
Queen's experts ensure past won't stay buried

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By Dave Rideout, Senior Communications Officer

Students work to catalogue grave markers in hidden Kingston cemetery.



Queen's Masters student Paulina Marczak working to map the Lower Burial Ground beneath St. Paul's Anglican Church in Kingston.

For more than a century, a burial ground beneath a church in downtown Kingston has remained hidden. Some of the city's earliest citizens – including prominent residents, sailors, Black slaves brought here by the Loyalists, and American prisoners of the War of 1812 – are interred there; their identities slowly fading from the pages of history.

Experts from Queen's University are among those now working to inventory and preserve the grave markers concealed in the Lower Burial Ground underneath a hall at St. Paul's Anglican Church, on the corner of Kingston's Queen and Montreal streets.



Panoramic photograph of the Lower Burial Ground site.

“It’s probably safe to say that most people in Kingston are not even aware this site exists,” says Sue Bazely, Queen’s PhD candidate and the project’s co-coordinator. “Many may also be surprised to know about some of the renowned people buried there, including Molly Brant and her daughters.”

Molly Brant was instrumental in bringing together Mohawk and Iroquois nations to fight against the Americans during the American Revolution.

Bazely is working together with the Lower Burial Ground Restoration Society, historical and cemetery experts, parish and local volunteers, and an interdisciplinary group of Queen’s graduate, undergraduate students, and faculty to record and categorize the site’s gravestones, many of which are significantly damaged or worn. Using traditional archaeological methods, photography, and Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) – a surveying method that uses lasers to make digital, 3D representations of targeted objects – the team will scan the stones’ inscriptions so their information can be pieced back together, read, and recorded.



Grave marker fragments at the Lower Burial Ground site.

“This project will not only restore respect and dignity to one of the oldest Anglican cemeteries in Ontario,” says Bazely. “We’re striving toward making this underground portion of the site accessible to the public; not physically, but virtually through a digital medium, so those buried there can be recognized and remembered.”



Students and faculty from a number of Queen’s departments are involved in the project, including Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering, Geography and Planning, Classics, History, and Art History.

Queen's Geography & Planning grad students Mark Ouseley and Nic England mapping gravestones.

“Many Queen’s student volunteers involved in the project were so eager to seize such a hands-on learning opportunity,” says Bazely. “Field work can

be incredibly valuable to a student’s overall studies, and this project in particular allows us to make a meaningful contribution right here in the community.”

The project runs from June to August 2019, and is supported in part by the City of Kingston Heritage Fund. Other restoration and presentation efforts received support from the City of Kingston Heritage Fund, the Kingston Association of Museums, Art Galleries, and Historic Sites, the Community Foundation for Kingston and Area, and the United Way for Kingston Frontenac, Lennox, and Addington.

Visit the [Lower Burial Ground Restoration Project website](#) to learn more.

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