

Burial vault in Frensham churchyard, 1987

BACKGROUND

A 19th century burial vault was discovered in Frensham churchyard (fig 1) in August 1987 when a section of pathway collapsed leaving a 1m-wide circular hole. Members of the local archaeological group were allowed to record the vault before it was backfilled with sand to render it safe.

THE VAULT

The chamber consisted of a brick-built barrel vault with a flat roofed side chamber to the south, (figs 2 and 3). The end walls of the barrel vaults were constructed with a combination of faced brick and a rough brick and mortar mix. The bricks used in the vault itself were of good quality, light orange in colour, had no frogging and were 23 x 11 x 6cm in dimension. The side chamber may have been constructed later than the main vault, as access to the former was through a hole knocked in the southern wall of the main structure. The secondary chamber had a flat roof supported on wooden beams, which were in a rotted state - hence the collapse. Brickwork showing on the surface of the path some 2m to the east of the vault, may well be the remains of the original access stairway. The whole structure was covered by some 70cm of soil.

The main vault contained three lead coffins, one of which was stacked on a framework of iron rods, while the side chamber appeared to have contained a further wooden coffin. However, this had been covered by a mound of soil and brick from the collapsed roof and it was, therefore, difficult to be certain on this point. The coffins themselves appeared originally to have been contained within a wood and leather outer coffin, decorated with metal panels depicting figures on either side of a plaque and also to have had iron handles set on tin backings decorated with cherubs. This outer coffin had in each case rotted away leaving only fragments on the upper surfaces of the lead coffins (for details see Appendix).

While it was impossible to decipher any names on the coffins, the following note by Dr M A Hewitt give details of the probable owners of the vault.

THE FAMILY

The vault, indicated by cross-hatching on the plan of the churchyard (fig 1), was occupying ground immediately to the east of two headstones, one commemorating RICHARD PAINE and his wife Lydia, and the other their daughter Elizabeth. Unfortunately, there is no positive identification of the three lead coffins.

Richard, who died in 1816, is recorded in the Frensham parish registers as 'Richard Paine of Farnham aged 75'. He was predeceased by his wife Lydia (née Trimmer) who died in 1790, and by their daughter Elizabeth, who died in 1812 at the age of 25, and who was 'brought from Farnham' for burial beside her parents. Subsequent records show that the family had only left Frensham about two years before her death.

There were two surviving sons - Richard (1782-1819), who inherited the Dyehouse at Thursley from his uncle, and William Pinke (1783-1847) who remained in Farnham.

Richard senior was married for a second time, in about 1796, to Catherine West of Petersfield. Outliving him, she eventually moved back to Frensham and was buried there in 1828, but she has no surviving memorial.

The Frensham branch of the Paine family came from Tongham in 1689, having bought the farm now known as the Rookery. Richard was the eldest son of the third generation in the village. After the death of his father in 1770, he appears to have inherited the homestead together with leases on two other sizeable farms nearby. The Church Rate book for the period 1717-1805 shows him to be assessed for Beales Place, Pitt Farm, 'his own' and several other small holdings. He was thus farming over 200 acres in Frensham alone and was one of the most substantial men in the parish. No doubt this fact enabled him to emerge as leader of the several local yeomen who put up a spirited resistance to the Revd Thomas Mantell in the 1790s. Mantell had moved into the Vicarage as lessee of the Archdeacon of Surrey and had paid heavily for a lease on the tithes of the parish. He then tried to obtain the latter in kind, whereas most of them had already been commuted to money. The farmers found this highly vexatious, and were eventually involved in numerous actions brought by Mantell in the Court of Pleas. The depositions in the various cases are of great interest in that they describe many of the farming and tithing customs of the time. Paine and his friends won some of the cases and lost others, but it was he who survived and later leased the right to his own tithes for £95. Mantell was declared bankrupt and died in 1804 at the age of 49.

In the 1764-1773 period, Richard and perhaps his father appear to have set up elaborate experiments in growing different species of hops at Pitt Farm: these most carefully recorded on a series of elegant hand-drawn maps, which are held in the Museum archives.

In common with all parishioners of his stature, he played his part in parochial administration, acting as churchwarden, as overseer of the poor and as administrator of Smith's charity.

Mary Hewett

NOTE

During the course of backfilling the vault an additional chamber was reported to have been found to the south, but this was not investigated. A resistivity survey carried out along the path edges in the churchyard, in an attempt to locate further vaults, indicates conclusively that the diagonal north-west to south-east path leading across the church to the porch is of relatively recent date, as it overlies many burials. The remaining paths appear to be original, as very few burials seem to have been affected by them.

I should like to thank the Vicar and Churchwardens for allowing access to the vault; Paul Stokes for entering the vault and recording it; Audrey Graham for figures 1-3; Paul Stokes for the Appendix drawings, and John Boas and Philip Brooks for their general assistance.

David Graham

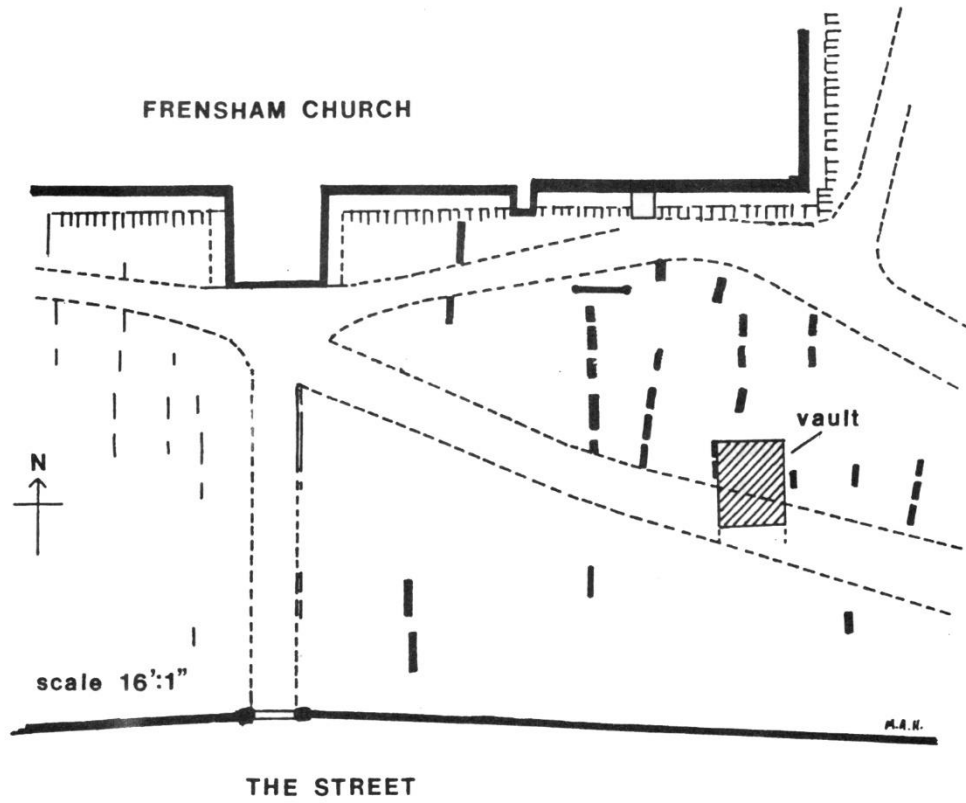


Fig 1 Plan of part of Frensham churchyard showing the location of the vault. Original plan by Mary Hewett.

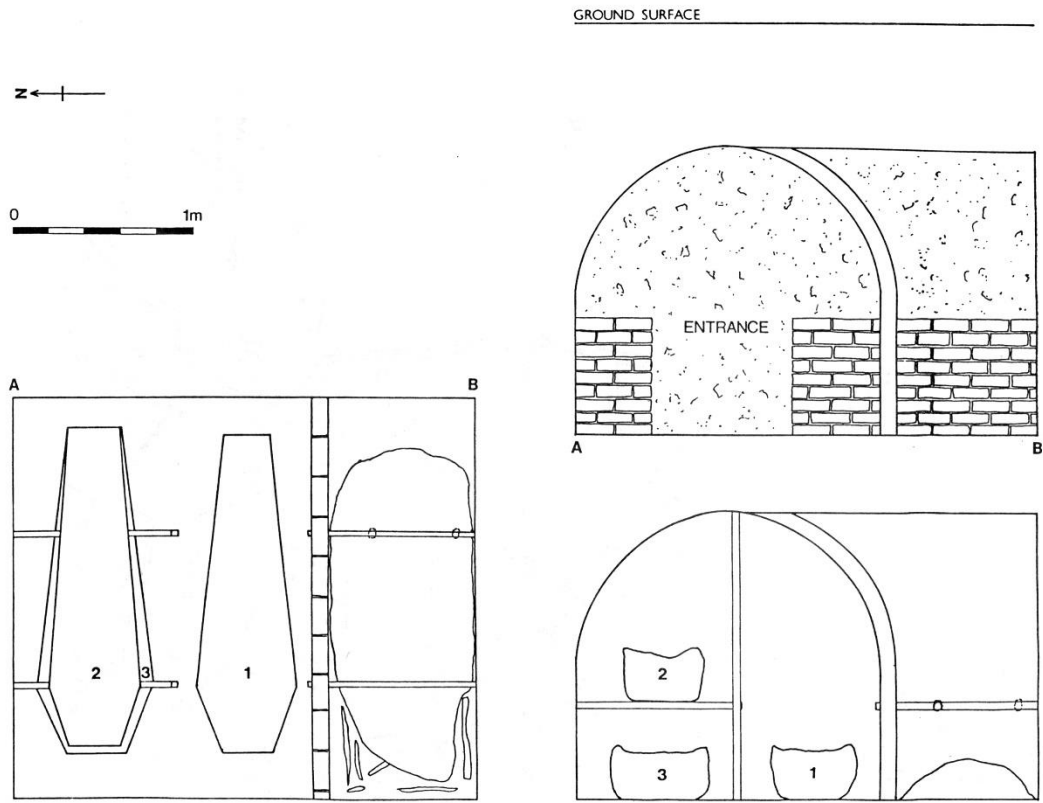


Fig 2 Plan and section of the vault.

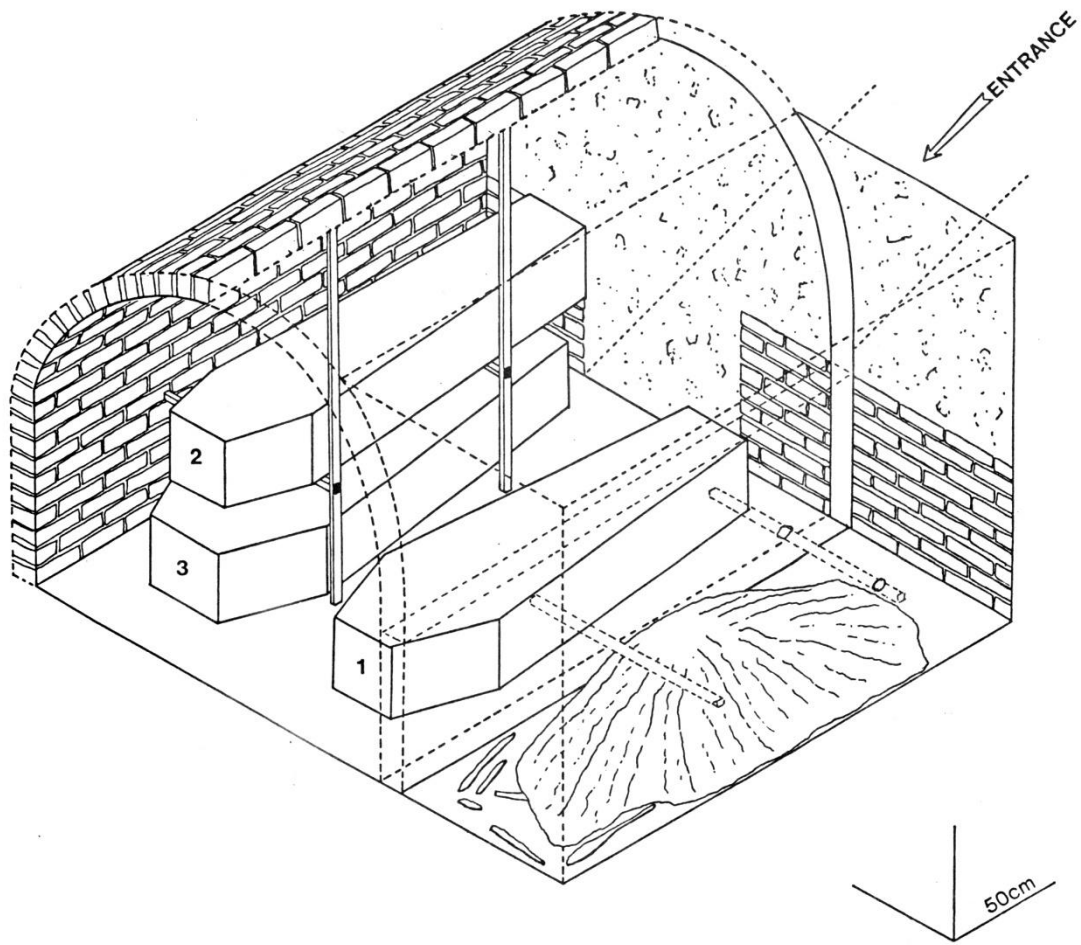
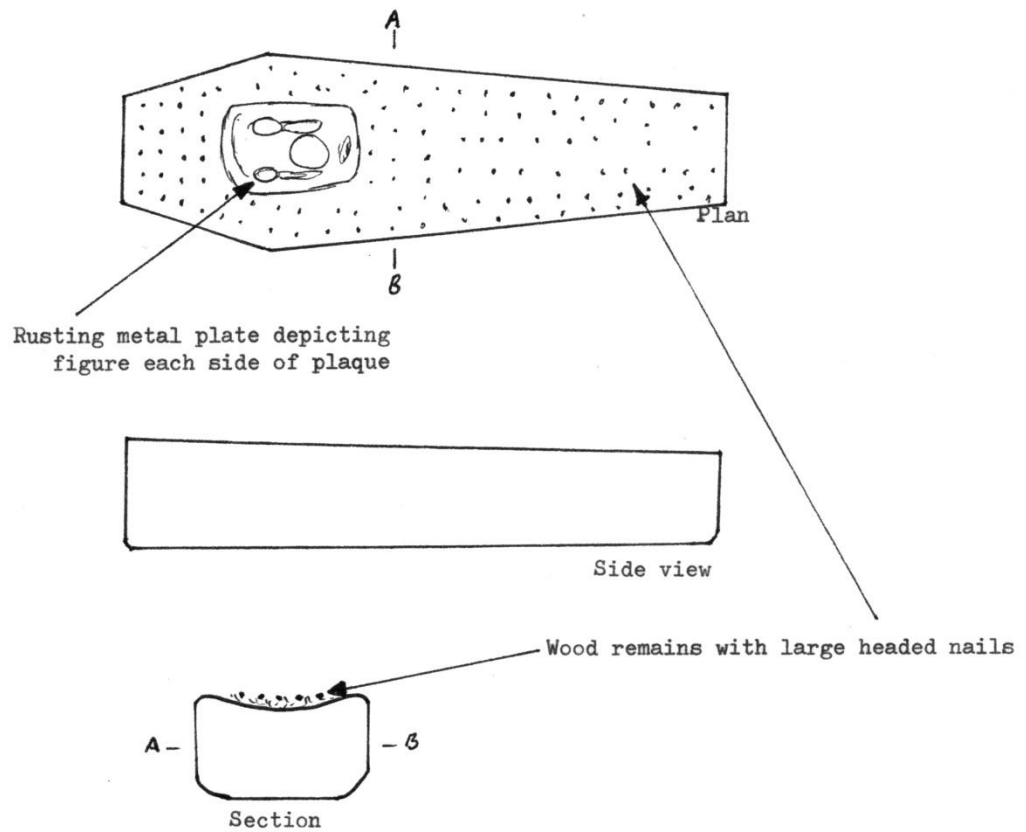


Fig 3 Isometric drawing of the vault.

APPENDIX, by Paul Stokes

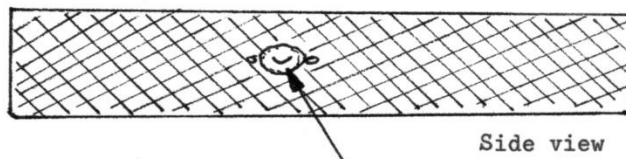
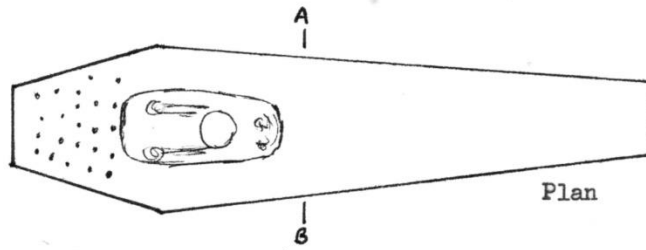
COFFIN 1



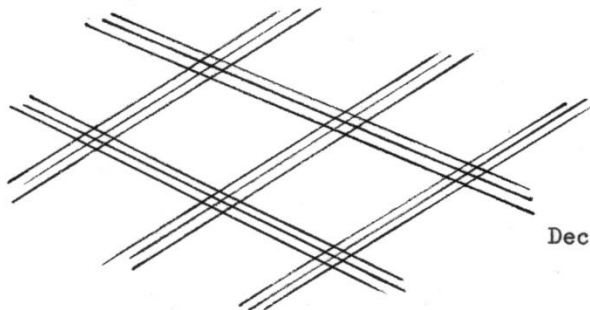
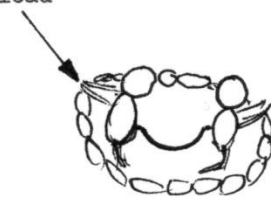
Measurements

Max. length	1.80m
Max. width	0.58m
Feet width	0.28m
Head width	0.28m
Head depth	0.35m
Feet depth	0.30m

COFFIN 2



Iron handle with tin back
(decorated with cherubs)
Note: remains of wooden outer
coffin between handle and
lead

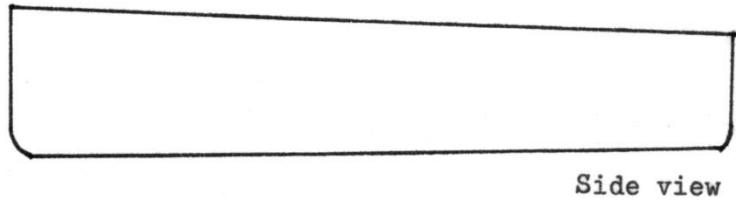
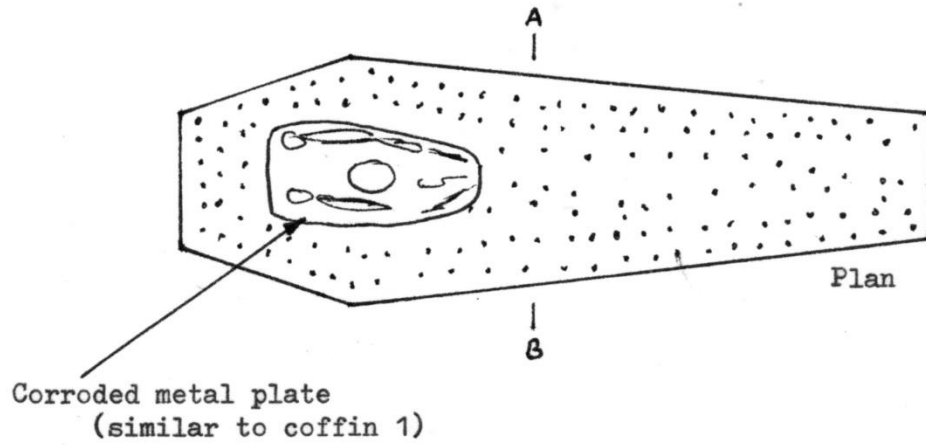


Decoration on side (approx. $\frac{1}{2}$ scale)

Measurements

Max. length	1.8m
Max. width	0.50m
Feet width	0.20m
Head width	0.23m
Head depth	0.35m
Feet depth	0.30m

COFFIN 3



Measurements

Max. Length	1.85m
Max. width	0.64m
Feet width	0.30m
Head width	0.33m
Head depth	0.38m
Feet depth	0.30m