

Uncovering our past



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Published on: June 26, 2019 | Last Updated: June 26, 2019 3:51 PM EDT



A burial ground, photographed on Tuesday, June 25, 2019, can be found underneath a Sunday school hall at St. Paul's Anglican Church on Queen Street. Since April, the Lower Burial Ground Restoration Society has been working on recording these grave markers and clearing out debris from the small piece of burial ground, hidden for more than a hundred years. Raechel Huizinga Photo/Kingston Whig-Standard/Postmedia Network *RACHEL HUIZINGA / RAECHEL HUIZINGA*

Underneath a Sunday school hall at St. Paul's Anglican Church on Queen Street, there are broken dishes, torn up bibles, cigarette butts and grave markers.

Since April, the Lower Burial Ground Restoration Society has been working on recording these grave markers and clearing out debris

from the small piece of burial ground, hidden for more than 100 years.

“It’s a project the Society has been interested in doing for a very long time, but they’ve been focused on restoring the monuments that still exist on the other side of the church and repairing the wall,” Sue Bazely, project co-ordinator, said. “It’s taken awhile to get to this part, because it’s not seen. People kind of don’t know it’s there.”

Bazely has worked on archaeological projects in Kingston for more than 35 years, and is currently pursuing a PhD in cultural landscaping research at Queen’s University.

The goal of the project is to make the information in the underground space accessible to the public, likely through a digital medium, and to restore dignity to the disturbed grave markers.

“It’s very cool and exciting to look for and use different technology and traditional archaeology,” Bazely said.

With the help of Kingston Heritage funds, community volunteers and Queen’s graduate students, the team has slowly been sweeping the debris from the underground space and recording inscriptions from the markers.

Bazely said in 1937, a parishioner created an inventory of the burial ground as it was then, prior to a modernization project of the 1960s that connected the church to the hall and disturbed many of the burial ground’s grave markers.

“It’s really a big puzzle,” she said. “It’s matching all the pieces together and sorting things out. It’s quite a challenge.”

The team is attempting to match the inscriptions from the grave markers to the inventory of the burial ground, but Bazely said they’ve already found some markers that don’t match any of the 1937 records.

"It makes you wonder where all the stones went from the parking lot," she said.

The parking lot, as well as the church, was constructed on top of the burial ground, which saw more than 600 burials of Kingston's early occupants and settlers. Established in 1783, the Lower Burial Ground is one of the oldest consecrated cemeteries in Ontario.

The Sunday school hall over the space Bazely's team is cleaning was constructed in the 1870s, about 30 years after the construction of the church itself.

Over time, Bazely said the small underground area became a "garbage receptacle" for various objects, including gravestones removed from their original outdoor locations and human remains-although Bazely stressed this is not an excavation project.

One benefit of the lengthy concealment of the gravestones, Bazely added, was that the markers were able to escape exposure to acid rains and other environmental damage, making the inscriptions easy to decipher.

Something that's not easy to decipher, however, are the mysterious placements of three upright headstones in a corner of the underground space.

At first, Bazely said the team thought the underground area was the original location of the headstones because of the upright positions, but after consulting the 1937 records, they discovered the opposite.

"Not one of them are in the same locations as they were in 1937," Bazely said. "What's weird about that is, somebody put these back in the ground, upright."

Bazely added that the nearby, matching foot markers only add to the mystery.

"It's really odd," she said.

Community members interested in volunteering for the project can contact Sue Bazely at s.bazely@queensu.ca.

<https://www.thewhig.com/news/local-news/hidden-for-a-century-local-restoration-team-is-working-to-record-grave-markers-under-st-pauls>

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Is the list going to be archived digitally? How will we be able to access it? cargomcculloch@

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Gord Ballik

Thanks for this. William Aykroyd my 4th Great Greatuncle is buried there. Born and died an i
1812

<http://lowerburialground.ca/record/aykroud-w/>

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Ray Bergstrom

How can we access results of this project? My wife's ggggggreat uncle, Bemsley Peters, wa
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