

## The Fitzwilliam Tomb and its occupants by Hazel Horrigan

The Fitzwilliam Tomb in St Mary's Church is a nationally-important early example of painted Italianate alabaster, from 1530-1540. In spring 2012, as part of a larger restoration project in St Mary's, the tomb was dismantled, and its fragile alabaster panels removed for conservation. Later, as the stonemasons removed the tomb core, they exposed human remains, packed tightly into a small chamber measuring 1.0 m x 0.5 m. An osteoarchaeologist, Malin Holst, was called in to investigate the find.

The principal questions raised were, whose were the remains, and how did they come to be so fragmented? The effigies on the tomb are of Sir Thomas Fitzwilliam, knight, (c1448-1495) and his wife, Lucy Neville (c1466-1534), niece of Warwick the Kingmaker and cousin of Richard III. The inscription on the tomb, now incomplete and illegible, but recorded in full in 1620, also includes Thomas's parents, Sir Richard Fitzwilliam (c1412-1478) and Elizabeth Clarell (c1415-1503). Tradition has it that the tomb came to St. Mary's from Tickhill Friary, at the Dissolution in 1538. Certainly, in 1538-43 John Leland wrote that the remains of the Grauntfather and father to my Lorde Privy Sealq previously buried in the Friary, were now in the parish church. The Lorde Privy Sealq was Thomas's son, William Fitzwilliam, created Earl of Southampton by Henry VIII.

Once the bones were removed from the tomb it was decided that, despite limited funds, they should be cleaned and an osteoanalysis commissioned. This would facilitate further investigation if appropriate.

The bones were cleaned, sorted according to size, colour and state of preservation, examined and recorded, before attempting reassembly. The bones were mainly disarticulated (separated) making the task more difficult. The remains of four craniums had been found. Two female craniums could be attributed to specific skeletons, but the two male craniums could not. None of the skeletons was complete, and there were a number of extraneous smaller bones. Nonetheless, four individuals were identified, and a careful analysis begun.

The remains were of two older mature women, 46 or older, and two mature men, aged 36-46. The two females were of average height (5'2" and 5'3"), as was one male (5'7") but the other, at 5'3", was short even for his time. Height was calculated using the long bones. It was not possible to identify individuals, although the two males were probably father and son. Despite signs of osteoarthritis, they were all in reasonable health at the time of death. Good health into old age is a likely sign of high status and good diet.

The teeth of all four individuals showed a higher level of dental decay than normal for their time. Sugar was very expensive so this is a further indication of relative wealth. The two females had a higher level of decay than the males, probably a result of pregnancy, involvement in food preparation and ease of access to sweetmeats. Both men had dental abscesses, and one of the women had an abscess which had penetrated into her sinus.

Although they were of high status there were signs that the individuals had suffered childhood stress. Three individuals showed pitting of tooth enamel caused by problems during growth, and two had unusual development of the orbit roofs for similar reasons. This may also explain the height of the shorter male.

The two males shared several unusual anomalies. Both had impaction of their third molar, an unusual development of the fibula, and six segments rather than the usual five to their sacrum (part of the pelvis). These all could have a genetic factor. One of the males also had a second spinal anomaly. The shorter male had a malformation of both shoulder blades, possibly caused by frequent archery practice when young. One of the male crania had a shallow depression caused by a blow from a blunt weapon, or a fall, and one male showed evidence of a twisted ankle. Surprisingly little trauma for such belligerent times!

The remains will be re-interred in the tomb in 2013. Small samples of tooth and bone will be kept for further analysis. We hope this will be their final resting place, in the reconstructed tomb in St. Helen's Chapel. The Fitzwilliams, hastily rescued from the Friary, and then moved across the church in Victorian times, will finally be at rest.