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Jeremy Boulton, Newcastle University¹

Sometimes the simplest historical questions are the hardest to answer. One very simple question, of particular interest to historical demographers, is this: can we ever know the true number of people who died in any one locality in any one year? This apparently mundane question is not merely vitally important to demographers, it is of interest to anyone searching for a death record in the past and should also interest the increasing number of scholars studying the social and cultural history of death and dying.²

This may, at first blush, also seem a daft question. Many might assume that any community with a surviving parish register of reasonable quality has a reliable record of all local deaths. This of course would be incorrect: those burying their dead without the rites of the Church of England would be omitted. Many Anglican parish registers also omitted, or recorded only sporadically, ‘stillborn’³ children and a proportion of those dying in the first few days of life. The overall rate of under-registration of deaths by Anglican burial registers caused by religious non conformity/non observance and delayed baptism was estimated long ago by Wrigley and Schofield. In sum, at the *national* level, they estimated that, the number of burials in Anglican registers represented the number of deaths with one hundred percent accuracy until 1640, but that thereafter there was a slow rise in under-registration until the 1770s, and a dramatic acceleration in rates of under-registration until the third decade of the nineteenth century.⁴ Although their estimates have been challenged, and occasionally modified, notably by the important and pioneering recent research of Stuart Basten, most focus otherwise has been on the effects of religious non-conformity and the under-registration of the very young as the most obvious sources of under-registration of deaths.⁵

¹ This paper derives from the data collected by the Pauper Biographies Project, and has been funded by the Wellcome Trust. Most of the primary data was collected by Drs John Black and Peter Jones. My co-investigator on the project, Leonard Schwarz, has been a source of advice and wisdom throughout. The paper has also benefited from the many insights and comments of Romola Davenport. For advice, comments and references, I would also like to thank Peter Razzell and Romola Davenport for their comments and suggestions.

² For some important recent work, see V. Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002); M. Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation? Public Health and Church Burial in Eighteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review* 120 (2005), 615-632; R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); K. Snell, 'Gravestones, belonging and local attachment in England 1700-2000', *Past & Present* 179 (2003), 97-134. A recent important and wide-ranging paper by Peter Razzell has looked at the general problems of London burial registration in some detail, see his 'Infant Mortality In London, 1538-1850: A Methodological Study', forthcoming.

³ I have put 'stillborn' in inverted commas, since it seems very probable that a proportion of children labelled as 'stillborn' were, in fact, born live but died within a few hours or days.

⁴ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 100-102, 136-42, 152-4. It must be emphasised that their estimates applied to their *national* estimates. Thus if a birth, burial or marriage takes place in one parish but is registered in another, this would not affect their national dataset, since the effects should cancel out. If an event was not registered in a Church of England parish register at all, then it would.

⁵ Stuart Basten, 'Registration Practices in Anglican Parishes and Dissenting Groups in Northern England, 1770-1840', Unpublished Cambridge Ph. D, 2008. For a very recent exception, see Peter Razzell, Christine Spence

The extent to which local burial totals corresponds to local death totals affects exercises based on the counting of events (Aggregative Analysis) and the accuracy of the technique of Family Reconstitution. It should be noted here that since Family Reconstitution only concerns the ‘reconstitutable minority’ of a parish it is less vulnerable to a major cause of under-registration in the parish register era. The growth of religious nonconformity will only distort the results of reconstitution if dissenting demographic behaviour deviated from that displayed by those who baptized and buried according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England. This paper, however, is looking at a further cause of registration distortion: the movement of corpses *post mortem*, a subject that has been studied in detail only very rarely.⁶

To return to that original question. Can we ever know the true number of people who died in any one locality in any one year? In addition to local levels of religious dissent and the extent to which the burials of the very young were registered, it is argued in this paper that, particularly in the eighteenth century, any assessment of the completeness of local burial registration requires an analysis of local interment practices and burial customs. Using evidence drawn from Georgian London the paper argues that we need to revisit the effects of two inter-related phenomena: the effects of burial fees on interment practices and the ebb and flow of a very considerable ‘traffic in corpses’. By the eighteenth century burial space in London was at a premium and there was an active market in the provision of suitable, and affordable, burial grounds. This ‘commodification’ of burial, driven partly by considerations of cost, had a major impact on interment practices in London’s West End.

The paper begins by describing the sources used and goes on to make an in depth study of how the parish of St Martin in the Fields disposed of, and registered, its dead. It then sets out the chronology of interment both in St Martin’s, and also in a sample of neighbouring parishes. One of the main sources used, the Sextons’ books of St Martin’s, are unusual in recording exported ‘certificate’ burials from 1767. The traffic in corpses is analysed in some

and Matthew Woollard, ‘The evaluation of Bedfordshire burial registration, 1538-1851’, *Local Population Studies* 84 (2010), 31-54. See also, P. E. Razzell and C. Spence, ‘The History of Infant, Child and Adult Mortality in London, 1550-1850’, *London Journal* 32 (2007), 271-92. Many of London’s middling sort used wet nurses located in parishes outside the city. As a result many London children died and were buried outside their parish of birth. As Roger Finlay showed thirty years ago, this was a significant cause of under registration, Roger Finlay, *Population and Metropolis. The Demography of London 1580-1650*, CUP: Cambridge, 1981, 29-31, 92-100, 145-8. See also, Gillian Clark, ‘A study of nurse children’, *Local Population Studies* 39(1987) 8-23. Sick nursing, as well as wet nursing, could also lead to migration very early in life. For the case of the Nehemiah Wallington’s son Samuel, a sickly child sent to a nurse (at the age of just under two years) at Peckham where he died and was buried in 1632, see, Ralph Houlbrooke, *English Family Life 1576-1716. An Anthology from Diaries*, (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1988), 145-6. Nehemiah Wallington lived in St Leonard’s Eastcheap, London but had family connections to the Peckham area. Wallington ‘customarily took family outings to Peckham fields’ a neighbourhood ‘he must have come to know on his trips to visit his sister’ who lived at nearby Lewisham, Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World. A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London*, (Methuen: London, 1985), 81.

⁶ The two most important published essays on this subject are K. Snell, ‘Parish registration and the study of labour mobility’, *Local Population Studies* 33 (1984), 29-43; R. Schofield, ‘Traffic in corpses: some evidence from Barming, Kent (1788–1812)’, *Local Population Studies* 33 (1984), 49-53. See also, Basten, ‘Registration Practices in Northern England’, 68-92, especially 88-92. Some useful observations on burial registration are contained in J. T. Krause, ‘The changing adequacy of English registration, 1690-1837’, in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History. Essays in Historical Demography*, (Edward Arnold: London, 1965), 379-93.

detail, and amongst other things, burial fees turn out to be of great importance in understanding fluctuations in interment practices. St Anne, Soho, emerges as a veritable ‘clandestine burial centre’ which interred non parishioners for profit on a huge scale for most of the eighteenth century. The St Martin’s data is then used to make a preliminary assessment of the social and demographic characteristics of the ‘mobile dead’. The paper ends by speculating on the wider significance of the practices identified.

This paper has been prompted by a major project, funded by the Wellcome Trust, on mortality in London’s West End in the eighteenth century. The main source for this investigation are the ‘Sextons’ books’ of the parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, which survive in a virtually unbroken series between the years 1747 and 1825. These books supply a (virtually) unique level of nominal data, including the age at death, cause of death, residence and place and cost of burial for nearly seventy thousand individuals whose interments are recorded in the period.⁷ The parish was a huge urban district, containing some twenty five to thirty thousand people inhabitants throughout the period in question, and part of the burgeoning Georgian West End. This district of London in the eighteenth century was a place with a highly variegated economy, with large numbers of domestic servants and luxury trades serving its often wealthy and titled residents.⁸ That said, there were also significant levels of deprivation, squalor and poverty, notably in parts of St Margaret’s Westminster and St Giles in the Fields. All the West End parishes maintained large parish workhouses throughout the period and spent, in addition, huge sums of money on outdoor relief.⁹ The geographical location of these London parishes is set out in Figure 1.

⁷ There were 69,350 interments in the Sexton’s books, together with 3,478 registered separately in a parochial burying ground in Camden Town which opened in March 1806.

⁸ C. E. Harvey, E. M. Green and P. J. Corfield, ‘Continuity, change, and specialization within metropolitan London: the economy of Westminster, 1750-1820’, *Economic History Review* 52 (1999), 469-93; L. Schwarz, ‘Hanoverian London: the making of a service town’, in P. Clark and R. Gillespie (eds.), *Two Capitals. London and Dublin 1500-1840* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 93-110; C. Spence, *London in the 1690s: A Social Atlas* (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2000), esp. 81-88, 106-112; L. D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation. Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850* (C.U.P, 1992), 7-10, 104-7.

⁹ For some recent work on poverty in eighteenth-century London, see D. R. Green, *Pauper Capital. London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), especially 51-79; Spence, *London in the 1690s*, 66-75; T. Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Hambledon, 2004); J. Boulton, ‘Parish nurses in early modern London’, *Family and Community History*, 10 (2007), 127-51.

significant numbers of exported, as well as imported, burials. The existence of a considerable traffic in corpses in the study area, revealed by our records, prompted a detailed investigation into interment patterns and practices in London's West End.

Interment in St Martin-in-the-Fields 1747-1825

One of the points made in this paper is that the number of burials that took place in a parish can be affected by the nature of local interment practices and customs. For this reason we need to establish where those who died in the parish, or who were brought into the parish for burial, were actually interred. Table 1 sets out the broad picture, as derived from a close analysis of the Sextons' books, together with ancillary information from the churchwardens' accounts and a separate register of interments at Camden Town. Table 1 breaks down the data before and after 1767. It does this because only after 1767 are exported corpses recorded routinely (as 'certificate' burials). Before 1767, almost all of those dying in the parish and exported elsewhere for burial were not recorded in the Sextons' books.¹¹

¹¹ Virtually all exported corpses were omitted from the parish register, and in returns to the London Bills of Mortality, throughout the period.

Table 1 Burial location in St Martin in the Fields, 1747-1825

Burial place	1747-1766	1767-1825	1747-1825
Almshouse burial ground, Hog Lane	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Camden Town Burial Ground (opened 1806)	-	6.4%	4.8%
New Old Burial Ground	8.5%	13.3%	12.1%
New Burial Ground (closed 1779-1802, 1807-1819)	4.2%	6.8%	6.2%
Not specified (mostly in New Burial Ground before 1764)	62.3%	6.0%	20.1%
Tavistock Burial Ground, Drury Lane (opened 1764)	3.0%	47.9%	36.7%
Vault burial	2.0%	1.8%	1.9%
'Workhouse' Burial Ground (adjacent to New Burial Ground, closed 1778)	19.9%	3.8%	7.8%
Corpses exported for burial elsewhere	-	13.8%	10.4%
Total interments	18,189	54,639	72,828

Note: these totals include all interments (including imports) and recorded exports. There is a gap in the Sextons' books between June 1812 and October 1817.

Until 1764 most parishioners, if buried locally, were buried in what was termed the 'New Burial Ground' on the west side of St Martin's Lane, on the same site as the parish workhouse. Many workhouse inmates were also buried there, probably in a specific part of the site reserved for their use. In the churchwardens' accounts many pauper burials are described as having been interred at this 'workhouse' site and Table 1 assumes that all individuals buried from the workhouse *without* a given burial location in the Sextons' books were interred at the workhouse site before 1778. The other main location for burials, before 1764, was in a more socially exclusive burial ground, or more properly grounds, adjacent to St Martin's parish church. This so-called 'New Old Ground' near the parish church included a substantial paved area - nine hundred or so burials in this ground thus included fees for

moving the pavement.¹² This burial ground was ‘broken up for the purpose of making improvements in the city of Westminster: the dead were disinterred, and their remains removed to vaults, called catacombs’ in 1831.¹³ Throughout the period a social elite were buried in the church, usually in vaults, and a very small number, mostly almswomen (and a few French people), were buried in a small burial ground next to the parish almshouses in Hog Lane (located outside the parish on the boundary of St Giles and St Ann Soho) until 1811.¹⁴ New parish almshouses were built on the new Camden burial ground in 1817 and deceased inmates buried there from 1818. Fees charged reflected the relative prestige of each location in the parish (see below).

Local interment practices changed dramatically in 1764 when a new burial ground for the parish was opened in Tavistock Square, Drury Lane in 1764. The ground was purchased from the proceeds of a local rate, and the vestry, as the local press reported, decided that those contributing to that rate would be excused burial fees in the new churchyard for a seven year period.¹⁵ This did not seem, in practice, mean burial without fees, but may have reduced the overall amount charged for contributing ratepayers and their families for seven years after 1764. This new burial ground provided extra facilities for the bereaved that were clearly lacking in the old grounds. London papers reported that

‘the parish officers of St. Martin’s in the Fields have divided all their new burying ground by Drury Lane into lots, and numbered the same by figures affixed round the walls: they have also ordered a book to be kept, and the name of every person buried, with the lot or number of each mentioned therein. By this method every person may know the burying ground of his relations’.¹⁶

Once the new Drury Lane ground was up and running the vestry, in 1766, ordered that the other main parish burying ground in St Martin’s Lane (i.e. on the west side of the Lane, the ground adjacent to the Workhouse) was to be shut up and ‘a proper place be allotted for the Buryal of the Poor at the Burying Ground in Drury Lane’. In 1766 it was also ‘the Opinion of this Vestry that Foreigners Burying at the Burying Ground in Drury Lane should be required to pay double fees’ which suggests that for the first two years the new burial ground did not

¹² Confusingly, both burial grounds were termed ‘new’. The ‘New burial ground’ is the New Churchyard, which was an acre of ground consecrated in 1608 on the West side of St Martin’s Lane. The ‘New Old Ground’ was the original burial ground on the East side of St Martin’s Lane, next to the parish church. Marginalia occasionally clarify this: thus the five-month-old David Gordon from Church Court was, on 6th May 1776 interred in the “N O G 6 ½ [i.e. at half past six]” at a cost of 18s 10d, ‘East End of the Church’. Most burials seem to have taken place in the afternoon or evening, and only rarely in the morning. Fourteen burials were labelled as ‘C G’ in 1767, these may have been for ‘Church Ground’ (part of the ‘New Old Ground’), but have been allocated to the non specified group here. The initials ‘C G’ were used again in 1825.

¹³ George Alfred Walker, *Gatherings From Grave Yards*, London, 1839, Kessinger reprint, 161-2.

¹⁴ The Hog Lane Almshouses also contained a French church, which is depicted in the 1746 Rocque map. Rails ‘around the burying ground at the almshouses belonging to this Parish in Hog Lane’ were repaired in 1729, COWAC F2006/335.

¹⁵ *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, Wednesday, July 18, 1764, issue 1096 correctly reported the first burial (of Judith Collimore) in the Drury Lane Ground. Iron gates were erected at the site before it opened in 1763. For details of the new burying ground see, COWAC F2007/290-1, 304, 316. Concern had been expressed regarding the state of the New Burial Ground as early as 1756. A vestry committee had been appointed ‘to inspect the New Church Yard and Consider whether it can’t be made more comadious for the Burying of Corps there’, *ibid.*, 172.

¹⁶ *Lloyds Evening Post* (7th December 1764, issue 1157). This book does not seem to have survived.

operate such charges. In fact, as we shall see, the ‘opinion’ of the vestry did not translate into higher charges in practice until 1771. Later in 1766, the ‘New Burial Ground’ was reserved explicitly to the workhouse poor and relatives of those already interred there,

Agreed and ordered that the Burying Ground in St Martins Lane be shutt up and that no person be Buryed therein unless the Poor in the Workhouse and those persons whose Friends and Relations lye there by Permission of the Churchwarden for the time being.¹⁷

The Sextons’ books show that, notwithstanding, burials continued on the St Martin’s Lane site until April 1778, when the vestry shut it down completely:

Resolved and ordered that the new Burying ground at the Workhouse on account of the same being full of Corps be shut up for the space of three years from this time and that no corps be buryed therein.¹⁸

This third ban seems to have stuck, and few if any burials took place at the St Martin’s ‘New Burial Ground’ until the ground was reopened for short periods between 1803 and 1806. Burials began again on the site in 1819. Table 1 has been constructed on the basis that workhouse paupers buried without a specific location were interred at Drury Lane after 1778. Overseers’ accounts begin listing payments to the parish bearers for carrying the corpses of the poor to Drury Lane only from 1778.¹⁹

Table 1 also records the effects of another new burial ground opened in 1806. From that date almost all workhouse paupers were buried in the new burial ground purchased by the parish in 1803 via a local Act of Parliament. The ground, which included a chapel, was consecrated in September 1805 and was located in Camden Town, although it remained a parochial site.²⁰ New parish almshouses were built there in 1817. None of these Camden burials appear in the Sexton’s books, but are recorded separately in a Camden Town burial register.²¹

¹⁷ COWAC F2007/351, 355.

¹⁸ COWAC F2008/13.

¹⁹ See, the Overseers’ accounts, 1778-86: F573/2; F575/2r, 32r; F577/8r, 9r, 10r, 12r; F579/4r, 29r; F581/29r; F587; F589. The parish bearers were paid £12 a year for providing this service. There seem to have been six bearers in 1778. There had been four when the Table of Fees was drawn up in the early eighteenth century.

²⁰ ‘Camden Town’, *Survey of London: volume 24: The parish of St Pancras part 4: King’s Cross Neighbourhood* (1952), pp. 134-139. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=65574> Date accessed: 26 May 2010.

²¹ For this material, see, COWAC 419/123, 233, 234, 235, 236, 236N, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, F2469. A broadsheet table of burial fees for the Camden Town Burial Ground is included in an undated early nineteenth-century view of the chapel erected on the ground, see, *A Front View of the Chapel belonging to the Parish of St Martin in the Fields situated at Camden Town in the County of Middlesex*, London, n.d. The bottom panel displays a spacious walled burial ground, with some flat stones in what is essentially a pastoral setting. In our database 2524 out of 3478 (73%) of Camden Town burials were from the workhouse. Non workhouse inmates seem to have been interred in significant numbers

Like most urban burying grounds and locations, therefore, those of St Martin exhibited a cycle of use. As old grounds became full to the point of being a health hazard they were closed and new spaces were provided. Although the Drury Lane ground may initially have been a relatively attractive place to be interred, it quickly filled up. The new Camden town burial ground effectively ended the interment of the corpses of the poor at Drury Lane, but nonetheless the latter was said to be in a noxious state by 1839.²²

This discussion thus far might be of interest more to archaeologists excavating urban burial grounds than historians.²³ However, Table 1 highlights both the changing topography of burial in the parish and suggests that nearly fourteen per cent of all those who died (after 1767) were interred in extra parochial burial grounds (for reasons discussed below the actual percentage was probably significantly higher than this). Even within the parish boundary, choice of burial location was considerable, varied over time and was tied closely to questions of status and, of course, cost. Such questions will be explored in more detail when the reasons for burial choice are analyzed. It also provides the parochial context for a short discussion of burial imports into the parish.

Burial imports

The only detailed studies of the parochial traffic in corpses that I am aware of concern bodies that were imported into a parish from elsewhere. This is not surprising, since, as Keith Snell has pointed out ‘the registration of burial occurred in the parish to which the corpse was

only from 1813 (only three were interred at Camden Town before then). Unfortunately cost of burial is not given in the Camden Town register used to compile the dataset. In the 1830s Camden Town burial fees were generating between £111 and £159 income per year in the Overseers Accounts, see, H. Simpson, *"Our parish:" being an outline of the history of the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields; with a comparative statement of all monies received and disbursed for and on account of its poor for the last six years; illustrating the effects of the Poor Law Amendment Act*, London, 1836, 69. The ground made a substantial loss, since the ‘expenses’ of the ground greatly exceeded this relatively modest fee income, *ibid.*, 70. The Camden Town burial ground was said to be in a ‘most wretched state’ by 1836, *ibid.*, 52. Fee income from Camden Town is first recorded in the Overseers’ Accounts from 1809, COWAC F635. This suggests either that some workhouse inmates were paying for burials (not unknown for workhouse officers or the better off down on their luck) or, less likely, that there are some omissions from the Camden Town Register.

²² Walker, *Gatherings From Grave Yards*, 162-3.

²³ For three recent archaeological monographs that deserve a wider audience, see, Adrian Miles, Natasha Powers, Robin Wroe-Brown, Don Walker, *St Marylebone Church and burial ground in the 18th to 19th centuries. Excavations at St Marylebone School, 1992 and 2004-6*, Museum of London: MOLAS Monograph 46, 2008; Adrian Miles and William White with Danae Tankard, *Burial at the site of the parish church of St Benet Sherehog before and after the Great Fire. Excavations at 1 Poultry, City of London*, Museum of London: MOLAS Monograph 39, 2008; Robert Cowie, Jelena Bekvalac and Tania Kausmally, *Late 17th - to 19th-century burial and earlier occupation at All Saints, Chelsea Old Church, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea*, Museum of London: MOLAS Archaeology Studies Series 18, 2008.

removed'.²⁴ It is extremely rare for parish registers – or any source - to identify with any consistency those who died locally but were buried elsewhere.²⁵ Even though many parishes laid claim to fees for those who died locally but were buried in other parishes, it seems very likely that most individuals avoided such payments. There was, normally, little effective recording of corpses exported outside a parish for interment. The volume of such traffic is thus normally impossible to measure. Even churchwardens' accounts that sometimes list those charged fees as being 'carried away' record only a small proportion of the outward flow of corpses.²⁶ If parish records are rarely informative, some contemporaries were well aware of the existence of a considerable traffic in the dead. Maitland believed that, in 1729, there was a net movement of corpses outside London. He counted large numbers of Londoners buried at Bunhill, other dissenting burial grounds and in parishes lying just outside the area covered by the Bills of Mortality.²⁷ Similarly, Birch, in 1759 argued that:

Another defect in the bills, not so generally attended to, is, that the number of persons, carried into the country to be buried, is not brought to account in them. Many are frequently removed from one parish to be buried in another, that are both within the bills; which makes no alteration upon the whole. But great numbers are carried from parishes in town to be buried in the country. This number has probably increased, as the fashion of having country-houses has more prevailed. A few indeed, who die elsewhere, are brought to be buried in parishes within the bills: but the number of these is very disproportionate to those, who are carried out. A distinct account of this matter ought to be kept in the several parishes, but seldom is kept with any exactness'.²⁸

²⁴ Snell, 'Parish registration and labour mobility', 33.

²⁵ Vanessa Harding, using parish register evidence, finds that only 7 out of 532 (1.3%) individuals were carried out of the parish for burial at St Helen's Bishopsgate between 1640 and 1658, Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 57. Recording of deaths as opposed to burials might have been more common during the period, 1695-1706, when the Marriage Duty Act was in force, see Jeremy Boulton, 'The Marriage Duty Act and parochial registration in London, 1695-1706', in Kevin Schürer and Tom Arkell, (eds.), *Surveying the people : the interpretation and use of document sources for the study of population in the later seventeenth century* (Oxford: Leopard's Head, 1992), 242-250, especially n. 88. Boulton found low levels of imports and exports at Aldersgate in the late seventeenth century, *ibid.*, 248-9.

²⁶ This is demonstrable. In 1771, to take the only year for which churchwardens' accounts coincide with the recording of certificates in the Sextons' books, 26 individuals paid fees to the churchwardens as being 'carried away' (in all cases the individuals were charged for the use of parish bells) but in that same year a total of 175 individuals incurred the 12d fee for a 'certificate', COWAC F149, 153.

²⁷ Maitland, *History of London*, 1739, III, 537-8.

²⁸ Birch, *A Collection of the Yearly Bills of Mortality, From 1657 to 1758 inclusive*, London, 1759, 5. I must thank Peter Razzell for drawing my attention to this reference.

It was different with the interments of those imported into the parish from outside. Most such interments would have been recorded in parish registers, and in churchwardens' accounts. It is less common, however, to find registers that *identify* such burials as 'imported' consistently. In fact the *parish register* of St Martin in the Fields (unlike some others in the West End) does *not* usually identify burials imported from other places. That is, there is nothing in the parish register that would alert a demographer to the fact that the person buried was from outside the parish. The Sextons' books, however, do this consistently over the entire period. For this reason it is possible to measure the volume and chronology of this traffic. Since other information is given in the books (age at death, address, burial fee, cause of death) this source enables us to make a detailed analysis of this usually hidden feature of burial practice in the past.

What, however, *was* an 'imported' burial? The Sextons' books give addresses, and each burial with the appellation 'from' is treated as a burial import.²⁹ It was important to identify such burials because, like most London parishes, the burials of non parishioners could incur higher fees. A Table of fees that survives for St Martin's before 1725 listed extra fees payable to the churchwardens for those 'of another Parish' buried in Church vaults under the Tabernacle. And, as we have seen, the vestry thought that 'foreigners' should be charged double to use the new Drury Lane burying ground in 1766. It is conceivable, of course that some of these individuals were already living in the parish as lodgers, recent arrivals or temporary visitors, and were not counted as parishioners and thus labelled as 'from' elsewhere. Although most London parishes distinguished simply between parishioners, 'strangers' or 'foreigners', others attempted distinctions that suggests more sensitivity to the difficulties of defining belonging. St Marylebone parish, in a table of fees drawn up when a new burying ground was consecrated in 1733, distinguished between 'housekeepers' 'lodgers' and 'foreigners'. 'Lodgers' and their families were charged greater burial fees than 'housekeepers' but less than 'foreigners'.³⁰ St Martin's seems to have made no such distinction. The fact that individuals imported were allocated addresses in other parishes suggests that most had indeed been living elsewhere at the time of their deaths and were

²⁹ There were 48 ambiguous cases where such individuals also paid for 'certificates' or bells only. These have all been treated as exported burials.

³⁰ COWAC WCC ACC 190-2. I would like to thank John Black for transcribing this table. The burial fees were to be paid 'before the interment of the corpse'. The churchwardens were to pay the minister 1s 6d for the interment of every pensioner and casual poor person. By 'casual poor are meant such poor only who shall be intirely buried at the charge of the parish'. This material has been published recently, see Miles et al, *St Marylebone Church and burial ground*, 14-15.

brought into the parish *post mortem*.³¹ These include at least 68 individuals who died in one of London's hospitals but who were returned to St Martin's for burial.³²

³¹ In two cases in May 1776 marginalia included instructions to the parish bearers regarding the fetching of the corpse. The 50-year-old Andrew Lee was brought from St Anne, Soho at a 'Cheesemongers - Bearers to go to Queen Street Soho' and, in the same month, the 78-year-old Mary Reeves, was brought from St Margaret's (Westminster) 'Bearers to go to Mr. Young Petty France', WAC 419/237.

³² By no means all of those returned for burial from hospitals were poor and it is probable that some patients were buried in the hospital grounds, sometimes at parish expense. The parish paid its bearers 4s a time to bring back the bodies of twelve deceased poor patients from London's three public hospitals between December 1726 and February 1728. COWAC F462/349, 354, 358; F467/274, 275, 278, 286, 296. Maitland, *History of London*, 1739, III, 537-8, reported that 90 individuals were interred at Guy's Hospital and just 12 at St Thomas's in 1729, which suggests that many more dead patients must have been interred in their home parishes. It seems to have been the norm to return dead patients for burial. In 1827 just under one third of deaths at Guy's and a quarter of those dying at St Thomas's were buried in the hospital burial ground, *Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy*, (House of Commons: London, 1828), 139.

Figure 2 Percentage of imported burials in St Martin in the Fields, 1747-1825

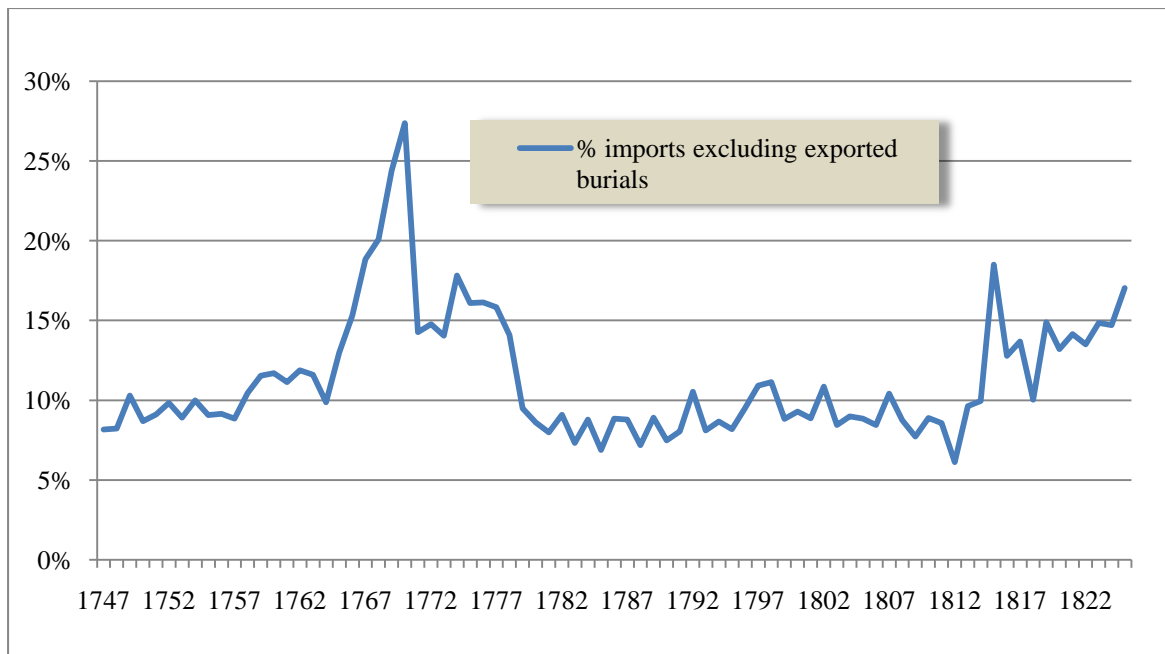


Figure 2 sets out the percentage of imported interments. These have been compared to the number of local interments only (that is corpses known to have been exported have been excluded). For most of our period, roughly one in ten of those buried in the parish died outside its boundaries. However, the proportion of imported burials was not constant. The opening of the new burial ground in 1764 coincided with a sharp peak in burial imports. From around 80 burials in 1764, imports surged to a peak of 333 in 1770, falling back thereafter. In 1769 and 1770 *a quarter of all burials* had been imported into the parish. This suggests that the traffic in corpses was not merely a ‘structural’ feature of urban demography, where ‘structural’ is defined as post mortem movement caused by such things as prior family ties and adherence to place. There must have been a dynamic element in such traffic that was responding to a short term stimulus. The bereaved of other parishes, in other words, saw burial in St Martin’s as unusually attractive for a short period. Why was this? It is possible that the new burial ground was regarded as more salubrious, a more ordered and convenient ‘landscape for the expression of grief’.³³ It is also possible that the initial fees charged at the new ground did not initially discriminate against non parishioners, which encouraged heavier rates of interment there. We will return to this in a later section.

Where did these mobile corpses come from? Most of them, unremarkably and entirely in line with the Schofield’s findings, came from the immediate locality (see Fig. 1).³⁴ At least 4,623 out of 7,518, about 62% of all imported corpses, came from parishes sharing a boundary with St Martin’s, and large numbers came from other nearby parishes in the West End and urban

³³ For this phrase, see, Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, CUP: Cambridge, 2005, 163.

³⁴ Schofield, ‘Traffic in corpses’, 52.

Middlesex, notably from St. Marylebone and St Pancras. The biggest exporters of corpses to St Martin's were the neighbouring parishes of St Giles in the Fields (more than thirteen hundred) and St Clement Danes (just under a thousand). The flow of corpses into the parish burying grounds in St Martin's, however, was more than matched by the transport of the dead out of the parish to other final resting places.

Burial exports

From the late seventeenth century, if not earlier, local registration practices included a recognition that many Londoners died in one parish but were buried in another. The existence of a sizeable traffic in corpses, for example, was recognized by the administration erected to enforce the payment of taxes on deaths under the Marriage Duty Act (1695-1706).³⁵ More significantly for our purposes, the London Parish Clerks' Company operated a system of burial certification to ensure that the details of London's mobile corpses were returned correctly in the Bills of Mortality. If the system worked properly, the statistics of those buried outside their parish of residence would be returned by the clerks where they were interred - assuming that they were buried within the area covered by the Bills. The 'certificate system' seems to have been put in place in the 1680s following an order made by the London Court of Aldermen. As a result, throughout the eighteenth century:

'VI ... no *Parish-Clerk* do presume to Receive, or suffer any Corpse to be buried in the Parish of which he is Clerk, unless a Certificate be first obtained under the Hand of the *Parish-Clerk* where the Party died, testifying that the Corpse has been Viewed and Searched, pursuant to several Orders of the Lord-Mayor and Court of Aldermen from time to time, enjoining the same'.

VII. That in such Certificate of the Burial of any Corpse, he shall therein Certify the Age and Disease of which the Person died.³⁶

This certificate system has left very few traces, but, from 1767, the deaths of those issued certificates in St Martin's *were* recorded in the Sexton's books.³⁷ This enables us to make some measure of the outflow of corpses from our study area. Unfortunately, however, the certificate entries rarely supply the destination of the outgoing corpse. So in addition to needing to know how common export of the dead was, we also need to know where our parish's exported dead were actually interred. It would be sensible to find out, since only by

³⁵ Boulton, 'Marriage Duty Act', 247-50.

³⁶ R. H. Adams, *The Parish Clerks of London. A History of the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks of London*, (London, 1971), 59-60. The quote is from the *Orders and Rules* of the Parish Clerks, pictured in Plate IX.

³⁷ It remains unclear why these payments were recorded only from 1767. One possibility is that it was around this time that the office of Sexton was merged with that of Parish Clerk, so that the fees payable to the Clerk for the certificate appear in the Sextons' notebooks. There seem to have been both a 'Head Sexton' and a Deputy in the later eighteenth century. The Sextons' notebooks record the burial of the 89-year-old Stephen Brown 'late Clerk & Sexton' on 15th October 1784, COWAC 419/239. It had been common for both offices to be combined in medieval times, Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 63.

tracking down the mobile dead can we test the comprehensiveness of the certificate system itself. It must have been difficult to monitor the burials of all those dying in this huge urban parish, and it may well be that the recorded number of ‘certified’ burial exports undercounts the true number.

The identification of ‘certificate burials’ in the Sextons’ books thus enables us, uniquely, to make an assessment of the overall rate of burial export between 1767 and 1825. The overall figures suggest a *net* outflow of bodies from the parish. Between June 1767 and 1825, only 5,552 corpses were imported into the parish. In the same period (even allowing for the gap in the books between 1812 and 1817 when no certificates were recorded) no fewer than 7,564 individuals were exported from the parish. Since, as we shall see, some individuals escaped certification, the *net* outflow must have been higher than this.

Figure 3 Burial certificates in St Martin in the Fields, 1767-1825

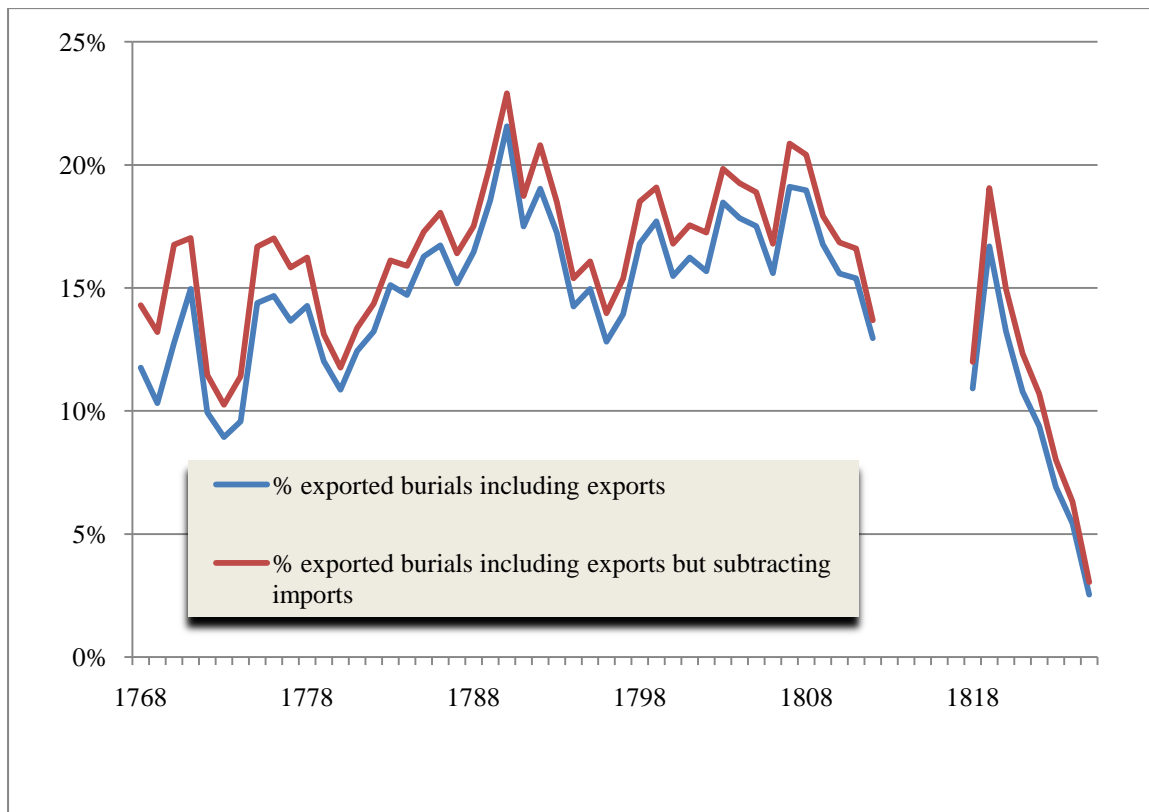


Figure 3 shows that between 10% and 20% of individuals were exported from the parish for burial elsewhere for most of our period. The actual percentage obviously varies according to whether one includes imported burials in the overall total. Although exports did not exhibit a sharp peak of the sort seen in the imported burials (Fig. 2) exports increased to a modest peak between 1789 and 1792. The number of recorded certificates seems to have declined sharply in the 1820s. Overall, if one excludes burials imported from elsewhere, about 15% of those dying in the parish were exported as ‘certificate’ burials between 1767 and 1825.

Only a tiny number of such entries supply a destination.³⁸ At an individual level one can sometimes find out where such burials took place. The burial register of St Paul's Cathedral, for example, records the interment of John Wasdale, M. D., of St Martin in the Fields in the Cathedral Vault on 14th June 1807. This is the same person who is recorded by the St Martin's Sexton's Books as being granted a certificate on 30th June 1807 'Dr Wasdill' of New Street, Spring Garden, a 74-year old man dying 'aged'. Dr Wasdale's relatives paid only 12d for a 'certificate' from the parish of St Martin's, even though his interment actually took place, presumably incurring very high fees, in a vault in the Cathedral.³⁹ Again, the 80-year-old Thomas Major, living at his death in St Martin's churchyard in 1773, was charged only 12d for a certificate burial. In fact, Thomas was a wealthy man - his will can be found in the PCC. His last testament opens with a request that his body was to be buried in the churchyard of St George's in the East, Middlesex.⁴⁰ Interesting though such case studies are, however, a serendipitous approach is hardly a practical means of establishing where most certificate corpses were interred.⁴¹

In order to investigate in detail the volume and direction of exported corpses, the burial registers of the neighbouring parishes of St Paul, Covent Garden, St Giles-in-the-Fields and St Anne, Soho (otherwise known as St Anne, Westminster) were searched for the interments of St Martin's residents, as were the surviving registers of the major London dissenting burial ground of Bunhill Fields (thought to have been taking at least 500 London burials a year in 1729).⁴² In total this time-consuming task unearthed no fewer than 7,695 individuals said to be from St Martin's who were interred in burial grounds at these four locations between 1747 and 1825.⁴³ Table 2 summarizes the total number of burials. Readers should note that the percentages calculated in the table takes no account of individuals who were registered in more than one location, and it also includes the 7,518 individuals in the Sexton's notebooks who were *imported* from other parishes.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Table 2 reveals a substantial 'traffic in corpses' in London's West End. Thousands of corpses from St Martin's found their final

³⁸ Three were sent 'to St Anns', one to Covent Garden, one to 'the Savoy' and one to Bloomsbury, COWAC 419/234.

³⁹ John W. Clay, ed., *The Registers of St. Paul's Cathedral*, The Publications of The Harleian Society, Volume XXVI (1899), 186. Maitland, referring to the year 1729, reported that there had been no burials for three years in St Paul's 'on account of the exorbitant duties', Maitland, *History of London*, III, 538.

⁴⁰ TNA PROB 11/984, ff. 196^v-197^v.

⁴¹ The difference between place of last residence, and actual place of burial may explain the under registration uncovered in Razzell et al's pioneering linkage exercise between probated wills and burial records in Bedfordshire, Razzell, Spence and Woollard, 'Bedfordshire burial registration'.

⁴² Maitland, *History of London*, III, 537. Maitland was being cautious. The Bunhill grave-digger was 'sure they buried annually between seven and eight hundred'.

⁴³ The registers of other neighbouring parishes, notably St James Westminster, St George Hanover Square and St Margaret Westminster do not consistently identify the burials of non parishioners in this period. John Black is thanked for collecting this material.

⁴⁴ From 1813 the Camden Town burial ground began accepting individuals from outside the parish, often from the Camden Town neighbourhood.

resting place in these extra parochial churchyards and burying grounds. Notably, and to an unsuspected extent, St Anne, Soho proved an exceptionally popular place of interment, a feature of West End interment practices that will be returned to later.

Table 2 Numbers of interments recorded in St Martin's and of St Martin's inhabitants recorded in three neighbouring parishes and at the Bunhill burying ground, 1747-1825

Burial registrations of known St Martin's residents	Number of recorded burial entries	%
St Martin in the Fields, Sexton's books, 1747-1825	69,350	86.1%
Camden Town burial ground, 1806-1825	3,478	4.3%
Bunhill registers, 1747-1825	889	1.1%
St Paul, Covent Garden burial register, 1747-1825	1,333	1.7%
St Giles-in-the-Fields burial register, 1747-1825	931	1.2%
St Anne, Soho burial register, 1747-1825	4,542	5.6%
Total interments	80,523	100.0%

Source: Parish registers of St Paul, Covent Garden; St Giles in the Fields; St Anne, Soho; Bunhill Registers; Sextons' Books and Camden Town Registers.

Table 2 also suggests that religious dissent cannot have been a very significant motive behind the traffic in corpses. Even allowing for some double counting and excluding burial imports, only just over one in a hundred of those dying in St Martin's were interred at the dissenters' main extra parochial burying ground at Bunhill Fields throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Most of these individual dissenters, too, consisted of the better off. Interment at Bunhill must have incurred the extra costs of transporting the corpse across London from the West End and the fees charged for interment at Bunhill were relatively substantial.⁴⁶ There seems to have been a relatively large number of family groups buried at the site.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ This is particularly so since many of these burials were identified by street rather than parish. Even using local maps, street names are sometimes difficult to match precisely to parish and a small number are suspected strongly to have belonged to neighbouring parishes.

⁴⁶ There was no provision for pauper burial at Bunhill. Until 1788 virtually all interments there were charged a standard, and relatively sizeable, fee of 13s 6d. After that date variable charges were introduced, which included a relatively low fee of 7s 6d for burial in a 'common grave'. Only about 13% of those St Martin's residents interred at Bunhill paid less

Figure 4 Interments in three neighbouring parishes, 1747-1825

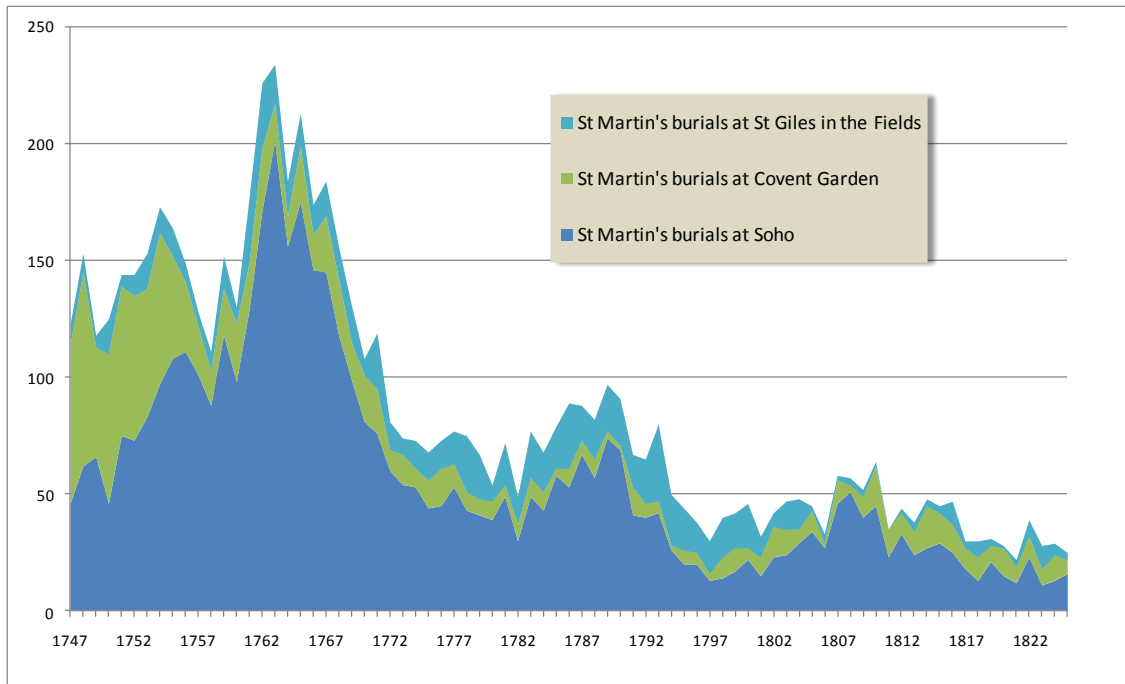


Figure 4 suggests that corpses were not exported at a constant rate. As with imports, there was a surge of exported corpses to neighbouring parish burial grounds which peaked around 1764, coincident with the opening of the Drury Lane burial ground. Far more corpses from St Martin's were interred in these neighbouring parishes before 1770 than afterwards. If this was duplicated in other neighbouring parishes, it would obviously suggest a higher level of export overall in the earlier period. These higher rates of burial export might well have been caused by local recognition that the parish burial grounds had become overstocked, since they declined rapidly after the new ground was opened. Figure 4 also shows that, of the three receiving parishes, Soho was by far the favoured final destination. This held throughout most of the period until the early 1790s. St Paul, Covent Garden, a relatively small parochial enclave within St Martin's (see Figure 1), was as popular as Soho for the first five years of the period.

Identifying burials in neighbouring parishes enables us to estimate the extent to which the certificates underestimate the volume of traffic to other burial grounds. From 1767 we can link the dead in St Martin's to the parish dead buried at Bunhill, and in the three neighbouring parishes. By these means it is possible to test how complete a record of burial export the certificates are likely to be. It should be noted that there are only a tiny number of cases where a burial found in a neighbouring parish or Bunhill could be linked with any confidence to a 'non-certified' burial entry. Since there are no certificate burial entries before 1767, this means that, before then, the Sextons' books omit virtually all those dying in the parish and

than 10s in burial fees. See, TNA RG4/3980, 3981, 3982, 3983, 3984, 3985, 3986, 3987, 3988, 3989, 3990, 3991, 3992, 3993, 3994, 3995, 3996, 3997, 4288, 4289, 4290, 4633.

⁴⁷ Unfortunately, no family relationships are given, so this is an impression based on shared surname and common local address.

exported for burial elsewhere.⁴⁸ After 1767 all but a tiny number of external links were made to certified burials. The exercise thus confirmed that the certificates do indeed relate to exported corpses. Table 3 sets out the results of this time-consuming exercise, and it is of course subject to the usual caveats regarding nominal linkage in this period. A secure link requires a coincidence of name and date. In only one case were two burials linked back to the same St Martin's burial, a conflict caused by the burial of two individuals of identical name in the same month in two different parishes. Even this conflict was resolved by extra age information.

Table 3 Burials traced to interments recorded in Bunhill and three neighbouring parishes, 1747-1825.

Parish	Number of burials imported from St Martin's after 31/5/1767	Number linked to corresponding burials in the Sextons' Books after 1766	% linked burials
St Anne, Soho	2317	661	29%
St Giles in the Fields	676	496	73%
St Paul, Covent Garden	545	347	64%
Bunhill Fields	582	38	7%
	4120	1542	37%

Clearly the certificate system did not 'catch' all exported burials, and must therefore underestimate the volume of exported corpses. Either certificates for some of these exported dead were not granted at all, or their purchase was not always recorded in the Sextons' books. It should be remembered, of course, that certificates were only necessary if the dead person was to be interred by a member of the Parish Clerks' Company. This probably explains why few dissenters interred at Bunhill paid for a burial certificate. As it happens, too, the majority of interments at Soho were not returned by the parish clerk either, and this probably explains why relatively few interments from St Martin's at Soho were certified. Since Soho and Bunhill were probably special cases, the other higher rates are probably more representative. One could thus argue that the existing certificated burials probably record about 70% of corpses exported to parishes within the London area, but miss most of those exported outside it, or those interred in non parochial London locations outside the jurisdiction of London parish clerks. There is no sustained difference over time in the proportion of certificates linked to known St Martin's residents buried in the three neighbouring parishes. All this would suggest that significantly more than 15% of those dying in St Martin's were interred outside the parish: an estimate of around 21% or so might be more accurate for the period

⁴⁸ There only 16 cases occurring before 1767, all but one of the links were to interments in St Anne, Soho, whose registration practice was, as we shall see, unusual. In these cases the rules of the Parish Clerks' Company were being broken. Many incoming burials in Soho were not returned in the Bills.

1767 to 1825.⁴⁹ The export of dead bodies from St Martin's was clearly very considerable before 1767 to judge from the number of extra parochial burials depicted in Figure 4. On the eve of the opening of the Drury Lane ground it was certainly greater than it was after that date. St Martin's was also, throughout our period, a *net* exporter of corpses.

These figures resemble uncannily closely a contemporary estimate of burial practices in 'one of the largest and most populous parishes in Westminster' reported by Birch in 1759. The figures Birch cited from a ten year portion from the register showed that an average of 1231 persons died each year in the unnamed parish, of which 261 were exported (21.2%). This Westminster parish imported 124 bodies a year (twenty of whom were 'children of the parish out at nurse in the neighbourhood') and buried 1074, an import rate of 11.5%.⁵⁰ Birch also commented on the observed differences between the detection rate of burial imports and exports:

Those, who are brought in to be buried, are carefully registered; those, who are carried out, are not so, Such are entered by themselves in the burial account, as come to the knowledge of those, whose business it is to attend to these matters: but of these, many are heard of but by accident, and some not at all.⁵¹

Explaining the traffic in corpses: burial as commodity

The foregoing has already suggested that there the traffic in corpses was dynamic. There were peaks and troughs in both exports and imports of bodies over time. How can we explain this?

Those who have studied this morbid subject before have usually put forward 'structural' motives. Familial ties are often said to explain burial outside the parish of death. Thus wealthier parishioners, those making wills, sometimes stipulated extra parochial burial so that they could be interred in a family grave or next to a relative. Something like half of the imported corpses in Barming, Kent, had a previous connection with the parish.⁵² Cases of this happening were certainly happening in St Martin's as well - we have seen that the church

⁴⁹ Assuming that the certificates only recorded 70% of all exports, and discounting imported burials in the overall total. Even this might be an underestimate, given the distorting effects of the flood of exports to neighbouring Soho.

⁵⁰ The parish is unfortunately anonymous. I must again thank Peter Razzell for drawing my attention to this valuable source. See, Birch, *A Collection of the Yearly Bills*, 5. Birch's material is also cited extensively in Razzell, 'Infant mortality'. It is possible that this parish was St Martin's, although no register reporting burial exports now seems to exist for any period before 1767. The register totals (if they resembled the totals reported for parishes in the Bills), suggest that a more likely candidate would have been St James, Westminster (or perhaps St Giles in the Fields). Birch discounted imported infants at nurse from his estimates of people dying in his unnamed source, but they should be treated as burial imports.

⁵¹ Birch, *A Collection of the Yearly Bills*, 6.

⁵² Schofield, 'Traffic in corpse', 51. See also, Houlbrooke, *Death, religion and the family*, 330-71, esp. 364-6; Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 134-5.

authorities recognized that some parishioners might wish to be buried with deceased family members. It has been argued, too, that paupers might be returned for interment in their parish of legal settlement.⁵³

However, such explanations although clearly part of the picture, do not explain the volume and direction of this movement. Nor, in particular, do they explain fluctuations in the traffic in corpses in London's West End. Family and kin ties to previous parishes may be important, but this hardly explains why, for example, some of this traffic was distinctly one sided. There are a few missing years in the St Martin's records (1812-1817), but this will not affect the overall picture suggested by Table 4. Thus over four and a half thousand inhabitants of St Martin's were interred at the smaller neighbouring parish of St Anne's, but relatively few of St Anne's residents chose to be interred at St Martin's (Table 4). St Anne's was about half the size of St Martin's, so this hardly explains this dramatic net import of corpses at Soho.

⁵³ There not much sign, however, that that was happening in St Martin's on a significant scale in the eighteenth century, other than in the case of corpses returned from the public hospitals. There are more cases of imported zero cost burials in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, although this may be partly an artefact of the opening of the new Camden Town burial ground. I have, to date, found no case of the parish paying to fetch pauper corpses back from other parishes in the overseers' accounts. The parish bearers, of course, could have fetched dead paupers back from neighbouring parishes without an extra charge, but more distant retrievals would have produced a visible fee. Infants put out to nurse by the parish were buried in the parishes where they died. For payments to Mr Mansell, an undertaker, for burying parish nurse children at Hampton (Middlesex), 1777-81, see, F571/14r; F573/40; F575; F577/15r; F579/22r.

Table 4 Comparison of traffic in corpses: exports and imports in St Martin's 1747-1825

	Corpses from St Martin's, 1747-1825	Corpses exported to St Martin's, 1747- 1825
St Paul, Covent Garden burial register, 1747-1825	1,333	481
St Giles in the Fields burial register, 1747- 1825	931	1,336
St Anne, Soho burial register, 1747-1825	4,542	348

Source: Table 2 and Sextons' notebooks of St Martin's.

Existing explanations for the 'traffic in corpses', therefore, leave much to be desired, at least for London. To understand the metropolitan traffic in corpses fully, we need to understand that London interment had become, as Vanessa Harding has commented, 'commodified' by the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ The traffic in corpses - both its volume and direction - was connected intimately to often quite small amounts of hard cash.

Local burial fees and local burial practices

Fees charged by London parishes were occasionally a source of contention and sometimes dispute. Although nobody, in theory, could be denied burial in their local churchyard, in practice burial fees were charged to all but the poor in all London parishes.⁵⁵ Tables of fees were published routinely by some parishes in broadsheet format, and might also be listed during rebuilding of parish churches, the redevelopment of local graveyards, or when new parishes were carved out of existing ones. All or part of the fees charged in practice can be recovered from churchwardens', sextons' accounts and parish clerks' notebooks.

A useful table of the burial fees charged at St Martin's survives for the period before the church was rebuilt in 1724.⁵⁶ It covers a period when the boundaries of the parish were

⁵⁴ 'charging higher fees to non-parishioners ... in the long run worked to undermine notions of natural community, in that it allowed outsiders to buy their way in, thereby perhaps reinforcing the translation of more subtle differences into monetary value. By the late seventeenth century, parishes in both London and Paris had gone a long way towards the complete commodification of burial', Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 272.

⁵⁵ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 59-61, 135-6, 207, 270-1; Burn *Ecclesiastical Law*, I, London, 1767, 234-6, 242-7, Snell, 'Labour mobility', 36.

⁵⁶ Lambeth Palace Library, LPL MS 2716/ff.7-8. Thanks are due to Dr Jacob Field, who transcribed the document. The document was drawn up as part of the proceedings of the Commissioners for Building Fifty New Churches. References to burial fees sent in by parishes occur in the minutes only in 1724-5, M. H. Port, ed., *The Commissions for Building*

bigger, since St George Hanover Square was carved out of the parish in 1725. The Table, despite its detail, does not include all items sometimes listed in the Sextons' books.⁵⁷ That said, the table is useful since the Sextons' books rarely itemize all the components of the fees charged. What does the table tell us about burial charges in the parish?

Firstly the table reveals that sets of fees were payable to up to *seven* different parish officers for each burial. The table itemized fees payable to the Churchwarden, the Vicar, his Curate, the Parish Clerk, the Sexton, grave maker and bearers. It seems probable that the Sexton was collecting all parish fees and then distributing them amongst parish officials. As far as one can judge, the fees charged for most of the eighteenth century correspond to the fees listed in the Table.⁵⁸

Fees were graded according to the type of individual buried. There was no official gender distinction. The table routinely laid out 'Man or Woman' or used the gender neutral term 'child'. However, fees charged differed by age. Those considered 'Children' were charged lower fees throughout the schedule. Thus for a 'Man or Woman in the New Church Yard if Attended' would cost 168d in fees, compared to burying a 'child' in the same place with attendance which would attract fees of only 78d. The fee structure also, interestingly, charged still lower fees for 'stillborn or Chrysom' children and even lower fees for what were termed 'abortives' (a stillbirth attracted a fee of 42d compared to an 'abortive' charged only 18d). Only the sexton and the gravemaker were due fees for abortive children. Differential fees for stillborn and abortive children seem to have been levied throughout the eighteenth century, with a possible small hike to both charges in the later eighteenth century. The important point here, of course, is that there was a clear financial motive for those burying very young children to have them classified as stillbirths or abortives. What, however, constituted a 'child'? The ages given in the Sexton's books demonstrate that very few individuals over the age of 15 were labelled as children.⁵⁹

Different fees were charged according to the relative prestige of local burial location (see above Table 1). Before 1725, the Chancel was the favoured, and most expensive, spot, followed by the Church or perhaps the 'French chappel' in Soho⁶⁰, or 'in the Vault under the

Fifty New Churches. The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar, London Record Society 23 (1986), 113, 116-17, 126, 130.

⁵⁷ The Sextons' books sometimes itemize the provision of 'prayers' (although this might well have been included in the Table under 'attendance'), bell ringing and moving pavements. Very occasionally the Sexton collected the fine for burial in linen rather than wool as stipulated by Statute.

⁵⁸ A sample of fees was matched between the two sources for 1771, which demonstrated that the Sexton's books collected more than three times the amount of money accounted for by the churchwardens. This again demonstrates that the Sexton's books are reasonable guides to the total burial fees incurred.

⁵⁹ In 1764, the vestry set out fees for the new Drury Lane Burial Ground, which distinguished between children aged between 6 and 12, and children under 6.

⁶⁰ The French Chapel was located in Hog Lane, over the parish boundary in Soho. It is depicted in Hogarth's 1738 print, *The Four Times of Day Plate II, Noon*. From 1790 the

Tabernacle'. Outside church walls, the most prestigious burial location was in the Old Church Yard or in the 'Ground by the Church Court'. This would have been in the burial ground(s) next to the Church proper on the east side of St Martin's lane, collectively known as the 'New Old Ground). For the more humble the cheapest burial location was in the 'New Church Yard'. As Harding and others have recently confirmed therefore, death brought no equality of commemoration. A man or woman buried in the 'Old Church Yard', even foregoing a stone, would have been charged fees totalling £1.40 but an adult, without 'attendance' would have been charged only £0.58 in the New Church Yard. Put another way to bury an adult, a bricklayer at this period would have had to work for about 9 days to afford prestigious Old Churchyard fees, but 'only' about four for a more modest burial in the New Church Yard.⁶¹ The parish was clearly aware of the financial burden fees represented to those face by the loss of a family member. The Table also set out a generic set of lower fees 'for them that can't afford the fees above' in the New Churchyard.⁶² As was the norm in London, parish paupers (and a few parish officials and servants) were buried at parish expense.

The fees listed in the Table also, as was the usual practice in London, penalized non parishioners, but it is noticeable that St Martin's did this only to a relatively limited extent. London parishes usually charged all non parishioners higher fees. Parishes most commonly charged a double fee, or like Marylebone, erected a scale of charges depending on local residential qualifications.⁶³ St Martin's, however, only levied a higher charge due to the churchwardens on 'one of another Parish' for those interred 'in the Vault under the Tabernacle'. This could imply fewer barriers to stranger burial, although it is very probable that local burial fees were higher than those in some neighbouring parishes. As we have seen, strangers were to be charged double fees at Drury Lane, in theory from 1766. This was a new policy erected to discourage stranger interment in the new parish burial ground.

Lastly, the Table shows that, as was also common in London, the parish attempted to levy fees on those exporting corpses.⁶⁴ The parish charged fees on those corpses 'carried away', graded according to whether they were considered 'chancel' 'church' or 'churchyard' fees. It must have been difficult to collect such fees, and in practice, as we have seen, it was only

ground was used exclusively by almshouse inmates. Most almshouse women were probably interred somewhere in the ground before then, although this is rarely specified.

⁶¹ For money wages, see, Leonard D. Schwarz, 'The standard of living in the long run: London, 1700-1860', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 38 (1985) 24-41.

⁶² For a similar case, see Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 61.

⁶³ Both the churches of St George the Martyr, and St George, Hanover Square, charged 'strangers' double fees, unless the parties involved could demonstrate poverty, Port, *Commissions for building churches*, 126, 130; Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 134-6.

⁶⁴ The right to levy fees on parishioners buried outside the parish had been tried at law, see Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, I, 245-7, Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Cemeteries, Religion and the Culture of Capitalism', in Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew, eds., *Revival and Religion since 1700. Essays for John Walsh*, (London: Hambledon, 1993), 190-1, 196.

those charged for parish bells that usually appear as being ‘carried away’ in the churchwardens accounts.⁶⁵

All this may seem, thus far, like a rather grim exercise in local history. However, we need to know the local fee structure in order to explain some of the interment practices in the parish. Unfortunately, of course, the Table of Fees is only a snapshot. To understand how fees might have affected interment, we need to use the actual fees charged over time, something that the Sextons’ books supply. That is, we need to relate cost of interment to numbers interred. To my knowledge no historian has been myopic enough to perform this sort of analysis before, but the results are striking, and suggest conclusions of wider historical importance. The analysis here will be restricted to the impact of local burial fees on the level of burial imports.

The Table of Fees described above suggests that any analysis of burial costs must take into account burial location within the parish, age of the deceased and address since all these variables could affect the fees charged. All those buried at parish expense or excused burial fees need to be excluded from any analysis, as do those exported elsewhere as ‘certificate’ burials. The measure used is average cost of burial, which will obviously vary somewhat according to age of child buried and possible extras, this will be offset by the large number of burials in the sample. Since the Drury Lane Burial Ground was associated with a surge in burial imports, this piece of micro analysis will be restricted to burials in that ground. Figures 5 and 6 define children as all those under 20, and exclude all those with unknown ages. In practice the exact cut off does not matter much, since child burials were dominated by those under 6.

⁶⁵ The broadsheet *Table of Fees or Duties to be from Time to Time paid to the Vicar, Church Wardens, Parish-Clerk, and Sexton of the Parish of Deptford, in the county of Kent*, laid down that ‘for every Inhabitant of the said Parish of Deptford, buried in any other Parish, or Place, the same Fees shall be paid to the Vicar, Clerk, Church-Warden, and Sexton of Deptford aforesaid, as if such Person had been buried in the said Parish of Deptford’. Problems of collecting burial fees from non parishioners presumably explain their order that ‘all Burial Fees for Persons who come from Abroad, to be buried in the said Parish of Deptford, shall be discharged before the Body be interred’.

Figure 5 Average cost of burial in pence of those aged 20 and over at Drury Lane Ground, 1764-1825

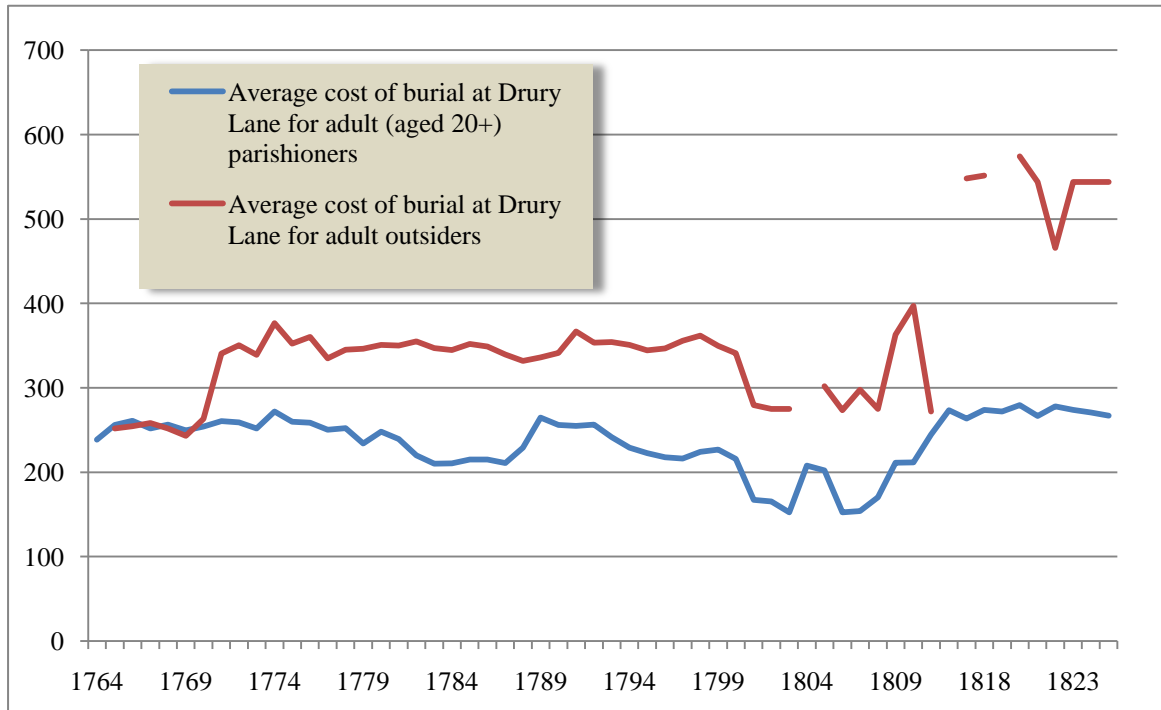
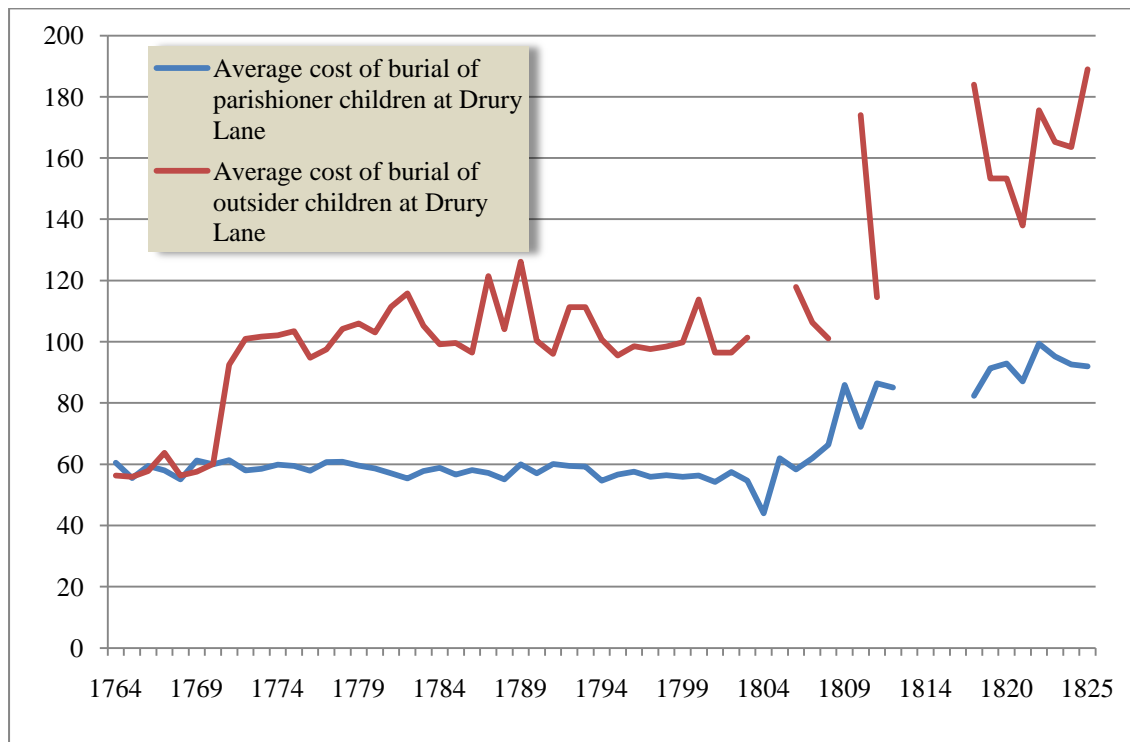


Figure 6 Average cost of burial in pence of those aged under 20 at Drury Lane Ground, 1764-1825



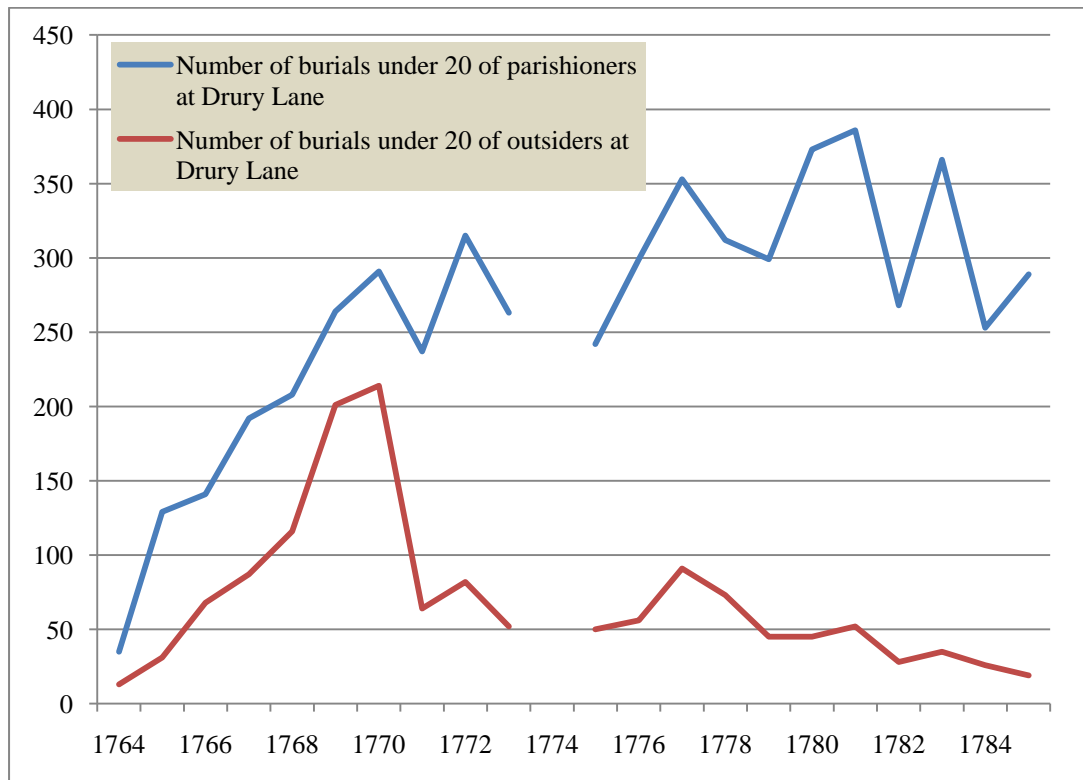
Figures 5 and 6 show quite clearly that until 1770 (and against that explicit order of the local vestry) outsiders were interred in the Drury Lane ground at the same average cost as parishioners. In 1771, however, the average fee charged jumped for outsiders. On average, those outsiders burying children at Drury Lane were being charged around 5s before 1771 (exactly the same average charge as parishioners), but thereafter the average fee jumped to around 8s. Those outsiders burying adults were paying, on average, about a guinea (21s) before 1771, and between 28s to 30s thereafter. The average fee charged before 1771 pretty much corresponded to the prescribed fees for the new ground.⁶⁶

The fee hike had a striking effect on local interment practice. Immediately the fees for strangers were raised, the number of stranger interments fell. This was especially marked with stranger children, as Figure 7 reveals. Levying an additional average sum of around 3s (a day's wages for a bricklayer at this time) on the burial of outsider children dramatically reduced the import of their corpses into the new Drury Lane ground. As a result the number of 'stranger' children buried there fell from 214 in 1770 to only 64 in 1771. Parents must have preferred to make a relatively small saving, rather than inter their children in what might have been seen as an otherwise attractive site. It must have been the case therefore that some families living outside the parish buried some of their children at the Drury Lane burial ground, but, after the fee hike, interred others elsewhere. The fall in burial imports seen in

⁶⁶ The parish vestry set out its 'opinion' on reasonable 'gross' fees for the ground 'lately consecrated' at Drury Lane in 1764. It prescribed totals of a guinea for the interment of a man or a woman, 4s 6d for a child under 6, and 7s for a child aged between 6 and 12. COWAC F2007/316.

Figure 2, therefore, is largely explained by the imposition of higher burial fees at the Drury Lane ground in the parish which greatly reduced the interment of the dead children of non parishioners. This microscopic examination, perhaps better termed a forensic analysis, thus suggests strongly that the relative level of burial fees charged can sometimes explain changes in the number of interments in a parish. A relationship between burial fees and rate of interment was, in fact, found commonly in Georgian London.

Figure 7 Burials of those aged under 20 at Drury Lane 1764-1785



The commodification of burial: the capitalist economy of the dead

There is actually quite a bit of evidence that burial fees had an impact on interment practices in London. Of course burial fees were only a small proportion of total funeral costs.⁶⁷ It is likely, however, that burial fees had proportionately greater significance for those of relatively modest means. Varying interment strategies could produce significant financial savings for bereaved families.

In fact, some Londoners attempted to avoid both burial fees and also the unwelcome publicity of a pauper funeral by leaving coffined corpses in the capital’s burying grounds. Dead

⁶⁷ The parish paid ‘the Funeral Expences of Thomas Whaley late one of the Bedels of this Parish’ in 1777 at a total cost of £2 17s 8d. Whaley’s (concessionary) burial fee for interment in the Drury Lane ground on 24/11/1777 was 7s 2d, only 12% of the total cost of his funeral, COWAC F419/237; F571/ 26r. For a later period, see the funeral charges listed in Miles et al, *St Marylebone Church*, 47-9.

children were left in London's churchyards, it was supposed at the time, simply to avoid the payment of burial fees.⁶⁸ The burial register of St James Clerkenwell, between 1729 and 1744, is unusual in that it records, in some detail, no less than forty one cases of corpses left for burial in the parish churchyard. These abandoned corpses were not simply dumped. Most were children, usually described as boys or girls, left, prepackaged as it were, in coffins, band boxes or once in a 'linnen bag'. Their parent or parents, although able to provide suitable coffins must have abandoned the corpse to avoid incurring burial fees. They clearly expected the parish to provide a suitable burial. It is possible, of course, that a private burial service had already taken place. Adult corpses must have been far more difficult to abandon in this way, for practical reasons, although a few cases of this are known. These abandoned corpses seem to have died of natural causes, and most do not seem to have been newly born.⁶⁹

Burial space was an increasingly valuable commodity in Georgian London and one can identify the emergence of a capitalist market to supply it. What is striking is that those supplying this market were not necessarily secular entrepreneurs. Early participants in this morbid capitalist economy of the dead were dealing in consecrated ground or ground otherwise associated with religious worship. There is a satirical article in the London press describing just this active market in the provision of burial space. There were, for example, deliberate burial fee reductions to attract 'customers' - just as a butcher might reduce the price of his meat. 'Sly Boots' made this very point in a longer rhetorical diatribe praising the effects of an 'interested opposition' in opposing monopolistic behaviour in 1778:

A very extraordinary reduction has lately taken place in the very sanctuary where traffic could not be supposed to be countenanced. The heads of the parish of St. James, Clerkenwell, caused some time ago a vestry to be called, and laid before it a grievance of a very extraordinary nature. It was proved, that belonging to a neighbouring tabernacle there was a burying ground where the dead were interred at so cheap a rate, that the parish church yard was absolutely *deserted*; not a *customer* was seen to make his or her appearance there, since the *charnel* house had been opened; the parishioners considering the great decay of *trade* in the parish cemetery, and determined to support the credit of their *ground*, in defiance of the opposition they met with from their rival, unanimously resolved that *lodgings* should in future be

⁶⁸ Thus the London edition of the *Daily Gazetteer*, reported on November 23rd, 1736 (issue 440), 'On Friday and on Saturday Morning last two Female Infants were left naked and dead in the Church-yard of St. Martin in the Field, which having no Marks of Violence about them, 'tis supposed they were dropped there because those they belonged to were not able to pay the Burial Fees'. For a similar case involving a coffined three year old in the neighbouring parish of St James, see, *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, August 14th, 1728, issue 2371.

⁶⁹ Robert Hovenden, ed., *A True Register of all the Christenings, Mariages, and Burialles in the Parishes of St. James, Clerkenwell, from the Yeare of Our Lorde God 1551. Vol. VI. Burials, 1720-1754*, Harleian Society 20, London, 1894, 88-240. For an abandoned adult corpse, see 20/4/1734 'Sar. a woman in a Coffin in the Church Yard'. Most of the bodies were, of course, anonymous. An entry on 16/1/1730 was 'A boy dropt in a Coffin, marked I. M'.

let in their church yard at as low a rate as at the Methodist's burying-ground, which had engrossed all the *business* from the parish of St. James. What effect this will produce cannot as yet be positively ascertained; but this much may be said, that the Methodist proprietor of the burying ground has been of much advantage to the public at large, and like the butcher of Litchfield-Street, has eased the poor of an intolerable burden, and saved the poor worms of St. James's from starving, by forcing the vestry to allow them food at as cheap a rate as their fellow reptiles have it at the tabernacle...⁷⁰

We may wonder about the reality underlying this comment, but it is clearly the case that by the eighteenth century many friends and relatives of the dead were opting for interments based on financial grounds. It is also clear that some parishes, or more specifically some parish officials, were maximising their fee income in archetypal capitalist fashion: effectively piling corpses high and selling the ground cheap. Nowhere was this practice more blatant than in St Anne, Soho.

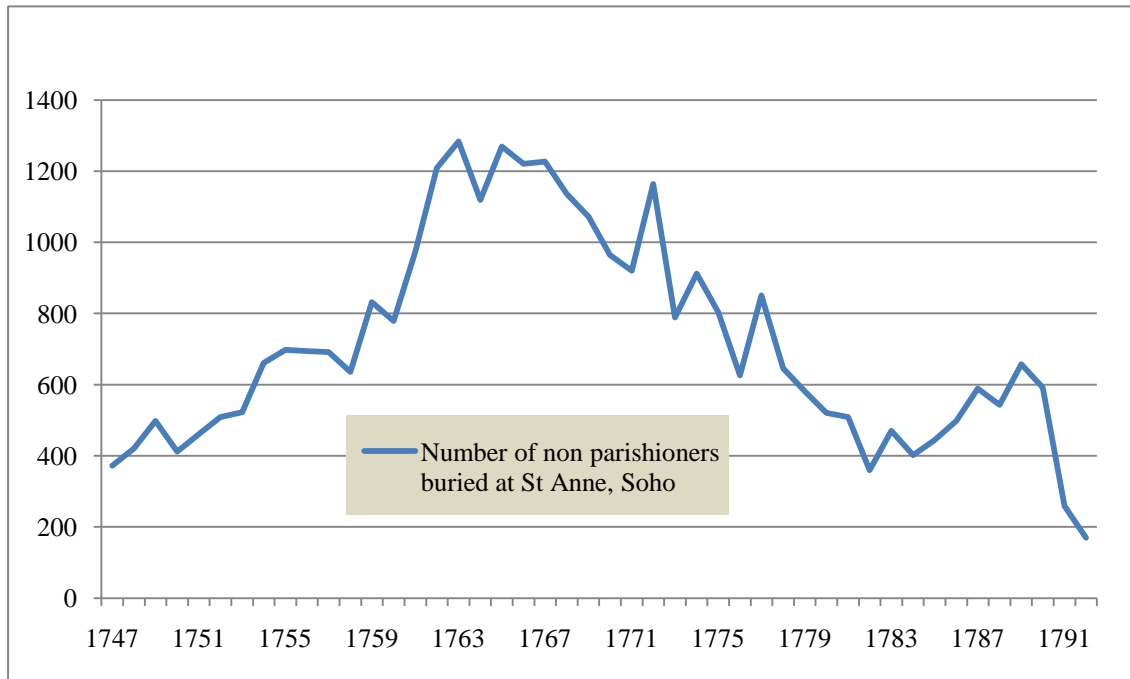
It has already been noticed that the parish of St Anne, Soho, was a popular destination for St Martin's corpses. For this reason it was investigated in more detail. Since the parish register of St Anne's identified the interments of non parishioners, it was a relatively simple matter to count each one between 1747 and 1792 (after this date the number of non parishioners declined dramatically). It is an extraordinary fact that around thirty-three *thousand* individuals were interred at St Anne's from outside the parish in that period.⁷¹ Numbers of interments at the parish increased steadily from 1750, peaking between 1761 and 1774, and then declining. Non parishioner interments fell sharply after 1791. For most of this period 'stranger' interments greatly outnumbered those of parishioners (Figure 8).⁷²

⁷⁰ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Tuesday, November 17, 1778, issue 1898.

⁷¹ The database constructed contains only clearly identified non parishioners.

⁷² There were 47,759 interments at Soho recorded in the parish register between 1747 and 1792, of which at least 69% were of non parishioners.

Figure 8 Stranger interments at Soho, 1747-1792



St Anne's was burying huge numbers of corpses from parishes in London's West End but, as Table 5 makes clear, the impact of the 'Soho' effect was disproportionate. The Table lists the parishes that together contributed 96% of all 'stranger' burials at Soho. To measure impact on the exporting parish, Table 5 includes a column comparing the number of burials found at Soho with the number of burials returned by each parish in the Bills of Mortality in the same period, supplying in effect a crude 'corpse export rate'. As was the case in St Martin's (see above Figure 1), neighbouring parishes commonly sent the greatest proportion of their dead to Soho. That said, the parish exporting most corpses to Soho *pro rata* was St Clement Danes, which though close, did not share a boundary with St Anne's. The dead of St Clements must have been carried through other parishes, and past other burial grounds, to reach the churchyard of St Anne's. When imported bodies were being interred in huge numbers – over a thousand a year - in the 1760s and early 1770s, very large proportions of the dead from other parishes were finding their way to Soho from its neighbours. About a quarter of all those dying in St Clements were buried at Soho between 1759 and 1765. Only a detailed investigation of interment practices and local burial fees in neighbouring parishes would explain the observable variations in their 'corpse export rate' to Soho, or indeed anywhere else. In St Martin's, as we now know, corpse exports to Soho declined steadily after its Drury Lane burial ground was opened in 1764.

Table 5 Parochial origins of individuals buried at St Anne, Soho, 1747-1792

Parish of Origin	Total burials found in Soho 1747-1792	Percentage	Total burials in Bills of mortality 1747-1792	% Corpses exported to Soho 1747-1792
St Clement Danes	2,622	7.95%	14,550	15.3%
St Giles-in -the-Fields	7,339	22.26%	49,351	12.9%
St James Piccadilly	5,414	16.42%	42,760	11.2%
St Paul Covent Garden	610	1.85%	6,415	8.7%
St Martin-in-the-Fields	3,756	11.39%	44,584	7.8%
St Bride Fleet Street	562	1.70%	8,015	6.6%
St George Bloomsbury	859	2.61%	14,673	5.5%
St Dunstan in the West	305	0.93%	5,873	4.9%
St Mary-le-Strand	390	1.18%	7,694	4.8%
St Andrew Holborn	1,474	4.47%	41,452	3.4%
St Margaret Westminster	760	2.31%	37,373	2.0%
St George Hanover Square	760	2.31%	38,966	1.9%
St Sepulchre Newgate	291	0.88%	21,673	1.3%
St John the Evangelist Westminster	113	0.34%	9,142	1.2%
St James Clerkenwell	213	0.65%	30,169	0.7%
St Marylebone	3,706	11.24%	n/a	0.0%
St Pancras	1,524	4.62%	n/a	0.0%
Precinct of Whitefriars	455	1.38%	n/a	0.0%
St Luke Chelsea	156	0.47%	n/a	0.0%
St Ann Blackfriars	133	0.40%	n/a	0.0%
Kensington	128	0.39%	n/a	0.0%

Note: Percentage calculated by adding Soho burials to totals reported in London Bills. It is here assumed that few exported burials were returned by the exporting parishes. Total burials for each parish were taken from the London Bills of Mortality as reported in Marshall, *Mortality in the Metropolis*.

The size of the traffic in corpses at Soho has more than local implications. For reasons which are not clear, few of these ‘stranger’ interments were returned in the Bills of Mortality by the parish clerk. Since we know exported bodies were not returned in the parish of death, this means that most of the thirty three thousand strangers buried at Soho were omitted entirely from the London Bills of Mortality. At its peak, this huge ‘clandestine burial centre’ was a (hitherto unsuspected) major cause of under registration in the London Bills of Mortality.⁷³ Soho’s interment business is also an excellent example of capitalist entrepreneurial spirit. Its burial ground was attractive because space was provided cheaply, with few restrictions on stranger interment.

⁷³ For a fuller discussion of the traffic in corpses and its effects on the London Bills of Mortality, see, L. Schwarz and J. Boulton, ‘Yet Another Inquiry into the Trustworthiness of Eighteenth-Century London’s Bills of Mortality’, *Local Population Studies* (2010, forthcoming).

The huge number of stranger burials at Soho represented something of a logistical challenge, since each one required a burial service. In 1778 the Soho Vicar, Richard Hind, fell out with the local vestry over the crucial question as to who was actually responsible for paying for conducting the burial service over ‘such persons as were neither Parishioners or Inhabitants of this Parish’. The Vicar was refusing to pay any additional fee to his curate, a Mr Martyn, for performing the service, claiming that it was part of the curate’s existing duties. Mr Martyn was anxious to have the situation clarified. In the course of this dispute the vestry spent some time ‘in considering whether any and what method can be taken to prevent the Loss to which the parish would sustain by a discontinuance of such Burials’. The matter was put to two legal experts, which hardly mattered, since the Vicar ‘would not come and that if the said Duty is to be done by him or if he is to pay for it he will not consent to the opening of the Ground And also that he shall soon leave the Parish’. Shortly after this, ‘Revd. Dr Richd: Hind resigned the Rectorship of this Parish And the Revd Dr. Robert Richardson was Presented and Inducted in his Stead’. Stranger burials continued in Soho on a significant scale until 1791. In that year, the vestry took the opportunity presented by need to appoint a new sexton, of ordering ‘that the Fees to be paid for the Burials of Non Parishioners (except in the Vault and Church) shall be doubled in future’ and that ‘the said Fees shall commence on the seventh Day of February next’.⁷⁴ Candidates for the sexton’s office were made to swear that :

‘We whose names are undersigned do agree that if the Choice of Sexton falls to any one of us that we will abide by the Order of the Vestry on Monday last and which was carried unanimous, that Non-parishioners (Church and Vault excepted) shall not be buried in future in the Church Yards of this parish without paying double dues’.⁷⁵

It is not clear why the parish took this decision - the most likely reason is that the available ground had become overstocked - but the doubling of burial fees at Soho resulted in a collapse of stranger burials in 1791 (see above Figure 8).⁷⁶

As it happens Soho was not the only West End parish to inter strangers for profit. As noted above, a relatively large number of St Martin’s corpses had been interred at St Paul Covent

⁷⁴ Decisions were taken by a ‘general’ as opposed to a select vestry. No less than 639 individuals were polled over the choice of Sexton.

⁷⁵ See the vestry minutes of St Anne, Soho, COWAC A2203/396-400, 403-406; **A2203/50-4**.

⁷⁶ After this date, too, Soho’s returns to the London Bills of Mortality were generally accurate, LPS. Most authorities identify only one burial ground at Soho, the relatively large graveyard next to the church returned in Chadwick’s 1843 enquiry, Bard, *Graveyard London*, 133. For the churchyard, see, ‘St. Anne’s Church’, *Survey of London: volumes 33 and 34: St Anne Soho* (1966), pp. 256-277. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41107> Date accessed: 23 May 2010. However, there are a few references to other burying grounds in the parish. The vestry minutes refer to an abortive offer of a ‘piece of Ground ... Offered for a Burying Ground for this Parish but did not know where the said Ground is situate nor the Extent of it’ in 1754, COWAC A2203/103-4 and the 1791 order does refer to churchyards, but these may refer to different areas within the main churchyard.

Garden in the ten or so years after 1747 (see above Figure 4).⁷⁷ Numbers from St Martin's interred at Covent Garden ran at about sixty per year until 1755, after which they declined steadily to about twenty a year by 1757. This decline was prompted by a fee hike, imposed because the Covent Garden burial ground had become full - partly because the low fees charged had resulted in an influx of stranger corpses. In July 1755 a vestry was called 'to consider of and Settle a proper table of Fees to be taken for burials of Foreigners or persons who are not Inhabitants of this parish'. Their order is worth quoting in full, since it is an excellent illustration of the relationship between fees, burial space and interment practice in this period:

The Inhabitants of this parish having observed that by the great number of burials of Strangers, the Ground of the Church Yard of this parish has increased and risen in many places to such a height, that at present it is not only become a Nuisance to such Inhabitants as live in the Houses adjoining to it, but in a short time there will Scarcely be room for ye interment of the parishioners; And the Inhabitants having frequently complained to the Church Wardens and the other Gentlemen of ye Vestry of this grievance and prayed some redress, This Vestry have taken the same into consideration and are clearly convinced that the multiplicity of these burials have been owing to ye small Fees for many years past taken for the Ground and by the Church officers for such burials, Therefore for preventing the like Evils for ye future, they have this day upon deliberate consideration settled a Table of Fees for all Burials in the Church and Church Yards, which the Churchwardens have signed, and have order'd the same to be hung up in the Vestry room for general perusal, inspection and observation.⁷⁸

Conclusions

It seems clear that a very considerable traffic in corpses existed in Georgian London. It has been demonstrated that the volume of this traffic in any one location is likely to have ebbed and flowed according to relative movements in local burial fees. Providing salubrious burial ground relatively cheaply could result in an influx of corpses from neighbouring parishes. Raising fees levied on stranger burials greatly reduced the inflow of corpses to any given burial ground. Opening a new burial ground could therefore cause a jump in the number of burials in a parish, raising burial fees in a ground could cause a fall. Some parishes, notably St Anne, Soho and, earlier in the century, St Paul Covent Garden were interring strangers in very large numbers at relatively low cost for maximum profit.

Although burial fees were an important driver, however, they were clearly not the only motive behind post mortem movement. Ties to family burial plots, multiple house ownership, or to previous residence must explain a large number of such burials. It is argued here, however, that financial motives provided the dynamic element. It is likely that it was that class of Londoners just above the ranks of the parish poor who were most likely to be 'cost

⁷⁷ Covent Garden's interment of large number of strangers has recently been detected by Razzell, 'Infant mortality in London', Table 5.

⁷⁸ COWAC H805/157-8.

sensitive' when it came to the interment of family members. For such people the paramount and ultimately pragmatic consideration seems to have been to achieve an affordable burial, at a time of family crisis and bereavement with all its associated costs. Saving on burial fees thus represents yet another element in the 'economy of makeshifts'.⁷⁹ In these cases, interment in the parish where the deceased last lived must have been considered less important than making modest savings on the burial costs. Many of these individuals displayed little parochial identity. Those seeking cheap interments were numerous enough to produce significant changes in the volume of corpses exchanged between neighbouring parishes, at least in the West End.

As noted above, however, the traffic in corpses was not driven solely by financial motives. The great majority of those dying in St Martin's, around eighty per cent of the total, were buried locally. Paupers, buried at parish expense, exercised little choice over their interment within the parish. Many parishioners were clearly wealthy enough to take burial fees in their stride. For the better off, after all, burial fees were only a small fraction of total funeral charges. Funeral costs themselves were, historically, a greater proportionate burden on the estates of the less well off.⁸⁰ Large numbers of wealthier parishioners therefore were clearly willing to invest in burial in preferred high status locations within the parish - or outside it. Large numbers of Londoners were prepared to pay higher burial fees, even double fees, to gain access to burial grounds in neighbouring and even distant parishes. In such cases, too, they would have had to pay higher transport costs, and might also have incurred a set of fees in their home parishes.

What sort of challenges does the traffic in corpses pose for the historical demographer? It is already clear that, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, perhaps one in five of those dying in St Martin's were interred outside the parish, and that around one in ten of those buried there were imported from elsewhere. The 'corpse export rate' in the West End, moreover, clearly varied over both time and space. Local fluctuations in the number of burials reported for individual parishes in the London Bills of Mortality, therefore, must, as in St Martin's, sometimes have reflected changes in local interment practices rather than fluctuations in local mortality rates.⁸¹ Only very detailed local analysis could tease out the effects at parish level. Some parishes, like St Martin's, were net exporters of corpses whilst others, such as St Anne's, were net importers. What is clear, too, is that the overall volume of the traffic in corpses has no clear chronology. The impression here, for example, is that

⁷⁹ For a recent discussion of this concept, see the essays in Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, eds., *The poor in England 1700-1850. An economy of makeshifts*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003).

⁸⁰ Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*, (Routledge: London, 1984), 239, Table 2. Her probate inventory evidence (dated mostly between 1581 and 1650) showed that the percentage of wealth spent on funerals correlated negatively with size of inventoried estate. See also, Vanessa Harding, "'And one more may be laid there": the Location of Burials in Early Modern London', *The London Journal* 14, 2 (1989), 121-2.

⁸¹ A heavy traffic in corpses therefore complicates, but does not necessarily invalidate, Landers' analysis of 'spatial variations in mortality' in eighteenth-century London, Landers, *Death and the Metropolis*, 301-50.

corpse export was heaviest in St Martin's before the new burial ground was opened in 1764. St Anne Soho's popularity peaked in the 1760s and 1770s, and declined rapidly when double fees were imposed on stranger burials in 1791. If there was no obvious chronology to this traffic in the capital, neither are spatial variations in the 'corpse export rate' predictable. Use made by West End residents of the cheap Soho burying ground ranged from heavy (St Giles in the Fields (12.9%), St Clement Danes (15.3%)) to relatively light (St George Hanover Square (1.9%)). Neither St Clements nor St George shared a parish boundary with St Anne's. Clearly those studying urban parishes need to factor in the mobile dead.⁸²

But what demographic characteristics did these shiftless corpses actually have? How representative were they of the parish dead? What sort of biases might the traffic in corpses produce in demographic statistics? As Schofield found in Barming, 'people of all ages were brought back for burial in the parish'.⁸³ In terms of the distribution by age at death, imported and local burials were identical, save for the virtually complete absence of stillborn children in the imported group. The population of those exported from St Martin's for burial elsewhere were also rarely stillborn but also had proportionally fewer infants than did imported or local burials. Those exported were also, however, more likely to lack age information than the other two groups. In terms of the sex ratio the most marked gender difference was that those exported from the parish were more likely to be males in the prime of life (aged 30 to 59) than were those buried locally. Whether these local findings have a more general applicability is an interesting question. It is clear, however, that they might not, since those imported for burial did not display the same characteristics as those exported. St Martin's, in other words, exported more males in the prime of life for burial elsewhere than it received for local interment. The traffic in corpses, therefore, could conceivably distort local estimates of the sex ratio at burial, just as it might affect estimates of lifetime mobility.⁸⁴

Apart from some age-specific differences in the gender of those exported and the almost complete absence of stillborn children, the mobile dead were not markedly different from those who died and were buried locally. It is also likely that those who were moved post mortem were socially representative, comprising a mixture of wealthy and more humble individuals (exclusive of those buried in a pauper's grave). Perhaps for this reason, a preliminary analysis suggested that there were no marked differences in the major causes of death of those exported or imported and those who died and were buried locally, other than differences attributable to the absence of stillborn children and the fact that greater numbers of those moved lacked causes of death.⁸⁵

⁸² See Basten, 'Registration Practices in Northern England', 92, who similarly notes 'the potential for *inflation* and *deflation* of burial figures as a result of post-mortem corpse transfer'.

⁸³ Schofield, 'Traffic in corpses', 52.

⁸⁴ Snell, 'Labour mobility', 29-43. For the differing proportions of children and adults imported into a sample of London parishes, see Razzell, 'Infant Mortality', Table 5.

⁸⁵ This material is not presented here to save space. The analysis was restricted to the period from June 1767 only. Nearly twice as many imported and exported individuals lacked cause of death information. The top five causes of death for all three groups were consumption,

The demographic biases produced by the 'traffic in corpses, are certainly non negligible. Although those omitted share many of the demographic characteristics of the wider population the volume of such movement clearly might affect local parish-based studies by producing peaks and troughs in any local burial series. Moreover, the tendency by a section of the population to inter children where it could be done cheapest might well affect Family Reconstitution exercises by removing such individuals from the 'reconstitutable minority' under observation. In our study of mortality in the parish, of course, perhaps uniquely, such biases can be identified and allowed for. If nothing else, however, this paper suggests that Basten's warning about the dangers of single parish studies in later eighteenth century should be taken very seriously for urban areas. Investigation of local interment practices should, in future, play an important part in the care taken in selecting and testing registers to be reconstituted.⁸⁶

How widespread and extensive, however, was the traffic in corpses? Figures for imported corpses suggest the dead were particularly mobile at the end of the eighteenth century. Basten's work unearthed percentages of imported corpses in three Newcastle parishes comparable to those found at Barming in Kent in the same period - between twenty and thirty one per cent of all burials - double the percentage found in St Martin's.⁸⁷ Both London and Newcastle might well have been exceptional, however, and some historians have come up with much lower estimates for provincial England.⁸⁸ It would be fascinating to know more about the traffic in corpses; perhaps the local historians of Britain will eventually respond to Schofield's call for more studies of the practice.⁸⁹

Was it more common for people to be buried outside the parish of their death in the eighteenth century than earlier? There is much less evidence of a significant traffic in

convulsions, fever, smallpox and 'aged'. An age- and gender-specific analysis would throw up a few more small differences. Few of those dying of 'foul disease', for example, were imported or exported, probably because almost all of those so stigmatised were buried from the parish workhouse.

⁸⁶ E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oeppen and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997), 97.

⁸⁷ For imports at St Nicholas, St John's and St Andrew's, Newcastle, see Basten, 'Registration Practices', 91, Table 2.13. For Barming, Kent, see, Schofield, 'Traffic in corpses', 51.

⁸⁸ London was atypical both from the wealth of its inhabitants, the number of its inhabitants, the huge choice of available burying places, and a tradition of extra parochial interment that went back to the sixteenth century, Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 59, 85, 90-101. Newcastle's interment practices were distorted from the eighteenth century by the custom, followed by around half the town's inhabitants, of opting for cheap burial in the extra parochial burying ground of Ballast Hills, Basten, 'Registration Practices in Northern England', 74-88. Razzell et al, using will evidence, suggest that far lower percentages of testators were buried outside their parishes of residence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'Evaluation of Bedfordshire burial registration', 41-2.

⁸⁹ Schofield, 'Traffic in corpses', 53.

corpses in the seventeenth century, but that impression could be entirely due to the paucity of suitable sources. Was there a greater attachment to the parish graveyard and to interment in one's place of death before the eighteenth century? Were burial fees then a less significant driver of local interment practices? More detailed investigation might dig up patterns similar to those unearthed here.⁹⁰ One's impression is that most London parish registers reported only the movement of their more notable dead, but a few must have been more comprehensive. As we have seen, however, available evidence suggests lower levels of post mortem traffic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least in London. Interment was certainly less commercialized, there were far fewer extra parochial burying grounds and, one suspects, although it would be a demanding exercise to establish, that there was greater identity with the parish, and thus a stronger desire to be buried locally, before the eighteenth century.⁹¹

If the traffic in corpses increased in the eighteenth century, it was merely a precursor of the nineteenth-century experience. As is well known, the demand for cheap salubrious interment in London, for example, was increasingly met by private entrepreneurs and enterprising non-conformist ministers in the early nineteenth century. The provision of attractive and affordable burial places became a growth industry, as increasing numbers of Londoners chose to be buried privately rather than in local parochial grounds.⁹² This paper has pointed out that demand for extra parochial, and often cheap, interment had been met by the established church for much of the eighteenth century. As parochial grounds filled up, however, the higher fees imposed on stranger burials redirected a substantial part of an existing traffic in corpses to cheaper extra parochial sites. Just as one nineteenth-century commentator pointed out, double burial fees charged in London parishes encouraged the supply of extra parochial burial sites. Writing in 1839, the surgeon George Alfred Walker (whose surgery was in Drury Lane) produced a series of reformist works aiming to promote decent interment of the dead outside population centres. Walker's *Gatherings from Graveyards* was both a historical

⁹⁰ For the imposition of higher burial fees in an old burial ground to encourage the use of a new, less popular, parochial site, see Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 52, 60. Harding found that for London testators before the Fire 'Election for burial in a parish other than in the parish of residence was not uncommon' which she found unsurprising given the small size of most city parishes and the mobility of their inhabitants, Harding, "'One more may be laid there'", 114. Family associations drove this post mortem mobility of the better off. Testators' wishes for particular types and locations of burial were invariably adhered to - but fewer expressed a preference in the seventeenth century than in the sixteenth, *ibid.*, 114-15.

⁹¹ For historical issues surrounding belonging see, Snell, 'Gravestones, belonging and local attachment', especially 100-3, 107-9, 116-18, 120-4.

⁹² B. Holmes, *The London Burial Grounds: Notes On Their History From The Earliest Times To The Present Day* (Macmillan & Co: London, 1896), 191-7; Krause, 'Changing adequacy', 389. For a definitive discussion of the notorious Enon chapel, see Peter C. Jupp, 'Enon Chapel: No Way for the Dead', in Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth, eds., *The Changing Face of Death. Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1997), 90-104.

account of urban interment, political polemic and a valuable contemporary survey of the state of graveyards in the metropolis.⁹³ He stated that:

‘It has, for a long period, been, and now is the custom, in a majority of the burying grounds belonging to the Establishment to impose double burial fees upon extra-parochial dead. This has resulted, in many instances, from the crowded state of the grounds, and it has been intended as a modest refusal. ... The “extra fees” have driven many, who were unable or unwilling to pay them, to seek other places: and there are many that the most fastidious pocket cannot complain of; wall grounds – enclosed receptacles, and low fees, have been a considerable inducement. I am acquainted with some places, one in particular. A private speculator built a chapel, the ground rent was £50. per annum; he derived a better income from the dead than the living.’⁹⁴

⁹³ G. A. Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards particularly those of London with a concise History of the modes of Interment, among different Nations from the earliest periods, and a detail of dangerous & fatal results produced by the unwise & revolting custom of inhuming the dead in the midst of the living*, London and Nottingham, 1839, iii; Robert Bard, *Graveyard London. Lost and forgotten burial grounds*, London, 2008, 7-8.

⁹⁴ Walker, *Gatherings*, 232, n. 1. See also, John Pinfold, “Walker, George Alfred (1807–1884),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28484> (accessed June 21, 2010). See also, Basten, ‘Registration Practices in Northern England’, 70-1.

