

Chapter 3: The spatial distribution of the coffins within the crypt

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INTRODUCTION

Nicholas Hawksmoor's original design for the crypt of St George's was never intended as a place of burial. The original open space, was divided by brickwork blocking arches to create 10 vaults leading off from a central open area (Fig. 3.1). Coffins were found within seven of the vaults (Vaults 1 to 7). A kitchen had been built into Vault 8 and lavatories inserted into Vault 12. Vaults 9-11 were devoid of coffins. Vault 11 adjacent to Vault 1 contained a pile of loose coffin fittings. Most legible inscriptions from *depositum* plates could be matched to inscriptions on coffins redeposited within Vault 7.

The fronts of Vaults 1 to 7 were sealed by brick walls of a single thickness. Vaults 1 to 6 appeared to have been bricked up in the mid-Victorian period, whilst the presence of a copy of *The Sun* newspaper found within Vault 7 gave a *terminus post-quem* of 1991. The arrangement and treatment of the coffins

within Vaults 1 to 6 and Vault 7 were markedly different.

VAULTS 1 TO 6

These vaults contained neatly stacked coffins, arranged directly one on top of another in piles up to eight deep. There appears to have been an attempt to arrange the coffins roughly in accordance with size, with large adult coffins occupying the lower stacks, and smaller coffins (such as infants' coffins) being placed on the top (Plate 3.2). In most of the vaults, infants' and children's coffins also occupied alcoves or bricked-up window ledges. The coffin stacks had been covered over with a layer of sand. This served to stabilise the stacks and to prevent them from collapsing sideways. Most of the damage to the coffins was due to vertical pressure, resulting from the weight of the lead coffins,



Plate 3.1 Vault 2: Coffin stacks before removal

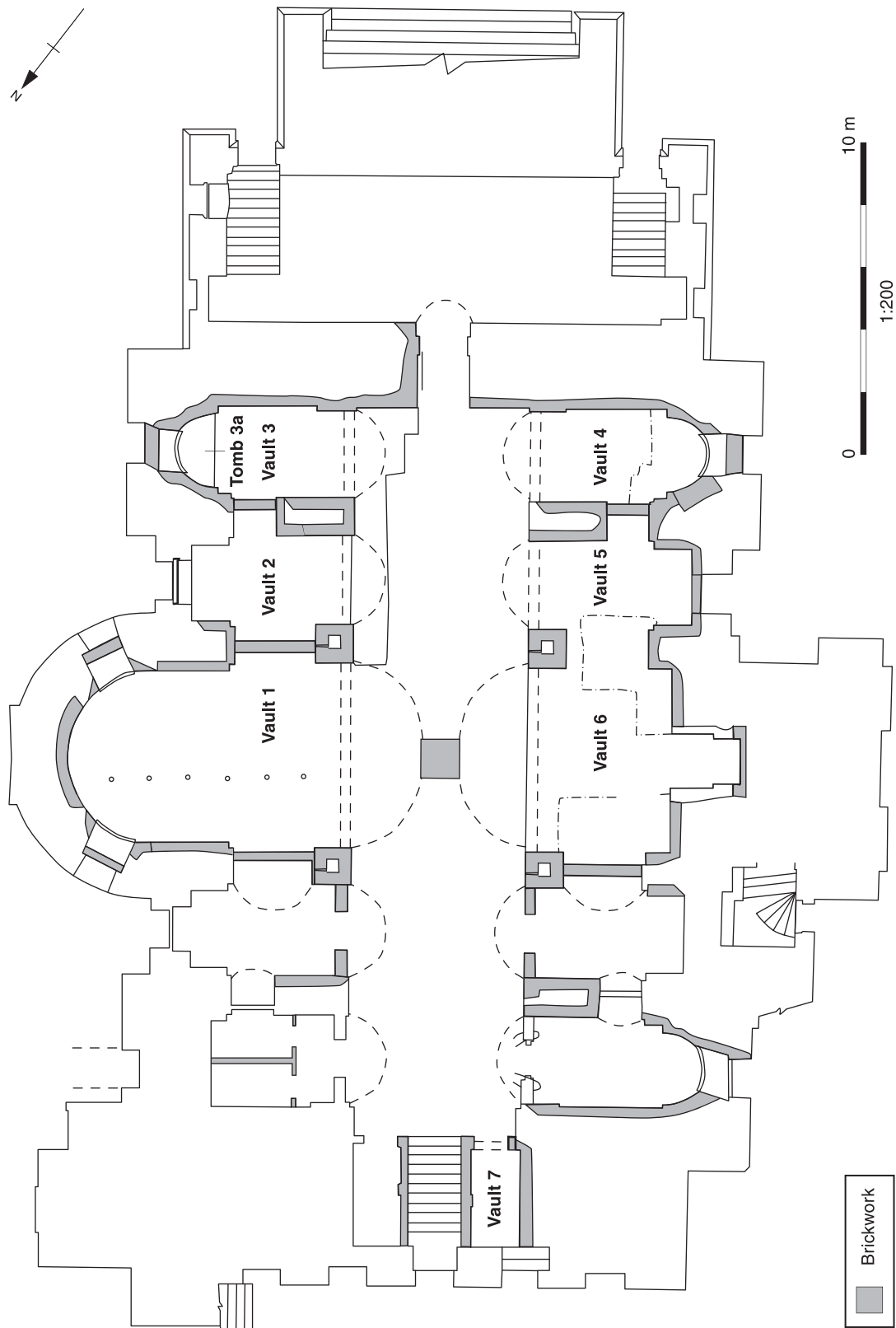


Fig. 3.1 Plan of the crypt showing locations of Vaults 1-7

causing many coffin sides and lids to collapse inwards. The sand layer was overlaid by a thick layer of charcoal. This served to absorb the miasma resulting from putrefaction of the corpses within breached coffins.

In many other church vaults of this period, coffins were not placed directly one on top of the other, but rested on wooden or iron racks. In these cases, the footplate inscription was particularly important in identifying the name of each individual interred. In St George's crypt, Vault 1 was the only vault to have extant racks. Here, the iron racks took up the northernmost third of the vault. The racks consisted of six vertical solid iron posts set 1.2 m apart (see Plates 2.4-2.5) and aligned parallel to the north wall of the vault. The bases of the posts were cemented into sockets cut into the flagstone floor. The central two posts were fixed into the ceiling, thereby anchoring the structure into place. Three 'shelves' were created by the use of horizontal slats of sheet iron. Fourteen coffins were accommodated horizontally on each shelf. Vertically, between two and three coffins were stacked directly on top of one another on each shelf. However, in several parts of the racks, fewer coffins were thus stacked, the space being backfilled with sand. It is possible that these rack spaces originally were occupied by individuals whose coffins had been reclaimed in 1853, and reburied elsewhere. In total, sixty-three coffins occupied the racks and spaces beneath.

The number of coffins within the vaults varied, largely as a factor of the different sizes of each vault. Two hundred and twenty-five coffins were found within Vault 1; 69 in Vault 2; 94 in Vault 3; 85 in Vault 4; 80 in Vault 5, and 139 in Vault 6. A further 89 coffins were found in Vault 7. The total number of coffins found was 781.

Each vault contained individuals from many different families. The only private family burial area was the small tomb of the Ford family (3500), constructed against the eastern wall of Vault 3, and containing the coffins of four members of the family: Randle Ford (coffin 3502), his wife Elizabeth (3503) and two grandchildren (coffins 3501 and 3504) (see above Fig. 2.1, Tomb 3a).

VAULT 7 (Plate 3.2)

This small vault was located beneath the chancel to the left of inserted modern steps. The coffins and human remains found in Vault 7 had been treated very differently. Eighty-nine lead coffins were found within this small vault. Twenty-seven lead coffins were arranged at the rear of the vault in three neat stacks. The orderly arrangement of these coffins was not dissimilar to the treatment of coffins in the other six vaults, although they lacked a covering of sand and charcoal. Spaces in the brickwork of the vault side walls suggest that originally this vault had contained either iron or wooden racks, which have since been removed. It is possible

that originally the stacked coffins been placed on the racks, but after the decay or deliberate dismantling of the racks, had been re-arranged directly on top of one another in the rear of the vault. However, no clustering of surnames was noted from the named coffins. This re-organisation would have made more space available in the vault and probably occurred when many more coffins were crammed into the Vault 7 (Plate 3.2). This may have happened as recently as 1991. What is clear is that very much less care was taken over the re-deposition of the remaining 62 lead coffins and the human remains originally within them.

On opening the vault, it was evident that the sole intention had been to cram as many coffins into this confined space as possible. To achieve this end, coffins had been torn up, folded in half, and twisted to accommodate all of the available space. Plastic bags, including old fertiliser bags, filled with charnel and human hair had been forced into any remaining spaces. Cross-bars of wooden planking and iron piping had been placed across the entranceway to stabilise the heap. The vault had then been bricked up, plastered and painted black on the exterior. Owing to the disorder in which the coffins were found in Vault 7 it was not practical to produce a coherent plan, although limited recording of the sequence of deposition was possible (Fig. 3.36).



Plate 3.2 Vault 7: Arrangement of the coffins within the vault

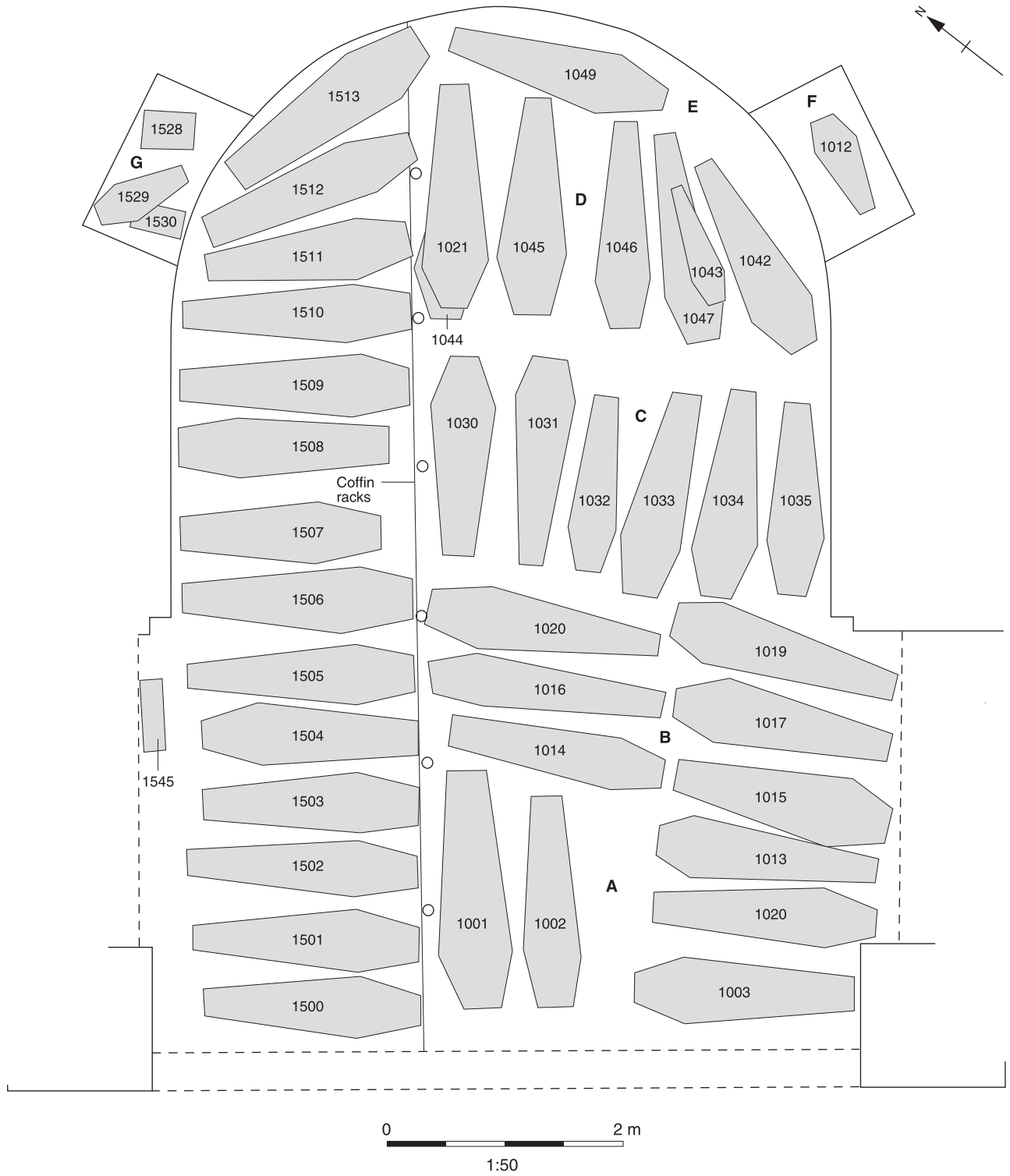


Fig. 3.2 Vault 1: the uppermost layer of coffins on racks and in stacks A-G

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE COFFINS WITHIN THE VAULTS (Figs 3.3-3.36)

Because 78.1% of coffins from the crypt had legible *depositum* plates, it was possible to analyse the spatial relationships between individuals with the same surname, who presumably were related, and also the sequence of deposition, based on the year of death.

In the late Georgian/Victorian period, considerable emphasis was placed on interring or burying family members together. Hence, the popularity of family plots in graveyards, and the use of both intra and extra-mural brick-lined shaft graves. In many churches, such as St Luke's Church, Islington, and Christ Church, Spitalfields, the crypts of the churches were divided into small family vaults, usually containing between one to ten coffins (Boyle *et al* 2005). At St Luke's the large central area of the crypt was also crammed with coffins of many different families. However, even in the darkness and chaos of this crypt, it was evident that considerable effort had been made to seek out the coffins of family members of the recently deceased, in order that they might be interred with their kin. Indeed, some Victorians made a living out of descending into the dark crypts of churches to seek out the coffins of relatives of the newly dead for this purpose.

The uppermost level of the coffin stacks within each vault was recorded in plan, and a matrix of each stack has been constructed, showing the name and year-of-death of each coffin. These are shown in Figures 3.2-3.36. What becomes immediately apparent from the *depositum* plate inscriptions is that the coffin stacks were not simply added to incrementally over time, with later coffins being stacked on top of earlier ones. Early interments were as likely to be found towards the top of the stacks, as they were to be located in the middle levels, or towards the base of stacks. Conversely, later burials were found throughout the stacks. It is clear that considerable re-arrangement of the coffins had taken place, and that this had occurred after the crypt had ceased to be used for further burial, but before the outer wooden cases of many of the coffins had decayed extensively. In all likelihood, this occurred in 1856 when the church issued a directive 'hermetically to seal the entrance to the vaults' (Meller 1975, 23). To some extent, consideration of coffin size also influenced the spatial arrangement of the coffin stacks with smaller coffins frequently being found towards the top and within alcoves and on ledges.

With the exception of the Ford family tomb (3500), there were no areas marked out for the exclusive use of any one family. Although clustering of coffins with the same surname was not as clear at St George's as in the crypt of St Luke's church, Islington, it seems nonetheless that some attempt had been made to keep family members together or close. For example, three members of the Yenn family (coffins 1517, 1534, 1550) were located one above the other in the racks in Vault 1 (Fig. 3.3).

Similarly, four members of the Atkinson family (coffins 1553, 1573, 1574 and 1575) were alongside or above one another in the racks. All six members of the Jeakes family (coffins 1013, 1015, 1024, 1057, 1075, and 1079) were in close proximity in Vault 1 (Figs 3.4-3.5). The Jeakes family lived at 36 Little Russell Street, the street directly behind the church. The burial register entry for Thomas Jeakes (burial 1057) reports that he died of inflammation of the liver, and that he worked as a carpenter.

In Vault 4, the redoubtable family of barristers and judges, the Hely Hutchinsons (coffins 4063, 4070, and 4083) are stacked one above the other in row D (Fig. 3.23). Separated from the rest of the family, but in the same vault was the coffin of Maria Louisa Hely Hutchinson (aged 1 year 5 months) (coffin 4005). Her coffin had been placed at the top of stack A (Figs 3.19-3.20).

It appears to have been common practice to stack family members one on top of another, rather than laying them side by side in a horizontal plane. However, this coffin sorting was by no means carried out consistently. For example, all four members of the Meabry family (coffins 2007, 2014, 2022 and 2032) were interred within Vault 2 (Figs 3.11-3.14). The Stringfield family (coffins 2067, 3064, 6033, 6039, 6040, 6071, 6109 and 6110), were largely concentrated in Vault 6. Four family members (coffins 6033, 6039, 6040 and 6071), a daughter-in-law Anna Stringfield (coffin 6110) and a son-in-law Bisse Phillips Sanderson (coffin 6109) all being located there. Another Stringfield, an adult male (coffin 2067), probably William Stringfield, was interred in Vault 2 (Fig. 3.13), and seven year-old Anna Stringfield (burial 3064) in Vault 3 (Fig. 3.17). The Stringfield family are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

A similar pattern of deposition was noted with the Keysell family. In this instance at least six members of the family (coffins 6007, 6019, 6020, 6069, 6119 and 6138) were located in Vault 6 (Figs 3.29, 3.32-3.33), whilst Richard Keysell (aged 10 months) (coffin 1092) was found in Vault 1. Another member of the family is Miss [Catherine] Ele[an]or [Key]sell (burial 6085) whose coffin was immediately beneath that of Henry Keysell (burial 6069) in Vault 6 (Fig. 3.33). John Keysall (coffin 6008) was a banker and was probably not related although he was interred in Vault 6.

Four members of the Sanders family were interred in the crypt. Francis William Sanders (coffin 1073), his wife (coffin 1080) and his mother (coffin 1137) were interred in Vault 1, but Elinor the young daughter of the family (coffin 6044) was interred in Vault 6. There appears to be no reason chronological or otherwise why some members of a family are found apart from their family group. It seems likely that young children are more likely to be separated, perhaps because their coffins were smaller and could not be stacked in the normal way.

More evidence for the re-arrangement of coffins within the crypt is the fate of the coffin of Dame

Vault 1 - The Racks

1500 Sophia Fuseli 1832	1501 John Hutchinson 1815	1502 Jane Maria Pearce 1819	1503 Miles Booty 1815	1504 Mary Williams 1835	1505 Elizabeth Planta 1821	1506 Thomas Bland 1825	1507 Elizabeth Children 1839	1508 Unnamed	1509 Richard Smith 1830	1510 Elizabeth Mary Roche 1833	1511 Joseph Littledale 1842	1512 Alexander Auldjo 1821	1513 Charles John Harrison Batley 1841
1514 Elizabeth Beckwith 1814	1515 Eleanor Pope 1831	1516 Mary Susan Holmes 1829	1517 Susannah Maria Yenn 1845	1518 Emily Charlotte Donne 1823	1519 Ansell Day 1808	1520 Mary Marilyn 1835	1521 Unnamed	1522 Unnamed	1523 William Gray 1842	1524 Barbera Gray 1831	1525 John Jortin 1843	1526 Harry Herman Luard 1816	1527 Thomas James Tatham 1850
1531 Letitia Beetson 1830	1532 Mary Newcombe 1836	1533 Anne Young 1830	1534 Elizabeth Yenn 1806	1535 Thomas Day 1815	1536 William Day 1807	1537 Unnamed	1538 John Lee Marilyn 1836	1539 Ann Martin 1810	1540 William Henry Manley 1813	1548 Mary Gray 1825	1549 John Bearpacker Jortin 1827	1543 Emily Angelica Platt 1825	1544 Sarah Tatham 1847
Sand	Sand	Sand	1550 John Yenn 1821	1541 Ann Catherine Day 1818	Sand	1542 Susannah Day 1810	1546 Hannah Marilyn 1810	1547 Sophia Manley 1823	Sand	Sand	Sand	1560 Mary Fortia Williams 1828	Sand
1563 Jane Addison 1856	1564 William Agnew 1828	Sand	1558 Harriet Taischeff 1843	1557 Unnamed	1556 Philadelphia Wood 1851	1555 Unnamed	1554 Catherine Elwell Beaumont 1826	1553 Martha Atkinson 1837	1552 Sarah Martin 1817	1551 Sarah Bayley Jortin 1840	Sand	1561 Edward Bullock 1835	1576 James Ogle 1823
1565 Ralph Addison 1840	1566 Mary Agnew 1831	1567 Harriet Agnew 1815	1568 Robert Nares 1829	1569 Thomas ----- 1811	1570 Anne Day 1827	1571 Daniel Beaumont 1821	1572 John Percival Beaumont 1844	1573 John Atkinson 1828	1574 Thomas Atkinson 1836	1575 Margaret Atkinson 1825	Sand	1562 Isabella Sophia Stevenson 1816	1579 Edward Ogle 1819

Floor

Fig. 3.3 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffins on the racks

Caroline Alecia Briscoe of Wimpole Street and Crofton Hall, Cumbria (coffin 3078). A memorial plaque within the church explicitly states that the lady was interred in the crypt within a private vault beneath the chancel. Nonetheless, Dame Caroline Briscoe's coffin was discovered within Vault 3 (Fig. 3.16). Like so many others, she had clearly been moved from her original resting place at a later date.

CONCLUSION

Unlike many churches with crypt interments of this date, the crypt of St George's did not appear to have been sub-divided extensively into small family vaults. The Ford family tomb (3500) and the Briscoe vault are the two exceptions.

Within the crypt, two major re-organisations of the coffins appear to have occurred. The coffins in Vaults 1 to 6 were re-arranged in very much the

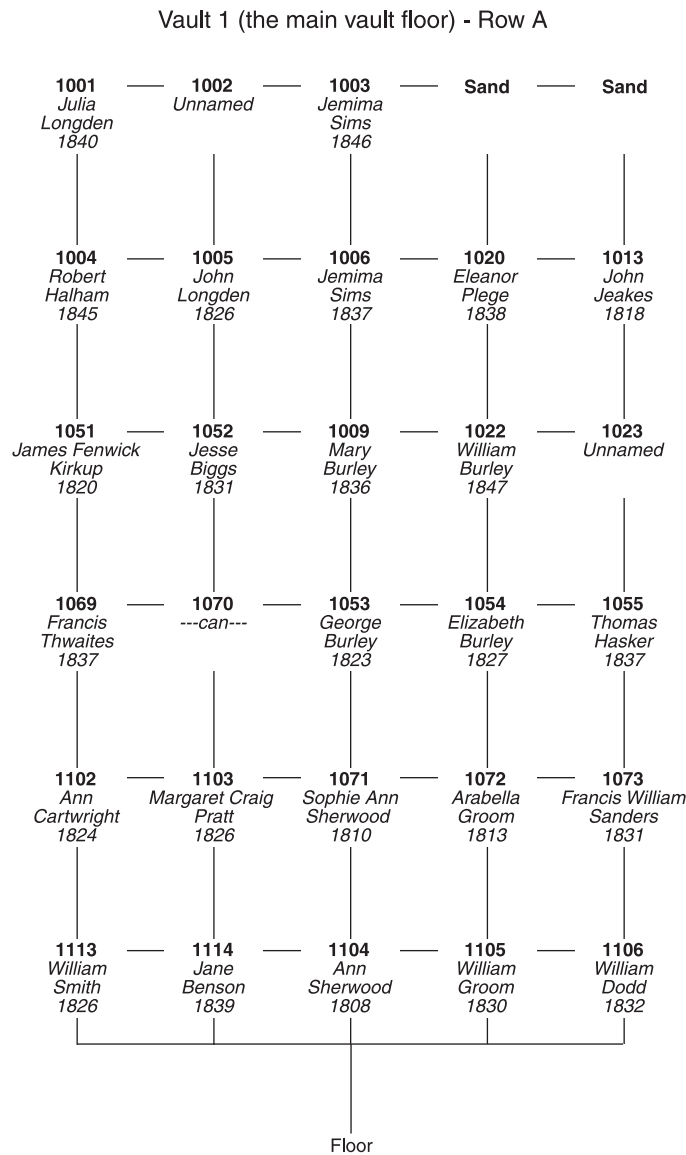


Fig. 3.4 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row A

same manner, suggesting that the re-organisation of the crypt was undertaken as a single event, probably around 1856. It is unclear whether the central open area of the crypt had originally housed coffins, but based on comparisons with contemporary church

crypts, such as St Luke's church, Islington, this seems highly likely. They were probably removed to the vaults during the reorganisation, leaving the central area clear. It is probable that the vaults were bricked up at the same time.

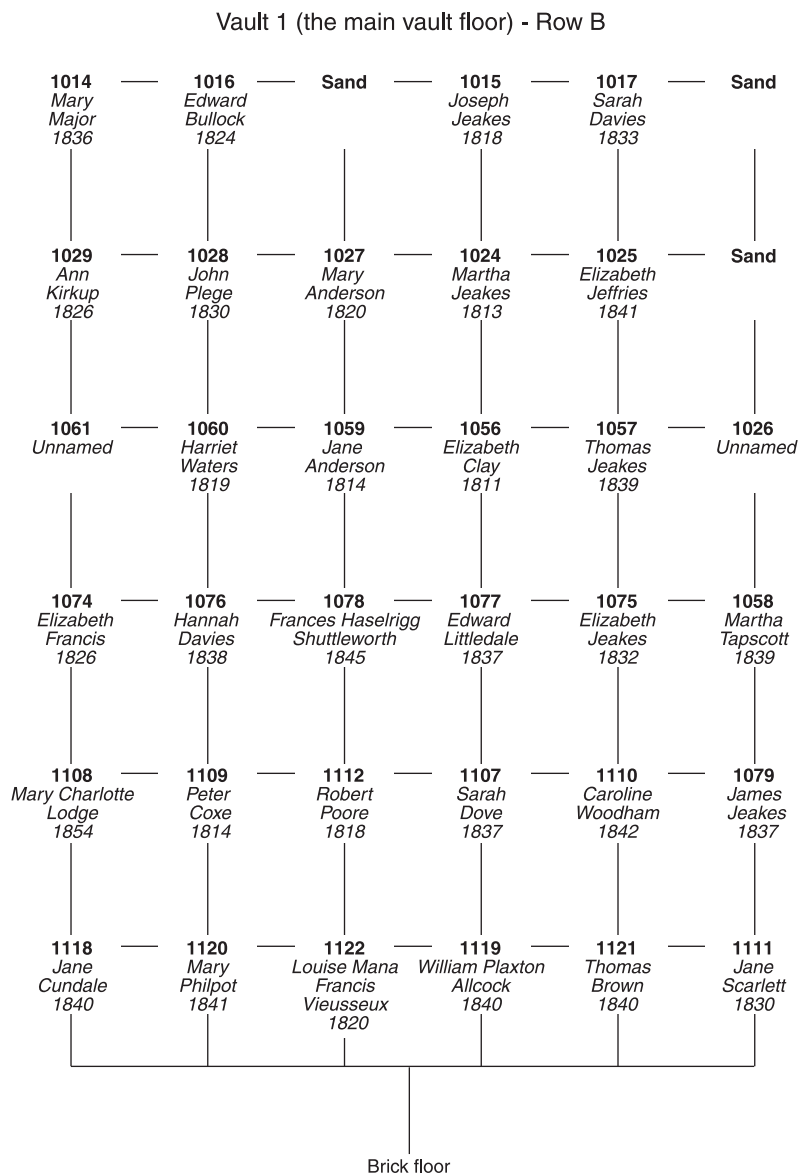


Fig. 3.5 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row B

The re-arrangement of coffins within Vault 7 was undertaken at a much later date (in 1991). It is probable that most of the coffins within the vault were cleared from the northern end of the crypt

(the area now occupied by the kitchen, lavatories and two empty vaults) when the facilities were installed, and this area was re-used as a boys' club.

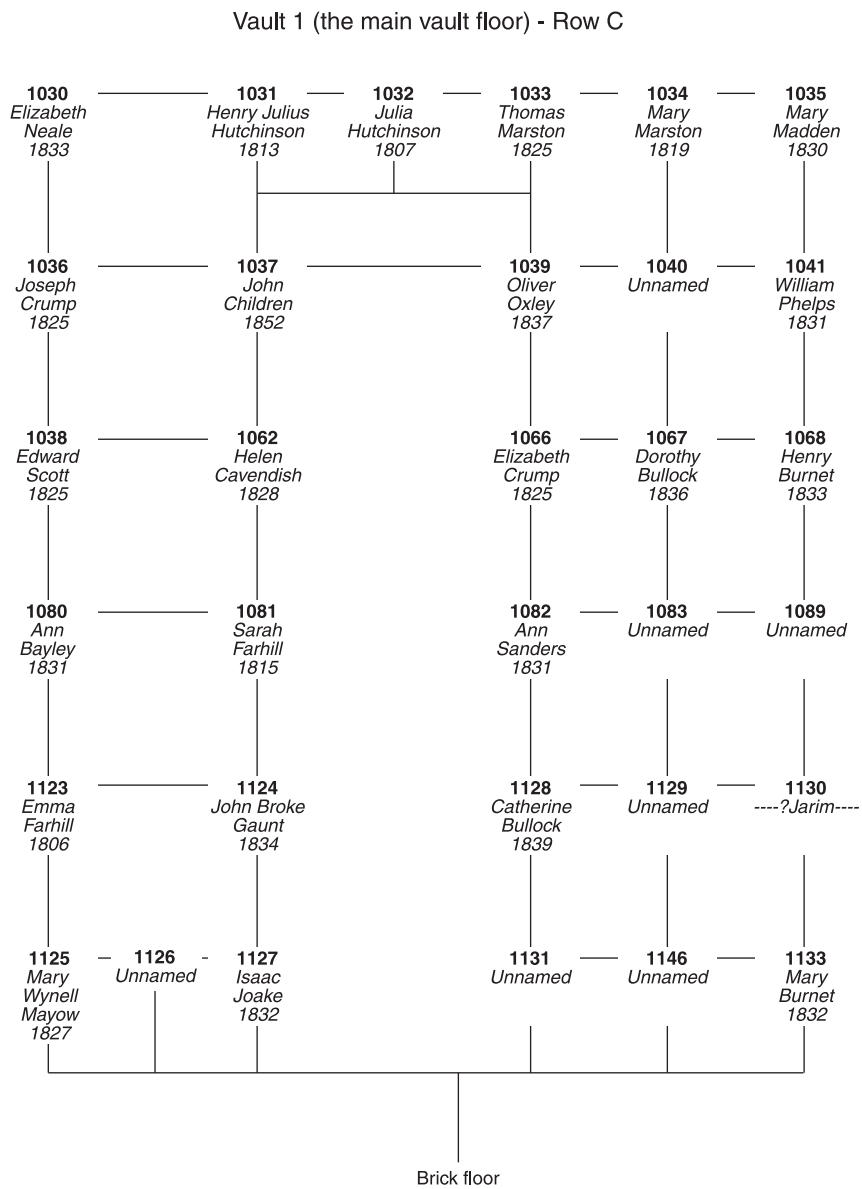


Fig. 3.6 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row C

Vault 1 - Row D

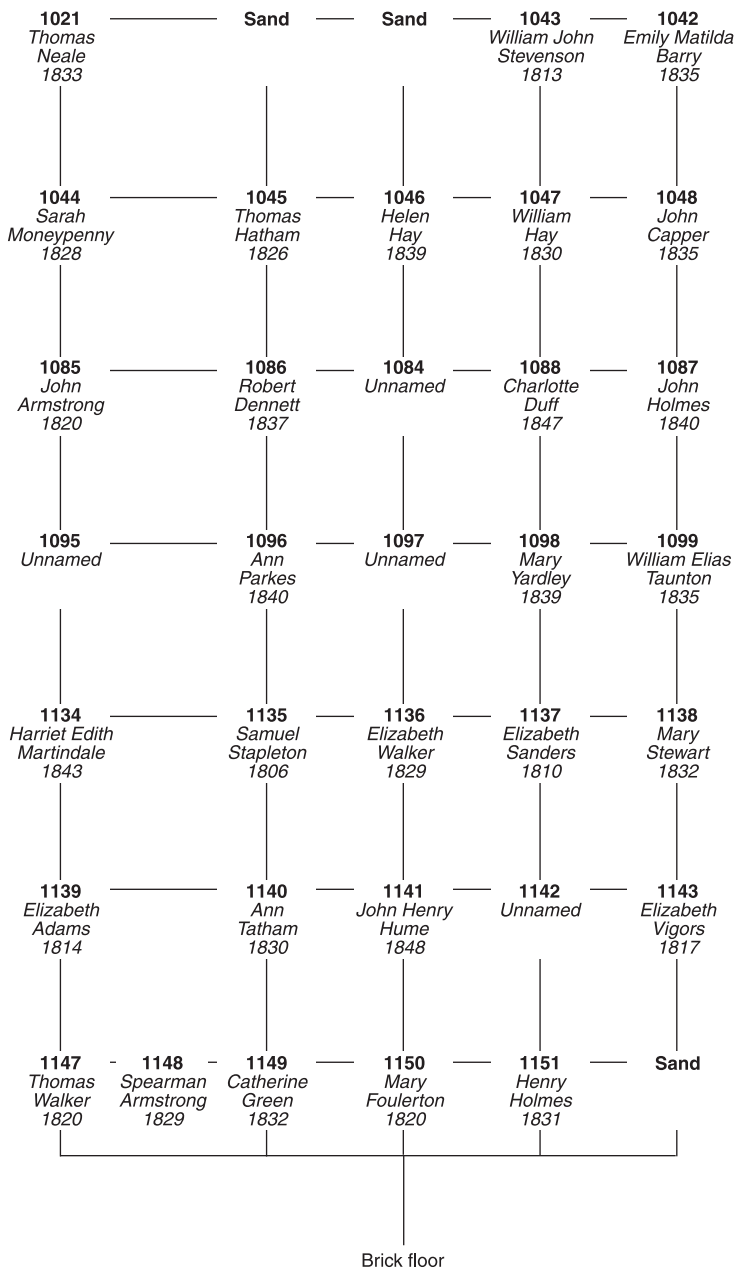
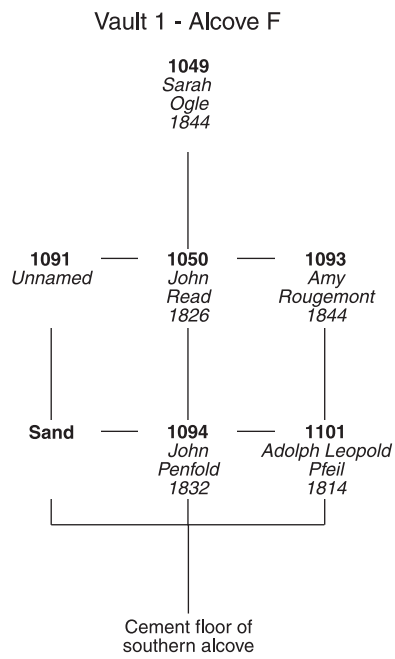


Fig. 3.7 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row D

Vault 1 - (Main vault floor) Row E



Fig. 3.8 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row E



Vault 1 - Alcove G

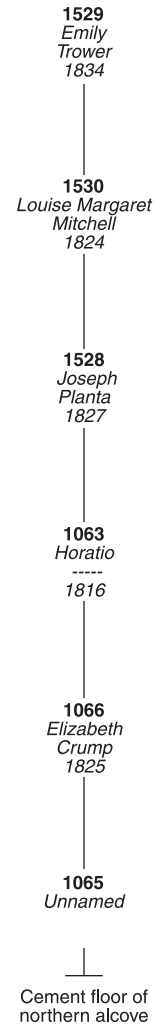


Fig. 3.9 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Alcove F

Fig. 3.10 Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Alcove G

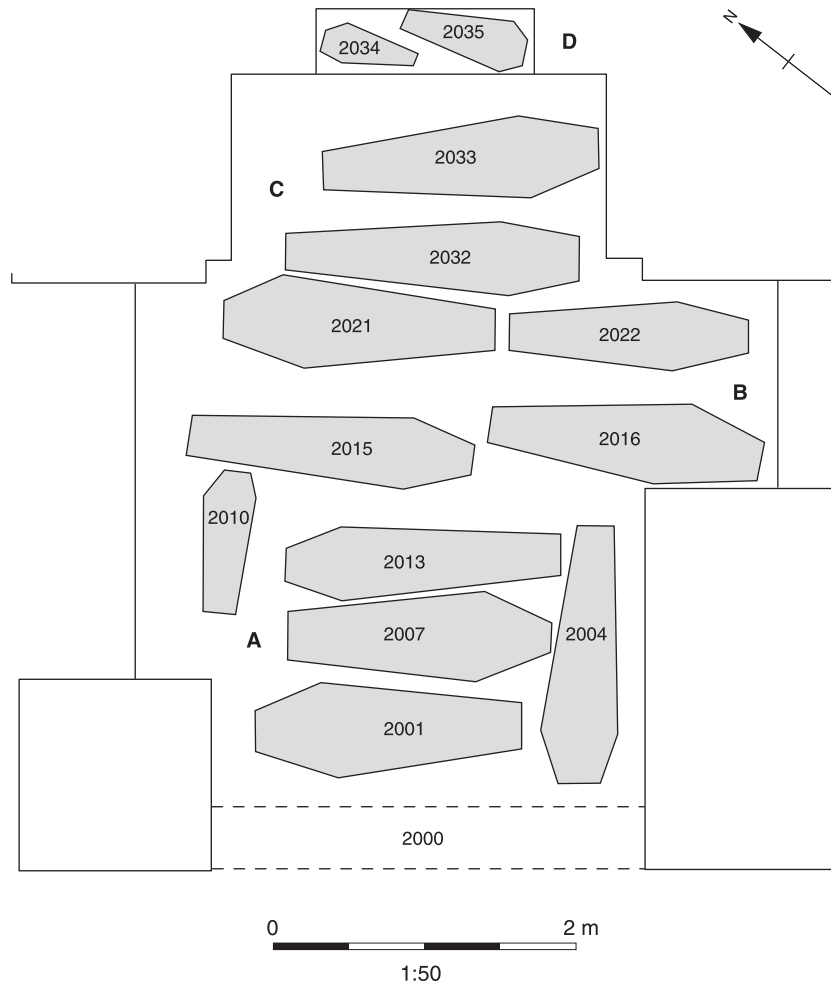


Fig. 3.11 Vault 2: the uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-D

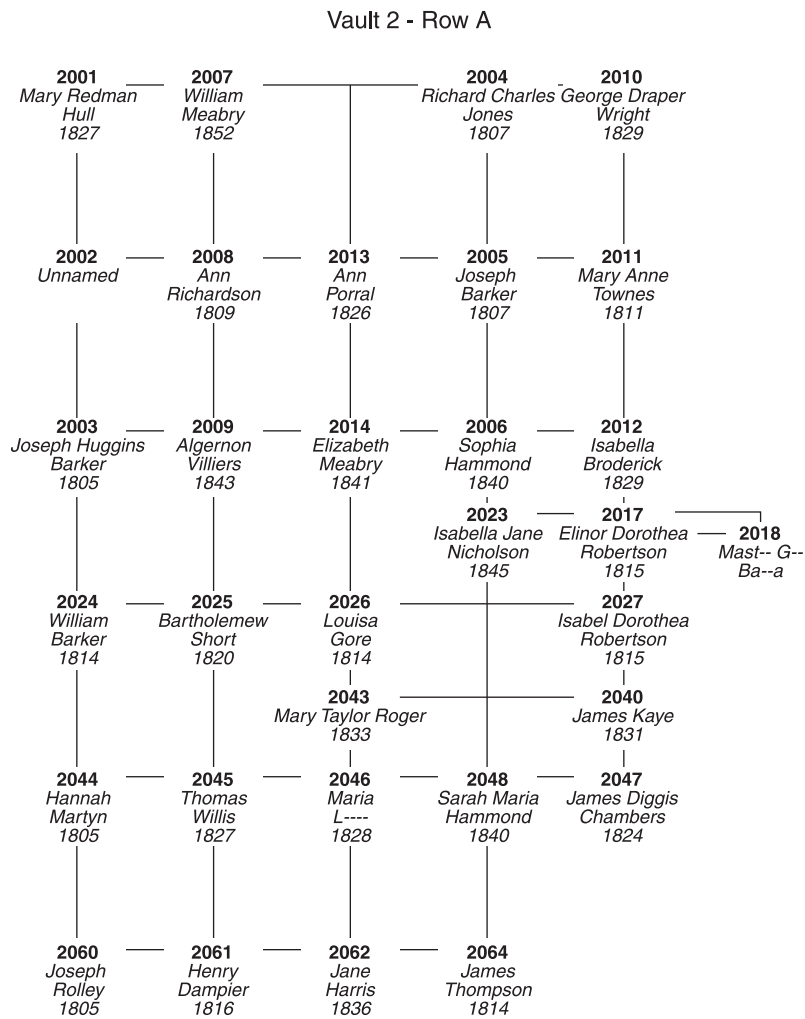


Fig. 3.12 Vault 2: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row A

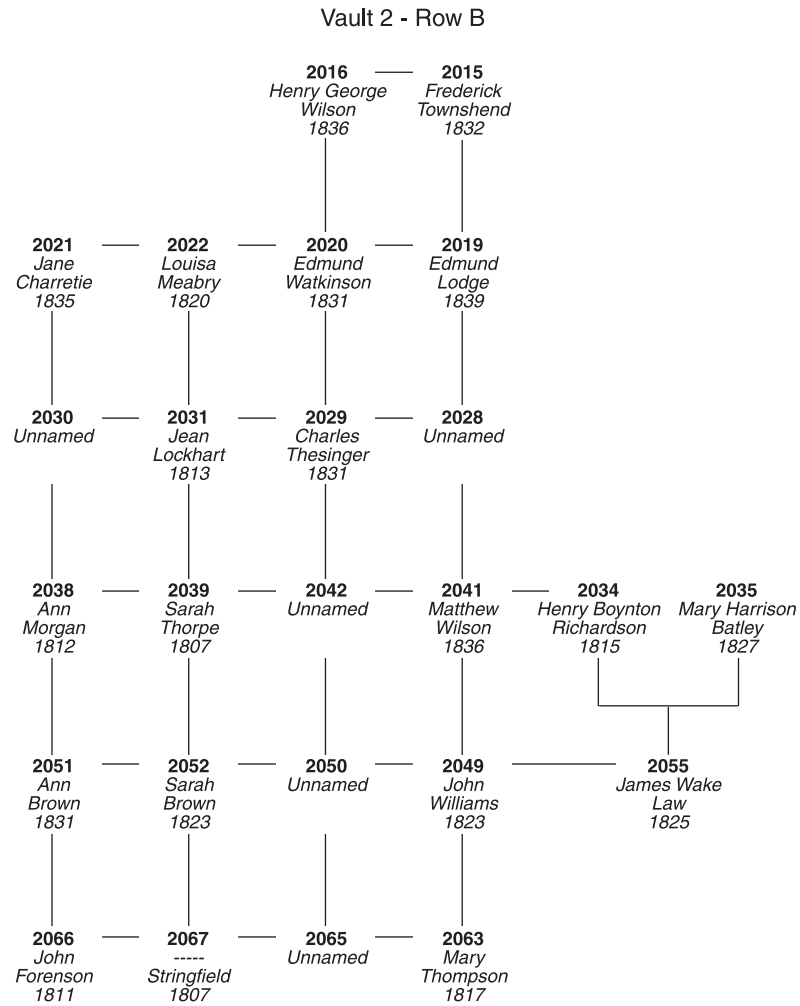


Fig. 3.13 Vault 2: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Row B

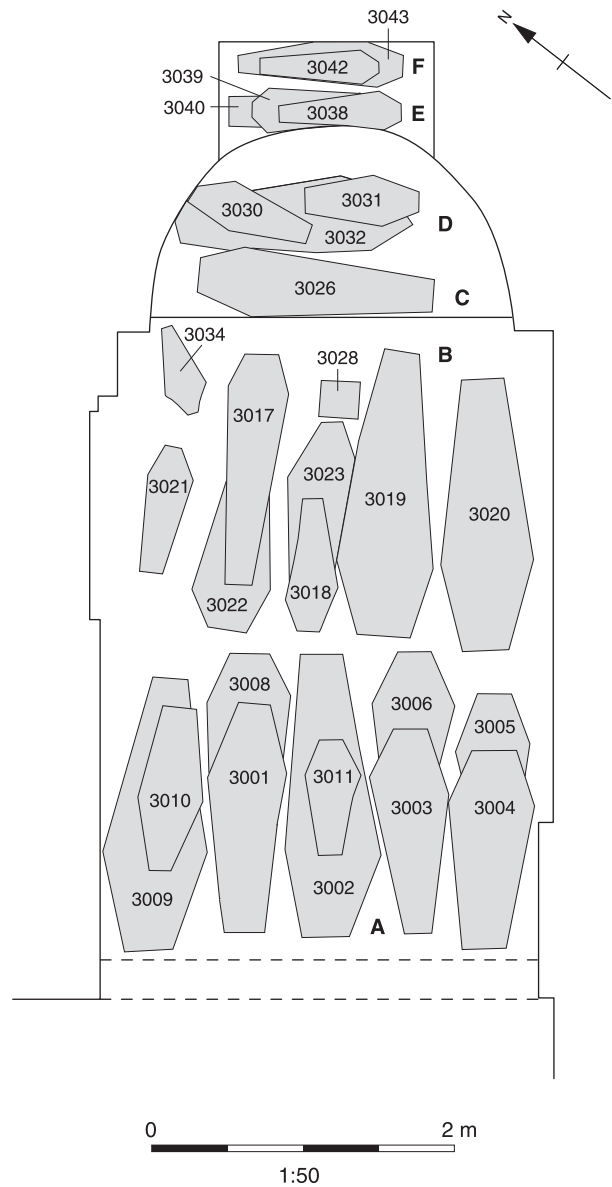
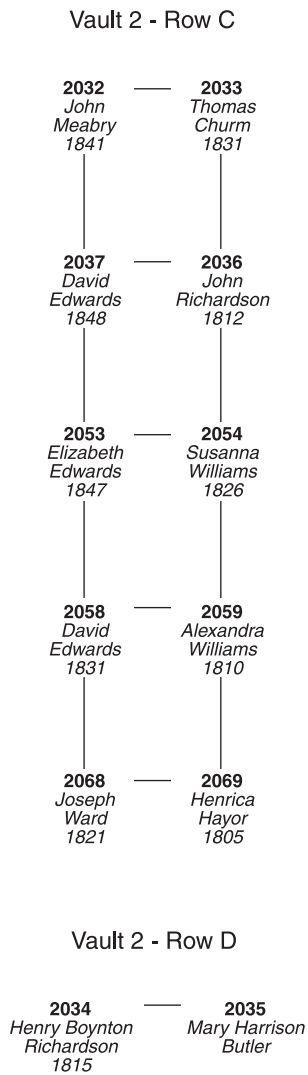


Fig. 3.14 Vault 2: Matrix of the coffin stacks – Rows C and D

Fig. 3.15 Vault 3: The uppermost layer of coffin in stacks A-F

'In the vaults beneath'

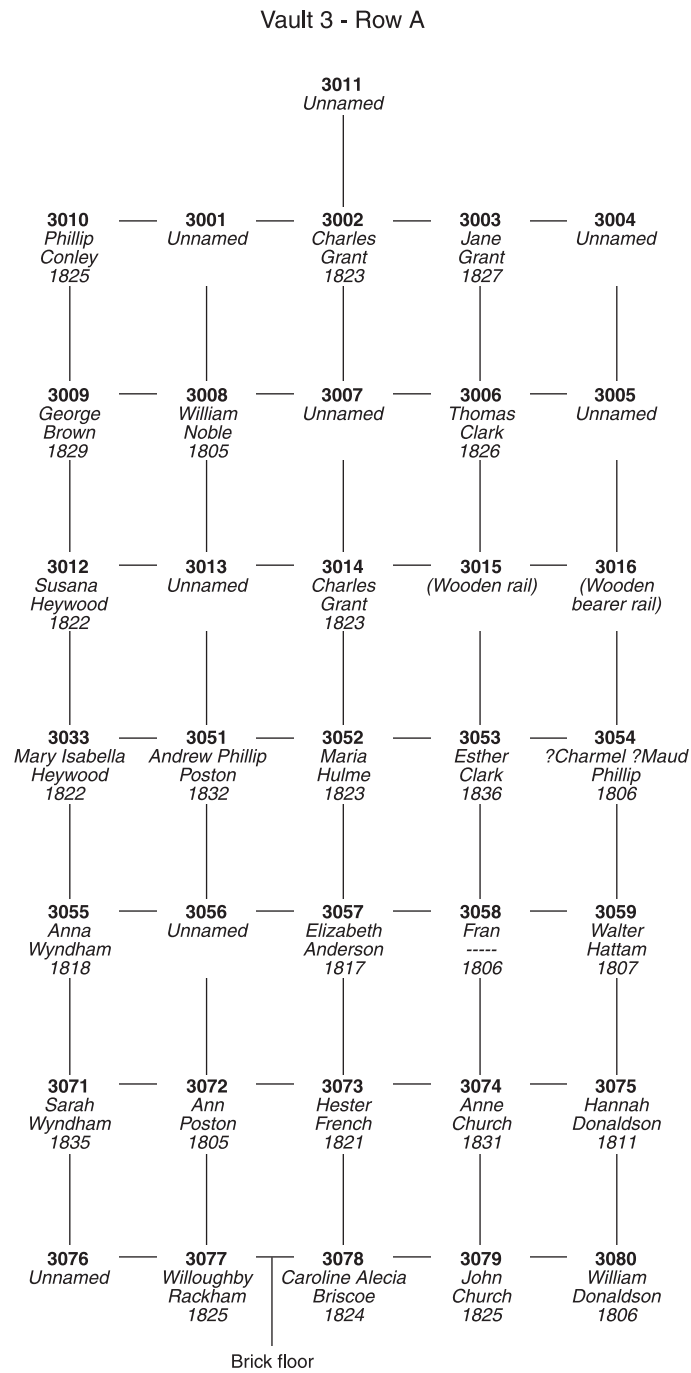


Fig. 3.16 Vault 3: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A

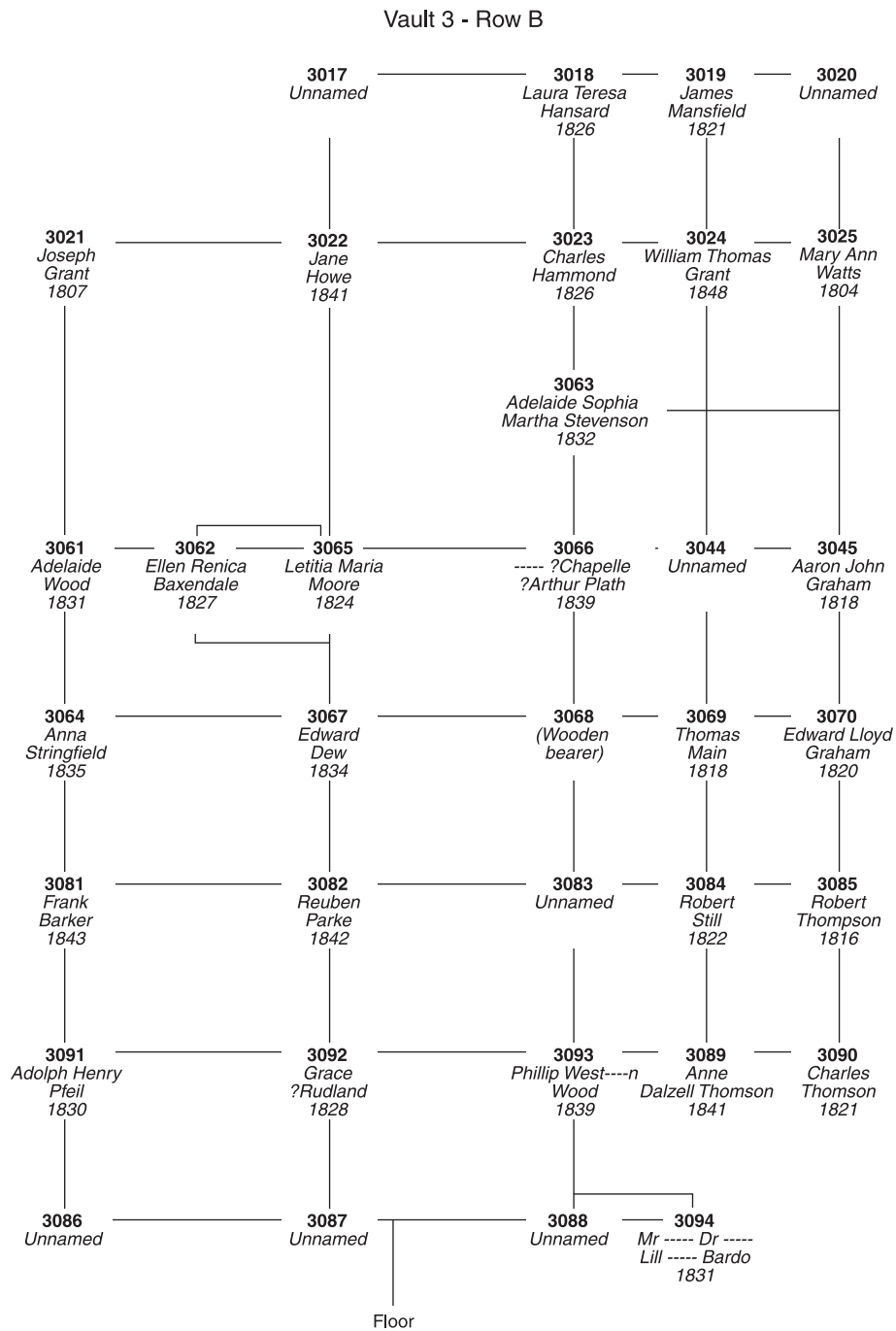


Fig. 3.17 Vault 3: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B

'In the vaults beneath'

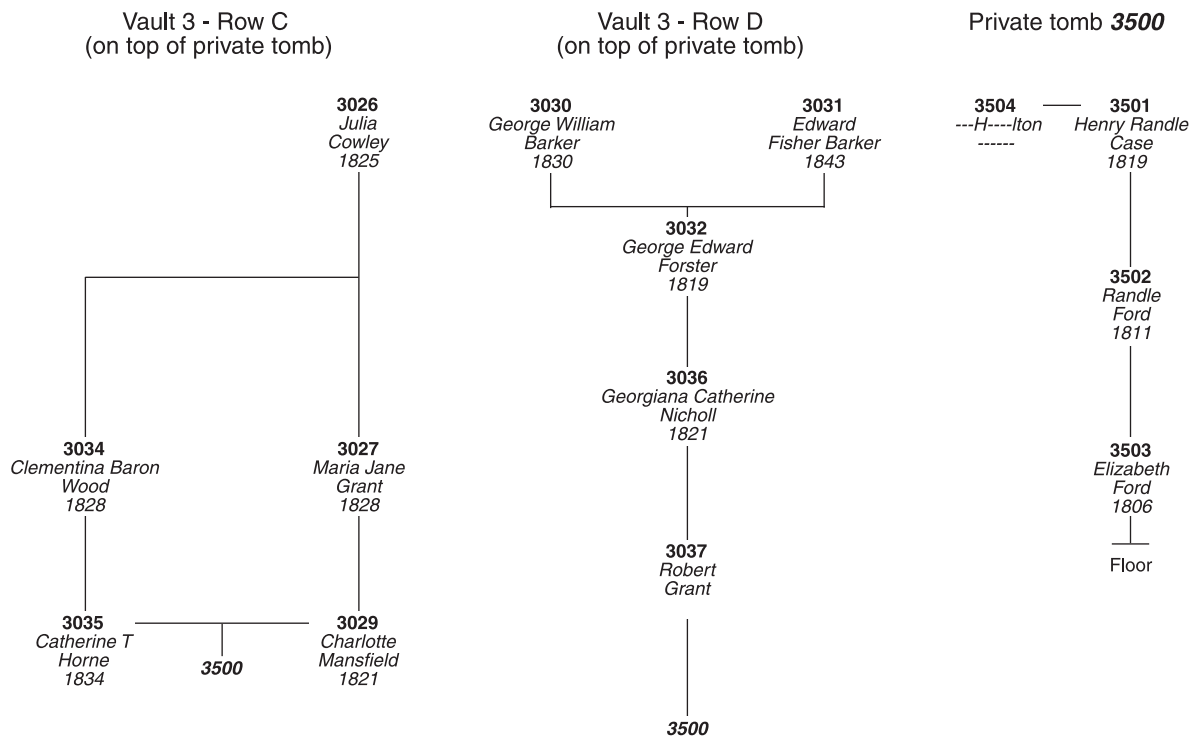


Fig. 3.18 Vault 3: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C-F and the private tomb 3500

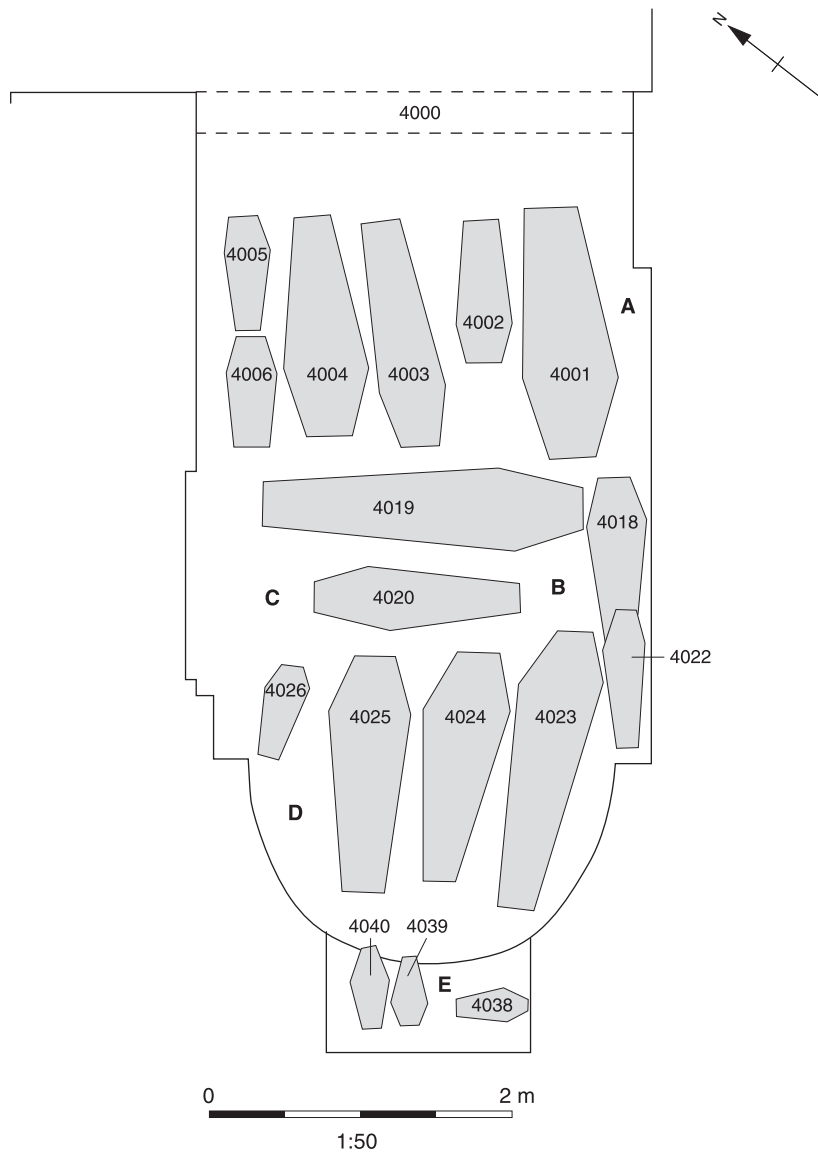
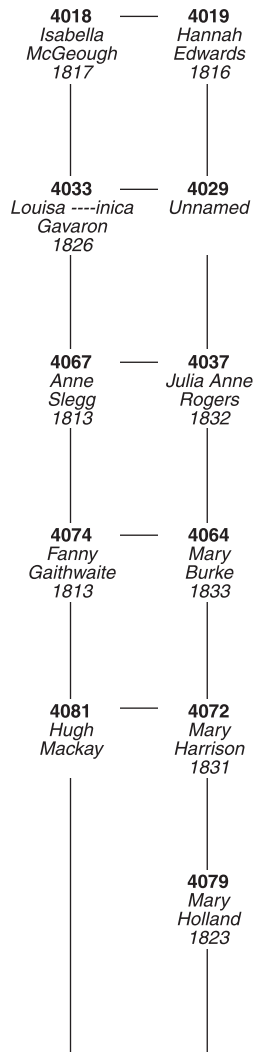


Fig. 3.19 Vault 4: The uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-E

Vault 4 - Row B



Vault 4 - Row C

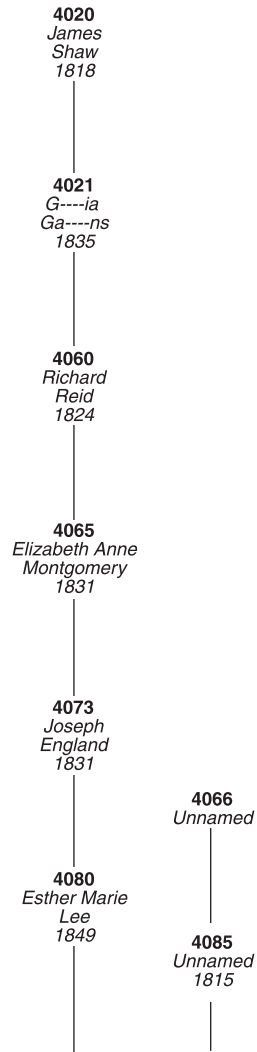


Fig. 3.21 Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B

Fig. 3.22 Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C

'In the vaults beneath'

Vault 4 - Row D

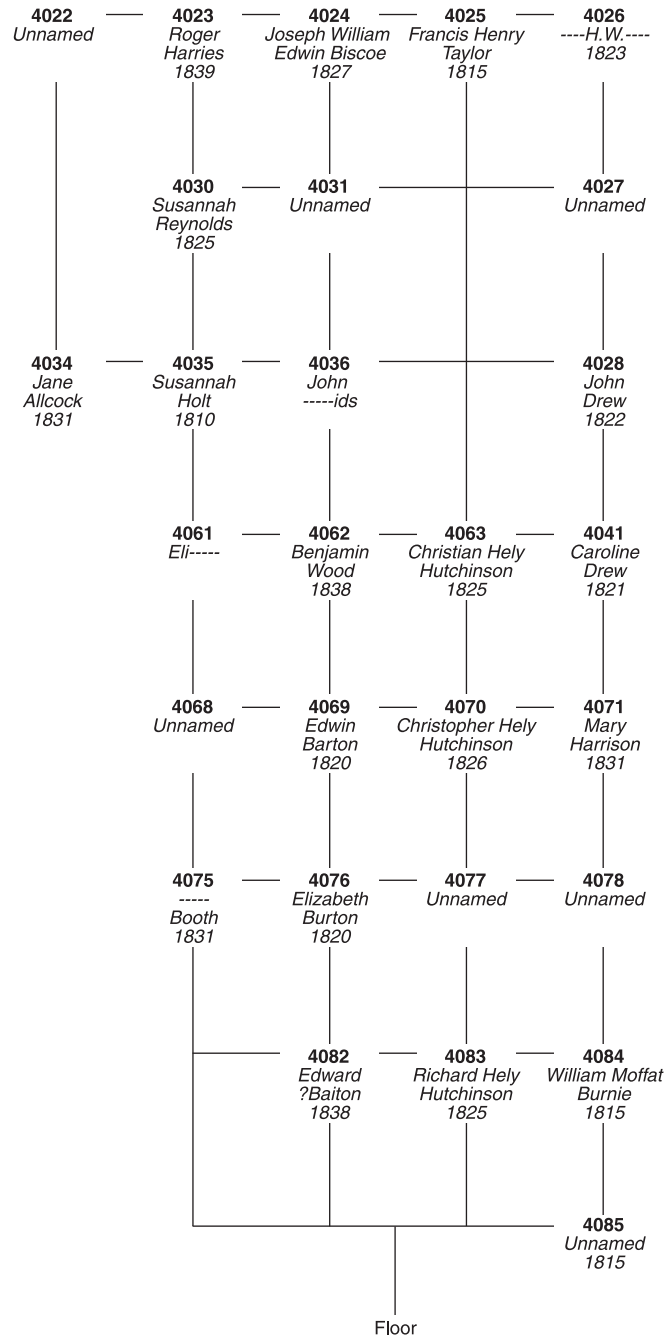


Fig. 3.23 Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row D

Vault 4 - Ledge (E) (Infant Coffins)

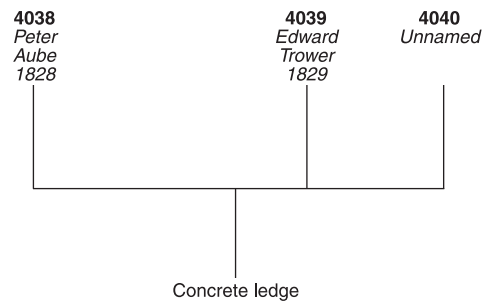


Fig. 3.24 Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Ledge E

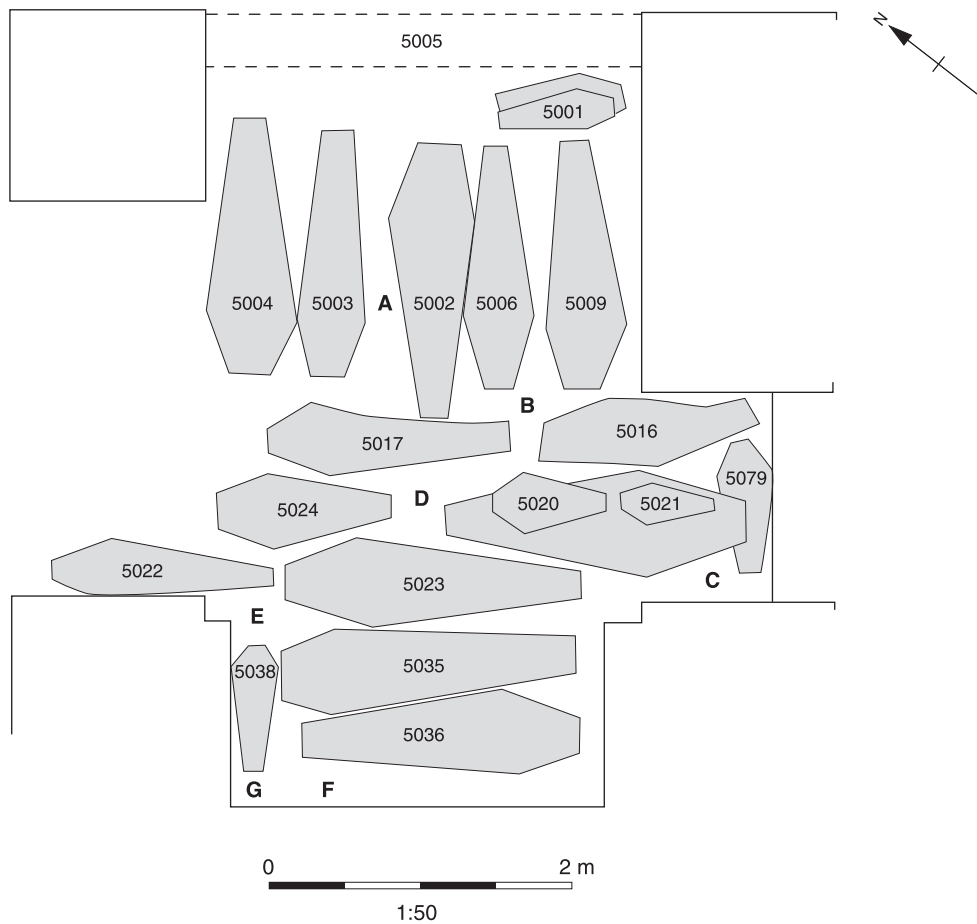


Fig. 3.25 Vault 5: The uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-G

Vault 5 - Row A

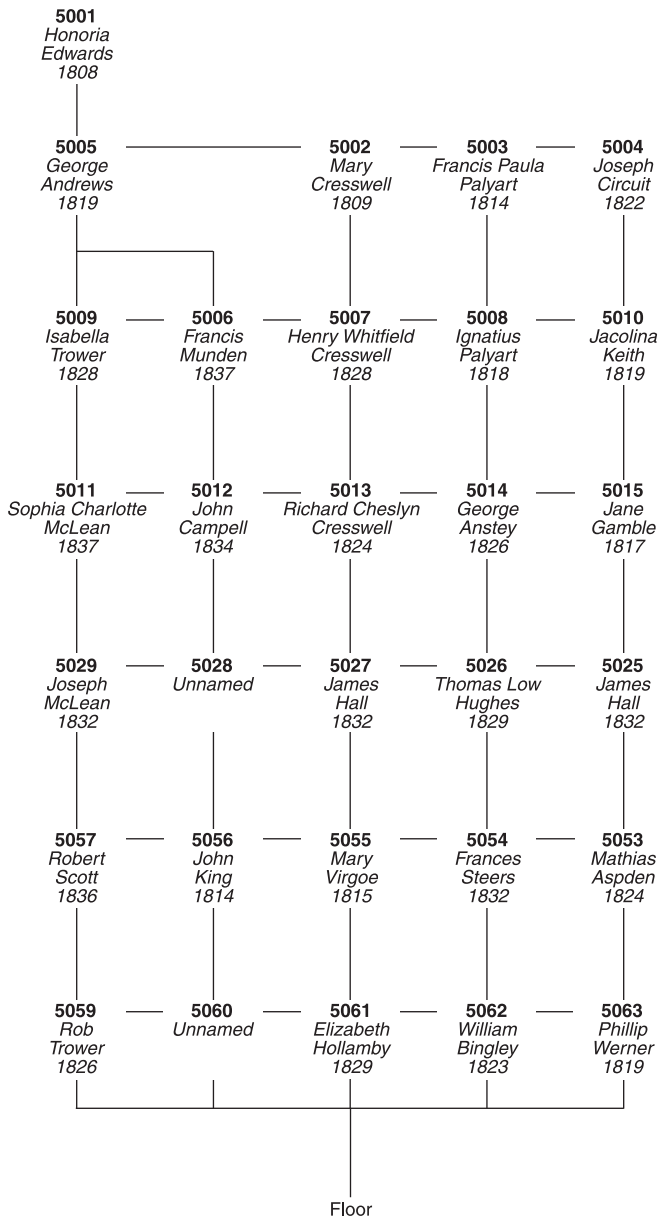


Fig. 3.26 Vault 5: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A

Vault 5 - Row B

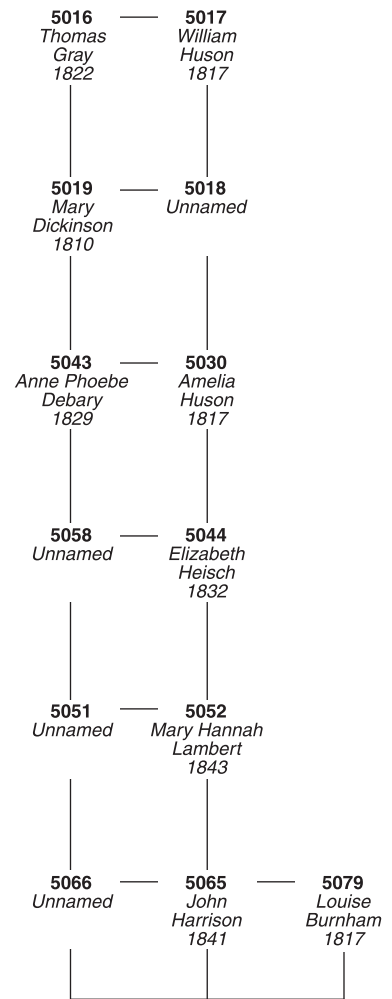


Fig. 3.27 Vault 5: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B

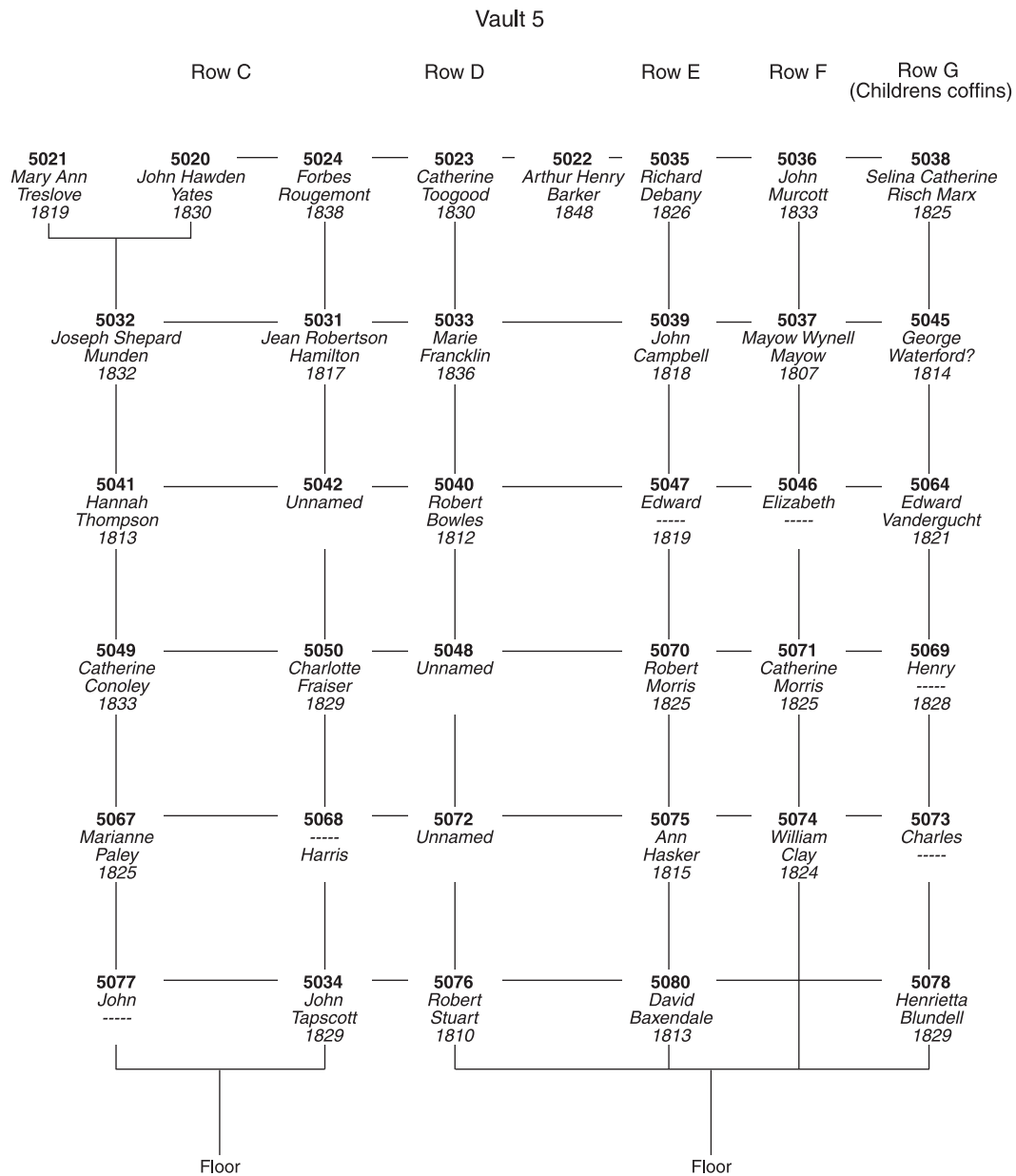


Fig. 3.28 Vault 5: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Rows C-G

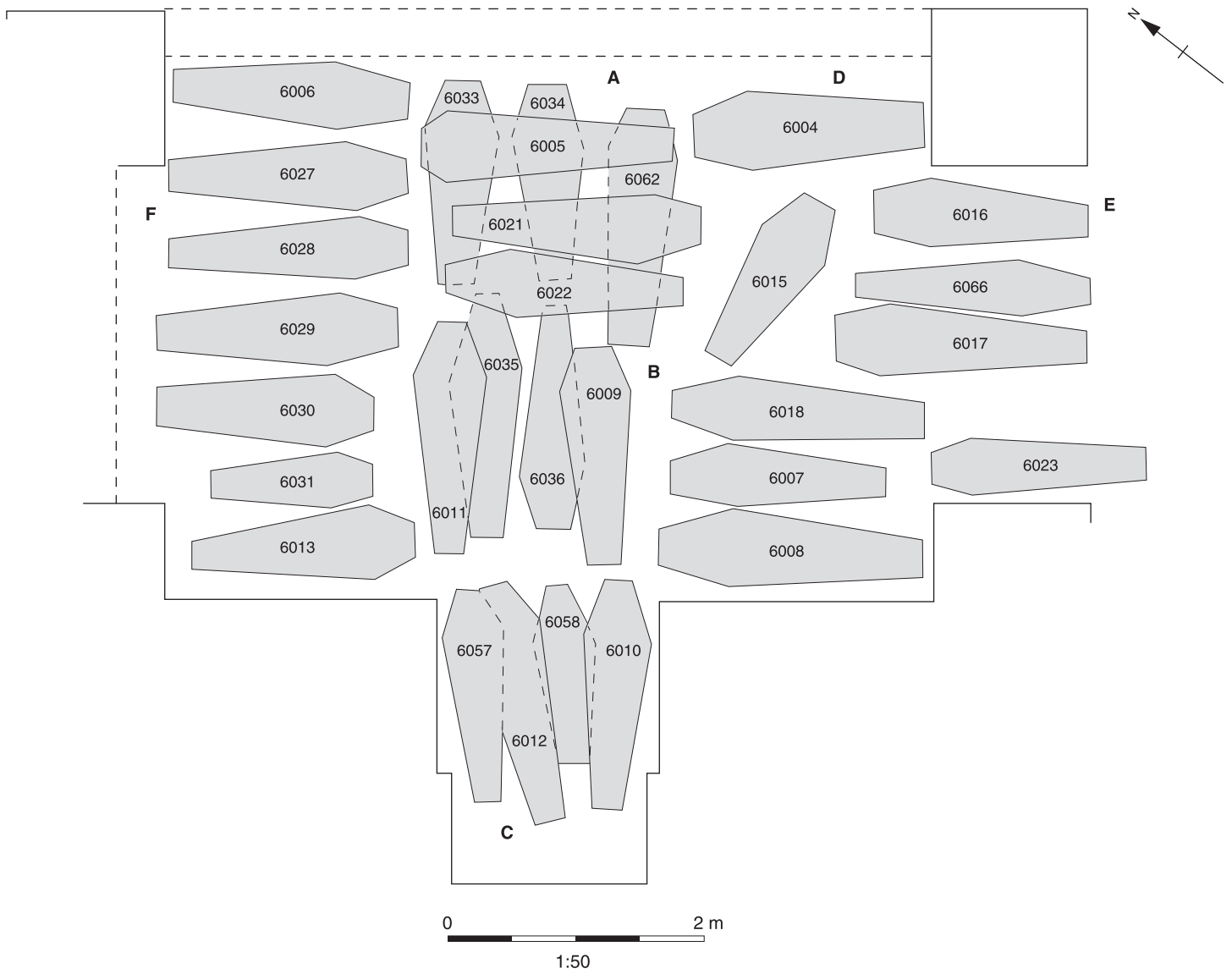


Fig. 3.29 Vault 6: The uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-F

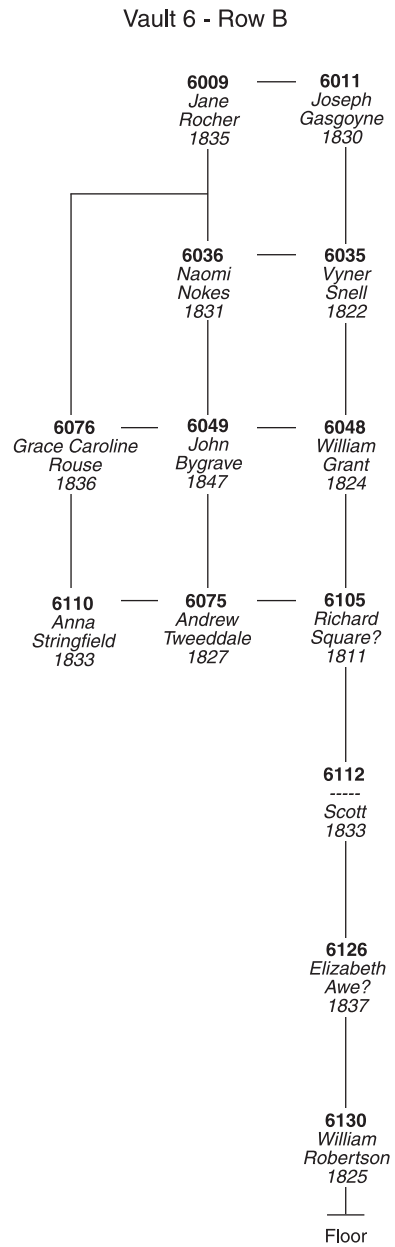
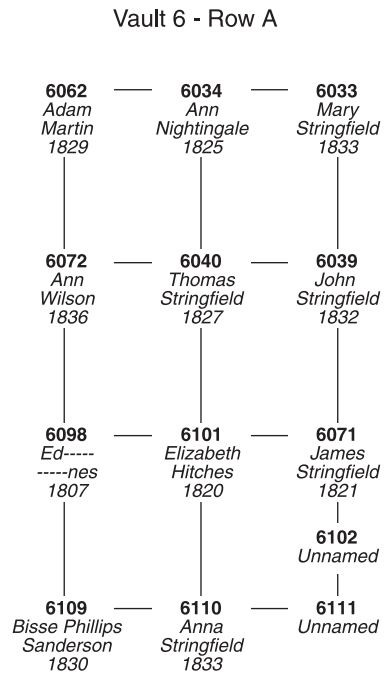
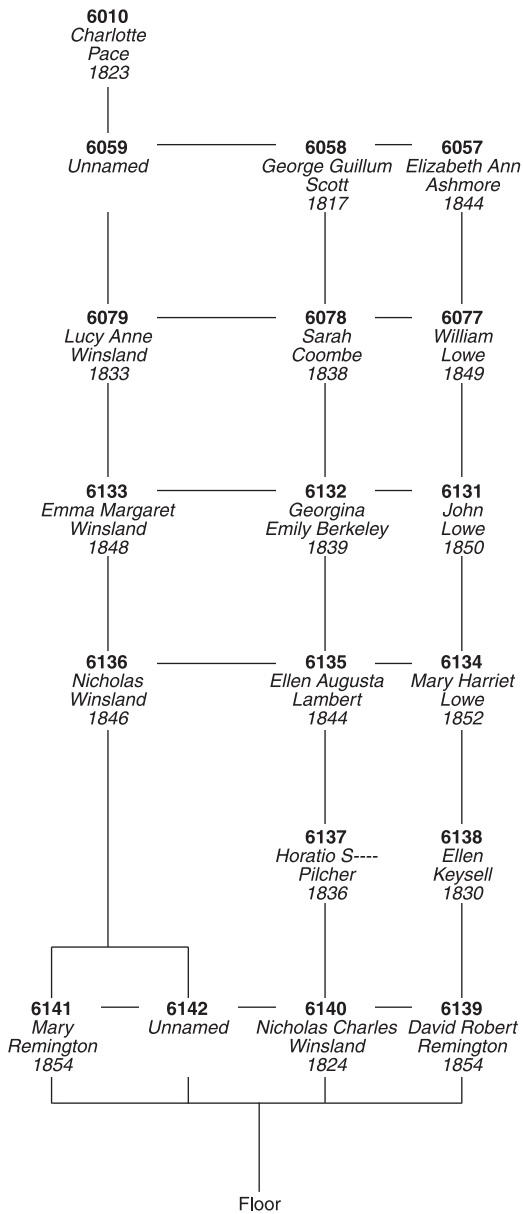


Fig. 3.30 Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A

Fig. 3.31 Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B

Vault 6 - Row C



Vault 6 - Row D

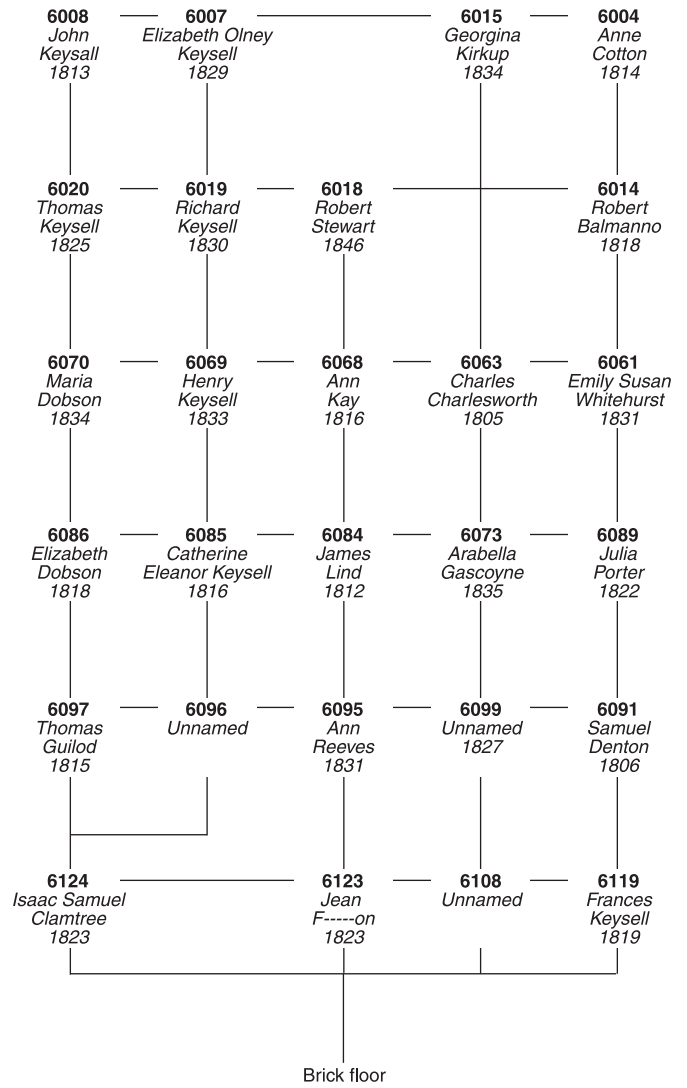


Fig. 3.32 Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C

Fig. 3.33 Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row D

Vault 6 - Row F

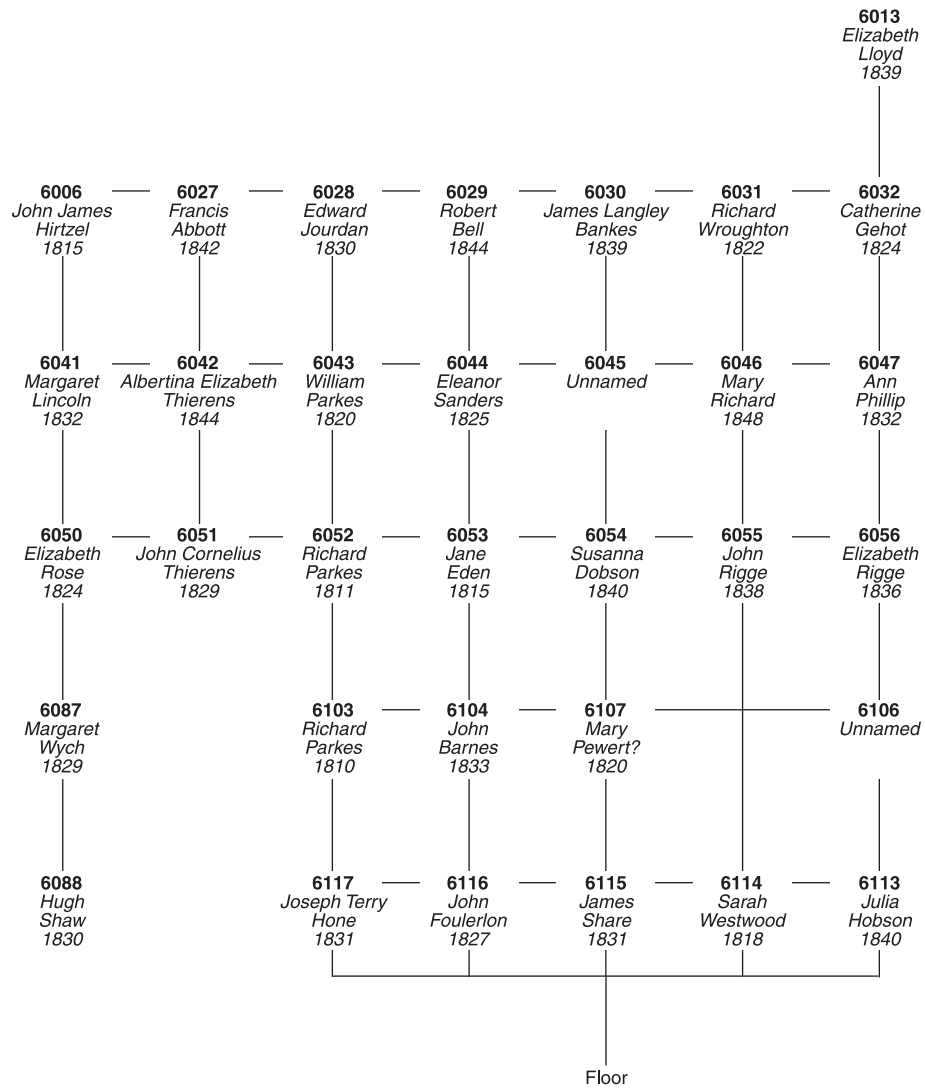


Fig. 3.35 Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row F

Chapter 3

Vault 7

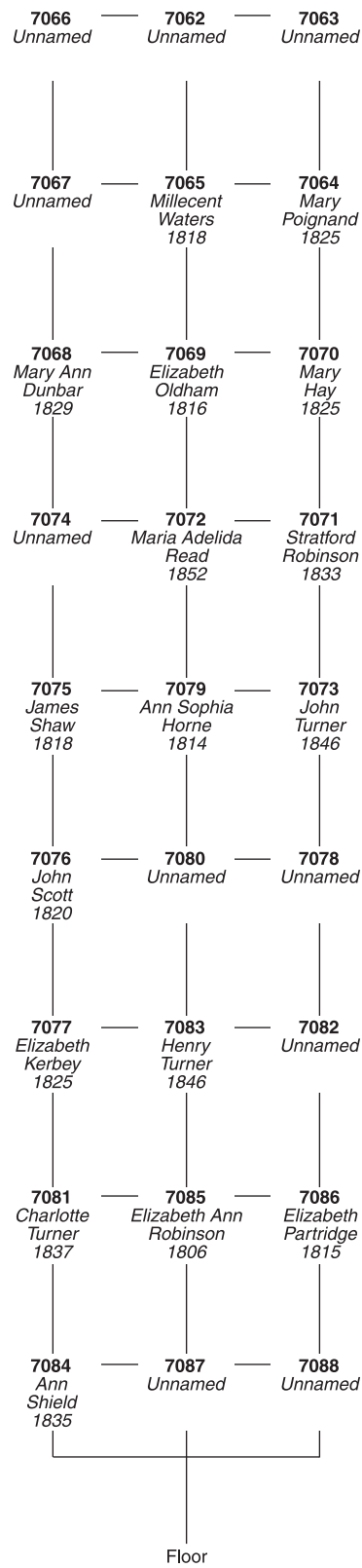


Fig. 3.36 Vault 7: Matrix of the stacked coffins found at the back of the vault

