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Bunhill Fields :

The Place and the Records.

AT the present day, "Bunhill Fields" interest Dissenters because of a burial-ground, west of the City Road, almost opposite Wesley's chapel. But the name has meant at various times many parts of a much larger area, bounded roughly by Old Street on the north, Shoreditch and Bishopsgate Street on the east, Sun Street and Chiswell Street on the south, Whitecross Street on the west. And as parts of this area were developed, the name of Bunhill was applied in rather bewildering fashion. It is worth while tracing the principal changes of use and name.

More than eight centuries ago, the manor of Finsbury was the property of St. Paul's Cathedral, whose authorities assigned to one definite prebendary "Holywell and Fensbury." This manor stretched from the city wall northwards and included the area we are concerned with, which was then a mixture of moor and fen; the holy well was just west of the modern Curtain Street, where Holywell Street joins. The Corporation of London bargained in 1315 for the use of the whole manor, a good precedent for its later interest in Epping Forest. While most was left wild, and there are stories of men with poles to leap over the boggy parts, there was firm ground here and there, and windmills arose on a little hill at the south-west of our plot. Before 1500 this section was largely used by the trained bands to exercise over.

In the time of Edward VI., the old charnel-house of St. Paul's was emptied, and hundreds of cartloads of bones were brought out here. From this time the name of Bonehill Fields frequently occurs, though a map of 1560 shows Finsbury Court standing close to this site, with Finsbury Field to the north-east. Next year the Corporation helped repair the spire of St. Paul's, and as a reward obtained leases of the prebendal property till 1783. A century later, when the Commonwealth offered for sale the lands of all deans and chapters, the Corporation bought the freehold, but that transaction was simply ignored at the Restoration.

In 1658 a map shows that a road had been laid out from the Moor Gate to six windmills on their little hill. A citizen out for a stroll thither would have walled gardens all the way on his left but more variety on the right. First, the Moor Fields laid out as a public recreation ground, with trees and cross walks. East of this lay Bedlam within a wall, with its own garden. North of Moor Fields was a second garden, walled in, with

walks from corner to corner. North of this to the windmills reached a field, also walled in. East of this field and the second garden, the ground was open as far as the private gardens to the houses facing Shore Ditch. The windmill hill was skirted on the west by a narrow track which then ran north to Golden Lane, the present Old Street. The open space west of this track is marked on the map, "Bun-hill." East of the track is a walled tenter-ground where newly woven cloth was stretched on tenter-hooks to bleach. All else is open ground, with one or two footpaths.

On 7 September, 1663, Henry Jessey was buried "in the yard joining to Old Bedlam, near Moorfields." This precise definition by Anthony Wood identifies the place, soon to be known as Petty France, now covered by Broad Street railway station. It is not in the district known as Bunhill Fields, on the most liberal reckoning.

In 1665 the Corporation decided to develop the estate, under the lease of 1561. The old Artillery Yard south of St. Mary's Hospital, east of Shoreditch, was no longer large enough for these days of muskets, though it had served for archers. A New Artillery Garden was reserved northward of Chiswell Street, from the Moor Gate Street west to "Bun Hill" (modern Bunhill Row). The windmills were cleared away, the Moor Gate Street continued north, the little track being straightened and widened, and the Artillery Garden defined as we know it still. A strip exactly the same width, on the north of the Garden, was included in the same wall, but was reserved as a "Church Yard," though no church was within it. East of the Moor Gate Street, the old Moore Fields were re-named "Lower Walkes of Moore Fields," the next section "Upper Walks," and the field opposite the New Artillery Garden was planted and laid out as "Upper Moor Fields." Where the windmills had stood, together with the open land north-eastwards, now took the name "Bun Hill Fields." Between them and the street called Bun Hill, came the prolonged Moor Gate Street and the new Church Yard. The rest of the Corporation estate was rapidly laid out with new streets and gardens.

This Yard may have been intended as a general burial-place, when the awful mortality of the plague in 1665 choked the yards within the city, but Maitland in 1739 says expressly that it was not so used. All that can be traced at that date is that a baby that died 23 July, 1665 was buried here, as a stone long showed, though the earliest now to be seen is dated 1668. The great plague-pit has been identified half a mile west, near Goswell Street.

Whereas before 1640 it was deemed a disgrace to be buried

outside consecrated ground many Dissenters now began to avoid such ground. If they buried elsewhere, the clergy of the parish had no right to interfere. So this Corporation Church Yard was peculiarly eligible. Kiffin buried his eldest son here in 1669; and next year Vavasor Powell was "entered" there at the west end, with a great crowd of mourners: an altar-tomb was erected over the grave, with a long inscription, still known by a copy, though the tomb itself has disappeared like most of the early stones. Knollys buried his wife here in 1671.

A lease of the Yard was taken by Henry Tindal, while the Society of Friends secured a separate plot further west for their own burials. It does not seem to be known whether Tindal was a mere speculator, or a Dissenter wise enough to secure this place for his friends, or an unofficial agent of the Dissenters. But in practice his Yard soon became the popular place for Dissenters in the City, though those beyond the city walls had no trouble in finding vacant land. In 1678 John Gosnold, of the Barbican church, was laid to rest here, and in 1688 Daniel Dike, of Kiffin's Devonshire Square church. That same year, John Strudwick buried here his guest, John Bunyan; whose former assistant at Bedford, Nehemiah Cox, was buried near him in 1689.

All this time, the space to the north of the Yard, and east of it across the Moor Gate Street, was still called "Bun Hill Fields." "This day Nov. 13, 1682, one Elizabeth Hoke was burnt for clipping [coin]; in Bunhill fields a place never used for that purpose; but the sheriff chose it as a void and spacious place. When shee saw shee must dye, shee owned Gods Justice in bringing her to dye in that place, where many years before shee had buryed a child with a spade in the night, being a bastard, born out of wedlock." So noted Thomas Woodcock, rector ejected from St. Andrew Undershaft, living in the village of Hackney, a few miles across open country.

With 1689 came the Toleration Act; but as this did not provide that Dissenting ministers might officiate in Parish Churchyards, it left this Corporation Churchyard just as popular. In 1691 were laid to rest here Hanserd Knollys, William Marnor and Francis Smith, three more Baptist ministers, the last with a fine monument; and as the century closed, Gamman, at whose meeting-house Bunyan had preached last in London, then Mordecai Abbot the iron-master.

The ground was now crowded, and Tindal acquired some more, adjoining to the north; but he did not enclose it properly, so that it was used still as for tenters; his term was running down, and perhaps he did not care to lay out money. A new sub-lease was granted to James Browne, on condition he walled

in the extension, and reserved it for burials. Attention being thus drawn to the insecurity of tenure, a tract was printed in 1717, containing 75 inscriptions copied from the tombstones. But Browne does not seem to have fulfilled the conditions: Rocque's map of 1745 shows the old wall at the north of the "City Burying Ground," and the part north of it, occasionally used by Tindal for burials, plainly marked "Tenter Ground." It also shows how beyond this a new street joined "The City Road" on the east with a new "Bristol Street" on the west, continuing "Bunhill Row" northwards. These three streets had frontages newly built. Beyond them was open country, with the old name, Finsbury Field. The story is that Browne's sub-lease had passed to Elizabeth Fetherstonhaugh, who developed all this extension, evidently thinking she could get more from the quick than from the dead: the new street bore her name, and bears it to this day "Featherstone Street." She drew about £700 yearly from the burial fees, and paid only £1 to the Corporation; but of course had to bear all the expense of burials and upkeep. If the ground grew too full, there was still another Tenter Ground eastward, as far as what was then recently named, with true antiquarian interest, "Windmill Hill," but to-day, "Tabernacle Street." However, new ground was acquired in 1753 out at Islington.

Now the Corporation's own lease from St. Paul's was due to run out in 1783. It decided to negotiate for an interminable lease, and then re-develop the whole large estate; in 1769 a lease was secured, but only to 1868, by some blunder never explained, and not even detected till 1842. As the sub-leases fell in, the Corporation built over Upper Moorfields, creating Finsbury Square; over Middle Moorfields; and Finsbury Circus instead of Moorfields proper; also swept away the tangle of alleys eastward, and laid out Finsbury Market, with better streets to the south.

The name "Bunhill Fields" was now restricted wholly to the little burial-ground, as enlarged; while the use of the New Ground was discontinued by the Corporation. No fresh sub-lease was granted; the City assumed direct jurisdiction. The registers kept privately by Browne and Featherstone (Tindal had kept none) were taken over, and a thorough system was inaugurated under civic control.

In 1838 all non-parochial registers were asked for, to be kept at Somerset House; and the Keeper handed over twenty-seven books covering 1713 to 1838, with four more relating to the New Ground 1753-1781.

Burials ceased in 1854, and all other documents were then deposited in the Guildhall Library. They include:—(897) Eight

volumes of inscriptions, drawn up in 1868, as then legible; with index. (1092) Eighteen volumes of interments, 1789-1834. (1093) Three volumes, alphabetical list of interments, 1827-1854. (1094) Copy of registers 1839-1854, two volumes. (1095) Six volumes of accounts, 1788-1854. (1308) Six volumes, daybooks 1795-1854. (1309) Alphabetical memorandum book. (1310) Register of stones taken for repair, 1840-1853. (2066) Copy of Museum Additional MS. 28516, Index of names, from Rippon's transcripts, volume 4. Rippon's own six volumes may be seen, by payment, at Heralds' College.

When the lease of 1769 ran out in 1868, the Corporation had not to deal with St. Paul's; the chapter estates had been handed over to a new body, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners; they reclaimed the whole of the great Finsbury estate which the Corporation had held for four centuries and had twice tried to buy outright. But the burial-ground was left as an open space, and the Corporation undertakes its upkeep. This did not apply to the New Ground in Islington, which has been built over.

Baptists had two important burial-grounds, one to the east, and the other in Southwark. Yet Bunhill Fields saw many of their interments, and some may be mentioned. Kiffin in 1701, and next year two more prominent pastors, Hercules Collins of Wapping, William Collins of Petty France; the latter a favourite pupil of Busby at Westminster, who had travelled in France and Italy; he was one of the small minority who disliked singing hymns. With 1717 was laid to rest the last of the old Commonwealth men, Joseph Maisters, who had studied at Oxford where he was denied his degree in 1661. That same year John Hollis, of the Pinner's Hall church founded by Palmer (himself buried here in 1678), opened a family grave for his son Thomas, aged 30. In 1717/8 Richard Allen, successor of Gosnold. John Gale, the Leyden graduate, and John Skepp of Cripplegate, showed how both extremes of theology met in 1721. Mark Key, Kiffin's successor, 1726. Dame Mary Page, who had built herself a most stately pew in Devonshire Square, 1728; a minister who had no connection with her chose to preach a funeral sermon for her, and the quarrel with her pastor gave some scandal. Old John Hollis was laid to rest 1729, and seven years later his wife. In 1739 Abraham Mulliner, the last orthodox minister of the original church in 1612. While the Seventh-day Baptists had now a third burial-ground up Mill Yard, yet the Mauldens opened a family grave here in 1741, and Joseph Stennett buried his wife Rebecca in 1744. The publisher family of Ward opened a family grave in 1747. In March 1749/50 the last male Hollis was laid to rest, the Reverend Benjamin, aged 54; he is rather a puzzle, and where

he ministered has not been traced. Samuel Wilson of Prescott Street died in 1750. Three years later the Hollis grave was re-opened for a son-in-law; then Benjamin Seward from the Evesham valley, friend of Whitefield; and in the same year James Foster, to whom splendid tributes were paid, witness this apostrophe by Savage :—

But see th'accomplish'd orator appear,
 Refined his language, and his reasoning clear :
 Thou only, Foster, hast the pleasing art
 At once to charm the ear, and mend the heart.

In 1758 Dr. Joseph Stennett, and Professor John Ward of Gresham College : his namesake of the printing firm two years later. Then comes a pleasant touch; the fine tomb of Francis Smith had been carved in a friable freestone and was crumbling; his descendant Thomas Cox restored it in 1761, the first of many such pious deeds. Between 1765 and 1772 there was sad mortality; Brine, Anderson, Flower, Burford, a Straton, Gill, McGowan's wife, and Messer, were all laid to rest. In one way, we may be thankful, for half of these had emptied their churches with reactionary preaching; and it is with the arrival of Abraham Booth in London that the Baptist churches began to revive. A Hollis daughter, buried 1776 at the age of 92, seems the last of her family, though the name was assumed by a legatee, no Baptist. In the next decade we note Josiah Thompson senior, Dr. Llewellyn the historian, Andrew Gifford of the British Museum and Eagle Street, with McGowan, and Christopher Hall, whose church at once moved to Bunhill Row and thence to Windmill Hill, as if to be near the pastor's resting-place; while Hopkins promptly followed his predecessor Gifford. Before the century ran out, Anderson of Westminster, Reynolds of Cripplegate, Dowars of Little Alie Street (whose church died also), Dr. Samuel Stennett of Wild Street, and from across the river, Joseph Swain of Walworth. This seems to be connected with the lease of the Southwark burial-ground running out; the trustees of it and of the Duke Street meeting-house were negligent and allowed the church to lose its premises. So in 1805 Martin Ready, the Peckham schoolmaster, and Josiah Thompson junior the antiquarian, were borne across the Thames hither.

The last forty years saw no falling off; and the perpetual demand must be partly accountable for the disappearance of the oldest graves. It is impossible to bury more than 120,000 coffins in this limited space without grave destruction; not six thousand sites can be traced. Of prominent Baptists we note Gwennap of Piccadilly, Dan Taylor in 1816, which suggests that the Baptist

ground in the east was no longer available, Sowerby of a church near King's Cross that he had emptied six years before his death, Jenkins of Walworth, and Thomas Thomas the schoolmaster of Peckham, first secretary of the Baptist Union. The third decade saw Martin, formerly of Keppel Street, who had been expelled from the Board for disloyalty; Button the minister who had dabbled in publishing; John Bolton of Spencer Place; Thomas Chevalier, surgeon to the king; Horne, who had been at Grub Street, Aldersgate Street, Limehouse, and Commercial Road in the last twenty years; Hutchings of Unicorn Yard; Timothy Thomas of Devonshire Square; and Thomas Powell of Mitchell Street. In 1832, George Washington Wilks, next year Joseph Hughes of Battersea, the Tract Society and the Bible Society, also Jonathan Franklin, who had taken the church of Knollys out of fellowship with the Particular Baptist Fund; in 1834 James Upton of the Union, and Ivey the historian. With 1836 they laid to rest old John Rippon, the antiquarian who had done so much to transcribe the inscriptions. In 1838 they brought from Whitechapel Thomas Denham, who even in 1799 had been in charge of a church at Gould Lane, Limehouse; this church seems to have escaped notice. Chin of Walworth in 1839; Powell junior and William Jones the Scotch Baptist in 1846; King of Bedford in 1847; David Denham late of Unicorn Yard in 1848. Next year John Andrews Jones laid his wife to rest here; his interest was stirred in the place, and he prepared the first popular study of the place. It was in good time, for a closing order was soon made, and his own bones lie elsewhere.

Restorations of monuments are allowed, and two in particular excited much interest and popular subscription; Daniel Defoe and John Bunyan. A little pamphlet can be bought at the gate, which enables a visitor to skim the cream in seventeen minutes. A scholarly paper and chart appeared in the *Transactions* of the Congregational Historical Society of 1910; and three years later, Alfred W. Light issued a second popular account. But anyone engaged in the study of London Non-formist worthies may spend his time most profitably at the Guildhall Library. The records show the finance of the place, residences of the people, persons concerned in the burials; a mass of plain contemporary information rather different from the laudatory inscriptions cut on the stones, and in the older cases preserved only by amateur transcribers. Much has been published about the ministers; but those who are proud of their own ancestors as deacons, teachers, or undistinguished members, will be able to build up their pedigrees for perhaps two centuries.

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