

# **'In the vaults beneath'**

## **Archaeological recording at St George's Church, Bloomsbury**

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## Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook archaeological recording at the Grade I listed St George's Church, Bloomsbury, London, from April to June 2003, on behalf of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St George's Church, Bloomsbury, in advance of redevelopment of the crypt.

The work involved recording the structure of the crypt, and small scale investigations in the churchyard and recording of funerary architecture. The major work was the record of the 781 burials found in seven vaults leading off the central chamber of the crypt. These were recorded prior to their removal for reburial by Burial Ground Services.

All 781 coffins were triple coffins, mostly comprising an upholstered wooden case, a lead shell and an inner wooden coffin. The coffins and their associated fittings were recorded in full. The names of 86% of the assemblage were identified from *depositum* plate inscriptions, although some of these had become detached from their coffins.

Osteological analysis of 111 skeletons recovered from open lead coffins was undertaken on site. Where the identity of individuals was known (named sample; n=72) detailed analysis was under-

taken, but where the identity was unknown (unnamed sample; n=39), a lower level of analysis was carried out.

The burials dated from 1804 to 1856, after which date the crypt was sealed. Documentary research was carried out on the named individuals. This confirmed that the burial population largely represented the wealthy upper middle classes residents of Bloomsbury, and numbered amongst them were many lawyers, doctors, M.Ps, imperial administrators, and Army and Navy officers. The population also included members of the staff of the nearby British Museum, including one Principal Librarian. In addition to the wealthier middle classes there were a number of tradesmen including butchers, grocers, builders, wine merchants and carpenters and a servant.

Palaeodemographics and disease patterns are consistent with this social picture. An interesting feature of this group was the wealth of evidence for dental surgery and prostheses and as such, the affluent population of St George's crypt, Bloomsbury provides a rare insight into this early period in the history of dentistry.



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