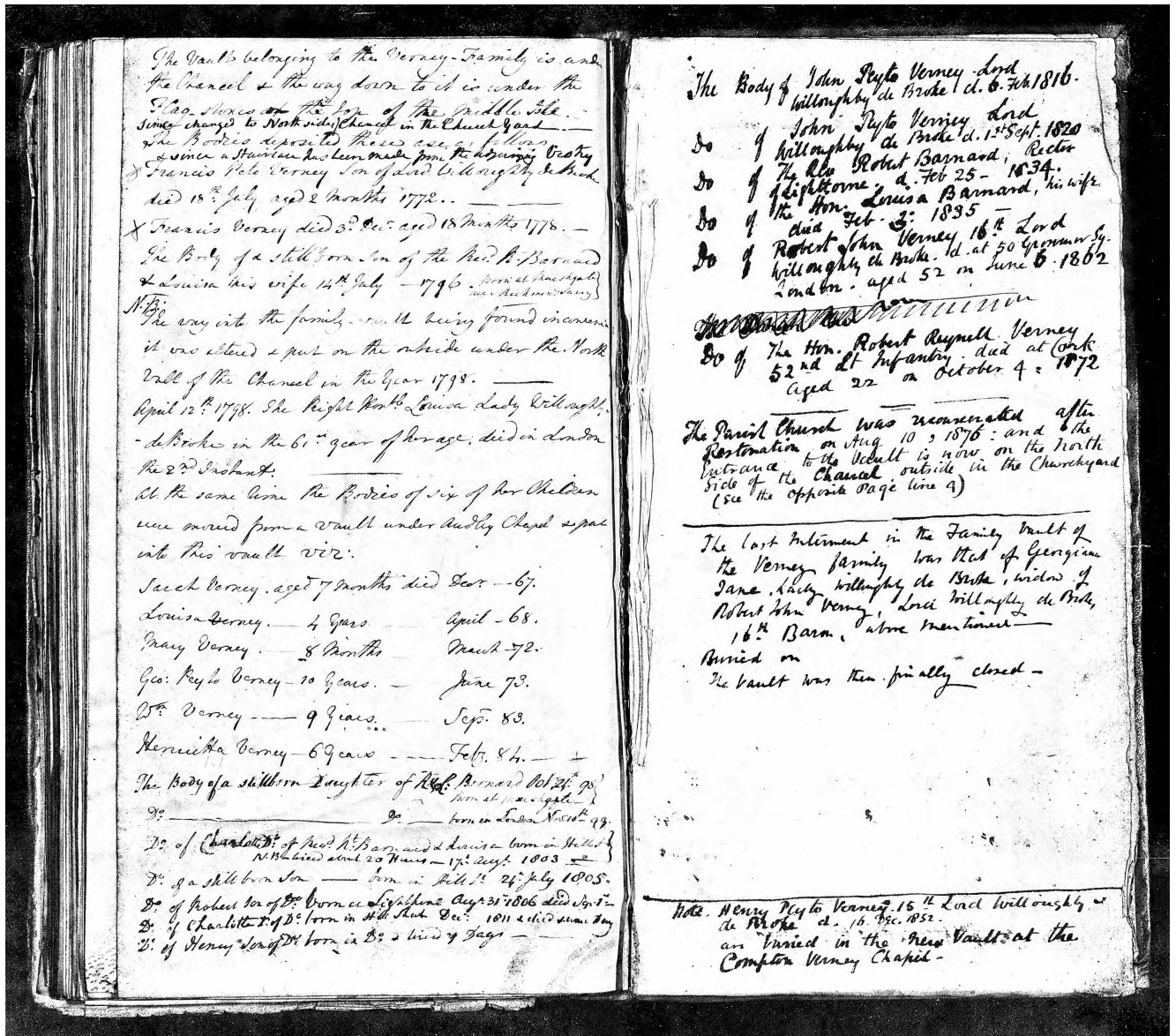


## The Verney Vault at Lighthorne Church

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 18<sup>th</sup> July aged 2 months 1772  
Francis Verney died 3<sup>rd</sup> Decr aged 18 months 1778  
The body of a still born son of the Revd R. Barnard & Louisa his wife 14<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 1798. The Right Honble Louisa Lady Willoughby de Broke in the 61<sup>st</sup> year of her age, died in London the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> 98  
Born at Marshgate  
Do Do born in London Nov 10<sup>th</sup> 98  
Do of Charlotte Dr of Revd Rt Barnard and Louisa born in (?) Hill St  
N.B. lived about 20 hours on 17<sup>th</sup> Augt 1803  
Do of a still born son born in Hill St 24<sup>th</sup> July 1805  
Do of Robert son of Do born at Lighthorne Augt 31<sup>st</sup> 1806 died Sep 1<sup>st</sup>  
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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 1835  
Do of Robert John Verney 16<sup>th</sup> Lord Willoughby de Broke d. at 50 Grosvenor Sq  
London, aged 52 on June 6 1862

Do of the Hon. Robert Reynell Verney 52<sup>nd</sup> 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 Interment 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,  
16<sup>th</sup> Baron, above mentioned. Buried on  
The Vault was then finally closed.

Note. Henry Peyto Verney 15<sup>th</sup> Lord Willoughby de Broke d. 1<sup>st</sup> 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  
14<sup>th</sup> 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  
23<sup>rd</sup> 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.

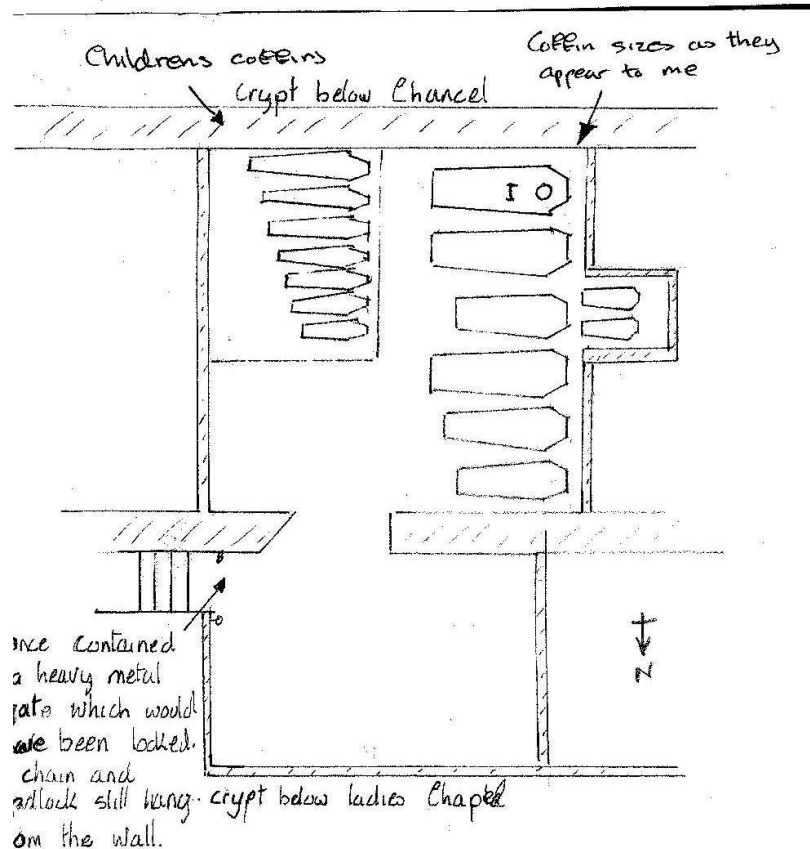
In 1796 a stillborn child was buried in the vault and then in 1798 a new entrance was constructed from the *north side of Chancel in the Church Yard*, which must mean the current entrance under the manhole cover. However the register continues with *& since a staircase has been made from the adjoining 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> baron (not the 16<sup>th</sup> 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. [See LH187(E)] 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 52<sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry. The current church was built in memory of him, the patron being Henry Verney, the 18<sup>th</sup> 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.