

Cornwall's own Richard III?

Has the Mystery of Sir James Tillie's Final Resting Place been Solved?

Following the discovery of a vault under the ground floor of the Mausoleum during recent renovation work, archaeologist Oliver Jessop, and building surveyor Richard Glover believe that they have found the final resting place of Sir James Tillie, who died in 1713, exactly three hundred years ago.

Sir James Tillie, who built Pentillie Castle in 1698, left instructions in his will that he should not be buried, but demanded that he should be dressed in his best clothes, bound to a stout chair and placed with his books, wine and pipe in his favourite folly to await resurrection. As far as can be established from the historical accounts, the faithful servants carried out these instructions, placing Sir James' body in his folly on Mt Ararat on the Pentillie Estate.

The servants continued to bring the deceased wine and food for two years until they could bear it no longer, had his remains interred and a marble statue built in his place. None of the stories relate exactly what happened to Sir James' body, but it has always been assumed that his remains were moved to one of the local parish churches.

With Sir James' statue residing comfortably in the building on Mt Ararat, it became known as the Mausoleum. It is likely to be one of the earliest known garden Mausolea in the country, and almost certainly boasts some of the finest views!

The Coryton's approach to looking after the Pentillie Estate that they inherited in September 2007, has not been exactly sedentary. With the castle fully renovated and open for weddings, B&B and corporate functions by June 2009, Ted and Sarah turned their attention to the gardens. They got a digger in to clear the footpaths, re-planted the flower beds immediately surrounding the castle, felled dying and dangerous trees and wondered what on earth to do with the riot of brambles and weeds smothering the kitchen garden. This was before they even dared look at the crumbling walls of the kitchen garden and mausoleum.

Following a fortuitous meeting with Hugh Tyler of Natural England and Sir John Parsons KCVO from the Country Houses Foundation, talk turned to possible assistance for the crumbling and

degenerating buildings in the estate grounds, and fortuitously, grant funding from both organisations was found to enable the restoration of the mausoleum.

Theories abound as to the construction of this edifice. Mentions at the time of Sir James' death state that he was placed on the first floor, although this currently appears to be the ground floor, windows have been bricked in over the years, and the roof had long since disappeared.

As part of the renovation, Sir James' Statue has gone to Cliveden Conservation in Bath for specialist restoration. Meanwhile, at the Mausoleum, the ivy has been cleared, the walls re-pointed, and where necessary rebuilt, the cracks repaired, and the crumbling castellations rebuilt. However, before scaffold could be raised inside the building, the floor needed to be stabilised. The paving slabs wobbled badly, and didn't even cover the entire floor. Late in 2012, William May-Somerville and his team of builders, dug an exploratory hole in the internal floor of the mausoleum and surprisingly discovered the brick built roof of a vaulted structure.

Ted Coryton expressed his surprise, "despite all the theories that we had banded about as we tackled the restoration of the mausoleum - the strange bricked in windows, the false ceiling joists, the inverted v shaped roof, the steps that seem barely connected to the main structure – this was certainly not on the list."

This new discovery was discussed with the building surveyor Richard Glover who had scheduled the repairs and was project managing the restoration, and archaeologist Oliver Jessop who has been recording the historic fabric of the building. They advised that the possibility of a vault, or open space under a three storey building did give some concerns as to its stability and a structural inspection would be required. The floor was gradually cleared to reveal a 2.5m long vaulted structure, almost centrally located within the building. On further investigation, granite slabs were found to cover an area at one end of the vault, and on closer inspection steps were visible through the cracks.

Once the floor area had been cleared, it left the way for the experts to assess the structural integrity of the space, and also a unique opportunity to determine why the vault was built. Could this indeed be the final resting place of Sir James as indicated in historical records? With great anticipation, one of the granite blocks was lifted and the steps that had been glimpsed through the cracks were revealed. Burial and exhumation licenses was applied for from the Ministry of Justice in anticipation that there may be human remains beneath the floor.

Following receipt of permission from the Ministry of Justice, arrangements were made to lift the granite floor slabs. William and his team of masons removed one of the slabs, then Oliver Jessop climbed down to discover a brick vaulted chamber approximately 2.5m square. There was a flight of eight steps leading to a simple room, with a stone floor and lime plastered walls. Propped up against the rear west wall of the room were the remains of two wooden planks with metal studs arranged to depict letters. Further degraded planks were lying on the floor, beneath which human remains were recorded. The planks appear to have been covered with a material, possibly leather, and their arrangement within the room is unlike what would be expected from a collapsed coffin. One interpretation is that they are in fact the remains of a wooden chair, which correlate with the historic accounts, although further analysis is currently underway.

Oliver said, "It has been a very exciting discovery and is an important day in the history of Pentillie, the discovery of a body in the vault contradicts local tradition and adds another twist to the eccentric goings on of the Coryton Family".

Ted Coryton, who along with his family have steadily been restoring Pentillie Castle and its grounds since inheriting the property five years ago, was there when the vault was opened, "It was an exciting moment, to finally uncover the truth and to know that Sir James was in fact in his mausoleum. Over the past 5.5 years we have researched much about him and the castle, so to finally tie up the loose ends was extraordinary. There is no doubt these are very old remains, and all indications are that it is likely to be Sir James Tillie. There was no sign of his pipe, books or wine but there was the remains of a chair that looks typical to the 1700's when he would have been placed there. There are no plans to exhume the body or to undergo any further DNA tests. There is not really any doubt about who the remains belong to."

Ted raised a toast to Sir James, with some sloe gin he had made himself with berries from the estate. Referring to the old stories of Sir James' will and his reasons not to be buried, Ted exclaimed, "Sorry that it took 300 years for your 'resurrection'!"

The mausoleum had seen little maintenance since its construction and the exploration has enabled English Heritage, Natural England and the local conservation officer, David Moore, to collaborate with the Coryton's on preserving the important monument. Financial assistance was generously provided by Natural England and the Country Houses Foundation.

Whilst the public will not have direct access to the mausoleum, the Coryton family have announced a series of **Garden Open Days** and **Invitations to View guided garden tours** over the next few months.

The Garden Open Days will take place on Mothering Sunday 10th March; and Sunday 21st April from 11am-4pm, as well as on the afternoon, (2pm until dusk), of Monday 6th May, no booking required. The Invitation to View guided garden tours will take place on Thursday 7th March, Thursday 4th April, Thursday 9th May, Thursday 6th June and Thursday 4th July at 2pm, numbers limited, booking essential. Visitors will be shown around the Pentillie estate by a member of the Coryton family on the Invitation to View days and hear all about the recent restoration work. Likewise, Garden Open Days will have information of the recent find readily available.

For more information:

Oliver Jessop - Archaeological Consultant. Oliver has worked as an archaeologist for the last 20 years, setting up his own consultancy, The Jessop Consultancy, in January 2012.

www.thejessopconsultancy.co.uk

Richard Glover – Conservation Building Surveyor. Richard has worked in building conservation for 35 years and started his own practice in 1995. Works extensively with historic buildings and scheduled monuments. www.richardgloversurveyors.co.uk

Country Houses Foundation - The Country Houses Foundation is a charitable grant giving foundation. The main aims of the Foundation are to support the preservation of buildings of historic or architectural significance together with their gardens and grounds, for the public benefit.

<http://www.countryhousesfoundation.org.uk/>

Natural England - Natural England is an Executive Non-departmental Public Body responsible to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Our purpose is to protect and improve England's natural environment and encourage people to enjoy and get involved in their surroundings. Our broad remit means that our reach extends across the country. We work with people such as farmers, town and country planners, researchers and scientists, and the general public on a range of schemes and initiatives.

Put simply, our aim is to create a better natural environment that covers all of our urban, country and coastal landscapes, along with all of the animals, plants and other organisms that live with us.

www.naturalengland.org.uk