

**An account of what appeared on opening the coffin of King Charles the First, in the vault of King Henry the Eighth in St. George's Chapel at Windsor, on the first of April, 1813 / By Sir Henry Halford.**

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OF WHAT APPEARED

*Northamptonshire*

ON OPENING THE COFFIN

*16.*

OF

KING CHARLES THE FIRST,

IN THE

VAULT OF KING HENRY THE EIGHTH

IN

*ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL AT WINDSOR,*

ON THE FIRST OF APRIL, MDCCCXIII.

By SIR HENRY HALFORD, BART. F. R. S. AND F. A. S.

PHYSICIAN TO THE KING AND THE PRINCE REGENT.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR WHITE, COCHRANE, AND CO. FLEET STREET;  
AND J. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY.

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ON THE FIRST OF APRIL, 1633.

BY SIR HENRY WALFORD, BART. F.R.S. AND F.A.S.

PHYSICIAN TO THE KING AND THE PRINCE ROBERT.

LONDON:

J. NICHOLS, SON, and BENTLEY, Printers,  
Red Lion Passage, Fleet Street, London.

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## TO THE READER.

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For the convenience of the Reader, therefore, those Narratives are here reprinted, as an Appendix.

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# AN ACCOUNT

OF WHAT APPEARED

ON OPENING THE COFFIN

OF

KING CHARLES THE FIRST,

IN

ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL AT WINDSOR,

ON THE FIRST OF APRIL, M DCCC XIII.

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**I**T is stated by Lord Clarendon, in his History of the Rebellion, that the Body of King Charles I. though known to be interred in St. George's Chapel at Windsor, could not be found, when searched for there, some years afterwards. It seems, by the Historian's account, to have been the wish and the intention of King Charles II. after his Restoration, to take up His Father's corpse, and to re-inter it in Westminster Abbey, with those royal honours which had been denied it under the Government of the Regicides. The most careful search was made for the body by several people, amongst whom were some of those noble persons whose faithful attachment had led them to pay their last tribute of respect to their unfortunate Master by attending Him to the grave. Yet such had been the injury done to the Chapel, such were the mutilations it had undergone, during the period of the Usurpation, that no marks

were left, by which the *exact* place of burial of the King, could be ascertained.

There is some difficulty in reconciling this account, with the information which has reached us, since the death of Lord Clarendon, particularly with that of Mr. Ashmole, and more especially with that most interesting narrative of Mr. Herbert given in the "*Athenæ Oxonienses.*" Mr. Herbert had been a Groom of the bed-chamber, and a faithful companion of the King in all circumstances, from the time He left the Isle of Wight, until His death—was employed to convey His body to Windsor, and to fix upon a proper place for His interment there; and was an eye-witness to that interment, in the Vault of King Henry VIII.

Were it allowable to hazard a conjecture, after Lord Clarendon's deprecation of all conjectures on the subject, one might suppose, that it was deemed imprudent, by the Ministers of King Charles II. that His Majesty should indulge His pious inclination to re-inter His Father, at a period, when those ill-judged effusions of loyalty, which had been manifested, by taking out of their graves, and hanging up the bodies of some of the most active Members of the Court, which had condemned and executed the King, might, in the event of another triumph of the Republicans, have subjected the body of the Monarch to similar indignity. But the fact is, King Charles I. was buried in the Vault of King Henry VIII. situated precisely where Mr. Herbert has described it; and an accident has served to elucidate a point in history, which the great authority of Lord Clarendon had involved in some obscurity.

On completing the mausoleum, which His present Majesty has built in the Tomb-house, as it is called, it was necessary to form a passage to it from under the choir of St. George's Chapel. In constructing this passage, an aperture was made accidentally in one of the walls of the Vault of King Henry VIII. through which the workmen were enabled to see, not only the two coffins, which were supposed to contain the bodies of King Henry VIII. and Queen

Jane Seymour, but a third also, covered with a black velvet pall, which, from Mr. Herbert's narrative, might fairly be presumed to hold the remains of King Charles I.

On representing the circumstance to the Prince Regent, His Royal Highness perceived at once, that a doubtful point in History might be cleared up by opening this vault; and accordingly His Royal Highness ordered an examination to be made on the first convenient opportunity. This was done on the 1st of April last, the day after the funeral of the Duchess of Brunswick, in the presence of His Royal Highness Himself, who guaranteed thereby the most respectful care and attention to the remains of the dead, during the enquiry. His Royal Highness was accompanied by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, Count Munster, the Dean of Windsor, Benjamin Charles Stevenson, Esquire, and Sir Henry Halford.

The Vault is covered by an arch, half a brick in thickness, is seven feet two inches in width, nine feet six inches in length, and four feet ten inches in height, and is situated in the centre of the choir, opposite the eleventh Knight's stall, on the Sovereign's side.

On removing the pall, a plain leaden coffin, with no appearance of ever having been inclosed in wood, and bearing an inscription, "KING CHARLES, 1648," in large legible characters, on a scroll of lead encircling it, immediately presented itself to the view. A square opening was then made in the upper part of the lid, of such dimensions as to admit a clear insight into its contents. These were, an internal wooden coffin, very much decayed, and the Body, carefully wrapped up in cere-cloth, into the folds of which a quantity of unctuous or greasy matter, mixed with resin, as it seemed, had been melted, so as to exclude, as effectually as possible, the external air. The coffin was completely full; and, from the tenacity of the cere-cloth, great difficulty was experienced in detaching it successfully from the parts which it enveloped. Wherever the unctuous matter had insinuated itself, the



separation of the cere-cloth was easy; and when it came off, a correct impression of the features to which it had been applied was observed in the unctuous substance. At length, the whole face was disengaged from its covering. The complexion of the skin of it was dark and discoloured. The forehead and temples had lost little or nothing of their muscular substance; the cartilage of the nose was gone; but the left eye, in the first moment of exposure, was open and full, though it vanished almost immediately: and the pointed beard, so characteristic of the period of the reign of King Charles, was perfect. The shape of the face was a long oval; many of the teeth remained; and the left ear, in consequence of the interposition of the unctuous matter between it and the cere-cloth, was found entire.

It was difficult, at this moment, to withhold a declaration, that, notwithstanding its disfigurement, the countenance did bear a strong resemblance to the coins, the busts, and especially to the pictures of King Charles I. by Vandyke, by which it had been made familiar to us. It is true, that the minds of the Spectators of this interesting sight were well prepared to receive this impression; but it is also certain, that such a facility of belief had been occasioned by the simplicity and truth of Mr. Herbert's Narrative, every part of which had been confirmed by the investigation, so far as it had advanced: and it will not be denied that the shape of the face, the forehead, an eye, and the beard, are the most important features by which resemblance is determined.

When the head had been entirely disengaged from the attachments which confined it, it was found to be loose, and, without any difficulty, was taken up and held to view. It was quite wet\*,

\* I have not asserted this liquid to be blood, because I had not an opportunity of being sure that it was so, and I wished to record facts only, and not opinions: I believe it, however, to have been blood, in which the head rested. It gave to writing-paper, and to a white handkerchief, such a colour as blood

and gave a greenish red tinge to paper and to linen, which touched it. The back part of the scalp was entirely perfect, and had a remarkably fresh appearance; the pores of the skin being more distinct, as they usually are when soaked in moisture; and the tendons and ligaments of the neck were of considerable substance and firmness. The hair was thick at the back part of the head, and, in appearance, nearly black. A portion of it, which has since been cleaned and dried, is of a beautiful dark brown colour. That of the beard was a redder brown. On the back part of the head, it was more than an inch in length, and had probably been cut so short for the convenience of the executioner, or perhaps by the piety of friends soon after death, in order to furnish memorials of the unhappy King.

On holding up the head, to examine the place of separation from the body, the muscles of the neck had evidently retracted themselves considerably; and the fourth cervical vertebra was found to be cut through its substance, transversely, leaving the surfaces of the divided portions perfectly smooth and even, an appearance which could have been produced only by a heavy blow, inflicted with a very sharp instrument, and which furnished the last proof wanting to identify King Charles the First.

After this examination of the head, which served every purpose in view, and without examining the body below the neck, it was which has been kept for a length of time generally leaves behind it. Nobody present had a doubt of its being blood; and it appears from Mr. Herbert's narrative, that the King was embalmed immediately after decapitation. It is probable, therefore, that the large blood vessels continued to empty themselves for some time afterwards. I am aware, that some of the softer parts of the human body, and particularly the brain, undergo, in the course of time, a decomposition, and will melt. A liquid, therefore, might be found after long interment, where solids only had been buried: but the weight of the head, in this instance, gave no suspicion that the brain had lost its substance; and no moisture appeared in any other part of the coffin, as far as we could see, excepting at the back part of the head and neck.

immediately restored to its situation, the coffin was soldered up again, and the vault closed.

Neither of the other coffins had any inscription upon them. The larger one, supposed on good grounds to contain the remains of King Henry VIII. measured six feet ten inches in length, and had been enclosed in an elm one of two inches in thickness : but this was decayed, and lay in small fragments near it. The leaden coffin appeared to have been beaten in by violence about the middle ; and a considerable opening in that part of it, exposed a mere skeleton of the King. Some beard remained upon the chin, but there was nothing to discriminate the personage contained in it.

The smaller coffin, understood to be that of Queen Jane Seymour, was not touched ; mere curiosity not being considered, by the Prince Regent, as a sufficient motive for disturbing these remains.

On examining the vault with some attention, it was found that the wall, at the West end, had, at some period or other, been partly pulled down and repaired again, not by regular masonry, but by fragments of stones and bricks, put rudely and hastily together without cement.

From Lord Clarendon's account, as well as from Mr. Herbert's narrative of the interment of King Charles, it is to be inferred, that the ceremony was a very hasty one, performed in the presence of the Governor, who had refused to allow the service according to the Book of Common Prayer to be used on the occasion ; and had, probably, scarcely admitted the time necessary for a decent deposit of the body. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the coffin of King Henry VIII. had been injured by a precipitate introduction of the coffin of King Charles ; and that the Governor was not under the influence of feelings, in those times, which gave him any concern about Royal remains, or the vault which contained them.

*On opening the Coffin of King CHARLES the First.* 11

It may be right to add, that a very small mahogany coffin, covered with crimson velvet, containing the body of an infant, had been laid upon the pall which covered King Charles. This is known to have been a still-born child of the Princess George of Denmark, afterwards Queen Anne.

HENRY HALFORD.

*London, April 11, 1813.*

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It may be right to add, that a very small tinny coffin, covered with crimson velvet, containing the body of an infant, had been laid upon the pall which covered King Canute. This is known to have been a still-born child of the Princess George of Denmark, afterwards Queen Anne.

HENRY HALLFORD

London, April 11, 1812.



APPENDIX, N<sup>o</sup> 1.

*Extract from Clarendon's "History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England," Vol. III. Part I. p. 393, Oxford, 1807.*

“His body was immediately carried into a room at Whitehall; where he was exposed for many days to the public view, that all men might know that he was not alive. And he was then embalmed, and put into a coffin, and so carried to St. James’s; where he likewise remained several days. They who were qualified to order his funeral declared, ‘that he should be buried at Windsor in a decent manner, provided that the whole expence should not exceed five hundred pounds.’ The Duke of Richmond, the Marquis of Hertford, the Earls of Southampton and Lindsey, who had been of his bedchamber, and always very faithful to him, desired those who governed, ‘that they might have leave to perform the last duty to their dead master, and to wait upon him to his grave;’ which, after some pauses, they were permitted to do; with this, ‘that they should not attend the corpse out of the town; since they resolved it should be privately carried to Windsor without pomp or noise, and then they should have timely notice, that, if they pleased, they might be at his interment.’ And accordingly it was committed to four of those servants who had been by them appointed to wait upon him during his imprisonment, that they should convey the body to Windsor; which they did. And it was, that night, placed in that chamber which had usually been his bedchamber: the next morning, it was carried into the great hall; where it remained till the lords came; who arrived there in the afternoon, and immediately went to Colonel Whitchcot, the Governor of the Castle, and shewed the order they had from the Parliament to be present at the burial; which he admitted: but when they desired that His

Majesty might be buried according to the form of the Common Prayer Book, the Bishop of London being present with them to officiate, he positively and roughly refused to consent to it; and said, 'it was not lawful; that the Common Prayer Book was put down, and he would not suffer it to be used in that garrison where he commanded;' nor could all the reasons, persuasions, and entreaties, prevail with him to suffer it. Then they went into the church, to make choice of a place for burial. But when they entered into it, which they had been so well acquainted with, they found it so altered and transformed, all inscriptions, and those land-marks pulled down, by which all men knew every particular place in that church, and such a dismal mutation over the whole, that they knew not where they were: nor was there one old officer that had belonged to it, or knew where our princes had used to be interred. At last, there was a fellow of the town who undertook to tell them the place, where, he said, 'there was a vault, in which King Harry the Eighth and Queen Jane Seymour were interred.' As near that place as could conveniently be, they caused the grave to be made. There the King's body was laid, without any words, or other ceremonies than the tears and sighs of the few beholders. Upon the coffin was a plate of silver fixed, with these words only, *King Charles*, 1648. When the coffin was put in, the black velvet pall that had covered it was thrown over it, and then the earth thrown in; which the Governor stayed to see perfectly done, and then took the keys of the church.

"I have been the longer and the more particular in this relation, that I may from thence take occasion to mention what fell out long after, and which administered a subject of much discourse; in which, according to the several humours and fancies of men, they who were in nearest credit and trust about the King underwent many very severe censures and reproaches, not without reflection upon the King himself. Upon the return of King Charles the Second, with so much congratulation, and universal joy of the people, above ten years after the murder of his father, it was generally expected that the body should be removed from that obscure burial, and, with such ceremony as should be thought fit, should be solemnly deposited with his Royal Ancestors in King Harry the Seventh's chapel, in the collegiate church of Westminster. And the King himself intended nothing more, and spoke often of it, as if it were only deferred

till some circumstances and ceremonies in the doing it might be adjusted. But, by degrees, the discourse of it was diminished, as if it were totally laid aside upon some reasons of state, the ground whereof several men guessed at according to their fancies, and thereupon cast those reproaches upon the statesmen as they thought reasonable, when the reasons which were suggested by their own imaginations did not satisfy their understanding. For the satisfaction and information of all men, I choose in this place to explain that matter; which, it may be, is not known to many; and at that time was not, for many reasons, thought fit to be published. The Duke of Richmond was dead before the King returned; the Marquis of Hertford died in a short time after, and was seldom out of his lodging after his Majesty came to Whitehall: the Earl of Southampton and the Earl of Lindsey went to Windsor, and took with them such of their own servants as had attended them in that service, and as many others as they remembered had been then present, and were still alive; who all amounted to a small number; there being, at the time of the interment, great strictness used in admitting any to be present whose names were not included in the order which the lords had brought. In a word, the confusion they had at that time observed to be in that church, and the small alterations which were begun to be made towards decency, so totally perplexed their memories, that they could not satisfy themselves in what place or part of the church the Royal Body was interred: yet, where any concurred upon this or that place, they caused the ground to be opened at a good distance, and, upon such enquiries, found no cause to believe that they were near the place: and, upon their giving this account to the King, the thought of that remove was laid aside; and the reason communicated to very few, for the better discountenancing farther enquiry."



APPENDIX, N<sup>o</sup> II.

*Extract from Wood's "Athene Oxonienses," folio edition, vol. II. p. 703.*

*Printed for Knaplock, Midwinter, and Tonson, 1721.*

“THERE was a passage broke through the wall of the Banqueting-house, by which the King passed unto the scaffold: where, after his Majesty had spoken and declared publicly that he died a Christian according to the profession of the Church of England (the contents of which have been several times printed), the fatal stroke was given by a disguised person. Mr. Herbert during this time was at the door leading to the scaffold, much lamenting; and the Bishop coming from the scaffold with the Royal Corpse, which was immediately confined and covered with a velvet pall, he and Mr. Herbert went with it to the back stairs to have it embalmed. . . . The Royal Corpse being embalmed and well confined, and all afterwards wrapped up in lead, and covered with a new velvet pall, it was removed to St. James's. . . . Where to bury the King was the last duty remaining. By some Historians it is said the King spoke something to the Bishop concerning his burial. Mr. Herbert, both before and after the King's death, was frequently in company with the Bishop, and affirmed, that he never mentioned any thing to him of the King's naming any place where he would be buried; nor did Mr. Herbert (who constantly attended his Majesty, and after his coming to Hurst Castle was the only person in his bedchamber) hear him at any time declare his mind concerning it. Nor was it in his lifetime a proper question for either of them to ask, notwithstanding they had oftentimes the opportunity, especially when his Majesty was bequeathing to his royal children and friends what is formerly related. Nor did the Bishop declare any thing concerning the place to Mr. Herbert, which doubtless he would upon Mr. Herbert's

pious care about it; which being duly considered, they thought no place more fit to inter the corpse than in the Chapel of King Henry VII. at the end of the church of Westminster Abbey, out of whose loins King Charles I. was lineally extracted, &c. Whereupon Mr. Herbert made his application to such as were then in power for leave to bury the King's Body in the said chapel, among his ancestors; but his request was denied, for this reason; that *his burying there would attract infinite numbers of all sorts thither, to see where the King was buried; which, as the times then were, was judged unsafe and inconvenient.* Mr. Herbert acquainting the Bishop with this, they then resolved to bury the King's Body in the Royal Chapel of St. George within the Castle of Windsor, both in regard that his Majesty was Sovereign of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, and that several Kings had been there interred; namely, King Henry VI. King Edward IV. and King Henry VIII. &c. Upon which consideration Mr. Herbert made his second address to the Committee of Parliament, who, after some deliberation, gave him an order, bearing date the 6th of February 1648, authorizing him and Mr. Anthony Mildmay to bury the King's Body there, which the Governor was to observe.

“Accordingly the corpse was carried thither from St. James's, Feb. 7, in a hearse covered with black velvet, drawn by six horses covered with black cloth, in which were about a dozen gentlemen, most of them being such that had waited upon his Majesty at Carisbrook Castle, and other places, since his Majesty's going from Newcastle. Mr. Herbert shewed the Governor, Colonel Whitchcot, the Committee's order for permitting Mr. Herbert and Mr. Mildmay to bury him, the late King, in any place within Windsor Castle, that they should think fit and meet. In the first place, in order thereunto, they carried the King's Body into the Dean's house, which was hung with black, and after to his usual bedchamber within the palace. After which they went to St. George's Chapel to take a view thereof, and of the most fit and honourable place for the Royal Corpse to rest in. Having taken a view, they at first thought that the Tomb-house, built by Cardinal Wolsey, would be a fit place for his interment; but that place, though adjoining, yet being not within the Royal Chapel, they waved it: for, if King Henry VIII. was buried there (albeit to that day the particular place of

his burial was unknown to any), yet, in regard to his Majesty King Charles I. (who was a real Defender of the Faith, and as far from censuring any that might be), would upon occasional discourse express some dislike in King Henry's proceedings, in misemploying those vast revenues, the suppressed abbies, monasteries, and other religious houses, were endowed with, and by demolishing those many beautiful and stately structures, which both expressed the greatness of their founders, and preserved the splendour of the kingdom, which might at the Reformation have in some measure been kept up and converted to sundry pious uses.

“ Upon consideration thereof, those gentlemen declined it, and pitched upon the vault where King Edward IV. had been interred, being on the North side of the choir, near the altar, that King being one his late Majesty would oftentimes make honourable mention of, and from whom his Majesty was lineally propagated. That therefore induced Mr. Herbert to give order to N. Harrison and Henry Jackson to have that vault opened, partly covered with a fair large stone of touch, raised within the arch adjoining, having a range of iron bars gilt, curiously cut, according to church work, &c. But as they were about this work, some noblemen came thither; namely, the Duke of Richmond, the Marquis of Hertford, the Earl of Lindsay, and with them Dr. Juxon, Bishop of London, who had licence from the Parliament to attend the King's Body to his grave. Those gentlemen, therefore, Herbert, and Mildmay, thinking fit to submit, and leave the choice of the place of burial to those great persons, they in like manner viewed the tomb-house and the choir; and one of the Lords beating gently upon the pavement with his staff, perceived a hollow sound; and thereupon ordering the stones and earth to be removed, they discovered a descent into a vault, where two coffins were laid near one another, the one very large, of an antique form, and the other little. These they supposed to be the bodies of King Henry VIII. and Queen Jane Seymour his third wife, as indeed they were. The velvet palls that covered their coffins seemed fresh, though they had lain there above 100 years.

“ The Lords agreeing that the King's body should be in the same vault interred, being about the middle of the choir, over against the eleventh stall upon the Sovereign's side, they gave order to have the King's name and year he died cut in lead; which whilst the workmen were about, the Lords went

out and gave Puddifant the sexton order to lock the chapel door, and not suffer any to stay therein till farther notice. The sexton did his best to clear the chapel; nevertheless, Isaac the sexton's man said that a foot-soldier had hid himself, so as he was not discerned; and being greedy of prey, crept into the vault, and cut so much of the velvet pall that covered the great body as he judged would hardly be missed, and wimbled also a hole through the said coffin that was largest, probably fancying that there was something well worth his adventure. The sexton at his opening the door espied the sacrilegious person; who being searched, a bone was found about him, with which he said he would haft a knife. The Governor being therefore informed of, he gave him his reward; and the Lords and others present were convinced that a real body was in the said great coffin, which some before had scrupled. The girdle or circumscription of capital letters of lead put about the King's coffin had only these words: *King Charles, 1648.*

“The King's Body was then brought from his bedchamber down into St. George's Hall, whence, after a little stay, it was with a slow and solemn pace (much sorrow in most faces being then discernible) carried by gentlemen of quality in mourning. The noblemen in mourning also held up the pall; and the Governor, with several gentlemen, officers, and attendants, came after. It was then observed, that at such time as the King's Body was brought out from St. George's Hall, the sky was serene and clear; but presently it began to snow, and the snow fell so fast, that by that time the corpse came to the West end of the Royal chapel, the black velvet pall was all white (the colour of innocency), being thick covered over with snow. The Body being by the bearers set down near the place of burial, the Bishop of London stood ready, with the Service-book in his hands, to have performed his last duty to the King his Master, according to the order and form of burial of the dead set forth in the Book of Common Prayer; which the Lords likewise desired; but it would not be suffered by Col. Whitchcot, the Governor of the Castle, by reason of the *Directory, to which* (said he) *he and others were to be conformable.* Thus went the *white King* to his grave, in the 48th year of his age, and 22d year and 10th month of his reign.”

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