

Standing up for the forgotten

A community history group in east Bristol has launched a nationwide campaign to remember the thousands of people buried in unmarked graves around the UK.

They are demanding that public and private cemeteries containing unmarked graves should install plaques or memorials to allow descendants to find out where and when their relatives were buried.

The Eastville Workhouse Memorial Group (EWMG) has already erected memorials to more than 4,000 paupers the group identified as having been interred without ceremony or marker in public land. Their efforts have enabled people from around Britain and beyond to track down family members who died in the huge Eastville Workhouse in east Bristol during the Victorian era.

Nearby, the Friends of Ridgeway Park Cemetery have recently discovered that more than 22,000 of the nearly 25,000 people buried were in unmarked graves. The 'packing and stacking' of working-class people in this private cemetery to increase profits, meant that as many as 84 bodies shared the same burial plot, and the graves were repeatedly desecrated to carry out reburials.

"Hiding away the poor and the disadvantaged in death as in life to save money is a scandal we need to expose," says Dr Roger Ball of the EWMG. "To fully appreciate working class history and Victorian values, we need to uncover what lies beneath the well-ordered public cemeteries with their ostentatious memorials that we know today. It is easy enough to publish a QR code that will take people to information about who is buried where. There should be such a memorial in every graveyard or cemetery to honour the largely disenfranchised working class, many of whom were deemed 'unproductive' and consigned to the workhouse."

EWMG is urging local history groups to lobby their MPs, local authorities and places of worship to reveal the sites and identities of those buried in unmarked graves.

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Notes for Editors:

- Pauper burials currently cost local authorities some £6m a year under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984. Those without the resources to meet the soaring cost of funerals, now averaging more than £4,000, may still be buried in unmarked graves.
- Research by EWMG members revealed that the bodies of 2,375 paupers from the Eastville Workhouse for the years 1895-1914 were interred in unmarked 'common graves' in three private cemeteries in Bristol, Ridgeway Park (1,264), Greenbank (962), and Arnos Vale cemetery in south Bristol (just over 100).
- The members identified more than [4,000 paupers](#) buried in unmarked graves from 1851-1895 in east Bristol's Rosemary Green. To make way for the East Park estate in the 1980s their remains were crudely removed to be placed in unmarked mass common graves in Avonview cemetery, in St George. They are now commemorated by [two memorials and a plaque](#) erected by the group, whose research can be viewed [here](#).

- The remarkable story of the Eastville Workhouse Memorial Group is recorded in *100 Fishponds Road: Life and Death in a Victorian Workhouse*, published by Bristol Radical History Group. ISBN 978-1-911522-00-3.