

Chapter 8: Burial practice and material culture

by Ceridwen Boston

BURYING THE DEAD OF THE PARISH

The burial ground

One of the general principles adopted by the Commissioners and embodied in the supplementary Act of 1712 relates to the burial grounds of new churches. It was determined that these should be sited some distance from the churches. The architect Vanburgh had demanded churches should be

free'd from that Inhuman custom of being made Burial Places for the Dead. A Custome in which there is something so very barbarous in itself besides the many ill consequences that attend it. . . . There is now a sort of happy necessity on this occasion of breaking through it, since there can be no thought of purchasing ground for church yards, where the churches will probably be placed . . . there must therefore be cemeteries provided in the skirts of the Towne . . .

The restricted area of the churchyard of St George did not allow for extramural burial on anything but a minor scale. As a result, the Commissioners had little choice but to purchase a separate piece of land to serve as the parish burial ground. In 1713 a three acre site costing £300 was purchased for the purpose. It was situated to the north-east of Brunswick Square in the parish of St Pancras, immediately to the north of the Foundling Hospital (see Fig. 4.3 above). The north half of the site was for the use of St George's church, while the south was used by the neighbouring parish church of St George the Martyr.

By 1845, several tombs were falling down, and the ground had a wild and desolate appearance. By 1855, the burial ground was full and had to be closed. It was subsequently developed into a public recreation ground. The gravestones were moved to the surrounding walls, and only a few large tombs remain *in situ*. Today most of the inscriptions are illegible. However, Frederick Teague Cansick recorded and published an illustrated record of the 981 inscriptions that were still decipherable (Cansick 1869). As one would expect of a prosperous parish like Bloomsbury, the names included a large number of professional men and several who had settled or made their fortunes in the colonies. Curtiss Brett, who died in 1784, is commemorated thus:

Twelve times the Great Atlantic crossed | To
Fortune paying court | In many a terrible
Tempest toss'd | But now I'm safe in Port.

It is likely that the memorials to the more prosperous residents buried in the cemetery are comparable to the affluent residents who chose to be buried in the vaults. It is likely that many of the graves in the cemetery without memorials were the burials of the less affluent residents of the parish.

The crypt

For the first 90 years, the vaults beneath Hawksmoor's church were not used. Proposals to lease them to a wine merchant in 1788 had been considered but rejected, and an alternative proposal to lease them to a brewer was considered totally unsuitable.

The 1801 census shows that the population of Bloomsbury had increased to nearly 8000. The Vestry met in May 1803 to consider

adopting measures for depositing dead bodies in the vaults under the church as they foresaw the burial ground would otherwise be full within 30 years. It was resolved that an opening be made in the floor of the church and an apparatus constructed from thence into the vaults.

The fee for this privilege was 10 guineas if buried under the church and 14 guineas if buried under the chancel. It was a condition that all bodies be encased within lead coffins. Clearly the expense both of the interment and the cost of a lead shell precluded all but the more affluent of the parish – a factor that has considerable ramifications when interpreting the social demography and palaeopathology of the skeletal sample from the crypt. Interments in the crypt in lead coffins began in 1803 and continued until 1856.

The earliest interment in the crypt is that of Mrs Mary Ann Watts (coffin 3025) who died in January 1804. She is the only certain interment in 1804. There are 7 burials known from 1805. Over the 53 years that the crypt was in use as a place of burial, the rate of interment varied between 2 and 34 burials per annum, with an average of 12 per year. Throughout

its use as a place of burial, the crypt accommodated only a fraction of the total population buried in the parish of St George's, Bloomsbury. Between 1801-1840, parish burial records (including crypt and churchyard burials) list the burials of 8656 individuals, an average of 216.4 per year. Initially crypt burials formed a very small percentage of total burials for the parish. From 1803 to the end of 1810 only 57 crypt burials are known (see above Table 5.1). This is less than 2% of all burials in the parish in the period. In the decade to 1820 there were 152 certain burials (7.78%). Burial in the crypt was most popular in the two decades from 1821 to 1840, with a peak between 1825 and 1833 (see above Fig. 5.1). In these two decades crypt burials formed more than 10% of total burials in the Parish. The single year with most known crypt burials was 1825 with 32. From 1833 the number of burials in the crypt slowly declined. From 1851 to 1856 there are only 11 known burials.

By 1844 the Vestry minutes records that many coffins were by now in so decayed and in such an 'offensive' state that it was decided they should be placed in a side vault and bricked up. From the distribution of post-1844 coffins within Vaults 1 to 7, it is unclear to which side vault the Vestry minutes refer. From the description of the decayed state of some coffins within the crypt in 1844 is not surprising that from the early 1840s onwards only a few interments were still being made in the crypt. There were 64 known burials from 1841 to 1850, and 11 between 1851 and 1856.

The crypt was closed for burial in 1856. The closures of both burial ground and crypt were in part a response to the Burial Act of 1852, which had prohibited further burial within crypts and churchyards in London, in favour of the new garden cemeteries, such as Kensal Green and Highgate (Curl 2002; Friar 2003, 69). In 1856 the St George's vestry finally resolved 'hermetically to seal the entrance to the vaults.' It was made clear that

parties whose connections lie in the vaults take the necessary steps for the removal of the remains of their connections.

It is unclear to what extent the latter directive was followed. One memorial in the church, however, records the removal of the remains of Sophia (surname illegible) to the family vault in the newly fashionable cemetery of Kensal Green.

There is no record in the Vestry minutes that the churchyard surrounding the church was ever used as a place of burial, and there was no evidence from test pits 1-4 excavated in the churchyard to indicate that there were any burials (Chapter 2). The problem of burial space in the parish was finally resolved by obtaining an allotment in the Woking Cemetery owned by the London Necropolis Company, 'a bad though the best substitute available'.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Historical background

In Britain from the late 17th century onwards, it became customary to cover the coffin with upholstery of baize or velvet, and to decorate the lid and side panels of coffins with studs and metal coffin fittings. By 1700-20 the funeral furnishing trade was a firmly established business, providing fittings for all classes of people and at various costs, depending on the status and wealth of the deceased (Litten 1991). The financial investment in funerary panoply grew over the course of the 18th century, reaching its zenith in the 1840s. Even amongst the poor the importance of providing a decent burial was keenly felt (May 1996). However, for those that could afford it, the coffin itself was just one aspect of the elaborate mourning and funerary practices surrounding the death of a loved one in this period. Funerals of the wealthy frequently involved processions of black draped hearses, black plumed horses, mutes and chief mourners, a complex symbolism involving appropriate mourning dress, grand memorials and, of course, the heavily decorated coffin itself.

However, after the 1840s, public sentiment changed yet again. Increasingly, such effusive displays of mourning were seen as excessive and undesirable. In particular, elaborate expensive funerals began to be regarded as vulgar, ostentatious displays of wealth and status and were increasingly considered to be in poor taste. In this period many caricatures stigmatise undertakers as avaricious vultures, preying on the vulnerability of families in grief, exploiting other peoples' misfortunes and their desire to be seen to 'do the right thing' by the dead. During the middle and later Victorian period a taste for simpler funerals became the norm, and persists with us today. Interestingly, in the further reaches of the old British Empire elements of the earlier burial traditions persist. Coffin fittings very much in the elaborate early Victorian mode were being manufactured in Birmingham and shipped out to the Caribbean, and in particular to Jamaica, as recently as the 1960s. The coffins from St George's church date to the heyday of the late Georgian/early Victorian funerary tradition at its most extravagant.

Early 19th-century perceptions of death

Social historians have often accused the Victorians of a morbid and unhealthy obsession with death. What is clear is that they celebrated this rite of passage more than any other, in terms of preparation for death, funeral ritual, and the long period of mourning that followed it. Victorian deathbed scenes, as depicted in the literature and art of the day, may seem to modern eyes morbid or mawkishly sentimental, but they represent a genuine attempt to confront the awful reality of

death, so that when one's time came Death could met with serenity and calm resignation. In a society where the infant mortality rate varied between 20-50% (Rugg 1999), where epidemic infections could sweep through cities with terrifying ease and where medical interventions were still rudimentary and powerless to halt the advance of many diseases, such as tuberculosis, death was a familiar part of life. Rather than deny the very real presence of death in everyday life, the Victorians chose to accept and celebrate it, to give it centre stage. This response may be seen as a very human, understandable and therapeutic confrontation of humanity's deepest fear, rather than being regarded as a morbid fixation.

Rugg (1999) writes that this Victorian concept of a 'good death', death faced with equanimity, came about through a number of ideological and medical developments in the early years of the 19th century. Advances in medical knowledge and a more widespread trust placed in the medical profession lead to a transformation of the deathbed experience, with the doctor's presence being as central to the proceedings as that of the cleric. A heavy reliance on opiates to ease the pain of the dying served to disarm death of much of its terror. Instead of the emphasis on the physical torments of death and the spiritual torments of hell that had so dominated the thinking of earlier generations, the later Georgians and early Victorians were now more able to perceive death as a gentle slipping away, a falling asleep. Christian teaching also changed emphasis in this period. God became much more a God of Love than a God of Vengeance, and instead of hellfire and eternal damnation a gentler concept of the afterlife as heavenly and as an eternal rest developed. Considerable emphasis was placed on heavenly reunion with loved ones in the afterlife, and was a great source of comfort to the bereaved. The ideas of the Romantic movement also had a profound effect on attitudes to death and grieving. The movement's emphasis on individualism and the expression of sentiment made the outward displays of grief more socially acceptable, even desirable, both in an emotional and in a material sense (ibid).

The material culture surrounding death and mourning was particularly rich in the 19th century. Memorials to the dead abounded in many forms. For example, it was common practice to draw or paint the dead or dying, and later in the period, to photograph the corpse. Death masks were sometimes taken of the face or hands of the dead. An example of such effigies was found in the coffin of six year old Anna Stringfield (3064) at St George's church, and will be discussed more fully below. Locks of hair were often collected as keepsakes, or converted into jewellery.

Correct mourning dress was rigidly prescribed, and individuals failing to adhere to social conventions risked social ostracism. The period of mourning varied with the closeness of the relationship. Widows were expected to be in deep

mourning for a year and a day following the death of their husband, and to wear only dull lustreless fabrics such as crepe or bombazine. After this they might wear more lustrous fabrics, such as black silk. After two years the widow might go into half-mourning when she was permitted to wear purple or mauve. In addition to prescriptions on dress, the social behaviour of the bereaved was rigidly laid out. For example, a widow might not attend public functions, and was prohibited from re-marriage for a year following the death of her husband. By contrast, a widower could remarry as soon as he pleased, but his new wife was expected to go into mourning for her predecessor (May 1996).

Social display of mourning manifested strongly in funerary ritual, and proved an admirable medium through which the social prominence of the deceased and family could be displayed. The necessity of giving a good 'send-off' to a loved one was felt by all classes of society. Failure to provide an appropriate funeral reflected on an individual's respectability (Richmond 1999), and many poorer individuals beggared themselves in the attempt to put on a decent funerary spectacle (May 1996). This opportunity for social display was not missed by the professional class interred in the crypt of St George's church. May (1996) estimates that the average sum spent on a funeral of this social class was in the region of £100. In addition, the cost of interment within the crypt at St George's was 10 guineas, or 14 guineas-. if, like Dame Caroline Biscoe (coffin 3078), one specifically wished to be buried beneath the chancel (Meller 1975). The richness of the coffins found within the crypt is eloquent testimony of the social ambitions of this class (see Plate 8.8).

Coffins

Coffin materials and construction

Coffins used in the later post-medieval period were of the flat lidded single-break type, and those found at St George's church were no exception. During the Georgian/Victorian period, coffins varied considerably in construction and material, ranging from the simplest unadorned wooden coffins of pauper funerals, to triple layered affairs, heavily adorned with velvet and encrusted with elaborate metal fittings, for the burial of the wealthier classes. The most inexpensive coffins were a simple construction of a single layer of wooden planks, fixed together with iron nails at the corners and along the coffin length. More elaborate wooden coffin constructions were double layered, or possessed a double lid. Some lids were especially designed to foil attempts by 'resurrectionists', or body snatchers, to open the coffin and steal the corpse for later sale to anatomy schools for dissection (Litten 1991). The wooden coffin may or may not have been upholstered and decorated with metal coffin fittings, depending on the wealth and inclination of the mourners.

More expensive coffins possessed a lead shell. Such coffins are most commonly used for interments in the crypts of churches and within intra- and extra-mural vaults and brick-lined shaft graves. The lead coffins or shells served to slow, and sometimes arrest the decay of the corpse. Georgian and Victorian belief in the importance of the integrity of the physical body on the Day of Judgement underlay some of the motivations to halt the natural corruption of the corpse. It also fed into the gentle, romantic metaphor of death as eternal rest, de-emphasising and sometimes denying the processes of physical decay that had so pre-occupied people of the later medieval and earlier post-medieval periods (Tarlow and West 1998; Rugg 1999). On a practical level, the containment of body liquor within a water- and air-proof container was of particular importance when interring individuals within the church vaults or beneath the floor of the church itself. In many churches, as in St George's, encasement within a lead shell was a basic requirement of interment in the church crypt. At St George's church this directive was carried through in practice in all but one case.

Lead-lined coffins were either double or triple layered. Double-layered coffins were composed of a lead shell either enclosed by, or enclosing a wooden coffin. Triple shelled coffins had a wooden inner coffin within a lead shell, the lead itself being enclosed within an ornately decorated and upholstered outer wooden case.

Triple coffins represent a great investment in time, materials and money and, as such, indicated the wealth and social prominence of the deceased and his or her surviving family. The inner wooden coffin was usually constructed of elm, which was particularly favoured for being more impermeable to water than many other available woods. Planed elm planks were glued and screwed together, and the seams caulked with Swedish pitch. The interior of the coffin was usually lined with fabric, most commonly cambric, a fine linen originally from Cambray, Flanders (Litten 1991). Often a decorative frill of punched 'lace' covered the coffin sides. Aesthetically this was most important where the corpse was to be viewed prior to burial. Fragments of coffin lining were found adhering to the internal wood of many open coffins at St George's church. Punched 'lace' frills were found in two coffins, but were poorly preserved.

Traditionally, the base of the inner coffin was covered with a shallow calico-covered layer of sawdust or bran, which helped to absorb some of the body fluids released during putrefaction. It was noted at St George's church, and also at St Luke's church, Islington (Boyle *et al.* 2005) and at St Nicholas' church, Sevenoaks (Boyle *et al.* 2002), that plentiful sawdust or bran within the coffin correlated closely with poorer preservation of the skeleton. This is probably the result of the leaching of the inorganic bone minerals due to the more acidic environment created by the decaying bran or

sawdust (Janaway 1996). As an alternative to this sawdust or bran layer, the corpse was sometimes laid out on a mattress, with a pillow beneath the head (Litten 1991). This practice reflects the strong symbolic association between death and sleep that developed in the later Georgian/Victorian period (Rugg 1999). No evidence for mattresses was found in coffins in St George's crypt.

The inner wooden coffin was sealed and encased within a lead shell. The fashioning of the lead shell was beyond the capabilities of most coffin makers, and was usually undertaken by a local plumber (Litten 1991). Unlike the inner or outer wooden coffins, the lead shell had to be bespoke. Lead sheets were cut and shaped around the inner wooden coffin. The pieces of lead were then soldered together to create a water- and airtight container. Then, either an inscription was engraved directly onto the lead shell, or a fairly plain inner coffin breastplate was soldered or riveted on. The inner breastplate of Anne Porral (Plate 8.1) shows an error in the inscription, erroneously naming her Mary rather than Ann. The mistake was crossed through and corrected. This

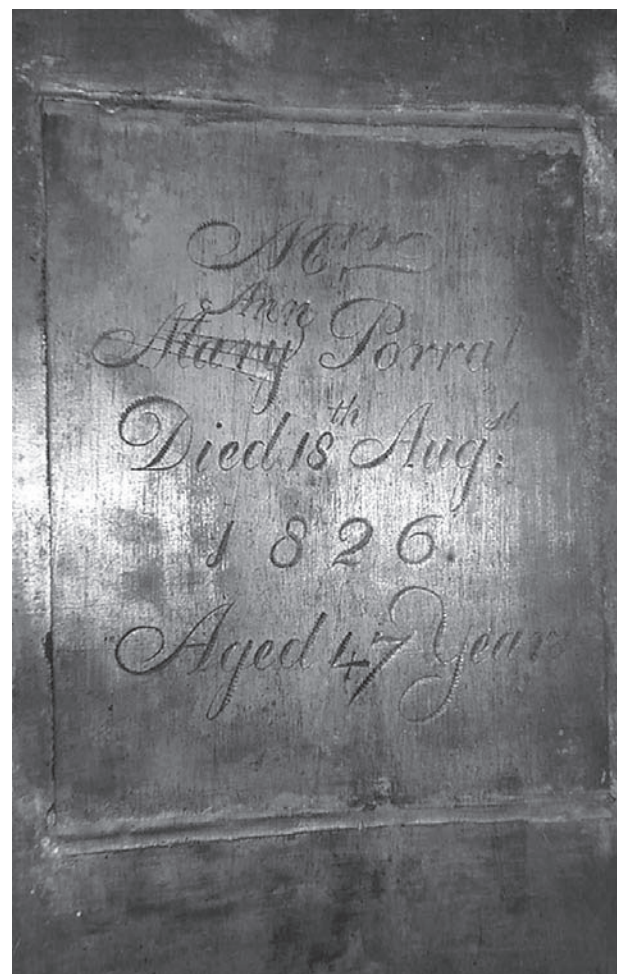


Plate 8.1 Inner breastplate of Ann Porral (coffin 2013) showing the error in her Christian name. Mary has been deleted and Ann inserted

error would not have been observed by mourners since it was concealed by the outer wooden case. The outer breastplate correctly named her Ann.

The outer wooden case of triple layered coffins was prepared and covered with upholstery and decorated with iron or brass studs, escutcheons and lid motifs in advance of the placement of the lead shell within it. A breastplate was also riveted onto the coffin. Lowering the lead coffin into the outer wooden coffin or case was a difficult and delicate business, considerable care being necessary not to pierce the lead shell. The shell was also very heavy, usually requiring six men to lift it by means of lengths of webbing. The shell was lowered into the outer wooden case, and the webbing was then cut and removed. The lid of the outer wooden coffin was then screwed or bolted into place (Litten 1991).

The middle and upper classes in this period invested considerable sums on the funeral and in particular on the coffin. The coffins at St George's church are typically elaborate examples of the period. Almost all were of the triple wood-lead-wood variety described above. Coffin 3095, was unusual because it was a simple single unnamed wooden coffin, upholstered in baize. Another coffin (2058; David Edwards a dressing case manufacturer of King Street) was unique at St George's church because it had two outer wooden cases, in addition to a lead shell and an inner wooden coffin. Coffin 5071 was a double coffin and lacked the outer wooden case. On this coffin the *depositum* inscription was formed from large individual letters of lead soldered individually and directly onto the lead shell. It read 'Catherine relict of Robert Morris of Brunswick Square Died 6th August 1825 Aged 55 years'. Litten (1991) writes that this type of lettering was designed to be viewed, and hence, would not originally have been covered by an outer wooden case. This is the only definite double coffin found on site. The rest of the coffins appear originally to have been of the triple wood-lead-wood type.

Lime in the coffin

One coffin (4054) was found to have a layer of lime filling the space between the lead shell and the outer wooden case. It is not clear why the coffin of this 17 year old woman, who died on 10th June 1818, was treated in this way. In Victorian England it was common practice to cover the bodies of cholera victims with lime as a public health measure to contain the contagion. However, cholera only spread to England in 1831-32 (Roberts and Cox 2003), 13 years after the death of this individual, and hence, could not have been the disease that had caused her death. It is probable that the use of lime in burials before this date was less disease-specific and was a more general response to a raft of different acute infectious diseases. A similar treatment with lime was seen in one coffin from St Luke's church, Islington (Boyle *et al.* 2005).

Preservation of the coffins

The general condition of the coffins at St George's church varied greatly. Coffins towards the bottom of the stacks were least well preserved, having suffered considerable vertical crushing from the weight of overlying lead coffins. For this reason, the side panels of the outer wooden case seldom survived. The wood of the lid was in better condition. Lead shells were frequently crushed vertically and many were breached along the seams. The lead shells of infant coffins were most likely to be found intact. The coffins in Vault 7 were particularly poorly preserved. The majority of these appeared to have been redeposited in 1991, and many coffins had been severely compressed, folded, twisted and torn apart in order to fit them into the limited space of the small vault.

The general condition of each coffin at St George's church was estimated on a scale of one to four, 1 being poorly preserved and 4 being very good. The proportion of triple coffins in each category is listed in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Overall level of preservation of triple coffins (N = 775)

Preservation Rating	Preservation	Number of coffins (n = 775)	Percentage of total coffins
1	poor	398	51.35
2	fair	228	29.42
3	good	90	11.6
4	very good	59	7.60

Coffin fittings

Introduction

From the early 18th century, the upholstery of outer wooden coffin cases was decorated with a suite of metal coffin fittings or furnishings. The number and materials used for the fittings was testimony to the wealth and hence, status, of the deceased and their family. Considerable variation may be observed across the classes of Georgian and Victorian society. However, it is important to note that even the less well-off went to considerable pains to bury their loved one with as many accoutrements as they could afford. With the exception of the fairly plain wooden coffin 3095, all other coffins at St George's church reflect the wealth of this predominantly upper-middle class population.

A full suite of fittings comprised from one to four *depositum* plates (an inner and outer breastplate, a headplate and a footplate), lid motifs, escutcheons, and grips and grip plates. In addition, the brass or iron studs, originally used to secure the upholstery to the wooden case, were arranged to create complex patterns on the lid and side panels of the coffin, thus becoming decorative device. An illus-

tration of the elaborate coffin of the Duke of Wellington shows one example of a full suite of coffin fittings (Fig. 8.1).

Grips were produced by casting, but the rest of coffin fittings were stamped using dies (May 1996). Between 1720 and 1730 these were produced by hand-operated die stamping machines, but after later power-assisted machines were used. Coffin fittings could then be produced *en masse* and by the mid- to late-Georgian period were financially accessible to a wider public (*ibid.*).

Excavations of the 18th- and 19th-century churchyard and crypt of Christ Church, Spitalfields, London, undertaken in the 1980s, revealed a large number of coffin fittings. The taxonomy compiled from these fittings (Reeves and Adams 1993) forms the basis for identification of the styles in vogue throughout this period. The coffin fittings at St George's church were compared to this catalogue and a large number of matches were found (n= 465). However an additional 77 hitherto unknown styles were identified. These were drawn on site and are illustrated in Appendix 3 (Figs A3.1-A3.40).

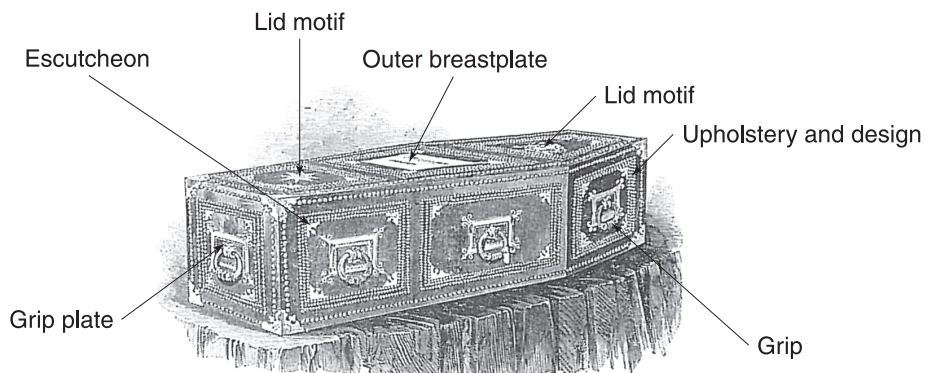
Comparisons between coffin fittings from St George's church and those from other contemporary sites has proved valuable in refining the dating of the fittings. In addition to Christ Church, Spitalfields, the fittings from St George's church's were compared to those from St Luke's, Islington (Boyle *et al.* 2005) and St Bartholomew, Penn, Wolverhampton (Boyle *et al.* 2002), two sites recently excavated by Oxford Archaeology. Table 8.2 summarises the results of these comparisons. In the following discussion, styles first recognised and catalogued at Christ Church, Spitalfields are prefixed by the abbreviation CCS; those first recognised at St Luke's church, Islington, are prefixed by OLR, and, finally, new styles from St George's church, Bloomsbury, are prefixed BBM.

Symbolism of motifs used on coffin fittings

The motifs displayed on coffin fittings were not merely decorative, but were deeply imbued with symbolism. Many represented Christian symbols of death, eternal life and resurrection, whilst others owe more to secular symbolism. Classical symbolism abounded, the urn, an Ancient Greek symbol of mourning, being a very popular motif well into the 1850s (Plate 8.2). Some motifs refer to the age of an individual, others to unexpected or premature deaths. For example, the broken column denotes untimely or unexpected death, a life cut short prematurely. Cherubim were particularly favoured for the coffins of infants and children. Angels and cherubim are very popular motifs on all types of coffin fittings at St George's church, for example on the ubiquitous grip plate CCS 3 (Plate 8.3), and the new style of lid motif BBM 4 (Fig. A3.28). Angels obviously denote heaven and the afterlife (Plate 8.4), but a cherub's head without a body symbolises the soul (Plates 8.3 and 8.5). Angels blowing trumpets represent God's glory and victory over death, or alternatively the Day of Judgement.

Composite symbolism was often used. One example, found on several coffins at St George's church, is lid motif CCS 4 (Plate 8.6), which depicts a snake biting its tail, intersected by an inverted flaming torch. The circle formed by the snake, and the snake consuming its tail symbolises eternity, life without end. The flaming torch symbolises life. By being inverted, however, it represents death instead of life. The snake motif recurs on the apex of lid motif BBM 8 (Plate 8.2; Fig. A3.30) whilst the inverted torches may be seen again on breastplate BBM 16 (Fig. A3.16).

A few of the more common motifs and their symbolism in a Victorian burial context are listed below:



Taken from May 1996, 28

Fig. 8.1 The elaborate coffin of the Duke of Wellington, displaying a full suite of coffin fittings (after May, 1996, 28)

Table 8.2: Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in Engand, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields		St Luke's, Isington		St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolverhampton		St. George's, Bloomsbury		Overall date range from the four sites	
	N = 325	n	N = 100	n	N = 47	n	N = 182	n	N = 655	n
Outer Brenstplates										
CCS 1	1729-1807	15	1775	1	1811-1855	40	1848	1	1729-1855	57
CCS 2	1839-1845	2	1814	1	undated	1	1830	1	1814-1845	5
CCS 3	1810-1821	11							1810-1821	11
CCS 4	1783-1822	5	undated	1			1819	1	1783-1822	7
CCS 5	1827-1847	3							1827-1847	3
CCS 6	1783-1852	25	1802-22	10			1805-1824	16	1783-1852	51
CCS 7	1779-1794	2			undated	2	1827	1	1779-1827	5
CCS 8	1767-1825	34	1785-1880	9			1805-1832	18	1767-1880	61
CCS 9	1773-1797	12	1773-1814	7			1825-1834	4	1773-1834	23
CCS 10	undated	1							undated	1
CCS 11	undated	1							undated	1
CCS 12	undated	2							undated	2
CCS 13	1799	1							1799	1
CCS 14	1743-1818	4					1818	1	1743-1818	5
CCS 15	1824	2							1824	2
CCS 16	1835	1							1835	1
CCS 17	1828	1							1828	1
CCS 18	1765	10							1765	10
CCS 19	1761	1							1761	1
CCS 20	1813-1847	3	1790-1853	18			1814-1852	19	1790-1853	40
CCS 21	1824-1847	21	1828-1850	27			1812-1846	29	1812-1850	77
CCS 22	1821	1					1818-1819	2	1818-1821	3
CCS 23	1831	1					1830-1843	2	1830-1843	3
CCS 24	1782-1819	4					1809-1826	3	1782-1826	7
CCS 25	1832	1					1845	1	1832-1845	2
CCS 26	1832-1849	3					1835	1	1832-1849	4
CCS 27	1788-1839	3			undated	2	1814	1	1788-1839	6
CCS 28	1829-1842	4	1844	1			1822-1823	2	1822-1844	7
CCS 29	undated	2							undated	2
CCS 30	1809-1832	3					1819-1826	3	1809-1832	6
CCS 31	1759-1821	3							1759-1821	3
CCS 32	1830	1					1833	1	1830-1833	2
CCS 33	1802	1							1802	1
CCS 34	1820	1							1820	1
CCS 35	1806-1825	6							1806-1825	6

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolveerhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
CCS 36	1821				1821
CCS 37	1796	1795			1795-1796
CCS 38	1779-1825	1			1779-1825
CCS 39	1794				1794
CCS 40	1788				1788
CCS 41	1764-1767				1764-1767
CCS 42	1777				1777
CCS 43	1793-1797				1793-1797
CCS 44	1828-1829				1828-1829
CCS 45	undated				undated
CCS 46	1771-1821			1806-1846	1771-1846
CCS 47	undated			1810-1840	1810-1840
CCS 48	1835				1835
CCS 49	undated		undated		undated
CCS 50	1780-1821		2		1780-1821
CCS 51	1795				1795
CCS 52	1778-1794				1778-1794
CCS 53	1834			1825-1833	1825-1834
CCS 54	1827				1827
CCS 55	1820-1826				1820-1826
CCS 56	1825				1825
CCS 57	1812-1824				1812-1824
CCS 58	1823				1823
CCS 59	1793				1793
CCS 60	undated				undated
CCS 61	1765-1786	1808		1811	1765-1811
CCS 62	1811				1811
CCS 63	1775				1775
CCS 64	1777-1794	1783			1777-1794
CCS 65	1778				1778
CCS 66	1761-1770				1761-1770
CCS 67	1769-1777	1802		1807-1826	1769-1826
CCS 68	1768				1768
CCS 69	1765-1803				1765-1803
CCS 70	1777-1778				1777-1778
CCS 71	1765				1765
CCS 72	1765				1765
CCS 73	1776				1776

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in Engand, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolberhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
CCS 74	1777	1			1777
CCS 75	1782	2			1782
CCS 76	1785-1793	2			1785-1793
CCS 77	1823	1			1823
CCS 78	1827	1			1827
CCS 79	1790	1			1790
CCS 80	1777-1786	2			1777-1786
CCS 81	1836	1			1836
CCS 82	1820-1829	5	1800- 1830	1806- 1848	1800-1848
CCS 83	1747	1			1747
CCS 84	1833-1836	2	1828-1835	1810-1842	1828-1842
CCS 85	1835	1		1810	1810-1835
CCS 86	1795-1811	2		1805	1795-1811
CCS 87	1827	1			1827
CCS 88	1770	1			1770
CCS 89	1758	2			1758
CCS 90	1827	1			1827
CCS 91	1824	1			1824
CCS 92	1832	1			1832
CCS 93	1852	1			1852
CCS 94	1829	1			1829
CCS 95	1737-1746	2			1737-1746
CCS 96	1732	1			1732
CCS 97	1793	1			1793-1823
CCS 98	1776	1		1823	1776
CCS 99	1772	1			1772
CCS 100	1775	1			1775
CCS 101	1768	1			1768
CCS 102	1739	1			1739
CCS 103	1806-1809	2			1806-1809
CCS 104	1784-1789	2			1784-1789
CCS 105	1753	1			1753
CCS 106	undated	1			undated
CCS 107	1794	1			1749
CCS 108	1806	1			1806
CCS 109	undated	1			undated
CCS 110	1827	1			1827
CCS 111	1788	1			1788

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolveerhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
CCS 112	1757 2				1757 2
CCS 113	1811 1				1811 1
CCS 114	undated 1				undated 1
Grip Plates	N = 216	N = 59	N = 10	N = 54	Overall date range
	n	n	n	n	N = 339
CCS 1	1812-1825 9	1816-1840 2			1812-1840 11
CCS 2	undated 1			1821 1	1821 2
CCS 3	1768-1842 100	1787-1880 30	1837 8	1807-1841 33	1768-1880 171
CCS 4	undated 2	1807-1850 5		1827-1843 3	1807-1850 10
CCS 5	1729-1815 15	1807 6		1829 1	1729-1829 22
CCS 6	undated 1	1820-1848 7			1820-1848 8
CCS 7	1791-1813 5				1791-1813 5
CCS 8	undated 2				undated 2
CCS 9	1784-1827 22			1826 1	1784-1827 23
CCS 10	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 11	1795-1849 2			1842 1	1795-1849 3
CCS 12	1761 1				1761 1
CCS 13	1798 1				1798 1
CCS 14	1843-1845 4	1844-1847 2		1824-1843 4	1824-1847 10
CCS 15	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 16	undated 2			1836 1	1836 3
CCS 17	1765-1793 2	1826 1		1817-1828 2	1765-1828 5
CCS 18	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 19	1763 2				1763 2
CCS 20	undated 4				undated 4
CCS 21	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 22	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 23	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 24	1794-1806 4				undated 5
CCS 25	1833-1847 10	1841 1	undated 1	1840 1	1794-1806 13
CCS 26	1819 2				1819 2
CCS 27	1779 2	undated 1			1779 3
CCS 28	undated 1				undated 1
CCS 29	1776 1	undated 1			1776 2
CCS 30	1747 1				1747 1
CCS 31	1823 3	1810-1830 3		1810-1846 6	1810-1846 12

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolverhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
CCS 32	undated	1			undated
CCS 33	1806-1828	8			1806-1828
CCS 34	1799	1			1799
CCS 35	undated	1			undated
<i>Grips</i>	N=514	n	N=101	n	N=90
			N=135	n	Overall date range N = 840
CCS 1	1747-1847	29	1762-1853	12	1747-1853
CCS 2	1763-1837	88	2a - 1811	29	2- 1763-1837
			2b-undated	1	2a- 1811-1830s
			3-1820-1850	3	2b- undated
CCS 3	1729-1827	121	3a-17.9-1830	11	3-1729-1850
			3b-1835-1840	49	3a- 17.9-1830
CCS 4	1743-1847	176	1761-1880	12	3b- 1835-1840
CCS 5	1744-1835	72	1796- 1822	8	1743-1880
CCS 6	1839-1849	19	1777-1844	10	1744-1835
CCS 7	1821-1849	2			1777-1849
CCS 8	undated	1			1821-1849
CCS 9	1770	2			undated
CCS 10	1837	2			1770-1844
CCS 11	undated	1			1825-1837
CCS 12	undated	1			undated
<i>Lid motifs</i>	N =124	n	N = 13	n	Overall date range N = 206
			N = 67	n	Overall date range N = 206
CCS 1	1839	5	1820	1	1821-1850
CCS 2	1795-1847	39	1797-1838	2	1795-1847
CCS 3	1821-1824	10	1831	1	1821-1831
CCS 4	undated	6	1835-1847	3	1835-1847
CCS 5	1798	2			1798
CCS 6	1779-1847	30	1797-1844	2	1779-1852
CCS 7	1849	1			1842-1849
CCS 8	1832-1849	3			1816-1849
CCS 9	1849	1			1842-1849
CCS 10	1793-1820	3	undated	1	1793-1820
CCS 11	1822-1843	5			1822-1843
CCS 12	undated	1			1835

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolverhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
CCS 13	undated			1836-1852	7
CCS 14	undated	1822		1813-1841	20
CCS 15	undated			undated	1
CCS 16	1789			1789	1
CCS 17	1821-1824			1821-1824	2
CCS 18	undated			undated	1
CCS 19	undated	1840		1840	2
CCS 20	undated			undated	1
CCS 21	undated			undated	1
CCS 22	1794			1794	1
CCS 23	undated			undated	2
CCS 24	1798			1798	1
CCS 25	undated			1825-1833	4
CCS 26	undated			undated	1
	<i>Escutcheons</i>	<i>N = 174</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>N = 72</i>	<i>Overall date range N = 266</i>
CCS 1	1776-1827	1797-1836		1804-1847	27
CCS 2	1839	1822			1776-1847
CCS 3	1815	1822		1837	1822-1839
CCS 4	1779-1839	1787-1831		1818-1824	1815-1837
CCS 5	undated			1833-1836	1779-1839
CCS 6	1823-1835	1826-1838		1806-1846	1833-1836
CCS 7	undated			1817	1806-1846
CCS 8	undated				1817
CCS 9	1779			undated	undated
CCS 10	1779-1839			undated	undated
CCS 11	1832-1845	1841		1835-1852	1779-1852
CCS 12	1779-1847	1799-1807		1835-1852	1832-1852
CCS 13	1833-1835	1847		1813-1831	1779-1847
CCS 14	1811-1822			1821-1843	1821-1847
CCS 15	undated				1811-1822
CCS 16	1842	undated		1829	undated
CCS 17	undated				1829-1842
CCS 18	undated				undated
CCS 19	undated				undated
CCS 20	undated				undated

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolveerhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
	N = 382	n	N = 2	N = 47	N = 431
<i>Upholstery stud-work</i>					
CCS 1	1739-1843	104		1829-1830	1739-1843
CCS 2	1747-1839	35			1747-1839
CCS 3	1744-1833	47	1831		1744-1833
CCS 4	1743-1821	17			1743-1821
CCS 5	undated	2			undated
CCS 6	1821	6			1821
CCS 7	undated	4			undated
CCS 8	1792	3			1792
CCS 9	1760-1825	23		1806-1827	1760-1827
CCS 10	1761-1849	3			1761-1849
CCS 11	1746-1811	21		1827	1746-1827
CCS 12	1781	2			1781
CCS 13	undated	1			undated
CCS 14	1759-1825	10			1759-1825
CCS 15	1822	2			1822
CCS 16	1754	2		1807	1754-1807
CCS 17	undated	1			undated
CCS 18	1809	2			1809
CCS 19	undated	1			undated
CCS 20	1752-1757	2			1752-1757
CCS 21	undated	1			undated
CCS 22	1808	1			1808
CCS 23	1813	1			1813
CCS 24	1812-1852	19		1826-1856	1812-1852
CCS 25	1847	5			1847
CCS 26	1815-1817	2			1815-1817
CCS 27	1750-1816	2			1750-1816
CCS 28	undated	1			undated
CCS 29	undated	1			undated
CCS 30	1813	1			1813
CCS 31	1757	2			1757
CCS 32	undated	2			undated
CCS 33	undated	1			undated
CCS 34	1823	3			1823
CCS 35	1825	4		1826-1836	1825-1836

Table 8.2 (continued): Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields

Types	Christ Church, Spitalfields	St Luke's, Islington	St. Bartholomew's, Penn, Wolveerhampton	St. George's, Bloomsbury	Overall date range from the four sites
CCS 36	1842	4	undated	1	1842-1847
CCS 37	1799	1			1799
CCS 38	1802-1821	2			1802-1821
CCS 39	undated	1			undated
CCS 40	1825-1839	7	1828-1845	4	1825-1845
CCS 41	undated	1	1812-1831	4	1812-1831
CCS 42	undated	1			undated
CCS 43	undated	1			undated
CCS 44	1819	2			1819
CCS 45	1809-1826	2			1809-1826
CCS 46	undated	2	1806-1846	15	1806-1846
CCS 47	1820	2			1820
CCS 48	1821-1839	2			1821-1839
CCS 49	undated	1			undated
CCS 50	undated	1			undated
CCS 51	undated	1	1812	1	1812
CCS 52	1770-1782	4			1770-1782
CCS 53	1794	1			1794
CCS 54	undated	1			undated
CCS 55	undated	1			undated
CCS 56	undated	4			undated
CCS 57	undated	1			undated
CCS 58	undated	4			undated

Bible	denotes a cleric or religious layman (Plate 8.7; Fig. A3.27)	Flame	social prominence (Plate 8.4) eternal life
Book	faith, learning, a scholar, memory (especially where it has a dog-eared page)	Scroll	life and the passing of time
Shells	fertility, resurrection and pilgrimage (particularly the scallop shell)	Skull	death and mortality
Sunbursts	renewed life after death (Fig.A3.38)	Winged face	the departing soul (Plates 8.3 and 8.5; Fig.A3.38)
Crown	the crown of Jesus, immortality, righteousness, glory of eternal life;		

Flowers have long played a symbolic role in funerals, the colour and species conveying complex ideas about life, death and rebirth. In the early



Plate 8.2 Lid motifs BBM 13 (left) and BBM 8 (right)

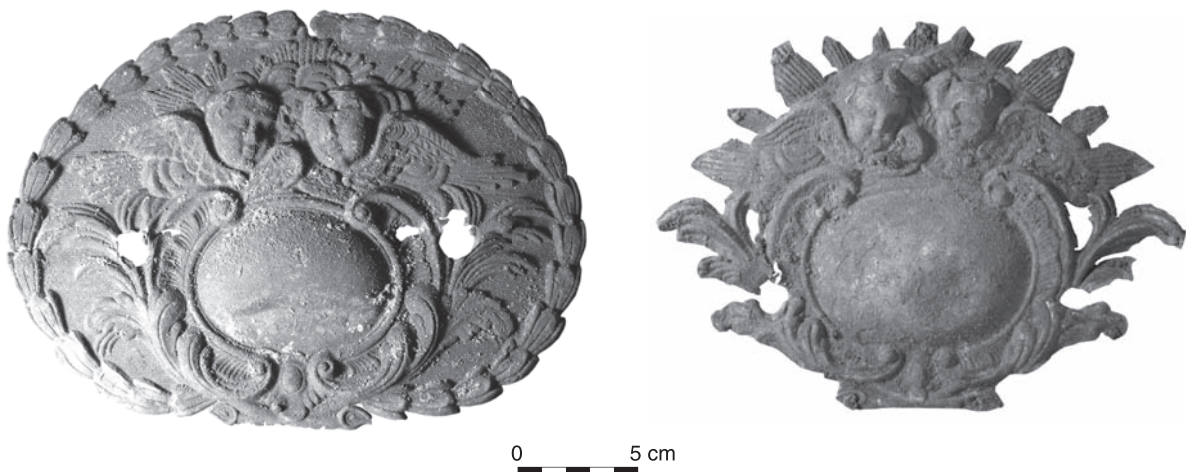


Plate 8.3 Grip plates CCS 3 (left) and BBM 3 (right)



Plate 8.4 Lid motifs CCS 13 (left) and CCS 6 (right)



0 5 cm

Plate 8.5 Grips BBM 1 (top left), BBM 2 (top right), and CCS 4 (bottom)

Victorian period the placement of wreaths of flowers on the coffin was largely confined to the funerals of girls and young maidens. Evergreens and white flowers, such as roses or lilies, were acceptable. Bright colours were frowned upon, and even the stamens of white lilies were cut off lest the golden pollen diminish the impression of purity (May 1996). Over the course of the 19th century, the laying of wreaths on the coffin and on the grave became more widespread through society (ibid.).

Breastplates and grip plates are particularly rich in foliage and floral motifs. Whilst the majority are stylised or generic plants, occasionally it is possible to recognise the species. Lilies and chrysanthemums have long been associated with death. Lilies are particularly associated with the Virgin Mary, and were most commonly found with women's burials. The lily was taken to represent purity, resurrection and the restoration of innocence of the soul at death. Roses are frequently depicted on breastplates and represent beauty, hope and unending love. Depending on the stage of their opening, the rose may represent the age of the person at the time of their death, a bud denoting a child, a partial bloom a teenager, and a rose in full bloom, an adult. Other plant motifs depicted on the fittings from St George's church are listed below:

Acanthus leaves	heavenly garden
Daisy	childhood innocence, youth, Jesus the Infant
Fleur-de-lis	flame, passion, love of a mother
Laurel	distinction in life, victory over death
Oak	stability, strength, honour,

Palm	eternity, the cross of Jesus, liberty spiritual victory over evil, success, eternal peace, Jesus' victory over death
Poppy	peace, sleep (and hence, death), consolation
Thistle	earthly sorrow, Christ's crown of thorns, Scotland as country of origin

Upholstery and stud-work

The outer wooden coffin was usually upholstered in either velvet or baize (Plate 8.8), although the coffins of a number of infants at St George's church appear to have been covered with a loosely woven shiny blue fabric that was probably raw silk. Although the charcoal that had overlaid the coffin stacks had blackened the upholstery of many of the coffins, a number of coloured velvets were observed on both adult and child coffins. Black was overwhelmingly the most common colour, but upholstery of mustard yellow, dark blue, dark green, red and brown was also observed. Several infant coffins were upholstered in turquoise a colour particularly popular for baby burials in the early 19th century (Litten 1991).

Due to vertical crushing of many of the lower coffins, few of the side panels of the outer wooden cases were preserved. The lids fared better, with large numbers being preserved sufficiently well to identify the upholstery stud decoration. In addition to the 47 matches made with the Christ Church, Spitalfields taxonomy, 29 new upholstery stud



Plate 8.6 Lid motifs BBM 11 (left) and CCS 4 (right)



Plate 8.7 Lid motif BBM 1 (top) and BBM 12 (bottom)

styles were identified, in most cases from the lid pattern alone (Appendix 3: Figures A3.41-48).

At St George's church, upholstery studs were made exclusively of brass or iron. Of the 395 coffins with extant stud-work, recording of the metals used were made on 325 coffins (82.28 %). Copper alloy was the more popular metal, recovered from 173 coffins (53.56 %), and iron from 152 coffins (47.06 %). Of the latter, the nails on five coffins had been painted, or enamelled, black, and on two had been dipped in tin to create a silvered effect (see Table 8.3).

Depositum plates

Depositum plates – breast, head and footplates – were riveted onto the upholstered coffin in the positions that their names suggest. All legible breastplates at St George's church bore inscriptions giving the title, name, age and date of death of the deceased. Occasionally, additional information was included, such as their place of birth or residence,

their profession in the case of a man, or the profession of their father or husband in the case of a woman, and relationships to other family members. Inner breastplates usually bore similar information to the outer breastplate, but sometimes contained less detail. The information from the head and footplate inscriptions was largely restricted to the name, title and year of death of the deceased. From the 781 coffins and 146 detached *depositum* plates, found within the crypt at St George's church, 673 individuals could be identified. Such information is a rich source of biographical and palaeodemographic data on the population interred here (see above Chapters 4 and 5 respectively).

Small differences in detail in the central panel motifs and frequent variations in the border designs were noted on many breastplates. Inner and outer border motifs are found in different combinations and the same border motifs are found on breastplates with different central panels. This suggests that composite designs were



Plate 8.8 Examples of wooden coffin cases showing coffin fittings and upholstery

produced by using separate dies for the central panels and the inner and outer borders, in a manner not dissimilar to that used in printing. In this way, by combining different combinations of borders and central panels, a diverse range of breastplate motifs could be offered to the discerning customer.

The majority of the outer breastplates (N = 403) was made of lead or brass, the former being heavily decorated with a stamped central motif and borders. The material of nine breastplates was not recorded. Of the assemblage of known material, lead composed 61.93 % (n = 244) of the metal used for breastplates, whilst brass composed 31.73% (n = 125); iron 2.79 % (n = 11); silvered tin 2.03 % (n = 8), and tin pewter 1.52 % (n = 6) (Table 8.3). Lead breastplates were occasionally enamelled or painted black. Brass breastplates tended to be plainer, but four bore inscribed coats-of-arms. These were difficult to discern due to the fineness of the inscription and the oxidation of the brass.

The inner breastplate, foot and head plates are generally far less decorative than the outer breastplate. Many were completely plain, bearing nothing but the inscription, but a number were bordered with simple lines of punched circles or stylised leaf or flower motifs. These *depositum* plates were almost exclusively of lead. Of the 427 inner breastplates recovered from St George's church, only three were

not of lead (0.70%). These were composed of iron. The material for the endplates (n = 176), likewise, was overwhelmingly of lead (98.30%). Three exceptions were composed of iron. Whilst the shape of the inner breastplates varied between rectangular, tapered or lozenge-shaped (often mimicking the shape of the outer breastplates), the endplates were uniformly rectangular.

Grips and grip plates

Once solely functional, the grips with which mourners carried the coffin became stylistically more elaborate during this period, as did the grip plates which attached the grips to the coffin. Eight of the grip types identified at St George's church (N = 71) matched with examples from the Christ Church, Spitalfields. The most ubiquitous of these was CCS 4 (Plate 8.5), found on 71 coffins (78.89%), followed by CCS 5 (9.86%). Frequently, but certainly not in all cases, grip plate CCS 3 (Plate 8.3) and grip CCS 4 (Plate 8.5) were found together as a set. Grip plate CCS 3 was overwhelmingly the most popular at St George's church, found on 33 of the 54 coffins that could be matched to the Christ Church, Spitalfields catalogue. This ubiquity is echoed in the assemblages from Christ Church, Spitalfields; St Luke's, Islington, and St Bartholomew's, Penn (see Table 8.5). Of the total numbers of these grip plates

Table 8.3: Summary of known metals used for coffin fittings (N = 1623)

Fitting type	N	Iron	Lead	Brass	Silvered tin	Tin pewter	Ormolou
Outer breastplate	394	11 (2.79%)	244 (61.93 %)	125 (31.73%)	8 (2.03%)	6 (1.52%)	0
Inner breastplate	427	3 (0.70%)	424 (99.30%)	0	0	0	0
Endplate	176	3 (1.71%)	173 (98.30%)	0	0	0	0
Coffin grips	134	108 (80.60%)	0	25 (18.66 %)	0	0	1 (0.74 %)
Grip plates	67	21 (31.34%)	3 (4.47%)	30 (44.78%)	8 (11.94%)	5 (7.46%)	0
Lid motifs	49	19 (38.78%)	4 (8.16%)	21 (42.86%)	2 (4.08%)	3 (6.12%)	0
Escutcheons	53	16 (30.19%)	4 (7.55%)	32 (60.37%)	0	1 (1.89%)	0
Upholstery studs	323	152 (47.06%)	0	173 (53.56%)	0	0	0

from the four sites, grip plate CCS 3 accounts for 50.44% of the total assemblage; and grip CCS 4 for 35.6% of the grips. In addition to the styles that could be matched to Christ Church, Spitalfields, four new styles of grips (BBM 1- 4; Figs. A3.39-40) and three new grip plate types (BBM 1- 3; Figs. A3.37-38) were identified. These are discussed more fully below.

Because grips needed to be strong, the metals used were restricted to iron and brass, whereas a greater variety of materials could be used for the grip plates. At St George's church, 108 of the 134 coffins with grips of recognised metal (80.6%) were of iron. Of the remainder, 25 were of brass (18.66%), and one was of ormolou (0.746%). Of the 67 coffins with grip plates of known material, 43.28% were of brass; 31.34% were of iron; 11.9% were of silvered tin; 8.96% were of tin pewter; and 4.48% were of lead (see Table 8.3).

Lid motifs and escutcheons

Lid motifs and escutcheons are stamped pieces of metal decorating the upholstery of the outer wooden case. Lid motifs are larger than escutcheons and tend to be located centrally in the chest and knee areas of the coffin lid. Escutcheons are most commonly found in the corners and along the margins of the stud-work panels on the lid and side panels of the upholstered outer wooden case.

Two hundred and twenty-one lid motifs were recovered at St George's church. Being composed of thin stamped sheets of metal, lid motifs are more prone to corrosion than some of the thicker, more robust coffin fittings. The worst preserved lid motifs

were those made of iron; the details of the decoration often being indiscernible due to rusting. The metal composition of 49 lid motifs was recorded. Brass constituted the most popular material (60.37 %); followed by iron (30.19 %); lead (8.16 %); tin pewter (6.12 %) and silvered tin (4.08 %). Sufficiently well preserved lid motifs were compared with the Christ Church, Spitalfields taxonomy. Sixty-seven could be matched to styles found in this catalogue. The most popular motif was CCS 6 (Plate 8.4), two angels holding aloft a crown (n = 19), followed by CCS 14 (essentially the same design as grip plate CCS 3), a design of a cartouche encircled by scrolls and leaves and surmounted by two cherubim (n = 17). Four hitherto undated lid motifs (CCS 12, 13, 14 and 25) from Christ Church, Spitalfields, can now be dated using the St George's assemblage. In addition, thirteen new lid motif types were recognised (BBM 1- 13; Figures A3.27-35). BBM 6, 7, 9 and 10 were composite motifs composed of three or more separate elements (Figs. A3.29, 31-32).

Escutcheons were recovered from 123 coffins at St George's church. Like lid motifs, these metal fittings were made of very thin sheets of stamped metal, and hence, were more prone to corrosion than more robust fittings, such as breastplates and grips. It is probable that originally there were more escutcheons than the examples which have survived. Variation in the metal used in escutcheons was similar to that found in lid motifs. In 70 cases, the metal used was not recorded. From the 53 coffins for which the metal is known, 32 were of brass (60.37%); 16 of iron (30.19%); four of lead (7.55%) and one of tin pewter (1.89 %).

Escutcheons from 72 coffins were sufficiently well preserved to be compared with the Christ Church, Spitalfields taxonomy (see Table 8.5). CCS 1 was the most common style (a cartouche motif surrounded by swirling foliage), forming 37.5 % of the total assemblage. This was followed by CCS 6, a stylised flower motif (19.44 %). The eight new types that were identified at St George's (BBM 1-8; Fig. A3.36; Plate 8.9) will be discussed below.

New coffin fitting types from St George's church
(Tables 8.4-8.5)

In addition to the many coffin fitting styles that matched the Christ Church Spitalfields taxonomy, there were 82 unrecorded styles from St George's church (Appendix 3, Figs A3.1–A3.48). Some could be matched to new types identified at the St. Luke's, Islington assemblage (identified by the prefix of OLR) (Boyle *et al.* 2005). The new types from these



Plate 8.9 Escutcheons CCS 13 (top left), CCS 12 (top right), BBM 8 (bottom left) and BBM 1 (bottom right)

two sites and from St Bartholemew's, Penn, Wolverhampton, recently excavated by Oxford Archaeology (Boyle 2002), can be added to the catalogue from Christ Church, Spitalfields, to create a more comprehensive taxonomy of coffin fittings with more accurate dating than hitherto has been available.

Upholstery stud work

Compared to Christ Church, Spitalfields, considerably more diversity in upholstery stud patterns was noted at St George's church. Twenty-nine new styles were identified on 132 coffins (BBM 1–BBM 29; Figures A3.41–48). Unfortunately, as a result of the vertical crushing of the coffins, many of the side panels of the outer wooden cases had been destroyed. For this reason, many of the new styles of patterns of the upholstery studs are derived from coffin lids alone. Where the side panels were extant, these have been recorded. Upholstery stud-work BBM 1 (dated 1804–1845) was by far the most common style with 62 examples. There were 26 examples of BBM 2 (dated 1814–1852). Most of the other upholstery stud patterns were found as single examples. The number of examples and the date ranges of these new types are summarised in Table 8.4.

Breastplates

Many of the breastplates at St George's church were variations on the styles recorded at Christ Church, Spitalfields. Where the style differences were minor the breastplate was not regarded as a new type. However, where three or more differences were remarked, a new style was declared. At St George's church, 26 new breastplate types were identified on 34 coffins. Some of these matched new types found at churchyard and crypt site of St. Luke's, Islington, London (Table 8.4).

Grips and grip plates

Most of the grips and grip plates at St George's church could be identified with types found in the Christ Church, Spitalfields taxonomy. Four new grip designs (BBM 1–4; Figs A3.39–40) were found on seven coffins. One of these (BBM 2, dated 1813–1842) was found to match OLR 7 from St. Luke's, Islington. Three new grip plates were identified on three coffins at St George's (BBM 1–3; Figs. A3.37–38). No matches were found between these new types and those from St Luke's, Islington.

Lid motifs

Thirteen new lid motifs were identified on 16 coffins from St George's church. Four were composite motifs involving between three and five pieces of decorative moulded metal placed together to create a motif (BBM 6, 7, and 9–10; Figs A3.29, 31–2). Some of the smaller elements were used elsewhere singly as escutcheons. For example, BBM 9 is composed of four corner escutcheons placed together to form a star (Fig. A3.31), and BB7 is made of escutcheon BBM 5 (a flower motif) and a stylised foliage motif (Fig. A3.29). BBM 10 (Fig. A3.32) is composed of two BBM 4 escutcheons and a CCS 9 escutcheon. The other lid motifs were single pieces of lead, tin or copper. They depict a crown, a bible, an angel, the crucifixion of a very Herculean Christ, and tombs and flaming urns (Figs. A3.27, 30, 35). Lid motif BBM 11 (Fig. A3.33) is the same style as grip plate CCS 16, but was found attached to the coffin lid in the position of a lid motif, and hence, has been included here as a new type. A single match was found between lid motifs from St George's and St Luke's, Islington: BBM 9 (dated 1830) very closely resembles OLR 5 (see Table 8.4).

Table 8.4: New types of coffin fittings from St. George's church, Bloomsbury, and St. Luke's church, Islington, that could be matched stylistically (N = 9). N represents the number of examples found, with the number of dated examples shown in brackets.

St George's	Date	N	St Luke's	Date	N	Overall date	N
Breastplates							
BBM 5	1820-1834	2 (2)	OLR 17	1830	1 (1)	1820-1834	3 (3)
BBM 23	undated	2 (0)	OLR 4	1823	1 (1)	1823	3 (1)
BBM 8	1813-1818	4 (4)	OLR 16	undated	2 (0)	1813-1818	6 (4)
BBM 9	1823- 1825	2 (2)	OLR 9	undated	1 (0)	1823-1825	3 (2)
BBM 16	1852	1 (1)	OLR 8	1812	1 (1)	1812-1852	2 (2)
BBM 26	1835	1 (1)	OLR 32	1838	2 (1)	1835-1838	3 (2)
BBM 1	1834	1 (1)	OLR 21	1823	1 (1)	1823-1834	2 (2)
Grips							
BBM 2	1813-1842	4 (4)	OLR 7	undated	1 (0)	1813-1842	5 (4)
Lid motifs							
BBM 9	1830	2 (1)	OLR 5	1852	1 (1)	1830-1852	3 (2)

Table 8.5: Date ranges of the new types of coffin fittings identified at St George's.
N refers to total numbers found, with the number of dated examples in brackets

Type	Breastplates	N	Upholstery studs	N	Grips	N	Grip plates	N	Lid motifs	N	Escutcheons	N
BBM1	1834	1 (1)	1804 – 1845	62 (50)	1836	1 (1)	1836	1 (1)	1836 – 1840	2 (2)	1827 – 1836	3 (2)
BBM2	1832	1 (1)	1814 – 1852	26 (22)	1813 – 1842	4 (4)	1852	1 (1)	1832 – 1836	2 (2)	1838	1 (1)
BBM3	1830	1 (1)	Undated	1 (0)	1850	1 (1)	Undated	1 (1)	Undated	1 (0)	1838	1 (1)
BBM4	1815	1 (1)	1805	1 (1)	1836	1 (1)			1837	1 (1)	1826	1 (1)
BBM5	1820 – 1834	2 (2)	1832	1 (1)					1814	1 (1)	Undated	1 (0)
BBM6	1805	1 (1)	1830	1 (1)					1826	1 (1)	1817	1 (1)
BBM7	1834 – 1841	2 (2)	1825 – 1831	5 (4)					Undated	1 (0)	1852	1 (1)
BBM8	1813 – 1818	4 (4)	1827	2 (1)					1852	1 (1)		
BBM9	1823 – 1825	2 (2)	Undated	1 (0)					1830	2 (1)		
BBM10	1815	1 (1)	Undated	1 (0)					Undated			
BBM11	1831	1 (1)	1809 – 1839	3 (3)					Undated			
BBM12	1812	1 (1)	1816 – 1818	4 (4)					Undated			
BBM13	1813	1 (1)	1825 – 1830	3 (2)					Undated			
BBM14	1835	1 (1)	1821	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM15	Undated	1 (1)	1825	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM16	1852	1 (1)	1811 – 1813	3 (2)					Undated			
BBM17	1806	1 (1)	1814 – 1820	2 (2)					Undated			
BBM18	1815	1 (1)	1810	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM19	1824	1 (1)	1826	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM20	1854	1 (1)	Undated	1 (0)					Undated			
BBM21	1827	1 (1)	1815	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM22	1836	2 (1)	1821	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM23	Undated	2 (0)	1842	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM24	1837	1 (1)	1815 – 1821	2 (2)					Undated			
BBM25	1845	1 (1)	Undated	1 (0)					Undated			
BBM26	1835	1 (1)	1831	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM27			1830	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM28			1810	1 (1)					Undated			
BBM29			1824	1 (1)					Undated			

Escutcheons

At St George's church, eight new styles of escutcheons were found on eight coffins. Three depict stars in different stylistic forms (BBM 1, 2 and 6, Fig. A3.36; Plate 8.9), one depicts an angel (BBM 3), another a flower (BBM5) and three are abstract designs of foliage of classical inspiration (BBM 4, 7 and 8; Plate 8.9). All but BBM 7 were made of brass. BBM 7 was made of of black painted tin that matched the other coffin fittings on coffin 2007.

Grave clothes and grave goods

Textiles: shrouds and coffin linings

Janaway (1998) comments on the great variation in dressing corpses in the 18th and 19th centuries. A loose sheet or winding cloth was often placed under the corpse and used to line the open coffin, and later was folded over to cover the corpse, often being pinned in place. A roused or punched lace ruffle often adorned the coffin sides as discussed above.

The corpse itself was often clothed in a crudely-made shroud. Nightdress-like shrouds, often with a ruffle round the neck and down the front, began to replace the earlier practice of dressing the dead in everyday personal clothing in this period (ibid.). At St George's church, the preservation of textiles within

the inner wooden coffin was generally poor. From the lack of fastenings, such as buttons or hooks-and-eyes, it is assumed that most individuals buried at St George's church were dressed in shrouds. In a number of lead coffins, shroud fragments were found adhering to the bone. The fabric could seldom be identified, but those that were appeared to have been made of linen. No woollen shrouds were recorded. One shroud found in the waterlogged coffin of a Mrs Catherine Morris, died 1825, aged 55 years (5071) was exceedingly well preserved. This linen shroud was in the style of a nightdress. The sleeves were raglan, and all the seams of the shroud had been hand sewn. The bottom of the shroud was decorated with a thick border of punched 'lace', bearing foliage and sun motifs.

Grave goods

There were no grave goods or even personal affects. No jewellery or hair or clothing adornments were found within the coffins at St George's church. One exception is the coffin of an older man was a small round box, interpreted as a snuffbox. Unfortunately the box had corroded too much to be opened and the contents examined. Several individuals had been buried wearing bridges and dentures, and two were buried with an additional set (see above Chapter 6).



Plate 8.10 *Discovery of the death masks in the coffin of Anna Stringfield (coffin 3064)*

Death masks

One highly unusual burial was that of a six-year old girl, Anna Stringfield (died 6 December 1835). Her coffin (3064) was found to contain three plaster effigies: two death masks of an older woman, and one of a right hand (Plates 8.10-8.11). In addition, a folded silk shawl was recovered from within the coffin, together with a short length of folded patterned velvet ribbon. The death masks are clearly of the same elderly woman. The face from which the mask had been moulded had been very wrinkled. Depression of the contours around the mouth indicates that the individual had lost most, if not all her teeth. The cast of the right hand also suggests that of an elderly woman. The hand is small and very narrow, and the skin was evidently very wrinkled when the cast was made. Impression of the veins on the back of the hand could clearly be seen. The nails were well manicured, and the fingers were in a loosely flexed position. Green staining of the palm of the hand cast suggests that something of copper alloy (possibly a coin) had originally been placed there.

Why these casts were included in the coffin is not entirely clear. It is assumed that they represent a relative of the young girl, Anna Stringfield, probably a grandmother. There were eight members of the Stringfield family interred in the crypt of St George's church. Anna she was baptised on 22 March 1829. Anna's parents were John and Anna Stringfield (née Frickelton) and they lived in Duke Street, and her father was a butcher. A memorial

plaque within the church itself also commemorates this family. (See Chapter 4 above for more discussion of the Stringfield family). Three generations of the family died within one decade between 1827 to 1836: her grandfather Thomas Stringfield (consumption, 15 Nov 1827, aged 67), her father, John (dropsy, 2 Sep 1832, aged 37), her mother, Anna (consumption, 12 July 1833, aged 25 years), and her paternal grandmother, Mary ('inflammation', 4 Nov 1833, aged 71 years), and finally Ann herself (6 Dec 1835). Anna was found in Vault 3, but the rest of her family were interred in Vault 6. The daughter, Anna, had outlived them only by a couple of years. Although it can never be proven, it is very possible that the child Anna had been cared for by her grandmother Mary in the few months between the death of her mother, and Mary's own death. It is very possible that the death-masks are of Mary Stringfield, and were placed within the coffin on the instructions of their sole surviving member of the family, her son and Anna's uncle, William Stringfield.

CONCLUSION

The interments within the crypt of St George's church date to the heyday of the late Georgian/early Victorian funeral at its most extravagant. The wealth and social aspirations of the professional classes buried here are reflected in the richness of the coffins. The clearance of the crypt has provided valuable opportunity to investigate both the biographies of individuals, and to develop our



Plate 8.11 Plaster death masks and the cast of a hand found within the coffin of Anna Stringfield (coffin 3064)

understanding of the material culture of late post-medieval funerary ritual. Although much is known historically about Victorian responses to death, the examination of the coffins and coffin fittings of the period is a relatively new field of enquiry. The excellent groundwork laid by Reeves and Adams (1993) from excavations at Christ Church, Spitalfields, in the 1980s requires considerable refinement and development. In comparing the Spitalfields taxonomy with contemporaneous sites, such as St Luke's church, Islington, St Bartholomew church, Penn, and St George's church, Bloomsbury, it has been possible to refine the dating of different fitting styles, and to identify many hitherto unrecognised designs. Already it is becoming apparent that some styles, such as grip plate CCS 3; grips CCS 2, CCS 3 and CCS 4, and breastplates CCS 6, CCS 8, and CCS 21, enjoyed extensive and prolonged popularity, often spanning as long as a century, whilst other styles are much more unusual. An accurate time-scale for the latter is more difficult to establish, given the small number of the samples. It is also apparent that certain styles were popular on some sites and not others. Breastplate design CCS 82 was found in large numbers at St George's church (n =

47) and at St Luke's church, Islington (n = 17), but in the much larger assemblage of Christ Church, Spitalfields, it numbered just five.

From this growing body of data a more accurate and comprehensive corpus of coffin fitting styles of the period is being developed. The coffin fitting assemblage from St George's church has been particularly valuable in this process. The excellence of preservation of the coffins, the quantity and richness of the fittings has provided valuable new dating of known fittings, and the identification of 76 new styles.

Today, growing secularisation, an overwhelming modern preference for cremation over burial, and an ever-increasing demand for real estate has precipitated an acceleration in the clearance of church crypts, churchyards and cemeteries within urban contexts. There is no reason to believe that this trend will reverse in the near future. It is thus particularly imperative that accurate and comprehensive recording of coffins and their furniture is undertaken. It is hoped that the existence of a more comprehensive and updated catalogue of fittings will facilitate this recording, and will expand our knowledge of this hitherto under-researched field.