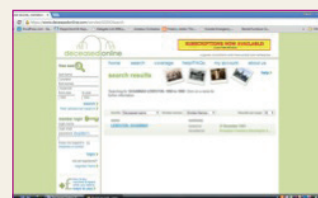


Magnificent DeceasedOnline includes records from three of the seven most famous Victorian cemeteries in London, including Brompton Cemetery pictured here



1 The quickest way to search is to use the free search – top left on the home page. This reveals results showing both a name and a summary, which covers the date a person was buried on, and which cemetery or crematorium the burial was recorded at. The name links to the next page, which has the burial register details.

Looking online: Burial records

Aside from BMD registers, the web can help locate ancestors with records of how their lives were memorialised via DeceasedOnline, writes **David Lewiston Sharpe**

The date of 1 July 1837 marks a threshold in the history of modern record keeping. The 1836 Births and Deaths Registration Act aimed to introduce a national system of civil registration across England and Wales, and in 1837 this system officially started. Before this, there were no records for births and deaths as such, though parish registers chronicled the yearly cycles of burials and baptisms which ran parallel to the life of the church calendar's religious festivals. A similar system started in Scotland on 1 January 1855.

In 1874 it became an offence not to report a death

or birth, and the fine of £2 was a high price for the age. These measures have had a positive impact on the researcher. The centralisation of records makes for an easier transfer to modern database systems (technical issues aside, of course) and DeceasedOnline, an internet database founded in 2008, is working to assemble a comprehensive, searchable, 'total view' of burials. It currently has around 150 sets of data relating to participating cemeteries and crematoria, whose records are searchable via the site (www.deceasedonline.com).

The site already presents millions of individual records nationally largely from the 1850s onwards, and mostly

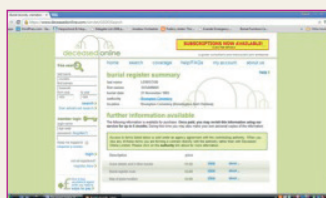
England and Wales. Still a 'work in progress', of course, the database aims to include as full a picture as practicable. A further five million records from 17 sources are due to go online shortly, with another 13 million records currently under negotiation from another 100 authorities.

The site is pretty clear, straightforward and uncluttered. The last name, first name, and years fields at the top left on the homepage put the search function first, and while the records have to be paid for using a voucher system (which has replaced a system of credits), the search, by names and variants, is no-nonsense. You can also filter by 'all records', 'burial records only', 'cremation

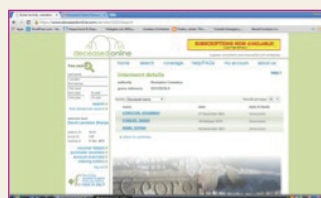
records only' or 'headstone collections' only. The function is accessed via the second main 'search' tab along the top (one of six tabs which give the site's construction a fairly streamlined presentation). The 'coverage' tab reveals the collections list, arranged by a sortable list (alphabetical or by date of addition) on a series of separate pages showing 10 at a time.

Within each set, localised by city, county, or borough, there are often a dozen or more burial sites included. There are currently 67 sets of data acquired via The National Archives (county burial records), and, at the moment, just 17 sets of data for Scotland (which, nonetheless, amount to hundreds of thousands ▶

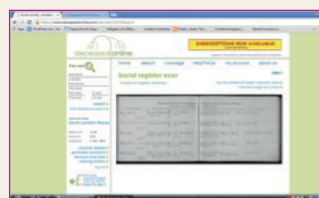
Step-by-step: Find an ancestor on the site



2 The burial register summary comprises the name and surname of the deceased, burial date, authority, and location. This page also tells you if any further information is available, such as grave details, including other burials in that grave, a burial register scan and a map of grave location. These data views cost, in turn, £1.50, £2 and £2.50.



3 The interment details give the authority under whose control the site and burial lies, with a grave reference number identifying the precise location of the plot. This will also show the name of others who might be buried in the same plot, if it proves to be a communal interment.



4 The burial register scan shows a facsimile of the original register, which is again useful for context, as it shows other interments. This data reveals the officiating vicar (or similar), the place where death occurred, and, if it was a burial rather than a cremation, even the depth at which they were interred!

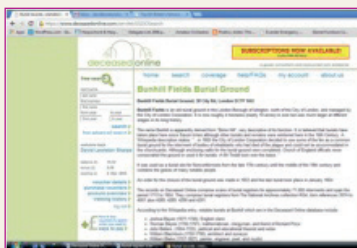


5 The third item under the burial register summary is a link to a map of the cemetery, which can present a complete map and detailed plan of a given area where the grave may be located. However, it does not necessarily indicate the exact location of the plot.

Top three: Records on the site

BUNHILL FIELDS, LONDON

1 Bunhill Fields (the name deriving originally from 'Bone Hill', appropriately) is a key burial ground in London in which poet and visionary William Blake, and Daniel Defoe, novelist and satirist, are both buried. Their actual grave locations are not known, but more recent markers attract frequent offerings of flowers, candles and copper coins placed on the tombstones in their memory. DeceasedOnline gives access to 71,000 burials, from the 18th century to the 1850s, by which time, the site was already closed to new burials.



OVERSEAS BURIALS - MALTA

2 The British Empire assimilated Malta in 1800 – it became a Crown Colony in 1814. The islands became strategically important as headquarters of the British Mediterranean fleet and troops were stationed at Valletta, the heavily defended capital. DeceasedOnline has access to records of the Quarantine Bastion Cemetery in Floriana, just outside Valletta, as well as Msida Bastion, the Cholera Cemetery and the Greek Cemetery. Quarantine Cemetery was enlarged in 1843, and was used up to 1868. As the DeceasedOnline blog explains, The National Archives has records of inscriptions for headstones that were destroyed in World War II. There are various military burials across the island.



MANOR PARK, LONDON

3 Given that DeceasedOnline has important records from the 19th century, it is difficult not to mention the Jack the Ripper murders, and the interment of his second victim Annie Chapman at Manor Park cemetery in September 1888. This cemetery in Forest Gate has seen over 300,000 burials in its 43-acre site, ample accommodation also for the 38-stone William Thomas Ecclestone – reputedly the world's heaviest man at the time of his death in 1915. You can see his grave marked 'Jolly Jumbo' at Manor Park. DeceasedOnline holds 42,000 records from its crematorium.



► of Scottish records). They also have some collections that have to be browsed, and are not indexed. This can, of course, be useful for context, as in any research.

Given that some burials become, through time, hidden from view – by being overgrown in unkempt graveyards or suffering from war damage and neglect, but also as land is reclaimed for housing – what can be done about finding ancestors whose resting places may seem lost? The site includes a collection relating to 187 sites in England and Wales involving the removal of graves and tombstones in disused cemeteries.

MILITARY BURIALS

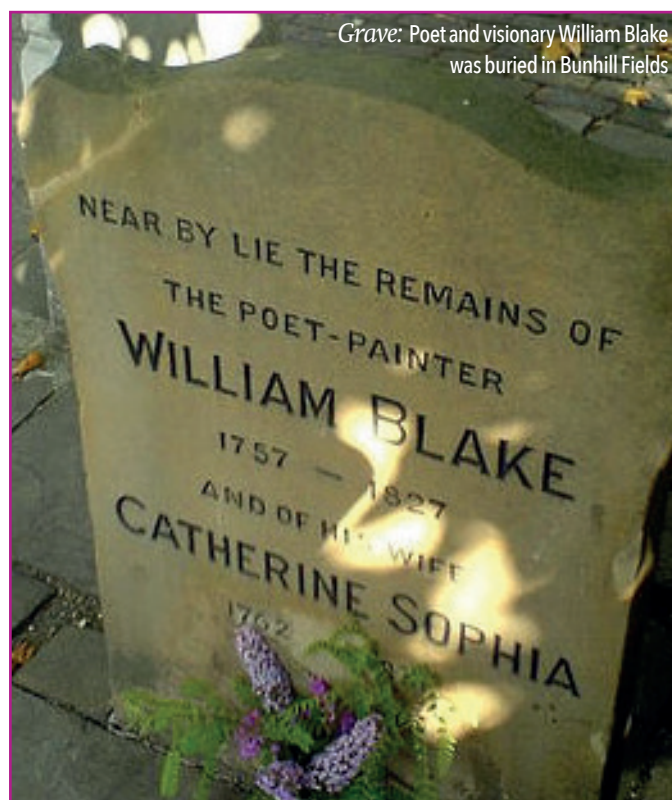
By no means a major part so far of the accessible records, but nevertheless of key interest, are military records. These cover mainly the second half of the 19th century, but do include records from the two world wars, and some other military records up to the 1990s. The records include those of British military

cemeteries in Egypt, Malta, Cyprus and Singapore, but are most useful to those following 'home ground' research.

The military records are presented separately, but also grouped under a discrete collection heading: 'The National Archives – Military Burials'. There are 10 cemeteries listed: Aldershot, Bordon, Colchester, Canterbury, Greenwich Royal Hospital and Chapel, Haslar and Clayhall (Royal Navy), Royal Victoria Hospital, Royal Garrison Church of St George, Sandhurst and Sheerness Dockyard Church. The overseas burials include four sites in Egypt, five in Malta and of one cemetery each in Cyprus and Singapore. Some of these records date back to the beginning of the 19th century, though most are from mid-century onwards.

WORKING CLASS BURIALS

Earlier this year, at *Who Do You Think You Are? Live*, DeceasedOnline launched its collection for Sandwell in the Midlands. This covers



Grave: Poet and visionary William Blake was buried in Bunhill Fields



Website The homepage of the DeceasedOnline website.

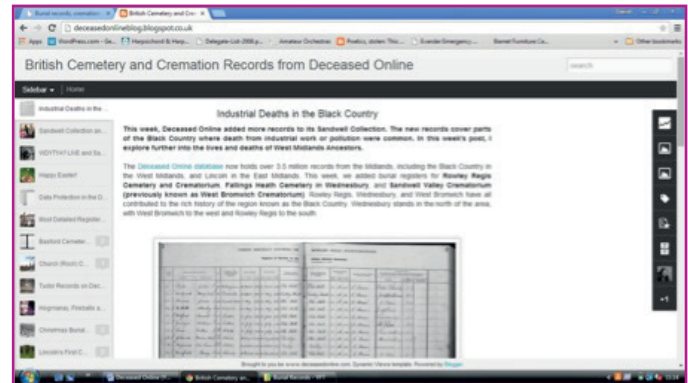
11 cemeteries and crematoria, with burial records in this part of the industrial Black Country going back to 1858.

For William Shenstone, the poet from nearby Halesowen, there was already a whiff in the air, in the late 18th century, that a “noxious vapour clogs the poison’d sky”. The area saw revolutions in engineering and manufacturing, and those with family links to this historically significant region can now find their burial records on the site.

Someone who died within the embrace of the workhouse, such as at the Shoreditch Infirmary just off Hoxton Street in East London, might have lived and worked a life literally in its shadow. It can be hard to find out more about such an individual than can be drawn out of census returns or BMD registers, but it is not a lost cause. DeceasedOnline makes it possible to find burial records and plot numbers at the given cemetery. Though they often constitute communal burials,

this website proves a very useful facilitator. However, it can, like much research, also lead to more questions.

Burials at places such as Brompton, Highgate, Kensal Green, or others of London’s ‘magnificent seven’ cemeteries, sometimes juxtapose the famous with the historically ‘nameless’. It is possible that Brunel, Pankhurst or Marx rest alongside our own forebears. To assuage the frustrations of searching for elusive ancestors, DeceasedOnline’s creators have assembled their FAQs systematically. Around 40 common research or site-specific issues are addressed – including how to use their vouchers, prices, payments and account information. Some common problems addressed are misspellings of names, partial anonymity resulting from communal (or ‘paupers’) graves, transcription errors, or the oddity in Scottish records of burials of females that include the maiden name, previous



Blog A recent homepage of the DeceasedOnline blog – this highlights the recent acquisition of records for Sandwell.

Quick Tips

1 Rather than using the quick search on the home page, click through to the Advanced Search (also free) via the second tab along the top. This lets you search also by country, region, county and contributor (cemetery or site).

2 Once you set up an account, there are handy records of your activity on the site, including a current balance regarding vouchers, viewing history and a vouchers purchase link (with pricing schedule and subscriptions information).

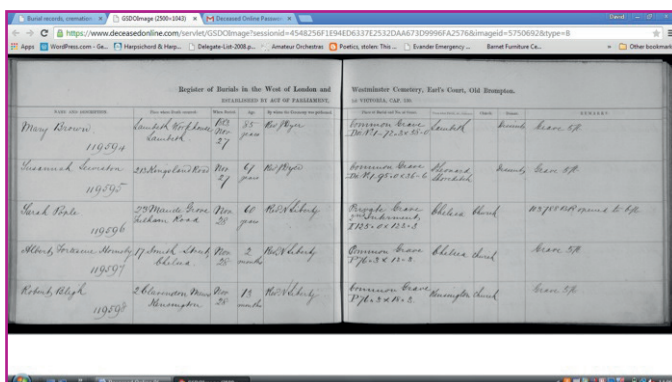
3 Under ‘search’, ‘coverage’ and ‘my account’, there are useful ‘help’ links on the top right which give details and descriptions of how to use those pages and functions on the site – useful additional guidance while searching.

married name or names changed by deed poll, given in different fields (including under forename!).

What is the cost of searching DeceasedOnline? Instead of just showing the value in credits for accessing either ‘grave details [including others buried with the subject in question]’, ‘burial register scan’, or ‘map of grave location’, the prices are given

in monetary terms. You can buy a £5 voucher, or larger value vouchers up to the value of £50, which include a bonus that is of greater value the higher value voucher you buy. The charge for accessing a particular data view takes the cost in equal proportions from voucher and bonus, which means your voucher goes further, once you’ve bought a voucher greater than £5. ■

Burial You can look at scans of burial records online



Plot Find out whereabouts your ancestor was buried

