

MMT NEWS

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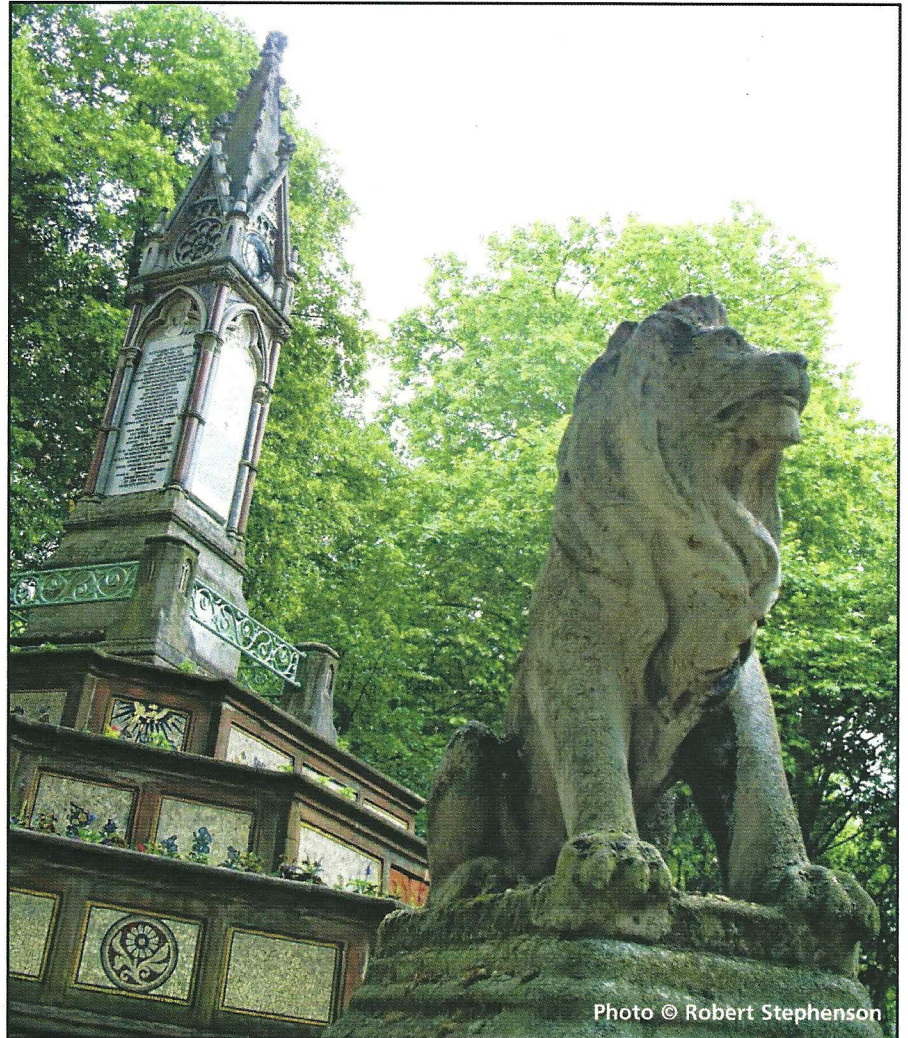
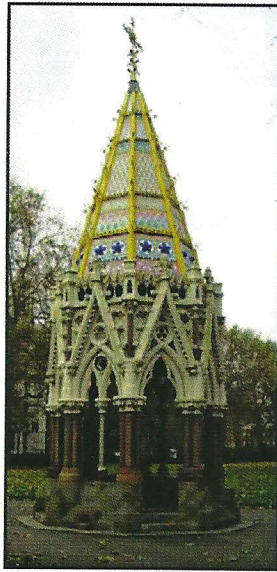


Photo © Robert Stephenson

ST. PANCRAS GARDENS

DESIGNATING HISTORY: SLAVERY & ABOLITION

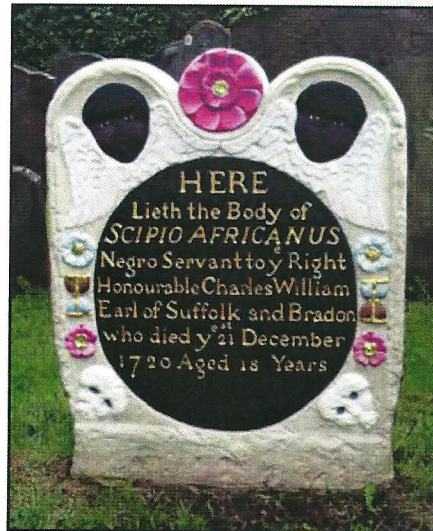
DESIGNATING HISTORY



The bicentenary of the 1807 Abolition Act, which outlawed the slave trade in Britain and her colonies, was commemorated throughout the country in ways which reached far beyond the glorious Act itself, to cast light into a shameful and not-so-distant period of our history. English Heritage took the opportunity to look at the way that special historic interest can be reflected in statutory designation: 43 sites associated with slavery in particularly telling ways are now listed as places of national importance with descriptions which recognize this connection.

The 'Designating History' project included commemorative structures such as the Anti-Slavery Arch at Stroud, Gloucestershire, and the Buxton Memorial Fountain in Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster, together with statues and tombs of abolitionists. The project also acknowledged the far-reaching and (until recently) comparatively little-studied influence of the slave trade on England's wider society and built environment: country houses, warehouses, public buildings and churches were amongst the

sites considered. Besides revisions to existing list descriptions, the project resulted in six sites' being upgraded from Grade II ["of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them"] to Grade II* ["particularly



ABOVE The Buxton Memorial Fountain by Samuel Sanders Teulon, commissioned by Charles Buxton MP abolition of slavery within the British Empire in 1834, and erected in Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster, in 1865 (coincidentally, the year in which the United States abolished slavery; upgraded from Grade II to Grade II*. PHOTO © JACQUELINE BANERJEE 2008, COURTESY OF WWW.VICTORIANWEB.ORG.

LEFT The headstone of Scipio Africanus (d.1720) in the churchyard of St. Mary, Henbury, near Bristol. PHOTO © THE ARCHITECTURE CENTRE, BRISTOL.

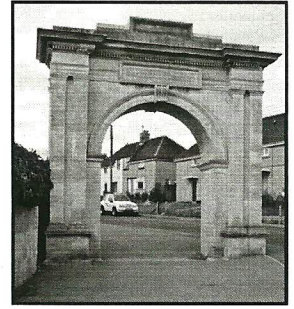
important, and of more than special interest”], plus seven entirely new listings at Grade II.

Britain’s raw involvement in slavery took place far away on West Indian plantations, which must partly explain why the enormity continued so long; making the British public comprehend the terrible reality of slavery was one of the abolitionists’ great achievements. Today, we are increasingly aware of the significant presence of black people in Britain since the 16thC. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the project was the investigation of a number of monuments commemorating black people who died in Britain in the 18thC and 19thC, all connected with slavery.

The legal status of slavery within England itself had been in question since the 16thC [when, in 1655, black African slaves are first recorded in London and, in 1562, John Hawkins led the first known slaving expedition on the ‘triangular route’ between England, Africa and the Americas]. Although the Somerset ruling of 1772 led many to believe that slaves in England were free, and the keeping of slaves could not have been tolerated after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the legal position was not completely clear until the abolition of the institution of slavery throughout most of the British empire in 1834.

Graves represent one of the few forms of tangible evidence regarding the existence of slaves in England. Such graves are rare and very precious – the vast majority died without trace – and in many cases the grave itself provides the starting point for piecing together a more complete individual history. These tombs offer a unique and invaluable window (or squint) on the lives of black people in 18th- and 19th-century Britain. They demonstrate that black people lived in England for many different reasons – and in remote rural areas, not just near major ports such as London, Liverpool, and Bristol – and give information not recorded elsewhere about origins, age and occupations.

Monuments also provide clues regarding the status of the individuals commemorated, and relationships between masters and slaves (or former slaves) in England, although these should be interpreted with caution. The objects of the powerful and often poetic inscriptions found on these tombs were exceptional; only a valued slave or servant would have been given a monument, and the vast majority



The Anti-Slavery Arch, Farmhill Lane, Paganhill Estate, Stroud – Britain’s oldest anti-slavery memorial; upgraded from Grade II to Grade II*. PHOTO © JAMES PURKISS, COURTESY OF WWW.GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK.

of the many thousands of black people living in England during this period – by no means all of whom were in service – received no stone memorial.

Those monuments that do remain speak across more than three centuries of an elusive and important aspect of our history. Most of those examined for the EH Designating History project were previously unlisted, whilst two have been upgraded. Five arresting examples are described below; though some have been listed principally for their historical interest, all are handsome, and most bear inscriptions which would be remarkable in any context.

Myrtilla, Oxhill

A modest headstone stands in the isolated rural churchyard of St. Lawrence, Oxhill, in Warwickshire. Of the same local ironstone as the church and most of the other monuments, in a design that follows the charming local template, it is not immediately distinguished from its companions. But it marks the grave of a woman named Myrtilla, who died in 1706, and is thus the earliest known to have been erected in Britain to commemorate a person of African descent; its importance is reflected in the upgrading of its listing to Grade II*.

The tomb illustrates how a fuller story may grow out of an elliptical inscription as attention turns to this previously neglected branch of British history, and of the way our imaginations may – tentatively – fill in remaining gaps.

The headstone (*photo, page 8*) informs us that Myrtilla was 'Negro slave to Mr Tho Beauchamp of Nevis', and the burial register describes her as 'a negro girl of Mrs Beauchamps'. Recent research has identified the Beauchamps of Nevis as

sugar-plantation owners, though little else is yet known. Favoured slaves, serving in the houses of planters, were sometimes brought to England; it may be that Myrtilla was to care for the Beauchamps' son, born in 1705. According to the headstone she was baptised a few months before she died; it is possible that this event took place soon after her arrival in England, although we do not know where (it is not recorded in the Oxhill registers), and that the shock of her first English winter hastened her demise. This dignified and ornamented memorial indicates that she was held in some esteem by the Beauchamp family.

Scipio Africanus, Henbury

The role of black servants in England, paid and unpaid, was often decorative as well as domestic. Black figures appear as counterfoils to their employers in fashionable portraits of the 17thC and 18thC, and Scipio Africanus – whose elaborate tomb in the churchyard of St. Mary, Henbury, near Bristol, has also been upgraded to Grade II* – evidently found special favour in the household of Charles Howard, 7th Earl of Suffolk and Bindon.

The enchanting headstone and footstone, embellished with black cherubs, were erected in 1720, following Scipio's death at the age of eighteen. A poetic epitaph informs us that he was born 'a pagan and slave', which suggests that he began life in the colonies. It is not known how Scipio came to live and die in this quiet village, where the family of Howard's wife occupied the Great House, but it may have been through some connection with Bristol's booming slave-dependent trade.

The name 'Scipio Africanus' – that of one of the great generals of the ancient

world – was given to the boy by the Earl or a previous owner; Roman names were frequently chosen for slaves, putting a heroic gloss on lives frequently characterized by horror and degradation. Whilst Scipio's exotic heritage may have recommended him to his master, his conversion to Christianity is celebrated in verse that displays ambivalence about the colour of its subject: 'What tho' my hue was dark my SAVIORS sight / Shall Change this darkness into radiant Light'.

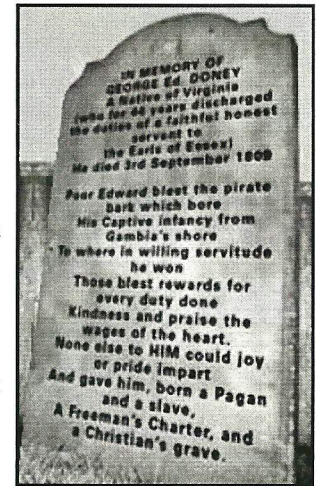
George Doney, Watford

J.M.W. Turner's painting *Harvest Home* (c.1809) depicts a harvest dinner at Cassiobury House, Hertfordshire, overseen by a high-ranking black servant. This was probably George Doney, whose monument in the graveyard of St. Mary's, Watford, has been listed at Grade II.

The journey described on his headstone marries the slave narrative with a morality tale: we read that Doney was born in the Gambia, where he was presumably sold into slavery, and that he 'blest the pirate bark' that bore him to the plantations of Virginia, because it opened the passage to 'willing servitude' which led to 44 years in the service of the Earls of Essex at Cassiobury, earning at last 'a Freeman's Charter and a Christian's grave' in 1809. The suggestion is that, by the time Doney died, at the age of 51 – two years after the abolition of the slave trade – he had been given his freedom legally, though no other evidence has been found.

William Anne Capel, 4th Earl of Essex (1732-1799) and his second wife subscribed to the autobiography of England's leading black anti-slavery campaigner, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), and the colourful 5th Earl,

George Capell-Coningsby (1757-1839) – whose childhood companion Doney may have been – moved in abolitionist circles. The inscription on



Doney's headstone, which the 5th Earl must at least have approved, suggests that he rejoiced in his servant's freedom, though the verse implies that Doney earned that freedom through devoted service and Christian faith rather than as a natural right:

*Poor Edward blest the pirate bark which bore
His captive infancy from Gambia's shore
To where in willing servitude he won
Those blest rewards for every duty done –
Kindness and praise, the wages of the heart;
None else to him could joy or pride impart,
And gave him, born a pagan and a slave,
A freeman's charter and a Christian's grave.*

Rasselas Belfield

The tomb of Rasselas Belfield, 'A Native of Abyssinia', in the churchyard of St. Martin, Bowness-on-Windermere, raises interesting questions about attitudes to race and slavery in early 19thC England. The 1822 headstone, now listed at Grade II, declares: 'A Slave by birth I left my native Land / And found my Freedom on Britannia's Strand / Blest Isle! Thou Glory

of the Wise and Free, / Thy Touch alone unbinds the Chains of Slavery.'

Rasselas was probably brought to the Lake District by Peter Taylor, a soldier who had served in India; the boy may have been found in Ethiopia, or have been an Indian 'Habshi', descended from an Abyssinian slave. Today, the idea that Rasselas won his freedom by being bought (from his mother, according to one account), and taken to another country to work as a servant, may seem contrary, but the verse suggests that slavery was viewed almost as the natural condition of an Abyssinian.

Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759) was a popular novel by Samuel Johnson, in which the hero escapes a luxurious incarceration to seek freedom in the real world; Belfield was the Taylor's house. The choice of such a name suggests that the Taylors enjoyed the reflected lustre of the exotic young newcomer.

The family's fortune derived from West India trade and a plantation in South Carolina: did they regard the Abyssinian as having anything in common with the black slaves to whom they were so indebted? The triumphant inscription on Rasselas's headstone (possibly the work of local poet Isabella Lickbarrow) demonstrates that by 1822 at least, the Taylor family had been convinced of the iniquity of slavery, perhaps by William Wilberforce himself: between 1780 and 1788 the great abolitionist sought recreation at nearby Rayrigg Hall, rented from Peter Taylor's mother's family.

Harriet Long & Jacob Walker

A slate ledger tomb, lying to the north-east of the Old Parish Church of St. Mary, Hornsey, London, imparts the startling

information that it marks the joint resting place of an American woman, Harriet Long, and a man who had been her slave, Jacob Walker. Both were born in Virginia in 1801, and died in Hornsey in 1841 (she in June, he in August); the inscription suggests that Harriet's husband, George Long, wished to demonstrate the poignant symmetry of the two lives.

Long, a distinguished classicist, taught for some years at the University of Virginia, where he met Harriet. Jacob was probably part of her household; slavery was not abolished in the United States until 1865, and in Virginia possession of domestic slaves would not have aroused disapproval. In 1828 the family moved to England, and Jacob ceased to be considered a slave. The inscription remarks the geographical accident that determined his status: 'in America the faithful slave / in England the faithful servant'.

George Long must have written the Latin verse which graces the tomb, praising a 'spirit equal to beauty, great strength in the heart / chaste loyalty, duty, and intelligence all together'. The form and style of the poem place it within the tradition of epitaphs composed by mourning husbands in ancient Rome; however, the gender is neutral, and the layout of the inscription allows of the possibility that Long intended it to apply to both mistress and servant. The tomb – now listed at Grade II – in a neglected corner of the graveyard, invites us to reflect on the circumstances in which a black man, born a slave, came to take his place within this transatlantic family.

Other monuments

This English Heritage initiative has been well-received, but it is only part of an

ongoing, cumulative endeavour to discover more about such memorials. Much valuable research has been undertaken both before 2007 and since.

The records database compiled by the Northamptonshire Black History Association helps to piece together the story of Charles Bacchus, a young man buried in the village of Culworth, 'belov'd and Lamented by the Family he Serv'd', and informed conjectures have recently been made regarding the mysterious African 'I. D.', buried at Bishop's Castle, Shropshire (both monuments listed at Grade II). Memorials to Olaudah Equiano's daughters at Chesterton, Cambridge, and Abney Park Cemetery, Hackney (both Grade II), are of continuing interest. In this year, the 175th anniversary of the abolition of the institution of slavery throughout the majority of the British Empire in 1834, Equiano himself (whose burial place is not known) has been commemorated with a plaque at St. Margaret's, Westminster, a church with which he had strong associations.

Whilst there is a danger that flames lit by great anniversary celebrations may soon sputter, the permanence of such monuments as these allows interest to grow, as knowledge and understanding is gradually built up. The stories conjured by the tombs are often sad ones, which must stand as representatives of the many such histories that have been lost forever. But the fact that these memorials, erected as manifestations of love and respect, are now receiving renewed attention – and protection – to ensure they continue to provoke questions, makes them a focus for celebration as well as regret.

ESTHER GODFREY

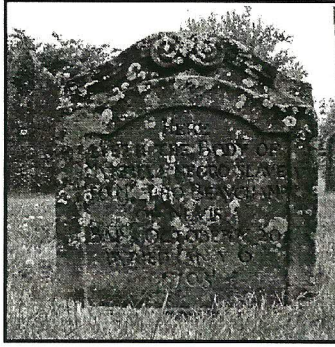
DESIGNATING HISTORY LISTINGS

New listings (all Grade II)

- Tomb of freed slave Rasselas Belfield, St. Martin's Churchyard, Lake Road, Windermere.
- Grave of an unknown African, 'I.D.', St. John the Baptist Church, Bishops Castle, Shropshire.
- Headstone of freed slave George Edward Doney, Church of St. Mary, Church Street, Watford.
- Tomb of Harriet Long and Jacob Walker, St. Mary's Churchyard, Hornsey, London.
- Tomb of social reformers Samuel Lucas and Margaret Bright Lucas, Highgate Cemetery, London.
- Tomb of abolitionists John and Mary Newton, Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Olney, Milton Keynes.
- Tomb of abolitionist James Stephen, Old St. Mary's Churchyard, Stoke Newington, London.
- Monument to Joanna Vassa, daughter of abolitionist Olaudah Equiano, Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington, London.

Upgraded from Grade II to Grade II*

- 62 Rodney Street (W), Liverpool.
- Anti-Slavery Arch, Farmhill Lane, Paganhill Estate, Stroud.
- Buxton Memorial Fountain, Victoria Tower Gardens, Millbank, Westminster.
- Headstone of presumed slave Myrtila, Church of St. Lawrence, Oxhill, Stratford upon Avon.
- Memorial to presumed slave Scipio Africanus, churchyard of St. Mary, Church Close, Henbury, Bristol.
- Picton House, 52 High Street, Kingston upon Thames.



The worn headstone above the grave of Myrtilla (d.1706), the earliest known monument in Britain to a person of African descent. PHOTO © MIKE COLLINS, COURTESY OF WWW.OXHILL.ORG.UK.

- Statue of Charles James Fox, Bloomsbury Square, Camden Town, London.
- Statue of William Wilberforce, Wilberforce House, High Street, Kingston upon Hull.

Listing descriptions amended to reflect connections with the slave trade

Grade I

- Church of St. Andrew, Church Street, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire.
- Church of St. Mary Woolnoth, Lombard Street, London.
- Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Church Street, Olney, Milton Keynes.
- Dr Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square, London.
- The Exchange, Corn Street, Bristol.
- Harewood House, Harewood, Leeds.
- Town Hall, Water Street, Liverpool.
- Warehouses and General Offices at Western End of North Quay, West India Road, Poplar, London.
- Wilberforce House Museum and Attached Garden Wall, High Street, Kingston upon Hull.

Grade II*

- Allerton Hall, Springwood Avenue, Liverpool.

- Barclay's Bank, 4 & 6 Water Street, Liverpool.
- The Church of Holy Trinity, Clapham Common North Side, London.
- Clarkson Memorial, Bridge Street, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.
- The Director's House, Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Lane, Bethnal Green, London.
- Dobroyd Castle, Dobroyd Road, Todmorden, West Yorkshire.
- The Georgian House, 7 Great George Street, Bristol.
- Maritime Museum (Customs House), 26 St. Georges Quay, Lancaster.
- Playford Hall and attached revetments around moat, Playford, Suffolk.
- Storrs Hall, Newby Bridge Road, Windermere.

Grade II

- 57 Parr Street, Liverpool.
- Clarkson Monument on High Cross Hill, High Street, Thundridge, Hertfordshire.
- Headstone of Charles Bacchus, Church of St. Mary, Queens Street, Culworth, Northamptonshire.
- Monument to Sir Tomas Clarkson, Church of St. Mary, Playford, Suffolk.
- Statue of Edward Colston, Colston Avenue, Bristol.
- Statue of Joseph Pease, High Row, Darlington.
- Statue of Joseph Sturge, Tube Investment House, Harborne Road, Birmingham.
- Wilberforce Monument, Wilberforce Avenue, Kingston Upon Hull.

EVENTS FOR MMT MEMBERS

Saturday, 26 September 2009

STUDY DAY: NORTH-WEST NORFOLK

From 8:30, Kings Cross Station, London

Private mortuary aisles were popular with the nobility and landed gentry during the 17thC. This visit, organized by Dr. Julian Litten, will look at examples in Norfolk, including the Coke monuments at Tittleshall; the Barkham Mortuary Chapel at South Acre; the Spelman monuments of 1496 to 1679 at Narborough; and the Hare Mortuary Aisle at Stow Bardolph.

We will catch the 08.45 train from King's Cross to Downham Market, then travel by coach, returning to Downham Market to catch the 18.09, reaching King's Cross at 19.33. Tickets: £25 for members, £30 for non-members (not including lunch or travel to Downham Market). *Please book with Dr. Litten (Friarscot, Church Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 5EB) by Friday, September 18, making cheques payable to The Mausolea & Monuments Trust.*

Tuesday, 3 November 2009

A PRIVATE HOME IN CLAPHAM

Near Clapham South tube station

Although tens of thousands of middle-class terraced houses were built at the end of the 19thC, very few have retained their original character and fittings. This will be a rare opportunity to enjoy the colourful and atmospheric interiors of just such a home, with an interesting collection of antique, Arts and Crafts and

contemporary furnishings built up over more than twenty years. There will be an introductory talk about the development of Clapham, and the house and its contents. The house is 10 minutes' walk from Clapham South tube station; full details will be sent with tickets. Numbers are strictly limited, so early application is advised: £15 for members, £18 for non-members, including wine and nibbles.

BOOKING FORM

Please make cheques payable to MMT, and include a stamped addressed envelope.

CLAPHAM VISIT, NOVEMBER 3:

- members' places @ £15 each
 non-members' places @ £18
for Clapham visit on November 3

Name

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ST. PANCRAS GARDENS

On June 27 June, MMT Chairman Roger Bowdler led a tour of two of London's most significant early burial grounds, St. George's Gardens, Bloomsbury (MMT N^o 22) & St. Pancras' Gardens, Somers Town, just north of Kings Cross and St. Pancras stations. One of the oldest Christian sites in Europe, with plausible claims to a foundation as early as 313, the church at the heart of the site was derelict when it was rebuilt in the 12thC, and again in 1848, but was only designated as St. Pancras Old Church with the transfer of the parish to St. Pancras New Church on Euston Road in 1822.

Eminent Georgians interred in the ancient churchyard included Benjamin Franklin's illegitimate son, the Loyalist William Franklin (1731-1813), and three popular composers: Samuel Webbe (1740-1816), Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-1787) and Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782); the 'London Bach', youngest surviving son of J.S. Bach, was regarded by many in his day as the greatest of his family.

The churchyard was enlarged in 1800, and a number of parishes on the trajectory from Holborn to Piccadilly, most notably St. Giles-in-the-Fields, established additional burial grounds hard by, as the population of London expanded westward from the City. However, during the 1860s, many of the graves (and some 4000 houses) were cleared to make way for the new lines and termini of the Midland Railway. Under the guidance of the young surveyor Thomas Hardy (rather better known for his later literary endeavours), displaced headstones were sympathetically arranged around an ash tree in a remote corner of the grounds, which flourishes picturesquely to this day. In 1879, the philanthropist Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts unveiled an **extravagant** monument, incorporating an obelisk and **sundial** (*photo, front cover*), to commemorate the preeminent lost graves in the newly-opened public gardens.

The burial ground had already lost the remains of the notorious 'thief-catcher' Jonathan Wild (1682-1725) to the Royal College of Surgeons (where his skeleton is preserved in the Hunterian Museum), and those of the radical writers William Godwin (1756-1836) and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (1759-1797) to reinterment by their daughter Mary Wollstonecraft



The figure of the muse Euterpe moved to St. George's Gardens from the Apollo Inn (1898) on Tottenham Court Road (demolished 1961). PHOTO © ROBERT STEPHENSON.

Shelley in St. Peter's churchyard, Bournemouth. Amongst the surviving monuments, the family tomb designed by Sir John Soane (1753-1837), architect of the Bank of England, strongly influenced the design of the classic 'K2' red telephone box by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1924 (*photo, back cover*). The cruel schoolmaster William Jones (c.1786-1836) strongly influenced the young Charles Dickens, who based *David Copperfield's* Mr. Creakle on his excesses; Jones' headstone, like that of the artist and Wedgwood designer John Flaxman (1755-1826), is badly eroded, but an interesting micro-site from UCL's Department of Earth Sciences uses both as examples of the varied geology observable within the burial ground (www.es.ucl.ac.uk/schools/Intro/intro_pancras.htm).

What remained of the burial grounds were disturbed again during the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link in 2002. A tactful summary of the brief archaeological investigation – which found much evidence of the remains of post-revolutionary French emigrés in the late Georgian cemetery – appears in print and online in the May/June 2006 issue of *British Archaeology*. More happily thereafter, St. Pancras Gardens was restored in 2003 with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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Photo © Robert Stephenson

ABOVE The tomb in St. Pancras Gardens designed by the architect Sir John Soane RA (1753-1837) following the death of his wife, Elizabeth, in 1815; Soane and their son are also buried within.

BELOW The chest tomb, with armorial carving, of Anna Gibson (d.1726), sixth and favorite daughter of Richard Cromwell, and grand-daughter of Oliver Cromwell, in St. George's Gardens, London.



Photo © Robert Stephenson