

Spring Semester 2024

In Situ

News and Events of the Harvard Standing
Committee on Archaeology





Fig. 1. The headstone of Jane (1741)

Scan this QR code for a 3D model of Jane's headstone ([link here](#))

Cicely, Jane, and Landscape Archaeology in Cambridge's Old Burying Ground

Jason Ur (*Stephen Phillips Professor of Archaeology and Ethnology in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University*)

Aja Lans (*Inequality in America Initiative Postdoctoral Fellow, 2021-2023*)

Andrew Bair (*PhD Student, Anthropology*)

When you're at a university as old as Harvard, you don't need to travel far to encounter the remains of the past. In Cambridge, centuries-old traces of the past surround us. Some are central and celebrated, like the statue of John Harvard in front of University Hall. Others are hidden within the fabric of 21st century Cambridge and overlooked, consciously or otherwise. Among the latter is Cambridge's Old Burying Ground (fig. 2), the last resting place of its residents since the town's founding in the 1630s.

For two decades, Harvard college students have been visiting the Burying Ground as part of introduc-

tory Archaeology and General Education courses. Our visits have stressed the memorialization of the dead, and particularly how the iconography of headstones has evolved through time. Students learn about important principles of archaeology, like sampling and artifact seriation.

Towards the back, near Christ Church, lie the headstones of Cicely (fig. 5) and Jane (fig. 1), two "Negro servants" who lived and died in the early 18th century. These are the only two headstones of enslaved persons in the burying ground. For years, Cicely and Jane have played a crucial role in our lessons about

sampling – despite their uniqueness and importance, most sampling strategies fail to discover them. Does it matter, we ask the students, that your analysis did not identify the only two enslaved people in the Burying Ground? For the instructors, it's a powerful example of how sampling approaches can overlook infrequent but nonetheless socially significant material aspects of the past.

In recent years, with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and our national reckoning on the legacy of slavery at Harvard and elsewhere, we thought it was time to recenter our thinking in the Old Burying Ground on Cicely and Jane. Where were they buried, and why? How do their resting places relate to those of the families that enslaved them? Do their monuments indicate their status as enslaved persons in any material way? In other words, we approached the case of these two young women from the perspective of landscape archaeology.

Any question of space requires locational precision. Therefore, we have flown a camera drone over the burying ground on several occasions, producing accurate imagery and topographic data (fig. 4) which

has allowed us to map not just the headstones of Cicely and Jane, but every headstone, footstone, obelisk and tomb. Our map confirmed what we already suspected: Jane and Cecily were both buried far away from the families that they served. Slavery in New England mostly involved domestic labor, so the enslaved would have worked for and lived with their white enslavers in intimate proximity. But any familial closeness, if it existed, did not manifest itself in death; these two young women were placed at the far outer edge of the burying ground, very far from the families who had enslaved them.


They were also buried quite close to Charles Lenox and his daughter, two free Black persons in the early 19th century. Though the Lenoxes were buried one hundred years after Cicely and Jane, it is significant that four Black individuals, the only four Black individuals with surviving headstones in the entire burying ground, were buried so close together. These four burials are placed in a largely vacant part of the burying ground – there are few headstones surrounding them. But what about underground? We know that Cicely and Jane were not the only two enslaved persons



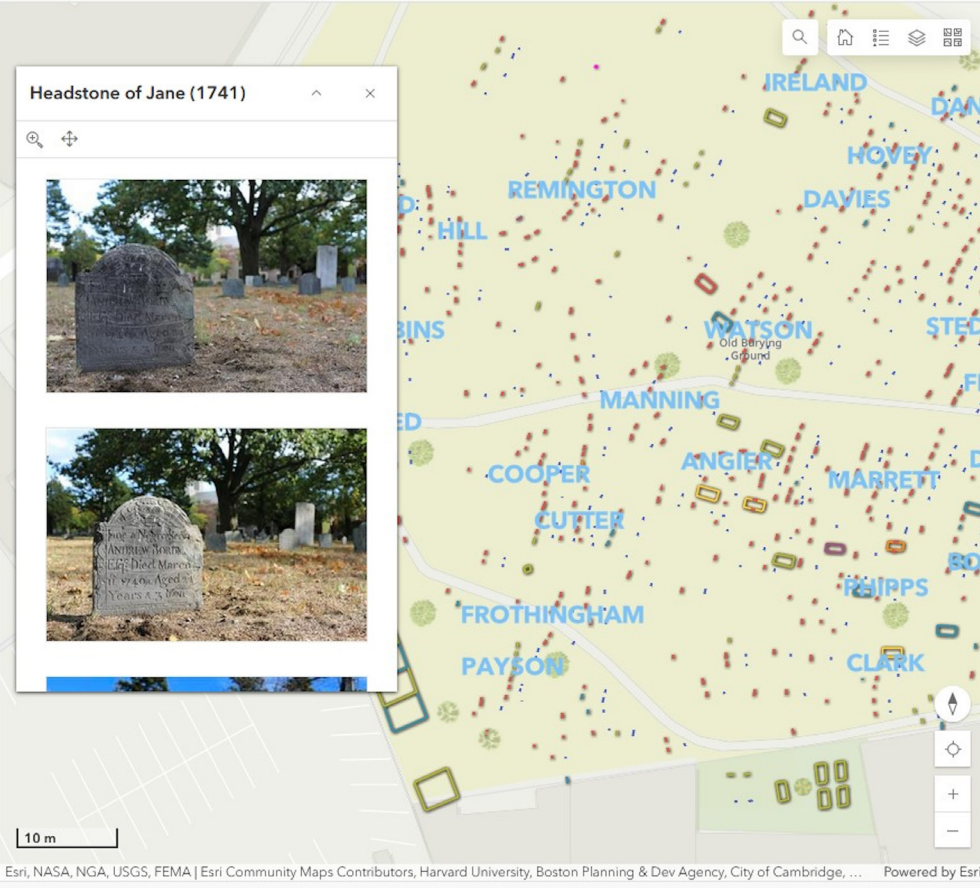
Fig. 2. Aerial photo of the Old Burying Ground, with Harvard Yard at left and Boston in the distance. Drone photo by Andrew Bair

Filters for the Old Burying Ground

- Choose a Family Name
All Families
- Select an iconographic style
All Styles
- Choose a Year Range
AD 1588 - AD 2002
- Select a carver
All carvers
- Select a probate status
No status selected
- Photographed?
All statuses



Scan this QR code to view the Old Burying Grounds Dashboard ([link here](#))



Selection contains

669

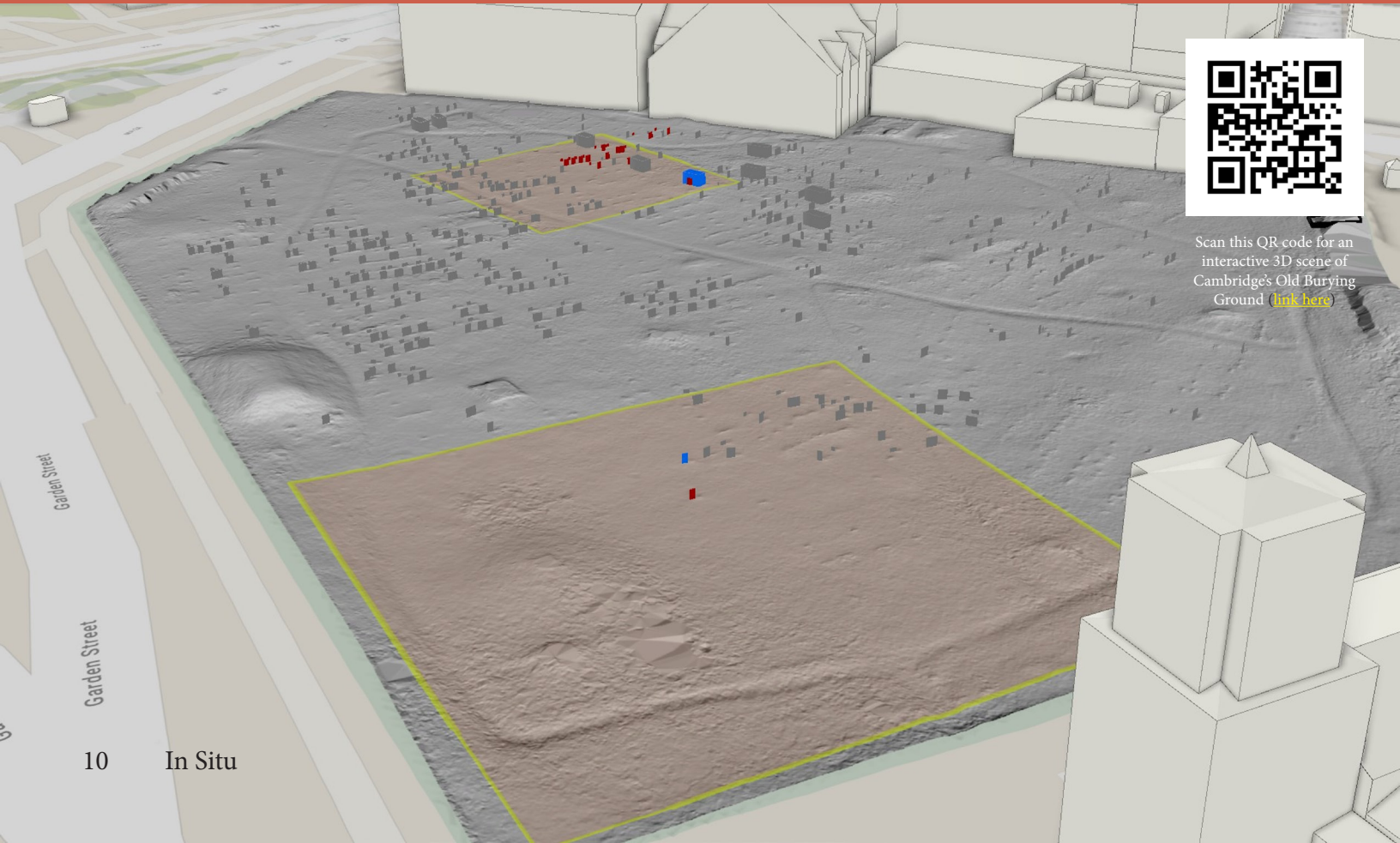
Headstones

Search...

Greenleaf-Dana (1829)	Cambridge
Cicely (1714)	Cambridge
Jane (1741)	Cambridge
Abbott Caroline (1817)	Cambridge
Adams Rebeckah (1718)	Cambridge
Adams Robert (1806)	Cambridge
Amsden Jacob (1701)	Cambridge
Andrew Timothy (1674)	Cambridge
Andrew Elizabeth (1689)	Cambridge
Andrew John (1693)	Cambridge
Andrew Jonathan (1700)	Cambridge
Andrew Seeth (1700)	Cambridge
Andrew Samuel (1701)	Cambridge

Fig. 3. The New England Burying Grounds dashboard (top).

Fig. 4. The Old Burying Ground as it would have appeared in 1741, the year Jane died. In the foreground are the headstones of Cicely (blue) and Jane (red) – note how they were buried on the outer edge of the burying ground. In the background, much closer to 18th century Cambridge, are the tomb of William Brattle (blue) and the headstones of members of the Bordman family (red). Yellow-bordered areas were surveyed by ground-penetrating radar in August 2023 (bottom).



in colonial Cambridge - they are however the only two who got durable markers that have survived to the present. It seemed likely to us that this vacant northwestern area might hold many more burials of other members of Cambridge's enslaved people.

To investigate this possibility, we needed a non-invasive method. We turned to ground penetrating radar (GPR), which uses radar waves to detect buried archaeological features up to two meters under the ground. In August 2023, we selected two areas to survey: the "vacant" northwestern corner, and a densely occupied but smaller area in the eastern part, around the Brattle and Bordman families. The eastern area would provide us "control" to interpret the findings in the larger northwestern.

After collecting data and interpreting the results, there was unmistakable evidence in both areas for unmarked burials. In the eastern higher status survey area, there were only a handful of unmarked burials. In the northwestern survey area, near Cicely and Jane, there was a high concentration of them—in fact, there are more unmarked burials than marked burials. We

think we have found the resting places of members of Cambridge's historic community whose grave markers have not survived to the present day— very likely including others of Cambridge's enslaved Black population.

In this first phase of research, we have focused on the stories of Cicely and Jane, but there are many more stories to be told in this space. For example, are the size of monuments related to aspects of identity like age and gender? How did families choose where to place their dead? Are there differences within families that might tell us about economic and social inequality among the white residents? Finally, are the spatial patterns in Cambridge's Old Burying Ground found elsewhere in the Greater Boston area? We hope to expand our research to other colonial burying grounds in Medford, Watertown, Arlington, and elsewhere.

We invite you to these so explore these monuments and burying grounds yourself online. Click on the linkS on the images or scan the QR codes to visit interactive maps, dashboards, and 3-D scenes.

Fig. 5. The headstone of Cicely (1714)



Scan this QR code for a 3D model of Cicely's headstone ([link here](#))