

'In the vaults beneath'

Archaeological recording at St George's Church, Bloomsbury

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Contents

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| List of Figures | vii |
| List of Plates | ix |
| List of Tables | xi |
| Summary | xiii |
| Acknowledgements | xvi |

Chapter 1: Introduction *by Ceridwen Boston and Angela Boyle*

| | |
|--|---|
| PROJECT BACKGROUND | 1 |
| Location and topography | 1 |
| Restoration programme | 1 |
| ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROGRAMME | 1 |
| Desk-based assessment | 1 |
| Archaeological mitigation | 3 |
| Project aims | 3 |
| Archaeological aims | 3 |
| Osteological aims | 3 |
| Recording system | 3 |
| Plans | 4 |
| Photographic record | 4 |
| Recording the coffins | 4 |
| Coffins and coffin fittings | 4 |
| Sealed coffins | 4 |
| Osteological methodology | 4 |
| Low resolution recording | 4 |
| High resolution recording | 4 |
| Ethical and legal considerations | 4 |
| Health and safety | 5 |
| Structure of the report | 5 |

Chapter 2: Historic buildings recording of the crypt and archaeological watching briefs within the churchyard *by Jon Gill, Ceridwen Boston and Jane Phimester*

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 7 |
| RECORDING THE CRYPT | 7 |
| Background | 7 |
| Aims, objectives and methodology | 7 |
| Summary history of the building | 7 |
| Description of vaults | 8 |
| Introduction | 8 |
| Vault 1 | 8 |
| Vault 2 | 13 |
| Vault 3 | 14 |
| Vault 4 | 15 |
| Vault 5 | 15 |
| Vault 6 | 15 |
| Vault 7 | 17 |

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Vault 8 (context 9001)</i> | 17 |
| <i>Vault 9 (context 9002)</i> | 18 |
| <i>Vault 10 (context 9003)</i> | 18 |
| <i>Vault 11 (context 9004)</i> | 20 |
| <i>Vault 12 (context 9005)</i> | 20 |
| Conclusion | 20 |
| ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEFS IN THE CHURCHYARD AND CRYPT | 20 |
| Test pits 1 and 2 | 20 |
| Areas 7 and 8 | 21 |
| <i>Area 7</i> | 22 |
| <i>Area 8</i> | 22 |
| Stairwell on the south side of the tower (Test pit 3 and Area 5) | 22 |
| Test pit 4 | 23 |
| Area 6 | 23 |
| Listed building description | 27 |

Chapter 3: The spatial distribution of the coffins within the crypt *by Ceridwen Boston*

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 29 |
| VAULTS 1 TO 6 | 29 |
| VAULT 7 | 31 |
| SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE COFFINS WITHIN THE VAULTS | 33 |
| CONCLUSION | 35 |

Chapter 4: The church, the parish and parishioners *by Ceridwen Boston and Ian Scott*

| | |
|--|----|
| THE PARISH OF BLOOMSBURY AND ITS PARISH CHURCH | 61 |
| Parish of Bloomsbury in the 18th and 19th centuries | 61 |
| The need for a new church | 61 |
| Construction of the new church | 63 |
| PARISHIONERS | 66 |
| Introduction | 66 |
| Coffin plate inscriptions | 67 |
| Memorial plaques | 68 |
| Other sources | 68 |
| <i>Parish registers, related records and civil registration</i> | 68 |
| <i>Wills</i> | 73 |
| <i>Census records</i> | 73 |
| <i>Trade directories, Post Office directories, and professional registers or lists</i> | 74 |
| <i>Death notices and obituaries, and other sources</i> | 74 |
| The professions and occupations of the crypt population | 74 |
| <i>The law</i> | 74 |
| <i>The church</i> | 76 |
| <i>The army, navy and merchant marine</i> | 78 |
| <i>Members of Parliament and politicians</i> | 80 |
| <i>Imperial administrators and civil servants</i> | 82 |
| <i>Merchants, bankers, stockbrokers, etc</i> | 82 |
| <i>Artisans, tradesmen and business men</i> | 84 |
| <i>Principal librarians and staff of the British Museum</i> | 88 |
| <i>Doctors of medicine and surgeons</i> | 89 |
| <i>The arts</i> | 89 |
| Abodes and social stratification | 90 |
| Church and charity: joining and giving | 92 |
| Bloomsbury a cosmopolitan parish | 93 |
| Conclusion | 94 |

Contents

Chapter 5: Demography by *Ceridwen Boston*

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 95 |
| AGE DISTRIBUTION | 95 |
| SEX DISTRIBUTION | 98 |
| SEASONALITY OF DEATH | 98 |
| CAUSES OF DEATH | 99 |

Chapter 6: The human bone assemblage by *Ceridwen Boston, Annsofie Witkin, Angela Boyle*
and *Jennifer Kitch*

| | |
|---|-----|
| INTRODUCTION | 103 |
| THE NAMED SAMPLE | 103 |
| Methodology | 103 |
| <i>Preservation and completeness</i> | 103 |
| <i>Skeletal inventory</i> | 103 |
| <i>Determination of sex</i> | 103 |
| <i>Estimation of osteological age</i> | 104 |
| <i>Estimation of stature</i> | 105 |
| <i>Comparative assemblages</i> | 105 |
| Results | 105 |
| <i>Quantification</i> | 105 |
| <i>Preservation and completeness</i> | 106 |
| <i>Demography</i> | 108 |
| <i>Osteological age and sex</i> | 108 |
| <i>Chronological age and sex</i> | 109 |
| <i>Stature</i> | 111 |
| <i>Dental pathology</i> | 111 |
| <i>Dental interventions</i> | 114 |
| <i>Skeletal pathology</i> | 117 |
| THE UNNAMED SAMPLE | 128 |
| Introduction | 128 |
| Methodology | 128 |
| Results | 128 |
| <i>Preservation and completeness</i> | 128 |
| <i>Composition of the sample</i> | 129 |
| <i>Skeletal pathology</i> | 132 |
| <i>Dental pathology</i> | 134 |
| <i>Dental interventions</i> | 134 |
| DISCUSSION OF THE NAMED AND UNNAMED SAMPLES | 137 |
| Demography | 137 |
| Health status | 137 |

Chapter 7: Examination of methods used to estimate osteological age and sex

by *Ceridwen Boston and Louise Loe*

| | |
|---|-----|
| AGE AT DEATH METHODS | 139 |
| Adults | 139 |
| <i>Auricular surface</i> | 139 |
| <i>Cranial suture closure</i> | 141 |
| <i>Dental attrition</i> | 141 |
| <i>Pubic symphysis</i> | 141 |
| <i>Sternal rib ends</i> | 141 |
| <i>Statistical analysis</i> | 141 |
| <i>Discussion of ageing methods</i> | 142 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Subadults | 143 |
| <i>Discussion of ageing methods</i> | 143 |
| <i>Sexing methods</i> | 144 |

Chapter 8: Burial practice and material culture *by Ceridwen Boston*

| | |
|--|-----|
| BURYING THE DEAD OF THE PARISH | 147 |
| The burial ground | 147 |
| The crypt | 147 |
| MATERIAL CULTURE | 148 |
| Historical background | 148 |
| Early 19th-century perceptions of death | 148 |
| Coffins | 149 |
| <i>Coffin materials and construction</i> | 149 |
| <i>Lime in the coffin</i> | 151 |
| <i>Preservation of the coffins</i> | 151 |
| Coffin fittings | 151 |
| <i>Introduction</i> | 151 |
| <i>Symbolism of motifs used on coffin fittings</i> | 152 |
| <i>Upholstery and stud-work</i> | 163 |
| <i>Depositum plates</i> | 164 |
| <i>Grips and grip plates</i> | 165 |
| <i>Lid motifs and escutcheons</i> | 166 |
| <i>New coffin fitting types from St George's crypt</i> | 167 |
| Grave clothes and grave goods | 170 |
| Textiles: shrouds and coffin linings | 170 |
| Grave goods | 170 |
| Death masks | 171 |
| CONCLUSION | 171 |

Chapter 9: Discussion and conclusions *by Angela Boyle and Ceridwen Boston*

| | |
|--|-----|
| INTRODUCTION | 173 |
| RESEARCH ISSUES IN POST-MEDIEVAL BURIAL | 173 |
| THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE ST GEORGE'S | |
| ASSEMBLAGE | 173 |
| Completeness | 173 |
| Condition | 173 |
| Rarity | 174 |
| Group value | 174 |
| Research potential | 174 |
| THE REBURIAL DEBATE | 174 |
| Recent relevant developments | 175 |
| CONCLUSION | 176 |

Appendices

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix 1: Alphabetical list of named individuals known from coffin plates | 177 |
| Appendix 2: Statistical testing of osteological dating methods <i>by Richard Wright</i> | 221 |

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Bibliography | 227 |
|--------------------|-----|

List of Figures

Chapter 1

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|---|
| Figure 1.1 | Site location | 2 |
|------------|---------------------|---|

Chapter 2

| | | |
|------------|--|----|
| Figure 2.1 | Plan of crypt showing brickwork and ashlar work. | 10 |
| Figure 2.2 | Cross-section through east side of vaults in crypt | 11 |
| Figure 2.3 | Plan of church and churchyard showing the location of test pits and boreholes and excavation areas | 19 |
| Figure 2.4 | Test pit 1: S-facing section; Test pit 2: S-facing section | 20 |
| Figure 2.5 | Areas 7 and 8: plans of excavation | 21 |
| Figure 2.6 | Area 5 and Test Pit 3: excavation of the stairwell 9000 S of the tower: Plans and sections. | 23 |
| Figure 2.7 | Test pit 4: NW-facing section | 24 |
| Figure 2.8 | Area 6: Plan of north-eastern extension showing location of well 10007 | 25 |
| Figure 2.9 | Area 6: Section 500: Elevation showing blocked arch 10016; Section 501: Elevation showing blocked arch 10017 | 26 |

Chapter 3

| | | |
|-------------|---|----|
| Figure 3.1 | Plan of the crypt showing locations of Vaults 1-7 | 30 |
| Figure 3.2 | Vault 1: the uppermost layer of coffins on racks and in stacks A-G | 32 |
| Figure 3.3 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffins on the racks | 34 |
| Figure 3.4 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A | 35 |
| Figure 3.5 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B | 36 |
| Figure 3.6 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C | 37 |
| Figure 3.7 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row D | 38 |
| Figure 3.8 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row E | 38 |
| Figure 3.9 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Alcove F | 39 |
| Figure 3.10 | Vault 1: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Alcove G | 39 |
| Figure 3.11 | Vault 2: the uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-D | 40 |
| Figure 3.12 | Vault 2: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A | 41 |
| Figure 3.13 | Vault 2: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B | 42 |
| Figure 3.14 | Vault 2: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Rows C and D | 43 |
| Figure 3.15 | Vault 3: The uppermost layer of coffin in stacks A-F | 43 |
| Figure 3.16 | Vault 3: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A | 44 |
| Figure 3.17 | Vault 3: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B | 45 |
| Figure 3.18 | Vault 3: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C-F and the private tomb 3500 | 46 |
| Figure 3.19 | Vault 4: The uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-E | 47 |
| Figure 3.20 | Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A | 48 |
| Figure 3.21 | Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B | 49 |
| Figure 3.22 | Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C | 49 |
| Figure 3.23 | Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row D | 50 |
| Figure 3.24 | Vault 4: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Ledge E | 51 |
| Figure 3.25 | Vault 5: The uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-G | 51 |
| Figure 3.26 | Vault 5: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A | 52 |
| Figure 3.27 | Vault 5: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B | 52 |
| Figure 3.28 | Vault 5: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Rows C-G | 53 |
| Figure 3.29 | Vault 6: The uppermost layer of coffins in stacks A-F | 54 |
| Figure 3.30 | Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row A | 55 |
| Figure 3.31 | Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row B | 55 |
| Figure 3.32 | Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row C | 56 |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|-----|
| Figure 3.33 | Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row D | 56 |
| Figure 3.34 | Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row E | 57 |
| Figure 3.35 | Vault 6: Matrix of the coffin stacks- Row F | 58 |
| Figure 3.36 | Vault 7: Matrix of the stacked coffins found at the back of the vault | 59 |
| Chapter 4 | | |
| Figure 4.1 | Map taken from Rocque's Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark (1746). | 62 |
| Figure 4.2 | Map taken from Horwood's Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster (3rd Edition 1813) | 64 |
| Figure 4.3 | Map taken from Bacon's large-scale Ordnance Atlas of London and Suburbs (1888) | 65 |
| Chapter 5 | | |
| Figure 5.1 | Bar graph showing the number of interments within the crypt between 1803 and 1856 | 96 |
| Figure 5.2 | Mortality curve of the crypt population shown as a percentage of the population | 97 |
| Figure 5.3 | Mortality curves of the crypt population and the wider London population based on Bills of Mortality of 1848 | 97 |
| Figure 5.4 | Piechart showing sex distribution of subadult and adults based on <i>depositum</i> plate inscriptions (N = 707) | 98 |
| Figure 5.5 | Mortality curves of the total crypt population and for males and for females | 98 |
| Figure 5.6 | Piechart showing seasonality of death | 99 |
| Chapter 6 | | |
| Figure 6.1 | Recovery of skeletal elements (percentage of total bones of each element) | 107 |
| Figure 6.2 | Named sample: Mortality profile based on osteological age (N=72) | 109 |
| Figure 6.3 | Named sample: Mortality profile based on chronological age (N=72) | 110 |
| Figure 6.4 | Named sample: Comparison between mortality profiles based on osteological and chronological age (N=72) | 110 |
| Figure 6.5 | Named sample: Mean stature of males and females (N=15 and 20 respectively) | 111 |
| Figure 6.6 | Named sample: True prevalence of osteoarthritis | 118 |
| Figure 6.7 | Named sample: True prevalence of Schmorl's nodes on the thoracic and lumbar spines. | 120 |
| Figure 6.8 | Named sample: True prevalence of periostitis according to element | 122 |
| Figure 6.9 | Unnamed sample: Mortality profile (N = 39) | 130 |
| Figure 6.10 | Unnamed sample: True prevalence of osteoarthritis | 132 |
| Figure 6.11 | Named and unnamed samples combined: Mortality profile based on osteological age (N=111) | 137 |
| Chapter 7 | | |
| Figure 7.1 | Skeleton 7081: comparison of age determinations using different ageing methods | 142 |
| Figure 7.2 | Skeleton 2008: comparison of age determinations using different ageing methods | 142 |
| Figure 7.3 | Skeleton 7045: comparison of age determinations using different ageing methods | 143 |
| Figure 7.4 | Bar graph showing percentage accuracy in ageing methods (N=52) | 143 |
| Figure 7.5 | Percentages of adult males and females estimated using different methodologies (N = 63) | 144 |
| Chapter 8 | | |
| Figure 8.1 | The elaborate coffin of the Duke of Wellington, displaying a full suite of coffin fittings (after May, 1996, 28) | 152 |
| Appendix 2 | | |
| Figure A2.1 | Regression: ageing using pubic symphysis (Todd) | 223 |
| Figure A2.2 | Regression: ageing using pubic symphysis (Suchey & Brooks) | 223 |
| Figure A2.3 | Regression: ageing using dental attrition | 223 |
| Figure A2.4 | Regression: ageing using sternal rib end | 224 |
| Figure A2.5 | Regression: ageing using cranial suture closure | 224 |
| Figure A2.4 | Regression: ageing using auricular surface | 225 |

List of Plates

Chapter 2

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| Plate 2.1 | Main central vault looking S. The doorway leads through to the E-W vault and the main stairs. | 9 |
| Plate 2.2 | E-W Vault to the S of the main central vault of the crypt, showing one of the main stairways at the E end of the vault | 9 |
| Plate 2.3 | Central vault, N end, showing inserted modern stairs with Vault 7 to the left. To either side of the main vault, the fillets or buttresses in front of the main arch springs can be seen clearly. | 9 |
| Plate 2.4 | Vault 1 looking E. Note the two cast iron uprights originally designed to support the racking for coffins. | 12 |
| Plate 2.5 | Detail of iron strut from former shelving in Vault 1. | 12 |
| Plate 2.6 | Stone post bases and extant cast iron posts for shelving in Vault 1. | 12 |
| Plate 2.7 | Vault 2 looking E, showing recess with raised sill and blocked window | 13 |
| Plate 2.8 | Vault 2 looking N, showing to the left the brick blocking of the opening through to Vault 1. | 13 |
| Plate 2.9 | Vault 2, later features: to the left an iron bar supporting inserted brickwork, and to the right is a blocked rectilinear opening with an iron lining. | 14 |
| Plate 2.10 | Vault 3 looking E, showing slightly skewed window recess with private tomb 3500 beneath. The semi-circular lid of the tomb is lying on the floor. | 14 |
| Plate 2.11 | Vault 3 looking N, showing brick blocking between Vault 3 and Vault 2 | 14 |
| Plate 2.12 | Vault 4 looking W. The skewed window recess in the apse at the end of the vault is clear. | 15 |
| Plate 2.13 | Vault 5 showing exposed brickwork where the 19th-century sealing wall has been removed | 15 |
| Plate 2.14 | Vault 5 looking W, showing square end of vault and blocked window. To the left is the block archway to Vault 4. To the right the fillet or buttress in front of the arch spring can be seen clearly. | 16 |
| Plate 2.15 | Vault 6 looking W. The block doorway to the base of the tower is clear. | 16 |
| Plate 2.16 | Vault 6, details of the stone quoins of the archway to the tower. | 16 |
| Plate 2.17 | Vault 7 looking N. The original wall and vault to the left are primary the wall to the right is a 20th-century insertion. The awkward positioning of the window at the north end of the vault is clear. | 17 |
| Plate 2.18 | Vault 7 looking S. The S wall is built of 19th-century bricks, the E wall to the left is built of 20th-century bricks. | 17 |
| Plate 2.19 | Vault 8 containing kitchen. View looking W. Note the apsidal end and skewed window opening. | 18 |
| Plate 2.20 | Vault 8 looking E. | 18 |

Chapter 3

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Plate 3.1 | Vault 2: Coffin stacks before removal | 29 |
| Plate 3.2 | Vault 7: Arrangement of the coffins within the vault. | 31 |

Chapter 4

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Plate 4.1 | St George's, Bloomsbury in c 2001 - viewed from Bloomsbury Way. | 63 |
| Plate 4.2 | St George's, Bloomsbury from Hart Street (later renamed Bloomsbury Way) | 66 |
| Plate 4.3 | Gin Lane by William Hogarth (1751), the spire of St George's church is clearly visible in the background. | 67 |

Chapter 6

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Plate 6.1 | Skeleton 3027: real tooth crown on a gold peg | 117 |
| Plate 6.2 | Skeleton 3027: Congenital hip displacement | 118 |
| Plate 6.3 | Skeleton 5041: rheumatoid arthritis of the left foot | 120 |
| Plate 6.4 | Skeleton 1041: DISH. | 121 |
| Plate 6.5 | Skeleton 5068: rickets and fracture of the fibular shaft | 126 |
| Plate 6.6 | Skeleton 4032 wearing a gold partial denture | 136 |
| Plate 6.7 | Skeleton 3044 wearing one set of swagged dentures. A second pair was found within his coffin. | 136 |

Chapter 5

| | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| Plate 8.1 | Inner breastplate of Ann Porral (coffin 2013) showing the error in her Christian name. Mary has been deleted and Ann inserted. | 150 |
| Plate 8.2 | Lid motifs BBM 13 (left) and BBM 8 (right) | 161 |
| Plate 8.3 | Grip plates CCS 3 (left) and BBM 3 (right) | 161 |
| Plate 8.4 | Lid motifs CCS 13 (left) and CCS 6 (right) | 162 |
| Plate 8.5 | Grips BBM 1 (top left), BBM 2 (top right), and CCS 4 (bottom) | 162 |
| Plate 8.6 | Lid motifs BBM 11 (left) and CCS 4 (right) | 163 |
| Plate 8.7 | Lid motif BBM 1 (top) and BBM 12 (bottom) | 164 |
| Plate 8.8 | Examples of wooden coffin cases showing coffin fittings and upholstery | 165 |
| Plate 8.9 | Escutcheons CCS 13 (top left), CCS 12 (top right), BBM 8 (bottom left) and BBM 1 (bottom right) | 167 |
| Plate 8.10 | Discovery of the death masks in the coffin of Anna Stringfield (coffin 3064) | 170 |
| Plate 8.11 | Plaster death masks and the cast of a hand found within the coffin of Anna Stringfield (coffin 3064) | 171 |

List of Tables

Chapter 4

| | | |
|------------|---|-------|
| Table 4.1 | Transcripts of selected memorial inscriptions from wall plaques within the interior of the church of St George, Bloomsbury | 68–9 |
| Table 4.2 | Summary memorial inscriptions from wall plaques within the interior of the church of St George, Bloomsbury | 70–73 |
| Table 4.3 | The Law | 75 |
| Table 4.4 | Nineteenth-century rectors of St. George's, Bloomsbury (from George Clinch, <i>Bloomsbury and St Giles's: past and present; with historical and antiquarian notes of the vicinity</i> , London 1890, 129) | 76 |
| Table 4.5 | The Church | 77 |
| Table 4.6 | Army, Royal Navy, East India Company service and merchant marine | 78 |
| Table 4.7 | Members of Parliament and politicians | 81 |
| Table 4.8 | Diplomats, imperial administrators and civil servants | 82 |
| Table 4.9 | Merchants, bankers, stockbrokers, etc | 83 |
| Table 4.10 | Artisans, tradesmen and businessmen | 85 |
| Table 4.11 | Librarians and staff of the British Museum | 88 |
| Table 4.12 | Doctors of medicine and surgeons | 89 |
| Table 4.13 | The Arts | 90 |
| Table 4.14 | Distribution of known abodes of selected professions. (Street names in bold are located to the south of the British Museum and Great Russell Street) | 91 |

Chapter 5

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 5.1 | The number of interments of known date within the crypt of St. George's in each decade between 1803-1856 (n = 682), based on <i>depositum</i> plate inscriptions, and the total number of burials in the parish, recorded in parish registers between 1801 and 1840 (London Metropolitan Archives). (The figures in brackets give numbers and %ages of crypt burials distributing undated burials proportionally) | 95 |
| Table 5.2 | Distribution of age-at-death in the St. George's crypt population, in total and by sex (N = 652). Percentages of males, females and total population are shown for each age category. | 96 |
| Table 5.3 | Comparative mortality rates within selected named burial assemblages and from London Bills of Mortality | 97 |
| Table 5.4 | Number of deaths per calendar month. Data from coffin plate inscriptions (n = 637) | 99 |
| Table 5.5 | Recorded causes of death (n=263). The information is largely derived from the records of the Bloomsbury searchers (LMA P82/GEO1/62) | 100 |

Chapter 6

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 6.1 | Human bone: Age categories | 104 |
| Table 6.2 | Quantification of coffins by vault, showing numbers of coffins in the named and unnamed samples | 105 |
| Table 6.3 | Named sample: Completeness and preservation (N = 72) | 106 |
| Table 6.4 | Named sample: Preservation and location within the crypt | 106 |
| Table 6.5 | Named sample: Completeness and location within the crypt | 107 |
| Table 6.6 | Named sample: Osteological age and sex (includes two adults who have been assigned sex based on biographical and not osteological data) | 108 |
| Table 6.7 | Named sample: Chronological age and sex (redistributed totals) taken from <i>depositum</i> plate inscriptions | 109 |
| Table 6.8 | Stature in four contemporary skeletal assemblages | 110 |
| Table 6.9 | Comparison of prevalence of dental disease (per tooth) in five contemporary osteological assemblages | 112 |

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--------|
| Table 6.10 | Named sample: True prevalence of osteoarthritis in different joints | 119 |
| Table 6.11: | Named sample: True prevalence of affected vertebrae | 119 |
| Table 6.12: | Named sample: Summary of fractures by element | 121 |
| Table 6.13 | Named sample: True prevalence of periostitis by element (lefts and right sides combined) | 122 |
| Table 6.14 | Unnamed sample: Summary of the age, sex, stature, completeness and preservation (N = 39) | 129 |
| Table 6.15 | Unnamed sample: Osteological age and sex (N = 39) | 130 |
| Table 6.16 | Unnamed sample: Summary of the skeletal pathology (N = 39) | 131 |
| Table 6.17 | Unnamed sample: True prevalence of osteoarthritis in different joints | 133 |
| Table 6.18 | Unnamed sample: Summary of the dental pathology and dental interventions | 135 |
| Chapter 7 | | |
| Table 7.1 | Quantification of age assessment methods used per skeleton (N= 52) | 139 |
| Table 7.2 | Quantification of ageing methods used (N= 52) | 139 |
| Table 7.3 | Chronological age of adults compared with biological age (N = 52). All ages are given in years. | 140 |
| Table 7.4 | Chronological age of subadults compared with biological age | 144 |
| Table 7.5 | Sex determination per method used (N=63) | 145 |
| Chapter 8 | | |
| Table 8.1 | Overall level of preservation of triple coffins (N = 775) | 151 |
| Table 8.2 | Summary of coffin fittings from the 18th and 19th century churches in England, based on typologies from Christ Church, Spitalfields | 151–60 |
| Table 8.3 | Summary of known metals used for coffin fittings (N = 1623) | 166 |
| 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. | 168 |
| 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 | 169 |
| Appendix 2 | | |
| Table A2.1 | Multiple Linear Regression: weights of the age indicators | 221 |

Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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