

## **Information on how to trace a baby's grave or a record of cremation:**

The issue of tracing the grave of a baby who has died, or a record of cremation of a baby, can be a very difficult time for people both mentally and emotionally. The Mariposa Trust are fully aware of how important it is for many people to trace burials relating to historic losses, and have tried to produce a document that empowers and helps to guide through the search process. It can be time consuming, but persistence can pay off.

### **History of Registration:**

In 1926 an Act was passed, which made provision for the registration of stillborn children. This came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1927, which meant that babies that were stillborn had to be correctly registered. Until then the only regulation that existed was the 1874 requirement that a declaration of stillbirth certificate had to be obtained to ensure that no child born alive, but who died quickly afterwards, was buried as a stillbirth. Unfortunately many such neonatal deaths (within the first 28-days after birth) went unregistered, as the parents were liable for the costs of both a birth and death certificate, a cost which many could not afford.

### **Miscarriage vs Stillbirth:**

Miscarriage refers to a loss during the first 24-weeks of pregnancy, with an early miscarriage being during the first 13-weeks (1<sup>st</sup> trimester) and a late miscarriage during weeks 13-24 (2<sup>nd</sup> trimester.) The law states that babies lost before 24-weeks (and until 1992, it was 28-weeks) are miscarriages, not stillbirths, and as such Cemeteries and Crematoria do not have to legally keep any records, and there is no requirement within law for the baby to have a formal burial or cremation. Because of this, it is unlikely that if you are searching for a baby that was born prior to 1992 and that was born before 28-weeks gestation, any records will exist.

### **Stillbirth and Neonatal losses:**

Until thirty to forty years ago, many parents were never consulted over funeral arrangements for babies lost through stillbirth or as a neonatal loss, with individual hospitals having set procedures for how they dealt with the body. As such many parents were never told what happened to the body of their baby, or the location of any burial or cremation. However in more recent years, parents more often than not take over the planning of their baby's funeral, so will be aware of all arrangements, and the location of their child. As such, it is more difficult to trace the body of a baby, the further back in time you go.

It is worth noting that:

- Records are not stored indefinitely by hospitals and trusts.
- Hospitals often move locations, transfer between trusts or authorities or close altogether, and as such records may not be easy to track down, if it is possible at all.
- Funeral Directors at times close down, are brought out or merge, making the tracing of records difficult, or they may simply not keep records dating back that far.

But it is also worth noting that:

- Cemeteries and Crematoria are legally obliged to keep full permanent records of all burials and cremations.

## What you will need to do:

The most important element of searching for a grave or burial site, will be to get together as much accurate information as possible about the people involved. It will be difficult if all you have to go on is 'Mrs Smith, Kent, 1960's' as there will be potentially thousands of people who fit that profile. The important information to try and provide will be:

- Full name of the mother (including maiden name), as well as the address she resided at.
- Name of Hospital
- Date of the birth, or at least a month and year
- Any other relevant information, such as gestation, names of doctors....(people will often have mentioned things like this, and though the piece of information may seem small, it can help to solve a mystery.)

You should then contact the General Office of the hospital in which the baby was stillborn or died, providing them with as much information as you can. They should then be able to explain about the form or burial or cremation, and the funeral directors who were used for said burial or cremation.

The funeral directors, will hopefully still maintain records dating back to the time in question, and should be able to provide you with details of which Cemetery or Crematorium was used.

Finally you will then be able to contact the Cemetery or Crematorium, who as explained previously, are legally required to maintain records, and who should be able to help you find the grave\* or area\*\* in question.

\*In many cases, stillborn children were buried together in a shared grave with multiple other babies that had died. At other times, a baby's body would have been added to the grave of an adult who had passed away.

\*\*The graves were seldom marked, and as such may be harder to find, however the cemetery should have an accurate plan detailing all marked and unmarked grave positions.

If you are in a position whereby neither the hospital and/or the funeral directors are able to provide any assistance or information relating to the final resting place, you may have to start contacting the cemeteries and crematoria closest to the hospital or area where a baby died, and asking their advice as to other local cemeteries or crematoria which may have been used, or which may be able to help. Members of the public can view some records, though some are restricted due to Data Protection. Staff may still be able to search these records for you, as long as they have basic information like the name and surname of the baby, and the date of the stillbirth or death.

If you do have success, and find the grave, you may want to take photo's of the grave or area, so that you have tangible evidence of the final resting place. You may be able place an item on the grave or in the area that ashes were scattered, and the staff will be able to advise on what is or isn't allowed, especially if it is a shared grave.

If you need further information, please contact the Mariposa Trust via email at [office@sayinggoodbye.org](mailto:office@sayinggoodbye.org). If you do have success, we would love to know about it, so please write to us, and tell us your story.