

Newbridge Street Burial

The mystery of the silk lined, stone coffins is revealed

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In September the Society was asked to investigate two stone cisterns that had been discovered by builders removing a sloping grass bank at the side of a detached house in Newbridge Road.

This bank about 1.8m (6ft) high, sloped towards the house and when removed exposed two Bath stone structures 3m (10ft) apart, each structure was 47cm (18.5in) wide by 1m 12cm (44.5in) long, and 1m 42cm (56in) deep. Each structure was capped with cemented Pennant stones. A small hole was made by the builder in one corner and a visual inspection appeared to show the rotted remains of a horse harness; the builder refused to continue as he thought the vault contained a horse burial. This initial view was strengthened by the owners, who stated that there was a small stable in the rear garden.

A small digital camera was pushed into the hole and revealed a rounded shape, with a small shaped plaque and at least two small brass fittings, adding to the view that the vault contained perhaps a harness from a horse or pony. However several days later, when the whole capping had been removed, it was clear that the visible content of the vault was a small child's coffin. The coffin had rested on two lateral iron bars across the vault, and having rotted, had caused the head and foot ends to bow upward, giving the appearance of a saddle.

The small plaque was lifted and when cleaned revealed an inscription which read 'ION died 4th MAY 1886'. It was decided to delicately examine the head end of the coffin, to see whether any

Figure 1
Inside the vault the two plaques and an upturned coffin.



identifiable human cranial bones could be seen, before pausing the excavation to notify the coroner. However no skeletal remains survived, but in the collapsed central portion, another plaque was visible.

This plaque was removed and when cleaned revealed an inscription which read 'PICKWICK'; the remainder of the inscription could not be read. It was now obvious that these two coffins, silk lined and padded contained the remains of two pet dogs. Each coffin was shaped and fitted with miniature carrying handles. Both this vault and the second one which was empty were constructed of fine Bath Stone ashlar blocks and each was designed to hold four coffins stacked above each other, resting on lateral bars.

A search of local records revealed that the owner of the house at the time of the burials was the Rev William Carr-Selby, later Carr-Forster, a retired vicar possibly from Selby in Yorkshire.