

DERBY CATHEDRAL: THE CAVENDISH VAULT

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the recording at Derby Cathedral of the Cavendish family vault, in use from 1607 to 1848. It discusses the problems of identification and the typology of lead coffin forms, and it concludes with a consideration of the wider priorities for archaeological recording and conservation in this branch of ecclesiastical archaeology. The vault contained 44 coffins and 2 burial drums.

INTRODUCTION

The Cavendish vault lies beneath the south aisle of Derby Cathedral, and was in use from 1607 until 1848. It consists of two chambers. In 1977, the east (inner) chamber was sealed and the west (outer) chamber converted into a crypt chapel. This report is based on the record made of the vault contents in 1977, before the nine coffins in the west chamber were removed to the east chamber and stacked in the passages.

In 1601, Elizabeth, countess of Shrewsbury ('Bess of Hardwick'), made preparations for her approaching death by purchasing from the Corporation of Derby the ground of the south chapel of All Saints Church, Derby. In the aisle of this chapel, at its eastern end, she began to erect a monument to herself, recording her four husbands. Beneath this chapel, otherwise known as St. Katherine's Quire, she caused to be constructed a vault measuring 16' [east-west] x 11' 9" (4.6 x 3.6 metres). In 1607, Elizabeth was the first person to be buried in the vault; she was followed in 1628 by her grandson, William, second earl of Devonshire. A further forty or more burials were made until the final closure of the vault in 1848.

During this period the vault was twice enlarged, first in about 1750, and then, with the addition of the western chamber, in about 1810. Meanwhile, apart from the late Gothic west tower, the medieval church which stood above the vault had been completely rebuilt (by James Gibbs, in 1723-5). Externally, the vault is distinguishable at the south-east corner of the cathedral by roughly dressed sandstone masonry and by a square-headed Perpendicular window. In the church above are four monuments commemorating those who lie in the vault below. These are: the sumptuous monument to Bess of Hardwick; the sad remains of a once elegant free-standing memorial to the second earl and countess of Devonshire (*terminus post quem* 1628, by Edward Marshall), dismantled in 1876; and two fine wall monuments to Caroline, countess of Bessborough (1760, by Rysbrack), and to her husband William, the second earl (1793, by Nollekens). Also on display is a collection of sixteen coffin breast-plates, removed from the vault below in about 1975. (In 1655, the second countess, Christiana, obtained a bishop's licence for the erection of a memorial chapel for herself and her ancestors, to be erected on the south side of the chancel and to measure 24' x 22' (Chatsworth Archives). This chapel was removed in Gibbs' rebuilding of 1723-5.)

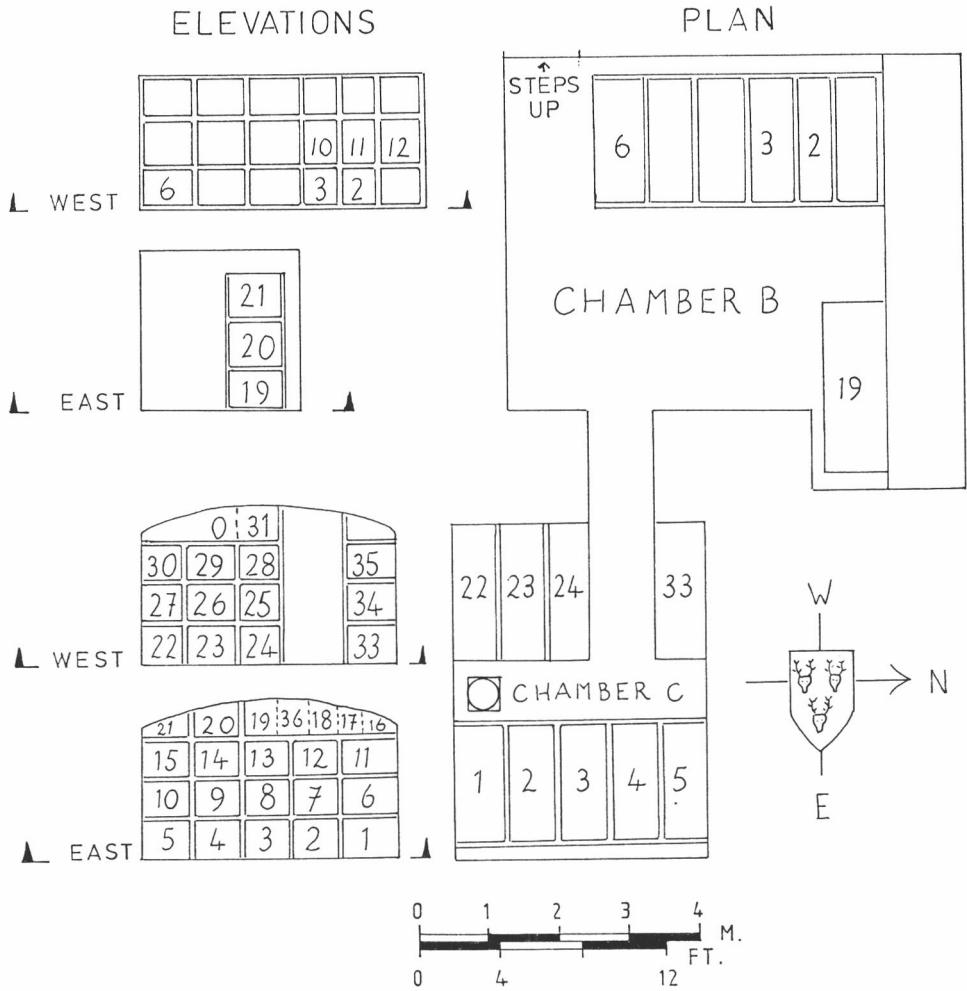


Fig.1 Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault: plan and cross-sections.

THE VAULT (Fig. 1)

The eastern chamber has a segmental barrel-vaulted roof resting on the north and south walls. Against the east and west walls are stone-built tiers of shelving intended to house coffins. All are filled, with the topmost tier on the east side holding two more coffins than was originally intended. A window opening high on the south wall lights the passage between the shelving. A further passage (12' 3" long) enters from the west (Plate 1), linking this earlier chamber to the 'New Vault', constructed in about 1810. The western chamber has a similar segmental barrel-vault but is a more spacious room (20' 1" [east-west] x 23' 1"), with tiers of shelving against the west wall, a smaller rank of shelving against the east wall, and low benches against part of the east wall and along the full length of the north wall. This second vault is entered at the south-west corner down a flight of steps from the south aisle. In 1977, the eastern chamber was fully

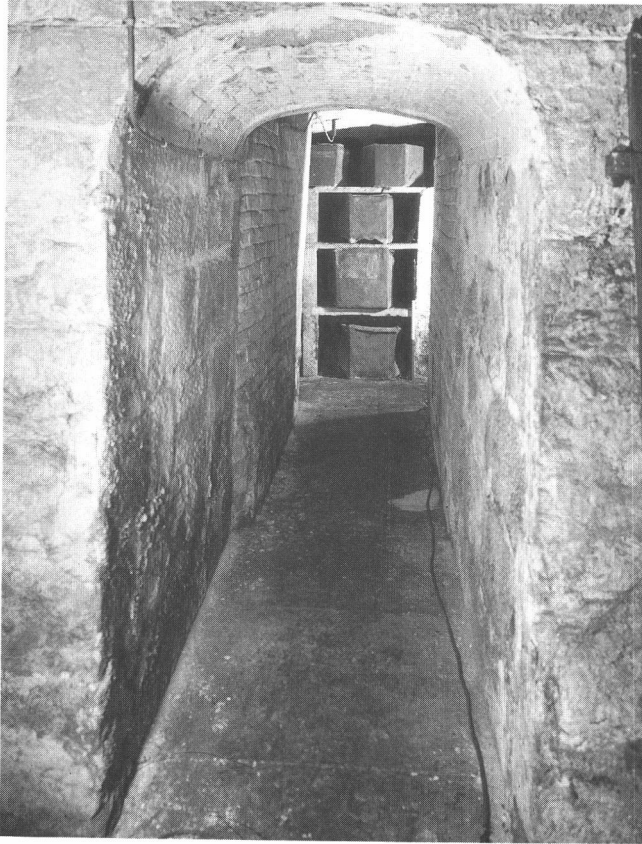


Plate 1 Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault: the passage linking the western chamber to the eastern chamber, looking east. The coffins visible are (from base) Nos. 4, 9, 14, 20 and 21.

occupied by coffins, 35 in total, and two metal containers (a drum and a cube) stood on the floor. The western chamber contained 9 coffins, all but one of which were in their original locations; there were 12 vacant spaces (Plate 2).

THE PERSONS BURIED

The majority of those buried in the Cavendish vault were members of the family that stemmed from Bess of Hardwick. The main line of descent was represented by the earls, and later dukes, of Devonshire (7 burials), their wives (6), brothers (10), and unmarried sisters (4). Also present were the children of the dukes' brothers (7), or the wives of those children (2). In a slightly more distant relationship were members of the family of the earls of Bessborough (5): the second earl married Caroline, the eldest daughter of the third duke. The earl of Burlington was the brother of the fifth duke; he and his wife (2 burials) were interred in the vault, perhaps qualifying as heir presumptive to the fifth duke. The only unrelated burial was of Spencer, second earl of Northampton. He was killed in the Civil War skirmish of Hopton Heath on 19 March 1643, was refused burial at Compton Wynyates by the Parliamentary forces then occupying the mansion, and was brought for burial in the Cavendish vault at Derby on 4 June 1643. Ironically, his fellow officer, colonel Charles Cavendish, was himself killed in the battle for Gainsborough on 28 July 1643, and was first buried at Newark, only to be brought home for burial at Derby on 18 February 1674 (see below p.19).



Plate 2 Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault: the western chamber looking west, June 1977.

RECORDING THE BURIALS

In 1977 the immediate task was to make an accurate plan of the two burial chambers and to draw the elevations of the coffin-shelving. The second task was to record the state of each coffin, i.e. what survived of the outer wooden casing, any coffin breast-plate, escutcheon, handles or ornament, together with any funeral coronet resting on the coffin, and, where visible, the type of construction of the inner lead coffin. This information is given in Table 1 with, wherever possible, an identification of the burial. (See p.22 for the key to the abbreviations used in the text.)

Identification was certain only when the coffin plate was still attached to the wooden outer casing of the coffin still in the vault. This occurred in only four instances: CE20 (Lady Diana, d. 1721/22), CE10 (Duchess Katherine, d. 1777), CE6 (Elizabeth, d. 1779), BW6 (Duchess Elizabeth, d. 1824). However, there were 16 coffin plates on display in the south aisle, where the criteria for the choice of display was either the illustrious nature of the individual or the artistic character of the lettering on the coffin plate. For many of these plates there was no archaeological evidence to show to which coffin they had been attached, even though in the case of at least six coffins there was reason to suspect that this had occurred not long before 1977. On



Plate 3 Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault: the eastern chamber; coffins of William, fifth duke of Devonshire, d. 1811 (CW' 35: above) and Georgiana, his first wife, d. 1806 (CW' 34: below).

eight coffins there was clear coincidence between the tack holes on the metal plate and the surviving tacks on the wooden casing from which the plate had been removed:

- CE9: Marchioness Charlotte, d. 1754
- CW24: William, third duke, d. 1755
- CE15: William, fourth duke, d. 1764
- CE21: Henrietta Ponsonby, d. 1793
- CW'34: Duchess Georgiana, d. 1806 (Plate 3)
- CW25: Henry, 'the philosopher', d. 1810
- CW'35: William, fifth duke, d. 1811 (Plate 3)
- BW12: Countess Elizabeth, d. 1835.

There are two earlier sources which help to identify the persons buried in the vault. In 1879 Cox and Hope inspected the vault with the permission of the seventh duke and compiled a list of burials (Cox and Hope, 1881: 129-33). This list was based partly on the information on the coffin plates and partly on the church's register of burials: 'All the loose and accessible coffin plates were carefully copied'. Cox and Hope recorded twenty different plates from 1675 to 1824. For some burials before 1700 it is likely that no coffin plates survived, while for burials after 1750 the wood of the coffins would still have been intact and the coffin plates (still firmly attached) would not need to be recorded. Cox and Hope did not record the positions of coffins,

though they were presumably aware of the existence of a plan of 1821. In 1817, Mr W. J. Lockett made a numbered plan of the vault for the sixth duke (Cox and Hope, 1881: 130). This was probably the source for a manuscript plan of the vault and a list of burials, made in 1821 and subsequently added to as further burials occurred (Chatsworth Archives).

There is little reason to doubt the accuracy of the recording by Cox and Hope in 1879. Wherever a coffin plate still survives its inscription has been correctly transcribed. They seem to have missed no more than one coffin which, now lacking a breast-plate, is possibly that of Mary, d. 1698, infant daughter of Henry, the second son of the first duke, and buried at Derby in 1700 (Cox and Hope, 1881: 206). However, the 1977 survey brought to light weaknesses in the manuscript plan. Although it appeared to give an accurate record of the coffin locations in the western vault, there was generally far less certainty about the accuracy of its location of the coffins in the eastern vault. Two instances of inaccuracy were immediately obvious: Mary, eldest daughter of the second duke, d. 1719, occurs as occupying both Coffin 2 and Coffin 11, while her sister Diana, sixth daughter of the second duke, d. 1721, is recorded as occupying both Coffin 16 and Coffin 21. The names omitted are likely to be those of William, third earl, d. 1684, almost certainly occupying Coffin 2 (his coffin plate is on display in the south aisle) and Henrietta Ponsonby, d. 1793, almost certainly occupying Coffin 21 (her plate is also on display), whose burial displaced Diana to Coffin-space 20. These discrepancies in the plan may just be carelessness in recording, but may conceal a more drastic rearranging of coffins when the western tier of shelves (Nos. 22-35) was built within the eastern chamber about 1750. Subsequently infants and less important members of the Cavendish family may have been displaced to allow dukes, duchesses, and deceased heirs-apparent to be buried in the most accessible shelf locations after 1764. For a correct identification, reference to coffin types is desirable.

COFFIN TYPES (Tables 1, 2)

Five types of coffin construction were observed. Type I has panels with molten lead run into the joints and with ribs either lapped or applied. This occurs on four coffins; the only dated example (CE6) is of 1779. Type II has sheet sides and occurs on eight coffins. It was mainly in use in the period 1700-1780; the only dated example (CE20) is 1721/2. Type III has the angles folded over and occurs on one example which, if correctly identified, is the non-local coffin of colonel Charles Cavendish, d. 1643, and brought to Derby in 1674/75 (CE14). The form of the lid is very similar to that of his mother Christiana, also buried in 1674/75. Type IV has the sides built round and has smeared joints. The best example seems to be the coffin of Charlotte, marchioness of Hartington, d. 1754 (CE9); the breast-plate has been removed, but one of identical size and positions of tacks is on display in the south aisle. However, the only securely dated example is the coffin of duchess Katherine, d. 1777 (CE10). The one example of Type V has a rippled joint with raised horizontal applied strips; this may well be the coffin of Charles Cavendish, d. 1670 (CE13). Type VI was a large rectangular chest with nipped angle joints; this is attributed to Bess of Hardwick, d. 1607 (CW'33).

Although based on a small number of closely dated examples, the general conclusion concerning the coffin types in the 25 inner shells that are visible for examination is that the earliest coffins are more rectangular in shape, with solid sheets, nipped joints, and folded-over lids, and that this format was usual in the seventeenth century (Type VI). Coffins with sheet sides and lapped or folded joints tend to be of the period 1700-1780 (Type II). The rippled joint occurs on only one example (?of 1670: Type V). The folded-over angle is found in the late-seventeenth

Table 1: Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault. Catalogue of burials and coffin types.

Date of Death	Person commemorated	Lockett, 1821	Cox and Hope, 1881	Coffin plate details	Coffin Type
1607	Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury	33 (CW')	I	none	VI
1628	William, 2nd Earl	1 (CE)	II	none	II
1643	Earl of Northampton	22 (CW)	XL	none	I
1643	Col. Charles Cavendish (reburied 18/2/1674)	14 (CE)	V	none	III
1670	Charles Cavendish	13 (CE)	VII	on show in aisle	II (or V)
1674	Christiana, Countess of 2nd Earl	4 (CE)	III	on show in aisle	Folded over
1684	William, 3rd Earl	Omitted (perhaps at 2)	IV	on show in aisle	Not ident.
1698	Lady Mary	Omitted	p. 206	not recorded	?II (at CE 16)
1700	Lord Henry	8 (CE)	X	rec. in 1881. Not on show	II
1707	William, 1st Duke	23 (CW)	VI	on show in aisle	II
1715	Lady Catherine	17 (CE)	XVIII	none	II
1719	Lady Mary	11 (also 2) (CE)	XVII	recorded in 1881	Soldered lid and edge
1720	Lord John (aged 12)	12 (CE)	XV	recorded in 1881	I, but full size coffin
1721/22	Lady Diana	16 (also 21) (CE)	XX	still attached at 20 (not rec. in 1881)	II
1725	Rachel, Duchess of 2nd Duke	10 (CE)	IX	on show in aisle	I (?moved to 28)
1729	William, 2nd Duke	5 (CE)	VIII	on show in aisle	I
1741	Lord James	18 (CE)	XIV	recorded in 1881	II central rib

Date of Death	Person commemorated	Lockett, 1821	Cox and Hope, 1881	Coffin plate details	Coffin Type
1751	William Cavendish of Staveley	32	XXI	recorded in 1881	Not identifiable (? moved from CW.0 to CE.36)
1751	Lord James	30 (CW)	XI	recorded in 1881	IV
1754	Charlotte, Marchioness of Hartington	9 (CE)	XXIV	on show in aisle (not rec. in 1881)	IV (or III)
1755	William, 3rd Duke	24 (CW)	XII	on show in aisle (not rec. in 1881)	I
1760	Caroline, Countess of Bessborough	19 (CE)	XXVII	on show in aisle	Not identifiable ? sheet sides
1764	William, 4th Duke	15 (CE)	XXIII	on show in aisle (not rec. in 1881)	II
1777	Katherine, Duchess of 3rd Duke	28 (CW)	XIII	still attached	IV welded (moved to 10)
1779	Elizabeth Cavendish	6 (CE)	XXII	still attached	I
1780	Lady Anne	20 (CE)	XIX	on show in aisle	II ribbed
1781	Lord Richard	31 (CW)	XXXIII	recorded in 1881	Sheet sides ?II
1783	Lord Charles	26 (CW)	XVI	none	Not visible
1793	William, 2nd Earl of Bessborough	3 (CE)	XLI	none	Not visible
1793	Henrietta Ponsonby	Omitted (at 21)	XLII	on show in aisle	Not visible (now at CW.0?)
1796	Lord John	7 (CE)	XXVI	recorded in 1881	Central rib
1803	Lord Frederick	27 (CW)	XXV	none	Not visible

Date of Death	Person commemorated	Lockett, 1821	Cox and Hope, 1881	Coffin plate details	Coffin Type
1806	Georgiana, Duchess of 5th Duke	34 (CW')	XXXI	on show in aisle (not rec. in 1881)	I
1809	George Henry	B19 (BE)	XXXVII	recently removed	Not visible
1810	Henry Cavendish (the philosopher)	25 (CW)	XXVII	on show in aisle (not rec. in 1881)	I
1811	William, 5th Duke	35 (CW')	XXX	on show in aisle (not rec. in 1881)	I
1812	William Cavendish	29 (CW)	XXXVI	none	I
1812	Frederick Cavendish	B2 (BW)	XXIX	recently removed	Not visible
1817	Sarah Cavendish	B10 (BW)	XXXVIII	recently removed	Not visible
1821	Henrietta, Countess of Bessborough (wife of 3rd Earl)	B20 (BE)	XLIII	recently removed	Not visible
1821	Henry W. G. Ponsonby	B21 (BE)	XLIV	none	Not visible
1824	Elizabeth, Duchess and 2nd wife of 5th Duke	B6 (BW)	XXXII	still attached	Not visible
1834	George, Earl of Burlington	B11 (BW)	XXXIV	recently removed	Not visible
1835	Elizabeth, Countess of Burlington	B12 (BW)	XXXV	on show in aisle	Not visible
1848	Felicia Susan	B3 (BW)	XXXIX	recently removed	Not visible

KEY: Lockett, 1821: BW = outer chamber, west shelves; BE = outer chamber, east shelves; CW, CW' = inner chamber, west shelves; CE = inner chamber, east shelves.

Coffin plates: none = no evidence of plate because wood of outer shell has decayed.

Coffin types: not visible = coffin still retains its outer wooden shell, and the lead coffin cannot be seen.

*Table 2: Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault.
Summary indication of coffin-locations and types.*

Coffin No.	Coffin Type	Adult/ Child	Plate	Date	Person	Certainty
B 2	Not visible		removed	1812	Frederick	Very probable
B 3	Not visible		removed	1848	Felicia S.	Very probable
B 6	Not visible		in situ	1824	Elizabeth	Certain
B 10	Not visible		removed	1817	Sarah	Very probable
B 11	Not visible		removed	1834	George	Very probable
B 12	Not visible		on show	1835	Elizabeth	Very probable
B 19	Not visible		removed	1809	George H. C.	Very probable
B 20	Not visible		removed	1821	Henrietta	Very probable
B 21	Not visible	C	none	1821	Henry W. G.	Very probable
CE 1	II		none	1628	William	Probable
CE 2	II folded		on show	?1684	William	Possible
CE 3	Not visible		none	1793	William	Probable
CE 4	III		on show	1674	Christiana	Probable
CE 5	I		on show	1729	William II	Probable
CE 6	I		in situ	1779	Elizabeth	Certain
CE 7	I centre rib		removed	1796	John	Possible
CE 8	II		removed	1700	Henry	Possible
CE 9	IV		on show	1754	Charlotte	Very probable
CE10	I		in situ	1777	Katherine	Certain
CE11	IV/II		removed	1719	Mary	Possible
CE12	I	A	removed	1720	John [C]	Unlikely
CE13	V		on show	1670	Charles	Possible
CE14	III		none	1643	Col. Charles	Possible
CE15	II		on show	1764	William IV	Very probable
CE16	I	C	none	?1698	Mary	Possible
CE17	II folded	?C	none	1715	Catherine	Probable
CE18	II folded		removed	1741	James	Possible
CE19	II		on show	1760	Caroline	Possible
CE20	I		in situ	1721	Diana	Certain
CE21	Not visible		on show	1793	Henrietta P.	Very probable
CW22	I			1643	Northampton	Unlikely
CW23	II		on show	1707	William I	Possible
CW24	I + wood		on show	1755	William III	Very probable
CW25	I + wood		on show	1810	Henry	Very probable
CW26	Not visible		none	1783	Charles	Possible
CW27	Not visible		none	1803	Frederick	Possible
CW28	IV welded	A		?1725	Rachel	Uncertain
CW29	I		none	1812	William	Unlikely
CW30	IV + wood		removed	1751	James	Possible
CW31	II + wood		removed	1781	Richard	Possible
CW 0	Empty space, coffin		removed: Lockett gives 32	William 1751;	nil probability	
CW'33	VI		none	1607	Bess of H.	Very probable
CW'34	I + wood		on show	1806	Georgiana	Very probable
CW'35	I + wood		on show	1811	William V	Very probable
CE36	sheets/ ribbed	A	removed on show	?1751 ?1780	William Anne } }	Possible

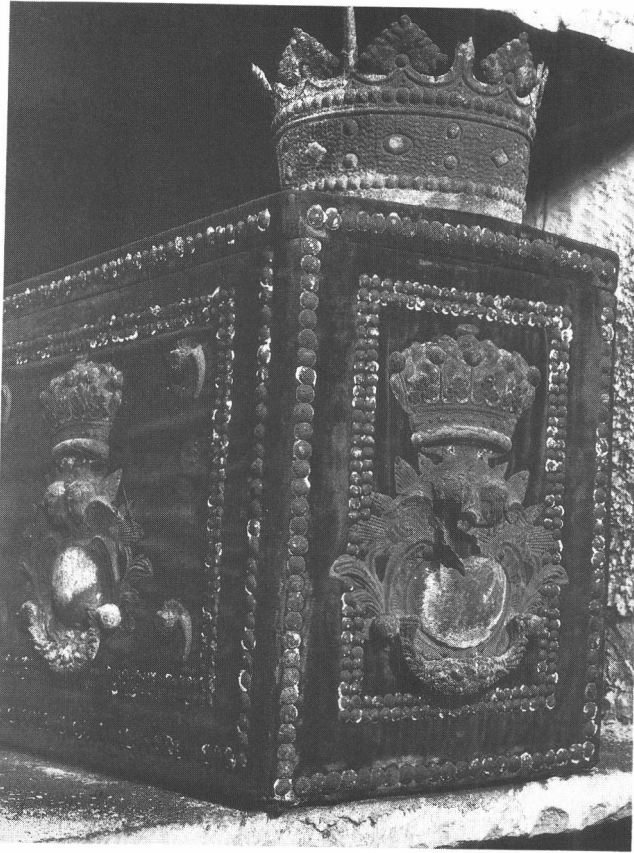


Plate 4 Derby Cathedral, the Cavendish vault: the western chamber; coffin of George, earl of Burlington, d. 1834.

century (Type III). The smeared join of the central rib is more characteristic of the later-eighteenth century (Type IV); and the coffin composed of separate panels with molten lead run into the joins and with applied ribs is common from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries (Type I).

If there was minimal reorganisation of the coffins in the eastern vault since Lockett prepared his plans in 1817 and 1821, then this typology is generally valid. However, if there was substantial repositioning, as is suggested by the movement of Duchess Katherine's coffin of 1777 and by the presence of children's coffins in the spaces attributed to adults (and vice versa), then the dating criteria of this typology are open to question, and it must be used with care.

IDENTIFICATION OF BURIALS

Within the western vault only one coffin (BW6) had been moved from its original position and placed on the eastern bench in about 1970. All the lead coffins retained their wooden outer casings which were covered by red-brown velvet cloth studded with gilt pins and decorated with coffin furniture consisting of grip-plates, escutcheons and coronets, and varied lid-motifs. The inscribed breast-plates had all been removed except from BW6, but for these nine coffins there was no reason to doubt the identities given on the 1821 plan. Furthermore the funeral coronets were either *in situ* (Plate 4) or placed on an adjacent empty shelf. There were no discrepancies

either in date or in occupant between the manuscript plan and archaeological evidence of date, gender or rank.

The eastern vault poses far more difficulties and is best considered in its three component areas. North of the entrance passage is a rack of three spaces (CW': Nos. 33-35). The lowest coffin (33) is a substantial oblong chest, unlike any other in the vault; its corners are nipped, unlike the usual ribbed form. It is attributed to Elizabeth, countess of Shrewsbury, d. 1607, and its size, design and form of manufacture support this identification. When Cox and Hope inspected the vault they identified this coffin by its funeral coronet though they must also have relied on tradition (Cox and Hope, 1881: 130). The other two coffins in the rack (Nos. 34-35) are similar to each other. In 1977 they still retained their outer wooden shells, cloth coverings and coffin furniture, and one still had a ducal coronet as a funeral accoutrement. The style of the furniture and the coronet would indicate a date after 1800, and the manuscript plan indicates that in these two spaces were William the fifth duke, d. 1811, and his first wife Georgiana, d. 1806 (Plate 3). The detached coffin plates fit the dimensions and spacing of the surviving tacks. These three attributions may be considered highly probable.

The second distinct area within the eastern vault is the rack against the west wall (CW) with twelve spaces (Nos. 22-31 and two vacant). In this there are now ten coffins, six of which still retain their outer shells and red velvet coverings. According to the manuscript plan these six should date from 1751 to 1810, but acceptance of its information in this respect is undermined by the fact that two coffins, which it dates to 1777 and 1812 respectively, were patently in a more advanced condition of decay than two others, which it dates to 1751 and 1755. It is likely that the rack was rearranged after the original completion of the plan, a supposition confirmed by the fact that the only coffin which still retains its breast-plate (that of Katherine, duchess of Devonshire, d. 1777), recorded in 1821 as being placed at No. 28 in this rack, is now to be found in Coffin-space 10 in the opposite, westward-opening, rack.

Where it is possible to inspect the construction of the lead inner shells, four are of Type I, two of Type V and one of Type II. This would seem to corroborate the general dating of the manuscript plan. The attribution of the one Type II coffin, No. 23, to William, the first duke, d. 1707 is also acceptable. However, one Type IV coffin, No. 28, was identified on the 1821 plan as that of Katherine, duchess of Devonshire, but (as mentioned above) it must contain a different burial, possibly that of Rachel, duchess of Devonshire, d. 1725. Thus within this rack firm identification remains very difficult and the manuscript plan must be used with caution.

The third distinct area within the eastern vault is the rack against the east wall (CE). This has three tiers, each of five spaces, making provision for a total of fifteen coffins. Additionally, a further seven coffins were stacked on top, those at the ends being compressed by the curve of the vault. One of the most recent coffins in the rack still retained its wooden outer shell and cloth covering: No. 3, of William Ponsonby, d. 1793. Another, at No. 21, was still identifiable — by the distinctive lozenge impression of the recently removed breast-plate — as belonging to Henrietta Ponsonby, d. 1793. Three breast-plates still remained *in situ*, identifying Katherine, wife of the third duke, d. 1777 (No. 10), Elizabeth Cavendish, d. 1779 (No. 6), and Diana Cavendish, d. 1721 (now at No. 20, but No. 21 on the manuscript plan). One ducal coronet remained on a coffin (No. 8), but had presumably been moved from the fourth duke's coffin (No. 15). The extra coffin on the top shelf (No. 36) may be that of Lady Anne, d. 1780, or of William Cavendish of Staveley, d. 1751 (transferred from No. 32): '0' in Fig. 1. Another possibility is that Mary, d. 1698 (see below), is not interred in this vault, and that the coffin tentatively ascribed to her (CE16) belongs to Lord John, d. 1720, with that of Lady Anne, d. 1780, at No. 12. In this

case, the intrusive coffin would very probably be that of William Cavendish of Staveley. In any case, one must assume that there has been a straight exchange between Katherine, duchess of Devonshire, d. 1777, at No. 28, and Rachel, duchess of Devonshire, d. 1725, at No. 10 (or else an error by Lockett in preparing his plan). This rack, therefore, contains three certain identifications (Nos. 6, 10, 20) and three very probable ones (Nos. 9, 15, 21). Apart from Nos. 2, 12 and 16, there is a presumption that the manuscript plan is correct but, of course, each error needs a compensating correction elsewhere within the burial vault.

No further study was made of individual coffin furniture or applied decorative items since all these will be available for future examination and they were not the prime purpose of the survey.

DISTANT DEATHS

The two drums in the eastern vault are likely to contain the entrails of corpses which had been embalmed (Litten, 1985: 12). The most likely candidates are Mary, died in London, 1698, and Henry William George, died in Parma, 1821. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that after a distant death a body would need special medical treatment before being brought to Derby for burial. However, on the same argument the drums may alternatively contain the internal organs of colonel Charles Cavendish and Spencer, the second earl of Northampton, both of whom died in battle in 1643. It is, indeed, still popularly believed that they hold the dismembered remains of the two Civil War soldiers (*The Independent Magazine*, January 1989). Lockett's plan does not support this view.

One other instance of a body brought from a distance is provided by the coffin of Elizabeth, second wife of William the fifth duke. She died in Rome on 30 March 1824, and her embalmed body was placed in a lead coffin bearing the undertaker's name and address: M. Francois Moneta, rue Condotti no. 49, Rome. This coffin had a glass inspection panel inserted in the lid to permit the identification of the corpse. The journey between Rome and Derby took nearly two months, and the interment took place on 26 May 1824. By contrast, we know that the return of the remains of Henry William Cavendish from Parma in 1821 and those of George Henry Compton Cavendish, drowned off the Lizard in 1809, took only one month.

COFFIN PLATES

There are 16 plates on display in the south aisle. They were removed without any record being made of their original location or even of the particular part of the vault their associated coffin lay in. Such a practice may have been pursued with the best of intentions (namely to add to the interest of the building's history for visitors), but it seriously impedes the preparation of an accurate record by the ecclesiastical archaeologist. However, by measuring the dimensions and by studying the position of the nail holes, it has been possible to link many coffin plates with the correct wooden shell in the vault below, though only in those instances where the wood has survived.

PRESENT SITUATION

The western vault has been entirely cleared of coffins and has been converted into a chapel. The coffins previously in that vault have been stored on floor spaces in the eastern vault because all the shelving was fully occupied by earlier coffins. The list prepared by Mrs Mallender, detailing the position of all the coffins after the 1977 re-ordering, has been placed in the cathedral archives, with a second copy deposited in the Chatsworth archives. No coffins were opened and no skeletal anthropometrical or palaeopathological observations were made.

FURTHER WORK

Many churches contain underspaces which between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries were either created or adapted to contain burials (Litten, 1985). Today, these areas are vulnerable to interference because they offer the prospect of extra accommodation without expensive structural alteration or extension of an existing church building. The *ad hoc* nature of the recording at Derby reminds us that hitherto neither the archaeological community nor the ecclesiastical authorities have given much attention to the archaeological implications of such changes, or to the types of response which may be appropriate when the clearance of a burial vault is contemplated.

The absence of much archaeological thinking on this subject is revealing. Arguably, it can be accounted for by the lack of weight given to post-medieval archaeology generally, and in particular by the unspoken view that burial vaults are to be regarded as unwelcome intrusions, which diminish the archaeological potential of earlier deposits, rather than as archaeological contexts in their own right. Happily since the mid-1980s this latter prejudice has begun to yield to those who advocate the archaeological study of churches on a holistic basis (Rodwell, 1989), especially as the results of such projects are brought to general attention (e.g. Litten, 1985; Boore, 1986; Adams and Reeve, 1987).

One consequence of this growth in concern for post-medieval mortuary remains is that it is now possible for archaeologists to contemplate their conservation rather than merely accede to notifications of their removal. Hitherto there have been few occasions when proposals for the clearance of burial vaults have been challenged on purely archaeological grounds. Yet today the preservation of archaeological deposits is almost always the first option to be considered when proposals for other types of development are put forward. There is no reason in principle why burial vaults should not enjoy the same regard. Indeed, although alterations inside churches in use are exempted from the controls of listing and scheduling, it is the policy of the Council for the Care of Churches and the aim of the 'Care of Churches Measure' that the ecclesiastical system of control should operate to standards which are at least as high as any which apply in the secular sphere.

In theory, then, preservation should be the first option. Yet in practice this policy remains difficult to apply. This is chiefly because there exists a widespread lack of awareness as to the reasons why particular vaults or vault assemblages should merit preservation. Hence, the first need is for a general survey to disclose the range of such structures and the assemblages they contain to establish what is typical and what is exceptional, and to measure the rate at which evidence is being lost.

The undertaking of such a study would not be easy. Almost by definition, burial vaults are inaccessible places. Their points of entry have often been forgotten. Even if access remains possible, inexpert or clumsy inspection may compromise the integrity of a fragile deposit, or trigger detrimental changes to environmental conditions. Vaults may also, of course, present biological or other hazards. Hence, if a survey is to take place, it may well be that its main thrust should be towards gathering information about vaults which have already been disturbed.

A second difficulty arises from the diversity of information which vaults contain. Vaults may have an intrinsic architectural interest. Coffins and their associated artefacts are of importance to the history of mortuary behaviour and of genealogy, while the human remains which lie within them may in turn be studied from one or more of several different perspectives: principally those of physical anthropology and palaeopathology, but potentially also those of environmental science. Some sites contain artefacts unrelated to their location (e.g. the eighteenth-century

working drawings for St. Mary's, Battersea, which were discarded in a burial vault). Since each branch of study has its own agenda, some method of ranking burial vaults which gives due weight to each of these different aspects is required.

Even if the results of such a survey were already to hand, the case for preservation would not always be easy to sustain. Dilemmas in conservation tend to be at their most awkward when one desirable aim can only be achieved at the expense of another. This is often the case with burial vaults, where an additional complication may be the legal status of the burials. The human remains and coffins which contain them belong to the descendants of the deceased; however, the vault is part of the church structure and has an ecclesiastical purpose. For reasons already given, the re-use of a vault may on occasion be argued as preferable to additional building work.

Given these uncertainties there may well be a case for deferring action on survey until the results of the most comprehensive investigation yet to have taken place — at Christ Church Spitalfields — have been published, and time has been allowed for consideration of its lessons. Such a delay need not, however, preclude the immediate formation of a small interdisciplinary group to map out paths of research into a class of archaeological site that is at once rich in data and largely unappreciated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We should like to thank the then Provost of Derby Cathedral for his kind invitation to undertake the work, and Mr and Mrs M. Mallender for their assistance upon our visits to Derby. Mr T. Askey, honorary archivist of the Devonshire Collections at Chatsworth, kindly provided copies of the relevant documents. This report was written when both authors were members of the Department of Archaeology, University of Leeds. Colleagues at Leeds who assisted were Mr J. W. B. Black of the Archaeology Laboratory (now of the Institute of Archaeology, University College, London), and Mr Eric Daniels and Mr Simon Pentelow of the University Photographic Department.

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