is not sufficient to understand the

[295] John Roberton, *A Treatise on Medical Police* (Edinburgh, 1809), p.178.
[296] Roberton, *Medical Police,* p.178. [Italics added.]
[297] Ibid., p.16. In this assessment, Roberton was probably informed by the work of Joseph Priestley, whose experiments had determined that loss of fixed air was not a cause but a consequence of putrefaction. Priestly thought that the cause of putrefaction, the putrid effluvia, was a thing 'sui generis' (of its own kind). See 'Joseph Priestley to Doctor Richard Price' (3 Oct 1771) via *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence* [August 2023].
[298] Roberton, *Medical Police*, p.li.

English silence on matters of burial regulation as simply a deficiency in knowledge or in interest. Certainly, Scottish medical teaching differed from the English, and practitioners of the latter seem to have been less attuned to changes taking place on the Continent. Yet, English authorities were not devoid of their own population health politics. Theirs was, as Christopher Hamlin and others have observed, simply very different: the 'focus of medicine' in their tradition 'was person, not policy', it was internal 'balance' of the individual body and its constitutions, as opposed to medicine construed as a primarily *social* problem, of whole populations and their living conditions.[299] Grant captured this idea when he wrote that any man could 'look down at himself and perceive that his whole body is a smoking dung-hill'. In this framework, medicine was conceived as the private pursuit of individual health; the objective of practitioners was therefore to treat the patient, 'not to make health policy'.[300] Thus the medical orthodoxy, that proximity to the dead increased risk of disease, remained for a long time simply an orthodoxy in England. It was matter-of-fact knowledge which could be deployed in medical advice – in advice, for instance, to stay away from burial grounds – rather than a political issue of whole populations and their living conditions among the dead.

This tradition helps us to understand why, at the very moment that calls for legislative intervention were first appearing in Britain, the received wisdom that human corpses transmitted and generated contagious diseases came under significant scrutiny. A number of theorists and practitioners of the early-nineteenth century expressed discontent with the medical establishment, its doctrines and its methods. The notion that dead bodies generated diseases was by the 1830s drawn into the debate as exemplifying these failings. A vocal minority criticised the tendency of writers on this subject to conjecture, the lack of dedicated experimentation on the matter and the doctrine's association with increasingly dated humoral theory. These texts

[299] Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1998; repr. Cambridge, 2008), p.50.
[300] Ibid., p.50.

reflect broader divisions in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century aetiology, with writers framing their own work on the dead as an attack on the medical establishment and its methods. They also reflect resistance, particularly among English authorities, to the developing notion that sanitary legislation was necessary in burial practice. Importantly, however, these critics failed to discredit the doctrine that corpses generated diseases. The theory underwent its greatest period of popularisation and political influence shortly after the emergence of its most vocal critics, to the extent that it is commonly considered as rejuvenated and even new in Britain after 1830.

Thomas Michael Greenhow, English surgeon and epidemiologist, wrote about dead bodies in his study of early cholera outbreaks at Newcastle and Gateshead. Greenhow's book, published in 1832, laid out his own theories on the causes and transmission of cholera. Its cause, he explained, was an 'invisible, inodorous, intangible poison' which generated an 'attack of cholera' in individuals with a 'predisposition' to infection.[301] The surgeon was particularly concerned with the question of contagion. His book lays out and refutes 'the supposed facts which have been brought forward in support of the doctrine of contagion'. Greenhow argues overall that the doctrine of contagion could not explain epidemic cholera; that bodily predisposition to the disease and the poor environmental conditions of the afflicted were primarily to blame for the effects of the 'poison'.[302]

The 'supposed fact' that cholera was transmitted from corpses to the living was important to Greenhow's argument against contagion.[303] 'It is affirmed', he writes of the presumptions of his contemporaries, 'that persons employed in the necessary offices about the dead, in placing them

[301] Thomas Michael Greenhow, *Cholera, as it Recently Appeared in the Towns of Newcastle and Gateshead* (Philadelphia, 1832), p.93.
[302] Ibid., p.103.
[303] Ibid., p.103.

in their coffins, and in attending their funerals have frequently been immediately afterwards afflicted with the disease'.[304] The surgeon recounts that he had treated patients in the north-east of England who seemed to have been struck with cholera after contact with corpses, such as the case of John Robson who 'attended the funeral of a man who died of the disease' and the following day 'was attacked' with cholera.[305] Such anecdotal evidence could not, Greenhow argues, be construed as evidence of contagion. Rather, other causes of disease were at play in such cases, including 'the exposure to cold and wet when standing around the grave', 'the eating and drinking, not unfrequently amounting to actual excess' after funerals and 'the moral tendency of such an attendance'.[306] Greenhow enters into great detail on this final point:

> It is probable that the mind would be impressed either with grief for the loss of a friend, with a feeling of awe at the rapidity with which his sickness, death and funeral had succeeded to a state of health and activity, or of personal apprehension that a similar fate might soon fall upon himself.[307]

In Greenhow's view, then, a funeral attendee or anyone in proximity to a corpse could develop cholera – not from contagion, but because they were experiencing grief or worrying about their own death. This account drew on a disease framework which had been developing in Britain for some time. Nervous physiologists held that diseases were caused in large part by a disruption to the nervous system, which left the patient susceptible to illness. Such a disruption could be generated by strong and negative emotions such as melancholy, by poor lifestyle habits or diet. The idea is also well-illustrated in the biography of surgeon John Hunter, written by his brother-in-law Everard Home.[308] A decline in Hunter's health began when he dissected a patient who had been bitten by a 'mad dog' in 1786, and the surgeon 'conceived it possible that he might be seized with the symptoms of hydrophobia' (rabies).[309] Home explains that 'the anxiety preying

[304] Greenhow, *Cholera*, p.103.
[305] Ibid., p.103.
[306] Ibid., pp.109-110.
[307] Ibid., p.110
[308] Everard Home, 'A Short Account of the Author's Life', prefixed to John Hunter, *A Treatise on the Blood* (London, 1784).
[309] Ibid., p.liv.

upon his mind for so long a time, there is every reason to believe was the cause of the present attack'.[310] When Hunter spent three hours embalming the young and revered Princess Amelia later that year, his decline escalated; over the following years, Home explains, he suffered a series of debilitating 'attacks' leading to his death in 1793 of an 'organic affliction of the heart' caused in part by 'affections of the mind'.[311] Early advocates of nervous physiology had included William Cullen and Francis Milman, the latter of which had staunchly criticised humoral medicine and argued against putrefaction as a cause of disease in his 1782 *Enquiry*. In Milman's view, writers advocating for humoral putrefaction had provided insufficient evidence for their argument. They had 'assured themselves' of the existence of this mechanism but failed to 'acquaint us with the specific nature of it' or to 'inform us by what particular marks it is to be known and distinguished'.[312] Milman's *Enquiry*, in his own words, redressed the 'leading notions' and 'fundamental principles' of eighteenth-century medicine to provide an account based on experimentation and 'true' principles.[313] Greenhow echoes Milman's tone, refuting what he perceived as a tendency to 'speculation' and stating instead that 'truth, and its legitimate deductions' were his 'aim throughout'.[314]

Greenhow was not the only British anti-contagionist to draw his argument from dead bodies. Charles Maclean, the English physician credited with popularising anti-contagionism in Britain, wrote extensively of corpses in his treatise *The Evils of Quarantine Laws* (1824). Maclean similarly adhered to nervous physiology, his argument against contagion supported by evidence of cholera outbreaks in which corpses did not appear to transmit the disease. At a British army camp in Sagar, India, he relates, there occurred an epidemic so severe that 'every tent was filled

[310] Home, 'The Author's Life', p.liv.
[311] Ibid., p.lxiv.
[312] Francis Milman, *An Enquiry into Scurvy and Putrid Fevers* (London, 1782), p.vi.
[313] Ibid p.vi.
[314] Ibid., p.xiii; Greenhow, *Cholera*, p.vi.

or surrounded with the dead or dying', and yet the army's officers 'suffered very little'.[315] Maclean criticised sanitary laws as 'pernicious', 'unjustifiable' and 'inefficient', suggesting that they were 'in themselves a powerful cause of sickness, misery and mortality'.[316] He applies this argument to the doctrine of corpse contagion and the sanitary laws which must, in his opinion, logically follow: 'in the hope of being perfectly secure,' he suggests quite sarcastically, 'it might further be advisable to direct the buriers of the dead, who may be *suspected* of having caught the invisible contagion, to be thrust alive (…) into the graves which they have themselves dug'.[317]

Such ideas, though powerfully argued, had only minimal impact on the medical establishment and its view of dead bodies as transmitting and generating disease. The General Board of Health published its *Directions for the Prevention and Cure of Cholera* in 1831, a pamphlet which greatly emphasised the notion of predisposition but nevertheless recommended sanitary precautions surrounding dead bodies. These included 'that those who may fall victims to this formidable disease, should be buried in a detached ground (…) to confine as much as possible every source of infection', and that 'the fewer number of persons employed in these duties the better, as then the chance of spreading the infection by their means will be diminished'.[318] Although the doctrine was not entirely discounted, the correspondence of 1840s burial reformers Edwin Chadwick and Southwood Smith suggests a growing sense amongst authorities that evidence, rather than truisms, was necessary to substantiate claims about corpses and disease generation. Smith addressed Chadwick in early 1843, after reading the latter's draft of *A Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1843). Smith wrote that 'the evidence of that fundamental truth' – the truth that 'burying grounds in towns must be injurious' – provided in Chadwick's *Report* was, in his view, 'neither so strong, so succinct nor varied as it might be to produce a

[315] Charles Maclean, *Evils of Quarantine Laws, and Non-Existence of Pestilentiall Contagion* (London, 1824), p.403.
[316] Ibid., p.xxxi.
[317] Maclean, *Evils of Quarantine Laws*, p.178.
[318] Great Britain, General Board of Health, *Cholera Morbus: Directions for the Prevention and Cure of the Cholera* (London, 1831), p.5.

powerful impression on the public mind', and Smith therefore recommended strengthening it to this effect.[319]

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Anthropologist and historian Thomas Laqueur has written of this correspondence between Chadwick and Smith in his *The Work of the Dead* (2015). Laqueur asks 'why the public health argument worked' when even one of its staunchest proponents – 'a thoroughgoing miasmatist' with 'about as unsentimental a view of the dead as one could hope to find' – questioned its basis in evidence.[320] Laqueur understands the theory expressed by Walker, Chadwick and Smith to be new to Britain in the mid-nineteenth century. The idea that the dead generated specific diseases was, for him, a theory causally related to the shift outlined by Michel Foucault in regard to clinical practices: 'in their capacity as rotting flesh [the dead] created a new and paradigmatic medical – not ritual – uncleanness'.[321] Laqueur offers several possible reasons for this 'massive cultural shift', including a new concern with smell and 'a series of micronarratives' about how the public health argument 'created an alternative to the millennia-old arrangements for the care of the dead'.[322]

Yet, examining the work of nineteenth-century sanitarians offers only part of the picture. Firstly, the theory that dead bodies generated contagious diseases had long existed amongst medical-scientific authorities in Britain. The notion that such a theory must necessarily have been conceived from an 'unsentimental', clinical conception of death, with its origins in a paradigm shift at the end of this period, does not accord with the actual timeline of writing on this subject.

[319] Cited in Laqueur, *The Work*, p.215.
[320] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.235.
[321] Ibid., p.237.
[322] Ibid., p.238.

Nor, indeed, does it accord with the ideas and values of many of these writers themselves: the notion that the dead harmed the living had long been compatible with theological and deeply metaphysical understandings of life and mortality, and in respect of putrefaction may even be said to have arisen from these understandings. Through the efforts of writers like Mead and Pringle, this natural philosophy had been cumulatively repackaged as an empirical 'science', with only a small minority of Victorian writers on putrefaction and contagion explicitly appealing to its fundamental vitalism.[323] Instead of seeing the nineteenth-century public health campaigns against the dead as the beginnings of a new, medicalised abhorrence for the dead body, we might thus understand these arguments as the last gasp of an old, spiritual idea: Smith, *in spite* of a lack of empirical evidence, remained attached to a theory which was beholden to centuries of natural philosophy, and would ultimately be discredited by late-nineteenth century germ theory.

There are implications here, too, for histories of eighteenth-century British medicine more broadly. Until relatively recently, historians have viewed Revolutionary Paris as a crucial setting for the development of 'modern' medical methods. 'It is said', Mark Harrison summarises of this literature, 'that the techniques developed in Parisian hospitals from the mid-1790s marked a sharped break from neo-classical notions of disease and medicine'.[324] New methods included 'meticulous record-keeping, clinical trials', and post-mortem examination, which 'became the hallmarks of medical modernity in the early-nineteenth century'.[325] Walker's journey to Paris in 1835, and his return 'carting a mass of statistics' in regard to the organisation of Parisian cemeteries, suits rather perfectly a 'conventional narrative' in the history of medicine that 'young

[323] The lesser-known botanist William Aiton, for example, provides a vitalist explanation of putrefaction in his *Dissertations on Malaria, Contagion and Cholera* (London, 1832): 'Death and decay of organised matter make way for new and vigorous life, nay, are the direct means of a succeeding growth, maturity and death. (…) No substances are capable of putrefaction but such as have been elaborated by the principles of animal and vegetable life.' (pp.3-6).
[324] Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire* (Oxford, 2010), p.1.
[325] Ibid., p.2.

men (…) flocked to France after the peace of 1815 to learn these new techniques'.[326] Where historians of medicine have earlier viewed these young men as disseminating a 'modern', 'clinico-pathological' approach to medicine on their return from Paris, historians of death similarly view them as disseminating a modern, clinico-pathological approach to death.[327] Harrison and others have shown, however, that medical modernisation was less abrupt – and less Parisian – than has been generally assumed. A gradual shift in methods is traceable over the eighteenth-century, led by practitioners in Edinburgh, London and elsewhere. The evidence put forward in this chapter lends support to such accounts: medical approaches to the dead, too, underwent not 'a sudden rupture' in the nineteenth century but 'a cumulative process of change' in the eighteenth.[328]

One question, however, remains unanswered. Why, after this long century of vibrant theory and debate amongst British authorities, did Walker select the texts he did as authorities for his pamphlet on burial, and choose to ignore almost all of those discussed in this chapter? The answer is that he was trying to legitimise a very specific kind of solution to the health problems posed by the dead. This was a solution of the type espoused by John Roberton: a 'medical police' model of burial sanitation which was indeed distinctly Continental in its origins, and which stood largely at odds with the English tradition of population health management. The following chapter will outline the English system that Walker and his colleagues in 'burial reform' took issue with, showing it at work in the eighteenth-century Borough of Southwark.

[326] Harrison, *Medicine,* p.2.
[327] Ibid., p.2.
[328] Ibid., p.2.

Chapter Two

Southwark in the Long-Eighteenth Century

Amongst the burial grounds condemned by nineteenth-century campaigners were several within the Borough of Southwark. This was a dense urban area, with a large and crowded population which had grown steadily to the 1830s. For several hundred years, its inhabitants had buried their dead in the flat marsh lands which descended from the River Thames. During the eighteenth century, residential housing, factories, prisons, and hospitals were constructed in large numbers around these grounds. By the time of Walker's writing, there was a noted shortage of space for burials in the region, a serious drainage and sanitation problem across its streets and docklands which not only rendered certain areas 'noxious' but occasionally left graves saturated with water, and growing public pressure to clean up Southwark's burial grounds.

This chapter introduces the case study area for this thesis, four parishes in the Borough of Southwark, and provides an overview of the area between 1690 and 1830. It sketches the changing population structure of Southwark, and the increasing urbanisation of the area in order to establish the crucial context for the main focus of the thesis, corpse disposal practices and burial provision. There are no systematic modern histories of Southwark in the long-eighteenth century, and most histories of the area tend to focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and to a lesser extent the nineteenth century.[329] Some useful work has been done, nevertheless, on several topics, and the following account draws on these, together with older works on

[329] See, for instance, Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987); Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture'; Martha Carlin, 'The Urban Development of Southwark' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1983); Molly Consibee, 'The Southwark Way of Death c.1830-1860' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bristol, 2020). Exceptions include Florence Higham, *Southwark Story* (London, 1955), which discusses parish politics in the eighteenth century, and Jacob F. Field, 'Economic Change in a London Suburb', *London Journal,* V.43, No.3 (2018), pp.243-266.

metropolitan history and the history of the Borough, as well as material gleaned from various parish records.

The topographical and population characteristics described here, as well as their change over time, make this an ideal location for a study of burial sanitation. Southwark's steady population growth, checked by epidemics for which certain neighbourhoods would become notorious, meant the region struggled with its burial arrangements oftentimes in the public eye. The condition of its land, and its scattered but substantial pockets of urban development, made organising provision increasingly difficult for parishes as the century advanced. Southwark's development as a centre of manufacturing, and its concentration of prisons and hospitals, also brought into focus the kind of environmental concerns with which sanitarian commentators would become preoccupied. All these factors would, as Chapter Three demonstrates, make Southwark a problematic place for burial provision. They would also, however, make it a problematic place in general to the eyes of onlookers and some historians. The following account seeks in part to challenge caricatures of the Borough as 'London's scrap-heap, the refuge of its excluded occupants and its rejected residents'.[330] It provides instead a more balanced description of Southwark society in the eighteenth century – the bedrock of its vibrant local politics of burial provision.

It is necessary to begin by identifying the area comprehended by Southwark, for definitions vary. Jacob Field and Jeremy Boulton define the Borough of Southwark as four Surrey parishes situated on the south-bank of the River Thames: St Saviour, St Olave's, St George the Martyr and St Thomas'. These parishes comprised around 550 acres, or ten per-cent of London's total

[330] Carlin, 'Southwark', p.610. Carlin provided this summary of Southwark as it has usually been perceived by historians; the quote has since been repeated as a description of the area. See, e.g., Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-century London* (New Haven, 2004), p.125; Judith Bennett, 'Queens, Whores and Maidens: Women in Chaucer's England', *Hayes Robinson Lecture Series* (Egham, 2002), p.16.

area during the seventeenth century, and were bordered to the east, south and west by Lambeth, Bermondsey and Newington.[331] During the period under study, however, an additional parish was established in the region: Christ Church was formed in 1682 from land previously belonging to St Saviour. As Martha Carlin points out, some early modern commentators, such as John Stow, also included Bermondsey in their definitions of Southwark.[332] When civil rather than parochial jurisdictions are considered the issue of definition is further complicated, with Southwark being more reasonably defined as the manors known as Paris Garden, the Clink, the Guildable manor, the King's manor and the Great Liberty manor.[333] However, since these manors were roughly coincident with Boulton and Field's parish area, and since parochial jurisdiction is more relevant than civil for a study of corpse disposal, this discussion takes as its definition of eighteenth-century Southwark the five parishes of Christ Church, St Saviour, St George, St Thomas' and St Olave's. For the purposes of the corpse disposal analysis to follow, St Olave's has been excluded as a large parish very similar to St Saviour in its topography and population characteristics. The remaining parishes are particularly suitable for a long-term study since their boundaries remained unchanged from 1682 to the 1850s.[334]

[331] Field, 'Economic Change', p.245.
[332] John Stow, *A Survey of London,* V.2 (London, 1908), pp.66-68, cited in Carlin, 'Southwark', p.19.
[333] Carlin, 'Southwark', p.21.
[334] Jurisdictional and boundary reshuffles in the case study parishes began with the Metropolis Management Act (1855), under which Christ Church was re-joined to St Saviour. St Olave was reorganised in 1733 with the formation of St John Horsleydown out of its land.

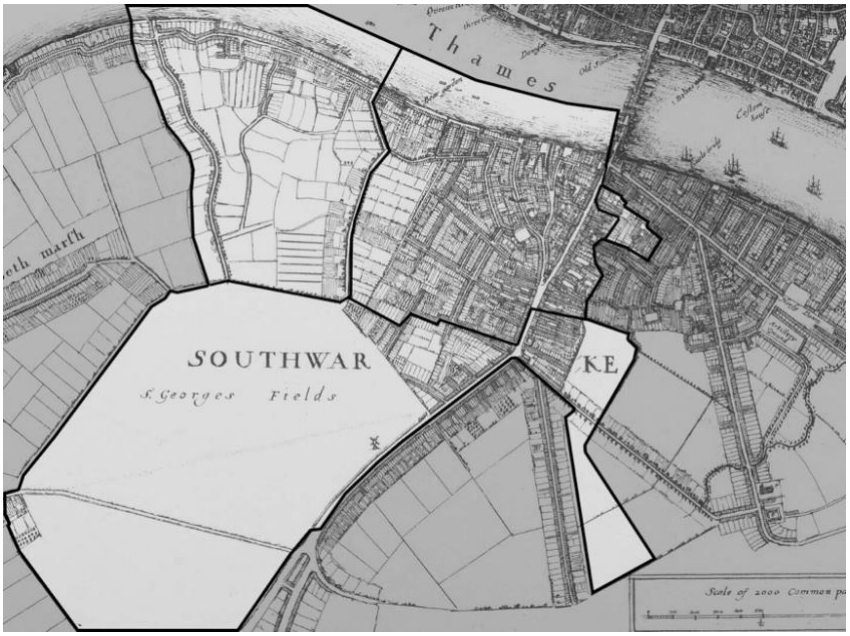


Fig. 1. The case-study area c.1690, annotated with approximate parish boundaries. From west to east: Christ Church, St Saviour, St Thomas'. South: St George the Martyr.

With regard to population, the period under consideration was marked at either end by crisis and characterised in between by recovery and relative prosperity. Southwark suffered particularly high excess deaths during the 1665 plague outbreak. Paul Slack has found that excess deaths in St Saviour were more than double those in London City parishes, and the highest of fifteen Metropolitan sample parishes.[335] Again, during the 1832, 1848-49 and 1853 cholera epidemics Southwark was particularly severely impacted. John Snow's statistical data on excess deaths in London districts suggested that the area, together with Vauxhall, experienced by a wide margin the highest mortality rate.[336] Sandwiched between these crisis periods was a century of steady population growth, from approximately 39,000 in the late-seventeenth century to 80,000 in 1811, and peaking at 105,000 in 1851.[337]

[335] Paul Slack, 'Metropolitan Government in Crisis', in Beier and Finlay (eds.), *London, 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (London, 1986), p.63. See also Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p.48.
[336] 'Table III' in John Snow, *On the Mode of Communication of Cholera* (London, 1855), p.61. Fatalities in Southwark and Vauxhall during the first four weeks of the 1849 epidemic were more than five times those in London: see also Theodore H. Tulchinsky, 'John Snow, Cholera, the Broad Street Water Pump; Waterborne Diseases Then and Now', in Theodore Tulchinsky and Joan Bickford (eds.), *Case Studies in Public Health* (Cambridge, Mass., 2018), p.82.
[337] Field, *Economic Change*, p.246. The rate of population growth in the City was much lower over the eighteenth century: from 112,927 in 1695 to 129,528 in 1801. See Leonard Schwarz, 'Conditions of Life and Work in London, c.1770-1820' (D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), p.267.

Population growth corresponded with substantial urban development, concentrated in certain regions. Seventeenth-century Southwark has at times been described as a leafy suburbia quite undeveloped in comparison to the City. Earlier characterisations of the area as 'a modest conglomeration of houses' and 'a small and pleasant spot' have recently been corrected: Boulton observes that in 1603 Southwark became the second biggest urban area in England, and Carlin has traced the region's development to 1550 into 'a densely-inhabited community displaying such characteristically urban features as paved roads (…) an excess of rubbish, and a traffic problem'.[338] These descriptions of an expansive urban region are useful correctives; nonetheless, Southwark's urbanisation by the late-seventeenth century should not be overstated. Most of this early development had been concentrated in St Saviour, St Thomas' and St Olave's. Major streets in the late-seventeenth century were those leading from London Bridge: Borough High Street, which ran south from the bridge to St George's Church, and Blackman Street, connecting St George's Church to Newington. Tooley Street connected London Bridge to the easternmost parish of St Olave's. Early urban development was centred along these roads and the alleyways surrounding them, with the area in 1690 still possessing a large open plain known as St George's Fields, numerous scattered gardens and waste ground in Christ Church and St George the Martyr (see Figure 2).[339] The maps provided in Strype's *Survey of London* (1720) also depict gardens and undeveloped land in western St Saviour.

[338] Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p.20; Carlin, 'Southwark', p.i.
[339] Carlin, 'Southwark', provides a detailed topographical description of Paris Manor Garden, roughly coincident with Christ Church, describing it as 'sparsely populated and largely undeveloped' until the mid-eighteenth century (p.57).

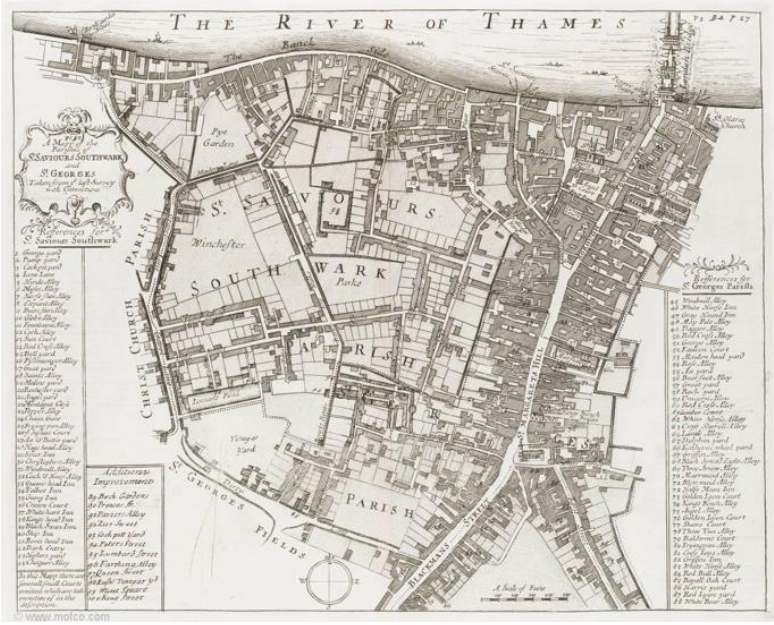


Fig. 2. Map of St Saviour, showing built areas surrounding the Borough Road, 1720.

Southwark lay in the Flood Plain of London and some parts of the area, including the entirety of Christ Church, were several feet below high-water level. A network of ditches had existed within Christ Church since the medieval period, to sluice away Thames-water, and a section of ground at its bank (the 'Upper Ground') was periodically raised to prevent flooding. The issue was, however, persistent, with Boulton finding several instances of damage to property caused by flooding across the parishes in the late-seventeenth century.[340] Southwark's reputation as a low-lying swamp persisted for many centuries. As the antiquarian Edward Walford commented in his 1878 history of St Saviour, 'there is nothing romantic, to say the least, in the situation of Southwark (…) at the best it is a dead flat, unmixed by a single acre of rising ground', with its typical waterside dwelling-house 'surrounded on three sides by mud, and standing on rotten piles of timber, with its front always unwashed'.[341]

[340] Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p.23.
[341] Edward Walford, *History of St. Saviour's Southwark* (London, 1878), p.16; George Augustus Sala, *Gaslight and Daylight* (London, 1895), cited in Edward Walford, *History of Southwark Bankside* (London, 1878; repr. London, 1996), p.57.

It was this undeveloped marshland in the west and south of Southwark which saw the greatest urban expansion and population growth during the long-eighteenth century. A comparison of Hollar's map of 1690 (Figure 1) with Smith's map of 1830 (Figure 3) testifies to the changing landscape of Christ Church and St George in particular. The former was transformed from a semi-rural flood-plain in the early decades of this period, with no major road to London Bridge and some 800 dwelling-houses, into a dense urban parish with upwards of 10,000 inhabitants by the early-nineteenth century.[342] Most of its development occurred after 1769, with the opening of Blackfriars Bridge linking Christ Church directly to the City of London. The addition of the eighty-foot-wide Great Surrey Street, connecting the new bridge to St George's Fields, also helped to facilitate urban development in open land previously used for pasture. William Bray and Owen Manning describe Great Surrey Street, earlier known as Blackfriars Road, in their *History of Surrey* (1812). The street was 'straight, wide' and, although still unpaved, 'mostly well built for tradesmen's houses and shops'.[343] St George was the largest of the parishes, covering around half the Borough's acreage; hundreds of new dwelling-houses constructed at the Fields after the addition of Blackfriars Road helped to accommodate a four-fold increase in the parish's population size between 1678 and 1807, making it the most populous of the five by the early-nineteenth century.[344]

[342] Rev. Owen Manning and William Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey,* V.3 (London, 1812; repr. Wakefield, 1974), p.536.
[343] Ibid., p536.
[344] In 1807 the 'present' population of the parish was recorded at 24,043, more than four times Jeremy Boulton's figure for 1678 at 5,727. In 1840 the parish was said to comprise 50,000 people. Figures for 1807 taken from 'Case of the Rectory of St George's, in the Borough of Southwark, by John Brand, Rector', Southwark Archives (hereafter SA): P283STGM (1807), p.2; for 1678 see Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p.19; figures for 1840 taken from George Weight, 'Statistics of the Parish of St George the Martyr, Southwark', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, V.3, No.1 (1840), p.50.

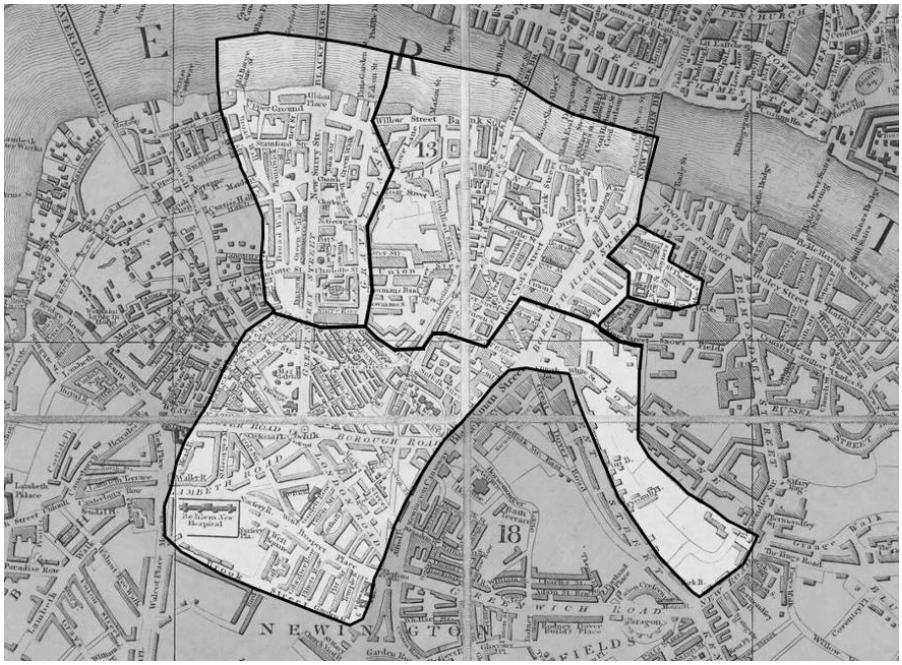


Fig. 3. The case study area c.1830, with approximate parish boundaries added.

Whilst urban development in medieval and early modern Southwark might be attributed to the area's being 'a satellite of London', during the eighteenth century these parishes grew into an industrial and commercial centre in their own right.[345] Field finds that several dominant industries emerged here from the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, particularly clothing and textiles manufacture (primarily tanneries), food and drink manufacture (including breweries and slaughterhouses), and construction.[346] These industries increasingly replaced agriculture in line with the decline of suitable land here and within London. A picture of some of the neighbourhoods in which they were concentrated can be gathered from other sources. Long Lane, for instance, ran from St George's Church to Bermondsey and was populated with leather tanneries throughout the century. Charles Knight described the street in 1844: 'Long Lane (…) exhibits nearly twenty distinct establishments where skins or hides undergo some of the many processes to which they are subjected'.[347] The resultant leather goods could be bought and sold at the Bankside Skin Market, established around 1720, or, from the mid-century, the 'large and

345 Carlin, 'Southwark', p.609.
346 Field, 'Economic Change', pp.251-252.
347 Charles Knight, *London* (London, 1844), p.24.

commodious' Borough Market.[348] The Bankside Skin Market was held three times a week and survived to the mid-nineteenth century; it is depicted on Roque's Map of 1746 as a large open area surrounded by coal yards and alms-houses.



Fig. 4. Map of Southwark showing proposed new roads through St George's Fields, 1769.

Elsewhere along the Bankside Road, which ran along the Thames in the north of St Saviour, Roque's map depicts tightly-packed timber yards, dyers'- and glass-houses, testament to the variety of industries developing in this small area. The expansion of such industry in Southwark, especially along the Thames bank, is well illustrated by the case of Anchor brewery. This brewery, Bray tells us, was established 'on a small scale' in St Saviour about the year 1690; it was successively enlarged and improved over the century to 1812, by which time it occupied some six acres and was 'now the largest establishment of the sort in London, or, more properly speaking, in the world'.[349] Southwark was particularly suitable for large-scale manufacturing: it possessed a plentiful supply of water through its numerous ditches, ready access to the Thames

[348] Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.559.
[349] Ibid., p.589.

at St Saviour's wharf, and a lack of regulation of 'noxious' industries in comparison to the City.[350] Artisans such as furniture makers, as well as the large number of Southwark men employed in housing construction, also benefited from these characteristics. Much of their prosperity was tied to local demand. Field has described how, as growing industries developed in Southwark, the Borough attracted immigrants and more demand for local trade and construction.[351] Women in particular were employed in the provision of services, including domestic services, food, drink, and accommodation at one of Southwark's many inns. St Saviour's Borough Road saw growing commercial activity over this period, its many alleyways populated with small shops, inns and public houses. Until the construction of additional Thames crossings in the late-eighteenth century, many visitors arriving here from the City-side would have travelled on watermen's boats to one Bankside's six stairways. Indeed, Field notes a shift in Southwark male occupations, from 'waterman' to road-based transport roles such as coach-painter, in the last decades of the eighteenth century.[352]

While certain Southwark neighbourhoods were industrial and commercial hotspots, others flourished in the eighteenth century as cultural and recreational spaces. Already in the 1690s, Christ Church possessed three playhouses and a bear garden, the latter established in the sixteenth century and used for bear-baiting as late as 1750.[353] After the development of Blackfriars Bridge and Great Surrey Street, new attractions were opened at Christ Church, including, in 1782, The Royal Circus and Equestrian Philharmonic Academy, and the Surrey Theatre. In 1788 was added, on the same road, the Leverian Museum, a collection of curiosities open to the public for half a crown per ticket.[354] After its closure in 1806, this museum was

[350] See for instance, Leonard Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation* (Cambridge, 1992), p.32.
[351] Field, 'Economic Change'.
[352] Ibid., p.257.
[353] Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.534. The sport was banned here by Act of Parliament in 1642.
[354] 'Blackfriars Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge Road', *Survey of London*, V.22, 'Bankside (The Parishes of St. Saviour and Christchurch Southwark)' (London, 1950); Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.537.

replaced by the Surrey Institution, modelled after the Royal Institution of Mayfair. The Surrey Institution was, according to Bray, the brainchild of several London gentlemen who held their early meetings at a coffee-house in Ludgate.[355] They selected Great Surrey Street as the site for their project, which at its completion included a library, a 500-person lecture theatre, and a chemical laboratory. Public lectures on mineralogy, natural philosophy, and chemistry were delivered here well into the nineteenth century. Mineralogy was a particularly apt lecture subject: the Institution bordered St George's Fields with its reputedly healing mineral springs. Samuel Johnson was said to bathe here, and antiquarian William Page recounts that 'a breakfast room, bowling green and swimming bath were constructed to serve numerous visitors', who would be entertained in the evenings by 'music and dancing' in the Long Room of St George's Spa.[356] Visitors to these pleasure gardens were not always well-behaved: David Garrick described the typical scene as it degenerated through the night in his *Maid of the Oaks*, with 'half drunk' women leaving the Dog and Duck to 'reel through midnight damps' on their return to London.[357] Other entrepreneurs capitalised on London visitors seeking Southwark's entertainments. In 1760, heraldic painter Thomas Finch founded 'Finch's Garden Grotto' on a patch of open land near the Borough Road.[358] Antiquarian William Rendle describes the Grotto as recounted to him by those who worked and visited there. 'In the centre a fountain was made to play over artificial embankments, forming a cascade', and 'the whole place was planted with shrubs and trees'.[359] Card games and politicians' dinners took place in the 'Grotto House', and occasionally a large ball would be held with an orchestra, impressive flower displays and fireworks.

[355] Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.538.
[356] William Page, *A History of the County of Surrey* (London, 1920), p.135.
[357] David Garrick, 'Prologue to the Maid of the Oaks', repr. in *The Poetical Works of David Garrick, Esq.* (London, 1785), p.297.
[358] The land is depicted in Strype's *Survey* (Figure 2), at the centre-south of St Saviour and marked by the word 'parish'.
[359] William Rendle, *The Inns of Old Southwark and Their Associations* (London, 1888), p.362.

Few of these pleasure gardens lasted to the nineteenth century: the Grotto was suppressed by 1777, and the Spa and its grounds were closed in 1799 to make way for Bethlem Hospital. Nonetheless, their existence and success during the late-eighteenth century contributed to Southwark's vitality and its urban development. In theory, these entertainments provided a counter to the area's reputation as a place of destitution and lawlessness. Southwark's illicit recreational trades had received attention from critics and constables since the medieval period, particularly at St Saviour's Bankside 'stews', Clink Liberty and Mint neighbourhoods which were notorious for crime and prostitution. The actual extent of prostitution in the 'bawdy-houses' of these areas is difficult to ascertain. William Maitland's *History of London* (1756) describes this as a primarily medieval phenomenon 'stamped out' in the sixteenth century.[360] The notoriety of these neighbourhoods nonetheless persisted; James Boswell described his revulsion at 'the gross voluptuousness of the stews' in 1762, and Bray refers to the Mint quite straightforwardly as 'that lawless place'.[361] New entertainments of the eighteenth century certainly attracted wealthier and more respectable visitors to Southwark, although their behaviour may have suggested otherwise: a character in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) asks sarcastically 'who can have a manner that has never seen the Pantheon, the Grotto Gardens, the Borough, and such places where the nobility chiefly resort?'[362]

The antiquarian picture of long-eighteenth-century Southwark, its environment and inhabitants, was generally far more negative and bleaker than that represented here. Charles Mackay described Southwark in 1840 as 'meanly built, with scarcely an edifice higher than a wool-shed or timber-yard, and a population with a squalid, dejected and debauched look', quite unlike the City side which was 'high and well built, thickly studded with spires and public edifices, and

[360] William Maitland, *The History and Survey of London* (London, 1756), p.1391.
[361] *The Journals of James Boswell*, ed. John Wain (London, 1990), p.27; Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.539.
[362] Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer* (London, 1773), cited in Page, *The County of Surrey*, p.135.

resounding with all the noise of the operations of a various industry.'[363] Southwark's land, he felt, was 'low and flat', this 'situation upon the low swamp [being], no doubt, one cause of the unhealthy appearance of the dwellers on the South side of the Thames.'[364] Edward Walford presents Southwark in a similar light in *Old and New London* (1878), recounting 'the journal of a London alderman' said to have visited the Borough for the first time in 1797:

> We went and saw a variety of people who had heads on their shoulders, and eyes and legs and arms like ourselves, but in every other respect as different from the race of mortals we meet at the West-end of the town as a native of Bengal from a Laplander. (…) Their meat is not so good, their fish is not so good, their persons are not so cleanly, their dress is not equal to what we meet in the City or in Westminster; indeed, upon the whole, they are one hundred years behind in civilisation.[365]

Such negative comparisons with the City-side were no doubt exaggerated, but they had some foundation. Southwark was a low-lying marshy area with many malodorous trades, a reputation for delinquency and accompanying street names like 'Dirty Lane' and 'Whores Alley'. Its notoriety was not helped by the fact that these 550 acres were home to three of London's largest prisons: the King's Bench; the Clink Liberty Prison; and the Marshalsea. In the early-eighteenth century Southwark House of Correction was also constructed in St Saviour, later moved to Horsemonger Lane in neighbouring Bermondsey. As Peter Thorold has written, 'one prison, let alone an array of them, lowered the standard of any residential district'.[366] Thus Southwark may have constituted a cheaper alternative to London which, as it became wealthier over the eighteenth century, pushed its poor 'into the outer perimeter of the City Without, where the greatest overcrowding took place'.[367] This has certainly been the picture favoured by some historians: Martha Carlin's observation that 'Southwark has been seen as London's scrap heap,

[363] Charles Mackay, *The Thames and its Tributaries* (London, 1840), cited in Edward Walford, 'Southwark: High Street', in *Old and New London,* V.6 (London, 1878), p.16.
[364] Mackay, *The Thames,* p.16.
[365] Walford, 'Southwark: High Street', p.75.
[366] Peter Thorold, *The London Rich* (London, 2001), p.107.
[367] Schwarz, 'Life and Work', p.267.

the refuge of its excluded occupants and rejected residents' has in places been repeated as a description of the area.[368]

A more systematic picture of Southwark's inhabitants during the long-eighteenth century can begin to be constructed from data compiled by Boulton, Leonard Schwarz, and others. Most strikingly in light of antiquarian comments, their evidence points to a substantial 'middling' class living here over the period under study. This possibility is already suggested by the description of Southwark's environment hitherto provided: this was, clearly, a commercially and culturally vibrant region with various opportunities for employment. Boulton's examination of wealth distribution in Southwark provides especially useful data for the early-seventeenth century. He distinguishes between three household wealth classifications: those assessed for the parish poor rate belonged to the category of 'surplus income', those able to pay for their own burial possessed 'adequate income', and those buried at the parish's expense were 'the poor'[369]. In 1622, almost half of households in Southwark belonged to Boulton's 'middling' category. The next largest group were the wealthiest at around thirty per cent of households, and 'poor' households were the smallest group at twenty-six per cent. Boulton concludes that 'although the Boroughside may have been a relatively poor part of seventeenth-century London it clearly contained individuals of some substance'.[370] This conclusion also rings true for the late-eighteenth century. Schwarz's assessed tax data, though it concentrates on London, contains information for Christ Church, St Saviour and St George the Martyr.[371] The existence of what Schwarz describes as a 'middling' class in Southwark is, again, immediately obvious from the tax collectors' returns of 1798.[372] Relative to broader London wealth distribution, Schwarz finds

[368] Carlin, 'Southwark', p.610. Such characterisations have not occurred without some basis – even the Rector of St George in 1750 was said to have been 'in the most depressed state of poverty, and often in prison'. See 'Case of the Rectory of St George's, in the Borough of Southwark, by John Brand, Rector', SA: P283STGM (1807), p.1.
[369] Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p.115.
[370] Ibid., p.116.
[371] Schwarz, 'Life and Work', pp.343-351.
[372] Ibid., p.178.

that inhabitants of Christ Church and St Saviour were primarily of middle income; these were not the poorest of parishes but were certainly less wealthy, on average, than those in inner London.[373] Christ Church has been described as the wealthiest of Southwark's parishes by the turn of the nineteenth century, partly on the basis that statistician George Weight, resident of St George the Martyr, described it in 1840 as possessing an 'excess' of gentry in comparison to its neighbours.[374] However, Schwarz locates St George the Martyr in the class of 'wealthiest' London parishes, although at the lower end of the spectrum, with more than half of its households liable to pay the highest rates of assessed tax in 1798.[375] Only a very small fraction (five per cent) were exempt from any assessed tax, compared to over forty per cent at Christ Church.[376]

Occupations given in baptism registers, collected for two-year periods at intervals, help to flesh out these percentages and fill in the blank period between them. Field has examined Southwark's male occupational structure between 1601 and 1850, using a combination of baptism registers and recognizances, and focusing on St Saviour and St Olave. Although the data provided below is not intended to be comprehensive in the same manner, it adds to his analysis by differentiating between parishes, and includes Christ Church and St George as well as St Saviour. In combination with other sources, a broad picture of Southwark's social structure in this period can be reconstructed.

[373] Schwarz, 'Life and Work', p.351; p.353.
[374] Weight, 'St George the Martyr', p.53.
[375] Schwarz, 'Life and Work', p.355.
[376] Ibid., p.355.

Table 1.1. Male Occupational Structure of Christ Church

	Jan 1690 - Dec 1691 (%)	Jan 1752 - Dec 1753 (%)	Jan 1828 - Dec 1829 (%)
Agriculture	4.0	1.3	1.2
Fishing	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total primary sector	**4.0**	**1.3**	**1.2**
Building and Construction	0.3	5.2	2.9
Clothing	0.0	1.7	0.4
Food and drink	3.1	5.2	9.9
Footwear	4.0	2.6	3.2
Metals	1.8	6.4	5.9
Textiles	5.8	15.0	8.3
Woods	10.1	10.7	9.3
Other	3.4	8.6	10.7
Total secondary sector	**28.5**	**55.4**	**50.5**
Dealers and sellers	0.9	2.6	7.7
Services and professions	3.1	4.7	24.6
Transport and communications	58.6	27.9	8.4
Total tertiary sector	**62.6**	**35.2**	**40.7**
Labourer	4.3	6.4	4.0
Gentleman	0.6	1.3	3.4
Other	0.0	0.4	0.3
Total	**100 (326)**	**100 (294)**	**100 (751)**

Sources: 'Register of Baptisms, 1671-1698', LMA: X015/146, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [15 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1624/images/31280_194586-00010?ssrc=&backlabel=Return&pId=428063; 'Register of Baptisms, 1752-1770', LMA: X097/268, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [15 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1624/images/31280_199057-00334?ssrc=&backlabel=Return; 'Register of Baptisms, 1825-1830', LMA: X092/058, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [15 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1558/images/31280_198022-00271?ssrc=&backlabel=Return.
Note: records X015/146 and X097/268 are incorrectly catalogued as 'Christ Church, Newgate Street' on ancestry.co.uk [as of 15 Mar 2025].

Table 1.2. Male Occupational Structure of St Saviour

	Jan 1690 - Dec 1691 (%)	Jan 1748 - Dec 1749 (%)	Jan 1833 - Dec 1834 (%)
Agriculture	1.2	1.3	0.7
Fishing	1.2	1.6	0.8
Total primary sector	**2.5**	**3.0**	**1.5**
Building and Construction	2.0	3.8	3.1
Clothing	10.5	7.8	5.1
Food and drink	13.2	9.7	7.1
Footwear	5.0	4.0	4.8
Metals	6.8	7.0	8.6
Textiles	6.4	11.6	8.6
Woods	9.5	8.4	8.7
Other	7.6	5.7	6.8
Total secondary sector	**60.9**	**58.0**	**52.7**
Dealers and sellers	4.8	4.0	6.8
Services and professions	7.8	4.3	11.4
Transport and communications	18.9	21.0	8.9
Total tertiary sector	**31.5**	**29.4**	**27.0**
Labourer	3.3	6.2	15.2
Gentleman	1.9	0.8	2.0
Other	0	2.7	1.7
Total	**100 (645)**	**100 (771)**	**100 (607)**

Sources: 'Composite Register: Births and Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1673-1705', LMA: X039/004, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [16 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1624/images/31281_a100608-00005?ssrc=&backlabel=Return; 'Register of Baptisms, 1720-1757', LMA: X039/005, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [16 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1624/images/31280_195132-00190?ssrc=&backlabel=Return; 'Register of Baptisms, 1832-1837', LMA: X097/272.

Table 1.3. Male Occupational Structure of St George the Martyr

	Jan 1700 – Dec 1701 (%)	Jan 1813 - Dec 1814 (%)
Agriculture	4.9	2.3
Fishing	0.4	0.0
Total primary sector	**5.3**	**2.3**
Building and Construction	3.1	4.8
Clothing	13.2	8.7
Food and drink	9.5	11.8
Footwear	4.5	3.4
Metals	4.9	4.8
Textiles	10.3	2.4
Woods	4.7	4.3
Other	7.6	13.2
Total secondary sector	**57.8**	**53.4**
Dealers and sellers	4.5	7.8
Services and professions	9.1	10.9
Transport and communications	15.8	6.5
Total tertiary sector	**29.4**	**25.2**
Labourer	5.6	7.8
Gentleman	0.2	12.2
Other	1.8	0.4
Total	**100 (514)**	**100 (1063)**

Sources: 'Composite Register: Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1695-1732, LMA: X092/030, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [16 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1624/images/31280_197998-00058?ssrc=&backlabel=Return; 'Composite Register: Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1800-1820', LMA: X092/032, accessed via ancestry.co.uk [18 Mar 2025]: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1558/images/31280_197999-00041?ssrc=&backlabel=Return. Note: Occupations were not recorded in St George's baptism registers for the period 1723-1783. See: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1624/images/31280_197997-00040?ssrc=&backlabel=Return.

The primary sector remained consistently small in all three parishes and had declined in size by the nineteenth century, mirroring Field's findings. In the seventeenth century, Christ Church and St George employed a much higher proportion of agricultural workers than did St Saviour, and a higher proportion than Field's average of 2.7 per cent for 1691.[377] As has been described, these parishes began as semi-rural and sparsely populated in comparison to St Saviour, but they experienced significant urbanisation during the century. This increased population density reduced the available land for farms and gardens, causing steep declines in agricultural employment in both parishes.

With regard to the secondary sector, the baptism registers for St Saviour closely resemble the patterns identified by Field. Manufacturing remained consistently important here, employing more than half of men in 1690-91 and declining marginally to the nineteenth century. As Field likewise observes of St Saviour and St Olave, reductions in clothing and textiles manufacturing had been largely offset by increases in other sectors such as metals production.[378] Food and drink manufacture was consistently larger at St Saviour than in Field's average, and it experienced a steeper decline to the nineteenth century.[379] This is likely due to the inclusion of St Olave in Field's data: St Saviour was home to Southwark's large breweries, and brewing made up 'the largest scale of food and drink manufacture' in London in the seventeenth century.[380] Food and drink production declined in the parish as most brewing shifted towards London's peripheries in the nineteenth century.[381]

[377] Field, 'Economic Change', p.251.
[378] Ibid., p.252.
[379] Ibid., p.252. Field finds a decline of 4.5% between 1691 and 1817.
[380] Ibid., p.254.
[381] Ibid., p.255. See also Deanne Morgan Ashton, 'The Industrialisation of English Brewing in the Long-Nineteenth Century' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Houston, 2018), pp.162-163.

At St George and Christ Church, patterns of change in manufacturing were slightly different. Whilst the secondary sector in St George also consistently employed more than half of men sampled, different industries dominated. Clothing manufacture, for example, was prominent in the seventeenth century, but had declined somewhat by the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, occupations were not recorded in St George's baptism registers in the mid-eighteenth century, and it is not therefore possible to see precisely when this pattern emerged. However, nearly half of clothing manufacture at St George was tied to hat-making across the sample periods.[382] The decline of Southwark's hat industry, which Field observes was driven by changes in fashion and movement to surrounding areas such as Lambeth and Bermondsey, helps to explain why overall employment in clothing manufacture at St George fell after the seventeenth century.[383]

The secondary sector at Christ Church was comparably small in the seventeenth century, employing less than one third of the male labour force, but it grew to match St George and St Saviour by the nineteenth century. Exactly why this happened can be best explained by changes in the tertiary sector. In 1690-91, a staggering 60 per cent of men at Christ Church were employed in transport and communications. The majority of these were watermen: indeed, watermen accounted for almost half the sampled population of the parish in this period.[384] The construction of new Thames-crossings during the eighteenth century and the subsequent rise of road-based transport led to a substantial decline in watermen, to approximately 1 per cent of the sampled population in 1828-29.[385] This shift brought Christ Church's occupational structure more in line with St Saviour and St George, and with Field's averages for the region.

[382] At St George, 44% of sampled men in clothing manufacture in 1690-91 and 46% in 1813-14 were involved in hat-making.
[383] Field, 'Economic Change', p.252.
[384] At Christ Church in 1690-91, 82% (154) of those in transports and communications (191) were watermen. Overall, there were 154 watermen in a total sample size of 324, approximately 48%.
[385] At Christ Church in 1828-29, there were 5 watermen in a sample size of 751, approximately 1%.

Christ Church remained an outlier, however, in its large proportion of men employed in services and professions. Medical practitioners and professionals were consistently present in the parish across the century, as were government employees. From the mid-eighteenth century, there occurred an influx of providers of commercial, administrative, and financial services, professionals in law, and domestic servants. By 1828-29, almost a quarter of the sampled population of Christ Church were employed in services and professions, and one in ten of the population worked as a professional of some description.[386] This is double the number of professionals that Field finds within St Saviour and St Olave.[387]

The presence of small retailers and manufacturers in Southwark, who likely received an income sufficient to take employees and apprentices, is already suggested by Schwarz's tax data: in London, householders in the 'middling' tax categories were overwhelmingly likely to be shopkeepers.[388] Field notes that 'it is difficult to determine exactly what was being sold in Southwark because of the ubiquity of imprecise terms such as 'merchant', 'shopkeeper' and 'chandler".[389] Although these terms do appear in the samples taken for this research, they were usually, and increasingly, quite specific. Those describing themselves simply as 'chandlers' were most prevalent in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries; they were also more likely than 'shopkeepers' and 'merchants' to provide no additional detail about what they sold. Where they did, however, it was specified in every case that they sold either 'tallow' or 'corn', while most 'merchants' tended to sell cloth and clothing. During the mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries, small retailers tended to describe themselves as selling specific foods and furnishings. Bedsteads, rugs, buttons, cabinets, children's toys and mattresses all began to feature frequently from the 1750s. 'Chandlers' and

[386] At Christ Church in 1828-29, there were 69 men employed in services and professions from a total sample size of 726, approximately 10%.
[387] Field finds a maximum of 5% in the nineteenth century. See Field, 'Economic Change', p.256.
[388] Leonard Schwarz 'The Middle Classes in London', in Peter Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth-century Town* (London, 1990), p.327.
[389] Field, 'Economic Change', p.256.

'merchants' of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries were replaced by more specific entries including bakers, green grocers, cheesemongers, wine merchants, sugar brokers, an 'orange merchant', 'potato dealer' and, at St Saviour in 1832, two 'egg merchants'. This apparent specialisation may be a product of more thorough record-keeping: the diligent rector of St George recorded one 'gingerbread baker' in 1702. What is clear, however, is that population growth demanded increased provision of foods and goods for local consumption, a trend also suggested by Field.[390] Another point to be noted, albeit only tentatively given the small sample sizes taken from these baptism registers, is that many foods, services and goods being sold for (presumably) local consumption were far from necessities. Contrary to the poor hygiene and squalor described by antiquarians, Southwark's inhabitants displayed increasing need of hairdressers, combs, rattan furniture, china, glass toys, language teachers, and mathematical instruments. It might be inferred that Southwark's middling groups experienced, or at least aspired towards, an improved quality of living over the long-eighteenth century.

Those who gave their occupation as 'labourer' have been separated out due to the difficulty of accurately assigning them a sector.[391] Field finds an increase in the proportion of labourers in Southwark which was especially marked between 1751 and 1817, rising from roughly one in twenty to one in ten employed men – more than the rest of London.[392] The baptism registers suggest that this increase was particularly substantial at St Saviour and was felt to a lesser extent in Christ Church and St George, where the proportion of labourers remained relatively stable. Their dominance at St Saviour in the early-nineteenth century supports Field's suggestion that by this period 'most of Southwark's labourers were [probably] employed in manufacturing', since St

[390] Field, 'Economic Change', p.252.
[391] Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion, Sebastian A. J. Kiebek has recently outlined a series of regression techniques for accurately allocating labourers to sectors. See Sebastian A. J. Kiebek, 'Allocating Labourers to Occupational (Sub-)Sectors Using Regression Techniques', *Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History* (2017).
[392] Field, 'Economic Change', p.262.

Saviour was home to large breweries, distilleries, and vinegar yards with increasing need of casual workmen.[393] Both 'waterman' and 'labourer' were low-status manual trades, although, as Dorothy George notes of both, this did not necessarily mean these individuals were unskilled. Watermen 'by virtue of their fellowship and their apprenticeship and often the ownership of a boat, belonged to the class of skilled labour', while labourers 'learnt [their] business by constantly working at it', securing a position of employment 'probably more stable than that of many artisans'.[394]

A small élite of very wealthy merchants, commoners who had acquired substantial land, prestige and often titles, clustered in residential courts at St Saviour and St Olave in the early decades of this period. Many of them, such as John Lade and Charles Cox, arrived in Southwark from humbler backgrounds and made their fortunes in brewing. Lade, for example, was born in Kent in 1662 to a small country landowner and arrived in Southwark in the 1690s.[395] Here he 'amassed a considerable fortune' in brewing, purchased a house at the respectable 3 Crown Court in St Saviour, served as MP for Southwark between 1713 and 1727, and was made a baronet in 1731.[396] When he died in 1740, he left to his wife considerable lands and properties spanning seven counties.[397] This route to prosperity would be repeated by several newcomers to Southwark over the following century. They included, in the mid-century, Henry Thrale, friend of Samuel Johnson and for some years owner of the rapidly-expanding Anchor brewery at St Saviour. Rendle's *Inns of Old Southwark* (1888) describes Thrale's acquisition of the brewery as, slightly dubiously, another case of self-made success. Thrale's father had arrived at St Saviour from Hertfordshire in the 1710s, a 'poor' but 'industrious' and 'good looking fellow'.[398] He found employment at the Anchor, then

[393] Field, 'Economic Change', pp.257-258. For a discussion of labourers' roles in factory-based work see Dorothy George, *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* (London, 1951), pp.157-158.
[394] George, *London Life*, p.158.
[395] John and Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies* (London, 1841), p.297.
[396] Ibid., p.297**;** Perry Gauci, 'Lade, John (1662-1740) of St. Saviour's, Southwark' in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1690-1715* (Cambridge, 2002)**.**
[397] 'Will of Sir John Lade', The National Archives: PROB 11/706/23.
[398] William Rendle, *The Inns of Old Southwark and Their Associations* (London, 1888), p.66; see also 'Streatham' in Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.381, which describes portraits of Thrale's visitors hung at Streatham Place.

owned by his uncle, earning six shillings a week, and continued working there for twenty years. By the 1730s he had acquired enough wealth and experience to purchase the brewery; it remained in the Thrale family for the next fifty years and led to their acquiring significant wealth, including a large country villa at Streatham in rural Surrey.[399] Rendle recounts that the Thrale brewery was sold in 1781 for £135,000, a price that Johnson attributed to its offering 'not (…) a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice'.[400] The dominance of brewers in the upper echelons of Southwark society is also reflected in the baptism registers: at St Saviour in the seventeenth century, all individuals who gave their occupation as 'servant' specified that they were a 'brewers servant'. By the nineteenth century there were 'gentleman's servants' and simply 'servants', testament to the growing prosperity of a wider variety of occupations.

Although occupational labels are imperfect indicators of social status, a broad picture of the three parishes can be drawn from this data. Christ Church, with its rising number of professionals and government employees by the early nineteenth century, appears to have developed a substantial urban 'middling' class, closely tied to London's expanding bureaucratic and professional infrastructure. This distinguished it from St Saviour and St George the Martyr, where the manual workforce remained dominant and social mobility was often tied to success in manufacturing or trade. In Southwark, particularly at St Saviour, the increasing number of labourers and the continued strength of manufacturing suggest a large lower-status population, though one capable of upward movement. St George, meanwhile, displays both a declining artisanal base and the emergence of a higher-status professional and gentlemanly élite by the early-nineteenth century. Notably, although these gentlemen lived shoulder-to-shoulder in St George with lower status individuals such as labourers, a degree of social stratification between parishes is evident by the

[399] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Autobiography, Letters, and Literary Remains of Mrs Piozzi*, ed. A. Haywood (London, 1861), p.ii; p.9, cited in Page, *History of Surrey*, p.iv; p.93.
[400] Rendle, *Inns of Old Southwark*, p.73.

nineteenth century, with St Saviour home to fewer lesser gentry and a much larger proportion of labourers than St George.

This picture of eighteenth-century Southwark reveals important differences and similarities with other English urban, and urbanising, areas. Not quite within London, but certainly not provincial, Southwark was in a sense unique: too large and close to the metropolis to be described as a distinct 'town', but distinct enough from the capital that by the eighteenth century it can no longer be fairly described as a 'London suburb'. Perhaps because of its liminality, eighteenth-century Southwark has escaped the notice of most comprehensive histories of English urbanisation, and it has been somewhat peripheral to many studies of eighteenth-century London.[401] Nonetheless, these liminal characteristics are also its virtue. They make the area representative of different facets of eighteenth-century urban change which elsewhere bore heavily on burial provision. St Saviour and St Thomas', both developed and relatively populous parishes by the late-seventeenth century, display similarities with historic urban centres like Bristol, whose burial provision was in this period constrained by medieval structures of organisation and land availability.[402] The parishes of Christ Church and St George, meanwhile, experienced a pattern of rapid late-century population growth and urbanisation similar to that of newer manufacturing, resort, and dockyard towns such as Bath, Portsmouth, Sheffield, and Hull. Such towns experienced different periods of change in burial provision from historic urban centres: at Sheffield, for example, it was during the last decade of the eighteenth century that provision became significantly problematic.[403] Southwark, in sum, encapsulates many of the characteristics which gave rise to the particular moral and population health concerns associated with growing industrial and manufacturing areas. At the same time, in

[401] Southwark is often briefly mentioned but not comprehensively examined in accounts of eighteenth-century London. See, for example, Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London, 1994); Peter Clark and Raymond Gillespie (eds.), *Two Capitals: London and Dublin, 1500-1840* (Oxford, 2001); Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2012).
[402] Barry, 'The Organisation'.
[403] Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield'.

the west and south of the Borough, Christ Church and St George were undergoing their own small-scale "urban renaissance", with pockets of gentrification and a developing leisure industry quite different to the overall picture in the north and east.[404] Perhaps its greatest aspect of representativeness, however, lies in the fact that by 1830 Southwark was, like many English urban areas, experiencing serious issues with its burial provision, and it is to these issues that Chapter Three will turn.

[404] Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989).

Chapter Three

Southwark's Burial Provision

This chapter examines burial provision in Southwark over the long-eighteenth century. In many respects Southwark's story is characteristic of other English localities examined by historians of burial: steady rates of interment placed pressure on existing burial provision, and urban development reduced viable land for new sites. Existing studies have overwhelmingly focused on the meanings associated with, and symbolic importance of, changes to burial location which resulted from these pressures. Revisionist accounts have challenged the argument that a change in the location of burials, from parish churchyards in the early modern period to extra-mural cemeteries by the mid-nineteenth century, reflected a triumph of secularisation over spiritual attachment to the corpse.[405] Recent histories have argued that burial location was largely a practical question of administrative provision of space, and that changes were caused by population pressures, topographical limitations, and developments in church structure.[406] In this 'new analytical framework', burial location was not primarily symbolic but driven by 'the exigencies of the matter': parishes across the country opened new burial grounds when and where land was available to them.[407]

This chapter sets up an alternative approach to the history of burial, one which frames the remainder of this thesis. It approaches eighteenth-century burial as a local political affair, dictated in most English parishes by the vestry, the central unit of parochial government. Following Southwark's vestries through this period of urban change, the chapter describes their failures as well as successes. It analyses the practical problems they faced, but also the social, cultural, and medical terms in which these problems were understood. Southwark's vestries and their

[405] Julie Rugg, 'Secularity and Burial Space in Nineteenth-Century England', *Revista Murciana de Antropología*, V.26 (2019), pp.33-54. This historiographical turn is summarised in Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield', pp.627-632.
[406] For example, Barry, 'The Organisation'; Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield'.
[407] Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield', p.645.

parishioners worried about ensuring decency for the dead and preserving burial grounds as sacred spaces; simultaneously, these needs had to be balanced with those of the living, from financial to physical wellbeing and the drive for urban improvement. The picture, overall, is one of substantial struggle, effort, and adaptation at local level, noticed by Parliament and acknowledged in legislation as the century advanced.

The chapter develops two main arguments. Firstly, from the perspective of Southwark's vestries during the long-eighteenth century, Parliamentary efforts to regulate burial practice in later periods appear permissive rather than disruptive. Vestries had long faced logistical problems in the management of their burial provision; by the late-eighteenth century, when space had become more limited and a wave of earlier burial ground constructions had slowed down, they found themselves under immense pressure to provide for interments. Though critical of overcrowding, local authorities and inhabitants often lacked the means to expand their burial provision, and were at times forced to tolerate burial conditions they considered inadequate. Secondly, sanitation concerns appear infrequently at local level during the long-eighteenth century, but they do appear at the beginning and end of this period. The relationship between corpses and disease was a continued concern finding expression in ways very different to the mid-nineteenth century: it appeared not as a catastrophic issue requiring centralised 'reform', but was handled with minor adaptations to, for instance, vault provision. The disease complaints identified in this chapter are examined in closer detail in subsequent case studies.

Burial Organisation and Local Government

Until the Burial Act legislation of the 1850s, the day-to-day organisation of burials, management of churchyards and graves, and changes to provision in most English parishes fell to a complex network of elected officers, most of them middling and elite householders. Some roles were salaried, the majority were paid per burial, but all were filled and overseen by the vestry, the central

unit of local government. Although the vestry's duties were outlined and constrained by ecclesiastical law, Church and clergy at Southwark were rarely directly involved in decision-making regarding burial. Instead, provision was dictated by the local personalities holding offices, their social ties and sense of obligation to other inhabitants. For most of this period, the parishes under study possessed open vestries, meaning these personalities were answerable to all householders 'paying scot and lot' – those contributing to local taxation – who might wish to participate in the vestry's meetings. In this respect, and in spite of an emphasis on Church control and religiosity in the history of eighteenth-century corpse disposal, burial was an aspect of parochial administration like any other, its organisation and change reflecting the varied concerns and interests of involved inhabitants.[408]

The overall management of burial provision in English parishes fell to the churchwardens, usually between three and six male parishioners of high social standing. Churchwardens were among the principal officers of parish government, alongside constables, surveyors of the highways and overseers of the poor. All of these offices were unpaid, and service was compulsory for taxpaying men. In practice, those liable to serve as churchwardens tended to be landholders, exemptions applied for those with certain occupations such as labourers and surgeons, and any especially reluctant individuals could escape service through payment of a fine. Once sworn into their office, churchwardens were responsible, alongside other duties, for overseeing the maintenance and improvement of all Anglican burial grounds within the parish. This could involve setting fees for interment, denying or permitting the use of headstones and family vaults, organising ground raising and levelling works in collaboration with the surveyor, deciding the location, dimensions, and

[408] Major publications on eighteenth-century burial and religiosity include Margaret Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England, 1700-1850* (York, 1998); Julien Litten, *The English Way of Death* (London, 1991); Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (1989). For Church control over death in the eighteenth century see: Peter Jupp and Clare Gittings (eds.), *Death in England: an illustrated history* (Manchester, 1999), especially pp.119-121; Peter Jupp and Glennys Howarth (eds.), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke, 1997), especially p.105; and on Kirk control, Michael Smith, 'The Church of Scotland and the Funeral Industry in Nineteenth-century Edinburgh', *Scottish Historical Review*, V.88, No.1 (2009), pp.108-133.

depth of graves, and managing all lesser officers such as the sexton. The sexton, in his or her turn, was responsible for notifying families of the burial dues to be paid on interment, collecting the payments and passing them to the parish clerk, notifying the minister of upcoming burials, and administrating funerals by 'opening the pews' for attendees and 'preserving order in the church'.[409] This was a lower-status, time-consuming position but one with perks. Service was not compulsory and was, therefore, often paid: St Saviour's vestry minutes record that the sexton was, throughout this period, provided with a house in the churchyard and a small salary.[410] For Henry Turner, sexton here from 1690, this salary supplemented his income as a 'haberdasher of hats', and on his death in 1708 his widow was provided a small annuity by the vestry.[411]

Managed by the sexton were several lesser officers with, often, arduous jobs paid a small fee per burial. The sexton passed instructions on grave locations and dimensions from the churchwardens to the gravedigger, usually a labouring parishioner contracted at a few pence per grave. Even in populous Southwark parishes with a higher death rate, gravedigger earnings were insufficient to live on, and this was necessarily a part-time office: the gravedigger of St Olave's in the mid-century, for instance, also worked as a butcher.[412] Coffin bearers, usually between four and six male inhabitants, were also paid per burial but were generally elected by the vestry. They were often provided with uniforms (gowns, gloves and caps) from the sexton's allowance, and were entrusted with management of the parish's coffin furnishings such as trestles and palls. The parish searchers, usually two elected and unsalaried women, inspected corpses for signs of infectious disease and reported deaths to the sexton or clerk, setting the whole operation into motion often several times a day. At the larger parish of St Saviour, a dedicated churchyard raker was also paid forty shillings

[409] Women sextons were often family members of men who resigned the post. At St Thomas' in 1692, for example, John Russell resigned his post as sexton and 'it was thought fit to entertain his mother in the office'. See 'St Thomas, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book', LMA: P71/TMS/0214 (8 Dec 1692).
[410] 'St Saviour, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1704-1738', LMA: P92/SAV/0452 (2 Sept. 1721).
[411] Ibid. (10 Aug. 1708); 'St Saviour, Southwark, Composite Register: Baptisms, Marriages and Burials', LMA: X039/004.
[412] 'Will of John Parrey, Butcher and Grave Digger of Saint Olave Southwark, Surrey', TNA: PROB 11/650/386.

per year to clean burial grounds once a week, and 'auditors of the parish accounts' conducted regular inspections of the burial officers' spending.[413]

This was a somewhat cumbersome system not designed for the demands of the urbanising eighteenth century. The organisation of burial at parish level, from the duties of these officers to their mode of election and compensation (if any), and even the very boundaries of the parishes under their governance, were derived from customs 'ancient and immemorial'. Sydney and Beatrice Webb have described this system of local government as it functioned where it originated, in the 'compact and peaceful parishes' of rural England.[414] Such areas were 'thinly populated', the vestry's business was straightforward, and public spirit was upheld by close social ties. For instance, at the parish of Tooting in Surrey, which in 1801 was 'made up of one long street', officers worked 'intimately and cordially' together and 'perfect agreement (…) always prevailed between the officers and the inhabitants at large'.[415] The picture in urbanising areas during the eighteenth century was, Webb and Webb suggest, quite different. The close economic and social relations on which the vestry system relied were here either non-existent or 'in the process of rapid disintegration'.[416] Vestries struggled to manage crowded populations, poor sanitation, crime, and an influx of poor.[417]

Southwark's vestries certainly felt the strains of urbanisation and population growth, but these difficulties worsened significantly as the century advanced. Whilst the four parishes organised their burials slightly differently, the broad picture to 1790 was one of *ad hoc* burial site development driven by a multitude of factors, from the rise of nonconformism to church beautification and institutional developments in poor provision. Growing populations were, in most parishes, catered

[413] LMA: P92/SAV/0452 (9 Feb 1726).
[414] Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, V.1, 'The Parish and the County' (London, 1963), p.51.
[415] Ibid., p.57.
[416] Ibid., p.61.
[417] Ibid., p.67.

to by these expansions to provision, but already constraints on the vestry system were causing logistical problems. By the late-eighteenth century, when space had become more limited and a wave of earlier burial ground constructions had slowed down, vestries found themselves under immense pressure to provide for interments. Parish records reveal an enduring intolerance of overcrowding on the part of vestries and other concerned parishioners. Such intolerance was informed variously by disease concerns, a desire for decency in burial and a sense of public duty among office-holders. The journey from problem to solution was, however, muddied by the constraints of civil government, the law and finances, and vestries were sometimes forced to tolerate burial conditions they considered inadequate.

To begin to understand the decisions made by these groups, we need to look at general patterns of change to burial provision in Southwark. Between 1690 and 1830, the total number of burial grounds in these four parishes almost doubled in number, from nine to seventeen. At St Saviour and St Thomas' by the nineteenth century, no fewer than eight different burial grounds were cramped within a square mile and, with the exception of one ground at Christ Church, pre-existing spaces continued to be used for interments. In Southwark, as was found by Julie Rugg for Sheffield and Jonathan Barry for Bristol and Exeter, there was little significant adjustment in the choice of location for burial sites, with the majority remaining crowded around major roads and built-up areas like the Borough High Street.[418] The picture of change is one of a hurried grab for space.

[418] Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield'; Barry, 'The Organisation'.

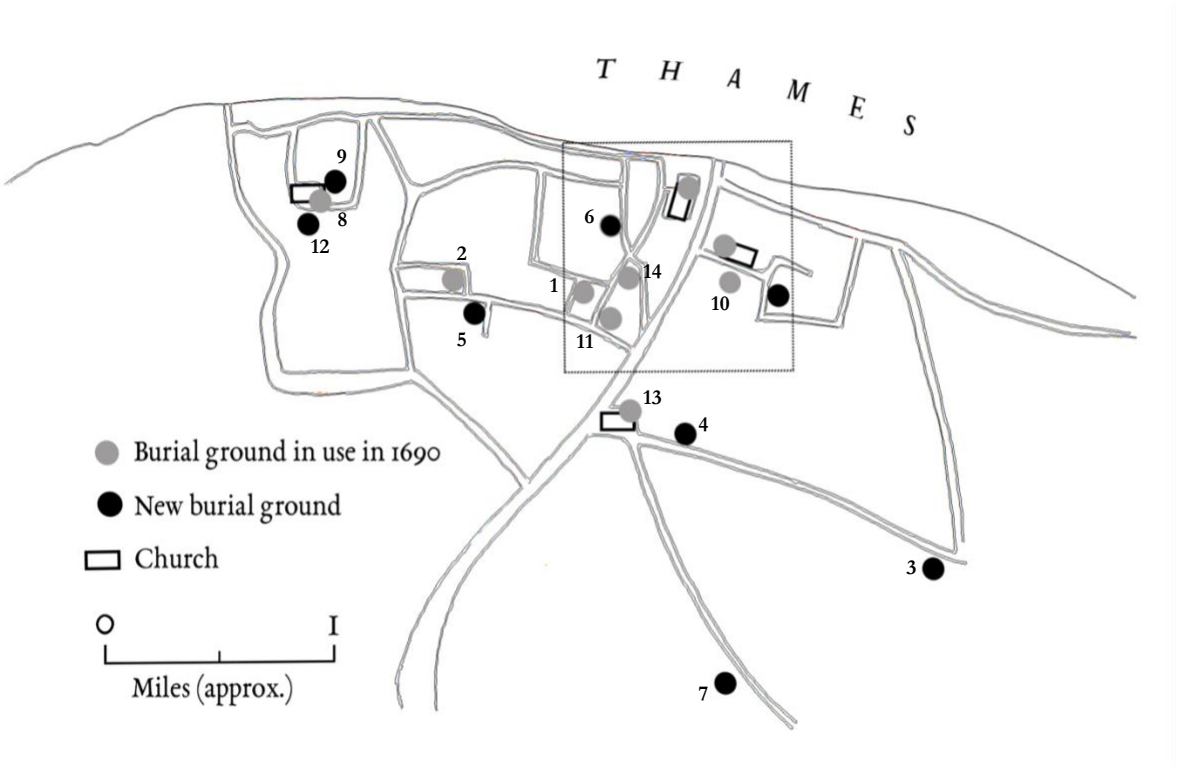


Fig. 5. Map of Southwark's known burial grounds (including Anglican and other), c.1690-1830. Created by the author.

Dissenter Provision

Not all new burial grounds were Anglican, however. Although this thesis concentrates on Anglican provision, it is necessary to first say something of Dissenters, if only because their activities otherwise distort the picture of change. Local studies of non-conformist burial provision before 1800 are few. Yet, just as Barry discovered in relation to Bristol, in Southwark Dissenters were behind the creation of new burial grounds between the 1690s and early-eighteenth century.[419]

Southwark had a large Dissenting population whose numbers grew steadily during the eighteenth century. Some indication of their growth in London at large can be gathered by comparison of John Evans' estimate of their numbers in 1715-19 and the religious census of 1851, the latter of which measured worship attendance. According to the Evans' survey, in the earlier period there

[419] Barry, 'The Organisation', p.607.

were around 32,000 Dissenters classified as Presbyterian, Independent or Baptist in London and Middlesex, approximately six per cent of the total population.[420] By 1851 there were just under 139,000 sittings in the area for the same denominations, a number of seats equating to around seven per cent of the total population.[421] There has been little contemporary research on Dissenter congregations in Southwark specifically; yet, although they made up only a small fraction of the population of London on average, antiquarian accounts suggest there was a particularly large community in Southwark from an early date.[422] Henry Hunter's *History of London* (1811) describes the immigration of 'foreign Protestants' to the area after 1549: 'these aliens settled principally in London and the vicinity, in Southwark', 'bringing with them their trades, their skill and industry' and religious diversification.[423] The findings of more recent studies suggest that Southwark was home to relatively large Dissenter populations from the early-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, since these denominations are known to have 'colonised' populous towns with large manufacturing industries.[424]

The Quakers in particular maintained a strong presence at St George and St Saviour for much of this period, and their burial provision expanded from 1690. One of the largest monthly meetings of the Society of Friends had taken place at the Old Park Meeting House, in the West of St Saviour, since 1674. The Quaker population in Southwark declined slightly from around this time to 1690 before increasing significantly: by 1719, St Saviour became something of a stronghold with over a fifth of its population being Quaker.[425] In 1763, the Old Park meetings were moved to a new purpose-built meeting house adjacent to the Society's burial ground, a plot of land in Worcester Street near Cross Bones, which had been their primary Southwark burial site since 1666 (labelled

[420] Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, V.1 (Oxford, 1978), p.264; p.509.
[421] Census, 1851 – 'Religious Worship', p.ccxii. [Accessed via histpop.org.]
[422] William Beck and T. Frederick Ball, *The London Friends' Meetings* (London, 1869), p.223.
[423] Henry Hunter, *The History of London, and its Environs,* V.1. (London, 1811), p.358.
[424] Watts, *The Dissenters*, p.271; Simon Neil Dixon, 'Quakers and the London Parish 1670–1720', *The London Journal,* V.32, No.3 (2007), p.231.
[425] Simon Neil Dixon, 'Quaker Communities in London, c.1667-1714' (Ph.D. Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2005), p.52; p.305.

'1' in Figure 5).[426] The Worcester Street ground was a small and shallow plot described as 'thickly populated with the dead' by the mid-eighteenth century, and in 1733 it was raised to accommodate more burials.[427] Additional Quaker burial sites had been purchased at Ewer Street (2) in 1685, and at the end of Long Lane, on the outskirts of St George, for £120 in 1697 (3).[428] The latter site catered also to the adjacent district of Bermondsey whose Quaker population was at this time the largest in Southwark; the ground here was 'extensively used' and it, too, was raised 'several times' during the eighteenth century to increase its burial capacity.[429] Two of these grounds, at Worcester Street and at Long Lane, were eventually filled to capacity and were closed to interments in 1794 and 1799 respectively.

Presbyterian, Baptist and Anabaptist burial grounds were also established at St Saviour and St George in the early-eighteenth century adjacent to new meeting-houses, in line with the growing construction of nonconformist buildings of worship from 1690.[430] Although the exact date of establishment of many new non-conformist chapels at St Saviour and St George is unknown, William Maitland's list of the chapels registered in London and Southwark in 1738 provides us with some indication of how many new meeting-houses existed in this area by the mid-century.[431] Many of these meeting-houses are also depicted on Roque's 1746 Map of London. The effort to create burial provision seems to have played a significant role in the choice of location for meeting-houses: all of the new buildings at St George and St Saviour were located either on top of a pre-existing burial ground or were built in locations that allowed for the construction of a new burial site. The Anabaptist Meeting House established in a courtyard of Alms-houses for the poor known as Colliers' Rents, in St George, before 1738 had its own dedicated burial ground on its eastern

[426] Basil Holmes, 'Haunts of the London Quakers', *The Antiquary,* V.35 (London, 1899), p.211.
[427] Beck, Ball, *The London Friends*, p.222.
[428] Ibid., p.223.
[429] Ibid., p.223.
[430] Watts, *The Dissenters*, p.303.
[431] William Maitland, *The History and Survey of London*, V.2. (London, 1756), p.1188.

side (4).[432] The exact date of construction of this meeting house is unknown, although Isabella Holmes in her 1896 survey of London burial grounds suggests that it likely dated to around 1719.[433] The eastern side of Colliers' Rents was a sensible place for a burial ground and, thus, Colliers' Rents was a sensible place for a meeting house: Roque's map, which does not depict any of the Anabaptist burial grounds in the parishes, shows Colliers' Rents as located to the far eastern side of the urbanised area of St George, at the border to a large undeveloped plain of fields, out of which land the Anabaptists created their burial site. An additional Anabaptist chapel is listed by Maitland on Pepper Street, in St Saviour, in 1738 (5).[434] This meeting house, but not its burial ground, is depicted by Roque as located in the north-east corner of a square of residential buildings, at the centre of which was a spacious open garden. The burial ground created by the Anabaptists in this garden had only a brief lifespan. Its exact date of establishment, as with Colliers' Rents, is unknown, but in 1777 the land was reclaimed by parish authorities for the construction of a parish workhouse burial ground, to be discussed shortly.

Along with Quakers and Anabaptists, Presbyterian and Independent congregations expanded their burial provision in St Saviour. At Deadman's Place, used on occasion as a plague pit during the early-seventeenth century, there were no less than three Dissenter meeting-houses and burial grounds established by 1738 (6). Two of these were Presbyterian and the third Independent. Exactly when Dissenter burials commenced here and when they stopped is unclear. The *Survey of London* (1950) states that the earliest known record of Dissenter burials in the ground was in 1716, and the last in 1837.[435] In 1792, however, a large part of the burial ground had been converted into dwelling houses for the workers of the Anchor Brewery.[436] The dates of obituaries published in

[432] Maitland, *Survey of London,* p.1189.
[433] Isabella Holmes, *The London Burial Grounds* (London, 1896), p.215.
[434] Maitland, *Survey of London*, p.1189.
[435] *Survey of London: Volume 22, Bankside (The Parishes of St. Saviour and Christchurch Southwark)*, ed. Howard Roberts and Walter H Godfrey (London, 1950), *British History Online* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol22 [accessed 4 June 2022], pp.78-80.
[436] Ibid., pp.78-80.

London newspapers would suggest that most interments had ceased at the Dissenter grounds in Deadman's Place by 1780, with the latest noted burial there taking place on a Sunday evening in 1778 at a ground belonging to 'Mr Wesley', the area's Independent minister.[437] There is no indication that Anglican burials occurred at Deadman's Place over the long-eighteenth century; the ground is not included on any lists of burial dues provided in St Saviour's vestry minutes.[438]

This growing Dissenter provision must have alleviated pressure on Southwark's vestries to some extent. More separatist sects, particularly Quakers, would likely have rejected Anglican provision even if it was offered to them, but there is evidence that some Dissenters made use of the parish's burial spaces before developing their own. At St Saviour in 1718, for instance, the vestry complained of 'Dissenters not paying duties for burying'; most likely, this had been taking place at Cross Bones which, although unconsecrated, was claimed by the vestry and thus incurred fees for interment.[439] Importantly, the closure of many of these grounds in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries did not mean that Dissenters were reverting to using Anglican burial spaces. They began, instead, to bury in purpose-built cemeteries on the city's outskirts, a transition which would later affect Anglican provision: as Julie Rugg and Jim Morgan have shown, this shift set a legal and cultural precedent for the establishment of new Anglican cemeteries in the mid-nineteenth century.[440] The overall alleviation of pressure on Anglican provision by dedicated Dissenter grounds should not, however, be overstated. Dead Dissenters could still be drawn into the early stages of the parish disposal system, even if they were not buried in the parish's grounds. That they were visited by parish searchers, their deaths noted to the vestry's officers, and their bodies perhaps carried by the parish's bearers is indicated by their presence in burial registers: for example, Mary Radford, a barber's daughter of St Saviour, was carried from the parish and buried

[437] 'News', *The Morning Chronicle* (London, 23 Sept 1778), p.4. Results from a keyword search of Gale Primary Sources Database for "Deadman's Place" and "burial", "buryall", "buried", or "buryed" [4 June 2022].
[438] 'St Saviour, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1788-1803', LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (19 Apr 1792).
[439] LMA: P92/SAV/0452 (15 May 1718).
[440] Morgan, 'The Burial Question'; Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation'.

at St George's Baptist Burial Ground (Colliers' Rents) in 1720, her death and its details recorded by St Saviour's parish clerk.[441] Growing Dissenter provision inevitably further reduced suitable burial land for vestries in an already urbanising region. However, as we shall see in considering the activities of vestries, more significant obstacles stood in the way of expansion of Anglican provision.

Anglican Provision, 1690-1790

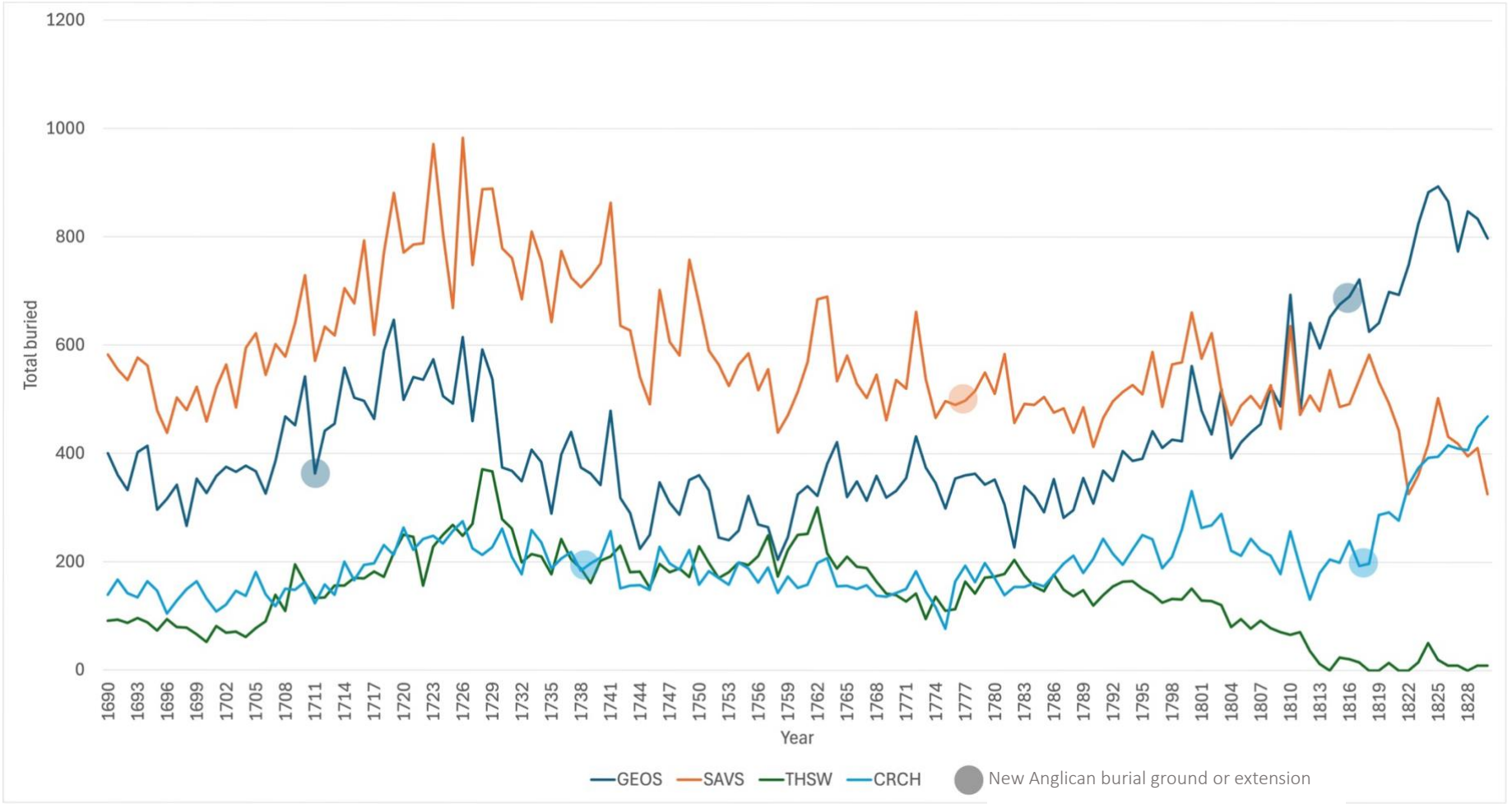
Whilst the four parishes organised their Anglican burials slightly differently, the broad picture of change to 1790 was one of *ad hoc* burial site development driven by a multitude of factors. Parish records suggest that overcrowding was not a frequent concern in this period, in spite of large annual burial totals: expansions to provision were motivated instead by institutional developments in poor provision and church beautification. Although burial grounds in most parishes seem to have been sufficient for the needs of the population, constraints on the vestry system were already causing logistical problems surrounding the management and maintenance of space.

The Bills of Mortality provide a useful introduction to changes in Anglican provision in this period, although they should be interpreted carefully (see Figure 6, below). While peaks in burial totals might intuitively suggest the need for more space, overcrowding was not, of course, a simple function of the number of burials. In Southwark, overcrowding depended on the extent of existing – often mediaeval – provision, including the size and depth of burial grounds. Accurate contemporary information of this kind does not exist for most of the grounds considered in this thesis, although some broad estimates survive for the late-nineteenth century, and these are used where appropriate.[442] Existing burial spaces were also reused repeatedly, with older graves being disturbed or overlaid to accommodate new interments. Different types of graves, coffins, and

[441] 'Burials composite, 1713-1722', LMA: X039/005 (19 Aug 1720).
[442] Particularly, some approximations are given in Holmes, *The London Burial Grounds*.

monuments could delay this 'recycling' process and restrict available space. An accurate examination of the extent of overcrowding at any given time would therefore need to consider: the presence of headstones and other stone monuments; the types of graves – whether individual or family plots, with multiple bodies stacked together; the use of shrouds or coffins, and whether the coffins were metal-lined or wooden; the use of brick graves or earth plots; the condition of the earth; and so on. Overcrowding was not, therefore, simply a function of rising burial totals but also of space management, burial frequency, and the physical layout and drainage of the site. In light of this, contemporary written accounts which explicitly describe overcrowding remain the most reliable indicator of issues with burial provision, and they are used as such throughout this thesis. Beyond this, overcrowding is identified in cases where burial provision was expanded cheaply and efficiently, for no clear reason other than to increase space, for example through ground raising works.

Fig. 6. Annual Anglican Burial Totals by Parish, 1690-1830



Sources: Richard Smith, Romola Davenport, and Gill Newton, *London weekly bills of mortality, 1644-1849* (2020) [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Service. 10.5255/UKDA-SN-854104. Graph created by the author.

Nonetheless, some useful inferences can be drawn from this data. Firstly, when Dissenter provision is removed, successful additions to burial space were quite infrequent: large periods of time, and large numbers of burials, could elapse with little or no change to provision. There is also no clear and straightforward correlation between quantitative burial totals and extensions to space, in large part because of the variables outlined above, but also due to the prohibitive practical issues that parishes could encounter in increasing provision. Changes to burial space therefore reflected not just demographic pressures but a combination of local customs, economic means, and administrative choices.

The only new Anglican burial site created at St Saviour over this period was that which adjoined the new parish workhouse, built at Pepper Street in 1777 (5).[443] Notably, this was neither a dedicated expansion to burial provision nor a genuinely new burial site, despite the probable necessity of increased provision at St Saviour at the time. It was constructed on the site of the burial ground and building of the Anabaptist meeting-house previously mentioned; the new burial site was not therefore built on 'fresh' earth but was constituted of re-claimed ground that had already been used for interments for several decades.[444] This choice of location resulted from restrictions to annual poor relief expenditure at St Saviour and the limitations of space in an already developed parish. This was a large, expensive building in need of a spacious burial ground: in 1776 the average capacity of a London workhouse was 201, whilst at St Saviour's were housed 530 poor workers in 1784.[445] The site upon which the house was built was spacious enough to accommodate burials of all workhouse inhabitants. This was a significant undertaking, since mortality rates at London workhouses were unusually high in the late-

[443] Arthur Tiler, *The History and Antiquities of St. Saviour's, Southwark* (London, 1765), p.252.
[444] Holmes, *London Burial Grounds* (1896), p.136.
[445] J. Boulton and L. Schwarz, 'The Medicalisation of a Parish Workhouse in Georgian Westminster: St. Martin in the Fields, 1725-1824', *Family and Community History,* V.17, Is.2 (2014), p.123.

eighteenth century.[446] At the slightly larger house of St Martin's were buried 226 people from an institution that housed on average 604 people between 1772-74, a crude mortality rate of 374 per 1000.[447] This reflected the average London workhouse mortality rate at the time, which was 328 per 1000.[448] Schwarz and Boulton have pointed out that this 'staggering death rate' of London workhouses in the second half of the eighteenth century resulted from 'the fact that many workhouse inmates were sick, sometimes actually dying, and occasionally already dead when they entered the workhouse'.[449] The impact of workhouse death 'inflation' on local death rates is difficult to calculate, but Boulton and Schwarz find that many individuals specifically sought admission to workhouses due to serious illnesses, and it was thus unlikely that workhouses raised the local death rate by inflicting contagious disease or injury on their inhabitants, as was suggested by some of their contemporary critics.[450] Rather, it was financially advantageous to die and be buried within the institution and its grounds, both for workhouse inhabitants and parish authorities seeking to accommodate large numbers of their dead poor.

A desire to provide dedicated burial space for the poor also lay behind growth in provision at St George in the early-eighteenth century. In 1659 the parish had been gifted a large plot of pastureland by trustees of the nearby Lock Hospital, and in 1711 the parish consecrated this ground as a pauper burial space (7).[451] This land was sufficiently spacious to accommodate the parish's pauper burials for another century. In 1716, the vestry passed an order allowing the

[446] Frederick Eden, *The State of the Poor, Or, An History of the Labouring Classes in England*, V.2. (London, 1797), p.442.
[447] Jeremey Boulton and Leonard Schwarz, 'These Ante-Chambers of the Grave? Mortality, Medicine and the Workhouse in Georgian London, 1725-1824', in Jonathan Reinarz and Leonard Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Suffolk, 2013), p.64.
[448] Ibid., p.64.
[449] Ibid., p.63.
[450] Ibid., p.74.
[451] Rob Woollacott, *Southwark's Burying Places: Past and Present* (London, 1983), p.12.

Lock Hospital to bury there, and by 1777 the ground accommodated a large proportion of St George's interments.[452]

Parish politics also influenced expansions to burial provision outside the context of poor relief. Since the administration of burial provision across the four parishes was dependent on their respective vestries, the constitution and politics of a vestry necessarily shaped decisions relating to provision. Southwark had long been a region of 'weak and divided' local government and ecclesiastical authority, in large part because of its unclear jurisdictional status.[453] A royal charter of 1550 had incorporated most of St Saviour and St George into the city of London as the 'Ward of Bridge Without' or 'Borough of Southwark'. The area still, however, lay within the county of Surrey and partially under the jurisdiction of the Surrey magistrates. An additional complication was added by the Bishop of Winchester's control over part of the parish of St Saviour. This overlap of authorities led to a loss of legal and jurisdictional control on all sides, a problem which developed in the sixteenth century and persisted until the mid-nineteenth. A petition of 1761 from the inhabitants of Southwark to the London Lord Mayor summarises the issue as experienced by parishioners: 'we find that the magistracy of the city of London have (…) neglected the more essential interest of the inhabitants of the said ward; and the justices of the county of Surrey have not failed to take advantage of their indifference and neglect of their jurisdiction within the said borough of Southwark.'[454]

One important consequence of this confusion and consequent neglect by municipal authorities was increased independence for Southwark's vestries, with differing effects for burial provision

[452] St George the Martyr, Vestry Minute Book, 1717-1733', SA: GM/1/1/1 (18 Oct 1716); 'St George's Burials 1777-1822', LMA: P92/GEO/261. Of 90 burials listed at St George between 1st July and 31st December 1777, 40 were buried at the Lock ground.
[453] Andrew Thrush and John P. Ferris (eds.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1604-1629* (Cambridge, 2010).
[454] Thomas Allen, *The History and Antiquities of London, Westminster, Southwark and Parts Adjacent*, V.3 (London, 1828), p.444.

between the four. The issue of potential corruption, for example, was brought into stark relief at St Saviour during the early decades under study. A group of around thirty wealthy merchants had in the late-sixteenth century formed a select vestry in the parish, excluding any other taxpaying inhabitants from attending their meetings, appointing all senior parish offices to themselves and selecting their own minister.[455] Under ecclesiastical law, the churchyard and all parish burial grounds were maintained by the churchwardens and 'owned' by the incumbent or minister, in trust for the souls of parishioners.[456] This self-selecting group of mostly brewers, including John Lade in the 1710s, thus gained full control of burial provision by appointing themselves to these offices. Strype's *Survey of London* records some activities of the 'corporation' in control of the church grounds and building, which included leasing parts of the church to bakers and converting it into a 'bake-house': 'in this [chapel] have I known a hog-sty; in another, a store-house, to store up their hoarded meal.'[457] It is telling that no additional burial space was created at St Saviour until after the dissolution of this select vestry in the Spring of 1730. Criticisms of the vestry, as recorded in the minutes of meetings early that year, centred on the group's neglect of the church and its burial grounds, as well as its failure to distribute fairly parish funds, including pauper burial provisions and funeral payments, to the elderly and dying poor 'who in this stage of life should have no difficulties laid upon them'.[458] Several 'principal inhabitants' – likely vestrymen – of St Saviour had petitioned *against* a 1716 bill for the better regulation of select vestries in London, Westminster and Southwark, intended to prevent the misallocation of parish funds; in consequence, St Saviour's vestry alone was excluded from the resultant act.[459] The only remaining solution, then, was a forced overthrow of this oligarchy, which occurred in February 1730: 'the inhabitants of this parish (not vestry men) do assume to

[455] Thrush, Ferris, *History of Parliament*.
[456] 'Burial' in Richard Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, V.1. (London, 1763), p.186. See also Mary Lowth, 'Charles Byrne, Last Victim of the Bodysnatchers: The Legal Case for Burial', *Medical Law Review*, V.29, No.2. (2021).
[457] Cited in Walford, 'Southwark: Bankside', p.16.
[458] LMA: P92/SAV/0452 (17 Jul 1730).
[459] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.18 (London, 1716), p.445.

themselves a right of choosing churchwardens of this parish in opposition to the antient way of choosing by this vestry.'[460] The first actions of the new vestry in the summer of that year were to employ workmen to inspect and make necessary repairs to the church and its burial ground, as well as conduct an 'inquiry' into the state of the parish's funds.[461] One outcome of the inquiry was the establishment of an annual budget of £120 for 'repairs of the church and other expenses where necessity requires', a clause which also ensured money was allocated for the maintenance and expansion of the parish's burial grounds in future.[462]

Yet even an engaged and public-spirited open vestry could encounter legal problems in managing its burial provision. Both the ecclesiastical and common law systems in England, which had an uneasy relationship before the mid-nineteenth century, held some jurisdiction over burial grounds.[463] In order for a burial site to be established at all, the parish and its representatives needed to purchase freehold tenure of an appropriate plot of ground on behalf of the church minister. Freehold tenure, meaning total ownership of the land, was necessary for the consecration of a burial ground.[464] This was also the case where a churchyard had been expanded or augmented rather than a separate ground established.[465] However, the purchase of freehold tenure for consecration, though required by ecclesiastical law, was not itself a matter for the ecclesiastical courts, and under common law any landowner had the right to 'hinder' consecration by refusing to sell his property for that purpose.[466]

Legal problems were felt at Christ Church in the early-eighteenth century, when conditions became dire at the parish's churchyard. The damp condition of the land, close proximity to the

[460] LMA: P92/SAV/0452 (8 Apr 1730).
[461] Ibid. (25 Sept 1730).
[462] Ibid. (Feb 1730).
[463] John Baker, 'The Ecclesiastical Courts' in John Baker (ed.), *Introduction to English Legal History* (Oxford, 2019).
[464] Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, p.237.
[465] Ibid., p.237.
[466] Ibid., p.233.

riverbank and steadily increasing numbers of interments had made burials untenable here within just fifty years of the churchyard's construction (8). In 1721, Christ Church parishioners elected several of their 'substantial inhabitants' to petition Parliament for a bill allowing them to demolish and rebuild their church and churchyard. The Parliamentary Committee considering this petition outlined the problem in the House of Commons. The church was

> …standing under-ground, and a slight Brick Building, in a very decaying condition; and the Church-yard, which is but small, by reason of the great Increase of the Inhabitants since the said Church was built, and the frequent Burial of their Dead, is become uncapable to receive and cover their Dead; and that the Ground now lies almost as high as the windows of the said Church; which being a marshy Ground, the Graves both within and without the said Church are filled with water as soon as they are dug.'[467]

The obstacles to fixing this problem were multiple. The church and churchyard had initially been constructed using money gifted in 1627 in the will of a local gentleman named John Marshall. Marshall had additionally left the future rents and profits of his large estate for 'the maintenance and continuance of the sincere preaching of God's Holy Word in this parish'.[468] The ambiguity of Marshall's meaning here compelled the vestry of Christ Church to apply for a bill empowering them to spend the profits of Marshall's estate, by then £2600, on demolition and reconstruction of the church and churchyard he had helped to build.[469] The bill was passed successfully in December 1721, the expenditure being deemed 'in the pious and charitable design of the said John Marshall'.[470] Despite the apparent severity of the situation and the successful passing of this bill, however, there would be no replacement burial ground constructed at Christ Church for another fifteen years. The primary cause of this delay was difficulty in obtaining new land for the creation of a burial site. In early 1738, the new Church and ground were finally constructed immediately north of the pre-existing site, on 'a piece of

[467] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.19 (London, 1803), p.663 (7 Nov 1721). Via *U.K. Parliamentary Papers Online* [Jun 2022].
[468] 'Will of John Marshall, Gentleman of Southwark, Surrey', The National Archives, Kew: PROB 11/159/449 (15 Apr 1631).
[469] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.19, p.663 (4 Dec 1721).
[470] Ibid. (7 Nov 1721).

copyhold land which had previously been used as a garden' (9).[471] This ground had been purchased by the trustees in December 1735 from a local gentleman and new tenant of the Manor of Paris Garden, the site being made available for sale only after falling under new ownership.[472] During the intervening period, the vestry had continued to use its waterlogged burial ground out of necessity: in only the first three years after the bill's passing, more than 600 interments took place here.[473] Thus the expansion of burial space, no matter how pressing, was here entirely dependent on a combination of legal approval and landowner cooperation.

The peculiarities of local governance led to a different set of issues at the parish of St Thomas', whose church and land were owned by St Thomas' Hospital. This remained the smallest of Southwark's parishes by area and population size throughout the long-eighteenth century. In the 1690s it was comprised of one, later two, large hospitals, a church and 'about three hundred houses' by the estimate of contemporary antiquary John Aubrey.[474] The parish was attached to and named after the oldest of the hospitals, which had stood in the area since at least the thirteenth century. Under Edward VI, the hospital and church were re-founded and St Thomas' parish was established. The select vestry here was, by all appearances, cordial and engaged, with officers working closely together and answering to the requests of parishioners. Decisions which may have fallen to the discretion of overseers in larger parishes, for example, were here brought to whole vestry meetings: in 1693, the vestry decided to pay travel expenses for parishioner Joseph Cumins to 'go down to Bath for the recovery of his limbs', and 'Ann Street had her mother's wedding ring delivered to her according to a former order of the vestry'.[475] This select vestry resembles the 'little oligarchy' described by Sydney and Beatrice Webb as

[471] Howard Roberts and Walter H Godfrey (eds.), *Survey of London: Volume 22, Bankside* (The Parishes of St. Saviour and Christchurch Southwark), (London, 1950), via *British History Online* [8 Jun 2022].
[472] Ibid., pp.101-107.
[473] 'Christ Church, Southwark, Register of Burials, 1718-1727', LMA: X092/05 (Jan 1722 – Jan 1725). Via *ancestry.co.uk* [17 Nov 2023].
[474] John Aubrey, *The Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, V.5 (London, 1719), p.309.
[475] 'St Thomas Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1674-1715', LMA: P71/TMS/0213 (22 Jun 1693).

existing at Leeds in the eighteenth century; a 'group of intimate friends and near relations' united by 'philanthropic impulses'.[476]

Thus, when the governors of St Thomas' Hospital encroached on the parish's burial ground and withdrew its access to the church's vaults, some of these vestrymen defended their parishioners with great fervour. Minutes of the hospital's meetings in 1705 describe 'the frequent requests made to us by parishioners of St Thomas' parish for the use of the two vaults under the church for burials there'.[477] The governors finally agreed to grant access 'out of kindness to the said parishioners', an arrangement which left the vestry with its own dedicated churchyard (10) and one vault for burial.[478] By 1721, however, pressure was building on the hospital's burial space. In March that year, at a further meeting of the governors, it was recorded that the hospital had 'demanded' keys to the parish's burial spaces for its own use. 'We expected', the entry continues, 'that the parishioners would have rested satisfied with the use of the said churchyard jointly with the hospital, but on the contrary (…) a padlock was hung up on the door of the said burying ground by order of some of the parishioners.'[479] Churchwarden William Waterman, being informed that a hospital officer was headed to remove the padlock,

> …went immediately from his own House, first putting on his sword by his side, [and began] running towards the Church yard, and crying aloud in the street, that he would murder him, damn him, he would doe his business, he would murder him by God; or words to that effect.[480]

No motivation is explicitly recorded in either the vestry or hospital's meeting minutes to explain this extreme response, but several possible reasons are suggested by other evidence. In the first instance, parishioners had a right to burial in their own churchyard under ecclesiastical law, and

[476] Webb and Webb, *The Parish and the County*, p.50.
[477] 'St Thomas' Hospital, Court of Governors Minute Books, 1690-1735', LMA: HO1/St/A/001/006 (23 Nov 705). Via *Londonlives.org* [Jan 2021].
[478] Ibid. (23 Nov 1705).
[479] LMA: HO1/St/A/001/006 (1 Mar 1721).
[480] Ibid. (1 Mar 1721).

joint use of the ground would have restricted available space. St Thomas' Hospital also had a history of over-using its burial grounds with potentially dangerous effects: already in 1709, inhabitants had complained to the governors that their small churchyard was so full that an 'infection' might result.[481] Yet efforts to defend the parish's space, however zealous, failed, and hospital burials commenced in the parish's ground and vault in 1722, to the continued complaint of the churchwardens.[482]

Vestries may have been relatively powerless to expand and even defend their burial space on occasion, but alternative provisions were sometimes possible. Vault constructions were, for example, carried out at St Saviour and St George during periods of church repair and 'beautification'. The construction of a 'large vault' under the middle aisle of St Saviour's in May 1703 took place as part of a series of orders for 'beautifying of the church', which included a new 'good and handsome pulpit' and repair of the church bell.[483] St George's church was also entirely rebuilt in the early-eighteenth century, its new interior featuring substantial vaults which opened to interments in 1735. Financial incentives likely factored into their construction: tables of St George's burial fees, surviving from the 1770s, confirm that adult burials in the new vaults cost over one pound, more than four times the price of churchyard burials at five shillings.[484]

Anglican Provision, 1790-1830

Overcrowding had thus appeared intermittently as an issue during the century after 1690, but was not evident in all parishes. Only at Christ Church, with its excessively damp churchyard, was the situation severe, and problems at St Thomas' arose largely from territorial disputes with the hospital. For the most part, expansions to burial space do not appear to have been a reaction

[481] This event is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.
[482] Ten years later, churchwardens were still petitioning for exclusive access to the churchyard. LMA: HO1/St/A/001/006 (18 Aug 1731).
[483] 'St Saviour, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1689-1703', LMA: P92/SAV/0451 (7 May 1703).
[484] LMA: P92/GEO/261. Specific figures taken from 'Burials from the 15th of July to the 1st of June 1777', f.16.

to overcrowding, and were instead driven variously by growing poor provision, the rise of nonconformism, and church beautification. Already clear, however, is that when issues did appear they could be incredibly difficult to resolve: the vestry system was constrained internally and externally by the attitude of its officers, the state of its finances and, more often, the legal systems to which it was subjected. By the late-eighteenth century, when existing provision had become saturated and viable burial land was in much shorter supply, these long-standing logistical problems came to a head.

Signs of escalating pressure appeared at St Saviour's Cross Bones (11) and St George's Lock ground, which were raised and levelled in 1790 and 1791 to increase their burial capacity.[485] This was a relatively cheap and straightforward way of handling overcrowding, and it was particularly useful in the absence of viable land for new burial sites. Still, urban development posed other challenges for Cross Bones in particular. A free school for boys had been established near to St Saviour's churchyard in 1681, and in 1791 plans were drawn up to move the building, it being 'unhappily situated in a dark alley and much out of repair'.[486] In the absence of suitable land, the 'committee of the estates' of St Saviour proposed that the new building should be constructed on top of Cross Bones burial ground.[487] This would remove a substantial patch of burial space 'fifty feet in length and twenty-three feet in breadth' and would cause, it was suggested, 'loss and inconvenience to the parish'.[488] A motion was eventually put forward that 'the foundation thereof be upon pillars' to allow interments to take place below.[489] Parish surveyor George Gwilt, who would become increasingly involved in burial provision here over the following decades, ruled this idea 'wholly impracticable' and, instead, the vestry passed a motion 'that it

485 LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (27 Nov 1790); 'St George the Martyr, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1785-1809', SA: GM 1/1/4 (22 Sept 1791).
486 LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (21 Jul 1791); on the free school see Arthur Tiler, *The History and Antiquities of St Saviour's Southwark* (London, 1765), p.46.
487 LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (21 Jul 1791).
488 Ibid. (21 Jul 1791).
489 Ibid. (21 Jul 1791).

will be for the benefit of the parish to make a vault for the interment of bodies' accessible underneath the new school.[490] This negotiation of needs worked well until Gwilt drew up estimates of the costs involved in the plan. The new school alone would cost the parish three-hundred pounds; with the vault the price rose to £570.[491] After some deliberation, the vestry resolved to construct the new school without the vault, apparently purely on grounds of economy.

What remained of Cross Bones was, only a few years later, jeopardised by legal problems similar to those at Christ Church in the early-eighteenth century. While legal hurdles at Christ Church had merely delayed a churchyard extension, at St Saviour these hurdles almost caused the loss of existing burial space. In January 1802, a prominent parish landowner named Samuel Farmer approached the vestry regarding the terms of several of its leases of his land in 'Southwark Park', the area on which stood Cross Bones and the parish's workhouse burial ground.[492] Farmer claimed that the burial ground lands, historically the property of the Bishop of Winchester, had fallen under his ownership upon the deaths of two parish trustees to whom the Bishop had previously leased them in succession. Farmer's request of two new leases for these grounds, at an annual rent of £250 for the workhouse ground and an unspecified 'certain yearly rent' for Cross Bones, was immediately rejected by the vestry, and a year-long legal battle ensued between Farmer and a committee of parish representatives.[493]

Farmer's claims jeopardised parish burial provision in two important ways. Not only did the vestry consider his demands 'oppressive and extravagant' enough that they risked pricing parishioners out of their own burial grounds, but during the course of the committee's inquiry

[490] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (21 Jul 1791).
[491] Ibid. (21 Jul 1791).
[492] Ibid. (16 Jan 1802).
[493] Ibid. (19 Jan 1802).

it also became clear that neither space had been legally consecrated.[494] As their report noted, 'no such consecration could have taken place, according to the ecclesiastical law of this kingdom, for by that law no ground can be consecrated unless of freehold tenure.'[495] Thus, either the grounds must be consecrated formally after the purchase of the land, or burials should cease there. Cross Bones in particular was a valuable parish burial site, as the committee's report noted: '[we] conceive it essentially necessary that the Cross Bones burial ground should not be converted to any other purpose than the present[,] and that the parish is bound to use every endeavour to retain a spot so sacred to the remains of the departed'.[496] In early 1803, after a full year of price negotiations, Cross Bones was purchased from Farmer and consecrated for interments. The workhouse ground, meanwhile, continued to be leased at a significantly reduced annual rate of £20, and as a result remained unconsecrated.[497] The practical necessity of interment, and the triumph of common over canon law, here outweighed the spiritual impetus to limit burials to legally consecrated ground alone.

The growing demands of the living, for charitable institutions and land for development, also caused issues for the new churchyard constructed at Christ Church in 1738. By the 1790s the church had become dilapidated and its burial ground overcrowded; repairs and a churchyard extension were proposed by the vestry in 1793.[498] In the years prior to this proposition, the culture of the open vestry at Christ Church had begun to change slightly. Already in the mid-eighteenth century, all routine business here was decided at public meetings, and any ratepaying inhabitants had the right to attend and vote on matters such as the setting of rates and election of officers. Attendance was, however, frequently poor. In the 1750s it was usual for meetings regarding the poor rate to be attended by around five inhabitants, and often just two –

494 LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (1 Feb 1803).
495 Ibid. (6 Jan 1802).
496 Ibid. (6 Jan 1802).
497 Ibid. (18 Mar 1803).
498 'Christ Church, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1756-1805', LMA: P92/CTC/085 (28 Nov 1793).

sometimes none at all – turned up for the election of officers. By the 1780s, usual attendance at these meetings had grown to upwards of twenty. Important issues began, increasingly, to be adjourned so that the opinion of more inhabitants might be heard, and salaried officers were now elected not on rotation but on the basis of their being 'a proper person of skill and experience' for the role.[499] In 1776, for example, a change to the poor rates was adjourned for one month 'to take the opinion of inhabitants by a poll' on the subject, and in 1793 proposals to rebuild the parish workhouse were 'printed on hand bills and delivered to the inhabitants'.[500] At least ninety attended the adjourned meeting and sixty ran for the new workhouse committee.[501] This committee, elected again by a poll of ratepayers, carried out its business in public, reporting to vestry meetings and hearing the opinions of other inhabitants on its next stages. When the workhouse looked to be too costly, fifty better-off parishioners lent up to £100 each for its funding.[502] Even the parish officers' accounts, after their annual audit, were from 1809 'made public to the parish at large by printed bills'.[503] Just as a culture of genteel entertainment and philanthropy was emerging in the parish at large, the vestry of Christ Church evolved into something like a democracy, well-organised and in theory efficient, at times prioritising 'the opinions and wish of the inhabitants' even above those of officers.[504]

This extensive involvement of inhabitants in parochial government proved detrimental to the proposed churchyard extension, carried out nineteen years and an Act of Parliament later. In the first instance, the proposal had been made in 1793, at the same time as the new workhouse was suggested. Excitement about the workhouse seems to have overtaken interest in the burial ground extension, and it appears that the vestry could only handle one of these time-consuming,

499 LMA: P92/CTC/085 (22 Sept 1767).
500 Ibid. (18 Jun 1776; 28 Nov 1793).
501 Ibid. (5 Dec 1793).
502 Ibid. (2 Jan 1794).
503 Ibid. (20 Oct 1809).
504 Ibid. (20 Oct 1809).

costly projects at a time: the latter was not raised again until 1803, when the former was finished.[505] By this time, however, the church itself was in pressing need of repair, and again the burial ground, although described by churchwardens as 'too confined and nearly filled up', had to be treated as secondary.[506] Divine service had in late-1802 been suspended after parts of the church roof fell down. Repair was felt to be a priority, 'in order that the parishioners may not be any longer without the means of attending Divine worship in their parish church than is absolutely necessary'.[507] The repair amounted, however, to an almost total rebuilding estimated at upwards of ten-thousand pounds.[508] In the absence of funding from Marshall's trustees, or any Parliamentary support, this cost had to be borne by the parish. The issue seems to have upset some: in February 1803, the churchwardens called for a public vestry meeting on the church and burial ground, adding in their notice that '[we] do most earnestly hope for a full attendance in the spirit of conciliation and good temper, as the only means to restore harmony, and mutual understanding'.[509]

The prospect of an expensive rebuilding scheme along with an additional burial ground found little favour with parishioners. One hundred and fifty-one householders are recorded as attending the subsequent public meeting. They voted by 'a great majority' to repair the church as frugally as possible, and only eleven voted to include a burial ground extension.[510] It was not until 1817, when the church had been rebuilt and its burial ground was now so overcrowded as to endanger the health of inhabitants, that an extension was finally secured on a plot of land adjacent to the old (12).[511]

[505] LMA: P92/CTC/085 (17 Feb 1803).
[506] Ibid. (7 Jul 1803).
[507] Ibid. (17 Feb 1803).
[508] Ibid. (17 Feb 1803).
[509] Ibid. (17 Feb 1803).
[510] Ibid. (7 Jul 1803).
[511] This churchyard extension is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Thus, in order to expand and even defend their burial spaces during a period of substantial urban development, vestries at Southwark had first to meet a variety of conditions. Viable land had to be not merely available, physically and legally, but available at a manageable price. Vestries needed to set aside time and money for projects relating to burial provision, and overcrowded churchyards could be neglected in favour of seemingly more pressing issues. The officers whose duty it was to maintain burial spaces had also, in an open vestry, to answer to the concerns and interests of ratepaying inhabitants with whom they might disagree. Lastly, these officers weighed the need for burial space against other requirements of parochial government, including poor provision and schooling, at times finding that the needs of the living quite literally reduced space for the dead.

Even when all these conditions had been met, a final additional burden was imposed by the need for local legislation to expand burial spaces. An Act of Parliament was necessary to expand burial grounds in any case where new provision would be funded by an increase in the parish rates.[512] Thus, St George's vestry, facing overcrowded conditions and with no private benefactors to support them, petitioned the House of Commons for a Parliamentary bill to extend its medieval churchyard in 1816 (13). Although vestry minutes for St George are not extant for this period, it is possible to follow this bill on its turbulent journey through the Commons' procedure for local legislation. The first petition was presented to the House in March 1816 by 'several inhabitants' of the parish, relating

> That the Vault under the Church, and the Churchyard and Burial Ground belonging to the said parish, owing to the increase of the population are full, or very nearly so, and insufficient for the decent interment of persons dying within the said parish. (…) The vestry of the said parish have agreed that the said Churchyard ought to be enlarged.[513]

[512] *Standing Orders of the House of Commons Relating to Private Bills and Other Matters* (London, 1814), p.5.
[513] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.71 (London, 1816), p.186 (13 Mar 1816).

This was not, in fact, a petition for a churchyard extension, but a 'petition for leave to present a petition' for a churchyard extension.[514] The Commons' standing orders for private bills dictated that all petitions 'be presented within fourteen days after the first Friday in every Session of Parliament'.[515] St George's vestry explained that they had missed the deadline, having been 'unacquainted with the extent of the grievance (…) until the time limited by the House for receiving petitions had elapsed'.[516] The extension had, however, to be carried out quickly. Several plots of land 'very eligible' for the project were 'recently let on building leases', and the petitioners pleaded that 'if any delay takes place in procuring an Act [this] will greatly enhance the expense which they will be put to in such purchase'.[517]

This petition to present a petition was considered by a Commons' committee headed by Charles Calvert, brewer and M.P. for Southwark. Two days later, Calvert's committee reported to the House that they had considered the application, and leave was given for the churchyard petition itself to be read. Thus, a second petition was presented 'containing the same allegations as the former petition', and it was duly ordered that this second petition 'be referred to a committee'.[518] The new committee, headed again by Calvert, reported to the House twice over the following week, and each report was ordered 'to lie upon the table'.[519] The title given to the second of these reports captures the convoluted nature of the whole process: 'Report from the Committee on the re-Committed Report from the Committee on the Petition of the there-undersigned Inhabitants'.[520] The main obstacle was now that more of the Commons' standing orders for burial ground extensions 'had not been complied with' by the vestry at St George.[521] Bills for

[514] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.71, p.186.
[515] *Standing Orders*, p.5.
[516] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.71, p.186.
[517] Ibid., p.186.
[518] Ibid., p.201.
[519] Ibid., p.210; p.230.
[520] Ibid., p.230.
[521] Ibid., p.230.

burial ground extensions were subject to the same orders as were those relating to county rates and prisons. These included that notices of petitions for bills must

> be inserted three times in the months of August and September, or either of them, immediately preceding the Session of Parliament in which such Application is intended to be made, in some one and the same Newspaper of the County (…) and that such notices be affixed to the door of the Sessions House [for the county].[522]

At the fifth sitting in which this petition was debated, the House ruled that St George's vestry must comply with these standing orders. Calvert's committee were required to monitor the vestry's progress in the matter; only after the publication of notices could a bill be approved.[523] Two months and four sittings later, Calvert finally reported that 'the standing orders had been complied with', and a bill to extend the churchyard was drawn up in June 1816.[524]

While the complexity of this process was worsened for St George by the hastiness with which their petition was prepared, these detailed standing orders and time-consuming procedures applied to every local bill in this period. Sheila Lambert summarises that 'it was with these bills that the time of parliament was unnecessarily taken up', and 'it is for local bills that the immensely complicated precautions embodied in the nineteenth-century standing orders had to be invented'.[525] The process could also prove costly for a parish, incurring charges for officers and servants of the House of Commons as well as local attorneys and clerks, with little guarantee of success. Before Christ Church had even drafted its churchyard petition of 1817, the vestry resolved that 'all expenses of preparing the said bill (…) be paid by the churchwardens for the time being out of the church rate'.[526] These additional financial burdens must have been unwelcome for many parishes in the early-nineteenth century: as Webb and Webb have

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[522] *Standing Orders*, pp.25-26.
[523] *Journal of the House of Commons*, V.71, p.234.
[524] Ibid. Sittings to discuss the petition took place on 25 March (p.240), 9 April (p.282) and 13 May (p.362). Calvert reported that the Orders had been complied with at the May sitting (p.362); the Bill was drawn up on 10 June 1816 (p.440).
[525] Sheila Lambert, *Bills and Acts: Legislative Procedure in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1971; repr. Cambridge, 2011), p.150.
[526] LMA: P92/CTC/085 (8 May 1816).

observed, inhabitants of parishes across the country were already being squeezed by steeply rising parish rates and taxes.[527] In the weeks before applying for their churchyard extension, parishioners of St George had joined several others in petitioning Parliament for an end to the property tax, expected to decline in 1815 with 'the long desired return of peace'.[528] The petitioners argued that they 'had endeavoured to bear with fortitude the severe pressure' of the cost of war, but objected to the tax's continuation and complained that it penalised the parish's middling classes in particular, whose tenuous incomes relied on 'the exertions of mind and body' as opposed to permanent property.[529]

Parliament, for its part, evidently agreed that the process of petitioning for a churchyard extension was too cumbersome. Thus far, virtually all of its activity relating to burial provision had been permissive: only two of fifty-seven burial ground petitions presented between 1696 and 1816 had failed.[530] The frequency with which Parliament was forced to deal with these requests was, moreover, rapidly increasing, with around three-quarters of those petitions being lodged only after 1780 (see Table of Petitions, Appendix). In 1816, the first 'Burial Ground Act' was accordingly passed.[531] The Act enabled ecclesiastical authorities and vestries to alienate lands for churchyard extensions without application to Parliament, provided the ground was available, that it was under one acre, and the consent of the relevant Bishop and other parties be gained in advance. The Act also made provisions such that churchyards could not be reclaimed by private landowners – as had occurred with Cross Bones in 1802 – after being used for interments more than twenty years, a clause which certainly would have aided parishes in their efforts to defend existing space.

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[527] Webb and Webb, *The Parish and the County*, p.152.
[528] *Journal of the House of Commons*, V.71, p.126.
[529] Ibid., p.126.
[530] Julian Hoppit (ed.), *Failed Legislation, 1660-1800* (London, 1997), p.552; p.548. Failed petitions were those of Covent Garden (Commons' Journal V.52, p.343) and Marylebone burial ground (Commons' Journal V.52, p.144), both presented in 1797. For a full list of petitions see Table of Petitions, Appendix.
[531] 'Burial Ground Act' (2 Jul 1816), Ch.141, 56 Geo III.

Petitions continued, nonetheless, to pour in, including from St Saviour in 1823. By the 1820s, the growing parishes of St George and Christ Church had secured some additional burial space, but suitable land at St Saviour remained severely restricted. Plans of the parish's burial grounds made by surveyor George Gwilt in 1821 show the effects of decades of cumulative ground-raisings, many of them not recorded in vestry minutes. The situation was, by now, particularly bad at St Saviour's churchyard. Gwilt noted on his plan that at its entrance from Church Street to the west, 'the burial ground is raised 4 feet above the level of the adjoining Street'. To the south it was '3 feet above the adjoining pathway' and almost two feet above the paving on the east.

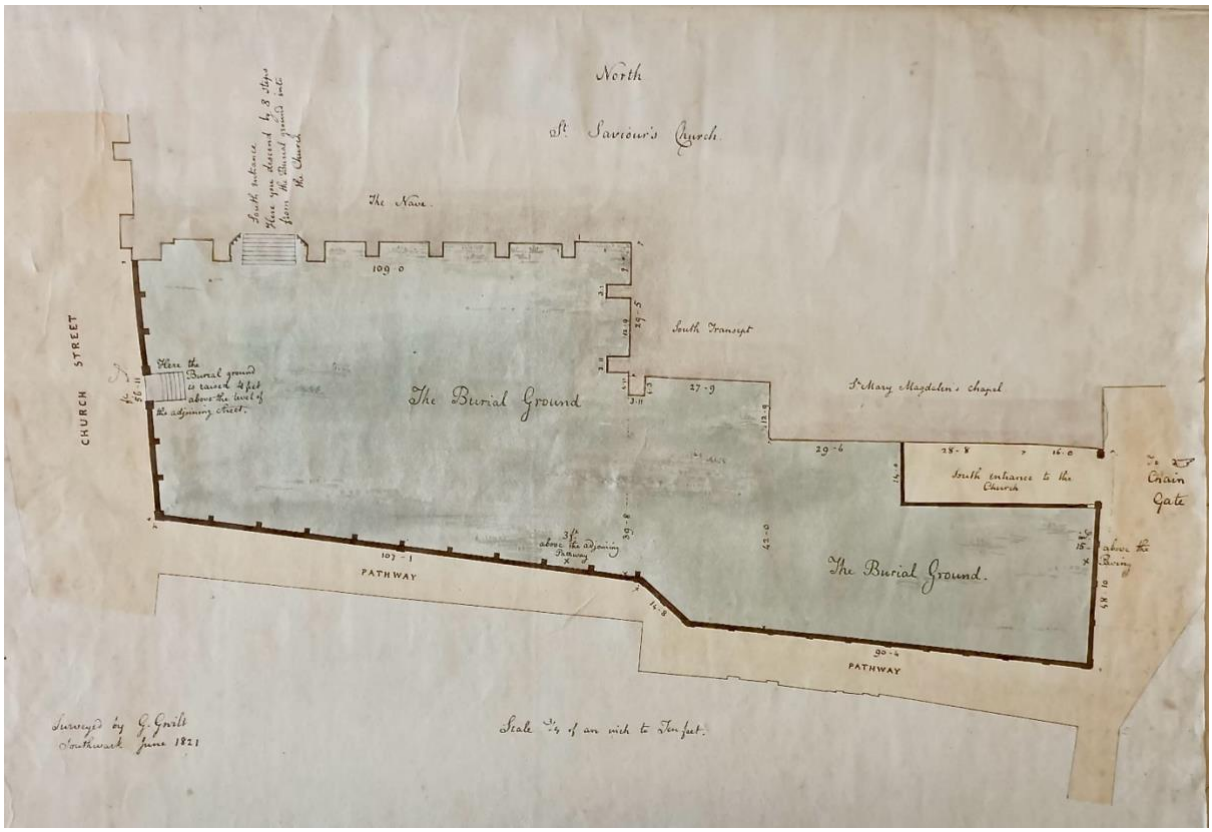


Fig. 7. Plan of St Saviour's Burial Ground, by surveyor George Gwilt (1821).

The need of the parish to accommodate growing numbers of inhabitants had also led to increased use of space surrounding these crowded churchyards. The College Yard burial ground

was by 1821 surrounded on all sides by dwelling-houses for the poor, most of them newly constructed or rebuilt in 1820 (14). The reconstructed buildings, Gwilt notes, had been raised 'six feet higher' than their predecessors, likely due to previous ground raisings or in preparation for the future. The health of inhabitants crowded around these burial grounds was, vestry minutes suggest, probably a concern, along with the indecency of crowded graves: over-use of the church vault had in 1793 sparked concerns about disease amongst church and funeral attendees.[532] Provisions of the 1816 Burial Act were insufficient in St Saviour's case, whose grounds were surrounded on all sides by businesses and residential houses, and thus unsuitable for extensions. College Yard, for example, had become slowly crowded by warehouses and stables of the Anchor Brewery.

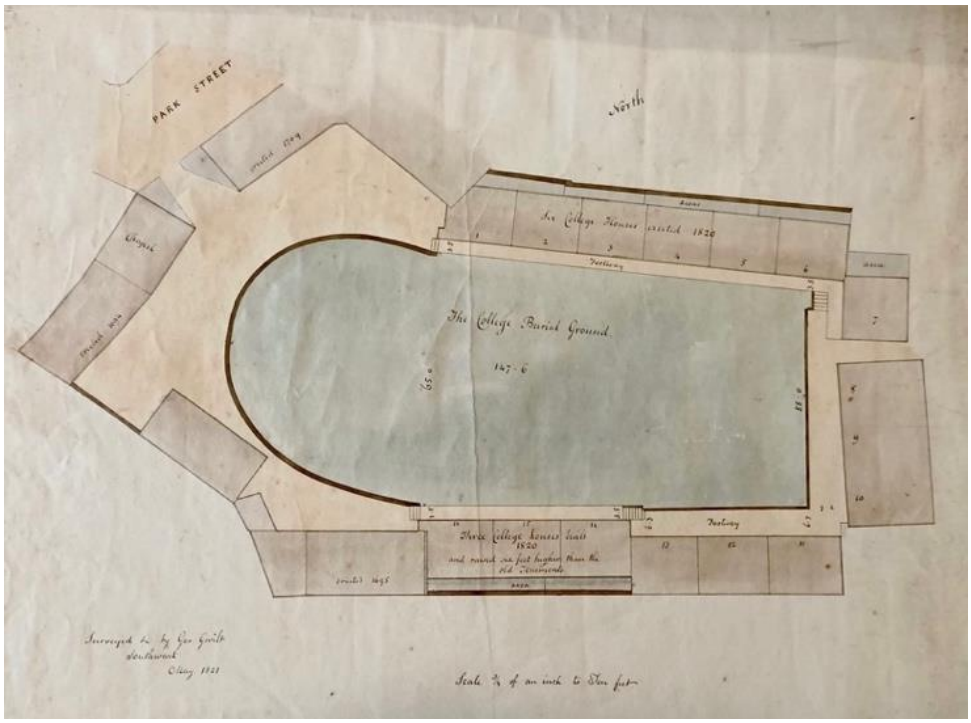


Fig. 8. Plan of the College Yard Burial Ground, by surveyor George Gwilt (1821).

[532] This event is discussed in Chapter Six.

Evidently, St Saviour's vestry was pressed for space, but any proposed solution needed to accommodate the living as well as the dead. The burial ground petition drawn up by parishioners in 1823 displays a deep consciousness of this problem, and a clear desire to marry improvements to burial provision with improvements to the parish in general. The vestry outlined a proposal to remove a handful of 'ruinous buildings and stables' situated between the church and Thames, ground which could, they proposed, be repurposed 'for depositing and working stone and other materials' during the rebuilding of London Bridge the following year.[533] Once the bridge was complete, this land 'might be made an open quay (…) for the purpose of landing goods and merchandize upon the open wharf', and a large patch spanning 'one hundred feet from the church might be reserved for a burial ground'.[534] Overall, the plan would remove 'inconvenient and dangerous buildings' from the Thames-side, increase the parish's burial space and 'lay open to public view' its church: 'a cathedral-like monument of antiquity' and 'a highly ornamental and interesting feature of magnificent building' which would 'add to the general improvement of the district'.[535] The petition was accepted and incorporated into the London Bridge Act as a series of amendments, but no new burial ground seems ever to have materialised. The bridge itself was not rebuilt until 1831; neither the parish's vestry minutes nor any antiquarian accounts describe a new churchyard as appearing in the years following. In the meantime, the vestry of St Saviour made more efficient use of what burial space it had in a variety of ways: banning headstones at the churchyard and College Yard in 1823; removing skeletons to the parish bone-house to make space for more interments; and, along with Christ Church, regulating intra-church burials on the grounds of public safety.[536]

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[533] *Journal of the House of Commons,* V.78 (London, 1823), p.224 (18 Apr 1823).
[534] Ibid., p.224.
[535] Ibid., p.224.
[536] 'St Saviour's Vestry Minutes, Standing Orders, 1755-1835', LMA: P92/SAV/2167 (18 Mar 1800, 10 Jul 1823, 12 Jan 1826).

In the mid-nineteenth century, some of the burial grounds discussed in this chapter were publicly criticised for their overcrowded condition. Walker, for example, described some of Southwark's burial spaces in his *Gatherings from Graveyards* (1839), devoting particular attention to the most populous parish of St Saviour. The primary Anglican burial ground, that of the parish church, was 'very full', and Walker relates that in the Great Vault underneath this church 'the coffins are piled one upon another; some, which contain branches of the same family, all chained together'.[537] The smell in these vaults he describes as 'offensive', and other burial grounds in the parish were no better, being 'surcharged with the dead' and presenting 'a very repulsive aspect'.[538] In September 1849, news of an event in the parish made its way into popular London magazine *Punch*. 'It is written in the Times', the article related, 'that at a vestry meeting of St Saviour's, Southwark, there was passed a deliberate resolution to disobey an order of the Board of Health'.[539] The order in question was one for the closure of 'a certain grave-yard in that district, called the Cross-Bones burial ground', on the premise that its overcrowded condition was surely contributing to the cholera epidemic then devastating the country.[540] The vestry and parishioners had resisted a public health policy intended to save themselves and others: 'perhaps some future historian', the writer continued, 'will relate how the name of St. Saviour's was given to this parish by popular irony during the epidemic of 1849, and will cite in support of his conjecture the astounding fact above recorded.'[541]

Such criticisms have been interpreted by historians as evidence of a popular disregard for the condition of burial grounds in this period, and for the health risks surrounding them.[542] From

[537] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp.177-179.
[538] Ibid., p.179.
[539] 'The Black Flag of St. Saviour's', *Punch* (London, Sept. 22, 1849), p.3.
[540] Ibid., p.3.
[541] Ibid., p.3.
[542] See, for example, Hoglund, 'Hidden Agendas', p.20, which quotes Walker on St Saviour. See also Mihailovic, 'The Dead', p.273, which quotes a letter to The Times describing Christ Church churchyard as overcrowded: 'News', *The Times* (London, 1 Sept 1849), p.3.

the perspective of Southwark's vestries during the long-eighteenth century, however, it is relatively easy to see how these circumstances could have arisen. The paralysing complexity of burial management had at times forced vestries to tolerate undesirable conditions. Parishioners co-opted into positions of authority, with little formal training and burdensome duties, were constrained in their activities by their relationships with other inhabitants, the law, the parish's finances, legislative procedure, and so on. Adaptations to burial provision were rarely straightforward and rarely merely 'practical': they reflected political decisions and negotiations on the part of office-holders, the wider vestry and, increasingly, a proportion of inhabitants. Throughout these decision-making processes, the same concerns cropped up repeatedly. Parishioners worried about ensuring 'decency' for the dead and preserving burial grounds 'sacred to the remains of the departed'; simultaneously, these needs had to be negotiated with those of the living, including financial, spiritual, and physical wellbeing, and the drive for urban improvement.

This picture of struggle and adaptation has two important implications. Firstly, from the perspective of the eighteenth century, Parliament's movements to regulate burial practice in later periods appear permissive rather than disruptive. Southwark's case is, of course, not intended to be archetypal in its details: burial provision was highly peculiar to localities and, as this chapter shows, arrangements could differ enormously even between parishes. Nonetheless, the *structure* of burial provision was not peculiar to localities, and it was this structure which lent itself to problems. Between 1817 and 1830, a further thirty petitions were presented to the House of Commons requesting expansions to burial provision in English parishes.[543] The Act of 1816 had not gone far enough: a few vestries, in collaboration with their ministers, even applied for powers to ban or restrict interments in overcrowded grounds, directly anticipating

[543] See Table of Petitions, Appendix.

the extended legislation of the 1850s.[544] Each of these petitions, we can reasonably infer, had its own turbulent background and diverse motivations which would be obscured, as they were at Southwark, by the sterile language of 'necessity' and 'expediency' in resultant statute.

Although vestries faced increasing problems in the management of their burial provision, equally striking is their obvious capacity to find solutions. On the whole, vestries were not apathetic about burial ground overcrowding, and nor were they entirely incapacitated by the logistical problems that stood in their way. Their efforts to improve burial provision, and to adapt to changing practical circumstances, accord with the findings of more recent histories of English local government. Joanna Innes, for example, writes of the 'fossilised structures' of London metropolitan government in this period: 'these were evolving structures' and 'inhabitants strove to ensure that [they] served their purposes'.[545] In Southwark, the vestry itself had also remained a vital political setting for decision-making processes surrounding burial. Even in the crowded and urbanised parish of St Saviour, where we might expect to find a 'general ambience' of anonymity and a relatively disengaged vestry by the nineteenth century, there instead existed an invigorated interest in the improvement of burial spaces, and an active involvement of parish officers in population welfare.[546] The activity and importance of vestries in regulating burial will remain a persistent theme throughout this thesis, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Secondly, sanitation concerns appear infrequently at local level during the long-eighteenth century, but they do appear at the beginning and end of this period. The relationship between corpses and disease was, it seems, a continued concern finding expression in ways very different

[544] There are two such petitions listed in the Appendix: St George's Hanover Square (7 Mar 1785) and Liverpool Church (12 Feb 1823). See also the case of St Margaret's in Westminster, discussed on p.245.
[545] Joanna Innes, 'Managing the Metropolis: London's Social Problems and Their Control, c.1660-1830', in Peter Clark and Raymond Gillespie (eds.), *Two Capitals: London and Dublin, 1500-1840* (Oxford, 2001), p.65.
[546] Ibid., p.56.

to the mid-nineteenth century. It did not necessarily involve a change in burial locations, nor even new burial spaces, but was handled with minor adaptations to, for instance, vault provision. Nor was it the catastrophic issue requiring centralised 'reform' that it appeared to be in later decades. The infrequency of explicit complaints about disease risk, escalating as graveyards became more overcrowded, suggests that this was a threat handled as it happened, quietly and in effect reflexively.

The long-term picture of sanitary regulation built up thus far echoes findings elsewhere in the history of British 'public health'. Historians have commented that eighteenth-century Britain lacked a distinctive 'public health movement': medical authorities were reluctant to 'write policy', and central state control in this regard was 'virtually non-existent'.[547] Population health measures were instead the business of local authorities, each of which, Christopher Hamlin summarises, 'conducted these [affairs] with its own traditions, institutions, and ineptitude'.[548] Burial sanitation was, too, handled by a local administrative system not designed for, and certainly not dedicated to, this purpose. The disease risk posed by the dead was just one of many considerations in the management of burial, and, in turn, burial provision was one of numerous responsibilities of local authorities. Nonetheless, and however slight it may appear amidst these various responsibilities, there clearly existed an impetus to protect populations from this risk. This impetus cannot have been owed to any formal administrative system of burial regulation. It had necessarily emerged instead from the sensibilities of parish authorities and inhabitants. Exactly why they were concerned, and why they settled upon the solutions that they did, are the main subjects of subsequent chapters.

[547] Christopher Hamlin, 'State Medicine in Great Britain', in Dorothy Porter (ed.), *The History of Public Health and the Modern State* (Atlanta, 2006), p.134.
[548] Ibid., p.134.

Chapter Four

'Infection' concerns at St Thomas' Parish and Hospital, 1709

In February 1709, the treasurer of St Thomas' Hospital relayed a message to its governors, stating 'that the burying ground belonging to this hospital being full and that the parishioners were afraid of an infection in case we continued burying there'.[549] The note continues with a request from parishioners that the hospital extend its burial ground. A patch of land contiguous with the existing ground had been offered up for this purpose by one 'Mr. Norgate', an inhabitant and later parish overseer, this area being considered 'a convenient and proper place' for burials.[550] The assembled governors agreed, ordering that the treasurer should prepare it for interments, but ruling that 'whether the said ground shall be made a burying place is referred to the consideration of another committee'.[551] When, in May 1709, the new ground had not yet been approved for burials, the parish vestry elected to send its churchwardens to 'treat with the governors of St Thomas hospital about taking that piece of ground next to Mr Norgate's garden to bury in'.[552] Still, no progress was made. The subject of the burial ground extension disappeared entirely from the governors' meeting minutes and St Thomas' parish vestry minutes until it was raised again in 1733. Construction works finally began in 1739, and the extension was completed in 1740, thirty-one years after it had been requested by parishioners. Over these three decades, no further health complaints surrounding the overcrowded burial ground were recorded in either party's meeting minutes. Just as quickly as they had appeared, these fears seem to have disappeared, not to be revived again until the hospital ground was closed to interments under the 1850s Burial Acts.

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549 'St Thomas's Hospital, Grand Committee Minute Books, 1705-14' LMA: H01/ST/A/006/005 (8 Nov 1709). Accessed via LondonLives.org [21 Feb 2020].
550 Ibid. (8 Nov 1709).
551 Ibid. (8 Nov 1709).
552 LMA: P71/TMS/0213 (25 May 1709).

Chapter Three has demonstrated that health concerns surrounding the dead appeared only intermittently at Southwark during the period under study. They arose suddenly, and seemingly reactively, before disappearing for prolonged periods of time. This chapter uses the case of St Thomas' Hospital burial ground to explain why. It first outlines the circumstances which led to this complaint. This outline establishes the chapter's first argument: burial ground overcrowding was not the main trigger for health concerns at local level in this period. The case of St Thomas' illustrates a pattern witnessed throughout this thesis, and elsewhere in the history of eighteenth-century burial practice, that overcrowded burial spaces were not necessarily regarded as dangerous. While existing deficiencies in burial provision, particularly overcrowding, constituted a necessary backdrop, these conditions were not in themselves the primary catalyst for local anxieties.

Following this, the chapter assesses other possible reasons for the health complaint. It argues that a heightened concern surrounding putrid diseases, and specifically the resurgence of historic plague anxieties driven by contemporary epidemic reports, acted as the principal trigger for these local anxieties. Crucially, these concerns proved transient, dissipating quickly even in the absence of an immediate resolution to the underlying issue of burial provision. The chapter suggests this transience may be due to the unsustainable nature of prolonged local action, as well as the perceived effectiveness of routine burial practices for mitigating disease risk. It thereby lays down two important themes which will recur frequently in subsequent case studies. The first is the capacity of historic disease anxieties surrounding the dead to be revived at local level, in certain periods and under certain circumstances. The second is the capacity of these same anxieties to pass surprisingly quickly, without the need for grand 'reforms', and in this case even with no obvious resolution.

One of the main peculiarities of this brief record is that the hospital burial ground had been overcrowded for decades. This was largely a consequence of its medieval burial arrangements. St Thomas' Hospital had been established in the area in the thirteenth century. Under Edward VI, the hospital and its church were re-founded and St Thomas' Parish was formed on the hospital's land. Between 1690 and 1740, burial provision here was strictly divided: the hospital possessed one very small burial ground to the north of St Thomas' Street, whilst the parish possessed a larger ground to the south, and neither was officially permitted to bury in the other's space.[553]

Whilst most of the burial spaces in the case study parishes – and, indeed, across Britain more widely – experienced their most significant pressures of overcrowding in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, these issues were already serious at the hospital's burial ground in the 1690s. Recent excavations have sized the ancient ground at approximately thirty-two square yards.[554] Isabella Holmes in her 1860 survey of London's burial grounds describes St Thomas' parish churchyard as, by contrast, 'about 787 square yards', more than twenty times the size of the hospital yard.[555] Such a small space for hospital burials was to some extent justifiable. The institution itself was small at this time, accommodating some 250 patients in 1690.[556] 'Incurables' were refused admission and so the mortality rate was relatively low, with some fifteen to twenty deaths taking place here every year, and even fewer buried in the hospital's ground.[557] However,

[553] Frederick Parsons, *History of St Thomas' Hospital,* V.2 (London, 1932) suggests that the Hospital possessed a second small burial ground in the late-seventeenth century and a third by the early-eighteenth century. It is possible that the second ground referred to by Parsons was in actuality an extension of the first. The evidence for the burial ground locations and construction dates identified in this chapter are derived solely from the Court and Committee minutes of the hospital, rather than from secondary sources where there exists disagreement about ground use and ownership.
[554] 'St Thomas' Hospital Cemetery', *Museum of London Archaeology* (2007): https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections/other-collection-databases-and-libraries/centre-human-bioarchaeology/osteological-database/post-medieval-cemeteries/st-thomas-hospital-post-medieval#:~:text=The%20site%20covered%20an%20area,either%20paupers%20or%20epidemic%20graves [May 2023].
[555] Holmes, *London Burial Grounds*, p.310.
[556] Benjamin Golding, *An Historical Account of the Origin and Progress of St Thomas's Hospital* (London, 1835), p.223.
[557] Calculation based on figures for the hospital's mortality rate in the 1720s, at which time between six and seven per cent of patients died annually.

this area had been used for interments for many centuries, and an excess of deaths in any given year could place intolerable pressure on the already-saturated space. Parsons' *History of St Thomas' Hospital* notes two prior instances in which the old burial ground was said to be concerningly overcrowded, in 1601 and again in 1632.[558] Excavations have also unearthed 'a large number of disarticulated remains' – human bones broken apart from disturbance – which were dated to the seventeenth century and are attributable to the continued use of this overcrowded area.[559] This situation was undoubtedly worsened by mass deaths during repeated plague outbreaks, most notably in 1625 and 1665, which had affected Southwark particularly badly. By the late-century, the issue of overcrowding was already quite serious: at a 1697 meeting of the hospital governors, it was recorded that 'the ancient burying place of patients dying in the hospital situate[d] at the backend of this house is so filled with corps as [to be] scarce capable of receiving more'.[560]

This had been a surprisingly difficult problem for the hospital to solve. Firstly, its internal structure meant that burial provision was handled by several parties. At the highest level was the Court of Governors, a self-elected group of the hospital's most senior officials. They met annually with the Grand Committee, a secondary group of around 13 governors established during the seventeenth century to deal with routine work. The Grand Committee, in turn, delegated tasks and responsibilities to the treasurer, who oversaw the majority of the hospital's dealings with dead bodies. At the time of the health complaint, this position was held by Thomas Eyre.[561] The treasurer's jurisdiction over the hospital's dead was significant and continually expanding. Parsons finds that the post was created in the sixteenth century for the purpose of 'surveying the hospital and managing its revenues'.[562] By the turn of the eighteenth

[558] Parsons, *St Thomas' Hospital*, p.127.
[559] MOLA, 'St Thomas' Hospital Cemetery'.
[560] LMA: HO1/ST/A/001/006 (26 Aug 1697).
[561] Ibid. (15 Dec 1708).
[562] Parsons, *St Thomas' Hospital*, p.134.

century, the treasurer was also responsible for overseeing nearly every aspect of disposal provision: managing the hospital's steward and porters who carried out burials, amending and expanding the churchyard and dead house when necessary, disposing of the clothes of dead patients, overseeing dissections, and liaising with the vestry and parishioners of St Thomas' on matters relating to the region's burial grounds. Where problems arose relating to the hospital's dead, these were routinely 'referred to Mr. Trear to see it done'.[563]

Corporate apathy and the periodic re-election of Grand Court and Committee members had presented obstacles to substantial burial improvements. Parsons observes of the hospital in the late-seventeenth century that 'the mass of governors seems always to have been a most docile body of men', and his criticism is certainly supported by their inactivity surrounding burial provision.[564] When, for example, the treasurer reported in 1697 that the hospital's ancient burial place was filled with bodies, the Grand Committee then assembled voted immediately to close the ancient ground and construct a new one nearby.[565] As would be the case again in 1709, nothing happened. On the contrary, the project was abandoned two years later by a new Grand Committee, which resolved that the existing space 'may be continued for a burying ground as formerly and so there is no occasion for another burying place'.[566] In 1702, a further committee of governors decided that the easiest way to handle overcrowding would be to disincentivise interments, rather than increase available space: 'taking notice that the burying place in this hospital is near filled up', they ordered that 'for the future eighteen shillings shall be paid for the burial of every person there'.[567]

[563] LMA: H01/ST/A/006/005 (26 Apr 1721).
[564] Parsons, *St Thomas' Hospital*, p.166.
[565] LMA: HO1/ST/A/001/006 (20 Aug 1697).
[566] Ibid. (7 Sept 1699).
[567] Ibid. (2 Dec 1702).

While inhabitants and parish authorities paid close attention to the hospital's burial provision, their interest was usually territorial. As Chapter Three has observed, disputes surrounding burial arrangements were frequent at St Thomas' because of an otherwise inconsequential bureaucratic detail: the parish and its churchyard technically belonged to the hospital. This attachment of the parish to the hospital meant that the former had little autonomy over its burial provision. Where, ordinarily, a vestry meeting and an 'order' might suffice to amend a parish's burial arrangements, at St Thomas' most changes had to be negotiated with and permitted by the hospital's governors. Simultaneously, parish authorities and inhabitants could, and frequently did, object to the disposal arrangements of the hospital's dead, particularly where these were perceived to encroach on the parish's space. Chapter Three has described some occasions in which disputes of this kind occurred, including in 1705, when the governors surrendered a burial vault to the parish, and 1721, when the hospital encroached on the parish churchyard for want of space. These disputes and their outcomes are recorded in great detail in the hospital's Grand Court and Committee minute books. The parish's vestry minute books, which are generally sparse for this period, also include records of discussions, committees, and deputations of vestrymen sent to the governors to negotiate on these matters. During the longstanding struggle over vault space, for example, the vestry withheld the hospital's access to its alms-houses 'until the governors (…) have given us satisfaction in relation to the vaults under our church'.[568] Evidently, territorial problems surrounding the allocation of burial space were recurrent and considered as serious, and great effort was expended by both parties in pursuit of their resolution. Disease concerns surrounding the *use* of this space were, by contrast, mentioned just once, in a brief protest by an unidentified section of the parish, for no immediately obvious reason and, it seems, swiftly forgotten.

[568] LMA: P71/TMS/0213 (25 Jan 1703).

Treasurer Thomas Eyre had likely learned of local infection fears from informal conversations with parishioners. At the time of his report, he had served as the hospital's treasurer for just under a decade.[569] With the gradual expansion of its remit, the hospital had resolved in 1704 to make his position a residential one.[570] Thus, for five years Eyre had lived in a purpose-built house at St Thomas' Street, in the centre of the parish. He attended the nearby church shared by parishioners and hospital, where he was married in 1704 and was reserved his own family pew.[571] His day-to-day duties included communicating with those parishioners who leased properties from the hospital, organising matters such as the arrangement of their leases and repairs to their homes. His presence in this small, close-knit parish and familiarity with its inhabitants made him a natural intermediary between governors and parishioners. In 1702, for example, it was recorded that 'complaint having been made to the Trear' by an inhabitant about a 'dangerous' wall on the hospital's property, a committee of governors was sent to survey it.[572] Formal delegations of vestrymen, as were sent in 1705 to negotiate on burial vaults with the governors, were not necessary in cases of complaint to the treasurer. He was, rather, the first point of contact from whom formal proceedings might follow.

Eyre's grasp of local affairs, and his manner of reporting other complaints, suggest that these infection fears were not restricted to one or two individuals. Individual complaints were, as previous examples have demonstrated, attributed to individuals; and vestrymen were distinguished in Eyre's reports from 'the parishioners', with the latter referring quite literally to inhabitants of the parish at large. The initial complaints are likely to have originated from residents of properties surrounding the hospital's burial ground. Although it has not been possible to identify these individuals, they were supported in their efforts by the parish's small

[569] Eyre was elected as treasurer in March 1699. LMA: HO1/ST/A/001/006 (17 Mar 1699).
[570] Ibid. (7 Apr 1704).
[571] LMA: HO1/ST/A/001/006 (7 Apr 1704); 'St Thomas, Southwark, Composite Register: Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1691-1715', LMA: X090/035 [Accessed via ancestry.co.uk, Nov 2024].
[572] LMA: HO1/ST/A/001/006 (10 Mar 1702).

select vestry of ten higher-status ratepayers. These figures included William Waterman, 'gentleman' and long-serving officer whose later efforts to defend the parish's burial space have been described in Chapter Three. Alongside him were two churchwardens, two overseers of the poor, two scavengers, and four auditors of the parish accounts, all of varying occupations.[573] Vestry records suggest that these positions were continually rotated been the same several men: 'gentleman' John Pantall, for example, served in all four offices over the course of a decade.[574] As Chapter Three has observed, this was an intimate vestry of long-term parish residents, which took very seriously its duties of representation and welfare support for inhabitants at large.

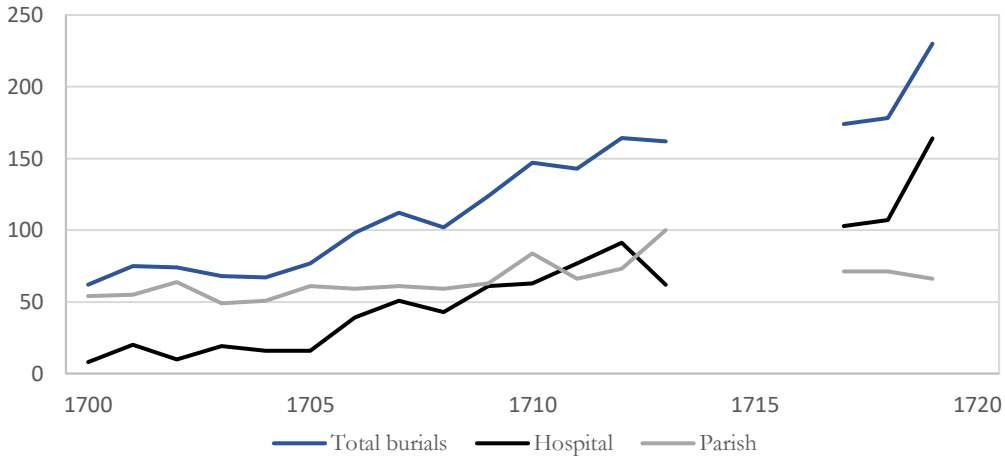
For parishioners and vestry, the immediate cause for widespread concern had been a sudden, steep increase in the number of interments at the hospital's burial ground. Since parish and hospital shared a church, they also shared a minister and sexton, and hospital burials were therefore recorded in the parish's registers. Between 1700 and 1705, the minister of St Thomas' recorded an average of seventy burials a year; of these, an average of fifteen were marked as hospital interments.[575] Between 1706 and 1709, this number increased sharply. Total burials climbed to 98 in 1706, and continued rising to some 130 for the year 1709.[576] This near-doubling of deaths was driven entirely by the hospital, whose average annual burials had increased suddenly from fifteen to fifty, with a peak of more than sixty in 1709. To put these figures into perspective, annual burial totals at hospital and parish had in 1709 surpassed 120 for the first time since the last plague outbreak of 1665-6.[577] Moreover, around half of these dead bodies were being interred in a small, already-crowded burial ground. Health concerns appear, on this occasion, as an immediate reaction to excess deaths and resultant burial ground overcrowding.

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573 LMA: P71/TMS/0213.
574 Ibid.
575 'St Thomas, Southwark, Composite Register: Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1691-1731', LMA: X090/035. Accessed via *ancestry.co.uk* [Jun 2023].
576 Ibid.
577 Thomas Birch (ed.), John Graunt, *A Collection of the Yearly Bills of Mortality* (London, 1759), pp.69-161. Annual burials for the parish in 1665-6 stood at 475. From 1666 to 1709 they remained at a consistent average of 73, with the exception of 1678-79 when they spiked to 105.

This was not, however, the whole picture. 'Infection' fears abated at St Thomas' after 1709, while burial ground overcrowding worsened. Although the parish's burial registers are incomplete for the years 1714-16 and 1720, it is clear from the available evidence that hospital burials had continued to increase while parish interments remained consistent.[578] It was in 1721, shortly after the record peak in burials displayed below, that the hospital's governors began to inter their dead in the parish churchyard, to the great irritation of its vestry. During this period of relative local crisis surrounding burial spaces, and during the preceding decade of worsening overcrowding, infection concerns were not mentioned again in the correspondence of hospital and parish. Overcrowding was, clearly, a necessary condition for the expression of health concerns surrounding burial spaces, but it was not the main trigger.

Fig. 9. Annual burial totals in St Thomas' parish registers, 1700-1719



This observation helps to make sense of the findings of other historians of eighteenth-century burial, as well as the patterns described in Chapter Three of this thesis. With regard to Southwark, it has been noted that health concerns surrounding burial spaces were more

[578] LMA: X090/035.

frequently expressed as more burial grounds became overcrowded. Yet, an overcrowded burial ground was not *necessarily* described as dangerous: no such concerns seem to have attended, for example, the extension at Christ Church in 1739, where the dead were said to be crowded, uncovered, in damp graves as high as the church walls. Nor did they attend the burial ground raisings at St Saviour and St George in the 1790s, the defence of Cross Bones against its encroachment by a landowner, or the majority of Southwark's Parliamentary petitions for increased burial provision. Laqueur, in defence of his theory of a nineteenth-century 'paradigm shift' in attitudes toward the dead, likewise points out that 'churches and churchyards had always been crowded', but they had not always been regarded as dangerous.[579] Harding observes of seventeenth-century London parishes that the dead were conceived in terms 'of quantity, not quality'; that is to say, she found that excess deaths were considered as a practical issue rather than a health concern.[580] This absence of evidence of health concerns, in spite of overcrowding, has generally been deployed as proof that health concerns did not exist at local level in this period; that they were the reserve of medical authorities and 'reformers'.[581] Chapter Three has made clear that they did exist, in Southwark at least. They were simply infrequent because something in *addition* to overcrowding had brought these health concerns into focus, on some occasions and not on others.

It is helpful to make sense of this event by drawing parallels with similar, if much further-reaching, 'popular panics' observed in eighteenth-century English urban communities. The notion of 'popular panic' has been used by historians to describe periods of widespread, heightened anxiety surrounding social problems which were otherwise viewed as relatively benign. Recent studies have, for example, examined the 'moral panics' attending crime,

[579] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.223.
[580] Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead', p.59.
[581] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.223.

gambling, and the urban poor, in London in particular during the eighteenth century.[582] During an 'extended period of panic' surrounding property crime in the 1780s, Peter King summarises, propertied urban inhabitants levelled their attention at 'the vagrant banditti'.[583] This period of heightened anxiety 'fed into, and stimulated, a broader movement for the reformation of the manners of the poor', which reached its height in the late-1780s.[584] Similar processes have been identified in respect of disease concerns. A large literature has, for example, examined waves of urban 'jail fever panic' during the eighteenth century in Britain.[585] Most pertinent for this chapter, the first decades of this century witnessed repeated, usually small-scale, panics surrounding plague: Kevin Siena summarises that newspaper reports about overseas outbreaks fuelled the revival of plague anxieties 'from time to time' long after the disease had abated in England.[586] Paul Slack has observed that the Marseilles epidemic of 1720-22, mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis, reinstated plague as a major public concern in England until fears abated in 1722.[587] These varied periods of 'panic', whether surrounding morality or disease, share similar characteristics. They are easily identified in urban communities with a high proportion of literate 'bourgeois' inhabitants, and a developed print culture.[588] Their outbreak is generally attributed to print media, and particularly newspaper reports. Lastly, as King describes in his six-stage 'pattern' of moral panics, 'after a couple of months or so the panic

[582] For example, David Lemmings and Claire Walker (eds.), *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2009); Richard Ward, 'Print Culture, Moral Panic and the Administration of the Law: The London Crime Wave of 1744', *Crime, Historie and Sociétés*, V.16 No.1 (2012), pp.5-24.
[583] Peter King, *Crime and the Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice From the Margins* (Cambridge, 2006), p.252.
[584] Ibid., p.252.
[585] Although Siena has coined this phrase, several historians of prison reform have pointed out "panic" periods in the eighteenth century. Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, pp.96-154; see also Philippa Hardman, 'Fear of Fever and the Limits of Enlightenment: Selling Prison Reform in Late-eighteenth Century Gloucestershire', *Cultural and Social History*, V.10, No.4 (2013), pp.511-531.
[586] Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, p.2.
[587] Paul Slack, 'The End of Plague' in *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1990).
[588] John Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750* (Oxford, 2001), p.22; Robert Shoemaker, 'Worrying about Crime: Experience, Moral Panics and Public Opinion in London, 1660-1800', *Past & Present*, No.234 (2017), pp.99-100.

begins to die away', 'as the action of the authorities calms initial fears, the media grows tired of the story and readers lose interest'.[589]

If a similar period of 'panic' had occurred at St Thomas' in 1709, Eyre's language helps us to understand why. His use of the word 'infection' is particularly suggestive. As Chapter One has demonstrated, putrefaction remained the conceptual framework for understandings of the dead and disease throughout the long-eighteenth century. Contemporary writers derived their arguments from accounts of plague, the foremost 'putrid disease' of this period. The circulation of information about plague and its relationship with dead bodies transcended narrow medical contexts in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century English society. During the 1690s and early 1700s, reports were frequently circulated in London newspapers of dangerous such 'infections' across Europe, the east and the Americas. In March 1691, for instance, *The London Gazette* reported on 'an infection' in Italy which had led to the quarantining of several Cardinals at Rome.[590] The following year, readers were reassured that 'the infection that lately broke out in Hungary and Dalmatia' had 'quite ceased'.[591] Such accounts continued into the early-eighteenth century as contagious disease appeared in Lisbon in 1702 'on board the French Galleys and Men of War there', *The London Post* noting that 'the Portuguese will not suffer the seamen to come a-shoar, for fear of an infection'.[592] Many of these 'infections' were in fact plague and its perceived forebearer, epidemic fever. In 1697, for instance, it was reported that in Constantinople and Adrianople 'the plague sweeps away an abundance of men', and 'many of the Christians that dwelt here, are removed to avoid the infection'.[593] In 1704, *The London*

[589] Peter King, 'Moral Panics and Violent Street Crime, 1750-2000: A Comparative Perspective', in Godfrey, Emsley and Dunstall (eds.), *Comparative Histories of Crime* (Cullompton, 2003), p.55.
[590] 'News', *The London Gazette*, Is.2644 (London, 16 Mar 1691), p.1.
[591] 'News', *The London Gazette*, Is.2739 (London, 11 Feb 1692), p.2.
[592] 'News', *The London Post, with Intelligence Foreign and Domestick*, Is.466 (London, 24 Aug 1702), p.2.
[593] 'News', *The Flying Post, or the Post-Master*, Is.398 (London, 30 Nov 1697), p.5.

Post reported on 'the infection (or rather malignant fever) said to rage amongst the soldiers' in the Spanish city of Badajoz.[594]

It was, however, the destructive Marseilles plague epidemic that Slack and others have argued caused the greatest resurgence of panic in England since 1665. If the nature, scale and proximity of epidemics overseas correlated with the extent of concern in England, the next most worrying event – although one which has received comparably little attention – must have been a plague outbreak in the Baltic region which reached its heights between 1708 and 1713. This epidemic has come to be considered one of 'the three great outbreaks of plague in Europe in the eighteenth century', the third being at Moscow in 1770.[595] Plague's presence in Poland, Prussia and eventually Germany was recorded and commented upon in London newspapers regularly, particularly as the situation escalated in 1709. One commentator, writing in October 1709, introduced the subject as that which now 'fills all of Europe at this time with trembling and terror, I mean, the plague.'[596] The earliest news in London publications about this epidemic discussed its appearance in Poland in 1707 and 1708, shortly before infection concerns were raised at St Thomas' burial ground. In November of 1707, London newspaper *The Daily Courant* reprinted reports from Leiden that 'the plague continues to rage in and about Kracow', with Dutch authorities having 'interdicted all manner of commerce with Poland' to avoid contagion.[597] The plague continued here throughout 1708, and London newspapers continued to comment. A matter of weeks before the discussion of 'infection' at St Thomas', the plague abated in Krakow and re-appeared at Warsaw with vigour. *The London Gazette* reported in

[594] 'News', *The London Post, with Intelligence Foreign and Domestick*, Is.725 (London, 22 Mar 1704), p.4.
[595] Paul Slack, 'Perceptions of Plague in Eighteenth-Century Europe', *Economic History Review*, V.75, No.1 (2022), p.138.
[596] 'News', *Review of the State of the British Nation*, Is.88 (London, 27 Oct 1709), p.1.
[597] 'News', *The Daily Courant*, Is.1806 (London, 28 Nov 1707), p.1.

November 1708 that here 'the infection began again with as great violence as the first, and most of [the victims] died suddenly'.[598]

It is quite conceivable that parishioners and vestry of St Thomas' were particularly attuned to early reports of a potentially large-scale plague in the Baltic region. Southwark was not a rural area; St Thomas' was sandwiched between two of the region's largest and most populous parishes, St Saviour and St Olave. These three parishes lined the South bank of the River Thames, immediately opposite the port of London. Were plague to be imported from northern Europe, it would likely arrive at the capital's port and nearby populous towns first. Writers spoke quite frequently of the risk of plague arriving in England on ships, particularly as the epidemic spread to port cities such as Danzig. Daniel Defoe, for example, recollected in his London pamphlet *Review of the State of the Nation* that plague had in the seventeenth century been imported to Scotland by ships arriving from Danzig, the very same city affected in 1709.[599] 'On this Account', he writes of the current epidemic, 'are our fears and cautions, as to ships coming from the Baltic, doubly justify'd; and indeed we cannot be too careful in such a case'.[600]

Heightened awareness of the threat of plague brought dead bodies into renewed focus. In numerous London publications across this period, reports of mass deaths even outside epidemics were often attended with comments about the risk of an 'infection'. This was the case particularly in context of war. In 1705, reports were circulated from Italy of 'great numbers of dead bodies who were killed in the late action near the Adda'.[601] These unburied bodies emitted a 'stench' which, according to a report in the *London Gazette*, was considered 'likely to occasion an infection' in the French army stationed nearby.[602] In 1707, a similar report was

[598] 'News', *The London Gazette*, Is.4490 (London, 18 Nov 1708), p.2.
[599] E.g. 'News', *Review of the State of the British Nation*, Is.88 (London, 27 Oct 1709), pp.1-3.
[600] Ibid., p.2.
[601] 'News', *The London Gazette*, Is.4156 (London, 6 Sept 1705), p.1.
[602] Ibid., p.1.

circulated from Italy that 'the enemy having, out of design or idleness, neglected to bury several of their officers and men that were kill'd (…), the stench of their dead bodies bred an infection that carried off most of the sick and wounded they left behind them in their hospital'.[603] Thomas Colton, Minister of York in 1706, discussed this problem in a sermon on Queen Anne's 'National Day of Thanksgiving' for military successes. Colton gave thanks that 'a gracious God should appoint the seat of war so far from us', since 'our streets have not run down with human gore, nor our wholesome air been corrupted, with the stench of dead carcasses'.[604] The risks of disease generation from exposure to rotting corpses were also understood widely enough to justify the advertisement of medical remedies for their mitigation. Throughout the 1690s and early 1700s, there appeared repeated advertisements in London newspapers for a medical remedy named 'Warham's Apoplectick Balsam', which purported to remove

> …all infection of the small-pox, spotted-fever and plague, all ill and nauseous smells from either sick or dead persons; all thick and unwholesome air is prevented and taken away, by only anointing the nostrils with this balsam.[605]

Thus, many English commentators attributed the 'violence' of the Baltic epidemic to disposal practices of the already-dead, who were thought to both transmit and generate the infection. In August 1708, London newspaper *The Courant* related news from Poland that

> 30 or 40 Men have died of [plague] in a Day; those who have been eploy'd to carry them to the Grave, have been overcome by the Stench and fallen down dead in the Streets, where their Bodies having lain unburied some Days, have been gnaw'd by the Dogs.[606]

Importantly, it was specifically the 'stench' of unburied corpses which threatened those nearby. Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester in the mid-seventeenth century, was amongst those whose accounts of plague were re-circulated in the early-eighteenth century and during the Baltic epidemic. Sprat's poem 'The Plague of Athens' (1659) re-interpreted the destructive epidemic

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[603] 'News', *The Daily Courant,* Is.1611 (London, 14 Apr 1707), p.1.
[604] Thomas Colton, *A Sermon Preached in the City of York, December 31st, 1706* (London, 1707), p.14.
[605] 'Advertisements', *The Flying Post, or the Post-Master,* Is.448 (London, 26 Mar 1698), p.2.; 'Advertisements and Notices', *The London Post*, Is.286 (London, 2-4 Apr 1701), p.2.; 'Advertisements', *The Post-Man* (London, 24-27 May 1704), p.2.
[606] 'News', *The Daily Courant*, Is.2038 (London, 30 Aug 1708), p.1.

which had occurred in Greece around 450BCE, first recorded by ancient historian Thucydides.[607] Six new editions of the poem were released in the half-century following its publication, the latest of these being printed and sold at Blackfriars' Road in Southwark in 1709.[608] 'The Plague' is a lengthy poem with thirty-one verses describing, firstly, the origins of 'the infection' and its symptoms and journey through the body.[609] Infection entered via the breath and conquered the body's 'Capitol', the head, before spreading into the breast, stomach and bowels where 'noisome smells from thence did come, as if the stomach were a tomb'.[610] Verses eighteen to twenty-three describe the process of death and the spread of infection through 'mountains of bones and carcasses' at Athens.[611] The final lines of verse nineteen are particularly pertinent for this discussion:

> Here others poyson'd by the scent
> Which from corrupted bodies went
> Quickly returned the death they did receive,
> And death to others give;
> Themselves now dead the air pollute the more,
> From which they others curs'd before,
> Their bodies kill all that come near,
> And even after death they are all murderers here.[612]

Sprat is somewhat ambiguous here about whether decomposing carcasses were transmitting or generating the 'poyson'. His ambiguity is to be expected: as Chapter One has shown, it was common for even medical-scientific writers in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries not to distinguish clearly between transmission and generation in their discussions of corpse contagion. In their accounts, the risk was ever-present but differed in its degree; all putrefying bodies generated the noxious air which damaged health, but the risk was particularly acute where the body was already infected with a putrid disease. Sprat's description of the 'scent' of

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607 Thomas Sprat, *The Plague of Athens* (London, 1659).
608 Thomas Sprat, *The Plague of Athens* (London, 1659; repr. London, 1709). The 1709 edition was printed and sold by H. Hills at Blackfriars Road.
609 Ibid., p.11.
610 Ibid., p.13.
611 Ibid., p.17.
612 Ibid., p.18.

'corrupted bodies' acting as a poison echoes this view. As he acknowledged himself in the preceding verses, all rotting bodies emitted 'noisome smells'; the reader is reminded that all corpse 'stench' could generate 'infections'.

From this perspective, the disease concerns expressed at St Thomas' appear as a momentary revival of historic plague anxieties. The association between organic putrefaction and plague was conceptually straightforward and familiar to early-modern Britons: bad air, indicated by bad smells, generated the disease. This association was also frequently repeated and discussed in the public sphere, and undoubtedly beyond the limited surviving evidence presented here. News reports about the war dead treated the risk of infection as already self-evident, and medical advertisers detected an opportunity to capitalise on existing concerns. The association was so apparent that, at St Thomas', it did not even seem to require explanation. Hitherto a straightforward reality for those involved in the management of burial practices, 'infection' became in 1709 an urgent issue, when an existing deficiency in burial provision was combined with an epidemic impetus for action.

Nonetheless, however serious the threat, and however widely understood it might have been, the anxieties it gave rise to were transient. The short-lived nature of health concerns surrounding the dead is recurrent theme in the findings of this thesis, and a key area of difference between medical-scientific publications and local attitudes and practices. Writers may, as Chapter One has demonstrated, have warned constantly against the health dangers posed by unburied and inadequately buried corpses. At local level, however, anxiety about this threat was not constantly present, or at least constantly publicly voiced. It appeared intermittently; almost always, as subsequent chapters will show, against a backdrop of heightened concern surrounding putrid diseases. It also disappeared swiftly, in this case even with no practical resolution. Exactly why it did so is difficult to prove conclusively. Historians

of 'moral panics' have, like King, tended to suggest that 'the panic' simply 'dies away', that those involved 'lose interest'.[613] Similar claims that epidemic diseases and their associated anxieties tend to 'drift toward closure' have been highlighted and questioned in recent research.[614] It may be the case that, for parishioners and vestry at St Thomas', the anxiety simply died down, and so too there was less urgency to improve provision.

In the case of burial sanitation, one alternative explanation is that our evidence of 'panics' is necessarily transient because it was political. That is, the panics identified in this thesis involved a degree of collective action, and a concentration of local resources, which could not be sustained by parish vestries for any significant period of time. The various demands made upon local authorities and their officers have been described in detail in Chapter Three, and it has been shown that vestries could flit from one preoccupation to another according to local needs. The disappearance of 'infection' fears from their records proves only that local authorities could not, or did not want to, prolong the debate – not necessarily because the anxiety had entirely gone, but because energy and resources were limited, and other pressing concerns had taken over.

A corresponding explanation is that disease prevention methods were effectively baked into routine corpse disposal practices, such that extreme circumstances were required to arouse disease concerns, and a continuation of traditional practice might even abate them. From the domestic preparation of bodies to the corporate provision of burial, the process of disposal in eighteenth-century England was characterised by practices which mitigated against putrid diseases by the standards of the day. To take just a few examples: the use of 'sweet' smelling

[613] King, *Crime and the Law*, p.55. See also Ward, 'Print Culture', p.21.
[614] Paul Slack, 'End of a Pandemic? Contemporary Explanations for the End of Plague in Eighteenth-century England', *Journal of the European Society for the History of Science*, V.64, No.1 (2022), pp.87-98; Erica Charters, Kristin Heitman, 'How Epidemics End', *Centaurus*, V.63, No.1 (2021), pp.210-224.

herbs to preserve corpses; the carrying of such herbs, and particularly rosemary, at funerals; the practice of keeping dead bodies at a distance in the home until their burial; the burial of corpses at the first sign of putrefaction; the use of coffins, coffins with absorbent linings, and, increasingly, air-tight lead coffins to prevent the escape of putrid gases and fluids; and, finally, the practice of underground burial itself. All of these common eighteenth-century disposal rituals have been subject to extensive research, and historians have described in detail their spiritual and existential meanings – at times conceding that their purposes are unclear.[615] What has been largely missed in this extensive literature is that they all served, directly or otherwise, to reduce the risk of putrid 'infection'. Social historians of medicine have identified the medical connotations of 'sweetness' and 'sweet' aromatic herbs, including their use as a plague remedy during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.[616] It has been shown in Chapter One that medical-scientific writers viewed the storing of dead bodies in separate rooms to the living as a means of avoiding 'effluvia'. Herring, Sydenham, Mead, and others advocated for coffin use on the grounds that it enclosed putrid air, and all the writers considered in Chapter One of this thesis viewed underground burial as the best possible method of putrid disease prevention.

[615] On the preparation of bodies with 'sweet' herbs, the spiritual meanings of the word 'sweet', and absorbent coffin linings see particularly: Jolene Zigarovich, 'Preserved Remains: Embalming Practices in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, V.33, No.3 (2009), especially pp.72-75. On rosemary and other fragrant 'funeral herbs', and their spiritual meanings, see: Susan Drury, 'Funeral Plants and Flowers in England: Some Examples', *Folklore,* V.105 (1994), p.102. Houlbrooke offers a more practical, but still not medical, explanation of funeral herbs as 'masking the smell of putrefaction', in Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford, 2000), p.137. On the interval between death and burial, see Stephen Porter, 'From Death to Burial in Seventeenth-Century England', *The Local Historian*, V.24, No.4 (1993), especially p.200. Porter briefly mentions contagion concerns but suggests that they only figured during epidemics, as an issue of disease transmission rather than generation. On storing bodies in separate rooms, see Mihailovic 'The Dead', p.48. Mihailovic observes that corpses awaiting burial were 'usually left locked in a separate room if one was available', and that 'why it was important to keep the body close but not necessarily important to actually be around it is very unclear' (p.48).

[616] Mark Jenner, 'Early Modern English Conceptions of Cleanliness and Dirt as Reflected in the Environmental Regulation of London, c.1530-1700' (D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1991); George R. Keiser, 'Rosemary: Not Just for Remembrance', in Peter Dwendle, Alain Touwaide (eds.), *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp.180-204. Eighteenth-century sources describing funeral flowers as an 'infection' remedy include: Francis Grose, *The Olio* (London, 1796), p.223; and Henry Phillips, *The Companion for the Kitchen Garden* (1822) V.II (London, 1831), pp.137-138.

Funerary rituals do not, of course, form the focus of this thesis; this chapter is concerned with them insofar as they help us to understand evidence of 'panics'. There is a scarcity of records surrounding the preparation and treatment of corpses in the Southwark for the period under study. Their absence is regrettable since vestry accounts provide only a narrow, and predominantly male, insight into contemporary attitudes toward disposal sanitation.[617] What we do have, in lieu of such evidence, are details of corpse disposal regulations at St Thomas' Hospital in the years preceding Eyre's report. Although corpse disposal practices were amongst the least standardised areas of hospital administration, it is clear from the available evidence that efforts had already been made to regulate interments. Between 1696 and 1699, the governors agreed upon a set of new rules for the maintenance of their burial ground and graves, the responsibility for which was entrusted to the sexton. These included, firstly and most notably, that 'all Corps should be laid and interred in coffins', and 'not without' as had formerly been the case.[618] Where graves could be dug deep enough to accommodate more than one coffin, 'boards shall be laid over each coffin with earth upon it until the grave be full' and it was 'not to be uncovered while it is unfilled'.[619] Three years later, in 1699, regulations expanded to include the size of the grave:

> the Comon graves be six foot in Length six foot in depth and three foot in breadth and that no corps be laid nearer than two foot to the upper part of the Ground.[620]

These practices may, ironically, have contributed to the hospital's overcrowding problem. Nonetheless, what is important here is that a continuation of 'normal' or 'traditional' practice

[617] With regard to women in particular, the findings of this thesis point to the need for further research on domestic burial practices and disease concerns. Mihailovic, 'The Dead', observes that it was primarily women relatives or hired nurses who prepared the dead for burial (pp.30-45). Early modern women and nurses possessed substantial medical knowledge, particularly regarding disease remedies and prevention methods using ingredients found in the home. There is an unfortunate disconnect between research on their medical knowledge and research on their role in corpse disposal. See Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Poor in Early Modern England* (London, 1998).
[618] HO1/ST/A/001/006 (26 Aug 1697).
[619] HO1/ST/A/006/005 (20 Aug 1696).
[620] HO1/ST/A/001/006 (8 Nov 1699).

at St Thomas' Hospital meant a continuation of closely regulated, relatively sanitary burials. If panic about 'infection' died down swiftly here and elsewhere, this may have been because routine practice was considered to be enough: 'reform', with all of the energy and resources it demanded of localities, may not have been entirely necessary.

Subsequent chapters of this thesis will consider different periods, different themes, and different parishes. However, they should all be read in light of the case of St Thomas' Hospital burial ground. They constitute, together, a succession of local 'panics', each sparked by a combination of deficient burial provision and heightened concern surrounding putrid disease. It will be shown that, toward the late-eighteenth century, the nature of these disease concerns changed in line with the preoccupations of medical-scientific writers. Anxieties intensified, improvements became more frequent, and debates were prolonged. The final chapter will return to the question of panic, to ask what had changed over the intervening century, and what these changes tell us about centralised 'reforms'.

Chapter Five

The Corpse as Annoyance: Hanging bodies at St George's Fields

On 25 February 1729, parishioners of St George addressed a petition to Thomas Pelham Holles, first Duke of Newcastle and Secretary of State, regarding the bodies of two criminals which had been left to hang in chains in the parish's open fields.[621] The petition stated

> that there are two malefactors hung up in chains in the said Parish within Thirty Yards of the Houses and Paved Streets which is a very great Annoyance & a very great prejudice to the petitioners. That there are several more convenient Places where they may be removed to without prejudice to any person whatsoever.

The twenty-one petitioners, including parishioners and landowners, requested that the duke 'give directions for removing the bodies'. The petition was also supported by a separate letter on the subject requesting the same, the corpses 'being a very great disadvantage to the parish in which they hang'.[622] This letter was signed, also on 25 February, by Robert Hucks, MP for Abingdon in Oxfordshire and the son of brewer William Hucks of the neighbouring parish of St. Giles in the Fields. Hucks also mentions that a 'Mr Inwen' would be grateful for the removal of the bodies, likely referring to the prominent brewer and magistrate Thomas Inwen of St Saviour, who would also become an MP in the following year.

This is the extent of the information provided in the petition, which neither names the two malefactors nor states how long they had been hanging before becoming an 'annoyance'. However, Sarah Tarlow has collated a list of cases of hanging in chains in England over the eighteenth century.[623] Her evidence suggests that this petition referred to the corpses of Edward Burnworth and William Blewitt, who had been executed for murder at Kingston Gallows on 7 April 1726. Their bodies had been left to hang at Kingston for several hours, before being cut

[621] 'Petition of Several Inhabitants of St George the Martyr', Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, George II, Letters and Papers, TNA: SP 36/17/156-157.
[622] Ibid., SP 36/17/158.
[623] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, pp.120-121.

down from the scaffold by foot-guards and transferred in a wagon to Southwark House of Correction, in the parish of St George.[624] Here, the corpses were enclosed in 'gibbets' (iron cages) and the following day were hung up in chains at St George's Fields.[625] They were left there for just over four years, being removed on 6 May 1730, and re-hung separately in rural areas further south, Blewitt at Bristow Causeway and Burnworth nearby on Kennington Common.[626]

This chapter is concerned with vocabularies used to describe the dead. It differs from the others in this thesis in that it contains no conclusive evidence of health concerns surrounding corpses on the part of Southwark's inhabitants. Its evidence is, instead, deeply ambiguous, and in this respect is more characteristic of the types of material with which historians of eighteenth-century death ritual have usually dealt.[627] The chapter seeks to unpick the meaning and implications of the language used in this petition, setting it in context of Southwark and broader English society during the 1720s. Firstly, it demonstrates that the notion of environmental 'nuisance' is vital for understanding lay attitudes and practices toward the unburied, and inadequately buried, dead in eighteenth-century England. It argues that Southwark's inhabitants engaged strategically with common nuisance law in order to gain powers for the regulation of unburied bodies, for health and other purposes. It also outlines crucial developments in this law during the 1720s which created a political framework for more invasive, centralised sanitary regulations in later periods. To these ends, the chapter first provides a background to this

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[624] Anon., *A True and Exact Account of the Lives of Edward Burnworth alias Frasier, William Blewitt…* (London, 1726), p.40. Southwark House of Correction was also known as Southwark New Gaol, established at St George adjacent to the Marshalsea in 1724. See Strype, *Survey of London*, p.30.
[625] 'News', *The Evening Post*, Is.2607 (London, 9 Apr 1726), p.1; 'London', *The British Journal*, Is.187 (London, 9 Apr 1726), p.2; 'Home Affairs', *Mist's Weekly Journal*, Is.50 (London, 9 Apr 1726), p.3; 'Arts and Culture', *The Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, Is.50 (London, 9 Apr 1726), p.4.
[626] 'News', *The Daily Journal*, Is.2906 (London, 6 May 1730), p.1. Burnworth's body was allegedly removed from its gibbet for a period in 1727, being discovered 'tied up in a sack' by a housekeeper in Southwark in an empty room he had let out five months ago: 'News', *The Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, Is.103 (London, 29 Apr 1727), p.8.
[627] For a discussion of ambiguous evidence in the history of death, see Lowman and Tarlow, *The Criminal Corpse*, pp.5-6; and Laqueur, *The Work*, pp.xii-xiv.

petition and existing literature on eighteenth-century gibbetting. It subsequently discusses contemporary medical-scientific literature on gibbetting and disease, before addressing the relationship between these theories and the petition at Southwark through the framework of 'nuisance'.

In conjunction with these arguments, the chapter engages with questions of method facing historians of burial sanitation, and it concludes by reflecting on these. While the petition itself does not explicitly mention health concerns, the chapter argues that its language, and particularly the invocation of environmental nuisance, reflects broader lay strategies for asserting control over the unburied dead within evolving legal and political contexts. It shows that nuisance law served as a flexible framework through which communities could articulate unease about the dead. By situating the petition within shifts in medical, legal, and cultural thought during the 1720s, the chapter contends that health concerns were often embedded in ambiguous or sentimental language, rather than overt public health terminology. This ambiguity, far from obscuring meaning, offers critical insight into how disease concerns surrounding the dead were understood and regulated in early eighteenth-century England. Ultimately, the chapter challenges assumptions about evidence of these disease concerns, suggesting that they were deeply entangled with ritual, sentiment, and developing legal norms.

Burnworth and Blewitt had committed crimes deemed atrocious enough to warrant severe punishment. The former was in the 1720s a notorious London gang-leader operating under the alias 'Frazer'.[628] He and his gang, which included Blewitt, were wanted for no less than 47 burglaries and robberies committed in the London and Southwark area.[629] Escaping conviction

[628] 'News', *The Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, Is.103 (London, 29 Apr 1727), p.8.
[629] 'A detailed list of burglaries and robberies committed by Edward Bunworth and his gang' (Mar 1726), TNA: SP 35/61/80. This list was compiled by Bunworth's associate, Christopher Leonard, in hopes of a pardon for his own crimes in exchange for information: see 'Petition for pardon of Christopher Leonard' (1726), TNA: SP 35/60/39.

for some time, the pair had in January of 1726 murdered a shopkeeper named Thomas Ball at his house in St George's Fields, 'by giving him a mortal wound near the left pap with a leaden bullet'.[630] They fled to the Netherlands and were apprehended in March, transported to Westminster and tried at Kingston Assizes before Justice Nathaniel Blackerby.[631] In theory, hanging in chains was not a legally recognised punishment, and the sentence passed by Justice Blackerby on the following day was simply 'execution' for both men.[632] In practice, and as William Blackstone noted in his *Laws of England* (1769), a judge might 'in atrocious cases' send orders for gibbeting to the county sheriff after legal sentencing had passed.[633] Indeed, contemporary reports suggest that Burnworth and Blewitt had been unaware that their corpses were to be hung in chains. Blewitt's family provided a coffin at his execution, to carry away and inter his body.[634] One account of the trial, published in 1742, also includes a purported statement from Burnworth to a Kingston guard 'that if he did not take care to see his body decently buried after execution, he would meet him in a dark entry and pull his nose off'.[635] Whether or not this conversation actually took place, hanging in chains was certainly considered an indecency for the executed, intended to further humiliate the dead by depriving them of a formal Christian burial.

Complaints about bodies hanging in chains were not especially unusual during the period under study, and have been noted by several historians. Figures for the exact number of criminals hung in chains are difficult to determine for the period before the passing of the Murder Act, but Tarlow finds approximately three-hundred cases between 1700 and 1832.[636] She examines a handful of complaints, most of them lodged after the mid-century as petitions to the Secretary

630 'Arts and Culture', *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* Is. 50 (London, 9 Apr 1726), p.3.
631 TNA: SP 35/61/61 (12 Mar 1726).
632 It became legally recognised in 1752: 'An Act for Better Preventing the Horrid Crime of Murder', 25 George II (1752).
633 William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, V.4 (London, 1769; repr. Chicago, 1979), p.202.
634 Anon., *A True and Exact Account*, p.39.
635 *Select Trials at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey*, V.2. (Dublin, 1742), p.347.
636 Around 160 of these took place before the 'Murder Act' (1752). See Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, pp.119-133.

of State. These complaints were motivated, she suggests, by 'two kinds of concerns'.[637] The first expressed 'distaste for the exhibition of cadavers', such as that leading to the removal of the gibbet of Samuel Hurlock in 1747 when 'the stench of his body' became 'a nuisance to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood'.[638] The second kind of concern related to local disturbances, for instance to traffic and trade, when large numbers of visitors were attracted to gibbets and, more often, famous sites of execution. Vic Gatrell's *The Hanging Tree* (1994) notes two petitions of this type from the 1760s. The trustees of Edgware Road, at the foot of Tyburn Gallows, along with proprietors of large estates surrounding Tyburn, petitioned that they were 'greatly annoyed and disturbed by the vast concourse of people that always assemble there upon days of execution whereby great tumults disturbances riots and nuisances happen'.[639] Occasionally, the family of the malefactor might also petition for the removal of the body, as occurred in 1734 when Thomas Willdey's family petitioned Coventry's High Sheriff complaining of 'abuse and loss of trade in their local area by reason of the continuing presence of Willdey's "offensive" body'.[640]

Authorities could prevent such problems by hanging corpses in spacious open areas, which were away from residential places and capable of accommodating large crowds. Choice of location was, however, something of a balancing act, since it was customary for corpses to be hung near to the scene of the crime: for this reason, Burnworth and Blewitt were gibbetted in the open space of St George's Fields near to the house of their victim. Increasingly over the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, however, this balance tipped. The public humiliation and punishment of criminals, for instance through whipping and gibbeting, is widely understood to have gradually declined over this period in favour of private physical

[637] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, p.81.
[638] Ibid., p.81.
[639] Vic Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* (Oxford, 1994), pp.602-603.
[640] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, pp.44-45

punishment.[641] Instances of gibbetting follow a similar chronology, with the practice formally abolished in 1834.[642] Complaints about bodies hanging in chains might in this sense be read as microcosmic examples of a broader shift in sensibility surrounding punishment during the last century under study: developing norms of public decorum and civility were compromised by the open display of 'offensive' corpses, which also attracted riotous and unruly crowds to developing urban areas.

The complaints about Burnworth and Blewitt's corpses strongly resemble those described by Tarlow as expressing 'distaste' for the exhibition of cadavers. It is unlikely that visitors to the gibbet had been disturbing local businesses and traffic, as was the case in other complaints later in this period. The area surrounding St George's Fields was in the late-1720s and early 1730s primarily residential, and the Fields themselves would remain largely undeveloped until the 1780s.[643] Public attention to this gibbet also seems to have been surprisingly lacking during the years following its erection: in 1727, Burnworth's body actually went missing from its irons, apparently unnoticed, for a period of at least five months before being discovered 'tied up in a sack' in an empty room let out by a Southwark housekeeper and returned to its position.[644] Rather, the complaint was in this case an 'annoyance' amongst neighbours about the bodies themselves and their proximity to houses and paved streets. Tarlow considers this language to reflect issues of taste and sensibility, noting that 'the continued presence of a rotting corpse amongst the dense habitations of the living would surely have been considered unpleasant even before the hygienic reforms of the mid-nineteenth century would have condemned it as unsanitary'.[645]

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[641] John Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750* (Oxford, 2002), p.474; Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York, 1978).
[642] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, pp.28-29.
[643] 'St George's Fields: Enclosure and development', in *Survey of London*, V.25 (London County Council, 1955), pp.49-64.
[644] 'News', *The Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, Is.404 (London, 29 Apr 1727), p.2. The housekeeper had let the room out five months earlier to some unidentified 'men' and had not heard from them since.
[645] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, p.50.

Concerns about gibbetting on sanitation grounds did, however, exist in the early-eighteenth century. The published material consulted in Chapter One of this thesis demonstrates a strong consensus amongst medical-scientific authorities that non-burial was dangerous to the living, and this principle was also applied to the gibbetted dead. Mead's *Mechanical Discourse on Poisons* (1702), for instance, recounts a story on corpse hangings told to the author by his friend and colleague Edward Baynard, physician and author of the popular instructive poem *Health* (1717). 'The body of a malefactor was hung up in chains in the country', Mead relates, and after several months it became 'sport and pastime to some boys playing thereabouts to swing the carcass up and down'.[646] One boy

> …more bold than the rest struck it with his fist upon the naked belly, which being outwardly parch'd and dry (…) was easily burst by the blow; out gushed a water so corrosive and fiery, that running down the poor lad's arm, it caus'd a violent excoriation, and a very hard matter it was to preserve it from being truly mortified.[647]

Mead continues that 'what this serum could do upon the outward skin, the more volatile parts' (the effluvia) 'would, without all doubt, effect on the more tender and sensible membranes of the stomach'.[648] Perhaps the most pointed argument against hanging in chains was published in the very year that Burnworth and Blewitt were executed. English clergyman Thomas Lewis, writing in a medico-theological pamphlet on intramural burial in 1726, cited medical authorities including Mead in his explanation of the health dangers posed by hanging corpses in chains.[649] In a chapter entitled 'Health and Life Endanger'd by Burying in Churches', Lewis first asserts the 'undoubted Truth' that 'many dangerous and fatal Distempers may be received by the Effluvia of the Dead'.[650] Importantly, Lewis notes, recently dead bodies 'do not presently send

[646] Mead, *Poisons*, p.165.
[647] Ibid., p.165.
[648] Ibid., p.165.
[649] Thomas Lewis, *Churches no Charnel-houses: Being, an Enquiry into the Profaneness, Indecency, and Pernicious Consequences to the Living, of Burying the Dead in Churches and Churchyards* (London, 1726).
[650] Ibid., p.49.

forth any Effluvia, but', he adds, 'I am very sure it is not long before they do'.[651] The onset of putrefaction, whenever this might be, marks the onset of danger, and 'when [corpses] corrupt and stink, those Steams are fatal'.[652] For Lewis, the condemnation of hanging corpses in chains was a logical extension to existing claims about the dangers of putrefaction, claims backed up by divine authority. 'The Stenches of Dead Bodies, when they begin to corrupt', writes Lewis following his summary of the mechanics of contagion, 'are exceedingly hurtful to the Health of the Living, and destructive of Life too. And that I verily believe this was the principal Reason why God would not suffer any Person that was executed to be continue unburied.'[653] The curate cites a Biblical passage from Deuteronomy to reinforce his argument:

> If a Man have committed a Sin worthy of Death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his Body shall not remain all Night upon the Tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that Day (for he that is hanged is accursed of God) that thy Land be not defiled.[654]

'Defilement' here is, Lewis qualifies, expressly health-related. 'God knew the secret powers of nature, and his infinite wisdom understood that corruption might be of fatal consequence to the living'.[655] Hence, he continues, 'the Custom among Christians, of hanging Offenders in chains', is not only 'contrary to' medical science but to the divine authority under which natural laws functioned.[656] The dangers of the practice included, for Lewis, not only the broadly-defined 'pestilential' and 'fatal' maladies caused by unburied corpses in general, but other health effects and ailments which the author suggests might arise specifically from proximity to hanging criminals. The practice had, for instance, 'scared and surprised' vulnerable persons such as 'women with child', and Lewis encourages the reader to consider 'how many have miscarried through the abominable Scent they have received passing by those Places where Malefactors

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651 Lewis, *Churches no Charnel-houses*, p.54.
652 Ibid., p.54.
653 Ibid., p.56.
654 Ibid., p.56. Donald Monro also cited a passage from Deuteronomy in his *British Military Hospitals*, in a footnote on 'the necessity of burying putrid substances' (p.345).
655 Ibid., p.57.
656 Ibid., p.57.

hang'.[657] The curate uses this self-confessed 'digression' in the topic of his pamphlet to request reconsideration of the practice by relevant authorities, adding, 'I heartily wish, that our Governors, (and with all good Manners and Respect to them, and due Deference to their high Station be it spoken), I heartily wish, that they would be pleased to consider of what bad Consequence this is, or may be'.[658]

On the face of it, the assertions of these writers are certainly in agreement with the behaviour and language of petitioners at St George, who sought to remove the corpses from an inhabited area and outlined some of their reasons for doing so. For instance, their brief request includes precise information about the proximity of the bodies to residential spaces, specifically 'within 30 yards of the houses'. As Chapter One has illustrated, medical and scientific writers argued that the likelihood of transmission of disease from putrefying to healthy bodies increased with proximity, and vice versa. Lewis outlines the contemporary thought on this observation: 'this Corruption caused by Distempers in human Bodies may, by those Effluvia (…) be carried through the Air, and be conveyed to other Persons at some Distance'.[659] Petitioners also noted in their message to the duke that the human 'annoyance' was hanging not just within thirty yards of residential houses but also near to 'paved streets'. In his *Preservatives Against the Plague* (1665), Francis Herring had expressly advised that 'care be had, that the streets, especially the narrow lanes and allies, be kept from annoyance'.[660] Herring's list of possible 'annoyances' includes 'dunghills, vaults or houses of office' (privies), as well as 'the carcasses of horses, dogs, cats, &c.', which should not be allowed to 'lye rotting and poisoning the air'.[661] These directions are reiterated nearly verbatim in 1720 by Mead, who advises for the prevention of a plague outbreak that 'care is taken of houses, the proper officers should be strictly charged to see that the streets

[657] Lewis, *Churches no Charnel-houses*, p.57.
[658] Ibid., p.57.
[659] Ibid., p.52.
[660] Herring, *Advertisements*, p.10.
[661] Ibid., p.10.

be washed and kept clean from filth, carrion, and all manner of nuisances'.[662] The removal of 'filth', 'nuisances' or 'annoyances' from urban streets had long been considered important precautions for disease prevention by medical authorities, and responses to the corpses of malefactors at St George seem to accord with their directions.

Moreover, the problem of environmental putrefaction on which these writers based their arguments was felt intensely in Southwark. During the five years between the erection of the corpses at the Fields and their removal to the south, several additional complaints about environmental 'annoyances' – this time in the form of dung, filth, unpleasant smells and sewage – were brought by inhabitants of St George and its neighbouring parishes to the Surrey Court of Quarter Sessions. In 1727, residents of Mortlake requested an order for the removal of 'a great quantity of dung' laid near their common highway.[663] In 1730, inhabitants of Battersea addressed a letter to the clerk of the Quarter Sessions complaining that a Frances Stacey 'kept pigs and a great heap of dung' in the parish, 'to the great annoyance of her neighbours'.[664] Later that year, the clerk received two separate complaints from women residents of St George about a problematic smell arising from the nearby House of Correction. Alice Worsdale, tenant of an alms-house for the poor some two-hundred yards from the late location of Burnworth and Blewitt's corpses, wrote that her kitchen floor had been covered in 'filth' after the installation of a leaky 'sink' (a sewage drain) at the new House of Correction, and requested that 'an order be made for the removal of the nuisance'.[665] Her complaint was supported by Martha Collier, owner of the alms-house where Alice lived, who addressed the clerk on behalf of tenants of 'several houses' under her ownership. She wrote that her tenants 'suffered considerable discomfort' due to the new sink 'which had been put through the wall of the houses' and was

[662] Mead, *Short Discourse*, pp.111-112.
[663] 'Certificate of removal of a great quantity of dung', Surrey Quarter Sessions Records, Sessions Bundles, 1701-1888, Surrey History Centre, Woking (hereafter SHC): QS2/6/1727/Mid/7.
[664] SHC: QS/6/1730/Mid/84.
[665] SHC: QS2/6/1730/Xmas/106.

causing a 'very offensive smell of the excrements and other filth'.[666] She, too, hoped an order would be made 'for the removal of the nuisances'.[667]

There was, clearly, an intolerance of organic 'annoyances' in residential environments expressed across various sectors of Southwark's society which should be considered as context for this petition. The presence of two rotting corpses near to houses was not merely unpleasant; it would compromise standards of cleanliness which were carefully upheld by at least some diligent residents. Indeed, the vocabulary of harm is the same across these local complaints: 'annoyance' characterises both 'a great heap of dung' and the corpses of the two malefactors; and 'prejudice', though sometimes used in the modern sense of 'bias' during this period, was in this context defined as 'injury', 'damage' or 'harm', akin to the 'suffering' and 'discomfort' described of Martha Collier's tenants in response to sewage.[668] Petitioners in both contexts also provided details about the proximity of offending objects to residential areas and rooms and, lastly, the resolution is the same in either case: a written petition to a legal authority by the affected parties, who wrote as a group to request a legal order for the 'removal' of the annoyance or nuisance. In this instance, then, it seems that openly rotting corpses were regarded and responded to at local level in very similar terms as 'excrement', 'dung' and 'sewage', in line with intellectual authorities who viewed all putrefying organic matter as dangerous.

These similarities in language are not coincidental; they should be understood as deliberate. In raising their complaints about standard environmental 'filth' to the clerk of the Surrey Court of Quarter Sessions, parishioners engaged with their own jurisdictional branch of an extensive system for the environmental regulation of eighteenth-century English parishes. Each county

[666] SHC: QS2/6/1730/Xmas/105.
[667] Ibid.
[668] For a contemporary example of 'prejudice' as harm to population health caused by improper corpse disposal see, for instance: Anon., *Some Customs Consider'd, Whether Prejudicial to the Health of this City* (London, 1721).

in England during this period possessed a Court of Quarter Sessions, so-called because of its quarterly meetings, dealing both with small criminal offences and aspects of the county's administrative business. Quarter Sessions meetings were called by the county's High Sheriff and headed by an elected group of usually three to four Justices of the Peace or magistrates. They were also attended by a Jury of gentlemen of the county, county and parish officers such as High Constables whose presence was mandatory, the Clerk of the Peace whose business there was administrative, and usually a number of the interested public.[669] Environmental offences such as the keeping of pigs or laying out of dung were liable for prosecution at county Quarter Sessions Courts under local acts. Parishioners of Southwark could be prosecuted for such offences under a 1690 Act of Parliament 'for Paveing and Cleansing the Streets' in the county, which at this time included all parishes stretching to the southern bank of the River Thames.[670] Many such cases brought to trial at Surrey's Quarter Sessions were committed by individuals, their crimes raised to the attention of the Court by groups of parishioners and their prosecution or 'presentment' at Court performed by a parish or county officer acting as representative, normally the High Constable.[671] These individual indictments supplemented a much broader system of county environmental regulation which was propped up by the Court and which might appropriately be characterised as administrative, wherein those parish officers responsible for cleaning, sweeping, raking and removing waste from public areas could be indicted for inadequacy or refusal to perform their duty. Such was the case in 1719 when the scavengers of the Manor of Southwark were presented to the Court of Sessions by a High Constable for 'not scouring the gully hole at the Park Gate' at St Saviour.[672] In this event the assembled magistrates would pass an order for the cleansing of the offending area; 'Certificates of the Justices' survive

[669] Webb and Webb, *The Parish and the County*, pp.421-424.
[670] 'An Act for Paveing and Cleansing the Streets', William and Mary, Ch.VIII, Pt.3, No.7 (1690).
[671] Webb and Webb, *The Parish and the County*, p.464.
[672] SHC: QS2/6/1719/Ea/66.

from later in the century attesting that specific streets and alleys in Southwark had 'now been cleansed by the scavengers', and further legal action was therefore unnecessary.[673]

The words 'prejudice' and 'annoyance' used in the petition regarding the hanging corpses bore an explicit legal and cultural weight in this context. Sidney and Beatrice Webb have described the 'municipal enterprise in street cleansing' during the long-eighteenth century as 'a development from the medieval conception of a common nuisance', meaning that which causes hurt, inconvenience or damage to the public.[674] The incorporation of environmental waste into common nuisance law is encapsulated in an Act of 1671 'for Paving, Cleansing, and for preventing Nusances in, the streets of London', which ruled that inhabitants keeping 'dung, rubbish, earth or other soil' be indicted 'as a common nusance'.[675] From the late-seventeenth century, the concept of 'nuisance' had expanded to include any action which caused 'annoyance' of any kind to others in a locality: in the terms of Webb and Webb, 'if every person fulfilled his lawful duty, according to the customs of the Manor and the Common Law, no one would do or suffer anything to be done to the annoyance of the neighbours. Any breach of this obligation was therefore a nuisance'.[676] The expansion of the law to categorise environmental 'annoyances' as a criminal offence by the beginning of our period is reflected in the 1690 Act for 'cleansing' Surrey, which rules as punishable by fine any throwing, casting, laying – or causing, permitting or suffering to be thrown, cast or lain – 'any sea-coal, ashes, dust, dirt, rubbish, dung, or other filth or annoyance in any open streete, lane, or alley' in the county.[677]

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673 SHC: QS2/6/1777/Mid/48.
674 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, V4. 'Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes' (London, 1963), pp.316-17.
675 John Noorthouck, 'Appendix: Act of Common Council for Paving and Cleansing the Streets (1671)', in *A New History of London Including Westminster and Southwark*, (London, 1773), pp.850-855. Via *British History Online*.
676 Webb and Webb, *Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes*, pp.358-359.
677 'An Act for Paveing and Cleansing the Streets' (1690), in *Statutes of the Realm*, V6 (London, 1819). Via *British History Online*.

The petition thus borrowed legalistic language surrounding environmental filth and reapplied it to the practice of corpse hanging, in doing so drawing dead and exposed human bodies into the common law category of 'nuisance'. The cognisance of at least some writers and signatories regarding the legal implications of this language is difficult to dispute. Although the frequency of environmental nuisance indictments across the country over the eighteenth century – styled by Webb and Webb as a 'torrent of nuisances' in the face of legal regulations – indicates some degree of popular noncompliance or arguably even non-knowledge of formal ruling, the regular complaints at Surrey may also provide important evidence of intolerance of environmental nuisance, and engagement with judicial systems for their regulation.[678] Indeed, recent research by Leona Skelton has attested that urban inhabitants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shared in, and were crucial to the enforcement of, the regulation of environmental nuisances on a much broader scale than hitherto acknowledged in the historiography of English sanitation.[679] Skelton traces early nuisance complaints similar to those at Surrey, arguing that these constituted nothing short of a 'bottom-up micropolitics' of 'sanitary regulation' which supported and could inspire county-wide statutory measures.[680] The scale and duration of this phenomenon at Southwark, or anywhere else for that matter, is difficult to measure, since formal records of this kind necessarily provide a narrow picture emphasising state involvement: disputes and complaints about nuisances between neighbours could, for instance, be left unrecorded or be resolved in pre-litigation negotiations.[681] A sliver of the 'micropolitics' theorised by Skelton as existing in the early modern period is nevertheless traceable in legal records throughout the eighteenth century in Surrey, with groups and individuals raising complaints about environmental nuisances quite regularly across the period under study. Nuisance law itself therefore outlined standards of cleanliness which could transcend statutory

[678] Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *The Development of English Local Government, 1689-1835* (London, 1963), p.72.
[679] Skelton, *Sanitation*. See also Jenner, 'Cleanliness and Dirt', for an earlier discussion of this.
[680] Skelton, *Sanitation*, p.162.
[681] Fernanda Pirie and Judith Scheele (eds.), *Legalism: Community and Justice* (Oxford, 2014), p.11. See also Jenner, 'Cleanliness and Dirt' (1991), pp.108-110.

authorities and provide or reinforce 'norms' of cleanliness for even small communities. The reverse was also true: that some Southwark parishioners, at least, time and again borrowed or weaponised common nuisance law to hold others to account over these same standards. Terms such as 'annoyance' and 'offensive' used to describe corpses were not therefore merely sentimental; they were charged with legalistic, environmental, and health-related implications.

This appeal to nuisance has two significant implications. Firstly, it offers an early illustration of legal and administrative developments in burial regulation which escalated during the eighteenth century and became the framework for legislation of the nineteenth. Secondly, it helps put into context the unclear role of health concerns in motivating this petition, and in documented complaints about dead human bodies more broadly. During the eighteenth century, common nuisance law developed into an important tool for communities dealing with unburied or inadequately buried bodies. Due to the broad conceptualisation of 'nuisance', which encompassed but did not distinguish between sensory irritants and health hazards, health concerns could be implied but need not be explicitly stated, and it might even be disadvantageous to mention health in legal proceedings surrounding cases of non-burial. This offers a stark juxtaposition with nineteenth-century statute against non-burial, when health hazards were for the first time conceptualised separately from public nuisances. It was from this period that the Metropolitan Board of Health, established to deal with these health hazards, became inundated with corpse disposal complaints from London and Southwark inhabitants which were made explicitly on health grounds.[682]

It is necessary here to consider briefly English laws relating to corpse disposal at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Questions of the right to burial, and grounds for refusing burial, were

[682] On complaints in this period see Consibee, 'Southwark Way of Death', pp.172-179.

in 1700 handled primarily by the ecclesiastical courts. Whilst Christian parishioners held the right to a Christian burial service in their parish churchyard, ministers also held the right to refuse burial in certain circumstances. These included where there was insufficient space in the churchyard, the corpse had been brought for burial without due warning, and cases where the deceased had been excommunicated – for instance because of suicide, Nonconformism or having committed a heinous crime. These principles had been inscribed in Canon Law since 1603, and at the beginning of the eighteenth century there existed no comparable statute or common law relating to non-burial: the temporal (secular) courts had, in effect, no means or regulating or enforcing churchyard burial.[683]

Involvement of England's secular courts in routine burial practice began in 1721, and it began on grounds of public nuisance. Legal historian Mary Lowth has observed that the earliest jurisprudence on non-burial dates to 1721, when an Anglican minister refused to bury a Baptist parishioner who had died in May the previous year.[684] The case was heard in January 1721, and in the intervening period the corpse had lain unburied in the parish churchyard. The presiding judge ruled that the minister 'must bury her to avoid public nuisance, irrespective of whether this was a Christian burial (which was not a matter for the secular court)'.[685] This ruling had the effect of establishing a common law 'right to burial': refusal to inter a dead body was, for the first time, regarded as a secular offence, and it was considered so on grounds of public nuisance. A better-known case of non-burial in 1744 repeated this judgement in more precise terms, it being determined that

> …If any temporal inconvenience arise as a nuisance from the neglect of interment of the dead corpse, [the Priest] is punishable by the temporal courts.[686]

[683] James Brooke Little, *The Law of Burial* (London, 1880), pp.7-8.
[684] Mary Lowth, 'Charles Byrne, Last Victim of the Bodysnatchers: The Legal Case for Burial', *Medical Law Review,* V.29, No.2. (2021), pp.244-255.
[685] Ibid., p.255.
[686] Ibid., p.255.

This expansion of 'nuisance' to include human corpses in common law opened an avenue for secular burial regulation which would remain in place to the twenty-first century.[687] It should be regarded, in Lowth's terms, as the invention of a 'public interest duty to provide burial'; that is, a duty of secular authorities to ensure corpse disposal is carried out for the benefit of the living public, as opposed to the benefit of the deceased's soul which was the remit of ecclesiastical authorities.[688] This duty was significantly extended in statute of the nineteenth century, which conferred further responsibility on local authorities to ensure the proper disposal of unburied corpses for the public good. New legislation included the Burial of Drowned Person's Act (1808) and Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), which required secular authorities to collect and remove unclaimed corpses from public spaces to avoid their becoming 'an indictable nuisance'.[689] In 1849 there was passed an important predecessor to the 1850s Burial Acts, the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Amendment Act.[690] This act extended powers of the General Board of Health over burial practice, to the effect that burial grounds could be inspected in cases of alleged nuisance and forced to close if the nuisance was deemed a danger to health.[691] The 1721 change in common law also impacted rules surrounding the medical handling and dissection of dead bodies. The 1752 Murder Act had provided for the dissection of corpses of those convicted and hanged for murder. This was, as with gibbetting, a form of state-sanctioned non-burial. John William Willcock's *Laws Relating to the Medical Profession* (1830) describes how the 1721 common law change affected non-burial in such cases, explaining that 'if the dissection be conducted in such a place or manner as to create disgust, uneasiness or a

[687] The public interest duty to inter corpses remains in place today through the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984. See Lowth, 'Legal Case for Burial', p.256.
[688] Lowth, 'Legal Case for Burial', p.256.
[689] W. Cunningham Glen and R. Cunningham Glen, *The Law Relating to the Burial of the Dead* (London, 1881), p.4. Previously, custom had dictated that churchwardens should bury the bodies of those who died in their parish. Churchwardens might avoid doing so, however, for financial reasons; henceforward the practice was a legal requirement. See Laqueur, *The Work*, p.602.
[690] 'An Act to Amend the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act 1848' (1 Aug 1849), 12 & 13 Vict. c.111, s.2.
[691] See Thomas William Saunders, *The Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts, 1848 and 1849* (London, 1849).

corruption of the atmosphere (…) it is clear that the conductors are guilty of a nuisance at common law, and punishable by fine and imprisonment'.[692] Graverobbing, whether for dissection or other purposes, was also from 1721 punishable as a common law nuisance where, previously, it had been indictable only as a petty theft.[693]

The expanding concept of nuisance also provided a framework for local authorities and inhabitants to appeal for more burial space or burial ground closures through private legislation. From the mid-eighteenth century, petitions for burial ground provision began increasingly to use 'nuisance' and terms suggestive of public nuisances, such as 'stench', 'noisome smells', 'offensiveness', 'inconvenience', and 'health' (see Table of Petitions, Appendix). Correspondingly, there occurred a rise in appeals to the public interest. Petitions began frequently to use phrases like 'public utility', 'for the benefit of parishioners', 'for the advantage of the inhabitants', and so forth, when requesting secular provisions for burial space. In cases where petitions completely omitted nuisance claims, using only an appeal to the public interest or to a vague 'expediency', nuisance sometimes emerged as the trump card in later proceedings. For example, when Commons committees examined such petitions, and chose to support them, they often reported nuisance concerns where these had not previously been mentioned. In 1820, inhabitants of Rotherhite, Surrey, used 'public utility' and 'decency' in their petition for a burial ground extension.[694] The investigating Commons committee, in support of the petition, later reported to the House that Rotherhite burial ground was in such a poor state as to be dangerous to health. Their opinion was that unless the petition succeed, 'the inhabitants may be exposed for many years to come to the danger and inconvenience consequent on the present condition

[692] John William Willock, *The Laws Relating to the Medical Profession* (London, 1830), p.150.
[693] The conviction of 'petty theft' for graverobbing was based on conceptions of property. In legal terms a corpse was the property of nobody and possessed no property itself, so was technically impossible to steal. Its shroud, however, was considered the property of the deceased's executors. Thus, when graverobbers stole a corpse in its shroud they were indictable for petty theft. From 1721, as Willock describes, 'the conveying of decomposing remains through public streets – to the annoyance of the people in their health as well as their feelings – [was] a nuisance punishable at common law'. Ibid., p.159.
[694] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.75 (London, 1819), p.180 (11 May 1820).

of the burial ground'.[695] On other occasions, petitioners themselves added nuisance language to their complaints during these investigations. In 1762, vestrymen and inhabitants of St James' parish, Westminster, petitioned the House for a churchyard extension on the straightforward grounds that it 'would be of great advantage to the inhabitants'.[696] Under examination two weeks later, the parish sexton added that 'bodies are obliged to be laid so near the surface of the ground, as to become offensive'.[697]

This legal background suggests that the petition of 1729 was part of a much broader societal and cultural shift surrounding the unburied dead from the middle decades of the eighteenth century. A clear political reasoning was emerging to justify secular intervention in burial practice. This form of intervention was strongly distinguished from its ecclesiastical counterpart, with early jurisprudence explicitly clarifying the different roles of divine and temporal control: one for the spiritual benefit of the dead, the other for the physical protection of society. The secular justification leaned on a very specific vocabulary which had been carried forward from medieval nuisance law. This was, importantly, a *broad* vocabulary reflecting a broad concept, as a nuisance was a harm to the living of any kind, whether an irritant, an inconvenience, or a danger to health. The necessity of an appeal using this vocabulary in the case of two gibbetted malefactors is very clear. Burnworth and Blewitt were, for one, excommunicated from the Church by virtue of their having committed a 'heinous crime', the 1603 Canon Law explicitly ruling murderers as prohibited from Christian burial. For this reason, their bodies had fallen under the charge of the state. The only avenue for intervention was thus a secular one, which left nuisance vocabulary as the best available option. It has been observed that petitioners provided no further information about the nature of the harm, and this was perhaps because they did not need to: from 1721, 'annoyance and prejudice to the petitioners' was considered sufficient.

[695] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.75, p.212 (15 May 1820).
[696] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.42 (London, 1803), p.120 (26 Feb 1762).
[697] Ibid., p.216 (9 Mar 1762).

Once we understand the vocabulary available to complainants in these formal legal and administrative proceedings, we can begin to make sense of the ambiguous role of health concerns. There are two interrelated explanations for this ambiguity. One was that, as has been stated, it was prescribed by law. In legal contexts, moreover, mentioning health could even be disadvantageous. James Hanley has written of the problems and inconsistencies which could arise from this broad conceptualisation of 'nuisance', summarising that in the common law tradition, 'nuisances did not have to be unhealthy, only offensive'.[698] Examining private bills on environmental nuisances from the 1740s to the 1830s, Hanley observes that

> Even where private-bill promoters expressly mentioned nuisances that would soon be identified as injurious to health, they did not distinguish them from nuisances in general. Nor, of course, could they have: there was no legal category apart from nuisances. (…) 'Dangerous to health' was a higher standard than merely 'offensive to the senses', and cases do not always report that plaintiffs claimed health damage in the context of nuisance proceedings.[699]

The omission of health concerns in these nuisance bills, Hanley suggests, may therefore 'have been a legal strategy on the part of plaintiffs', while 'the introduction of health into the proceedings may also have been a legal strategy on the part of the defendants'.[700] Thus the legal vocabulary available for formal complaints about non-burial *necessarily* obscured health concerns, and may even have suppressed them.

Although this vocabulary was, in a sense, prescribed by law, the law and its language also reflected contemporary understandings of disease. It has been observed in Chapter One that the seventeenth century witnessed a shift toward mechanical accounts of disease, alongside which received theories persisted. One such received theory resembles what would later emerge

[698] James G. Hanley, 'Parliament, Physicians and Nuisances: The Demedicalisation of Nuisance Law, 1831-1855', in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, V.80, No.4 (2006), p.707.
[699] Ibid., pp.710-711.
[700] Ibid., p.711.

as nervous physiology – the view that negative emotions could negatively impact health. Thomas Lewis captured this understanding when he wrote of the health dangers of corpse hanging. Putrefying corpses emitted effluvia, certainly, but they also caused illness by disturbing onlookers. They could 'scare and surprise' vulnerable persons, producing disruptions of the mind which might, for example, induce a miscarriage.[701] Historians have established a close relationship between ill-health and 'passions' like fear, shock and sadness across various sectors of medieval and early-modern English society: Erin Sullivan, for instance, has pointed out the frequent appearance of 'deaths from grief' in seventeenth-century London Bills of Mortality.[702] Strong emotions continued to bear bodily implications in the eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) provides an indication of contemporary usage of nuisance vocabulary, and his definitions evidence the continued relationship between sentiment and illness. An 'annoyance', for example, was both 'that which annoys' and 'that which hurts'.[703] 'Offensive' was defined as something deeply sentimental, 'causing anger; displeasing; disgusting', but also physically dangerous, 'causing pain' and 'injurious'.[704] A 'nuisance', in turn, meant 'something noxious or offensive', with neither of these secondary definitions distinguishing clearly between emotional and physical harm.[705] It was not merely the case that there existed no legal 'health' category apart from nuisances, and that vocabularies were artificially constrained as a result. There was also no *need* of a separate legal category: disturbances, annoyances, offensiveness and nuisances all necessarily bore the capacity to physically hurt.

[701] Lewis, *Churches no Charnel-houses*, p.57.
[702] Erin Sullivan, 'A Disease unto Death: Sadness in the Time of Shakespeare', in Elena Carrera (ed.), *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700* (Leiden, 2013), pp.159-184.
[703] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755).
[704] Ibid.
[705] Ibid.

A question of causation arises here. The antiquity of the concept of 'nuisance' has been referred to in passing throughout this chapter. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, for instance, describe nuisances and nuisance law as a 'medieval concept'.[706] Hanley observes that throughout the eighteenth century 'the nature of nuisance had not undergone much change' from its early origins.[707] The close relationship between sentiment and ill-health, which helped to render health concerns ambiguous and make 'nuisance' a particularly useful category for complainants, pre-dated the eighteenth century. Lastly, Chapter One of this thesis has demonstrated that early natural philosophers regarded the corpse as a source of disease well before this period. The potential had, therefore, long existed for dead bodies to be drawn into the legal category of nuisance and regulated as such. Why, then, did this significant shift towards secular burial regulation begin only in 1721?

As many historians have described, the concept of nuisance at large expanded during the eighteenth century. A growing preoccupation with nuisances has been attributed to the negative environmental effects of urbanisation.[708] Local communities sidestepped the complications of common-law procedure and began frequently to apply for private bills for nuisance regulations, leading to a proliferation of nuisance legislation.[709] This rising interest in nuisances has been attributed variously to a preoccupation with personal property, developing expectations of local amenity, the drive for urban improvement, and, to a lesser extent, population health concerns.[710] Although much of this legislative growth is evidenced only later in the eighteenth century, and particularly after 1740, it is likely that dead human bodies and parish burial grounds were caught up in this rise of nuisance; their regulation more a consequence of these broader changes than

[706] Webb and Webb, *English Local Government, 1689-1835*, p.72.
[707] Hanley, 'Demedicalisation of Nuisance Law', p.710.
[708] Webb and Webb, *English Local Government, 1689-1835*, pp.72-80.
[709] Hanley, 'Demedicalisation of Nuisance Law', p.708; Frederick Spencer, *Municipal Origins* (London, 1911), pp.207-208.
[710] Christopher Hamlin, 'Public Sphere to Public Health: The Transformation of "Nuisance"', in Steve Sturdy, *Medicine, Health and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1600-2000* (London, 2002); Tom Crook, 'Sanitary Inspection and the Public Sphere in Late-Edwardian Britain', *Social History*, V.32, Is.4 (2007), pp.369-393.

a primary end in itself.[711] The influence of disease concerns surrounding the dead for this process should, however, not be understated. The crucial change in common law had taken place much earlier, in 1721. This was during the height of Marseilles epidemic of 1720-22, a well-established period of plague panic in Britain. 1721 was also, as Mark Jenner has observed, the very year in which the curate Thomas Lewis published the first edition of his pamphlet against intra-mural burial, with the epidemic 'and the expectation that the disease would reach Britain' being 'clearly (…) the immediate occasion' for the publication.[712] Fear and panic surrounding putrid disease had, perhaps, provided the initial impetus for a shift towards secular burial regulation which would not for another century become clearly expressed in terms of health.

At the close local level, a similar impetus for change is visible at St George in 1729. Before they were gibbetted at St George's Fields, the corpses of Burnworth and Blewitt had been carried to the nearby Southwark House of Correction. Although details of their preparation and storage here are not extant, the bodies were certainly handled at some point by Daniel Parish, Keeper of the House of Correction from 1724 to 1733.[713] Parish was responsible for the overall running of the House: feeding and providing medical care for prisoners, as well as arranging their burials if and when they died under his care. Until the late-eighteenth century, no standardised system existed for corpse disposals here. The Keeper himself organised and paid for burials at his own discretion, out of his own salary, and records suggest that arrangements were the same in other Southwark prisons.[714] In the Spring of 1728, increasing fatalities at Southwark House of

[711] On the 1740 growth see Spencer, *Municipal Origins*, pp.207-208; cited in Hanley, 'Demedicalisation of Nuisance Law', p.708.
[712] Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation', p.619.
[713] 'Petitions for appointment', SHC: QS2/6/1733/Eas/68 (1733).
[714] Expenses generally included a coffin and shroud, searchers, messenger to notify the coroner, costs of the coroner and jury, and burial fees for local churchyards. On at least one occasion, Parish had also hired inmates to 'wash and carry out' the corpse of another inmate for burial: 'Account of expenses borne (…) at Southwark House of Correction', SHC: QS2/6/1733/Eas/3 (1733). 'Bill of expenses incurred on the deaths of inmates (…) at Southwark House of Correction', SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mid/10 (1728); 'Account of money spent on (…) the

Correction led Parish, disgruntled about these costs, to complain to Surrey's magistrates.[715] He provided a detailed account of his expenses for interments (including fees for inquisitions, searchers, coffins and burials for each body) and requested an increase in his salary accordingly.[716] The magistrates examining the petition – including Thomas Inwen, who would later lend his support for the removal of the gibbeted corpses – observed that prisoners were dying within weeks, at times days, of admission to the House.[717] An enquiry into the state of the prison was launched over the following months, just as a gaol fever enquiry was beginning at Surrey County Goal, and another sanitation enquiry at the neighbouring Marshalsea Prison was drawing to a close.[718] Inwen and his colleagues recommended an increase in Parish's salary but also numerous sanitary improvements, such as repairs to the prison's blocked-up and overflowing sewers.[719] When Parish complained again in early 1729 that deaths during the winter had been very high, the issue was escalated, and it was proposed that the prison be enlarged.[720] Magistrates noted that

> It has been represented to this Court that there are some inconveniences and annoyances at the said House of Correction and that the rooms or apartments are too straight and narrow for the custody of such numbers of prisoners which renders it unhealthy.[721]

This unhealthy situation and increased deaths would certainly have been observed locally. Amongst the investigating magistrates were figures such as John Lade, resident of St Saviour and son of the parish's esteemed churchwarden mentioned in Chapter Three.[722] Burial registers

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burial of prisoners who died in the Marshalsea', SHC: QS2/6/1724/Ea/25 (1724); 'Account of money spent on (…) the burial of prisoners from the County Gaol', SHC: QS2/6/1724/Xmas/25 (1724).
[715] 'Petition of Daniel Parish, that steps may be taken for his relief', SHC: QS2/6/1728/Eas/51-52 (1728).
[716] Ibid.; 'Bill of expenses incurred on the deaths of inmates', SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mid/10 (1728).
[717] 'Justices Report on the salary and allowance of the Keeper of the House of Correction', SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mid/20 (1728).
[718] 'Order for an enquiry into the state of the House of Correction', SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mid/30 (1728); 'Order for an inquiry into the repair of the Common Gaol', SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mic/4 (1728); 'A Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the State of the Gaols of this Kingdom' (London, 1729), pp.9-12.
[719] SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mid/20 (1728).
[720] 'Petition of the Keeper of the House of Correction', SHC: QS2/6/1729/Mic/5 (1729); 'Draft Order for, an enquiry into the state of repair of the House of Correction', SHC: QS2/6/1730/Mid/52 (1730)
[721] 'Order for an enquiry (…) with report', SHC: QS2/6/1730/Mic/52 (1730).
[722] SHC: QS2/6/1728/Mid/20 (1728).

also attest that bodies from Southwark House of Correction, the Marshalsea and Surrey County Gaol were interred in St George's burial grounds.[723] Increased prison deaths were undoubtedly noticed by parish residents who, as Chapter Three has also shown, were closely involved in managing burial space. The complaints about nuisances from the House of Correction, addressed by Martha Collier and others in the following year, all suggest a heightened concern about the putrid state of Southwark's prisons and prisoners around the time of this petition.

Viewing the petition from this perspective helps to make sense of some oddities. It had been written almost three years after the initial gibbetting, a surprisingly long period of inactivity if the corpses were indeed a continuous annoyance. The signatories were all residents of St George: they included several vestrymen, gentlemen, a carpenter, a cheesemonger, and an inn-keeper, but at least one of them carried out his business in a different parish.[724] Why exactly all these figures should band together in 1729 to protest against Burnworth and Blewitt's gibbet location remains unclear – as this chapter has shown, motivations could be multi-faceted and were *necessarily* ambiguous – but it is likely that these heightened disease concerns played a substantial role.

The parallels between broader English legal changes and this single petition might be regarded as instructive for histories of death in the eighteenth century. In both 1721 and 1729, an immediate epidemic concern underlay activity against non-burial. The relevant epidemics were, in fact, essentially one and the same: as Siena and others have observed, gaol fever was in the early-eighteenth century understood as a subset of plague, generated and transmitted through

[723] 'St George the Martyr, Southwark, Burials Composite, 1685-1714', LMA: X092/030.
[724] TNA: SP 36/17/156-157. Petitioners whose occupations have been identified are Jonathan Hatcher (Cheesemonger), Gilbert Clarke (Innholder at St Saviour), Edward Stone (Carpenter), and Wenman Hill (Cheesemonger). 'Will of Jonathan Hatcher, Cheesemonger of St George the Martyr', TNA: PROB/11/642/104; 'Will of Gilbert Clarke, Innholder of Greyhound Inn, Southwark', TNA: PROB/11/775/260; 'Attorney General v Bridger', TNA: C11/1219/14.

putrefaction in the same manner.[725] Although they provided the initial impetus, in neither case were these health concerns recorded in immediately recognisable language. Instead, the evidence presents porous terms suggestive to modern audiences of a sentimental aversion to non-burial. Such language should not, this chapter has shown, be taken at face value, but should be examined in context of eighteenth-century notions of environmental regulation, disease, and – most importantly in formal records of this kind – nuisance. Such a reassessment of the *type* of evidence we should expect to see of health concerns in this period might reveal substantial local activity where it has hitherto been overlooked.

A corresponding point relates to the nature of these health concerns. Part of the problem facing historians has been that these ideas were often expressed in ambiguous language and are not, therefore, easily identifiable: 'it is difficult', summarises Vanessa Harding in her study of seventeenth-century London burials, 'to see any qualitative change, any trace of "Enlightened" or "Hygienic" sensitivity towards the problem at parish level'.[726] The evidence contained in this chapter helps to explain Harding's finding. Neither in formal administrative proceedings nor in English culture more broadly did health concerns surrounding the dead occupy a distinct and self-contained category like that of 'hygiene'. They were, instead, deeply ambiguous and bound up with sentiment, expressed in medical vocabularies and practices that are not immediately recognisable as such. Laqueur likewise considers hygiene as a clear category apart from traditional attitudes and practices, suggesting that public health campaigners of the nineteenth century regarded the dead in terms of 'a new and paradigmatic medical – not ritual – uncleanness'.[727] For both historians, 'hygiene' or 'medicine' has its opposite in 'tradition' or 'ritual': one is instrumental or practical, the other is symbolic or sentimental. Anthropologists

[725] Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, pp.49-70.
[726] Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead', p.59.
[727] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.237.

including Mary Douglas and Catherine Bell have problematised such distinctions.[728] Bell, in particular, observes that 'the whole issue of ritual arose as a discrete phenomenon to the eyes of social observers in that period in which "reason" and the scientific pursuit of knowledge were defining a particular hegemony in Western intellectual life'.[729] The effect of approaching hygiene as a self-evident and self-contained category which necessarily disrupts ritual is, then, that nineteenth-century distinctions are mistakenly applied to earlier periods. As a result, the fundamental relationship between health and ritual, sentiment, or culture in earlier periods is obscured.

In a similar vein, this case study advances an observation made in Chapter Three that health concerns surrounding the dead in the eighteenth century do not appear with the same force and totality as they do in the mid-nineteenth century. They came and went; in the case of this petition, they appeared briefly during a period of heightened panic and subsequently died down. They also disrupted very little. In spite of contemporary concerns about putrefaction, Lewis' call for a reconsideration of corpse hanging would not be satisfactorily answered for another century, when an 1834 bill banned it throughout Britain. As with some cases of burial ground overcrowding described in Chapter Three, the ends had perhaps justified the means. The gibbeting of corpses has been aptly characterised by Tarlow as a severe 'post-mortem punishment', a fundamental tool of the English judicial system which additionally functioned as a criminal deterrent.[730] Such considerations may have influenced George Gwilt, the parish surveyor of St Saviour who was highly involved in burial sanitation improvements at the turn of the nineteenth century, to help arrange for the gibbetting of highwayman Jerry Abbershaw

[728] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, 1992; repr. Oxford, 2009); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966).
[729] Bell, *Ritual*, p.6.
[730] Tarlow, *The Gibbet*, p.1.

at Southwark in 1795 – albeit on Wimbledon Common, a non-residential area away from the scene of his crimes.[731]

Lastly, in regard to broader eighteenth-century change, 1721 appears to be an overlooked turning point. Certainly, the role of plague panic in fuelling fears about non-burial during the Marseilles outbreak has been acknowledged by some historians; nonetheless, these fears are understood to have had limited impact outside narrow medical and literary spheres.[732] Although concern was not necessarily expressed at local level in the same clear terms as in medical-scientific texts, its implications are apparent in legal and administrative developments. Namely, 1721 had witnessed the emergence of a new form of routine burial regulation intended for the physical protection of English society. As will be seen in the following chapters of this thesis, this new political reasoning only expanded in its strength and implications for local burial practice as the period advanced.

[731] 'Accounts for woodwork etc. in erecting a gibbet on Wimbledon Common', SHC: QS2/6/1796/EPH/30 (1795).
[732] Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead*, p.144, Mihailovic 'The Dead', p.277.

Chapter Six

'Medical Men' and Putrid Fever at St Saviour's Great Vault, 1793-94

The following incident was recorded in the vestry minutes of St Saviour's parish on 30 September, 1793:

> Mr Robert Kent, an Eminent Surgeon and Apothecary of this Borough, made a Report to this Vestry that on his late attendance at the Interment of a Person in the Great Vault of this Parish there was a most dangerous and Disagreeable smell of Effluvia proceeding from the said Vault by the great Number of Dead Bodies and Putrid matter confined there. And that he thought the same might endanger the Lives of Persons who may have Occasion to resort there. And recommended that some means be used to remedy this Evil. A motion was made and seconded that the Wardens of this parish be empowered to consider and consult with some Scientific Person or Persons respecting the above premises and report to the next vestry the most likely means proposed to remove the Nuisance and Annoyance here complained of.[733]

At the next parish vestry meeting, exactly three months later, one of the churchwardens described the outcome of his investigations into the dangerous vault. Warden James Ferguson reported 'that since the last vestry he has been particularly attentive to the matter of complaint respecting the noisom smells proceeding from the Great Vault in the church.'[734] Ferguson's investigations had led him to the solution that 'by clearing the pipes altering the position and making additional length to the same the cause of complaint has been greatly abated if not wholly removed'.[735] To remove the danger 'permanently', however, Ferguson recommended that the Vestry 'make an order not to admit any more corps to be buried [in the Great Vault] unless the same be put into a leaden coffin'.[736]

The lead coffin order was not passed immediately. The vestry first solicited the opinion of a legal professional named John Scot, asking him 'to advise the wardens whether they have the power to make such an order (the vault being for a general accommodation) and whether they

[733] LMA: 'Vestry Minute Book, Saint Saviour, Southwark, Borough High Street', P92/SAV/0454 (30 Sep 1793).
[734] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (30 Dec 1793).
[735] Ibid. (30 Dec 1793).
[736] Ibid. (30 Dec 1793).

have the power to deny admission to any who may be obstinate and insist on burying the corpses.'[737] Scot wrote back that he 'could not advise the churchwardens to make such an order' and that it must instead 'be made by the vestry, by which I understand is to be meant a majority of the inhabitants'.[738] The lawyer explained that the churchwardens of St Saviour did not 'have by custom any particular authority over this vault, which being under the body of the church can belong to the parish by custom only', and that 'it is custom alone that can fix the manner in which the use of it is occasionally to be regulated.'[739] In February 1794, Scot's letter was read aloud at a third and well-attended vestry meeting on the subject, and attendees approved the order to ban interments in the church vault unless corpses were placed in a lead-lined coffin.

This chapter deals with the growing role of medical practitioners and professionals in British burial sanitation from the late-eighteenth century. This was, as Chapter One has shown, the period in which medical-scientific writers displayed a new willingness to criticise British burial practices and call for reform. Evidenced in their publications was a changed understanding of their own relationship with the dead and corpse disposal. No longer describing known phenomena through the traditional framework of natural philosophers, they began instead to investigate experimentally and to champion new solutions – in short, to *insert* themselves into the problem of burial sanitation to an extent not hitherto seen in Britain. Kent, like his contemporaries in print, found in the growing public concern with 'putrid fever' a justification for medical intervention in local burial practice. Though small in scale, the reform he seems to have pioneered calls to mind the grand public health improvements delivered by other 'medical men' in late-eighteenth century Britain, charted by James Riley and others.[740] It is also reminiscent of *Annaliste* characterisations of late-century French doctors, and Victorian burial

[737] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (17 Feb 1794).
[738] Ibid. (17 Feb 1794).
[739] Ibid. (17 Feb 1794).
[740] Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign*.

reform campaigners, as self-interested figures 'drawing the dead onto their own terrain' to the detriment of spiritual and religious understandings of mortality.[741]

This chapter uses the case of Robert Kent and the Great Vault to posit an alternative argument about the changing relationship between medical experts and English burial practice at the dawn of the nineteenth century. It argues that the growing involvement of medical professionals in burial sanitation was not simply a matter of medical authority overriding tradition, but rather a collaborative process grounded in local agency, which depended on the active participation of parishioners and vestry. The chapter also highlights how popular awareness of putrid fever, shaped by local experience, epidemic fear, and medical-scientific theory, motivated the vestry's decision to regulate burial in the vault. Moreover, inhabitants not only accepted but sought out 'scientific' solutions, such as ventilation and lead-lined coffins, suggesting a cultural shift in how localities understood and managed health concerns surrounding their dead. Overall, the chapter complicates dominant narratives of top-down sanitary reform, highlighting instead a reciprocal dynamic in which professional medicine was invited into burial regulation by an increasingly engaged and scientifically literate public.

St Saviour's Great Vault was a highly coveted burial place for the parish. It dated to 1703 and had been constructed as part of a 'beautification' project organised by the select vestry at the time.[742] Plans taken by the parish surveyor in 1821 depict its central location beneath the pulpit, where bodies would be lain facing the main altar to the east (Figure 8). This was the grandest of the church's vaults, measuring around seventy feet in length, ten feet in height and thirteen in width.[743] When completely filled, this space may have accommodated some two-hundred

[741] Vovelle, *La Mort*, p.464.
[742] LMA: P92/SAV/0451 (7 May 1703).
[743] Width estimation taken on examination of the vault in-person.

adult coffins.[744] As the church's only public vault, it catered to those who sought a higher-status intra-mural interment but wished to avoid the expense of constructing a private family burial space.[745]

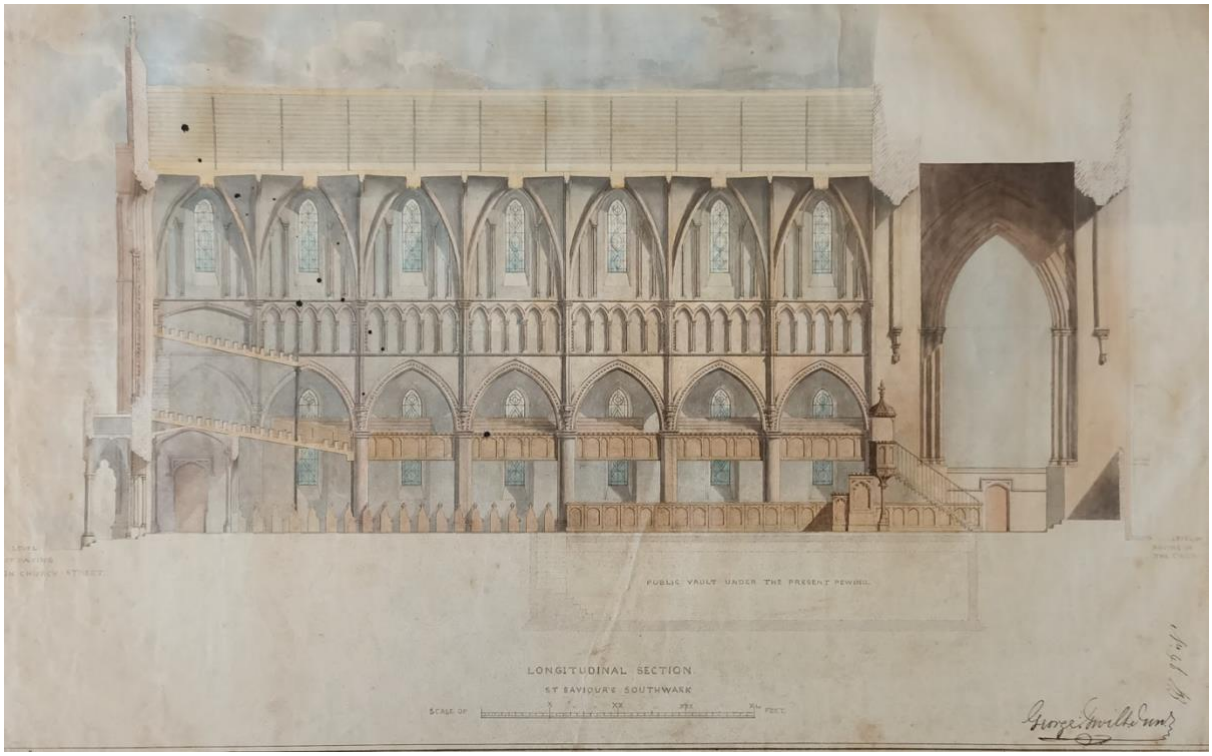


Fig. 10. Cross-section of St Saviour's Church showing public burial vault, c.1826.

This vault was likely quite oversubscribed by the early 1790s. As Chapter Three has demonstrated, many of Southwark's existing burial spaces were becoming overcrowded in the last decade of the eighteenth century. The pressures of continued interments, and the previous century of expansion in mostly Nonconformist provision, led to a increase in overcrowding complaints and measures across the Borough. St Saviour was particularly affected as one of Southwark's most populous.[746] It was also highly urbanised, and therefore possessed little

[744] Estimation based on an assumed coffin size of 84 by 28 by 20 inches, with 2 feet of clearance in the centre.
[745] On interment locations and social status, see Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London, 1984), and Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead*, pp.103-130.
[746] Field, 'Economic Change', p246. In the mid-eighteenth century St Saviour grew at a faster rate than any other Southwark parish; by 1790 it had outstripped its large neighbour St Olave's in size (p.246).

suitable land to appropriate for burial ground extensions. No additional intramural provision for interment been constructed here since the Great Vault almost ninety years ago.

The surgeon-apothecary had his own motivations for complaining about this situation. Kent had been born in Lincolnshire in 1741, the third son of a Lincoln landowner.[747] On his father's death in 1756, he inherited a small amount of farmland and several tenements in the city of Lincoln.[748] His father's will directed that once Kent reached of age, he be provided with £100 'for his placing out' in 'such profession, trade or business' as his elder brothers thought fit.[749] This sum may have supported his qualification at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1760, and around 1777 Kent set up business in a rental property at 6 Borough High Street, immediately opposite St Saviour's church.[750]

[747] Birth date based on images of Kent family memorial at St Benedict's Church, Lincoln. Courtesy of Jay Hulme.
[748] 'Will of John Kent, Gentleman of Lincoln, Lincolnshire', TNA: PROB 11/886/207 (6 Apr 1763).
[749] Ibid.
[750] Peter John Wallis, et al, *Eighteenth Century Medics: Subscriptions, Licenses, Apprenticeships* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1985), p.341; 'Insured: Robert Kent, 6 The Borough, Surgeon', in 'Fire Insurance Policy Register, 1777-1786', LMA: 1777SUN1257/20/11/79 (1777), via *LondonLives.org* [Jan 2021].



Fig. 11. Kent's home and practice at 5-6 Borough High Street, depicted in 1830. His name still appears on the façade in the centre, alongside that of surgeon Charles Muriel who took over the practice after Kent's death in 1816.

The years to 1793 seem to have been quite successful for Kent. Land tax records show that by 1791, he had purchased 6 Borough High Street from its owner John Lade.[751] Shortly thereafter, he expanded his business into 5 Borough High Street, and began accumulating rental properties across St Saviour and St Olave's.[752] In June of 1791, Kent was assessed for £25 and fourteen shillings of land tax across two Southwark properties; according to data compiled by Leonard Schwarz, this figure suggests an annual income well above £200, making him amongst the wealthiest of Southwark's residents.[753] By the time of his death in 1816, he employed an assistant surgeon and three domestic servants, and his will describes a substantial estate, including land and property across Lincoln, Southwark, and Essex.[754] In this respect, Kent's life on the

[751] 'St Olave's, Southwark, Land Tax Assessment Books, 1780-1832', SHC: QS6/7/260-266.
[752] He accumulated a rental property in Lower Thames Street, and had Ship Inn Yard and No. 5 Borough Road by 1808: 'Insured: Robert Kent, 6 Borough of Southwark, Surgeon', in 'Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Group', LMA: CLC/b/129/F/001/MS11936/362/558689 (Jul 1789); 'Insured: Robert Kent, 5 and 6 The Boro', in Ibid., LMA: MS11936/442/816017.
[753] SHC: QS6/7/260-266. Via *Ancestry.co.uk* [November 2023].
[754] 'Will of Robert Kent, Surgeon of Saint Olave Southwark, Surrey', TNA: PROB 11/1589/106 (1817).

Borough High Street is characteristic of the kind of upwards social mobility that, Chapter Two has suggested, was possible for at least some newcomers to eighteenth-century Southwark.[755] It was also characteristic of the opportunities afforded by a career as a surgeon-apothecary. As Beatrice Hamilton relates, by the late-eighteenth century this had become an attractive profession to 'middle class people of substance' and 'the needy gentry': it required only a small amount of money to set up but offered 'the chance of rising in the world, and purchasing an estate'.[756]

Professional self-interest must have factored into Kent's complaint of 1793. As a private surgeon-apothecary, seemingly unaffiliated with any Southwark hospitals, much of his commercial success necessarily proceeded from his local reputation.[757] His role is best understood as that of a general practitioner to the neighbourhood.[758] Licensed to perform surgical interventions and dispense medicines – though not, in theory, to diagnose complex illness – the surgeon-apothecary was, in Hamilton's phrase, 'the useful all-round man'.[759] Kent thus practised from his shop in the Borough High Street, but also regularly travelled to visit patients in their homes, for which he employed a personal coachman.[760] His dependence on this local network necessitated significant self-promotion. As Patrick Wallis has emphasised, even minute considerations such as the location of an apothecary's shop, its fixtures and fittings, down to his manner of dress and the size of his coach, served to reinforce his status and could

[755] Part of the advantage of establishing this business in Southwark may have been its exclusion from the jurisdiction of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, which regulated London practitioners' activities. See Kenneth Sharples, 'Professionalism with Special Reference to English Medical Organisation during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' (Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Manchester, 1975), pp.111-112.
[756] Beatrice Hamilton, 'The Medical Professions in the Eighteenth Century', *EHR,* V.4, No.2 (1951), p.161.
[757] It was not uncommon for medical practitioners in this period to operate autonomously. See Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c.1450-1850* (Basingstoke, 2007), in particular Chapter Three, 'Competition and Cooperation in the Early Modern Medical Economy'.
[758] The surgeon-apothecary has often been described by historians as the ancestor of the modern 'general practitioner': see, for example, Hamilton, 'The Medical Professions', p.142.
[759] Hamilton, 'The Medical Professions', p.166.
[760] TNA: PROB 11/1589/106.

boost his business.[761] Displaying one's expertise – through publications, public lectures, and so on – was another effective means of gaining patients, and the vestry meeting provided an opportunity to do so.[762] It is telling that Kent chose to deliver his report at a public event with upwards of 20 attendees, including local gentry who might constitute lucrative potential customers. That he provided no advance warning of his complaint to the churchwardens, thus avoiding any private resolution of the issue, is suggested by the fact that neither his name nor the subject matter appears on the vestry meeting's notice. During his announcement, he took care to express his concern for the population's health and adopt intelligible, but still specialist, medical terminology – displaying his knowledge and moral inclinations in a manner which would surely have benefitted his business.

This is not to suggest, of course, that Kent was not legitimately concerned for the health of his community. Firstly, and as Michael Brown and others have demonstrated, philanthropy was increasingly central to eighteenth-century medical identity.[763] In the vicinity of St Saviour alone there had sprung up five charitable medical institutions since 1758, and Kent seems to have been personally, if not professionally, attached to these: in his will, he donated some two-hundred pounds to Southwark's Philanthropic Society for orphans, the Magdalen Hospital, the Surrey Hospital for the Reception of Lunatics, and the Hospital for the Poor in St George's Fields.[764] Before moving to the Borough, he had already become a corresponding member of St Olave's 'Physical Society', established in 1771 for 'the improvement of a science on which

[761] Patrick Wallis, 'Consumption, Retailing and Medicine in Early-Modern London', *EcHR*, V.61, No.1 (2008), 29-30.
[762] Jenner and Wallis, *Medicine and the Market*.
[763] Michael Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity in Early Nineteenth-century England', *EHR* 124/511 (2009); Michael Brown, 'True heroes and Healers: Expertise, Authority and the Making of Medical Dominion', in *Performing Medicine* (Manchester, 2017), pp.193-222; Susan Lawrence, *Charitable Knowledge: Hospital Pupils and Practitioners in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1996).
[764] TNA: PROB 11/1589/106. The full list of institutions is as follows: The Magdalen Hospital (1758), The Surrey Dispensary (1777), and The Deaf and Dumb (1792), all in St George's Fields. The Physical Society (1777) and The Philanthropic Society (1788) were based at St Olave's and Christ Church respectively. See Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, V.3, pp.545-663.

the health and welfare of every individual so much depend'.[765] Finally, in his will, Kent provided detailed instructions that his corpse be opened after his death, to the end that others 'who are afflicted with disease in the manner in which I have been afflicted may have such benefit as shall result therefrom'.[766]

Kent also had good reason to be especially concerned about the health of vault visitors in 1793. To understand the medical-scientific context and theories he drew upon, it is necessary here to expand upon some material discussed in Chapter One. It has been observed that the latter decades of the eighteenth century witnessed a proliferation of medical-scientific texts suggesting that putrefying corpses were a dangerous source of epidemic disease. The shift was particularly marked amongst Scottish and Scottish-educated authors and escalated after the publication of John Pringle's *Experiments* (1749-52) and *Observations* (1752). It has also been noted that amongst the immediate reasons for this heightened concern was a new epidemic context: 'putrid' or 'malignant' fever.

This disease type is worth examining in closer detail, as it absorbed the British medical imagination around the time of Kent's petition to the vestry in late 1793. 'Fever' was an umbrella term for a broad class of symptoms which seemed to reappear frequently across the population. Eighteenth-century writers described fever as beginning with a change in body temperature, sweating, extreme thirst and sometimes skin rashes or 'marbling'; as it advanced the patient's pulse would usually 'sink', delirium might set in and, in many cases, death would result.[767] Different types of fever were tentatively described by physicians according to their clinical symptoms and causes, and by the 1790s three broad categories of the disease were accepted:

[765] *Laws of the Physical Society held at the Guy's Hospital, Instituted 1772* (London, 1800). Kent, based in Lincoln at the time of his initial subscription, is listed amongst the corresponding members (p.22).
[766] TNA: PROB 11/1589/106.
[767] Pringle, *Observations on the Army*, p.17.

inflammatory, nervous and putrid. Inflammatory fevers were those contracted by, for example, exposure to cold weather. Nervous fevers, in the words of eighteenth-century Aberdonian obstetrician Alexander Gordon, were caused by 'depressing passions, fatigue' and 'great study'.[768] Putrid fevers were 'excited' (caused) by putrefying organic matter, whether in the environment or in other diseased persons, and were closely associated with 'the low class of people'.[769] This latter category occupied medical writers the most in the latter half of the century. Severe epidemics of a species of putrid fever in various parts of Britain in 1718-19, 1727-29 and the 1740s attracted renewed attention and debate surrounding the disease, with writers attempting to describe and classify its new variations and locate the causes of outbreaks. By the mid-century, as John Pickstone describes, putrid fever had become perceived as 'the major threat to public health' in Britain, resulting in a series of population health interventions focused particularly on those environments crowded with diseased and dead bodies; namely, hospitals, workhouses, battlegrounds, and prisons.[770]

As Chapter One has demonstrated, the notion that corpses could produce and transmit putrid fever – sometimes called 'malignant' or 'pestilential' fever – was affirmed by most British authorities on the subject, including Pringle, John Huxham, William Hillary, John Millar and William Grant. Their uniting principle was that this form of fever was generated by putrid matter. Not only were corpses an obvious source of putrefaction, but it was also considered a historically observed fact that other 'putrid diseases', a broad classification encompassing all diseases generated by putrefaction, had been transmitted by dead human bodies. Thus the danger presented by exposed, putrefying corpses was, for these writers, both self-evident and

[768] Alexander Gordon, 'The Practice of Physick' (London, 1786-93), ed. Peter Bennett (ed.), (Bloomington, 2011), p.109.
[769] Ibid., p.110.
[770] John Pickstone, *Medicine and Industrial Society* (Manchester, 1985), p.23.

historically proven. As such, the dangerous corpse became a trope of much eighteenth-century putrid fever literature from its outset.

One of the first publications to appear in response to the eighteenth-century outbreaks, the physician John Barker's *Inquiry* (1742), summarises the view. In his discussion of the causes of putrid fever, Barker explained that plague had historically arisen 'in camps, prisons and the like' under warm, crowded conditions and 'especially if dead bodies of men, or other animals have been suffer'd at the same time to putrefy above ground.'[771] Barker continued, 'that these causes are fully sufficient to produce malignant and pestilential fevers, I believe will be readily granted me'.[772] The suggestion was indeed readily granted. In 1750, Pringle commented on the generation of putrid fevers in 'jails, and other publick places' such as hospitals, arguing for a practical nosology which considered these various species of fever 'as one'.[773] The opening lines of his *Observations on the Nature and Cure of Jayl and Hospital Fevers* (1750) outlined a view that would remain authoritative for several decades afterwards: putrid fever 'is proper to every place that is the receptacle of crowded men, ill aired or kept dirty, and what is the same, wherever there is a collection of putrid animal steams, from dead or even diseased bodies.'[774] Organic putrefaction was, for Pringle, both a cause and symptom of the fever raging in British hospitals, prisons, ships and workhouses. 'When a person is confined in such places', the author continued, 'he will run the hazard of falling into this distemper (…); whether he draws in the poison with his breath, or swallows it with his saliva'.[775] Once it entered the body, this 'poison' generated an internal 'corruption' evidenced by the patient's 'putrid sweats and stools' with a 'cadaverous smell', and 'putrid smell of the body'.[776] Pringle explained the contagious nature of

[771] John Barker, *An Inquiry into the Nature, Cause, and Cure of the Present Epidemick Fever* (London, 1742), p.52
[772] Ibid., p.52.
[773] Pringle, *Observations on Hospital and Jayl Fevers*, p.7.
[774] Ibid., p.8
[775] Ibid., p.8.
[776] Ibid., pp.25-30.

putrid fever by reference to this bodily putrefaction and its products: the bodies of the sick and dead themselves generated the disease by releasing putrid vapours and, 'by opening the bodies of those who have died of very putrid distempers, and holding the head too long over them, a fever has been caught of the same nature'.[777]

If the danger increased as putrefaction advanced, then exposure to numerous rotting corpses crowded in a confined space had to be amongst the most lethal causes of fever epidemics. According to Pringle corpses produced the most putrid emanations, being in a far more advanced state of putrefaction than living bodies. Hence the physician's qualification in 1750 that putrid fevers are 'proper to' places 'wherever there is a collection of putrid animal steams, from dead or *even*', he adds as a point of contention, 'diseased bodies.' The same year, the physician John Huxham wrote of 'the generation of pestilential fevers by the putrid exhalations of dead bodies, after battles, sieges, etc.'.[778] For Huxham, the danger was particularly acute when the dead had been infected with putrid fever pre-mortem, since their bodies had reached an advanced stage of putrefaction before death: in this case, a 'corpse air' could be generated 'in seven or eight hours, as [ordinary] dead bodies do in seven or eight days', leaking out 'a most putrid sanies' (discharge) 'from all the outlets of the body'.[779] The logical conclusion to this theory was summarised by William Buchan in his *Domestic Medicine* (1769): burying within churches was 'a detestable' practice, since 'the air in churches is seldom good, and the effluvia from putrid carcasses must render it still worse'.[780]

The language in Kent's report of 1793 could have been taken verbatim from Buchan. For the purposes of his work, as well as his examinations and qualification from the Royal College of

[777] Pringle, *Observations on Hospital and Jayl Fevers*, p.9.
[778] Huxham, *Essay on Fevers*, p.118.
[779] Ibid., p.51.
[780] Ibid., pp.93-94.

Surgeons, the practitioner must necessarily have been attuned to contemporary discussions of fever: this was, in Margaret Pelling's terms, 'the fundamental phenomenon in a large number of diseased conditions where the whole body was affected'.[781] What's more, whilst attempts to prevent putrid fever included ventilating environments and removing smells, it was still the case that, once disease set in, curing the patient was primarily a bodily matter for the remit of surgeons and apothecaries such as Kent. In his *Reflections on the General Treatment and Cure of Fevers* (1772), physician John Lettsom described the 'general remedies' then adopted in England for the cure of fevers as entirely surgical and medicinal.[782] 'Bleeding' and 'blistering' were used in the early and later stages of the disease respectively, and medicinal treatments supplied by apothecaries, who 'in this country (…) are usually the first employed to visit the sick', included 'antiseptics' such as vegetable acids, and 'emetics' which induced vomiting.[783] Lettsom's treatise was just one in an 'explosion' of medical publishing on putrid fever in the 1770s and 1780s which restated the 'orthodox' view that bodily putrefaction was the disease's central mechanism.[784] For Kent, then, information on the epidemic dangers of such putrefaction would have been near impossible to avoid. His career necessitated an awareness of putrid fever and its mechanisms, and he was actively studying and practising as a surgeon and apothecary during a period in which this disease type preoccupied the Metropolitan medical community.

Thus far, this burial sanitation initiative appears as a consequence of broader developments in medical identity and theory in the late-eighteenth century, channelled through the activities of one surgeon-apothecary. Kent, roused by his own understanding as a medical practitioner, likely held putrid fever in mind when he approached the vestry in early 1793. Chapter One has already demonstrated that putrid fever theory provided a new impetus for medical intervention in burial

[781] Margaret Pelling, *Cholera, Fever and English Medicine, 1825-1865* (Oxford, 1978), p.14.
[782] John Lettsom, *Reflections on the General Treatment and Cure of Fevers* (London, 1772), p.28.
[783] Ibid., p.28.
[784] Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, p.113.

practices in this period. Although no grand changes are visible at legislative level, medical-scientific writers of the late-century displayed a new willingness to criticise existing practices and call for change. The broader 'professionalisation' of medicine in this period had supported their capacity and willingness to do so: Kent, in raising his complaint, displayed professional motivations and a civic spirit quite characteristic of the emerging 'medical man'.[785] In effect, this case reveals the link between medical thought and popular practice as it happened, and it appears a familiar process of 'expert' knowledge filtering downwards, from practitioner to public.

This is a particularly familiar process to historians of nineteenth-century 'burial reform'. In most accounts, reform was spurred suddenly during the Victorian era with the lobbying efforts of ultra-sanitarians such as Edwin Chadwick and George-Alfred Walker, who articulated a connection between corpse rot and disease and linked this with public health. Emphasis on their publications persists across the historiography. One pertinent example is Molly Conisbee's research on Southwark burial practices from 1830 to 1860, which describes local efforts to close St Saviour's burial ground, Cross Bones, after the cholera outbreaks of the 1830s.[786] With the publication of Walker's pamphlet, the author argues, inhabitants of St Saviour became 'armed with a language about the dangers of intramural interment' which enabled them to lobby for closure of the burial ground in the 1840s.[787]

On the one hand, the vestry minutes of 1793-4 problematise such accounts by pushing the timeline of burial sanitation development further back and away from ultra-sanitarians such as

[785] Laurence McCullough, 'The Discourses of Practitioners in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Robert Baker and Laurence McCullough (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Medical Ethics* (Cambridge, 2008), pp.403-413; N. D. Jewson, 'Medical Knowledge and the Patronage System in Eighteenth-Century England', *British Sociological Association*, V.8, Is.3 (1974), pp.363-560; Alannah Tomkins, 'The Social and Professional Milieu of the Provincial Surgeon-Apothecary', *Journal of Social History*, V.44, No.3 (2013), pp.915-935.
[786] Conisbee, 'Southwark Way of Death', p.185.
[787] Ibid., p.186.

Edwin Chadwick. On the other, however, they reinforce typical explanations of sanitary reform, which hold that 'hygienic' practice was imposed on localities by medical lobbyists with disruptive consequences for 'tradition'.[788] Indeed, the language of Kent's report, as recorded by the Vestry, anticipates quite strikingly the claims that would be made by Victorian medical men some forty years later. Walker, too, described contagious disease as arising from 'the dreadful effluvia of human putrefaction', with its 'very afflicting and very dangerous' effects on the living.[789] Moreover, the moral and political obligation of medical experts to intervene and 'remedy this Evil', as Kent had suggested, is a sentiment that would be echoed later in 1842 when Parliament appointed a House of Commons committee to investigate for the first time 'the evils arising from the interment of bodies' in populous areas, and 'to consider legislation to resolve the problem'.[790] These similarities are clear enough that they might be deployed to reiterate the accepted view of burial sanitation as an idea and process advanced by medical men, their politics and their theories of disease causation.

Nor was this an entirely isolated example. Provincial medical men, and particularly surgeons, began involving themselves in burial sanitation projects elsewhere in England from the late-eighteenth century. For instance William Smith, surgeon of Richmond in Surrey, testified to the House of Commons in March 1785 that his parish churchyard had 'become a real and great nuisance to the inhabitants of the said town', and that it would 'in a short time, if not prevented, become very unwholesome and dangerous'.[791] There are also broader parallels to be drawn between these local philanthropists and other, better known, late-century medical campaigners. Putrid fever was a crowd disease, and reform-minded experts thus concentrated their efforts on oversubscribed hospitals, prisons, and workhouses. Figures such as John Howard and John

[788] Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead', p.59.
[789] Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p.9; p.105
[790] *Reports from Select Committees of the House of Commons*, V.17 (London, 1842), pp.ii-iii.
[791] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.40 (London, 1803), p.635 (11 Mar 1785).

Haygarth, who successfully campaigned from the 1770s for sanitation improvements to prisons and hospitals respectively, are favourably remembered as amongst the driving forces for these institutional public health developments.[792] The all-consuming 'fear of fever' was prompting sanitary reform on a national scale; it is thus possible to view Kent as one amongst a 'choir of critics' of crowded, putrid spaces in the last decades of the eighteenth century.[793]

Sanitary intervention at the Great Vault was not, however, an early example of medical men's persuasive capacity: this was a willing collaboration between inhabitants and practitioner, predicated on a prior understanding that his claims were correct. It must be understood, firstly, that Kent's influence was necessarily very limited in this context. Burial grounds and vaults were unique in comparison to those other crowded spaces susceptible to fever, and medical men had not the same degree of authority here. However easily the churchwardens might be convinced of Kent's claims, it was not they, nor the surgeon-apothecary, who held authority over burial practice: as the lawyer John Scot had advised, the Great Vault 'being under the Body of the Church can belong to the Parish by Custom only', and 'it is Custom alone that can fix the manner in which the use of it is occasionally to be regulated'. In his allusions to 'custom', Scot refers to the fact that although under ecclesiastical law the church was property of the incumbent or minister, it was considered to be held in trust on behalf of the inhabitants. As Richard Burn summarised in his *Ecclesiastical Law*, the church and its burial grounds were above all intended 'for the use of the inhabitants' – customarily, it was they who "owned" the space and had final say on its use.[794] Scot's conclusion was therefore that any orders for the sanitary

[792] Hugh Cunningham, 'John Howard, Dissent and the Early Years of Philanthropy in Britain', in Clyde Binfield, G. M. Ditchfield and David Wykes (eds.), *Protestant Dissent and Philanthropy in Britain, 1660-1914* (Woodbridge, 2020), pp.60-76; Margaret DeLacy, 'John Haygarth and the Campaign for Contagion', in *Contagionism Catches on* (Oxford, 2017), pp.165-205.
[793] Hardman, 'Fear of Fever', p.511.
[794] Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, V.1., p.186.

regulation of the vault 'must be made by the vestry, by which I understand is to be meant a majority of the Inhabitants'.[795]

Henceforward, the issue changed hands. Kent does not appear in any further vestry meetings surrounding the Great Vault, and there are no records of his opinion being solicited again. Instead, eighty-one parish householders appeared to cast their vote on the new regulations in February 1794, the majority of whom had not witnessed Kent's report the preceding September.[796] This number was staggering in comparison to usual attendance at St Saviour's vestry meetings, which generally attracted some twenty attendees. Represented here was, of course, only a limited subsection of the parish. Only male householders 'paying scot and lot' – that is, contributing to the church and poor rates – had the right to vote on parish affairs. Nonetheless, there was certainly no requirement for medical expertise or experience, nor even need of experience as a parish officer.[797] This was, as far as the constraints of eighteenth-century parish governance would allow, a 'popular' initiative for the improvement of burial sanitation.

This vote in favour of the measure suggests that, by and large, inhabitants were convinced of the danger. It is not sufficient to attribute this broad agreement to Kent's brief report in September of 1793. Although an esteemed surgeon-apothecary amongst local inhabitants, Kent was not an especially influential figure in the wider Metropolitan medical world. His qualifications set him above unlicensed practitioners and apothecaries in terms of professional reputation, but he may have been less esteemed than the other influential university-educated physicians with attachments to the parish and with whom inhabitants were familiar. Particularly

[795] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (17 Feb 1794).
[796] Ibid.
[797] The exclusion of women from formal involvement in such decisions seems also to have become a point of tension at around the time this vote was carried out. In March 1794, one month after this final vestry meeting, the parish held a debate on the rights of non-residents and women to vote for Church incumbents; it was resolved that, for the first time in the parish's history, they would be permitted to do so henceforward. LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (18 Mar 1794).

reputable physicians with connections to St Saviour included the Cambridge-educated William Heberden M.D., lecturer in medicine at London and Cambridge, who was born in St Saviour and educated at the churchyard grammar school earlier in the century, and William Lowder M.D., who practised midwifery and delivered popular lectures on the topic at the grammar school in the 1780s.[798] Kent was, by contrast, a low-level practitioner whose short report to the vestry constituted merely a brief warning about the danger – hardly persuasive, if a contentious idea. His brevity and lack of involvement thereafter in a matter of such apparent gravity perhaps indicates, even, that Kent himself did not consider his claims contentious or likely to be ill-received, since he felt a nudge to the vestry would prove sufficient to enact change.

There would, moreover, have been good reason for inhabitants to ignore the surgeon-apothecary's opinion had they disagreed. Lead-lined coffins were significantly more expensive to buy and bury than standard wooden ones.[799] St Saviour was a manufacturing parish with a large labouring population, not an especially wealthy one.[800] Higher-status vault burials were likely in demand here, a phenomenon well-documented across the history of English eighteenth-century funerary rituals.[801] Vault burials were, however, already out of reach for most inhabitants who could not afford the one pound and ten shillings burial fee, and instead interred their dead in a parish burial ground for a maximum of two shillings and six pence.[802] That families wishing to bury their dead in the Great Vault might resist the added cost of a lead-lined coffin is suggested by the churchwarden's anticipation that parishioners 'may be obstinate and insist on burying' a corpse there 'without a leaden coffin'.[803]

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[798] 'Midwifery Lectures by William Lowder', RCS: MS0104/2; William Munk, 'The Roll of the Royal College of Physicians', V.2 (London, 1844), p.311; p.141. Via *rcplondon.ac.uk* [Nov 2021].
[799] The increase in bearer's fees for a lead-lined coffin instead of a wooden coffin at St Saviour was ten pence in 1792. LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (May 1792).
[800] Field, 'Economic Change', 243-266.
[801] See, for instance, Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual* (London, 1984).
[802] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (May 1792).
[803] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (17 Feb 1794).

A final query about the extent of the practitioner's influence relates to the nature of the evidence itself. Although Kent was the first to lodge a formal complaint, and thus to have his opinion recorded in the parish's vestry minutes, it seems unlikely that he was the first to notice the air in the Great Vault. With little ventilation, an accumulation of large numbers of dead bodies, and the damp surroundings of the Thames bank, the smell must indeed have been quite overpowering. Nor were urban communities in eighteenth-century England generally tolerant of such conditions in their churches, especially during the winter months when illness was rife. At St John's in Wapping, for example, inhabitants had in January 1756 complained that the air in their dilapidated church was so damp and unwholesome that it was 'as bad as going into a vault'.[804] Cheesemonger Thomas Goodland testified to the House of Commons that he had attended divine service in this church every week for three years until, earlier that winter,

> …He sat at one end of the Church, where the graves in the church-yard were over his Head; and that he was taken very ill in the Church, and was not able to follow his business for a fortnight.[805]

Similarly, parishioners of St Saviour in 1793 did not need a local practitioner to persuade them of the health dangers of crowded, putrefying bodies. The circulation of information about putrid fever transcended narrow medical contexts in eighteenth-century society. Kevin Siena has, for example, characterised the 1770s and 1780s as a period of popular 'jail fever panic' which accompanied and motivated broader English penitentiary reform.[806] Margaret DeLacy has similarly written of prison reforms in 1780s Lancashire that it was 'the threat of fever' that 'won cautious justices over to the recommendations' of medical activists.[807] Both have linked popular panic with specific epidemics, local or national. For Siena, the critical 'turning point' was a 1772 outbreak of fever at the Old Bailey, which developed into an epidemic that killed several judges and sparked two decades of national panic.[808] For DeLacy, it was a 1783 fever

[804] *Journal of the House of Commons*, V.27 (London, 1803), p.505 (9 Mar 1756).
[805] Ibid., p.506.
[806] Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, pp.124-154.
[807] Margaret DeLacy, *Prison Reform in Lancashire, 1700-1850* (Manchester, 1986), p.81.
[808] Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, p.145.

epidemic in Lancashire that persuaded authorities of the necessity of sanitary reforms in local prisons.[809] In essence, it was the experience and awareness of national and local fever epidemics that motivated change, and not merely what medical activists said about the potential danger.

Such anxieties about putrid fever are detectable at local level in Southwark, and they ran on to the 1790s as outbreaks escalated. It has been mentioned that the Borough was by this decade home to five new medical institutions. These had joined two pre-existing hospitals, two large prisons and a house of correction, many of them built or rebuilt in the late-eighteenth century.

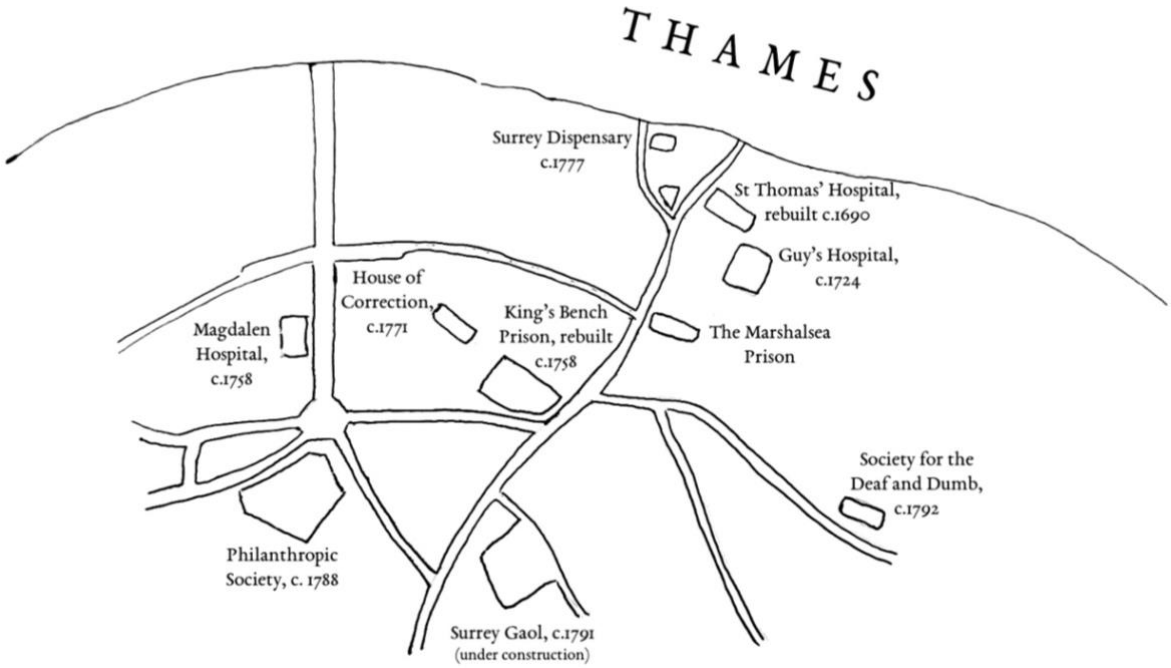


Fig. 12. Map of principal prisons and hospitals in Southwark, c.1793, with their approximate dates of construction. Created by the author.

Several of these institutions had a long history of overcrowding and associated epidemic concerns. It has been mentioned in Chapter Three that the Marshalsea, a large and infamous debtors' prison located at the east border of St Saviour, had been investigated as early as 1729 due to concerns about the conditions of prisoners. The investigators' report describes the

[809] DeLacy, *Prison Reform*, pp.78-81.

crowding and confinement of debtors there in small spaces, with 'thirty, forty, nay fifty prisoners having been locked up in some of them not sixteen foot square'.[810] The sick, too, were 'lying without beds on the floor, perishing from extreme want', laid upon dressers to the sides of the wards, and hanging from the ceiling in hammocks.[811] Even before putrid fever 'came in vogue' later in the century, these conditions raised concerns: 'the crowding of Prisoners together in this manner is one great occupation of the gaol distemper' and 'it seems surprising', wrote the investigators, that 'it hath not caused a contagion.'[812] The open putrefaction of prisoners' corpses is also explicitly discussed, it being reported that guards 'made a practice' of 'coupling the living with the dead'.[813] One particularly gruesome incident was recorded of

> … a Person whom the Keepers confined [with] two dead Bodies which had lain there for Four Days; yet he was kept there with them Six Days longer, in which Time the Vermin devoured the Flesh from the Faces, eat out the Eyes of the Heads of the Carcasses, which were bloated, putrifyed, and turned green, during the poor Debtor's dismal Confinement with them.[814]

Southwark was also home to a large house of correction at the south border of St Saviour, where putrid fever scares had emerged at an equally early date. In 1738, the Keeper of the House petitioned the magistrates of Surrey Quarter Sessions for 'an order for the enlargement' of the building, on the grounds that 'the gaol is so full that he is apprehensive it will occasion a sickness therein', and 'two prisoners have died from the gaol distemper there in the past three weeks'.[815] Concern about jail fever at Southwark House of Correction continued for several decades thereafter, with a succession of investigating committees declining to enlarge and repair its buildings for financial reasons. By 1773, concern was escalating such that a local surgeon was commissioned to 'attend' the House of Correction, and Surrey's County Gaol, to testify and produce a certificate stating that 'there has been no contagious disease of gaol distemper in

[810] House of Commons, *A Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the State of the Gaols of this Kingdom* (London, 1729), p.4.
[811] Ibid., p.4.
[812] Ibid., p.4.
[813] Ibid., p.9.
[814] Ibid., p.9.
[815] SHC: QS2/6/1738/Eas/81 (1738).

either prison during the year, the principal diseases being venereal and small pox'.[816] The surgeon returned in 1776 and 1779 to re-testify that prisons were still 'free from contagious distemper'.[817] Whether his report was truthful or not, these investigations point to a continued, and indeed escalating, concern about putrid fever in Southwark's jails and a resultant drive for close monitoring of the health of prisoners.

Information about such risks and their relationship with putrid bodies, living and dead, was circulated widely. In June 1767, a report in *The London Evening Post* stated that 'numbers have lately died' at the Marshalsea and King's Bench prisons, the latter another large institution at the south border of St Saviour.[818] The writer speculated that 'some very dreadful distemper' 'must be the consequence of immuring such numbers', suggesting that a contagion had broken out due to the warm weather and crowding in these Southwark prisons.[819] In 1787, the King's Bench was still deemed a fever risk. As one London commentator warned in *The Public Advertiser*, the prison was then 'so full that a gaol fever is dreaded every hour – perhaps even a plague may be the consequence'.[820] Popular fear of these emerging epidemics, and reports of devastating putrid fever outbreaks across Britain and overseas, were also capitalised upon by apothecaries and hopeful salesmen. London newspapers were littered with advertisements over the late-century for putrid fever remedies, such as 'Dr James' Fever Powder' and 'Dr Norris' Fever Drops'. In late November and early December 1786, a Surrey surgeon named 'Mr Rymer' advertised his 'antiseptic elixir' several times in *The Public Advertiser*. This medicine was 'for the cure and treatment of the plague, the jail distemper, malignant, putrid and low nervous fevers, and all infectious and contagious diseases'.[821] Rymer lists the two main causes of such infectious

[816] SHC: QS2/6/1773/Eph/34 (1773).
[817] SHC: QS2/6/1776/Eas/42 (1776); QS2/6/1779/Mic/39 (1779).
[818] 'News', *The London Evening Post*, Is.6829 (London, 9-11 Jun 1767), p.1.
[819] Ibid p.1.
[820] Cited in Siena, *Rotten Bodies*, p.151.
[821] 'Advertisements and Notices', *The Public Advertiser,* Is.16390 (London, 1 Dec 1786), p.2. Rymer advertised his elixir in thirty-five separate newspaper notices between November 1785 and January 1787, including in *The Public Advertiser*, *The Morning Herald*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Sussex Advertiser*.

and contagious diseases. His elixir could abate any illness arising 'from putrid, stagnant marshes' in 'unhealthy climates', or 'immediately proceeding from the morbid steam, vapour and exhalations from deceased human bodies'.[822]

Rymer likely had a range of customers, as critics of intramural burial constantly restated that even uneducated laypeople could intuitively comprehend a link between putrid fever and human corpses. In April 1791, just two years before sanitation concerns were raised at the Great Vault, an anonymous 'philanthropos' of Gray's Inn addressed the Lord Mayor of London with an open letter discussing vault burials in particular.[823] In a lengthy article, the author describes 'the serious and destructive consequences that result from the present pernicious and savage custom of burying in churches in the heart of the metropolis'.[824] The 'injurious consequences of those mephitic exhalations which are constantly emitting from our best regulated vaults' were, for the writer, demonstrated by 'physicians of ability' who 'have joined their testimony to the public voice'.[825] The author is careful to stress that 'there can be no real reason for appealing to the opinions of physicians to support self-evident propositions'; he instead states that the fact 'is notorious to most of my readers' and did not therefore require 'laboured argument'.[826] The deficiency thus lay not with popular understanding but with legislation. As one writer in *The Morning Chronicle* had phrased it in 1783, 'even the illiterate dread the consequences of putrid exhalations', and London authorities had therefore 'to take so important a matter' as 'the dangerous tendency of interments in churches [into] their serious consideration'.[827]

[822] 'Advertisements and Notices', *The Public Advertiser,* Is.16390 (London, 1 Dec 1786), p.2.
[823] 'News', *Diary or Woodfall's Register,* Is.651 (London, 27 Apr 1791), p.2.
[824] Ibid., p.2.
[825] Ibid., p.2.
[826] Ibid., p.2.
[827] 'News', *The Morning Chronicle*, Is.4454 (London, 26 Aug 1783), p.7.

Kent was, then, likely a catalyst rather than a force for reform. Experience and awareness of the risks of putrid fever had primed inhabitants of St Saviour to receive his report and, in the absence of legislative guidance, they devised their own 'scientific' solutions. The technologies suggested by the churchwardens were relatively innovative. It was only in roughly the preceding decade that ventilation had been widely embraced as a key fever-prevention strategy in Southwark's prisons and hospitals.[828] Lead-lined coffins, meanwhile, had been used for interments in England since at least the seventeenth century; yet as recently as 1783, St Thomas' Hospital, saddled with 'febrile infection', had begun a sanitation programme involving the adoption of iron bedsteads, 'as less likely to contract and retain infection than those of wood'.[829]

The vestry minutes provide no conclusive evidence to explain where the churchwardens had learned of these technologies, nor why inhabitants accepted them as a solution so readily. The allusion to a 'scientific person or persons' in minutes of the initial vestry meeting provides a possible answer, but not a definite one. If the churchwarden James Ferguson had consulted a local physician, perhaps one based at St Thomas' or Guy's hospitals, this correspondence took place very informally: it was customary for professional opinions to be recorded in full wherever they were solicited to inform the vestry's orders, and no such record appears in this case. In his advice on the order for lead-lined coffins, the lawyer John Scot likewise observed that 'it is merely stated that such a proposition has been made but it is not said that it has been made by any of the scientific men to whom the wardens were referred'.[830]

[828] At St Thomas' Hospital it was introduced after 1780. Gilbert Blane, *Observations on the Comparative Prevalence, Mortality, and Treatment of Different Diseases* (London, 1813), pp.112-113.
[829] Ibid., pp.112-113. It should be noted, however, that archaeological excavations at Cure's College burial ground suggest that wood coffins remained standard for earth burials in Southwark during the period under study. Excavations undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology in nine sections of the burial ground revealed 223 wooden and no lead or lead-lined coffins. See Louise Loe, et. al., *Living and Dying in Southwark: Excavations at Cure's College Burial Ground, Park Street* (Oxford, 2017), pp.93-94.
[830] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (30 Dec 1793).

Just as inhabitants of St Saviour were already aware of the risks of fever, they may also have been aware of these solutions. Several of them were, for example, directly involved in the construction of Surrey New Gaol at the border of St George's Fields, and others were no doubt conscious of it (see Figure 10). This was a vast rebuilding project begun in 1791 and concluded in 1799; it replaced Southwark House of Correction and was the second most expensive prison to be erected in England before 1800.[831] James Neild described the New Gaol in his *The General State of the Prisons* (1812): 'a noble building which does honour to the County', it possessed model sanitary facilities such as 'an oven for purifying offensive or infected clothing' and was 'well-ventilated' and 'airy'.[832] Each felon was allocated a room with 'a circular ventilator, of 18 inches in diameter in the middle of each cell'.[833] This initiative had exposed at least some Southwark householders to the latest 'scientific' methods for putrid fever prevention. Of the workmen contracted to construct this prison in 1791, more than half lived in the Borough.[834] They included, for example, William Holmer, plasterer of 145 Borough High Street in St Saviour. Principal organisers of the project were John Pardon of Blackman Street, who acted as treasurer, and George Gwilt, then of Union Street, the prison's surveyor.[835] Inhabitants had, perhaps, consciously designed their vault sanitation initiative after the example of other local institutions with a similar propensity to putrid disease.

Wherever the churchwardens and vestry meeting attendees had learned of ventilation and lead coffins as methods for putrid fever prevention, what is most striking is that they sought out and laid emphasis on rational, 'scientific' solutions of their own accord. In doing so they placed value on contemporary medical-scientific theories and guidance to an extent not hitherto seen

831 The total cost of the prison was £39,742. See C. W. Chalklin (ed.), *Surrey Gaol and Session House, 1791-1824* (Woking, 2009), pp.xix-xx.
832 James Neild, *The General State of the Prisons* (London, 1812), pp.547-53. Reprinted in ibid., pp.lxi-lxvii.
833 Ibid., p.lxiv.
834 Ibid., p.xix.
835 Ibid., p.xviii.

in this thesis. Around 1816, St Saviour's vestry also commissioned a number of ventilators at ground level in the church, in which position the effluvia from vaults below could be better removed from the building.

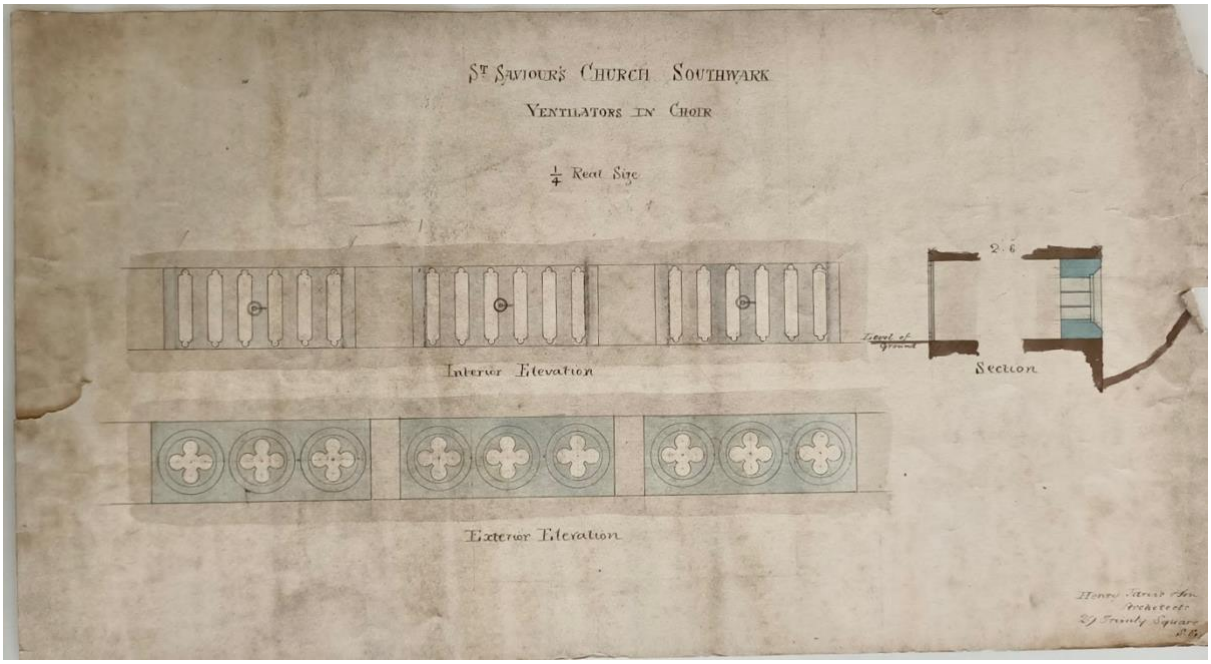


Fig. 13. Plan of proposed ventilators in St Saviour's Church, c.1816.

The capacity and willingness of communities to engage with professional medicine in this manner is evidenced elsewhere after 1790. Similar initiatives for the improvement of vault ventilation occurred, for example, at Christ Church in April 1821. The parish adopted the same regulations as had St Saviour, its open vestry ordering that

> …the churchwardens do adopt such measures as they think necessary for making the vaults under the church fit for the decent reception of the dead and preservation of the health of the living, and for the proper draining and ventilating of the same. (…) [And] none other than lead coffins to be placed in such vaults on account of the health of the inhabitants.[836]

In 1826, improvements continued with the purchase of 'a hot air stove for warming and ventilating the church'.[837] At the parish of Rotherhite, Bermondsey, vestry and inhabitants recorded in 1821 that 'for many years past' they had considered it necessary 'to erect flues [pipes]

[836] LMA: P92/CTC/088 (Apr 1821).
[837] Ibid. (Nov 1826).

in different parts of the church, to prevent the offensiveness and danger occasioned by the effluvia arising from the putrefaction of the bodies' in their vaults.[838] Urban communities were increasingly resorting to novel medical-scientific practice to manage burial sanitation, and conceiving of the problem in terms of 'effluvia' and 'putrefaction' as well as nuisance.

It is through these measures, and this language, that the changing relationship between established medicine and burial practice from the late-eighteenth century is best understood. Philippa Hardman has made a convincing case that the popular 'fear of fever' was itself a product of medical-scientific writing.[839] In this sense, professional writers and campaigners were ultimately responsible for reforms in which they were not even directly involved: Howard, Haygarth, and Pringle, just as much as Robert Kent, were the drivers of sanitary improvements at the Great Vault and elsewhere. Yet the framework of parish governance, bound up as it was with ecclesiastical law, continued to prevent medical figures from exercising direct authority over burial practice. The agency of communities over their own burial provision cannot be overstated – it was they who possessed the authority to permit or deny professional medicine its role in burial regulation. Thus, what was truly changing here was not professional medicine's increased effort to be let in, but its *invitation* by urban communities who increasingly understood it as constructive and valuable. If practitioners like Kent became more present, and medical experts more vocal, this cultural shift had emboldened them to do so.

The 1790s 'turning point' identified in Chapter Three should also be reconsidered in this light. This case study has shown that Southwark's inhabitants were capable of evaluating the dangers of putrid fever and enacting small burial reforms to resolve it of their own accord. It is thus noteworthy that putrid fever's rise as a public health concern in the last decade of the eighteenth

[838] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.75, p.180 (11 May 1820).
[839] Hardman, 'Fear of Fever', pp.511-531.

century corresponds exactly with a sudden proliferation of burial ground expansions in Southwark. Nor was this pattern restricted to Southwark. Julie Rugg, Fiona Stirling and Andy Clayden have identified the same sudden expansion to burial provision in Sheffield, suggesting that 'the late-eighteenth century is one likely common turning point' for change in British burial practice.[840] The authors associate this change with population increase and overcrowding, both undoubtedly significant factors. It seems likely, however, that these unpleasant practical circumstances were also understood as incredibly dangerous.

Important continuities are nonetheless evident in this case study. Most obvious is the presence of an immediate epidemic background linked with plague, in this case putrid fever, which rendered the dangers of corpse putrefaction real to Southwark's inhabitants rather than an intellectual abstraction. Again, moreover, popular responses to the threat are muted by the nature of the evidence. Here the absence is particularly apparent at the national level. It must be observed that corpses and burial spaces were not subject to the same extensive regulations as environments of the living, like prisons and hospitals, during the putrid fever campaigns of the late-eighteenth century. This paradox has not hitherto been addressed in work on either putrid fever or burial sanitation and yet it is notable that, despite writers' powerful warnings against the effluvia of the dead during this period, campaigners directed their efforts nearly exclusively at the living. It seems clear that they did so because, in spite of its growing involvement, medical responsibility in this period still did not extend to the regulation of non-hospitalised dead bodies. Lastly, the danger continued to be conceived within the framework of 'nuisance' identified as so important in Chapter Five, now beginning at the turn of the nineteenth century to be more explicitly identified with health and medicine.

[840] Rugg, Stirling, and Clayden, 'Sheffield', p.645.

Chapter Seven

Self-government and Sanitary Legislation at Christ Church, 1815-17

On 8 March 1815, the parish clerk of Christ Church recorded a lengthy (five-page) resolution of the vestry which had assembled that day to discuss the matter of the parish churchyard. This entry includes the following statement:

> [Resolved] That the church yard is become too small for the population of this parish, and that the same is now, and has for some time, been in a disgraceful state, and that contagion may arise from the putridity of the bodies buried there; and that the church yard ought to be improved and enlarged by Mr Marshall's trustees (the new owners thereof) and that if not improved, the responsibility will rest with such Trustees, in case any pestilential disease shall arise from the church yard.[841]

The issue of the churchyard as a site of disease had been alluded to in records of vestry meetings held over two years earlier. A committee of inhabitants had been appointed in February 1813 to 'investigate the state of the churchyard' for reasons not, at the time, recorded.[842] The committee's investigation lasted several months and was eventually thwarted by the trustees of John Marshall's endowment. Marshall was a seventeenth-century benefactor whose will, executed in 1627, provided the original funds for the construction of Christ Church and its churchyard, enabling the creation of the parish from ground previously belonging to St Saviour. Between 1813 and 1817, the parish vestry and Marshall's trustees butted heads continually over the latter's reluctance to permit and finance a churchyard enlargement. In the Spring of 1817, the vestry organised a parish-wide, three-day poll to garner the consent of parishioners in their efforts to bypass the trustees and expand the churchyard by petitioning for an Act of Parliament. Following a narrow majority of participants voting in favour of this measure, 'An Act for Enlarging the Church Yard of Christ Church' was passed later that year.[843] After the passing of the Act, there occurred a year-long hiatus during which the local residents tasked with carrying

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841 'Christ Church, Southwark, Vestry Minute Book, 1811-1823', LMA: P92/CTC/087 (8 Mar 1815).
842 Ibid. (15 Feb 1813).
843 Local and Personal Act, 57 George III, c.xxxv. Parliamentary Archives: HL/PO/PB/1/1817/57G3n85 (1817).

out the enlargement ignored the matter, to the frustration of the vestry. Eventually, in mid-1818, a small amount of new ground was purchased to the south of the existing yard, and burials continued there until the entire churchyard was closed to interments for health reasons under the terms of the Burial Act of 1852.



Fig. 14. The churchyard layout prior to the extension, c.1746.



Fig. 15. The churchyard layout after the extension, with extension outlined, c.1880.

This thesis has throughout shown the problems that Southwark communities faced in the sanitary management of their dead. Conflicts with other institutions, legal hurdles, and financial barriers, amongst others, were all ordinary to the archaic and fragmented system of burial management which characterised English parishes during the long-eighteenth century. By the end of this period, as Chapter Three has shown, parishes faced further difficulties in managing their burial provision. These issues laid the immediate groundwork for later sanitarian campaigns: in spite of its long history of local agency and improvement, Southwark would come to be held up by mid-century commentators – and by some historians – as an example of failure,

its overcrowded burial grounds and unruly parish management together appearing to vindicate centralised legislation for 'burial reform'.

This chapter considers the case of Christ Church's burial ground extension to explore in more detail the interplay between local self-government and sanitary improvement. This chapter first examines the process by which Christ Church secured a burial ground extension, detailing the severe practical, legal, and financial barriers involved. It demonstrates that burial reform was a significant local issue, attracting extensive public interest. In analysing the aftermath of the Act of Parliament, which led to significant discontent in the parish, the chapter argues that parishioners pursued burial sanitation improvements not merely out of concern for population health, but because they derived civic meaning, pride, and identity from managing their burial spaces. This finding echoes recent histories of parish-based community identity in the nineteenth century, as well as eighteenth-century English public health. The final section of the chapter seeks to challenge the dominant narrative that sanitarian campaigners introduced public health concerns surrounding burial spaces. It argues that the political and moral value placed on burial management at local level gave these debates a heightened public and emotional weight, both at Christ Church and elsewhere. Whilst the visibility and complexity of local efforts helped to render reform a national issue, the desire for autonomy over burial practice also led some figures to resist legislative assistance, viewing it as an affront to local self-determination.

Christ Church had been suffering from burial ground overcrowding since at least 1793. The churchyard then in use had been constructed with adequate space and drainage for the parish population in 1742. Chapter Three has discussed the vestry's earlier attempts to secure an extension due to overcrowding, in 1793 and 1803. Plans were quashed on both occasions by the diversion of parish funds – and inhabitants' attention – to other pressing projects. In the meantime, interments had not abated at the parish. Its small churchyard catered not only to a

large number of inhabitants but to the numerous dead of growing neighbouring parishes and 'unknown persons' passing through the area. For instance, the parish burial registers reveal a large number of drowned persons recovered from the Thames and interred here: in October, 1764, 'a woman and two children drowned' were buried, and the following month there occurred five burials of 'persons unknown' who died within the parish bounds.[844] Thomas Ackland, Rector of the parish from 1796 to 1810, paid close attention to these accumulating numbers: he recorded annual burial totals for every year that he was in office.[845] His figures show that around four thousand bodies had been interred at the churchyard during his incumbency alone.[846] Taking his annual calculations as averages, it is possible to estimate that during the twenty years since the first overcrowding complaint, some six thousand people had been buried here.[847] By 1813, when the issue of the churchyard was raised for a third time, these growing numbers and repeated failures to extend provision had rendered the space, in the words of the vestry, 'filled with graves and dead bodies'.[848]

[844] 'Christ Church, Southwark, Burial Registers, 1671-1752', LMA: X059/165.
[845] 'Christ Church, Southwark, Register of Burials, 1796-1812', LMA: P92/CTC/057. Via *ancestry.co.uk* [Accessed Jun 2023].
[846] Ibid. (1796-1810). Ackland recorded an average of 280 burials annually in these years.
[847] Based on the average of 280 burials per annum, ibid.
[848] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (Feb 1816).

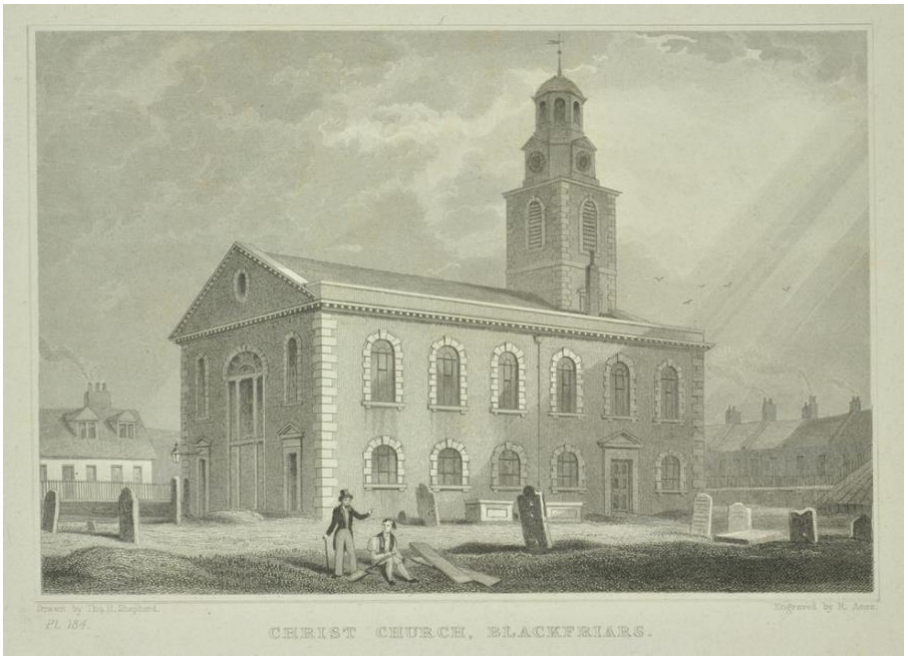


Fig. 16. Engraving of the parish church of Christ Church, showing gravedigger and burial mounds, c.1830.

On this occasion there was no shortage of attention to the matter. For five years the problem of the churchyard occupied the parish at large. Including the polling days in April 1817, a total of twenty-one open meetings were dedicated exclusively to the matter of the burial ground between 1813 and 1818.[849] In other years at Christ Church, vestry meetings were held once per quarter on a range of topics, whereas in the month of April 1817 alone, five separate meetings were held just on the subject of the churchyard.[850] These meetings were attended on average by significantly more parishioners than were standard meetings, such as those for the negotiation of parish rates and elections of parish officers. A vestry meeting held in January 1815 for setting the year's poor rate attracted twelve attendees; in March the same year, a printed notice advertising a churchyard meeting brought forty-six named inhabitants, and 'many others' unnamed, to the parish vestry.[851] Throughout the churchyard negotiations, the only comparably well-attended meeting was a single discussion held in March 1815 on the recently-passed Corn

[849] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (Feb 1816).
[850] Ibid. (Apr 1816).
[851] Ibid. (3 Jan 1815; 8 Mar 1815).

Law amendments.[852] These amendments, the vestry recorded, would increase the price of 'the basic necessities of life' and therefore aroused 'deep concern and alarm' amongst the fifty-eight assembled parishioners; similarly high numbers at the churchyard meeting four days later suggest an equivalent degree of interest in the safe burial of the dead.[853]

This high attendance is unsurprising given the urgent terms in which the problem was represented, but notable, nonetheless. The need for a churchyard extension was pressing, and the prolonged failure of the vestry to obtain one had become a source of considerable discontent. In early 1815, the new Rector for Christ Church, Reverend J. H. Mapleton, addressed a letter to the committee investigating the churchyard to appeal that they enlarge it in spite of resistance from the trustees of Marshall's fund. 'The fact is', Mapleton began, 'that [the churchyard] has deeply and constantly engaged my attention, and my most unremitting exertions.'[854] The Rector described having previously been assured that 'the gentlemen of Mr Marshall's Trust were taking the subject into their serious and grave consideration', and stated that responsibility now lay with the committee and vestry to pursue the matter: 'to you, then, Gentlemen, the ultimate decision of this most important question is submitted: and, if anything can be done by you, towards the alteration & extension of the church yard, I would (most respectfully, but most earnestly) intreat your adoption of it'.[855] Mapleton felt that he 'need not point out' the 'evils of our present situation; the 'remedy', he continued, 'I leave to your better judgement'.[856] No solution would appear for three years, and in the meantime frustration mounted. In April 1817, the vestry summarised that 'the disgraceful state of the church yard has been long the subject of complaint, and particularly on account of the contagion which may

[852] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (1 Mar 1815).
[853] Ibid. (1 Mar 1815).
[854] Ibid. (7 Mar 1815).
[855] Ibid. (7 Mar 1815).
[856] Ibid. (7 Mar 1815).

arise from the putridity of the bodies, unless remedied, and repeated vestries have declared their opinion of the necessity for the enlargement and improvement of the church yard'.[857]

The main obstacle facing the vestry was funding. The full cost of the eventual extension is not recorded in the minutes; the only reference to the purchase is a late-1818 record of 'ground lately purchased at the south-west of the church'.[858] Some indication of the expense can be gathered by looking at other similar projects in Southwark. Such purchases were usually organised on a leasehold rather than freehold basis, and vestries therefore paid large upfront costs followed by yearly ground rental fees when they acquired property or land. At St Saviour, for instance, the suggested fee for Cross Bones burying ground had been £80 per annum when its lease was renewed in July 1802, as well as a £100 lease renewal fee.[859] This price was considered so unaffordable that negotiations for reducing it lasted several months, with the landowner agreeing eventually to a lower rental fee of £65 – still more than double the £30 suggested by the vestry.[860] At Christ Church, the leasehold purchase of a single property in Bennett Street in February 1815 cost the vestry £100 up-front, a two-guineas annual ground rent and a £16 annuity to the owner for life.[861] The fee for the large extension at Christ Church must have been significantly higher than both of these projects, since it additionally required purchasing and pulling down several buildings as well as reconstruction work. The cost of fencing the new ground and creating a pathway was estimated at a staggering £420 in 1816.[862] These minor construction works alone would therefore eat up more than half the parish's annual income from church rates, the usual source of money for church repair and improvement projects.[863]

[857] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (1 Feb 1816; 8 Apr 1817).
[858] Ibid. (29 Oct 1818).
[859] LMA: P92/SAV/0454 (27 Jul 1802).
[860] Ibid. (27 Aug 1802).
[861] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (7 Feb 1816).
[862] Ibid. (27 Apr 1816).
[863] The Church Rates income for Christ Church was £729 total for 1810-1811. Ibid. (18 Jun 1811).

Perhaps due to these costs, the vestry decided from the outset to avoid funding the extension using parish money. The first action they took in response to complaints about the churchyard was the formation of the 'churchyard committee' in February of 1813, whose primary role was to source alternative funding.[864] This original committee's members are not named in the surviving minutes; when it was re-formed in 1816, however, there were elected to join it all the parish overseers as well as thirteen inhabitants.[865] The former group had met with the trustees of Marshall's fund in 1813 and 'stated to them the necessity of some enlargement of the burial ground'.[866] According to a report read early the following year, the committee had 'requested to know if the trustees would furnish ground for such purpose, and that in case they should not provide the same, whether they would unite with the parish in obtaining and making a title thereto'.[867] The trustees promised to consider the matter and respond in due course. After 'several applications' were made by the committee for an answer, one was 'at last received' several months later stating that the trustees 'were not in possession of any ground applicable for such purpose and could not unite with the parish in the purchase of premises for that purpose'.[868]

It was in response to this initial rejection that the vestry addressed Marshall's trustees with the letter cited at the beginning of this chapter: 'if not improved, the responsibility will rest with such trustees, in case any pestilential disease shall arise from the church yard'. The vestry's attempt to lay the blame for a potential epidemic at the door of Marshall's trustees was more than financially justified. The rejection had forced the committee to seek legal counsel 'as to what rights and powers the parish has for compelling the trustees of Mr Marshall to enlarge the

[864] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (15 Feb 1813).
[865] Ibid. (1 Feb 1816).
[866] Ibid. (7 Feb 1814).
[867] Ibid. (7 Feb 1814).
[868] Ibid. (18 Jan 1814).

burial ground'.[869] Even in an expedient public health situation, the answer from local legal specialist 'Dr Adams' was that the vestry had none. The existing burial ground was owned by the trustees; at the very least, an extension required their permission. This ownership also threw into question future burial fee arrangements, should the churchyard be extended. The vestry speculated that, if they proceeded without permission or funding, they would materially suffer long after since 'Mr Marshall's trustees would oppose the [parish's] receipt of the income which might arise from the burial fees'.[870]

After 1815, issues of political authority and legal privilege came to dominate meetings about the burial ground. The vestry was uncertain of its own 'rights and powers' with regard to the churchyard, and those of the trustees.[871] Not only the trustees but also the parish Rector neglected to act within their full capacity. The vestry approached the Rector and asked that he write to the Bishop of Southwark to enquire about Church funding for the extension, 'as the only means of preventing a continuance of the nuisance complained of'.[872] In response, Mapleton simply stated the words above recorded, that 'to you [the committee], the ultimate decision of this most important question is submitted'. Both groups thus deflected responsibility for the churchyard extension back onto the vestry, despite clear warnings in these letters and meetings that outbreak of disease might be the outcome. The helplessness of the vestry's situation was clearly felt after these two responses, and the vestry minutes after Mapleton's letter was read concede that 'this parish has no power or funds to enlarge the church yard.'[873] After more lengthy consultations and an exchange of letters between the vestry clerk and Henry Bilke, clerk to the trustees, the owners 'expressed their consent to the proposed alteration of the church yard upon condition that the same be done at the expense of the

[869] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (4 May 1815).
[870] Ibid. (7 Mar 1815).
[871] Ibid. (4 May 1815; 1 Feb 1816).
[872] Ibid. (3 Jan 1815).
[873] Ibid. (7th Mar 1815).

parish'.[874] The trustees agreed, moreover, that they would make no claim to the burial dues for the new ground. Thus, over three years after first approaching the trustees, the parish resolved to proceed without their involvement.

The already complicated situation surrounding funding was henceforth compounded by additional problems of land ownership, shortage of space for a burial ground, and the extreme complexities of early nineteenth-century English land law. After this resolution in 1815, the burial ground committee began inquiring about land they might purchase, but struggled to find any. Their search was in part complicated by the Rector's insistence that the new churchyard adjoin the old, a condition which significantly limited choice in a parish already short of available ground. During the period between the first churchyard extension in 1742 to this second extension in the 1810s, virtually the entirety of the Manor of Paris Garden, which was roughly coincident with the parish of Christ Church, had been built upon. In 1760, Blackfriars Bridge was constructed connecting Christ Church directly to the City of London. In the same decade, Great Surrey Street was created joining Blackfriars Bridge to St George's Fields, the latter of which was by this time populated with residential properties and would be completely enclosed for development in the 1780s.[875] Great Surrey Street was eighty feet in width and ran directly through the centre of Christ Church parish, cutting off the church's burial ground and preventing any extension on its eastern side.[876] The only available lands for an extension in 1816 were thus small plots to the north, south and west of the churchyard on which there already stood residential properties.

Problems of land shortage due to urban development had also plagued the vestry of St George when they dealt with burial ground overcrowding that same year. Their own petition for an Act

[874] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (27 Apr 1815).
[875] 'St George's Fields, Enclosure and Development', *Survey of London,* V.25 (London, 1955), pp.49-64.
[876] Manning and Bray, *Surrey*, p.536.

of Parliament, presented to the House of Commons in 1816, describes the parish churchyard and its vault as 'full' 'owing to the increase of the population', and that although 'there are several pieces of open or void ground adjoining and near to the said churchyard very eligible' for an extension, many of these 'have recently been let on building lesses, and the lessees are now digging the foundations for small houses or tenements to be erected thereon'.[877] The vestry minute books of St George are sparse and damaged, and no detailed discussion of their extension survives. However, a debate about Rector's rates at St George survives in documentation dated 1807. In this year the 'present' population of the parish was recorded at 24,043, more than four times Jeremy Boulton's figure for 1678 at 5,727.[878] Many of these inhabitants were lodged in the newly developed St George's Fields. Information was given to the Rector 'from a gentleman who founded a great number' of these tenements that within the previous seven years alone he had 'caused 200 new ones to be erected: and that the number built by others cannot fall short of 150'.[879] 'An Act for Enlarging the Church Yard of St George the Martyr' was passed in June, 1816, conferring power on the parish's burial ground trustees to attempt to purchase some of these lands and tenements for their own extension. The complexities of English land law in the early-nineteenth century were such that, until July that year, it was not lawful even for willing landowners possessing grounds adjacent to cemeteries to sell that land for consecration without application to Parliament. Fortunately, Christ Church vestry did not face this problem, carrying out their extension after the passing of the Burial Ground Act (1816), but they still dealt with serious difficulty in finding a lawful seller. The Manor of Paris Garden was at this time largely the property of a single landowner; when the vestry approached him 'respecting the purchase of a ground adjoining to the south-east of the

[877] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.71 (London, 1816), p.186 (13 Mar 1816).
[878] 'Case of the Rectory of St George's, in the Borough of Southwark, by John Brand, Rector', SA: P283STGM (1807), p.2.
[879] SA: P283STGM (1807), p.2.

churchyard', they discovered that he was 'a minor who is not therefore at present in a position to sell the same'.[880]

The first mention of an Act of Parliament at Christ Church followed after the vestry failed to find any suitable ground. The committee felt that these practical hurdles warranted a change of approach, and they stated in a vestry meeting of April 1816 that 'therefore under all the circumstances of the case [they] beg leave to recommend it to the vestry to apply to parliament for an act to enlarge the present church yard.'[881] It was resolved in the following month that

> The necessary ground for such purpose cannot be obtained so advantageously for this parish as by an act of parliament, whereby the parish may be enabled to borrow the money necessary for the purchase of the ground and premises by way of Annuity or at interest to be repaid progressively out of future rates or out of the profits and fees to be received from such new burial ground, instead of raising the same by a rate or rates on the present inhabitants, which would be the case if ground could now be obtained without an act of parliament.[882]

This Act of Parliament was not the end of the matter, and broader parish politics came to the fore after it was suggested. The churchyard extension was now decisively going to be funded with parish income, using future church rates as well as any profits from burial dues. The values of environmental and population health improvement underpinning this innovation thus came into direct conflict with the financial concerns of some parishioners. Where, at the outset of the debate, parishioners and vestry had been united against Marshall's trustees, the parish itself was now divided along financial lines. For those less well-off, the financial risks attending an extension outweighed the population health risks associated with burying in overcrowded ground. In the end, a compromise was reached by popular vote: a 'frugal' churchyard extension which resolved the overcrowding issue and did away with expensive plans for the beautification of the new ground.[883] The petitions, letters and votes surrounding the Act of Parliament shed

[880] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (27 Apr 1816).
[881] Ibid. (27 Apr 1816).
[882] Ibid. (8 May 1816).
[883] Ibid. (21 Apr 1817).

light on the types of people in favour of, and against, a costly extension. Those in favour were represented by a large committee who, in the summer of 1816, drew up the bill to be presented to Parliament. Included in this group were the Rector, churchwardens, parish overseers and twenty-five inhabitants. The inhabitants were primarily male householders employed in Southwark's large manufacturing sector, along with a small number of established merchants, and eleven of them had already served on the smaller February committee for purchasing new ground. Southwark merchants' and tradesmen's directories from the years prior offer information about a handful of these individuals. Amongst them was George Vaughan, heir to a cider merchant who, along with his father John, had been heavily involved in churchyard proceedings since 1813 and regularly attended meetings on the subject.[884] Benjamin Hawes, one of the staunchest proponents of the extension, owned a large soapery on Blackfriars Road.[885] Alongside them were artisans such as William Browne, a currier; Henry Taylor, a stove-maker; and Richard Killick, a coach-painter.[886]

None of the men – including the overseers, churchwardens and inhabitants – for whom trade information is available were involved in medical practice, a noteworthy point given their pivotal role in advocating for and enacting the extension on population health grounds. The available evidence suggests, rather, that most of them were habitually involved in a wide range of parish affairs and aspects of its governance. Almost all the twenty-five householders elected to this committee served simultaneously as 'Commissioners of the Local Act', an 1811 Act for 'better assessing and collecting the poor and other rates' in the parish.[887] Eleven of them had served, and some continued to serve, as auditors of the parish accounts; at least two, Edward Bunn and

884 Roger Wakefield, *Wakefield's Merchant and Tradesman's General Directory for London, Westminster, Borough of Southwark* (London, 1794), p.316.
885 'Insured: Thomas and Benjamin Hawes, Upper Ground Street, Soap Manufacturers', Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Group, LMA: CLB/B/192/F/001/MS11936/461/889223.
886 Wakefield, *General Directory*, p.45; p.301; p179.
887 'Local and Personal Act, 51 George III, c. xxxii', Parliamentary Archives: HL/PO/PB/1/1811/51G3n80 (1811).

Joseph Harris, had served recently as churchwarden; and others still had been guardians of the infant poor and workhouse committee members since 1810. One of them, Benjamin Hawes, acted as treasurer of the Royal Humane Society for the 'restoration of suspended animation', founded by his brother William in 1774.[888] On his death in 1822, newspaper obituaries described him as 'a character rarely paralleled in the annals of benevolence'.[889] The overall impression, then, is one of a geographically small but developed and populous parish whose affairs were directed by a group of publicly active, rather civic-minded gentlemen, middling manufacturers and tradesmen.

This apparent domination of parish organisation by a small number should not be misread as a narrow, closed oligarchy akin to the Select Vestry of St Saviour a century prior, who were eventually ousted for embezzlement and corruption. Inhabitants of Christ Church from less established backgrounds, who disagreed with the extension on financial grounds, voiced their concerns and were taken seriously by the bill's proponents. The issue of the churchyard extension went undiscussed at vestry meetings while the Committee drafted their bill; broader discontent was, however, developing during these months. In the Spring of 1817, several unnamed inhabitants of the parish presented a requisition to the churchwardens asking that a meeting be called: 'that the clauses of the Act of Parliament for enlarging the church yard &c. may be submitted to the said vestry, for the approval of the parishioners at large previous to their going to Parliament'.[890] The meeting was held in late March and attended by 80 named inhabitants, along with 'a great number of others'.[891] The bill, which had already been presented to the House of Commons at this time, met with the firm disapproval of most of the attendees and was subsequently withdrawn. Their conviction was 'that if the bill now before Parliament

888 'The Late Benjamin Hawes, Esq.', *The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, Is.3092 (25 Jan 1822), p.4.
889 Ibid., p.4.
890 LMA: P92/CTC/087 (26 Mar 1817).
891 Ibid. (26 Mar 1817).

be carried into a law, it will be very destructive and ruinous and the very heavy expense attending the same, the parishioners will not be able to bear'.[892]

A month after the 1817 bill was withdrawn, however, its proponents suggested a compromise. Forty-three of them signed a public notice asking that it be proceeded with after some amendments and calling for a vestry meeting on the subject.[893] Two clauses were removed: one for the cleaning of pavements around the churchyard, the other an 'amendment to the Local Act' for rate collection which would have given the vestry additional powers to increase rates for the funding of the ground. In this pivotal notice, the need for an extension was again reiterated to the parish: 'the disgraceful state of the church yard having been long the subject of complaint, and particularly on account of the contagion which may arise from the putridity of the bodies, unless remedied'.[894] A vestry meeting was held in response to this notice, 'to take into consideration the most frugal method of enlarging the church yard without delay', and it was unanimously decided that the amended bill should be put to all inhabitants in an open poll.[895] Over the following three days, between 9am and 2pm each day, a total of 609 inhabitants cast their vote. A narrow majority of 99 were in favour: the bill was resubmitted to Parliament and passed in October the same year.[896]

Proponents of the extension had at last succeeded, but not without difficulty. The process thus far had taken four years, and it would be another year before construction works actually began. Negotiations had been complicated by bureaucracy, with progress delayed by opacity on the part of the trustees and time incurred in correspondence. From here, the parish at large had

[892] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (26 Mar 1817).
[893] Ibid. (12 Apr 1817).
[894] Ibid. (12 Apr 1817).
[895] Ibid. (21 Apr 1817).
[896] An Act for Enlarging the Church Yard of the Parish of Christ Church', Local and Personal Act, 57 George III, c. xxxv (1817), *UK Parliamentary Papers Online* [accessed 24th November 2022].

become embroiled in a heated debate about funding. The volunteer officers, inhabitants and Rector who advocated for this extension had, in all, encountered a series of practical, political, and administrative hurdles which seem almost farcical in their extent.

The emotional tenor of many of these records suggests that the process had also taken a personal toll on some inhabitants. We have already witnessed the emotive terms in which proponents and opponents of the bill stated their case. For some, the financial burden would be 'destructive', 'ruinous' and unbearable. On the other hand, as Mapleton had described, the 'evils' of burial ground overcrowding were apparent, the churchyard was in a 'disgraceful' state and lives were at risk. These written accounts provide only a glimpse of the commotion that must have transpired at vestry meetings during these years. Indeed, some parishioners expressed their strength of feeling when the poll results were published on Thursday, 24 April 1817. The following Monday evening, a large group of disgruntled inhabitants assembled at the Surrey Tavern on Blackfriars Road to discuss its outcome. They recorded a series of their own 'resolutions' to be published in *The Times*. Firstly, 'the bill now before Parliament for enlarging the church yard (…) has been repeatedly condemned' at vestry meetings 'the most numerous ever known in this parish'.[897] 'The opposers of the bill', their notice clarifies, 'never did object to enlarging the burial ground, but most respectfully submit to Parliament, the parish, and the country, the propriety of waiting a few months until the Lord of the Manor, now a minor, will be of age', at which time they had hoped he would gift the required land to the parish.[898] The notice continues with a personal attack on one of the bill's advocates:

> Resolved, 3. That, were the church-yard to remain in its present state for 20 years to come, it would not be so great a nuisance as the noxious and pestilential effluvia constantly exhaling from the soapery of Mr. Benjamin Hawes, the principal promoter of the Bill.[899]

[897] 'At a Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Christ Church', *The Times,* Is.10135 (30 Apr 1817), p.2.
[898] Ibid., p.2.
[899] Ibid., p.2.

This was an attempt to disgrace publicly the Bill's supporters, whose endeavour 'to force such a measure on the Parish at such a time, is truly oppressive, and calculated only to promote future litigation, and the aggrandisement of a few at the expense of the great body of parishioners'.[900]

In respect of these difficulties, this case study seems to vindicate the centralised reform efforts of the mid-nineteenth century. The extent and variety of issues facing this community should be understood as characteristic of provision in this period more broadly: as Chapter Three has observed, it was the fragmented system of English burial provision that often exacerbated practical problems. From the late-eighteenth century, under pressure of continued interments, this system could no longer sustain itself. Between February 1810 and February 1817 alone, seventeen petitions were presented to the House of Commons requesting permission to construct additional burial space expressly on the grounds of churchyard overcrowding.[901] Eight of these came from Middlesex, three from Southwark, and others from areas including Bradford, Essex and Gloucestershire. Several early petitions explicitly mention disease concerns, including, for example, that presented by inhabitants of Covent Garden to the House of Commons in February 1797 describing

> …the intolerable nuisance of an open burying ground in the centre of their Habitations, which, from the Multitude of burials covered only with Earth, the Smallness of the Space, and the Close-ness of the Neighbourhood, cannot fail, if suffered to continue, speedily to produce disease, and even Pestilence.[902]

As early as 1780, contemporary commentators had described metropolitan communities not as ignorant, but as struggling. Chapter Six has provided examples of newspaper appeals that physicians and authorities 'join their testimony to the public voice' and begin to regulate burial practice on the grounds of population health. Indeed, some local authorities called for

[900] 'At a Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Christ Church', *The Times,* Is.10135 (30 Apr 1817), p.2.
[901] Several other requests for burial space, in which overcrowding is not expressly mentioned, were presented in the same period. See Table of Petitions, Appendix.
[902] *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.52 (London, 1803), p.343 (24 Feb 1797).

churchyard closures, directly anticipating the extended legislation of the 1850s. When, in 1809, a Parliamentary committee was appointed to investigate ways to improve physical access to Westminster Hall, the curate of nearby St Margaret's Church brought the committee's attention to the state of his churchyard. Reverend William Groves told assembled M.P.s that the family graves at St Margaret's had become 'too full for the reception of any member of the family they belong to', and that it could not 'be considered proper' to continue using this churchyard at all for burials 'on account of the health of the neighbourhood'.[903] The system of local government was at best struggling, at worst failing, to manage its burial provision in a safe and healthy manner. Resulting from this situation was a wave of local acts for burial expansion which might be regarded as presenting a mandate for centralised assistance.

Yet, the manner in which Christ Church had met these problems helps us to understand why this fragmented system of burial provision persisted as it did, through the eighteenth century and beyond. It meant a great deal to parishioners to manage their own burial space, and to enact sanitation improvements on their own terms. This conviction was clearly expressed in the tavern meeting resolutions of 1817. Change was certainly welcome – opposers of the bill 'never did object to enlarging the burial ground' – but it must be made to work for inhabitants' own circumstances. Proponents of the bill likewise approached the matter as a community affair. Their solution sought to negotiate between competing local interests, and they had arrived at it in a reasonably open and democratic manner. The 609 who turned out to vote represented a large proportion of householders in the parish.[904] However disgruntled some of them became about the outcome, they had by a large majority agreed that the question should be decided by such a vote. Polling in this manner was not mandatory for either open or closed vestries, even

[903] 'Report on Improvements in Westminster', *Journals of the House of Commons*, V.64 (London,1809), p.420 (20 Jun 1809).
[904] In 1801 there were 765 residential houses and 146 shops in the parish. See Schwarz 'Life and Work', p.350.

in cases where outcomes pertained to a parliamentary petition.[905] The strategy had, in fact, been *suggested* by Benjamin Hawes – supporters of the bill had willingly delegated the key decision to their community.[906]

A moral imperative had underpinned this approach to local government. Throughout this process, the large number of merchants, tradesmen, and officers involved seem to have been driven by a sense of public duty and a shared desire for the improvement of the parish and its inhabitants, a desire reflected in their involvement across its affairs. On 29 October 1818, a year after the Act had passed and shortly after the new ground had been purchased, the full significance of what had been done was reflected upon by Joseph Harris, member of the May 1816 committee and churchwarden during the polling days and passing of the Act. Harris addressed a poignant open letter to the vestry and inhabitants regarding the churchyard affair, thanking them for their support:

> While I was your churchwarden, my aim was to do that which I considered right as far as my feeble abilities would enable me, and those actions having met your approbation you have raised my ambition to the highest pitch, and you may command me on any subject that shall be for the interest, prosperity, and unanimity of the parish of Christ Church. I have spent half my days in the parish and I hope to spend many more, and to see it flourish, and be the envy of all the parishes round, by the unanimity and good management of its inhabitants.[907]

The strong sense of public duty expressed by Harris has been observed elsewhere in this thesis. It echoes the behaviour of William Waterman, churchwarden of St Thomas' in 1721, who went to great lengths to defend his parish's burial space from governors of the local hospital. It is no coincidence that both Harris and Waterman were churchwardens; they evidently took very seriously their statutory duties as caretakers of the parish burial spaces. For Harris, however, this sense of duty was also closely bound with a local patriotism that far exceeded the obligations

[905] *Standing Orders* (1814).
[906] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (21 Apr 1817).
[907] LMA: P92/CTC/087 (29 Oct 1818).

of parish officers. For him, and perhaps for the volunteer inhabitants who joined his cause, improvements to burial sanitation were a means of reinforcing the identity of 'the parish' community: they reflected its success in comparison to other parishes, its social cohesion, and its orderliness, as well as its ability to manage the challenges of disease.

It is notable that we should find such a clear expression of parish identity in Southwark so late in the period under study; indeed, this is the only such expression found in Christ Church's vestry minutes. Most studies of the parish as a basis for community in eighteenth-century England concentrate on the period to 1750.[908] In accounts of local identity in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, many historians have shifted emphasis towards 'the town', 'the city' or 'the nation'.[909] The forces which are thought to justify this shift are very apparent in Southwark's case. In other urbanising areas, immigration, population growth, religious diversification, and industrialisation are considered to have disrupted old bases for community identity and created new ones.[910] As Chapter Two has observed, Southwark's parishes had also enjoyed a large influx of immigrants during the eighteenth century, significant population growth, increased trade, and a booming manufacturing industry. They became overall better connected, with each other and with London, and more alike in physical appearance, economic

[908] Nicola Whyte, 'Landscape, Memory and Custom: Parish Identities, c.1550-1700', in *Social History*, V.32, Is.2 (2007), pp.166-186; Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London, 1982); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004); Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1995); Margaret Spufford, *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995); Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974). For an exception see Keith Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

[909] Histories of the later-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries accordingly display a shift in language, from that of 'community' to that of 'civic identity' and 'civic pride'. See Jon Stobart, 'Building an Urban Identity: Cultural Space and Civic Boosterism in a 'new' Industrial Town: Burslem, 1761-1911', in *Social History*, V.29, Is.4 (2004), pp.485-498; Steeve Poole, 'To be a Bristolian: Civic Identity and the Social Order, 1750-1850' in Madge Dresser, Philip Ollerenshaw (eds.), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), pp.76-95; Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1997); Sarah Tarlow, 'Towns and Civic Improvement', in *The Archaeology of Improvement in Britain, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.90-123; Rosemary Sweet, 'Freemen and Independence in English Borough Politics, c.1770-1830', in *Past & Present,* V.1998, Is.161 (1998), pp.84-115.

[910] See Ibid. Critics of this idea have attributed it to Webb and Webb: see, for example, Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.13.

condition, and population characteristics. At the same time these parishes retained a shared heritage as "Bridge Ward Without" which distinguished them from central London, but a unique proximity to London which also distinguished them from provincial towns. We might expect, therefore, to find a strong and increasing *Borough*-based civic consciousness in Southwark which was replacing allegiance to 'the parish' by the nineteenth century. Indeed, evidence of some form of 'Borough pride' is not difficult to find: in 1863, for example, Bankside inhabitant James Robertson delivered a series of popular lectures on Southwark's history at St Saviour's Town Hall, describing the 'commercial importance', 'greatness', and 'political enthusiasm' of this 'sunnier side of London'.[911]

Harris' appeal to 'the parish' might be interpreted as a reaction against this homogenisation; an effort to stir up more localised civic consciousness in the face of its decline. Or the churchwarden may have been describing a shared ideal which had quietly persisted alongside the rise of 'the Borough', invoking it to placate those who had been dissatisfied with the extension. Regardless, it is clear that the parish had remained an important basis for community for figures like Harris. If such highly localised urban pride and loyalty was indeed in decline by the early-nineteenth century, the management of burial spaces was one of few areas where it might persist or even be rejuvenated.[912] Burial spaces had traditionally been managed *by* inhabitants, *for* inhabitants, and they continued to be so well into the nineteenth century. If strong local identities and loyalties were, as Rosemary Sweet has suggested, founded upon shared histories, churchyards were quite literally the physical manifestation of that history.[913] They were also a space for the performance of rituals and customs which, excepting superficial

[911] James Robertson, *Lectures on the History of Southwark* (London, 1863), pp.2-3.
[912] Keith Snell has written a great deal on burial spaces as preserving and reinforcing notions of parish community. See particularly Snell, 'Of this Parish: Gravestones, Belonging and Local Attachment', in *Parish and Belonging: Community Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.454-495. See also discussions of the churchyard in Alistair Mutch, 'Administrative Practices and the "middling sort": Place, Practice and Identity in Eighteenth-century Rural England', in Alan Kidd, Melanie Tebutt (eds.), *People, Places and Identities* (Manchester, 2017), pp.19-38.
[913] Sweet, *Urban Histories*, p.2.

differences, might be considered as transcending social distinctions in urban parishes which were increasingly stratified; uniting Anglican inhabitants in the performance of one standardised burial service, in one designated place. With regard to sanitation concerns, their management could also attract the interest of inhabitants of any denomination: Dissenter congregations at Christ Church were equally as threatened as Anglicans by an increase in the church rate or a potential outbreak of disease, and their presence is noted at vestry meetings on the subject.[914] In this sense it is unsurprising that improvements to burial sanitation should be framed as expressive of a parish's individuality, independence, and community cohesion, whether real or idealised.

If burial ground improvements were bound up with local identity in this way, it is worth briefly reconsidering the possible mechanisms behind their sudden increase during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Chapter Three has observed this pattern of change in Southwark from 1790 and discussed its association with burial ground overcrowding. Chapter Six has added to this the background of putrid fever, arguing that rising fear of fever epidemics provided a new impetus for change to burial practices in these decades. The idea that a 'healthy' burial ground might confer status on a parish adds another dimension to this proliferation of churchyard extensions and vault improvements. Historians have frequently remarked that contemporaries assessed eighteenth-century urban improvements in comparison with those of other 'rival urban centres'.[915] Harris, too, expressed a spirit of comparison and competition with other parishes in the Borough: he wished to see Christ Church 'become the envy of all the parishes round'. In English towns, a large literature has suggested, this spirit of competition

[914] LMA: P92/CTC/087.
[915] Joyce M. Ellis, "'For the Honour of the Town": Competition, Comparison and Civic Identity in Eighteenth-century England', *Urban History*, V.30, No.3 (2003), pp.325-337.

gave rise to emulation; localities replicated the improvements they witnessed elsewhere.[916] It is entirely plausible that local burial sanitation improvements were popularised in a similar manner. Where St Saviour emulated early the practices adopted at Surrey New Goal – 'a noble building', it is worth recalling James Neild's words, 'which does honour to the country' – other parishes may have followed suit, in order to keep pace with the changing criteria of progress and refinement.

There was more, however, than a misty-eyed vision of local identity underpinning these churchyard improvements. Consider who exactly had pushed for the extension at Christ Church: gentlemen like George Vaughan, John and Joseph Harris, and Benjamin Hawes, all of whom had ties with charitable organisations such as the Royal Humane Society and the Surrey Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb.[917] At St Saviour in 1794, advocates of vault improvements had similarly included the philanthropic surgeon Robert Kent, and churchwarden James Ferguson, who also served as Steward for the Surrey Dispensary and lifetime Governor of the London Society for the Relief of the Ruptured Poor.[918] The common theme in all of these cases was more than medical understanding, and more than a narrow interest in the health and advancement of 'the parish': it was a humanitarian concern with population health in general.

Christopher Hamlin has written of the origins of the British 'public health' movement in the second half of the eighteenth century. He argues that these decades witnessed the emergence

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[916] Roy Porter argued for a model of specifically metropolitan emulation which has since been challenged. See Porter, 'Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England', in Borsay, *The Eighteenth-Century Town* (1990), pp.243-67; Sweet, *Urban Histories* (1997), pp.236-275; Philip Knowles, 'Continuity and Change in Urban Culture' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leicester, 2001).

[917] George Vaughan was listed amongst the Governors of the Surrey Asylum in 1807; all four gentlemen were subscribed to the Royal Humane Society in 1818, and Benjamin Hawes was its treasurer. 'Plan of the Asylum for the support and education of deaf and dumb children' (London, 1807), p.96; 'Advertisements and Notices', *The Morning Chronicle*, Is.15292 (London, 6 May 1818), p.2.

[918] 'Advertisements and Notices', *The Sun*, Is.2315 (London, 21 Feb 1800), p.1; 'Surrey Dispensary', *The Times*, Is.1154 (London, 14 May 1789), p.2.

of 'a marked concern with the health of the people'.[919] This concern usually focused on local issues, was not tied to reform movements in local government, and cannot be attributed to 'new patterns of disease' or to 'new aetiological or pathological conceptions'.[920] It arose instead from 'a broader concern with social welfare and class relations', characterised by Hamlin as 'a new humanitarianism'.[921] This movement was not restricted to medical professionals, although it was closely associated with Scottish and Dissenter medical authorities such as John Pringle and his followers. It was reflected, too, in preoccupation with putrid fever, a disease attributable to the squalid living conditions of the poor. Its first great 'prototype', Hamlin argues, was the prison reform movement that began in the 1770s, and by the early-nineteenth century it had shifted focus toward the 'confined communities' of the urban poor.[922]

Burgeoning local improvements to burial sanitation from the late-eighteenth century were part and parcel of this early public health movement. The medical orthodoxy that the dead generated diseases had not changed in this period, and improvements like that at Christ Church cannot therefore be attributed to 'new pathological conceptions'. Nor can they be attributed to, in Hamlin's phrase, 'fuller knowledge' of these conceptions: as the case of St Thomas' has demonstrated, this orthodoxy had long been understood at local level. Medical professionals, following Pringle, certainly involved themselves in burial sanitation both in print and in practice, but their presence was *not* a pre-requisite for improvements to parish provision, just as medical experience was not a pre-requisite for involvement in the broader public health movement. In the absence of a distinctive British medical movement for the sanitary regulation of burial practice, the baton had been taken up instead by figures like Harris, Hawes, Kent, and Ferguson,

[919] Christopher Hamlin, 'State Medicine in Great Britain', in Dorothy Porter (ed.), *The History of Public Health and the Modern State* (Atlanta, 1994), p.134.
[920] Hamlin, 'State Medicine', pp.134-135.
[921] Ibid., p.135.
[922] Ibid., p.137.

who saw in the condition of their local burial grounds a social 'evil' akin to that public health reformers saw in the living conditions of the poor.

The fragmented structure of burial organisation in long-eighteenth century England was not, then, merely a hindrance to sanitary improvement. Nineteenth-century campaigners may have regarded the vestry system as failing and, by their own measure of success, it often was. To eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century parishes, however, local autonomy over burial spaces was an important tradition which could *facilitate* improvements. It gave profound meaning and motivation to what might otherwise be regarded as negligible projects: actors could take great pride in the fact that self-government had successfully delivered improvement. Even failure might be regarded as a success in its own right if it protected the interests of the parish. Twice before Christ Church had neglected to extend its burial ground under pressure of overcrowding. It did so not out of apathy or incapacity, but out of a positive desire to preserve the 'harmony and mutual understanding' that its officers and inhabitants considered so important.[923] More broadly, local burial provision was a vehicle for the realisation of those humanitarian sentiments which characterised the early public health movement: it offered a rare opportunity for civic-minded inhabitants to enact tangible changes in their own neighbourhood.

If local self-government facilitated sanitary improvement, it also laid the foundations for the social and political disputes that would come to dominate the movement for 'burial reform'. Historians have traditionally taken for granted that, once 'the public health argument' for burial regulation was introduced to Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, insanitary corpse disposal practices came to be considered as backward. A large revisionist literature has since pushed back against such objectivism. Recent accounts have framed reformers' campaigns variously as

[923] LMA: P92/CTC/085 (17 Feb 1803).

attacks on the working class, the Anglican Church, and on traditional death rituals; seeing in all these arguments a quest for social and political power amongst public health campaigners and their supporters, the urban élite.[924]

With regard to class, the tensions that would manifest undeniably in the mid-nineteenth century were already materialising in context of churchyard extensions. The supposed humanitarianism of the urban gentry was experienced by some as paternalistic and hypocritical: Benjamin Hawes, that 'character rarely paralleled in the annals of benevolence', owned a noxious soapery and had 'forced' his sanitary measure upon the less well-off.[925] With the shifting emphasis of the public health movement further towards the urban poor in the mid-nineteenth century, these class tensions only worsened. Chadwick's *Report on the Practice of Interment in Towns* (1843) was designed, Hotz argues, as 'an attack on the working-class funeral'.[926] While there is some truth to this characterisation, it is important *not* to conclude that the movement for burial sanitation was entirely a symptom of class tension: it had already arisen at local level in concern with all manner of burial practice, including, for example, the vault burial habits of the relatively wealthy.

Another set of divisions seeded in the late-eighteenth century was that between localities. This chapter has already shown how local identity could be leveraged in support of churchyard improvements. The implication, often missed in histories of the 'burial reform' campaigns, is that the sanitary condition of a churchyard was, and had long been, considered to reflect the status and standing of its parish: the attitude of its officers toward their duties, its degree of progress in comparison to other parishes, the civility and benevolence of its inhabitants, and the good management (or lack thereof) of its needy poor and its population health. Later

[924] Hotz, 'Down Among the Dead', p.35.
[925] 'At a Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Church Church', *The Times,* Is.10135 (30 Apr 1817), p.2; 'The Late Benjamin Hawes, Esq.', *The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, Is.3092 (25 Jan 1822), p.4.
[926] Hotz, 'Down Among the Dead', p.35.

critiques of burial practice were, more than anything else, attacks on parish communities, and they were experienced as such. Walker had structured his *Gatherings from Graveyards* as a systematic list of guilty parishes, each with its overcrowded burial grounds named and described in detail, the historic failures of each vestry to improve its provision laid out in full. In 1848, when St Saviour voted to keep open Cross Bones burial ground against orders of the Board of Health, the parish was shamed in national headlines. An article entitled 'The Black Flag of St Saviour's', published in *Punch* magazine, joked that 'the vestry-men of St Saviour's have made a bold stand indeed against their sanitary aggressors'.[927] 'Perhaps some future historian', the writer continued, 'will relate how the name of St Saviour's was given to this parish by popular irony during the epidemic of 1849'.[928] Another commentator, writing in *The Times*, argued that the parish's right to self-government should end when its decisions harmed its neighbours. 'If the effluvia from St Saviour's burial ground could be confined within the [parish's] boundaries', the author postulated, its ratepayers 'might perhaps fairly object to be hindered from cooking those necessary elements to their own taste – from working up their dead friends into an atmospheric condiment, and flavouring their water-springs with the infusion of mortality'.[929] As it stood, however, 'every Briton is cock on his own dunghill; but on this indispensable condition – that his dunghill offend no one else's nose'.[930]

Such public attacks became incredibly frequent with the Burial Acts of the 1850s. Parishes across the country had been ordered to close their burial grounds; the tumultuous proceedings of their vestry meetings were laid out in newspapers, and the self-interest and corruption of their officers was frequently stressed. Inhabitants, too, felt themselves in the public eye, and some attempted to absolve themselves of blame. One resident of Manchester complained in

[927] 'The Black Flag of St. Saviour's', *Punch* (London, Sept. 22, 1849), p.3.
[928] Ibid., p.3.
[929] 'London, Wednesday September 26, 1859', *The Times*, Is.20291 (London, 26 Sept 1849), p.4.
[930] Ibid., p.4.

The Manchester Times that the poor condition of his local churchyard was all the fault of the churchwardens, who 'would seem to have abandoned the idea of doing anything towards providing this large and populous parish with a burial ground'.[931] Inhabitants, he wrote in their defence, had come to the realisation that 'we are not to look to parish officers to provide for a crying want'.[932] Proceedings for the closure of a burial ground at Rochdale in 1852, published in *The Leeds Mercury*, paint a contrasting picture of harmony and civility that reads like a curated public apology:

> The necessity of some additional burial ground had been obvious to the whole parish. The manner in which the dead were interred in the grave yards at Rochdale was a disgrace and a reflection upon the character of Rochdale as a parish.[933]

It was not campaigners who had invented the association between local identity and the sanitary condition of burial grounds. Their attacks were structured as they were, and afforded weight, because this association already existed. In effect, campaigners had weaponised the ideal of local improvement against the very communities from whose values it had originated.

The tradition of local autonomy also explains why many parishes rejected these criticisms, giving rise to the most evident political tension of the 'burial reform' movement. The rationale behind local resistance to centralised reforms was usually not, as some historians have suggested, that these inhabitants and parish authorities understood no danger in overcrowded burial spaces. Rather, they interpreted the legislation as a meddlesome intervention in local affairs, and an affront to parishes which were perfectly capable – and proud – of managing their own sanitation problems. Vestrymen of St Saviour were, for example, met with 'cheers' amongst inhabitants when they described their justification for keeping Cross Bones burial ground open. One churchwarden argued in a vestry meeting of 1849 that

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931 'The Parish Vestry', *The Manchester Times*, Is.672 (Manchester, 11 Apr 1855), p.4.
932 'The Parish Vestry', *The Manchester Times*, Is.672 (Manchester, 11 Apr 1855), p.4.
933 'Burial Ground at Rochdale', *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, V.28. Is.1638, (Manchester, 25 Sept 1852), p.7.

> If the allegations made against the graveyard were true, he would be the first to prohibit another interment, but he deprecated the meddling of a Whig Government, and indeed of any government, in their local affairs.[934]

Examples of resistance on these grounds were numerous. In Basingstoke it was argued that the Board of Health was ignorant of the situation in localities, and inhabitants were the best judges of their own affairs. An order to close one parish burial ground was 'not called for': the ground was 'completely detached from the town, in an elevated position upon a solid bed of chalk, and could not possibly be in any way detrimental to the public health'.[935] It was therefore hoped that 'the government would suspend the order, and leave the town to deal with the subject as they thought fit, for the convenience and health of inhabitants'.[936] At a vestry meeting on the closure of a Liverpool burial ground in 1854, it was summarised that 'this was the place for parishioners to bury their dead, and they should not let the government, or anyone else, frighten them into an expense which was totally unnecessary.'[937]

The most emotive responses of this kind came from newspaper commentators on the Burial Acts. They appealed variously to the distinctiveness of England's system of self-government, and the immorality of removing care of the dead from their local loved ones.[938] 'Government meddling' was, as one writer in *The Times* argued, 'alien to the habits of the people and genius of the country'.[939] An effective model on the continent was not necessarily effective here, where

> It is rather too late now to cry up among us German and French systems of government control for the people, in childhood and in age, in the cradle and the coffin (…). It is pretty well settled by public opinion, that the spirit of centralisation and government

[934] 'St Saviour's Southwark', *The Times*, Is.20279 (London, 12 Sept 1849), p.5.
[935] 'Proposed Closing of the Liten Burial Ground, at Basingstoke', *The Berkshire Chronicle*, V.32, Is.1545, (London, 16 Jun 1855), p.5.
[936] Ibid., p.5.
[937] 'General Meeting of the Parishioners', *The Liverpool Mercury*, Is.2573 (Liverpool, 31 Mar 1854), p.12.
[938] See, for example, 'The Bill brought in by the Government', *The Times*, Is.20504 (London, 1 Jun 1850), p.6; 'The Numerous Amendments Proposed upon the Metropolis Interments Bill', *The Times*, Is.20505, (London, 3 Jun 1850), p.4.
[939] 'The General Board of Health in Interments', *The Sheffield Independent*, V.31, Is.1591 (Sheffield, 30 Mar 1850), p.8.

> meddling must be restrained, and that the people are better judges of what they should do, and how they should do it, than those of any jobbing commissioners.[940]

Local control over burial spaces was, for these writers, a British virtue that centralised legislation appeared 'to trench upon', if not 'absolutely transgress'.[941] They understood 'burial reform' not as an attack on death practices themselves, but on communities' *autonomy* over those practices. Prescriptive legislation would strip local improvement of its positive meaning, 'relieving the ratepayers of the conviction that on them depends the good management of their local affairs'.[942]

Finally, the qualities of local autonomy help us to understand why calls for legislative 'burial reform' arose when they did. It is useful to return here to the idea of 'panic', discussed in Chapter Four. We have seen in this thesis four successive panics, escalating in scale, duration, and impact across the course of the century. What had been a brief, swiftly-disappearing concern in 1709 had become by 1815 a prolonged debate, lasting several years and drawing in hundreds of inhabitants. Perhaps, under the worsening practical pressures facing nineteenth-century parishes, the panic itself had escalated. It is possible to view this flurry of churchyard extensions, public debates, and medical-scientific pamphleteering as evidence of a widespread hysteria surrounding the dead and disease. Such heightened anxieties might have 'fed into, and stimulated' the movement for burial reform in the same manner as 'moral panics' surrounding other social issues had prompted reforms in earlier periods.[943]

Alternatively, it was the increased aptitude and sophistication of many local authorities that had established burial sanitation as an important political issue. Burial sanitation improvements had always been time-consuming and resource-intensive. It has been pointed out in Chapter Four

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[940] Ibid., p.8.
[941] 'The Bill Brought in by the Government', *The Times*, Is.20504 (London, 1 Jun 1850), p.6.
[942] 'Lord Morpath's Public Health Bill', *The Sheffield Independent*, V.29, Is.1462 (Sheffield, 19 Feb 1848), p.8.
[943] King, 'Moral Panics', p.252.

that health anxieties may appear as brief when local authorities could not afford to prolong the debate. By the early-nineteenth century, parishes were expending time, publicity, resources, and energy on these projects to an extent never seen before. This was not a symptom of hysteria – it was evidence of increased aptitude. Vestry positions had become increasingly professionalised: Christ Church, for example, possessed by 1815 a salaried, full-time clerk who had previously been employed as a solicitor.[944] This was a significant development from the level of record-keeping at, for example, St Thomas' in the early-eighteenth century, where vestry minutes not infrequently amounted to a date atop a blank page. Population growth, too, had certainly brought its burdens, but it did not necessarily lead to a deterioration in the effectiveness and efficiency of local government. Christ Church vestry had responded to these new pressures by expanding in its size and scope. It was populated by more officers than ever before, and inhabitants were actively encouraged to participate in decision-making processes. The increasing capacity of local institutions to address social problems can, historians have pointed out, provide the impression that the problems themselves were worsening, when they were merely being reported, recorded, and resolved more often.[945] For contemporaries, too, developments in local government had made the debate about burial sanitation more prolonged, more disruptive, and more public than ever before. In this sense, it was not the ultra-sanitarians and Parliamentary 'reformers' who had brought to public attention the dangerous state of England's overcrowded burial grounds. On the contrary, it was the traditional structure of local burial organisation, its capacity for adaptation and success, and the people who took part in it, that had established burial sanitation as a political cause deserving of authorities' attention.

[944] The vestry employed John Gilbert Meymott at £150 per annum. Prior occupation from 'John Gilbert Meymott, Surrey Freeholders' Book, 1808-1813', SHC: QS3/10A/7. Via *ancestry.co.uk* [Oct 2023].
[945] Innes, 'Managing the Metropolis'.

Conclusion

There are two parts to the main findings of this thesis. The first is a longer history of 'burial reform', told from the perspective of eighteenth-century localities and medical-scientific authorities. The second is a series of conceptual findings about disease concerns surrounding the dead in early modern Britain: what they looked like, how they should be approached by historians, and how they relate to histories of attitudes toward death in this and later periods.

The longer history of 'burial reform' presented in this thesis can be summarised succinctly. It began, for both medical-scientific writers and Southwark's inhabitants, with anxieties about plague in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Concerns about the disease's generation through dead bodies did not disappear with the epidemic itself. They persisted and were revived in the early-eighteenth century in relation to Southwark's burial grounds. Over the course of the century these anxieties took on a new form, that of 'putrid fever', and they would continue in this manner to the era of cholera. Periods of heightened local anxiety about these two diseases sparked intermittent 'panics' surrounding the dead and burial spaces. Parishes responded by drawing on the political and legal systems available to them. Vestries delivered small-scale improvements, at times in collaboration with inhabitants and increasingly with the aid of local statute. They expanded and attempted to close burial grounds, ventilated burial vaults and church interiors, and enforced the use of lead-lined coffins. As overcrowding worsened in the last decade of the eighteenth century, these improvements became more frequent, more arduous, and more drawn-out. Nonetheless, in the face of increasing practical hardship, localities clung tightly to their traditional system of burial organisation. They understood disposal of the dead, however dangerous it might be, as a local affair to be handled by inhabitants. On these grounds at least one Southwark vestry, and many others across England, refused to abide by sanitation statute of the mid-nineteenth century.

Yet, over the course of this period some important foundations for a centralised intervention had been laid. From the 1720s, parishes appealed increasingly frequently for statutory assistance in the sanitary regulation of their burial practice, and their efforts were acknowledged and aided by the passing of the first 'Burial Act' (1816). At the zenith of public concern with 'putrid fever', Southwark inhabitants also began to engage with medical practitioners in the delivery of local burial reforms. During this period, prominent medical-scientific writers had also started calling for change to British burial practice. Professional medicine was, for now, kept at arm's length, but the principles of public health intervention were taking shape in the actions of local figures.

Although this thesis has concentrated on Southwark, this longer history of 'burial reform' was not restricted to the Borough. Anxieties surrounding the health dangers of the dead often had their end-point in a local bill for burial improvements. Petitions for these bills were widespread and are readily identifiable. Several of them, from London and elsewhere, explicitly mention disease concerns. In other cases, disease concerns may have been omitted from petitions, to remain buried in vestry records: the petition and bill for an extension at Christ Church in 1817, for example, contain no mention whatsoever of health, disease, or nuisance.

That this end-point can be identified in other English localities is quite unsurprising. The material and cultural conditions which gave rise to anxieties at Southwark were burial ground overcrowding and heightened awareness of major putrid diseases; plague and malignant fever. Eighteenth-century churchyards were often overcrowded. Plague, that 'most dreaded of diseases', and putrid fever, 'the major threat to public health in eighteenth-century Britain', were hardly the narrow interests of medical-scientific authorities.[946] Inhabitants of localities facing

[946] Wear, *Knowledge and Practice*, p.310; Pickstone, *Medicine and Industrial Society*, p.23.

burial ground overcrowding were undoubtedly deeply conscious of these diseases' origins in organic putrefaction. Information about the relationship between these diseases and dead bodies was also difficult to avoid, particularly for the literate ratepayers occupying positions of authority over burial spaces. It appeared in didactic medical texts, in news reports about war fatalities, in advertisements for medicines, and even in novels.[947] Possible solutions to the issue were self-evident: create more space and bury deeper. Other, more inventive, solutions followed the example of neighbouring localities and of similar spaces prone to putrid outbreaks, such as ventilation using piping or containing putrefactive materials in lead-lined coffins. Lastly, the association between disease and the dead also made sense from a religious standpoint. As has been illustrated through the arguments of curate Thomas Lewis, Bible passages connecting corpses with impurity could be leveraged in support of burial sanitation measures.[948] There was little about eighteenth-century English culture to make the health threat posed by dead bodies a point of contention.

Historians of death in the eighteenth century should be more open to the possibility that health concerns played a role in routine corpse disposal practices. Evidence of 'abhorrence' or 'disgust' at decomposition, deliberate separation between the living and the dead, and attempts to delay putrefaction are usually treated one of two ways by historians. Either they constitute a natural response to 'unavoidable physical realities', warranting no further comment, or they indicate a profound spiritual and emotional aversion to death.[949] Where it is considered, their additional 'practical' implication – that decomposing bodies were considered as physically dangerous – is regularly explained away as fear of spiritual contamination or, often, 'ritual uncleanness' and

[947] On its appearance in novels, see for instance Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, V.7 (London, 1748): 'I retired to the further end of the room, and threw up the window for a little air, being half poisoned by the effluvia arising from so many contaminated carcasses, which gave me no imperfect idea of the stench of gaols' (p.262).
[948] Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation'.
[949] Mihailovic, 'The Dead', p.31. Generally, which of these lines a historian adopts will depend on their willingness to use emotional approaches: Mihailovic, for example, 'rejects the idea that it is useful or meaningful to assess attitudes towards death (…) using fear or other emotions' (p.18).

'pollution'.[950] Historians of death are often deeply attuned to the explanatory frameworks offered by social anthropology and cultural theory. Widespread acceptance of such frameworks has made the standard of proof for inferences about 'ritual uncleanness' and 'pollution' sometimes relatively low; at the same time, it seems to have raised the necessary standard of proof for health concerns. Laqueur specifies, for example, that 'medical' uncleanness is 'not ritual' uncleanness – the former is conceived as more pathogenic, scientific, and less sentimental.[951] Such a distinction between medical and spiritual contamination is unthinkable to many historians of science and medicine: Margaret Pelling summarises that religious and moral impurity 'is a basic element' in concepts of contagion, infection, and miasma.[952] These nuances pose a challenge to accounts of 'medicalisation', if medical concerns are considered to undermine spiritual understandings of death and contribute to its 'taboo'.

Practically speaking, health and ritual can be reintegrated if historians of death reconsider corpse disposal practices through the lens of the history of medicine. This thesis has applied this approach to burial provision, but alternative research avenues are also possible. Eighteenth-century funerary practices offer one such avenue. Methods of preparing and treating corpses for burial could usefully be examined for evidence of disease precautions. Certain preservatives used in the 'laying out' process, for example, likely doubled as household medical remedies. Importantly, historians should not begin their search for health concerns armed with nineteenth-century notions of 'Enlightened' or 'hygienic sensibility' surrounding death. The practices prescribed by sanitary campaigners were not the same as those used to mitigate against disease in earlier periods. Eighteenth century disposal sanitation was characterised by subtle improvements, not 'reforms', and by adaptations rather than challenges to tradition. The dead

[950] See for example Zigarovich, 'Embalming Practices', pp.71-72; Thomas Laqueur, 'The Deep Time of the Dead', *Social Research*, V.78, No.3 (2011), pp.800-801.
[951] Laqueur, *The Work*, p.235.
[952] Margaret Pelling, 'The Meaning of Contagion: Reproduction, Medicine, and Metaphor', in A. Bashford and C. Hooker (eds.), *Contagion* (London, 2002), p.23.

retained their customary location in the church and churchyard; issues of health existed alongside concerns about decency and the sanctity of burial spaces; and sanitation could be improved not because death was 'denied' but because it was absolutely central to local identity and governmental traditions.

Further research would also help to illuminate more clearly the interplay between religious and medical concerns in death and body disposal. This interplay has not been the main focus of this thesis, but religious belief has emerged as a theme in the evidence consulted. Not least, medical authorities viewed spiritual understandings of dying and mortality as central to explanations of the health threat posed by the dead. Religion could also serve to facilitate tangible sanitary measures. This was clearly the case when Rectors like Mapleton involved themselves as proponents; less obviously, Christian norms operated in the sense of moral duty expressed by officeholders and civic-minded inhabitants. Studies of funerary practice may offer a means of exploring in more detail the relationship between religious and medical concerns in death practice. Comparisons of Anglican and Dissenter attitudes toward disposal sanitation may also be fruitful. It should not go unnoticed, for instance, that Dissenter burial grounds were the first in Southwark to close to interments, and this pattern is reflected in Rugg's research on nineteenth-century cemetery establishment.[953]

This thesis has also explored some of the ways in which the relationship between local practice and formal medicine changed over this period. It has shown that, whilst awareness of the health threat posed by the dead persisted during the long-eighteenth century, the terms in which it was described were shifting. 'Infection' and 'nuisance' became 'contagion' and 'effluvia'. 'Vital spirit' became 'sulphur and salt'. Medical authorities were devising new methods, and new

[953] See Chapter Two, p.115. Julie Rugg, 'The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment in Britain', in P. Jupp, G. Howarth, *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp.105-109.

vocabularies, with which to describe a broadly understood phenomenon. As has been observed of the emergence of physiology in the seventeenth century, 'academically qualified physicians gradually abandoned one form of intellectual capital, which was becoming "common", for another', and this process 'arguably helped to preserve physicians' monopoly over their intellectual resources'.[954] Robert Kent benefited from the same phenomenon when he inserted himself as an expert in the issue of vault 'effluvia'. So, too, did George Alfred Walker when he criticised London's overcrowded burial grounds. Historians' interpretations of these critiques as 'redefining the corpse' in the popular imagination are testament to the success with which professional medicine had distinguished itself from popular knowledge.[955] It is possible to suggest that over the course of the long-eighteenth century reliable knowledge about the dead body was increasingly thought to reside in the established medical professions.

This shift in approaches to death is more accurately characterised as 'professionalisation' than 'medicalisation'. Medical authorities had not transformed the dead into a medical problem, they had assumed more authority over a pre-existing medical problem. Thus, they adopted and adapted the older frameworks within which the problem had been understood. As Chapter One has shown, putrefaction remained a disease process with deep theological foundations. Practitioners' arguments about the health dangers of the dead were still intrinsically compatible with lay medical knowledge and many aspects of existing death practice. Their authority was, moreover, still limited in the nineteenth century by the traditions of self-government and improvement that had characterised burial sanitation over preceding centuries. Localities continued to manage the threat in their own considered ways, without the need for 'experts', and, ultimately, imposed 'reforms' would be widely experienced as meddlesome intrusions.

[954] Pelling, *The Common Lot*, p.3.
[955] Strange, 'Death', p.366.

From the perspective of the eighteenth century, the history of 'burial reform' therefore appears less a story of 'medicalisation' and associated 'death denial' and more one of local knowledge, initiative, and political vitality. Such a revision to *Annaliste* metanarratives should be welcome in the history of death in Britain. Following sceptical sociologists, some cultural historians of death have recently become critical of the notion of 'death denial'.[956] 'Medicalisation' is also increasingly regarded as tired and simplistic: the framework 'has tended to imply passivity on the part of the medicalised' and to represent everyday life as 'artificial' under the influence of professional medicine.[957] Yet, grievances with modern Western attitudes towards death, and with medicine's role in its perceived marginalisation, inspired the first histories of death in the twentieth century and have arguably been considered to justify the field.[958] Although historians of death in Britain are clearly deeply conscious of the weaknesses of 'medicalisation' and 'death denial' metanarratives, the invention of the corpse 'as an agent of contagion' has remained a compelling case in their favour.[959] George Alfred Walker still finds his traditional place in many recent histories.

There are two broader points worth concluding with. The first is that this critical stance towards modern attitudes need not define the work of historians of death. This suggestion is made explicitly by Martin Robert and Laura Tradii in their recent survey of 'death-denial' scholarship.[960] It is also illustrated by the work of historians and other scholars who have concentrated, in their words, on what 'the living have done with the dead, as opposed to what they should have done or did not do'.[961] Specifically for this thesis, grievances with

[956] Laura Tradii, Martin Robert, 'Do we Deny Death? Critiques of the Death-denial Thesis', *Mortality*, V.24, Is.4 (2019), pp.377-388.
[957] Nikolas Rose, 'Beyond Medicalisation', *The Lancet*, V.369, Is.9562 (2007), pp.701-702.
[958] The opening lines of Julien Litten's survey of early modern English funerary practices provide a good example of this preoccupation with modern denial, and are not unusual for a historical introduction to the subject: 'Many people erect fences whenever conversation turns to death, manoeuvring the conversation towards lighter topics.' Litten, *The English Funeral*, p.1.
[959] Lynteris and Evans, *Histories of Post-mortem Contagion*, p.12.
[960] Tradii, Robert, 'Do we Deny Death?'.
[961] Ibid., p.386.

'medicalisation' need not define approaches to burial reform campaigners, or to the localities whose traditions and beliefs they are supposed to have disrupted. Secondly, debates about death denial and medicalisation still continue across disciplines: sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and ethicists are amongst those concerned with the processes by which death has or has not become 'medicalised' and 'taboo'. History is often leveraged in their arguments, sometimes explicitly but more often vaguely: sociologist Allen Kellehear, outspoken opponent of the death-denial thesis, concedes that in modern Western societies 'death has become a potentially contaminating situation in need of sanitising'.[962] This thesis demonstrates that historians have much to contribute to these debates, not least because historical research is required to rigorously test such claims.

[962] Allen Kellehear, 'Are we a Death-Denying Society? A Sociological Review', *Social Science and Medicine*, V.18, No.9 (1984), p.716.

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Appendix

1. List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Wenceslaus Hollar, 'A New Map of the Cities of London Westminster & ye Borough of Southwarke' (1675). London Picture Archive: K1268791. Museum photograph.

Fig. 2. John Strype, 'The parishes of St Saviour, Southwark and St George, Southwark', in Strype, *Survey of London* (London, 1720). Photograph from Motco Enterprises Limited, www.motco.com.

Fig. 3. C. Smith, 'Smith's New Map of London, Westminster and Southwark', line engraving (1823). London Picture Archive: K1268791. Museum photograph.

Fig. 4. Anon., 'A Plan of the Streets Between Blackfriars Bridge Together with the New Intended Streets' (1769). London Metropolitan Archive: 3395/J/SO/1769. Photographed by the author.

Fig. 5. 'Map of Southwark's known burial grounds (including Anglican and other), c.1690-1830'. Created by the author.

Fig. 6. 'Annual Anglican burial totals by parish, 1690-1830'. Created by the author.

Fig. 7. George Gwilt, 'Plan of Church Street Burial Ground by Geo. Gwilt' (1821). London Metropolitan Archive: P92/SAV/1263. Photographed by the author.

Fig. 8. George Gwilt, 'Plan of College of the Poor and Burial Ground, by Geo. Gwilt' (1821). London Metropolitan Archive: P92/SAV/1263. Photographed by the author.

Fig. 9. 'Annual burial totals in St Thomas' parish registers, 1700-1719'. Created by the author.

Fig. 10. Anon., 'Drawings accompanying letter P92/SAV/1265' (1826). London Metropolitan Archive: P92/SAV/1266-70. Photographed by the author.

Fig. 11. George Scharf, 'A View of High Street Southwark', aquatint (1830). London Picture Archive: SC_PZ_SW_02_005. Museum photograph.

Fig. 12. 'Map of principal prisons and hospitals in Southwark, c.1793, with their approximate dates of construction'. Created by the author.

Fig. 13. 'Elevations and Section of Ventilation of Choir, St Saviour's Church' (n.d.). London Metropolitan Archive: P92/SAV/1296. Photographed by the author.

Fig. 14. John Roque, 'Plan of London and its Environs' (1746). Photograph from Locating London's Past website, www.locatinglondon.org.

Fig. 15. Ordnance Survey, 'Map of London', 1st. ed. (1880). Photograph from Locating London's Past website, www.locatinglondon.org.

Fig. 16. Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, 'Christ Church, Blackfriars', engraving (18--). London Picture Archive: SC_PZ_SW_01_316. Museum photograph.

2. Table of Petitions for Increased Burial Provision, c.1690-1830

Date	Petition Title	Request	Reasoning	House of Commons Journal Reference (volume, page number)
11.12.1830	Bermondsey Church (Surrey)	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Insufficient funding	V.86, p.166.
23.03.1830	Petition for a National Cemetery, Thomas Wilson	A National Cemetery	Decency; health concerns	V.85, p222.
22.03.1830	Greenwich Improvement (Kent)	Burial ground enlargement	Necessity	V.85, p.208.
5.03.1830	Birmingham St Martin's Burial Ground	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Insufficient space	V.85, p.137.
9.02.1829	St Dunstan Church (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Necessity	V.84, p.13.
15.02.1828	Oldham Chapel (Lancashire)	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Insufficient space	V.82, p.69.
24.11.1826	Oulton Church (Suffolk)	New burial ground	Population growth	V.81, p.30.
22.11.1826	Ramsgate Church Bill (Kent)	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Insufficient space	V.81, p.13.
13.02.1826	Shadwell Rectory (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Population growth; insufficient space to contain the dead	V.81, p.35.
13.02.1826	Ripon Church (Yorkshire)	New chapel and burial ground	Population growth	V.81, p.35.
10.02.1826	Clapham Chapel (Middlesex)	New chapel and burial ground	Population growth; insufficient space to contain the dead	V.81, p.30.
13.05.1825	Henley Parish (Oxfordshire)	New burial ground	Population growth; necessity	V.80, p.41.
18.02.1825	Stratford Bow Churchyard (Middlesex)	Churchyard enlargement	Population growth; insufficient space; health concerns (apprehension of 'fever or other epidemical complaint'.)	V.80, p.85.

17.02.1824	Islington Improvement (Middlesex)	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Public utility	V.79, p.45.
17.02.1824	Barnsley Church (York)	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Insufficient funding	V.79, p.44.
16.02.1824	Blackburn Church (Lancashire)	Addition to previous churchyard Act	Expediency	V.79, p.35.
16.02.1824	Oldham Church (Lancashire)	Burial ground enlargement	Ruinous; insufficient space	V.79, p.34.
18.04.1823	St Saviour's Southwark (Surrey)	New burial ground	Parish improvement	V.78, p.225.
12.02.1823	Liverpool Church	New burial ground and restriction of interments in existing grounds	Desired by parishioners	V.78, p.18.
11.05.1820	Rotherhithe Burial Ground (Surrey)	Churchyard enlargement and new burial ground	Decency; health concerns ('effluvia')	V.75, p.180.
29.03.1819	Barnsley Church (York)	Churchyard enlargement and new church	Insufficient space	V.74, p.278.
25.02.1818	Mitcham Church (Surrey)	Churchyard enlargement and church rebuilding	Insufficient space	V.74, p.161.
13.02.1818	Bolton-in-le-Moors Burial Ground (Lancaster)	New burial ground	Necessity	V.73, p.57.
10.02.1818	Southminster Church and Burial Ground (Essex)	Churchyard enlargement	None given	V.73, p.39.
10.02.1818	St Giles Burial Ground (Reading)	New burial ground	Expediency; necessity	V.73, p.39
10.02.1818	Reading Burial Ground (Berkshire)	New burial ground	Expediency	V.73, p.39.
5.02.1818	Chipping Barnet Burial Ground (Hertford)	Churchyard enlargement	Decency	V.73, p.24.
28.01.1818	Blackburn Church &c. (Lancashire)	New burial ground, or churchyard enlargement	Expediency	V.74, p.41.
13.02.1817	Bradford Burial Ground (Yorkshire)	Churchyard enlargement	Public utility	V.72, p.60.
10.02.1817	Christ Church Burial Ground (Surrey)	Churchyard enlargement and new burial ground	Necessity	V.72, p.39.

13.03.1816	St George the Martyr Burial Ground (not complied with standing orders of the House)	Churchyard enlargement	Decency	V.71, p.186.
15.02.1816	Woodford church burial ground (Essex)	Burial ground enlargement	Public utility	V.71, p.42.
12.02.1816	Clifton Church (Gloucester)	New burial ground and vault 'without any communication with the church interior'	Expediency	V.71, p.21.
11.11.1814	Abingdon Burial Ground (Berkshire)	Churchyard enlargement and new burial ground	Public utility	V.70, p.13.
20.11.1813	Lambeth Burial Ground (Middlesex)	Burial ground enlargement	Decency; expediency	V.69, p.70.
17.11.1813	Clifton Church (Gloucester)	New burial ground	Public utility	V.69, p.39.
17.12.1812	St Mary Abbots Kensington burial ground (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Decency; necessity	V.68, p.85.
16.12.1812	Shoreditch Poor &c. (Middlesex)	Burial ground enlargement	Expediency	V.68, p.76.
10.12.1812	Camberwell Poor (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Public utility	V.68, p.37.
9.12.1812	Newington Poor &c. (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Desired by parishioners	V.68, p.34.
23.01.1812	Merthyr Tydvil burial ground	New burial ground	Necessity	V.67, p.61.
31.1.1811	Islington Chapel (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Decency; expediency	V.66, p.57.
01.02.1811	Shadwell Church (Middlesex)	Burial ground enlargement	Necessity	V.66, p.74.
09.02.1810	Paddington Burial Ground (Middlesex)	Churchyard enlargement and new burial ground	Expediency	V.65, p.73.
09.02.1810	Hampstead Burial Ground (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Decency; necessity	V.65, p.71.
09.02.1810	Saint John Southwark Poor (Surrey)	Powers to bury in vaults	Necessity	V.65, p.76.
06.02.1810	St Luke, Chelsea Burial Ground (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Necessity	V.65, p.42.
12.02.1807	Birmingham Burial Ground Petition	Churchyard enlargement and new burial ground	Necessity	V.62, p.119.
07.03.1806	Greenwich Burial Ground Petition (Kent)	Burial ground enlargement	Necessity	V.61, p.111.

06.03.1806	St Marylebone Burial Ground Petition (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Expediency; necessity	V.61, p.95.
24.02.1804	Woolwich Improvement Petition (Kent)	Churchyard enlargement or new burial ground	Public utility	V.59, p.114.
24.02.1804	St Martin's Burial Ground St Pancras (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Convenience	V.59, p.113.
30.11.1802	St Giles Burial Ground Petition (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Health concerns; nuisance ('offensive' and 'unwholesome')	V.58, p.40.
13.03.1801	Sheffield Poor (York)	Churchyard enlargement or new burial ground	Necessity	V.56, p.161.
05.03.1800	Pontefract Petition (York)	New burial ground	Necessity; public utility	V.55, p.262.
24.02.1797	Petition from certain Inhabitants of Covent Garden, relative to a burial ground (Middlesex)	Removal of a burial ground	Health concerns (risk of 'disease and even pestilence')	V.52, p.343.
30.11.1796	Marylebone Burying Ground (Middlesex) *Failed*	New burial ground	Necessity	V.52, p.144.
28.11.1796	Millbrooke Church (Southampton)	New church and burial ground	Necessity	V.52, p.127.
04.02.1795	Oswestry Petition (Salop)	Churchyard enlargement	Necessity; decency	V.50, p.128.
02.02.1795	County of Warwick	New church and burial ground	Public utility	V.50, p.106.
25.02.1794	Tibbington Church (Stafford)	Burial ground enlargement	Necessity	V.49, p.229.
01.03.1792	St Pancras Burying Ground (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Necessity; decency	V.47, p.648.
27.02.1792	Worcester Petition (Worcestershire)	General burial ground for all parishes	Convenience; necessity; public utility	V.47, p.438.
8.02.1791	St Chad's Shrewsbury Petition (Shropshire)	New burial ground	None given	V.46, p.156.
16.3.1787	St James Westminster (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Necessity	V.42, p.548.
26.02.1787	Hanley Chapel (Stafford)	New burial ground	Desired by parishioners	V.42, p.408.
2.5.1786	All Saints Church (Newcastle-upon-Tyne)	Burial ground enlargement	Convenience; health concerns (enlargement	V.41, p.663.

			would 'contribute much to the health of parishioners.')	
7.3.1785	St George Hanover square (Westminster)	New workhouse burial ground and ban on interments in existing ground	Necessity and health concerns ('situated in the most populous part of the parish, and it is highly necessary that burying should be discontinued'.)	V.40, p.592.
25.2.1785	Richmond Poor and Streets (Surrey)	Powers to prevent nuisances including churchyard overcrowding	Health concerns; nuisance (churchyard 'may in a short time become unwholesome and dangerous').	V.40, p.564.
20.4.1774	St Stephen's (Bristol)	New burial ground	Convenience	V.34, p.659.
15.3.1774	Battersea New Church (Middlesex)	New church and burial ground enlargement	Necessity	V.34, p.562.
21.1.1774	Shoreditch workhouse (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Decency	V.34, p.407.
20.02.1772	Watford Church Yard	New burial ground	Too small to bury in	V.33, p.495.
5.2.1767	Rotherhite Church (Surrey)	New burial ground	Too small to bury in	V.31, p.120.
26.2.1762	St James Westminster (Middlesex)	Churchyard enlargement	Public utility	V.29, p.167.
24.2.1762	Hanover Square Burial Ground (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Necessity; nuisance ('noisome smells')	V.29, p.495.
3.5.1758	St Margaret's Westminster (Middlesex)	Repair of church and burial ground	Necessity; nuisance ('stench' of corpses)	V.28, p.231.
9.3.1756	Wapping Church (Middlesex)	Churchyard enlargement and rebuilding of church	Impossibility of draining the churchyard; nuisance ('unwholesome' and 'stench' of corpses)	V.27, p.505.
25.11.1755	St Mary Kennington Church Yard (Surrey)	Churchyard enlargement	Too small to bury in	V.27, p.307.
15.02.1752	Paddington Church Yard (Middlesex)	Churchyard enlargement	Too small to bury in	V.26, p.591.
13.02.1746	St James' Westminster Churchyard (Middlesex)	Churchyard enlargement	Too small to bury in	V.25, p.286.

21.1.1746	St Andrew Holborne Burial Ground (Middlesex)	New burial ground	Decency and nuisance ('offense to the inhabitants')	V.25, p.243.
10.2.1737	Rotherhite Church (Surrey)	New burial ground	Necessity	V.23, p.28.
6.11.1721	Christ Church Southwark Church (Surrey)	Churchyard enlargement and church rebuilding	Too small to bury in; impossibility of draining the churchyard	V.19, p.663.
15.2.1706	Birmingham Church	Churchyard enlargement	Decency and necessity	V.15, p.298.
2.2.1696	Stepney Parish (Middlesex)	New church and churchyard	Too small to bury in	V.11, p.685.