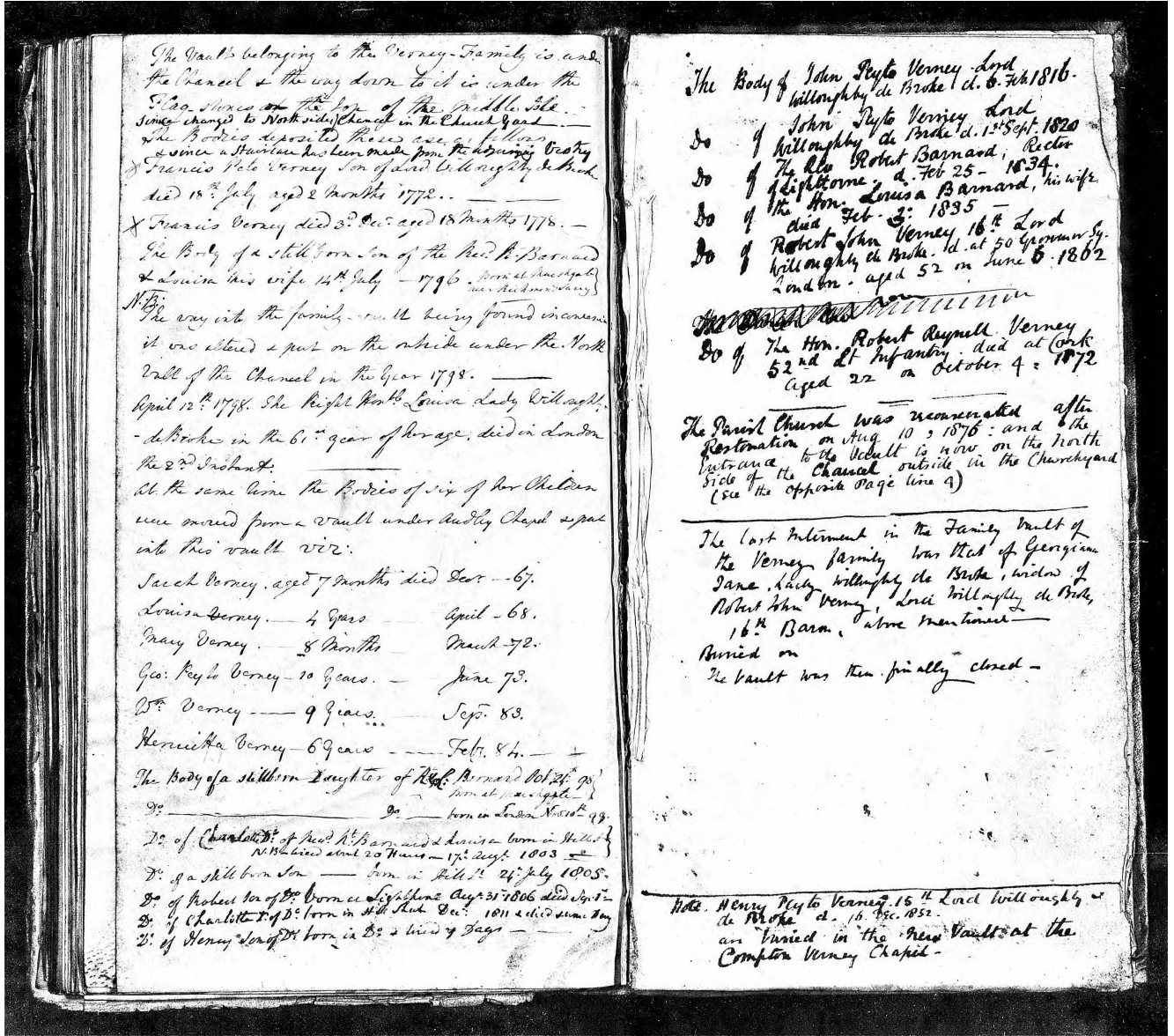


The Verney Vault at Lighthorne Church

By Colin Such (2015)



Details of the Verney Vault in the Lighthorne parish register

Transcription of the Entry in the Lighthorne Register concerning the Verney Vault

(The script in italics has been added at a later date, between the lines of the earlier script.)

Left Page

The vault belonging to the Verney family is under the Chancel & the way down to it is under the Flag Stones at the top of the Middle Isle

Since changed to north side of Chancel in the Church Yard

The bodies deposited there are as follows

& since a staircase has been made from the adjoining Vestry

Francis Peto Verney son of Lord Willoughby de Broke died 18th July aged 2 months 1772

Francis Verney died 3rd Decr aged 18 months 1778

The body of a still born son of the Revd R. Barnard & Louisa his wife 14th July 1796

Born at Marshgate near Richmond Surrey

NB

The way into the family vault being found inconvenient it was altered and put on the outside under the North Wall of the Chancel in the year 1798.

April 12th 1798. The Right Honble Louisa Lady Willoughby de Broke in the 61st year of her age, died in London the 2nd instant.

At the same time the Bodies of 6 of her Children were moved from a vault under Audley Chapel and put into this vault viz:

Sarah Verney aged 7 months died Decr 67.

Louisa Verney 4 years April 68

Mary Verney 8 months March 72

Geo. Peyto Verney 10 years June 73

Wm. Verney 9 years Sep 83

Henrietta Verney 6 years Feby 84

The Body of a stillborn Daughter of Rvd Barnard Oct 24th 98

Born at Marshgate

Do Do born in London Nov 10th 98

Do of Charlotte Dr of Revd Rt Barnard and Louisa born in (?) Hill St

N.B. lived about 20 hours on 17th Augt 1803

Do of a still born son born in Hill St 24th July 1805

Do of Robert son of Do born at Lighthorne Augt 31st 1806 died Sep 1st

Do of Charlotte I of Do born in Hill Street Decr 1811 & died same day

Do of Henry son of Do born in Do and lived 7 days

Right Page

The body of John Peyto Verney Lord Willoughby de Broke d 6 Feb 1816
Do of John Peyto Verney Lord Willoughby de Broke d 1st Sept 1820
Do of the Rev Robert Barnard, Rector of Lighthorne d. Feb 25 1834
Do of the Hon Louisa Barnard, his wife died Feb 3rd 1835
Do of Robert John Verney 16th Lord Willoughby de Broke d. at 50 Grosvenor Sq
London, aged 52 on June 6 1862

Do of the Hon. Robert Reynell Verney 52nd Light Infantry. died at Cork aged 22 on
October 4 1872

The Parish Church was reconsecrated after Restoration on Aug 10, 1876: and the
Entrance to the Vault is now on the north side of the Chancel, outside in the Churchyard
(See the opposite page line 4)

The last Internment in the Family Vault of the Verney family was that of Georgiana Jane,
Lady Willoughby de Broke, widow of Robert John Verney, Lord Willoughby de Broke,
16th Baron, above mentioned. Buried on
The Vault was then finally closed.

Note. Henry Peyto Verney 15th Lord Willoughby de Broke d. 1st Dec. 1862 is buried in
the New Vault at the Compton Verney Chapel.

Interpretation of the Evidence about the Vault by Colin Such, August 2015

Lighthorne church was rebuilt in 1773-4, following the demolition of the old Compton
Murdack chapel, on the instructions of Capability Brown. The Lighthorne parish register
lists the bodies interred in the vault commencing with that of the 2 month old son of the
14th Lord Willoughby de Broke, in 1772. The next burial it lists is dated 1778 and I think
it likely that the vault was constructed when the church was being built in 1773. There
are 2 problems, namely the first burial was, according to the entry in the register, on July
23rd 1772 at least 6 months earlier than the recorded commencement date of the
construction of the church and the second is that the vault is constructed of brick whereas
the church was constructed of stone. With respect to the former problem, perhaps the 2
month old child was buried in a grave initially until the vault was constructed.
Alternatively, as the vault would be the first part of the new building to be built, together
with the foundations, perhaps it was started in 1772. The second problem needs further
investigation. Is it possible that a vault would be built of brick because it was cheaper
than stone and it would not be seen above ground level? There was a brick works
opposite Chesterton Wood.

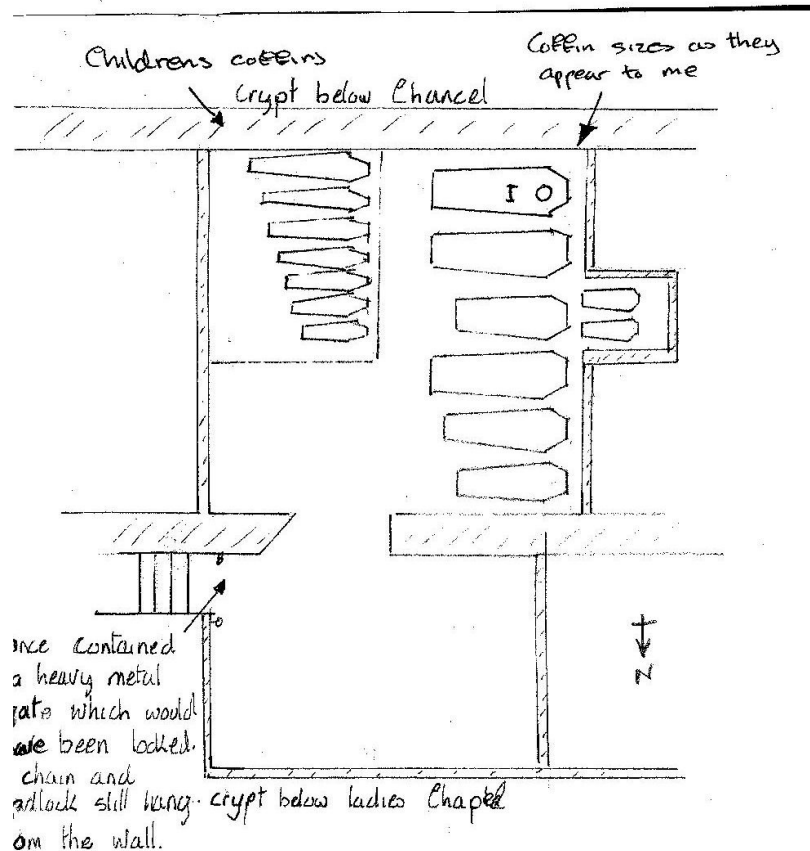
In 1796 a stillborn child was buried in the vault and then in 1798 a new entrance was constructed from the *north side of Chancel in the Church Yard*, which must mean the current entrance under the manhole cover. However the register continues with *& since a staircase has been made from the adjoining Vestry*. Where was the vestry? Was it an outbuilding on the north wall of the chancel? This does not seem likely, as the nearest access to the church would have been the easternmost door on the south wall.

On April 12 1798 Louisa, wife of the 14th baron, who came from Scotland (NB = North Britain = Scotland), was buried in the vault, together with 6 of her children who had pre-deceased her, and whose remains were moved from the Audley Chapel. Where was that? Subsequently 6 babies of Rev Barnard and Louisa (daughter of the 14th baron) were buried in the vault, in addition to a further 6 adults.

In 1876 the 1773-4 church was demolished, apart from the tower and a new church constructed on the same footprint, I assume. So, the old vault must have been left intact and the new church was built on the foundations of the old church. This needs checking and I would imagine that the plans of the 1876 church are available via the diocese or the Record Office.

Georgiana Jane Barnard, widow of the 17th baron (not the 16th as recorded in the register) died on March 7 1889 and hers was the last interment in the Verney vault. It was then sealed. This means that the vault held 15 baby/child coffins and 7 adult coffins.

On August 15 2015 the entrance to the vault was located and the steps were descended. A few bricks were carefully removed from the sealed wall of the inner vault and by the light of a torch the contents were described by Alwyn Knapton and photographed by Nelson Watkins. Alwyn recorded 7 baby/child coffins on a brick platform on the left, though I can make out only 6 from Nelson's photo. Alwyn thought that there were a further 2 baby coffins in the recess on the west wall, which was the original entrance, though this is difficult to see from the photo. There are clearly 6 adult coffins visible. This means there are at least 6 baby/child coffins and 1 adult coffin unaccounted for. They could be concealed by the brick structure on the east wall.



Sketch plan of Verney vault, as observed by Alwyn Knapton, August 2015

There is one adult coffin, in the south-west corner of the vault, in much better state of preservation than the balance and it would be logical to assume that it was the last to be interred, namely that of Georgiana Jane Verney, who died in 1889. The previous burial was that of Robert Reynell Verney who died in 1872, aged 22 in Cork, whilst serving with the 52nd Light Infantry. The current church was built in memory of him, the patron being Henry Verney, the 18th baron. I think that this well preserved coffin could be that of Robert Reynell Verney and that the shiny item on top of it is the brass badge and remains of his military helmet.