

# The organization of burial places in post-medieval English cities: Bristol and Exeter c. 1540–1850

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**ABSTRACT:** This article analyses the changing options for the provision of burial places between the Reformation and the mid-nineteenth century in two major provincial cities, Bristol and Exeter. The two cities experienced very different patterns of change, especially in their Anglican provision, reflecting medieval differences of organization as well as the differential impact of dissent. Common factors include the effect of epidemics (plague, cholera) and population pressure, but also great conservatism regarding use of inner-city burial places. The major changes are associated with the three great shocks to church–state relations: the Reformation, the mid-seventeenth-century crisis and the reform period of the 1830s and 1840s.

Using case-studies of two major provincial cities, Bristol and Exeter, this article will consider the changing options for the provision of burial places between the Reformation and the mid-nineteenth century and how far these were responsive to changing practical/medical considerations in disposing of the dead safely in growing cities, or shaped by political and religious structures and developments. It will focus not on the choice of location *within* burial places but rather on the burial places themselves. It will demonstrate that two well-established southern cities could experience very different patterns of change, especially in their Anglican provision, reflecting medieval differences of organization as well as the varied impact of nonconformity. Although both epidemics (plague, cholera) and population increase could have a significant impact in raising doubts over the safety and capacity of traditional burial sites, these pressures were heavily mediated by local circumstances, and offset by great conservatism in practices, with a strong desire to continue to

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use inner-city burial places, including an intensified use of space inside and underneath church buildings. The major changes are associated with the three great shocks to church–state relations: the Reformation, the mid-seventeenth-century crisis and the reform period of the 1830s and 1840s, but once again these did not inevitably lead to the ending of existing arrangements. In Exeter, smaller pressures for change were addressed by civic burial schemes and by suburban parish provision, while in Bristol nonconformist and commercial provision helped offset the lack of Anglican reorganization within the old city, while new parishes emerged in the growing eastern suburbs. Both cases reinforce the recent revisionist work which questions the traditional assumptions about the necessary triumph on health grounds of a cemetery-based system.

Vanessa Harding's work on Paris and London has demonstrated the value of comparison for identifying the factors underlying the changing places of burial in early modern cities, as well as their significance for understanding the wider societies.<sup>1</sup> To date, there are no similar English studies for other cities, though excellent work has been done on northern towns after 1700.<sup>2</sup> I will compare the twin capitals of south-west England. Both were major medieval towns, Bristol being the first outside London to obtain county status (in 1373) but it was not a cathedral city until 1542. Exeter had an ancient cathedral formed from a minster in a Roman city, and late medieval Exeter prospered, so that by 1525 both cities were among the five largest in southern England, with perhaps 8,000 people in Exeter and 10,000 or more in Bristol: Exeter also became a county in 1537. Each grew only gradually to 1642, with recurrent plagues, and both suffered severely from Civil War sieges, with Exeter's suburbs (with a third of its 15,000 pre-war population) completely destroyed and plague killing c. 9 per cent in 1643. Bristol suffered less housing destruction but plague after both its sieges cut its population back to about 14,000 by 1646. In the early 1660s, Bristol had about 16,000 people and Exeter 11,500.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter, both cities grew steadily (avoiding major losses in the 1665–66 plague) to about 22,000 and 15,000 respectively by 1700. But Bristol's new Atlantic trading and related industries made it grow rapidly thereafter, while Exeter's cloth industry stalled after 1720. By the 1750s, Bristol had perhaps 40,000 people

<sup>1</sup> V. Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670* (Cambridge, 2002); *idem*, 'Burial choice and burial location in later medieval London', in S.R. Bassett (ed.), *Death in Towns* (Leicester, 1992), 119–35; *idem*, 'Burial on the margin', in M. Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns* (York, 1998), 54–64. A useful summary of English developments can be found in D. Sayer, 'Post-medieval churchyards, cemeteries and grave plots', in C. King and D. Sayer (eds.), *The Archaeology of Post-Medieval Religion* (Woodbridge, 2011), 199–214.

<sup>2</sup> Notably J. Morgan (ed.), *The Burial Ground Problem in Leeds c. 1700–1914*, Thoresby Society, 2nd ser. 23 (Leeds, 2013). J. Rugg, F. Stirling and A. Clayden, 'Churchyard and cemetery in an English industrial city: Sheffield 1740–1900', *Urban History*, 41 (2014), 627–46, demonstrates the value of an urban case-study (critiquing linear national models of a shift from 'churchyard to cemetery'), but is mostly post-1820.

<sup>3</sup> P. Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1985), 113–26; *idem*, 'The local incidence of epidemic disease', in *The Plague Reconsidered* (Matlock, 1977), 49–62.

and Exeter only 16,000,<sup>4</sup> and in 1801, the Bristol conurbation had just under 60,000 people (43,000 within the 1373 city boundaries, not expanded until the 1830s), while Exeter had just over 20,000. The margin intensified as by 1841 Bristol's population had doubled again to 125,000, while Exeter's grew to 35,000, so from the 1720s Bristol had to adjust to much greater population increase than Exeter.<sup>5</sup>

Another significant difference arose from their topography. Exeter was a city on a hill above a river, with a largely complete Roman wall enclosing an area which (even in 1800) included substantial green space, and with the Cathedral Close at its heart, established as a separate jurisdiction since the twelfth century with its own inner wall and gates. Building had spread along the roads outside the walls in St David and especially St Sidwell to the north, and in St Thomas across the Exe Bridge, and growth resumed in these suburbs after 1660, but there was scope for infilling within the walled city.<sup>6</sup> Bristol was an amalgamation of two settlements north and south of the bridge over the Avon. It had fewer walls (though some gates), and was more densely built up, although, as in Exeter, the dissolution of religious houses around 1540 released some land, but mostly on the city borders (as was the cathedral, a former abbey). Bristol's population growth, especially north of the bridge, was largely achieved by extension not infilling, although the castle was demolished and built over from the 1650s (unlike Exeter's castle, which remained crown property and jurisdictionally part of Devon).<sup>7</sup> By the later eighteenth century, Bristol's expansion reached a scale in which the two largest suburban parishes, St Philip and St James, were both divided – in each case dividing the 'out-parish' within Gloucestershire (outside the city's formal jurisdiction), and further parishes were created there in the early nineteenth century, while Exeter's parochial structure remained unaltered until the 1830s.

In burial terms, the greatest difference between the two cities was the status of the medieval parish churches. As in other 'minster' towns (especially in western England), when parishes were established in Exeter the cathedral retained the monopoly of burial rights within the walls, so its intramural parish churches were established without churchyards.<sup>8</sup> Even burials of the elite within parish churches required cathedral permission.

<sup>4</sup> W. Maitland, *History of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1753), 221–4, compares burial rates for various cities, including Bristol 1742–48 (average 1,662 p.a.) and Exeter 1729–34 (537 p.a.). In Bristol, of 11,638 burials, 666 people were buried in the Baptists' cemeteries and 358 in the Quakers', plus 2 Jews.

<sup>5</sup> J. Barry, 'The south west', in P. Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II (Cambridge, 2000), 67–92, at 70–3.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kain and W. Ravenhill (eds.), *Historical Atlas of South-West England* (Exeter, 2000), 482–511; M. Stoye, *Circled with Stone* (Exeter, 2003); *idem*, *Water in the City* (Exeter, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> R. Leech, *Town House in Medieval and Early Modern Bristol* (Swindon, 2014), 13–58; N. Baker, J. Brett and R. Jones, *Bristol: An Archaeological Assessment* (Oxford, 2018). The latter volume contains references to many published and unpublished archaeological assessments of Bristol burial areas, which cannot all be cited here for reasons of space.

<sup>8</sup> D. Lepine and N. Orme (eds.), *Death and Memory in Medieval Exeter*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, N.S. 47 (Exeter, 2003), 3–38; N. Orme, *Churches of Medieval Exeter* (Exeter,

As religious houses established themselves, they obtained the right to bury their own personnel and, after a fight, limited rights to bury laypeople (again with cathedral permission). But the overwhelming majority of Exeter's citizens were buried in the Cathedral Close. There is no record of marking graves with headstones (let alone tombs) in the Close, though wooden crosses may have been used and areas of burial marked by various paths. With the closure of the religious houses, the monopoly became even more complete, and remained in place until 1637. There is no sign that most intramural parishes attempted to obtain churchyards, even though there was land spare.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the extramural parishes had churchyards with plenty of open space and expected to bury their parochial dead.

In Bristol, the position was very different. There was no cathedral until 1542, and the parish churches were responsible for burying their own, so all of them had churchyards (if often very small), even where the church was built on the corners of densely packed central streets (one on top of a city gate). Unlike eastern cities such as Norwich, they were not founded with substantial churchyards surrounding them except in the outer parishes in the north (St Augustine, St Michael, St James and St Philip) and the three parishes south of the river (Temple, St Thomas and the mighty St Mary Redcliffe, right on the edge of town).<sup>10</sup> The various religious houses also offered burial facilities and St Augustine's Abbey had its 'great cemetery' on the city outskirts. But when the abbey became the cathedral, far from its cemetery becoming a city cemetery, it ceased to operate even as the cemetery for the cathedral staff, who were henceforth buried either within the cathedral, in the cloisters, or in the neighbouring parish churchyard of St Augustine the Less. Instead (though still occasionally called the 'great cemetery'), the former burial ground became the 'College Green', an open space used either as a thoroughfare

2014); J. Barrow, 'Urban cemetery location in the high Middle Ages', in Bassett (ed.), *Death in Towns*, 78–100. Sayer, 'Post-medieval churchyards', 211, reads Barrow's generalization about western churches not having burial spaces before the early modern period as including Bristol, but this is mistaken, as is clear from Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, and the maps and references to Bristol's medieval parish cemeteries in R. Leech, *The Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol: Part I*, Bristol Record Society, 48 (Bristol, 1997). B. Kjolbye-Biddle, 'Dispersal or concentration', in Bassett (ed.), *Death in Towns*, 210–47, shows Winchester to have many similarities with Exeter, but the post-Reformation period is covered in one page.

<sup>9</sup> When all burials within Exeter's intramural parish churches were banned in 1854, only St Laurence and St Paul make reference to a 'churchyard' as well as the church: *London Gazette*, 20 Oct. 1854, 3178. Only 10% of Exeter's intramural deaths were in these two parishes: R. Pickard, *The Population and Epidemics of Exeter in Pre-Census Times* (Exeter, 1947), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Barrow, 'Urban cemetery', 88–91. C. Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls* (Woodbridge, 2018), 96–118, discusses burial practices in late medieval All Saints, Bristol, from testamentary evidence, most of which relates to wealthier testators requesting burial within the church, though the parish also had a small adjoining cemetery. For post-Reformation religious developments in Bristol, see J. Barry, 'Bristol as a "Reformation City" c. 1640–1780', in N. Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation 1500–1800* (London, 1998), 261–84.

or as a planted space for recreation.<sup>11</sup> It had no walls and only one minor gate, and was a common civic space: even the Laudian clergy merely tried to limit its use for unsuitable housing or for Bristolians to stretch or dry cloths. This reflected the marginal status of Bristol's cathedral both within the city and nationally.

### Exeter's Anglican developments to 1832

So, while Bristol's burial arrangements were based on its parishes, in Exeter the cathedral monopoly made burial a city-wide issue. The Cathedral Close in Exeter was simultaneously a separate church-controlled space but also the resting ground for almost all Exeter's intramural citizens. Yet by the early seventeenth century, there were signs of changing attitudes, amidst regular cycles of tension between the city corporation and the cathedral, especially during 'Puritan' dominance of city government. When objecting to secular 'misuse' of parts of the Close in 1599, one cathedral spokesman noted how they would expect Exonians to be more respectful of their burial place, criticizing the dislodgement of bones through the digging of ditches.<sup>12</sup> As population grew, and especially at plague times, when large numbers needed to be buried in rapid succession, fitting the dead safely into the Close became problematic. New burials had long disturbed previous interments. There was a charnel house chapel until 1549, but it is unclear what, if anything, was done to store displaced bones thereafter.<sup>13</sup> The rising tide of burials was raising the ground level of the Close such that, by the 1630s, the cathedral authorities were complaining that the cathedral itself was being submerged: the same presumably applied to the clergy's houses built around it.<sup>14</sup> When combined with the anxiety caused by plague burials, especially in the very severe outbreaks of 1570, 1590–91 and 1625–26 (each killing 15–18 per cent of the population), the privilege of acting as civic burial ground gradually became a problem, requiring a citywide solution.<sup>15</sup>

As early as March 1630, the Exeter cathedral authorities were discussing a 'proposition of the mayor and citizens touching a new burial place'.<sup>16</sup> Nothing more is reported until June 1634, when the visit of Laud's

<sup>11</sup> Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 185–207; W. Barrett, *History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1789), 294; J. Bettey, *Records of Bristol Cathedral*, Bristol Record Society, 59 (Bristol, 2007), 12, 63, 68, 79.

<sup>12</sup> M.E. Curtis, *Some Disputes between the City and Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* (Manchester, 1932), 50.

<sup>13</sup> Lepine and Orme (eds.), *Death and Memory*, 23–4.

<sup>14</sup> In c. 1840, it was agreed to level the ground along the whole north wall of the Cathedral which 'had accumulated so high above the level of its floor' (Exeter Cathedral Library and Archives (ECLA) D&C 7076/283).

<sup>15</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 113–18.

<sup>16</sup> ECLA D&C 3555, fols. 135, 141. There is no mention in the city records, except an unfinished entry agreeing 'parte of Fryernhay shallbe': Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) Exeter City Archives (ECA) Act Book 7, fol. 752.

vicar-general, Sir Nathaniel Brent, prompted more discussions regarding 'the necessities of a newe churchyard or buryinge place', with proposals apparently agreed by July, only to lapse again until April/May 1635, when '9 articles touching a newe churchyard' were agreed by the city. Some may have favoured multiple sites: on 9 July 1636, they considered 'the divisions of the sevrall parishes or quarters of this cittie to the particular buryall places', but five days later, they agreed 'that Friernhay shalbe allotted for a new churchyard or burying place as noe other be required to be provided by the cittie'.<sup>17</sup> These were the grounds of a former friary which had passed into civic ownership, rented out since the 1580s as racks for clothworkers: on 30 August 1636, they gave notice to the tenants of the racks to remove them. Local women rioted when city workers began to prepare the new site – whether objecting to the loss of working space, to the health dangers or the loss of their traditional burying space is not clear.<sup>18</sup> The cathedral, apart from ceding its right to burials, provided £150 to help wall and prepare the site.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Bishop Joseph Hall had the cathedral cloister quadrangle converted into a burial place for the Close's own inhabitants.<sup>20</sup>

On 24 August 1637, St Bartholomew's Day, Hall consecrated the new burial ground, known thereafter as Bartholomew's Yard. The date (associated with the Paris massacre of Protestants) may indicate an appeal to a common anti-Catholic heritage. The entire protracted negotiation raises questions, given the intense contemporary dispute between the civic and cathedral authorities over jurisdictional issues but also over two different visions of Protestantism which shaped subsequent Civil War allegiances when (broadly speaking) the cathedral clergy and the Close's inhabitants lined up as Royalists against most city rulers and the inhabitants around the new burial ground, who were Parliamentarian.<sup>21</sup> Admittedly, Bishop Hall was a moderate Calvinist (though he sided with his Laudian dean on the church's legal rights), but agreement on such a major change in burial arrangements amidst such conflict suggests either that this change was one where consensus could be achieved or possibly that it was a concession offered by the city to the cathedral. The latter interpretation is supported by the condition built into the new arrangements that after 16 years the citizens of Exeter would regain the right to be buried in the Cathedral Close.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> DHC ECA Act Book 8, fols. 9–12, 29, 38, 40–3, 55, 59, 66–7, 85, 89, 94.

<sup>18</sup> M. Stoye, *From Deliverance to Destruction* (Exeter, 1996), 11. I thank Prof. Stoye for advice and Dr Kate Osborne for research in city and cathedral archives.

<sup>19</sup> R. Izaacke, *Antiquities of the City of Exeter* (London, 1677), 155; T. Shapter, *History of the Cholera in Exeter in 1832* (London, 1849), 142; W. Cotton and H. Woollcombe, *Gleanings from the Municipal and Cathedral Records of Exeter* (Exeter, 1877), 76. A nineteenth-century transcript (by Shapter?) of the 27 Aug. 1636 agreement is ECLA D&C 4621/33.

<sup>20</sup> G. Oliver, *Lives of the Bishops* (Exeter, 1861), 167–8, 247.

<sup>21</sup> Stoye, *From Deliverance*, 34–42.

<sup>22</sup> Shapter, *History*, 142.

The sixteen-year clause was probably never implemented, because by 1653–54 bishops, deans and chapters had been abolished, the cathedral walled into two halves to act as two mega-churches, and its property (including the Cloisters) sold off. For 1653–54, some church burials from parishes across Exeter were recorded in the cathedral register: this may simply reflect uncertain registration arrangements (when parish registers were often suspended), but it raises the intriguing possibility that there was some limited reuse of the Close.<sup>23</sup> Bartholomew's Yard continued to function as the main burial ground, but in 1664, in another joint agreement, a second city burial ground was established in Southernhay, over the walls from the Bishop's Palace garden. The city agreed to this on 30 August 1664 'for the continuance of frindshipp between the church and cittie', because 'the burying places of this cittie are overfilled with dead corps to the danger of infecon to the inhabitants'; the new agreement referred to 'Friernhay' (i.e. Bartholomew's) as being 'overpressed'.<sup>24</sup> But the initiative came from the cathedral, in turn apparently prompted by Dr Robert Vilvain, a physician who had paid to refurbish the cathedral library in 1657–58 and now offered to pay the costs of enclosing a new burial place in return for an extra life on a lease.<sup>25</sup> The ground, cleared during the Civil War destruction,<sup>26</sup> was given by the city, while the costs of its enclosure were paid by the cathedral, and once again provision was made that after a period (this time 20 years), the right to burial in the Close would be restored. It seems that medical concerns, notably the renewed threat of plague, may have been the driving force: the mayor in 1664–65, Alan Penny, died in March 1665 and was replaced by his brother-in-law Anthony Salter 'Doctor in Physick'.<sup>27</sup> The new ground was consecrated by Bishop Ward on St Simon and St Jude's day, and became generally known either as Southernhay Yard or Trinity Churchyard, because it lay in the extramural part of Holy Trinity parish.<sup>28</sup> City parish registers show many

<sup>23</sup> *Registers of Exeter*, vol. I: *Cathedral*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society (Exeter, 1910), 69, 147.

<sup>24</sup> DHC ECA Act Book 11, fols. 34, 39–41, 55; ECLA D&C 4621/34 (a transcript of the 20 Oct. 1664 agreement).

<sup>25</sup> ECLA D&C 4659 and 3559, fols. 496, 544.

<sup>26</sup> Stoyle, *From Deliverance*, 12, 136.

<sup>27</sup> Izaacke, *Antiquities*, 169–70, also notes the purchasing of a pesthouse later that year in case plague reached Exeter. In 1684, the chapter consented to a burial in 'St Peter's churchyard if it be found consistent with the agreement made with the Cittie about the restraint of burials there' (ECLA D&C 3561, fol. 369), while Shapter (*History*, 142) cites a City order of 30 May 1689 allowing inhabitants to bury their dead in Bartholomew's Yard, 'in regard the churchyard near Southernhay was overfilled', implying that Bartholomew's Yard had been closed for a period, conceivably since 1664?

<sup>28</sup> Izaacke, *Antiquities*, 170, prints a poem produced on the occasion, celebrating that 'the Saints have Elbow-room to rest/This day a Plot prophane is truly blest', before punning on the bishop's name: 'That all our foes who do us disregard/May be kept out by this our well-fenc'd Ward'.

more burials in Bartholomew's than in Southernhay,<sup>29</sup> and the former is regularly referred to as *the* city burial ground in the eighteenth century; modern accounts often ignore the Southernhay ground.<sup>30</sup>

Very little is known about the early operation of either ground. The city appointed the sextons and set the fees for gravedigging, but neither graveyard had a chapel.<sup>31</sup> Nor, judging by the images of both sites, did either have many gravestones or tombgraves, though a few appear on a print of the newly established Devon and Exeter Hospital in Southernhay on the border of Rocque's map of 1743, which looks across the graveyard, within which a small-scale funeral is taking place.<sup>32</sup> This shows a few stones and one tomb, as well as a hut, but also a flock of sheep grazing! Presumably the Hospital became a regular user of the burial place. The Bristol Infirmary, founded four years earlier than Exeter's, purchased its own burial ground in nearby Johnny Ball Lane in 1757, which remained open for nearly a century, allowing ample opportunity for systematic grave robbery by medical staff and students needing bodies for dissection: probably similar practices occurred in Exeter.<sup>33</sup>

An 1824 document reports on Exeter's burial arrangements. The sextons of Bartholomew's and Southernhay both paid 9d to the authorities for each grave (all to the city for the former, half each to the city and cathedral for the latter), and then 6d to the digger of a child's grave and 1s for other graves, and then kept the charges they made: 6s 8d for a grave for a respectable person, 5s for a labouring mechanic, 4s 6d for an almshouse resident and 2s for a pauper direct from the workhouse. About 170–200 people per year were buried at Bartholomew's and about 50 at Southernhay: the yards were 350 by 210ft and 270 by 120ft respectively.<sup>34</sup> They must have fitted in the great majority of the nearly 28,000 burials recorded in the intramural Anglican registers between 1701 and 1800 (a further 17,000 were buried at St David or St Sidwell and 6,000 at St Thomas over the river, so almost

<sup>29</sup> H. Tapley Soper (ed.), *Exeter Registers II*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society (Exeter, 1933): e.g. St Pancras records 112 burials in Bartholomew's, 14 in Southernhay and 28 in the church itself in the periods 1736–43, 1770–3, 1776–86, 1790–9 and 1800–12.

<sup>30</sup> A. Brice, *The Mobjiad* (Exeter, 1770), 109 n. (e) [written in 1737–38] 'the common burial-yard, viz, St Bartholomew's'. But Brice's *The Grand Gazetteer* (Exeter, 1759), 544, noted that since the two new yards had been created 'no sepulture I think has been allowed' in the Close although 'almost where-ever in its precincts, vaults or sewers have been dug, an infinite number of human bones have been turned up'.

<sup>31</sup> T. Gray, *Chronicle of Exeter 1205–1722* (Exeter, 2005), 131 (fees), 142 (gravedigger), 145 (paving), 148 (planted with trees),

<sup>32</sup> T. Gray, *Exeter Engraved: The Secular City*, vol. I (Exeter, 2000), 89; P. Thomas, *Changing Face of Exeter* (Stroud, 1995), 93.

<sup>33</sup> G. Munro Smith, *History of Bristol Royal Infirmary* (Bristol, 1917), 40–1, 205–14; Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 403. In 1850, this area of 400 square yards was said to be 'in use about 80 years' and made no charge, but only had about 15 interments annually (G. Clark, *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Enquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the City and County of Bristol* (London, 1850), 159).

<sup>34</sup> ECLA D&C 7076/91.

half Exeter's burials were not intramural).<sup>35</sup> Admittedly half these deaths were young children (with epidemics largely of smallpox, targeting the young), whose burial did not require so much space, but changing burial practices were making coffins (even lead-lined coffins) expected as part of a 'decent funeral', so increasing the demand on space and the disturbance to skeletons caused by each burial.

### Bristol's Anglican developments to 1832

By contrast, in Bristol there was no attempt to provide a civic solution to graveyard provision before 1850, leaving parochial authorities to manage massive population growth. As Natasha Mihailovic has demonstrated, the overwhelming response was one of muddling through, with churchyards gradually rising above surrounding houses and roads, and constant disturbance of remains, but no sustained initiatives to overhaul the system.<sup>36</sup> Parishes sought new burial spaces, in several cases purchasing small extra plots near the church: St Nicholas parish did this twice in the eighteenth century, though it also lost portions of its existing churchyard to street alterations.<sup>37</sup> Two of the fastest growing parishes in the early nineteenth century, St Augustine and St Andrew Clifton, purchased new grounds: St Augustine in 1819 at the new Great George's Street off the top of Park Street and Clifton opening a new yard on Clifton Hill in 1788 'the churchyard being full', then purchasing a former quarry at Honey Pen Hill in 1808, consecrated in 1811.<sup>38</sup> The two largest parishes (St Philip and St James) were divided in 1759 and 1794 respectively, and the new parish churches of St George Kingswood and St Paul each had

<sup>35</sup> Pickard, *Population*, 15, 48–52 and 77. Since it seems unlikely that these three parishes contained almost half Exeter's population across this period, they may have been attracting burials from Exeter's intramural inhabitants. J. Boulton, 'Traffic in corpses and the commodification of burial in Georgian London', *Continuity and Change*, 29 (2014), 181–208, has shown how varying burial fees between parochial burying-grounds in London could lead to widespread burial in other parishes; parishes with surplus space could attract more business by offering lower fees, raising them when space became short. Further research is needed to establish if this was happening in Exeter.

<sup>36</sup> N. Mihailovic, 'The dead in English urban society c. 1689–1840', University of Exeter Ph.D. thesis, 2011, especially 219–36, 249–50, 265, 273–4. See also M.J. Crossley Evans, 'Parochial burials in Bristol in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, exemplified by Christ Church, City', in *idem* (ed.), 'A Grand City', Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society (Bristol, 2010), 230–56. The only complete listing of Bristol burial grounds (as in 1850) is provided in Clark, *Report*, 158–67. This gives the size in square yards and average annual interments for most parishes (not St Augustine or St Philip) and some dissenting congregations, along with comments on their fullness and other remarks, as well as a paragraph or so describing each of them, usually stressing their fullness, bad condition, closeness to housing and rise in level above the houses around: only St Paul's churchyard is praised as 'of modern date...in good order and the reverse of crowded' (163), while the upper Clifton churchyard was also in 'excellent order', unlike the 'dirty and neglected' lower burial ground (165).

<sup>37</sup> Mihailovic, 'The dead', 240–3, 248.

<sup>38</sup> Dowry Chapel at the Hotwells in Clifton also had a cemetery consecrated in 1784: J.F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 3 vols. (Bristol, 1881–3), vol. II, 279.

their own churchyard. Further subdivisions took place later, with Holy Trinity carved out of St Philip out-parish in 1832.<sup>39</sup> Some very small inner city parishes were united, including St Ewen with Christchurch around 1790. One contemporary report stated that more than 1,000 skeletons, including over 500 complete skulls, were removed from St Ewen's tiny churchyard (where only 242 burials had been registered 1700–75, many inside the church). The vestry had sought to stop the parish's (relatively few) poor from being buried in the churchyard by offering in 1778 to pay the full costs for them to be buried 'in any other place', and in 1788 the corporation (which wanted to use the site) promised that if the Christ Church burial grounds proved insufficient the corporation would obtain a further burying ground, though this never happened. Christchurch already had a 'lower church yard' separate from the church in the cheaper surroundings of Duck Lane, as well as the 'upper churchyard' behind the church itself in Broad Street.<sup>40</sup>

As Mihailovic shows, there was more interest in maintaining the churchyards as decent and usable amenities for the living than as undisturbed resting places for the dead. The larger churchyards, such as Redcliffe, were (like College Green) valued as places of greenery and recreation with trees, walks and gateways to promote their respectable use.<sup>41</sup> Other secular uses, especially for business or to hang out clothes or beat carpets, drew regular (if largely ineffective) objections. An issue requiring considerably more research is whether, as the churchyards became fuller, more people sought burial inside the churches or in vaults underneath them, with a much higher chance both of commemoration and of being able to keep family bodies together.<sup>42</sup> In Bristol, extensive church rebuildings after 1700 often incorporated new vaults to add burial space.<sup>43</sup> During rebuilding, more attention was devoted to preserving monuments and inscriptions than the bodily remains, often dumped under the churches as at Christchurch.<sup>44</sup> Burial within the church (which was much more expensive, partly reflecting the higher cost of preparing

<sup>39</sup> J. Leech, *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer* (Gloucester, 1982), 105, notes 'I do not think I ever before saw so many graves open at once in the same burial ground.' A full listing of Bristol places of worship in 1851 can be found in A. Munden (ed.), *The Religious Census of Bristol and Gloucestershire 1851*, Gloucestershire Record Series, 29 (Bristol, 2015), 53–88.

<sup>40</sup> Crossley Evans, 'Parochial burials'; and C. Godman and M.J. Crossley Evans, "'The cemetery under the tower'", in Crossley Evans (ed.), *'Grand City'*, 112–42; Mihailovic, 'The dead', 210.

<sup>41</sup> Barrett, *History*, 294, 588.

<sup>42</sup> The medieval crypt of St Nicholas was preserved in the rebuilding of 1768 and restored in 1823: W. Matthews, *Bristol Guide* (Bristol, 1825), 139–40.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. St Michael rebuilt in 1777: Barrett, *History*, 417–18; and Clifton in 1822 with 176 vaults: Matthews, *Bristol Guide*, 133. Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol*, vol. II, 238, notes 800 leaden coffins in the vaults under St Augustine in 1877, possibly added in the rebuilding of the chancel in 1708. Bristol's vaults, especially St Augustine's, are discussed in E. Boore, 'Burial vaults and coffin furniture in the West Country', in Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns*, 67–84, at 67–73.

<sup>44</sup> Mihailovic, 'The dead', 201–3, 213–15; Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol*, vol. II, 173; Godman and Crossley Evans, "'Cemetery'".

the space and partly as a rationing and revenue-raising exercise) remained socially exclusive – nearly all those listed in registers are singled out either as Mr/Mrs (or more socially exclusive title) or have a superior occupation, but it would require detailed analysis to prove if such people were increasingly avoiding the main churchyards.<sup>45</sup> In elite St Ewen, only 5 of the 20 burials 1768–75 were in the churchyard, but this may be an extreme example. But one barrier to the emergence of commercial cemeteries before the 1830s and 1840s was that those with most purchasing power were those with strong family ties who could afford to be buried inside/under their parish churches. Indeed, when cemeteries were opened they initially struggled for business – Exeter’s catacombs, opened in 1835, never taking off at all – until mid-Victorian legislation prevented burials within inner-city churches as well as within churchyards, forcing such people to turn to the new cemeteries. Many city people may also have been buried in rural churchyards where they had family ties, or (in the case of the rich) second homes: many Bristol names occur in Gloucestershire monumental inscriptions.<sup>46</sup>

### Non-Anglican burials

However, before considering the nineteenth century, we need to examine non-Anglican burials. The emergence of separatist congregations during the Civil War, and then the exclusion of Presbyterians from the national church after 1662, together with the successive establishment of Huguenot, Jewish and Roman Catholic congregations, all created potential alternatives to Anglican burial. Although nonconformist objections to paying for Anglican burial provision in the nineteenth century have been well documented, there are few local studies of the growth of nonconformist provision prior to 1800, so it is worth detailing how these developed. Here, there were much greater similarities of experience between the two cities, so they will be treated together.

Huguenot communities only emerged after 1685, with both cities granting them the use of an Anglican church, St Olave in Exeter and St Mark’s Chapel on College Green in Bristol, which was also the

<sup>45</sup> St Stephen’s burial registers record place of burial 1754–59, 1767–74 and post-1782, divided into old yard (31 in 1754), new yard (67), pavement (3), church (6) and chancel (1): in this parish, there is no sign of greater use of the church, although absolute numbers of burials fall off from the 1790s. An average Anglican table of fees in 1836 is given in Clark, *Report*, 167, showing an interment (including the clergyman’s fee) in a ‘common earthen grave’ to cost £1 0s 6d, whereas a vault or brick grave cost £6 16s in the churchyard, £20 18s in the crypt and £23 2s in the chancel, with an extra 19s 6d for ‘ledger stones in the churchyard’, £3 for flat stones in church and £13 or £18 for a monument in the body of the church or the chancel respectively. Many churches charged more but some ‘considerably less’.

<sup>46</sup> See R. Bigland, *Historical, Monumental and Genealogical Collections*, 4 vols., Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2, 3, 5 and 8 (Gloucester, 1989–95). About 10% of burials in St George Kingswood after 1758 were of outsiders, mostly from St Philip or other Bristol parishes.

corporation chapel, regularly chosen for elite burials within the church,<sup>47</sup> but there is no sign of a churchyard either here or at the nearby Orchard Street chapel to which the Huguenots moved in 1727. Probably the Huguenots in both cities used Anglican grounds.<sup>48</sup> It was only in the mid-eighteenth century that both Bristol and Exeter obtained Jewish communities sufficient to sustain either a synagogue or a cemetery. In Exeter, the cemetery of 1757 definitely predates the synagogue of 1764, and in Bristol the cemetery opened in 1750, whereas the former Weavers Hall was only refitted as the synagogue in 1756.<sup>49</sup> In both cities, the Jewish burying ground was on the edge of the built-up area – in Exeter in Magdalen Street (on the grounds of the old leper hospital), and in Bristol in the brickfields by the river Froom in St Philip, both close to other non-Anglican burial areas. Roman Catholic worship only became publicly tolerated in the late eighteenth century. The Bristol chapel in Trenchard Street opened in 1790 with no churchyard (but a garden, where a few burials are recorded) but vaults underneath and its burial registers start in 1787 (10 years after its baptisms began). Two chapels opened in Exeter, the first (in Mint Lane) rented from 1775 and built anew in 1790 and the second (in South Street) from about the latter date: both have burial registers beginning in 1789–90.<sup>50</sup> They may also have used vaults underneath their churches.

Of the Protestant nonconformists, one can generalize that the more firmly they rejected Anglican forms of worship and the very idea of a national church, the quicker they made arrangements for their own burials, starting with the Quakers. By 1669–70, they had two burial grounds in Bristol: the main one (with about two-thirds of burials) at Redcliffe Pit south of the river, not far from their Temple Street meeting house, the other (about 20 per cent) in the former Dominican cemetery in the grounds of their Friars meeting house in St James, with some 250 bodies buried in the latter between 1700 and 1808. Prior to 1669, they used their own gardens or burial sites at countryside meetings, and about 11 per cent of their eighteenth-century burials were still outside Bristol.<sup>51</sup> It was only after 1688 that Exeter's Quakers established their own meeting house,

<sup>47</sup> R. Mayo, *Huguenots in Bristol* (Bristol, 1985), 12–15; Barrett, *History*, 346–52.

<sup>48</sup> H. Peskett, *Guide to the Parochial and Non-Parochial Registers of Devon and Cornwall 1538–1837*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, Extra Series 2 (Exeter, 1979), 230.

<sup>49</sup> B. Susser, *Jews of South-West England* (Exeter, 1993), 30–1, 128–30; J. Samuel, *Jews in Bristol* (Bristol, 1997), 45, 74–6; Mihailovic, 'The dead', 199. Another small Jewish cemetery operated in Brook Court off Rose Street in the nineteenth century: Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 402. This may be the one described in 1850 as '90 square yards, not full, no interment for 9 years' and then as 'very small and narrow: house windows overlook it...in a very dirty and neglected state, being used as the back premises of the dwelling house through which it is entered' (Clark, *Report*, 160, 165).

<sup>50</sup> Peskett, *Guide*, 178. No details of the Roman Catholic provisions in Bristol in 1850 are given in Clark, *Report*.

<sup>51</sup> Mihailovic, 'The dead', 197; Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 207, 397; G. Stock, 'Survey of Quaker burial grounds', *Bristol and Avon Archaeology*, 13 (1996), 1–10; *idem*, 'Quaker burials', in Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns*, 129–43; Bristol Record Office 7967/9–10; and see n. 4 for evidence of c. 50 Quaker burials p.a. 1742–48.

just off Magdalen Street (again) with a spacious burial ground, but before this they used burial spaces at Topsham and rural grounds. The Exeter Quaker community was very small so there was plenty of space for the few hundred burials recorded in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (only 17 in the period 1761–1800).<sup>52</sup> The Bristol meeting was much larger – the largest outside London – and it not only sustained demand for the existing two burial grounds but added a third in 1699 in the grounds in St Philip of its workhouse for its poorer members (about an eighth of their Bristol burials). All three remained open after 1854.<sup>53</sup>

Quakers could never accept Anglican burial, even if the clergy had been prepared to bury them (those formally excommunicated were not entitled to Anglican burial). The Baptists were the next most ‘separatist’ sect, but their objections centred on baptism practices. It was not until 1675 that the Broadmead Baptists in Bristol, faced with renewed persecution, accepted a proposal from ‘the other congregations [probably Pithay Baptists and Congregationalists], to seeke for and buy a buryingplace, for all ye separates to bury their dead’. Nothing was settled until in 1679 they minuted an agreement ‘to pay one halfe, with Br Gifford’s people [Pithay] ye other halfe, to buy a burying place for ourselves, a garden in Redcross Lane...that wee might bury our dead without ye ceremonies of ye parish parsons in their yeards’. In October 1681, they repeated the decision ‘considering the parson would not suffer those they pleased to excommunicate to be buried in their graveyards’, subscribing to ‘buy a life and ye fee, which would cost about £120’. While burying a child ‘in our yard’ during renewed persecutions in May 1684, they were ‘accused for a riot; but ye Jury would not find it a riot, but an unlawful assembly for not burying in consecrated ground’: the child’s father was fined 40s, with £3 in court fees.<sup>54</sup> The Redcross Lane/Street ground remained the joint burial place for Bristol’s various Baptist chapels and a ‘new yard’ was purchased across the street in 1722, which was separated into ‘new ground East and West’ as more land was purchased.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Peskett, *Guide*, 218–19; Pickard, *Population*, 15; A. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter 1650–1875* (Manchester, 1962), 62.

<sup>53</sup> Mihailovic, ‘The dead’, 197. In 1850, the combined area of the three grounds was 4,372 square yards, with about 16 and a half interments annually. Both the main grounds were said to have been ‘in use 200 years’ but whereas Redcliffe Pit was ‘not full’ and ‘in good order’, the Friars was ‘full’ but ‘in excellent order’ (Clark, *Report*, 159, 164–5).

<sup>54</sup> R. Hayden (ed.), *Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol*, Bristol Record Society, 27 (Bristol, 1974), 173, 209, 226, 262.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 197–8, and see n. 4 for evidence of c. 95 people buried here p.a. in 1742–8; Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 401–2. When the Pithay Baptists moved to a large chapel in Old King Street in 1815, the burial ground around was fitted with brick vaults: T.M. Williams, *Short History of Old King Street Baptist Church* (Bristol, 1955), 27. In 1850 (Clark, *Report*, 159, 164), the ‘Broadmead-ground’ in Redcross Street, of 1,570 square yards, had an average 37 interments annually, and is said to be ‘vey full and the ground somewhat raised’ but ‘in neat order’. Another burial place of 2,420 yards is also given at Broadmead Chapel itself, said to be ‘in use 200 years’, fees 9s 6d to £1 2s, though it is described as ‘full’ and no figure is given for annual interments, and it is not described any further. Brunswick Chapel,

The first clear evidence of a burial place for the much smaller Baptist congregation in Exeter comes in the St Sidwell's registers 1688–1706 which refer (17 times) to burial in 'Mountstephen's garden': two deeds confirm that this property (off Paris Street outside the walls) had been granted as a burial ground for Baptists by this family. Although only about three burials a year are recorded 1781–1800, it was still being used in the 1830s.<sup>56</sup> As in Bristol, Exeter Congregationalists may have used the Baptists' grounds, as they have no recorded burial ground, though since the Little Castle Street Congregational Chapel, into which they moved in 1795, was in the relatively under-developed Castle precinct, it may have had space for burials around as well as inside it: this may be the 'Independent Chapelyard (in Saint Lawrence parish)' closed in 1854.<sup>57</sup>

The largest dissenting groups in both cities were Presbyterian, who only reluctantly accepted their status outside the established church. Many were occasional conformists and often participated in both parish and civic government, while in itself the Anglican burial service posed them no problems, certainly if conducted in 'low church' fashion. The monuments of leading Presbyterian families are often found in Bristol and Exeter parish churches until the mid-eighteenth century, and presumably their humbler brethren were buried in Anglican churchyards – this must have been particularly simple in Exeter with city-wide churchyards. But gradually the position changed, as Presbyterians accepted that they were 'dissenters' with a new ideology of religious 'freedom' and with the spread of Unitarian theology within both Bristol and Exeter's leading chapels, rendering the Trinitarian aspects of the Anglican service problematic. The Arian controversy came early to Exeter, and it was first in Exeter that (in 1748) the three Presbyterian chapels started keeping a burial register and purchased a joint 'dissenters' burial ground', inevitably off Magdalen Street. Although the Unitarian George's meeting house (the largest and most wealthy) was dominant, it remained a joint enterprise with joint registers. Its intake was relatively small – only about 6 a year in the early decades, rising to 10 by the 1790s – so it remained adequate until closed in 1854.<sup>58</sup> The equivalent Bristol congregation, at Lewin's Mead, did not begin to record burials until 1768, when they purchased (again as a joint 'Presbyterian burial-ground') a space off the new Brunswick Square on the

occupied by a splinter group from the Castle Green Independents, had 800 square yards 'all brick vaults' and charged £1 2s to £3 8s, only having 7 interments per year, according to the table, but the later description, by contrast, states 'around Brunswick Independent Chapel are two small yards, very neat and clean, turfed and planted. Only one is in use.'

<sup>56</sup> A. Gabb, *History of South Street Baptist Church Exeter* (n.p., n.d), 59–61; *Exeter Itinerary and General Directory* (Exeter, 1828), 26; Peskett, *Guide*, 198; Pickard, *Population*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Peskett, *Guide*, 198; C. Snell, *Chapels and Meeting-Houses of South-West England* (London, 1991), 81; *London Gazette*, 20 Oct. 1854, 3178. Also closed were the Quaker burial ground ('Wynards Chapel'), the Presbyterian 'Magdalene-street burial ground called Saints' Rest' and the 'Wesleyan Burial-ground at the Mint' but not the Baptist or Jewish burial places.

<sup>58</sup> DHC 3693D/B/1–2, 4251; Pickard, *Population*, 15.

city edge. However, later maps also show a burial ground on the Lewin's Mead site, so there may have been burials there prior to 1768.<sup>59</sup>

Donne's 1773 map of Bristol also identified a 'dissenting chapel and burying ground' on the very edge of the city. In 1778, this is called 'Dolman's burial ground', and John Dolman licensed a meeting house for Protestant dissenters there in 1754–55, which later alternated between use by Baptists and Methodists.<sup>60</sup> It no longer features on maps by the 1790s, but the 1854 order closing burial grounds listed 'Dolman's burial ground' in Pennywell Street. Its location next to the St Philip out-parish workhouse (and close to the Quaker's workhouse burial ground) is significant, because it promised low burial costs. It was probably intended, like Dolman's adjoining chapel, to cater for the growing working class in Bristol's suburbs, and in nearby mining and industrial communities like Kingswood. Kingswood and this part of Bristol were key locations for the evangelical revival of Whitefield and the Wesley brothers. However, evangelical burial practices confirm that Methodism only gradually became a set of independent chapels, as opposed to a movement within both Anglican and dissenting churches. Although Whitefield's Calvinistic Methodists established their Tabernacle in Penn Street in 1753, they only began to register burials in 1769, which were in the crypt, as they had no burial ground until 1806, when they purchased land in Redcross Street, probably from the Baptists. The Wesleyan New Room had no burial ground, nor did their Ebenezer Chapel in Old King Street, and neither kept burial registers. However, the new Portland Street chapel in Kingsdown, opened in 1793 by those who wanted Wesleyanism to become a separate church, kept burial registers, burying in their vaults until 1821, when they opened a churchyard.<sup>61</sup> The Moravian church in Bristol, opened in 1757 in Upper Maudlin Street, had its own burial ground, with standard

<sup>59</sup> Mihailovic, 'The dead', 198; J. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), 372. In 1850, the Brunswick Square ground was described as 'in use 70 years' with 'fees 14s 6d to £1 7s; ground £1 1s per square foot' with 4,840 square yards and only 30 interments per year so 'not full', although it is later noted that the part occupied is 'very full' but another portion has not yet been opened, and overall it is reckoned 'in good order' (Clark, *Report*, 159, 164).

<sup>60</sup> Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal*, 4 Jan. 1755, 16 Oct. 1762, 5 Apr. 1783; *Bristol Weekly Intelligencer*, 22 Oct. 1757; *Bristol Journal*, 26 Dec. 1767; *Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal*, 25 Jul. 1778; Bristol Archives (BA), EP/A/45/1.8; G.M. Best, *The Cradle of Methodism* (Bristol, 2017), 516–18. In 1841, an Independent congregation obtained a licence for worship at 'the chapel called "Dolman's chapel" in Eugene Street' (BA, EP/A/45/3 119). Clark, *Report*, refers to 'Dolman's or Allen's burial-ground' standing on a slope near the open drain from Lawrence Hill (164), but its table of burial grounds (159) does not refer to Dolman, but instead lists 'Wych's ground near Pennywell-road', covering 509 square yards with an average of 13 interments p.a., with fees of £3 11s per interment and £1 for keeping graves.

<sup>61</sup> Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 397; Mihailovic, 'The dead', 199. In 1850 (Clark, *Report*, 159, 164), the Portland Street ground (whose dimensions and annual interments are not given) was said to be 'nearly full', while a 'Wesleyan' burial-ground in Redcross Street of 1,200 square yards only had 18 interments annually, whereas the Tabernacle ground in the same street of 2,420 square yards 'in use 45 years' with fees 7s to £3 3s, had 150 burials a year, but was 'of large extent' and 'by no means full'. A Wesleyan chapel at Baptist Mills was 'small, open and kept in good order' but had 'few interments'.

gravestones.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the much weaker Methodist groups in Exeter did not establish a separate church with a burial ground and registers until the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup>

A number of private, unconsecrated burial grounds, catering for the less-well-off, also opened in Bristol by the early nineteenth century: the 1854 closure order named four as well as Dolman's. Two (Francis' and Williams') were both on West Street in St James: both men had been undertakers.<sup>64</sup> Another was Thomas' burial ground in Clarence Place off Castle Street: James Thomas was an undertaker at 52 Castle Street in 1838. The best documented is Howland's burial ground, which lay between Newfoundland Street and Wilson Street, the home of Thomas Howland, a house carpenter who began buying land there in 1786. The housing crash of the 1790s led him to use his land for a burial ground instead, and its register runs from 1801 to 1854. He offered families a chance to bury successive family members in the same plot, mostly with 6–10 burials per plot, although there were also larger graves with up to 17 bodies, probably cheaper graves for the poor. A splinter group from the Tabernacle evangelicals opened Gideon Chapel next to this ground in 1809 and they may have co-operated with Howland.<sup>65</sup>

Commenting on the 1854 closures, the *Bristol Mercury* noted that, while the rich were served by Arno's Vale cemetery (see below) and the paupers by the Poor Law, 'for a numerous intermediate class...who have been in the habit heretofore of interring the deceased members of their families at the cheap private burial-ground in West Street and elsewhere, or in the churchyards in which their parishionership gave them a right to

<sup>62</sup> Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol*, vol. II, 304; Baker, Brett and Jones, *Bristol*, 399–401. Clark, *Report*, 164, singled this burial ground (of 1,000 square yards, with five interments a year) out for praise as 'in beautiful order and, except in being within the town, a pattern for everything of the kind', not least because 'the graves are very deep indeed' (164) and printed a February 1850 memorial by the Moravians arguing for an exemption from any closure order on the basis of their good practices (214).

<sup>63</sup> The Mint Wesleyan Chapel had a burial ground 1813–67: Thomas, *Changing Face*, 126.

<sup>64</sup> *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 25 Oct. 1788, notes the death of Mr William Francis undertaker of Bridge Street whose business in West Street and Bridge Street will be continued by his widow, then on 22 Nov. 1788 John Arnold undertaker (Francis' assistant many years) advertised that he would continue at 2 Bridge Street and the Warehouse in West Street. *Bristol Mercury*, 31 Oct. 1846, advertises properties in West Street including the court 'known as Francis' court' and the 'large piece of ground behind the said court now used as a burial ground'. Samuel Williams of Clifton 'undertaker' registered a room in Clifton for religious worship in 1824 (BA, EP/A/45/2 196). Clark, *Report*, 159, does not give dimensions or annual interments for Francis' or Williams' grounds but states that both were full. Francis' is stated to have been 'opened since 1836–7' and 'close and narrow and in a very crowded neighbourhood...very full...there is a very offensive drain from this burial-ground into the public street', while Williams' 'is narrow, very crowded, much raised and in a dirty and neglected condition...at the back of a thickly-peopled neighbourhood' (164).

<sup>65</sup> *Cemeteries and Burial Grounds* (Bristol Record Office, 2013), 4–5; Mihailovic, 'The dead', 203, 209–10. Clark, *Report*, describes Howland's as 'full', 'in use 40 years, fees 7s to £3 3s' (159), and 'in a dirty state...crossed by a path and is a common receptacle for filth and rubbish' (164) but Thomas' is said to be 'not full' (159) and 'planted with trees and flowers and inclosed within a wall...on the whole it is in good order' (164).

comparatively inexpensive grave-room, no proper provision has been made'.<sup>66</sup> It is clear that Bristol's much greater population pressure had created a significant demand for non-parochial burying spaces. Bristol's Anglican clergy were certainly aware of the problem by October 1847, when the rural dean set up a committee to consider 'the necessity of making further provision for the interment of the dead' because 'all the city parishes, with the exception of St Paul's, require additional burying-ground; and it may be determined that even St Paul's burial-ground is too much in the midst of the population for the health of the neighbourhood'. The committee considered it impractical for each individual parish to pay for new grounds, but also wanted grounds 'at a convenient distance' from each parish, so recommended that four 'unions' of parishes be formed, each to buy extra ground on the outskirts of the city nearest their group of parishes, at an estimated total cost of about £10,000, and their report submitted in January 1849 was supported by all the clergy and the bishop later the same year.<sup>67</sup>

### Developments from 1832

There seem to have been no equivalent private burial grounds in Exeter. As noted above, almost half Exeter's eighteenth-century burials were in its three suburban parishes, whose churchyards could expand as required, and this must have relieved the pressure on the two inner-city yards. Instead, it took the cholera epidemic of 1832 to spark decisive change in Exeter, although the previous year the improvement commissioners had noted that the city's burial grounds were full.<sup>68</sup> We have a detailed account of 1832 by an eye-witness, Dr Shapter (whose meticulous mapping of the cholera deaths helped Snow to identify its waterborne causes), who also researched the history of the burial yards and described the complex unfolding of the burial crisis.<sup>69</sup> Initially, the city buried victims in Bartholomew's (often at night-time) and Southernhay,<sup>70</sup> but faced

<sup>66</sup> 8 July 1854. In 1850, Savery (see n. 78) admitted that 'the expense of interments in the private burying-grounds is generally low; but this is to be accounted for by the vast number of bodies so improperly crowded in these burial-places' (Clark, *Report*, 167). He also noted another reason why the poor preferred inner-city burials: 'the bearers at this class of funeral are usually acquaintances of the deceased who will carry the corpse to a neighbouring churchyard but cannot do so if buried out of the city; and the expense of paying bearers is beyond the means of this class of persons' (221–2).

<sup>67</sup> Clark, *Report*, 215–19.

<sup>68</sup> Shapter, *History*, 142.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. VIII. I have largely relied on this and secondary sources for my coverage of this period, although no doubt much further detail would be revealed by a study of the local newspapers, not attempted here.

<sup>70</sup> Of 402 cholera deaths between 19 July and 27 October, 131 were buried in Bartholomew's, 64 in Southernhay, 14 in St Sidwell and St David churchyards and 21 in the Jewish and Dissenter's graveyards, then 159 in Bury Meadow and 13 in Pester-Lane St Sidwell: 155 people were buried from other causes in the normal graveyards. Recurrent outbreaks in 1833 and 1834 led to 34 more burials at Bury Meadow and 33 at Pester Lane (*ibid.*, 168, 171).

mounting health concerns, culminating in a riot at Southernhay, which also reflected popular disgust at how the poor were being transported and buried.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, the authorities sought undeveloped sites within the suburban parishes. The city already controlled Bury Meadow (named after a Canon Bury) in St David parish close to the county gaol, and proposed to consecrate a corner of this as a cholera burying ground. Attempts to implement this without local agreement led to a riot as St David's parishioners objected strongly to becoming the sole burial ground for the inner city, although they offered to bury those from the city quarter nearest to them, if other grounds were established for the other three-quarters. The diocesan authorities supported the city, and the Bury Meadow area was consecrated for Anglican burials, with an area for others.<sup>72</sup> A second burial ground was purchased in a field in St Sidwell (close to where a plague pesthouse had been located), again despite opposition from a parish meeting (though their chief concern was the route taken by the dead bodies).<sup>73</sup>

The long-term consequence in Exeter was a decision that new burial arrangements were needed: given the cholera burials in the two main graveyards, people did not want them disturbed by fresh burials, so their 'fullness' was now taken seriously. Bartholomew's Yard was replaced by two new provisions. The first, built into the steep cliff beside the old churchyard, were the catacombs, but these spectacular tombs (costing £6,000 to build) were never much used, being very expensive. The second was a new 'lower cemetery' in the valley ground below the catacombs. This was divided into two areas, a smaller one for nonconformist burials and a larger one for Anglican ones, and the latter was consecrated on 24 August 1837, exactly 200 years after its predecessor opened. It remained the city's main cemetery for the inner-city parishes (with 18,000 burials) until 1866, when a new 'higher cemetery' was opened in the Heavitree suburbs, though the lower cemetery was not closed until 1949.<sup>74</sup> Some sources say Southernhay Yard was also closed by 1836, but it may have still operated until 1903.<sup>75</sup> In 1854, not only were burials banned in all the intramural churches and the cathedral, but also (except in certain circumstances) in St Thomas, St Sidwell's original churchyard and the 'new burial grounds' of both St Sidwell and St James (a parish created out of St Sidwell in 1842).<sup>76</sup>

The Bristol cholera outbreak in 1832, though it killed more people (584) than Exeter's, does not appear to have had such a dramatic impact on the city, still recovering from the notorious Reform riots of 1831. As in Exeter, there were churchyard riots (with fears the poor were being buried alive) and ground was consecrated at the new Cattle Market in Temple Meads,

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–4, 236–7, 247–8 and plates XX and XXV.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 146, 161–2, 169–70.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 58–60, 163, 168.

<sup>74</sup> See [www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/exetergraves.php](http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/exetergraves.php) (accessed 11 Nov. 2018).

<sup>75</sup> DHC 17/8/A/PP/1; TNA RG 37/213.

<sup>76</sup> *London Gazette*, 20 Oct. 1854, 3178.

especially for the many paupers who died in the central workhouse, who were moved secretly by water.<sup>77</sup> No immediate public action was taken about the city's graveyards, but in 1836 a public company was formed, the Bristol General Cemetery Company, with £15,000 in capital, to create a new cemetery at Arno's Vale (with a separate chapel and burying area for nonconformists), and its promoters stressed that there was less than 14 acres of ground (the initial size of their new cemetery) in all the existing city churchyards. They obtained the land by Act of Parliament in 1837, though it was only consecrated in 1840 after the bishop had ensured a fee of 10s per burial in the consecrated area for the city's clergy, which effectively doubled the cost, which was one reason why there were considerably less than 100 burials a year until 1845 and only 165 in 1848.<sup>78</sup> Although the *Bristol Mercury* regularly contained articles condemning the inner-city burial grounds in the 1840s,<sup>79</sup> decisive change only followed the second cholera epidemic of 1849 (killing 777 people), which led to a devastating report on Bristol's public health, which condemned not only the burial grounds as unfit for further interments but also burials in vaults.<sup>80</sup> The Local Board of Health created in 1851 requested the closures which followed in 1854, following national legislation in 1853 empowering the privy council.<sup>81</sup> This did not immediately close additional churchyards away from the main church: St Nicholas' churchyard on the Back was only closed four years later, and Redcliffe's churchyard only in 1866 for a railway extension (a parochial churchyard was established near Arno's Vale). Some nonconformist yards, such as Redcross Street, also remained in operation.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> S. Hardiman, *The 1832 Cholera Epidemic* (Bristol, 2005); J. Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1887), 139, 186–7; *London Gazette*, 21 Sep. 1832, 2119.

<sup>78</sup> Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*, 226; Mihailovic, 'The dead', 284–92; J. Rugg, 'The rise of cemetery companies in Britain 1820–1852', University of Stirling Ph.D. thesis, 1992, 17–19, 34, 97, 306; *Arno's Vale Bristol* (Bristol, 2007); Clark, *Report*, 160, 220–4. Clark obtained his information from Charles Savery, registrar of Arno's Vale Cemetery, whose 'extensive experience of mortuary arrangements in Bristol' Clark cited at length in his report (165–7) although Savery can hardly have been disinterested, especially in his condemnation of the use of church vaults, which were probably the main competition to the cemetery. Competition from Arno's Vale was presumably one cause for the Anglican initiative to develop more burial space (see n. 67 above), whose report failed to mention the cemetery's consecrated space as a possible solution to their space shortage.

<sup>79</sup> See 6 Aug. 1842, 25 Sep. 1847 and 30 Jun. 1849. I have not been able to conduct a search of the other newspapers, which were less reformist than the *Mercury*.

<sup>80</sup> Clark, *Report*, 159–67. 733 people were buried in Arno's Vale cemetery in 1849, including 332 from St Peter's parish, which was home both to the city workhouse and the cholera hospital established that year (160), and Savery explained that they accepted several hundred cholera corpses for which there was 'no suitable ground found in the city' and that 'the corporation of the poor have since made arrangements for the burial of the poor who die at the hospital [meaning the city workhouse, St Peter's Hospital]' at the cemetery (220–1).

<sup>81</sup> *London Gazette*, 21 Feb. 1854, 514 (revised 1 Dec. 3907).

<sup>82</sup> Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*, 312–16, 337–8, 356, 426, 523; Mihailovic, 'The dead', 295.

### Conclusion

What can we learn from this comparative exercise? It is clear that two well-established southern cities could experience very different patterns of change, especially in their Anglican provision, reflecting medieval differences of organization as well as the differential impact of nonconformity, much greater in Bristol. Common factors include the potentially transformative effect of epidemics (plague, cholera) and population pressure (though this was again much greater in Bristol than Exeter), but also great conservatism, with a strong desire to use the inner-city burial places, including an intensified use of space inside and underneath church buildings. The major periods of change coincided with the three great shocks to church–state relations: the Reformation, the mid-seventeenth-century crisis and the reform period of the 1830s and 1840s, but these did not necessarily overturn existing arrangements. Apart from the loss of burial places in religious houses, the Reformation had little direct effect in either city, while the Exeter changes 1637–64 were not paralleled in Bristol, partly because Exeter’s citywide arrangements were simpler to change (if city and cathedral could agree) than Bristol’s more decentralized provision by parish. The growth of nonconformity initially affected few burials: in 1790s Exeter, non-Anglican burial places accounted for less than 1 in 400 burials, though the impact was much stronger in Bristol (where almost 9 per cent of burials were in non-Anglican grounds as early as the 1740s). By contrast, in both cities an ever-growing percentage of both the living and the dead were in suburban parishes: the story of how their churchyards met their needs (in slower-growing Exeter) or failed to do so (in Bristol, leading both to new parishes and to private provision) has been unduly overshadowed by the gradual overwhelming of the older city centre graveyards.