

EXPLORER GUIDE

Something for everyone



**Ballast
Hills**

Burial Ground

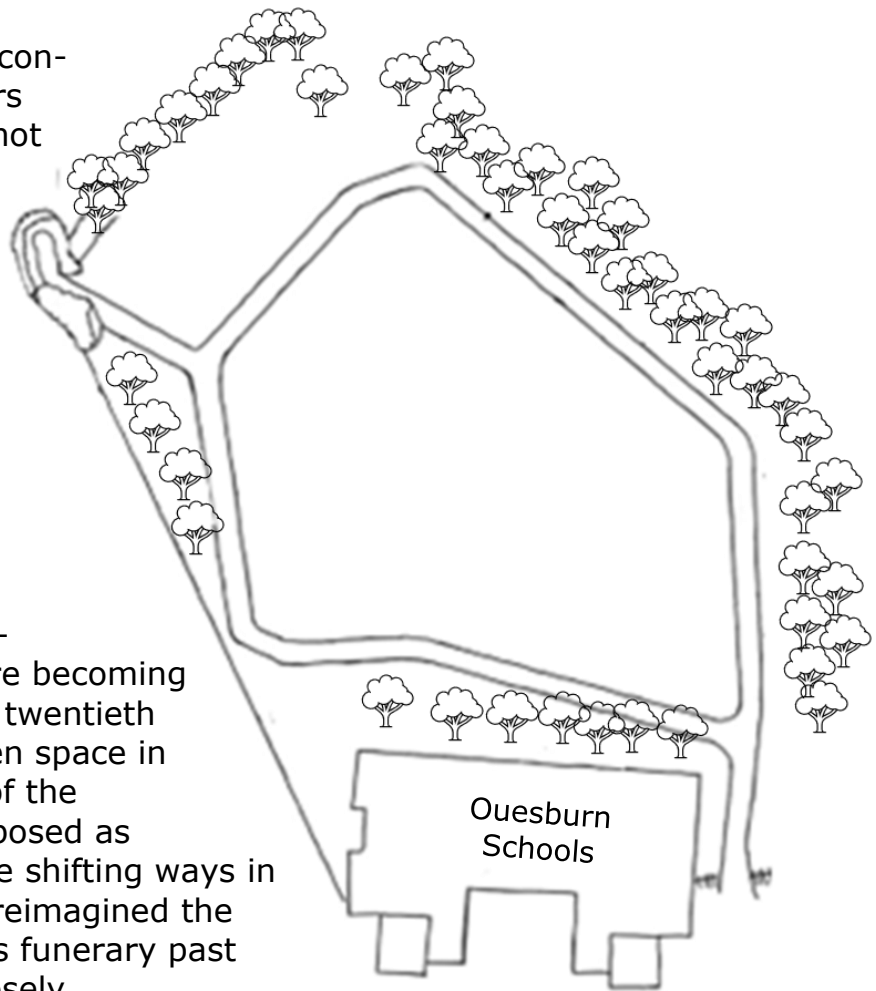
**Read the guide, solve the
clues, and see if you can
become a BHBG Explorer.**

We are revising this guide, please email
ballast.hills@newcastle.ac.uk to make
recommendations on how to improve it.

Ballast Hills Burial Ground

It began in the mid-1600s as an unconsecrated burial ground for Dissenters and other Nonconformists who did not wish to be buried in Anglican churchyards. Over time, it also became the main burial place for the working poor of all faiths; low fees made it accessible to many. More than 40,000 people were laid to rest here—local families, sailors, children, migrants, and victims of accidents and epidemics.

Since its closure in 1853, the site has gone through several changes in use. In the late nineteenth century it was laid out as a garden, before becoming a children's playground in the early twentieth century. Today it survives as a green space in the Ouseburn Valley, where many of the gravestones can still be seen repurposed as pathways. These changes reflect the shifting ways in which communities have used and reimagined the ground over time, while traces of its funerary past remain visible to those who look closely.



Names and Occupations

Gravestones record many different names and occupations. Do you recognise any local family names? What is the oldest date of death you can find, and who lived to the greatest age? Some jobs may be unfamiliar—can you work out what they meant? Take your time to look closely and decide what you find most interesting. If you spot something unusual, make a note of it to share later.

Stonemasons' Names

Some gravestones include the name of the stonemason who carved them. These are usually found near the base of the stone and give us clues about local craftspeople and their skills.

Resurrectionists

Long ago, some people were known as resurrectionists. They were grave robbers who dug up freshly buried bodies to sell to doctors and medical schools for lessons. This was frightening for families, who worried about their loved ones not resting in peace. Ballast Hills was one of the places they sometimes came to, because so many poor and working families were buried here. If you could afford to pay more, you might be buried deeper in the ground, which made it harder for resurrectionists to steal the body.



Detective Work

1. **Find the gravestone of Cuthbert Johnson.** How many children can you tell he had from the inscription? (Tip: look for the list of names.) Answer: _____
2. **Can you find D. Haggie's gravestone?** Mark it on your map.
3. **Near the hedge archway there's a signpost.** What is the closest place it points to? What is the furthest? Closest: _____ Furthest: _____
4. **Look for Rev. Thomas Sommerville's gravestone.** Can you find it?
5. **Check the bottom of gravestones, the area well below the main inscription. Can you spot a stonemason's name?** (Hint: most are carved near the base (the hatch markings). You can also see some examples on the opposite page. One clear example can be found near the bench.)
6. **Find William Brown's gravestone.** It is along the pathway near the trees. What is unusual about this stone? Answer: _____
7. **Look at the wall that runs along the old Ouseburn School towards Ford Street.** Can you find a gravestone built into the wall? Write down the name and the date. Name: _____ Date: _____
8. **Can you spot all the gravestones with metal inset into them?** Count how many you can find. What do you think these metal pieces were used for in the past? Number: _____ Idea: _____
9. **Can you find the burial place of Thomas Kirkby Fife?** What was his job, and where did he live? Job: _____ Place: _____

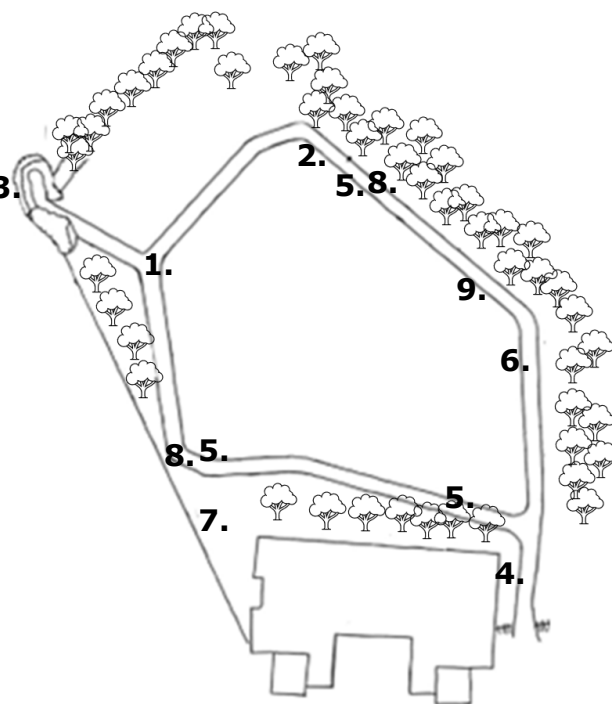
10. **Stand in the burial ground and look around.** How many famous landmarks can you see from Ballast Hills? Answer: _____

Sketching Activity

Choose your two favourite gravestones. Make a quick sketch of each one and note what you like about them.



Answers: **1.** See map for the location, four children (three sons and at least one daughter). **2.** See map. **3.** Closest is St Lawrence Park (just 5 minutes away); furthest is the City Centre (about 30 minutes away). **4.** See map. **5.** See map for several locations. **6.** The carving of the date has been corrected. **7.** See map for location, the name on it is R GRAHAM and the date is 1786. **8.** See map—there are two gravestones with metal drain covers in them. These covers were not part of the original stones; they were added later, when the gravestones were reused to make the pathway. **9.** Thomas Kirkby Fife (see map for location) was a surgeon from Gateshead. **10.** You should be able to see the River Tyne, the Tyne Bridge, the Millennium Bridge, the Baltic, and the Glasshouse (formerly called the Sage).



The BHBG Project, led by Newcastle University researchers together with descendants and volunteers, is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (Curiosity Award). Together we are uncovering the stories of those buried here and restoring connections between the site and its heritage. Our work combines research, community engagement, and creative activities to bring Ballast Hills back into public memory.

Scan the QR code to find out more about BHBG and subscribe to our newsletter.

