Discovering What Lies Below: the Exploration of William & Mary's Crypt Under the Chapel

Somayah S. Allibhai-Mawani
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Part of the Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/124

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Discovering What Lies Below: the Exploration of William & Mary's Crypt Under the Chapel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies Department from The College of William and Mary

by

Somayah Shaheen Allibhai-Mawani

Accepted for \underline{High Honors} (Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Mark McLaughlin, Director

Annie Blazer

Carl Lounsbery

Elizabeth Mead

Williamsburg, VA
April 17, 2015
# Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Part I: A General Overview of the Sir Christopher Wren Building 6
   History of the College Building 6
   Movement of Bodies Below Ground 12

Part II: Interment of bodies in the Wren crypt 17
   The Death and Funeral of Lord Botetourt 17
   President Dew’s body Interred at William and Mary 27
   Comparing the Burials of Lord Botetourt and President Dew 30

Part III: Archaeological Remnants from the Wren crypt 36
   Removal Process 36
   John Randolph Coffin Plate 39
   Thomas Roderick Dew Shipping Plate 41
   Lord Botetourt Coffin Plate 43
   Lord Botetourt Coffin Hardware 46
   Artifacts as Research Tools 50

Conclusion 53

Bibliography 57

Appendix 61
Introduction

The Sir Christopher Wren Building, originally known as the College Building, is the oldest academic building with almost continuous use in the United States (see Figure 1). Surviving three fires and two wars, the construction contains a significant amount of infrastructure from its original composition, dating from 1695 to 1699. Making up the majority of William and Mary’s historic campus, today the red brick building is home to four academic classrooms and multiple exhibition spaces for visitors (see Figure 2). Always considered a central core to The College of William and Mary, this spot on campus continues to define experiences for students in Williamsburg more than 300 years after the first bricks were laid.

Numerous rites of passage take place in and around the Wren Building for students of the College, starting from an undergraduate’s first week greetings on campus. During fall orientation new students recite the honor code aloud in the Great Hall, vowing to not lie, steal, or cheat. Opening Convocation transpires a few days later, welcoming the most recent members of the Tribe to the community. Nearly 8,000 students gather there to participate in the Yule Log Ceremony, celebrating worries disappearing by festively placing pieces of holly in a blazing fire in the grand fireplace. Possibly the most sentimental event within this magnificent building may be the pomp and circumstance ringing true for students in May, as graduates pass through the Wren Building one final time before receiving their degrees. All of these moments within the William and Mary experience recall the central environment of campus, now represented by a single architectural form. Each experience within and surrounding the Wren helps contribute to the building’s continually evolving history.
My senior thesis adds one more layer to the rich history of using, loving, and yes, studying the Sir Christopher Wren Building. Focusing on the chapel wing and the crypt in particular, I evaluated the space, read archival documentation, and analyzed artifacts once housed within and below the building’s south (chapel) wing. Ideally, my research will become a tool for better appreciating and understanding William and Mary’s main building. Exploring both intentional and fortuitous elements of the chapel wing and its history, I was able to collect a more complete framework of the school’s continually evolving sacred space.

Completed in 1732, the south wing was originally the location of daily campus worship, and has been used by the students, faulty, and staff at William and Mary as well as the neighboring community of Williamsburg. These worshipers and those attending concerts, lectures, and weddings in the chapel might be surprised to learn that they are accompanied by unseen “locals”: those buried directly below the chapel’s floor. It is here that one finds the College crypt, housing between 9 and 12 dignitaries with ties to the school. This collective group brings its own dimension to the space above, and associations to the College that expand well beyond the limits of Williamsburg itself.

William and Mary’s chapel and crypt environments are best comprehended through three distinct methods of exploration: considering revisions within the progressing physical space (such as alterations to structural composition), investigating the interment of bodies below the chapel floor, and closely studying artifacts once housed in the campus crypt. Together, these sources of data offer a more accurate image of the space, its history, and its function.
My goal for this research project was to better understand the largely misconceived crypt space on campus. When speaking with students, faculty, staff, and community members in Williamsburg, I found about half of the population to be unaware of the bodies interred below the chapel floor. This was astonishing to me, as while many men and women worshiped, watched concerts, and took part in ceremonies within the Wren Building’s south wing, none were aware or informed about the local dignitaries directly below their feet. For those that were familiar about the crypt below, little accurate knowledge was known. This series of events inspired me to explore the topic of the Wren crypt for my honors thesis, which evolved into the form seen today.

To begin, it was necessary to understand the foundational history of the Sir Christopher Wren Building. My goal was to trace the space marked by multiple fires and wars from its early beginnings through today’s landscape. *So Good a Design: the Colonial Campus of the College of William and Mary: its history, background, and legacy* by James Kornwolf became my guidepost, detailing the space’s social history within a larger architectural timeline. This newly acquired knowledge was paired with my Wren Building training as a historic campus tour guide, providing the necessary structure upon which to build my work.

Gaining a historical frame upon which to base my research, I sought information specifically related to the crypt on campus. Formal research reports by Colonial Williamsburg, campus newspaper clippings, and everything in between were read to better understand the crypt landscape, as I knew physical access to the basement environment would be a rarity. My research revealed previous documentation and analysis of the evolving crypt space with the interment of successive bodies over time,
but not much on the process of how those bodies arrived at this place—their final destination.

The process of the transporting the deceased’s bodies to the College and their interment in the crypt became an interest of mine, leading to case studies of colonial governor Lord Botetourt and College president Thomas Roderick Dew. Both men represented an esteemed quality of personhood through their actions, elevating the William and Mary community through example. Lord Botetourt walked from his home to the College each morning to worship alongside students within the chapel. His heavy involvement in official and non-official duties raised the bar of leadership and accessibility, making his sudden death that much harder to process. President Dew encapsulated all facets of the William and Mary experience. Beginning as an undergraduate student, he became a Chair of the College, and eventually, the president of William and Mary. Embodying many traits of valiant effort, the Virginia native became a figurehead of the South in addition to his alma mater. These outstanding character attributes are paired with comprehensive historic accounts in the archives of Williamsburg, allowing the stories of the two body interments within the Wren crypt to be compared. These two histories can now be considered in relation to the previously documented context of the developing crypt.

Having a sense of two complete interment narratives, it made sense to progress onward by personally examining artifacts once housed in the Wren Building crypt. While the site has been looted on multiple occasions, four substantial artifacts remain intact. The College owns three coffin plates and one set of coffin hardware, which are now available for study at Swem Library. Examination of these portable objects, and their
exemplary craftsmanship reveal the esteemed regard with which these College dignitaries were held by their contemporary communities. Spanning 200 years of history, each artifact informs the others, helping to produce a scaled crypt inventory.

Collectively, these three realms of study help share the larger narrative of William and Mary’s Sir Christopher Wren Building. Through examination of each specific crypt component, a developed dialogue emerges from the space itself.
Part I

A General Overview of the Sir Christopher Wren Building

History of the College Building

On February 8, 1693 King William III and Queen Mary II granted a royal charter establishing “a certain Place of universal Study, a perpetual College of Divinity, Philosophy, Languages, and other good Arts and Sciences, consisting of one President, six Masters of Professors, and an hundred Scholars more or less” in the colony of Virginia.¹ Three schools were to develop within the new academic institution – a grammar school to prepare boys of twelve to fifteen for college, a school of moral and natural philosophy to educate topics ranging in logic and ethics to physics and mathematics, as well as a school of divinity, preparing males for ordination within the Church of England. This wide range of study was to be housed in the same space.

The English origin of the classical design of the College is virtually assured by the fact that no one in Virginia at the time could design it, supervise its construction, or even build it. No structure of its style and scale had yet been built in any of the colonies and there is no evidence, except for Penn and his English architect, Porteus, in Philadelphia, that any American architect was then living who was capable of creating “so good a design.”²

With these considerations in mind, the College of William and Mary was intended to be “an English, Anglican, and royal foundation. Therefore, it would have been natural for its design to have also been English, Anglican, and royal. The combination points

directly to the Office of Works, the only administrative and functional structure existing that designed buildings authorized by the sovereigns.”\(^3\) Construction for the institution for higher learning began on August 8, 1695,\(^4\) in an area known simply as Middle Plantation. A region comprised of simple timber structures and few brick buildings, this landscape would eventually become the city of Williamsburg.

Kornwolf notes this quadrangular structure would have been the largest attempted in the English colonies, resulting in a building between 80,000 and 90,000 square feet.\(^5\) Due to financial considerations, the College Building’s first phase became complete in 1699 with only a north (Great Hall) and east wing (main building). Three-foot thick brick walls were laid in English bond both above and below the water table, a pattern broken only for a few courses on the eastern façade. The building also includes glazed headers throughout.\(^6\) Wall thickness tapered as the building was constructed vertically, while the site’s horizontal dimensions were 138 by 164 feet, approximately 7:8 in proportion.\(^7\) Containing all facilities necessary for the school’s function, the single academic building accommodated students and professors with classrooms, a library, dining facility, and sleep quarters by 1700.

The College of William and Mary’s built environment stood strong until 1705, when the school’s library unexpectedly caught fire. Starting in the Great Hall’s eastern wing, the flames quickly spread and gutted the entire interior. This major moment of destruction heavily impacted much documentation and pictorial evidence of the school’s

\(^3\) Ibid., 33.  
\(^4\) Ibid., 36.  
\(^5\) Ibid., 56.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 38.  
\(^7\) Ibid., 39.
early years. A Swiss visitor named Franz Ludwig Michel documented the only known view of the original William and Mary building in mid-1702.\textsuperscript{8} His elevation of the east wing provides general parameters of the project, rather than worry over the structure’s technical execution (see Figure 3). Although lacking the qualities of methodical study, the work of Franz Ludwig Michel provides insight towards the first College Building, depicted with an additional floor that is non-existent today.

Thankfully Queen Anne of England, sister to the College’s namesake, provided funds for the school to be rebuilt. Restored using as much original material from 1695 to 1699 as possible, the College Building was erected using most of the original walls and became complete once again in 1716. While able to function using only a north and eastern wing, a plan was created to construct a south wing in the form of a chapel. Intended to compliment the already crafted Great Hall wing directly opposite, the College Building’s newest addition was erected from 1729 to 1732 to provide worship space for everyday use. A former William and Mary student, Henry Cary the Younger had the opportunity to oversee the construction of a sacred site on campus.\textsuperscript{9} The College Building expansion was complete by 1732, opened with a sermon by James Blair on June 28\textsuperscript{th}.

Archaeological evidence shows approximately eight feet of truncation on the west end of the north wing took place in order to match that of the recently constructed south wing, prioritizing the equanimity between old and new. The Great Hall now matched that of the Chapel, each measuring 32 by 64 feet.\textsuperscript{10} Providing a 1:2 proportion, the fashioned forms provided an aesthetic architectural appeal executed through scale. Kornwolf states,

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 33.
“These two facades stand almost proof that any plans for completing the original quadrangle had been abandoned.”

Although no major additions constructed after 1732 survive today, the College Building continued to evolve as time progressed (Figure 2). One major event in this process was the Charter Day fire, occurring on February 8, 1859. The flames destroyed much of the campus library collection and scientific equipment, including large apparatus resources. The school is fortunate to have been rebuilt the same year, allowing William and Mary to remain vibrant and strong.

Williamsburg became a place of conflict during the Civil War. Transformed into a hospital, the college’s Main Building housed soldiers from the 5th Pennsylvania cavalry. Drunken soldiers set fire to the building in September 1862, nearly consuming the total structure in flames. At this point in time, the building became increasingly fragile, in addition to the resources housed within its walls. Rising up from the ashes once again, William and Mary had a building ready for use in 1869. Surviving two wars and three fires, the College remained alive but fragile in the 20th century.

It was the generosity of John D. Rockefeller that has allowed the College Building to be experienced in such esteemed regard today. The current fifth phase of the Main Building at William and Mary, which depicts the space’s post 1705 appearance, was reconstructed and restored in the period from 1928-1931. The Boston architectural firm of Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn reconditioned the site to its colonial appearance through referencing “contemporary interiors in England and in the United States” since very little

11 Ibid., 139.
12 Ibid., 33.
documentation dates prior to the mid-19th century.\textsuperscript{13} Consideration of colonial aesthetics paired with modern advancement in structural stability allows the building to remain actively used today.

Most of the 19th century structure was gutted to provide space for the erection of a concrete-and-steel superstructure. Steel floor joists were installed,\textsuperscript{14} allowing entire expanses within the building to be documented. While the site’s complete interior received a much-needed face-lift, the most elaborate interior reconstruction was attempted in the chapel. Paneling is of native pine, and the reredos and balustrades are walnut.\textsuperscript{15} Space was arranged in antiphonal seating, a pattern seen in early Christian traditions in which the congregation is divided into two groups for acoustic and visual reasoning. This manner of praying provides a seating arrangement comprised of rows on each side of the church sanctuary, running the full length of space. This design pattern is similar to many college chapels in Great Britain, fitting within a larger collegiate theme.\textsuperscript{16}

An altar table, lectern, and credence table were designed for the south wing by Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn during the building’s restoration. In addition, a sacristy was formed and ten concrete vaults were constructed under the chapel aisle and within the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{14} Buchanan, Paul, and Catherine Schlesinger. "Burial Vaults under the Chapel at the Wren Building, the College of William & Mary (Block 16, Building 3)." Chapel Vaults and Tablets. July 1970.
\textsuperscript{15} Much of the College’s modern physical composition has become second nature thanks to the training provided by the Spotswood Society on campus. The shadowing program and excellently compiled manual have provided the groundwork for my knowledge.
\textsuperscript{16} One example is Merton College, a constituent college of the University of Oxford in England. Established in 1264, Merton College’s chapel is arranged with antiphonal seating very much like the layout seen at William and Mary today.
crypt.\textsuperscript{17} Intended to help support the chapel floor, these concrete vaults also doubled as potential interment space.

Upon thorough completion of both the building exterior and interior, the finished product became visible to all in 1931.\textsuperscript{18} At this time the structure was designated the “Wren Building,”\textsuperscript{19} although no specific reference to Sir Christopher Wren as the designer of the first College Building has been found. Kornwolf notes, “[The English architect’s] name has been associated with the building on wholly stylistic grounds because only he had designed similar buildings previously.”\textsuperscript{20} Through time, this title has remained although no new evidence has arisen to tie the English architect to the Williamsburg campus directly. Used as a tool of recognition, the name Sir Christopher Wren has become synonymous with the College of William and Mary, maintained through both formal and informal terms of reference. Seen as a collective whole, the evolutions discussed thus far pertain to the building above ground, constructed and repaired throughout its three hundred year history. Not as widely known among the community lies the recognition of movements made below ground level, underneath the chapel floor.

\textsuperscript{17} Paul Buchanan and Catherine Schlesinger, "Burial Vaults under the Chapel at the Wren Building, the College of William\& Mary (Block 16, Building 3)," (1970).
\textsuperscript{18} An engraved copper plate discovered in 1929 at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University in England provided an 18\textsuperscript{th} century architectural drawing of Williamsburg’s most prominent buildings, including the College Building at William and Mary.
\textsuperscript{19} James Kornwolf, \textit{So Good A Design} (Williamsburg: College of William and Mary, 1989), 65.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 100.
Movement of Bodies Below Ground

In addition to physical evolutions transpiring above ground, the College of William and Mary was greatly impacted through the moving of bodies below the chapel floor. Directly under the building’s southern wing lies a crypt, housing the remains of individuals deeply tied to the school. Intended to be a sign of great honor, the presence of the remains of these select individuals permanently tied to William and Mary resonate above ground.

Some individuals are housed within vaults attaching to the walls of the south wing, literally becoming part of the building’s infrastructure (see Figure 4). The presence of these physical remains are indicated by visual markings on the floor, paired alongside archival documentation and artifact analysis.

This process of interment began soon after the chapel’s unveiling in 1732, fulfilling the purpose of the open space below the floor (see Figure 5). Sir John Randolph, Speaker of the House of Burgesses and Attorney General for the colony of Virginia, was the first to be placed inside the cellar, located directly under the eastern-end altar in 1739.21 As a graduate of William and Mary, Sir John Randolph was placed in the northernmost corner (see A of Figure 5 and Figure 6), allowing his prominent offspring to be placed alongside the family patriarch. Sometime after 1754, his wife Lady Susanna Beverley Randolph joined him inside the comfortably spaced brick vault.

The next to be buried in the crypt was Lord Botetourt, who passed away in 1770. Perhaps in order to leave room for John Randolph’s descendants, Lord Botetourt was not

21 First seen in the early Christian period, crypts were spaces intended to house coffins, sarcophagi, and relics below spaces of public worship. The most prominent individuals found themselves buried below the eastern apse of a church within a constructed vault. From this point, bodies radiate westward in a subsequent reversed hierarchy until the underground space becomes full. If possible, families were located alongside one another, allowing lineal ties to be grouped into the afterlife.
interred below the eastern altar. Rather, the 18th century governor was placed on the northern end of the chapel. This location presumably places Botetourt beneath his pew of worship, relatively close to the wing’s eastern end (see D of Figure 5).

In subsequent years, additional Randolph burials dominated the cellar landscape. Peyton Randolph and his wife Elisabeth Harrison Randolph enter the crypt in 1776 and 1783, respectively. As the older son of John Randolph, Peyton graduated from the College before becoming Attorney General of the Virginia Colony, Speaker of the House Of Burgesses, and president of the 1st and 2nd Continental Congress. His death placed him and his wife in parallel proximity to Peyton’s parents, in a brick vault located near the southeast intersection below ground (see C of Figure 5 and Figure 7). It can be assumed that younger brother John Randolph was intended to round out the space directly below the eastern altar, as his body was transported from Europe to Williamsburg after his death in 1784. Although buried alone below the chapel, his vault remains the same size as his relatives (see B of Figure 5 and Figure 8).

Bishop James Madison, a professor of philosophy and mathematics and the 8th president of William and Mary, passed away in 1812 (Figure 4). As the first religious figure to be placed within the College crypt, his presence reaffirmed the collectivization of church and state at this period of time. Students would worship each day in the building’s chapel, now occupied by a spiritual leader known by all early 19th century scholars. Three years later, his wife Sarah Tate joined Bishop Madison below ground in their crypt vault. By the 19th century, the most revered interment locations were occupied in the Wren crypt. To ease the challenge of funeral arrangers and mason workers, the Madison brick burial vault was constructed in conjunction to the already complete
underground chamber of Lord Botetourt (see E of Figure 5), constructed near the pulpit on the north wall.

The perimeters of the next two burials below the Wren chapel are more vague, due to the lack of formal architecture defining their presence. Both Judge Thomas Nelson and Chancellor Robert Nelson were placed below the chapel floor without expressed boundaries of space. Excavations of the site have established Chancellor Robert Nelson, a professor of law at the College and a judge, to be buried in front of Lord Botetourt and the Madison’s, in a simple grave covered by the dirt floor (see F of Figure 5). Judge Thomas Nelson has historically been tied to burial within the crypt, although his exact location remains unknown today. These two peculiar cases are followed by one more burial, that of President Thomas Roderick Dew. Buried after the Colonial Williamsburg restoration of 1928-1931, Dew is the only individual intentionally interred within a concrete vault below the College’s chapel floor (see H of Figure 5).

While the crypt on campus was intended to be a private environment, much movement and unauthorized observation has transpired in the chapel subfloor over time. The first published article detailing the crypt space on campus came on July 31, 1858 in the *Southern Argus*. Distributed three times a week, this periodical of Norfolk, Virginia was able to shed light on the world below the chapel floor due to construction work being performed on the wooden flooring. Titled “The Dead of the Chapel of William and

---

22 There is a tendency to reference each brick burial vault by name of the family patriarch, even after the bodies have been removed through instances of looting or preservation.

Mary", this expose revealed a great detail about the Randolph vaults, in addition to the excavation of the grave of Robert Nelson, described as existing without a mark of any kind.

The next major alteration to the space came as a result of soldiers occupying the College Building during the Civil War in 1862. Graffiti marks and rough treatment of the brick vaults indicate each brick enclosure was opened, presumably by those staying within the building, severely damaging the architectural forms and robbing relics housed within these sealed environments. By the 20th century, steam tunnels were fitted below the college campus, providing vast opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to travel below ground and enter the private environment (see Figure 9).

Structural alterations also took place within the building’s south wing, helping to hold and consolidate what has remained. A bearing wall was constructed in 1869 to support the chapel floor while William and Mary was being reconstructed after the Civil War (see Figure 10). Part of the complete 4th form of the building, this addition is now covered by ten concrete vaults constructed during the 1928-1931 restoration.24 During the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation restoration, the early brick vaults were repaired,25 and disturbed vaults were consolidated into a concrete vault to prevent further destruction (Figure 5). In addition to practical preservation, the Wren Building has seen three additional restorations during the 20th century—1928-1931, 1967, and 1999-2000.

---

24 Paul Buchanan and Catherine Schlesinger, "Burial Vaults under the Chapel at the Wren Building, the College of William& Mary (Block 16, Building 3)," (1970).
25 Ibid.
The 1967 interior restoration of the Wren Building conducted a thorough inventory of the chapel space, in addition to five other rooms. The fabric in each space was documented. The effort of Colonial Williamsburg’s 1967’s inventory and repairs brought to prominence features typically overlooked, very much like the bodies buried in the crypt. The space as it is seen today was the result of the 1967 repairs. This work has become the focus of my senior project. The latest renewal of the Wren Building came in 1999-2000, producing additional structural stability. Although architectural features were reconditioned during this process, upgrading safety elements within and modernizing technology took up the vast majority of the project.

The collective balance between architectural preservation and continual academic use within the Sir Christopher Wren Building has allowed the site to acknowledge the past and present. Visitors today experience a building with centuries of collectivized history, encountering 17th century foundations alongside 21st century technology. This juxtaposition stimulates tourists and challenges researchers, pushing them to keep asking questions.

---

26 In addition to the Chapel, the Grammar School Room, the Moral Philosophy Room, the Great Hall, the Convocation (“Blue”) Room, and the Common Room were restored in 1967.

27 1697 was the latest project significantly impacting the physical crypt environment. After this point in time, no research endeavors have noticeably altered the subterranean composition, i.e. repairing brick vaults or moving physical remains from one location to another.
Part II

Interment of bodies in the Wren crypt

The Death and Funeral of Lord Botetourt

In 1768 Lord Botetourt arrived in the new world. Leaving behind his native land of England for residency in Virginia, the full governor took on the role of “his Majesty’s Lieutenant, Governor-General, and Commander-in-Chief of the Colony and Dominion of Virginia, and Vice-Admiral of the same.”\(^{28}\) Superseding six lieutenant governor predecessors, Lord Botetourt became known as a friendly, skilled politician. Although very active in the colony’s government, the governor found time to develop a special bond with the College of William and Mary. Each morning he would worship alongside students on campus and discuss developments with the scholars, giving particular care to this select institution. Pairing social and political ties, the governor was able to carry out official duties while still being very present in the lives of Williamsburg residents, including the impressionable young scholars located down the road. Edmund Randolph said Botetourt was “always available on business…affable to the humblest visitor in social circles, easy himself, and contributing to the ease of others, he was sincerely and universally beloved.”\(^{29}\) He clearly took pride in engaging with the Williamsburg population, becoming more than a governmental figurehead.


Having such an active role in the community, it came as quite a shock when Lord Botetourt unexpectedly became ill in the fall of 1770. According to James Parker, ‘He was taken with a slight fever the 23rd of September which he had gotten the better of, [but] it returned in a week after.’\textsuperscript{30} Unable to complete his political duties, it became increasingly clear that the governor would most likely pass away. Although aware of the imminent death in the days before October 15\textsuperscript{th}, the community was desolate to hear Lord Botetourt had passed. The colony of Virginia was quick to share the news via letter and public announcements in the newspaper, vocalizing their universal lamentation. The *Virginia Gazette*’s formal obsequy described the governor as having “many great Virtues and amiable Qualities…[being the] best of Governors and…best of Men.”\textsuperscript{31} His role as speaker and listener, governor and friend, could not easily be forgotten.

Due to the sudden nature of Lord Botetourt’s passing, Williamsburg residents searched to find written legal documentation describing the appropriate next course of action. A single record from 1766 was found, signed by Norborne Lord Botetourt himself of Stoke in the County of Gloucester. This will and testament written in the first person asked for a simple and private ceremony, where the governor would be “buried in Stoke Church and carried to [his] Grave in the most private manner by [his] own servants.”\textsuperscript{32} Although cognizant of this document produced with Lord Botetourt’s wishes, the Williamsburg community wanted his funeral to be an event of a grander nature. Colonial officials felt his unusual combination of admirable qualities and high rank should proceed

\textsuperscript{30} Parker, James. “Letter from James Parker to Charles Stuart.” Charles Stuart Papers, Rockefeller Collection Microfilm 68-9, 1770.
“in the provincial equivalent of a state funeral.”

Trustees of his estate included William Nelson, president of his Majesty’s council, John Randolph, attorney general of the colony, Robert Carter Nicholas, treasurer of the colony, John Blair Jr., clerk of the Council, and George Wythe, clerk of the House of Burgess. These men felt Lord Botetourt deserved more than a basic ritual of passage, and helped organize the most elaborate funeral ever recorded in Williamsburg.

William Nelson spoke about this decision, saying “the whole Country, thought themselves call’d upon by every Sentiment of Gratitude and Affection to pay the most respectful Regard to his Lordship’s memory.” One way to show respect from the colony was through punctuality, prompting swift, efficient actions in both planning and executing arrangements for the service. Invitations were distributed the very next day, and appeared as so:

WILLIAMSBURG, October 16, 1770.

THE Gentlemen appointed to the conduct the Funer-ral of his Excellency Lord BOTETOURT, present their Compliments to all Gentlemen and La-dies, and beg the Favour of their Attendance at Palace at Two o’Clock on Friday next.

The Procession to begin precisely at Three, and move to the Church, where the usual Service will be performed; after which the Corps will be con-ducted to the College Chapel, and there interred.

---

34 Ibid., 12.
35 Ibid., 16.
36 Charles Washington Coleman, “Norborne, Baron de Botetourt, Governor-General of Virginia, 1768-1770.” *William and Mary College Quarterly* Historical Magazine, January 1897, 170.
In addition to the invitation, the governor’s entire funeral procession has been preserved thanks to its publication in print. The multifaceted program was published in the October 19th edition of the *Virginia Gazette*. Beginning with preparation stages, the funeral of Lord Botetourt commenced at his home and place of death, the Governor’s Palace (see Figure 11). Everyone was to gather at this point of interest, marked in time through the tolling of bells in Williamsburg. The newspaper said:

at one o’clock the Church, College, and Capitol bells, began tolling; and the company repaired to the Palace, according to invitation, precisely at two. At three, the corpse being placed on the hearse, the procession began to move, in the following order, to the church, both sides of Palace street being lined with the city militia, and those of York and James city counties.37

While the governor was being transported from the Governor’s Palace to the College Chapel, via Bruton Parish Church, a formal hearse accompanied him. This group of prominent men speaks to the esteemed residents of Williamsburg in 1770, and the specific ranking of individuals within (see Figure 12). Described in great detail:

The Hearse
- Preceded by two mules, and three on each side the hearse,
- Outward of whom walked the pall bearers,
- Composed of six of his Majesty’s Council,
- And the Hon. the Speaker, and Richard Bland, Esq;
- Of the House of Burgesses.
- His Excellency’s servants, in deep mourning
- The Gentlemen of the Clergy, and
- Professors of the College.
- Clerk of the church, and Organist.
- Immediately followed the hearse the Chief Mourners.
- Gentlemen of the Faculty.
- Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen, and
- Common Council, of the city,
- with the mace born before them.
- Gentlemen of the Law, and Clerk of the General Court
- Ushers, Students, and Scholars, of
- William and Mary college

All having white hatbands and gloves,  
And then the company, which was very numerous,  
two and two. 

Speaking to relations of great significance, the formal hearse associated with the funeral of Lord Botetourt encompasses a social hierarchical order, ultimately becoming a foundational structure within the performed enactment. To fit the ceremonial parameters of this solemn event, members from multiple establishments joined together to lay the governor to rest. Members of the General Assembly, professors from William and Mary, and fathers of the city were directly part of the march, while Botetourt’s servants of the house were in close proximity. The amalgam of formal and informal relations represented within this group show widespread understanding of ceremony in Virginia society.

The group of men within the hearse stopped only once during the funeral procession, allowing for service at Burton Parish Church. This momentary pause halted all movement, allowing the memory of Lord Botetourt to be memorialized by the colony. Described once again in the Virginia Gazette, we know:

At the western gate the corpse was removed from the hearse, and carried by eight bearers, the Gentlemen appointed supporting the pall, placed in the centre of the church, on a carpet of black. The altar, pulpit, and his Excellency’s seat, were likewise hung with black. Then the service began; and an anthem, accompanied by the organ, was sung, conducted by Mr. Wools. The Rev. and Hon. the Commissary then delivered a discourse, from Psalm xlii. part of the 7th verse, Put thy trust in God; which, joined to the deep affliction felt by the whole audience for the loss of such an excellent man, and so good a Governour, drew tears from many. Sermon being ended, the corpse was again placed on the hearse, and the company moved in the same order to the chapel, where the corpse was deposited in a vault, the militia firing three vollies at the interment.

---

38 Ibid.  
40 Virginia Gazette Supplement. October 19, 1770.
While we can assume the *Virginia Gazette* concludes its description based on the private nature of interring a body, this action makes details beyond the funeral hard to come across (see Figure 13). It is known that a Williamsburg carpenter named “Kendall took up the floor of the college chapel and prepared the vault – a highly traditional and honorific resting place for the governor, particularly appropriate in view of his affection for the institution and his regular attendance at the chapel.”\textsuperscript{41} Specifically “helys in a vault under his own pew,”\textsuperscript{42} linking together space and place.\textsuperscript{43} While no formal documentation can conclusively relate the decision making process for burying Lord Botetourt below the College chapel floor, it can be assumed his relationship with William and Mary was felt and seen outwardly.

Formal descriptions of the funeral processional help gage the social and hierarchical levels of Williamsburg society, while decorative elements directly engaged local merchants and the like. These embellishments show the collaboration of Williamsburg residents, and their ability to gather material and produce final works in a very short period of time. While overseen by Botetourt’s estate managers, the success of decoration came from the artisans themselves. Consisting of men and women with a variety of talents, the funeral’s visual aesthetic was an important component of the procession. Cloth and ribbon were two major components of the procession, and were needed in massive quantities. These materials were most likely bought in from Richmond.

\textsuperscript{42} James Parker, “Letter from James Parker to Charles Stuart” (Rockefeller Collection Microfilm 68-9, 1770.)
\textsuperscript{43} Lord Botetourt’s pew is an important factor in understanding the layout of the chapel, in a way that is different from the reconstructed space experienced by visitors today.
and Norfolk, and integrated with the work being done in Williamsburg. One example of this comes from Joseph Kidd, a local upholsterer and former servant in Botetourt’s family. “He accumulated more than seven hundred yards of black cloth and crepe to make covering’s for the governor’s seat, pulpit, altar, communion table, and reading desk at Burton Parish Church.” This was combined with the acquisition of 350 yards of ribbon. Placed alongside the governor’s body, these textile additions helped enhance the eminence of the processional taking place on October 20, 1770.

The remains appear to have been enclosed in three several coffins, one of lead furnished by Joseph Kidd, ‘an inside coffin and one of black walnut furnished by Joseph Kendall. The inside coffin was laid with Persian fully ornamented’ and the outside covered with crimson velvet, ornamented in the best manner. There were ‘8 silver handles and 16 escutcheons for his lordships’ coffin and one large silver plate engraved, a lustering shroud pillow, mattress and cap.

The outermost coffin was adorned with silver objects, showcasing external signs of Lord Botetourt’s great social status. A local goldsmith and engraver named William Waddill made and inscribed the silver coffin plate and its hardware between October 15 and 19, 1770. The receipt for this transaction has survived, helping to frame the economic value placed on the death of Virginia’s highly esteemed governor (see Figure 14). Examining the sterling silver alone, it is estimated the total expense of Lord Botetourt’s funeral aggregated anywhere between 550 and 700 pounds of sterling. Comparatively, this equates to over one quarter of the governor’s annual salary – a sum

---

47 Robert Brock, Virginia and Virginians (Richmond: H. H. Hardesty, 1888). This equates to over $155,000 US Dollars today.
that could have paid the wages of an entire household staff for several years.\textsuperscript{48} Although this was a considerable financial undertaking, the individual being recognized clearly exceeded factors of economic concern.

Many of these same sentiments were felt in 1992, when the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation staged this funeral as part of their Learning Weekend on Life Passages: Birth, Marriage, and Death in Colonial Virginia. This event was intended to allow “exploration of the rituals and ceremonies which mark these life passages.”\textsuperscript{49} To gain a better understanding of this funeral recreation, I spoke with Ann Willis, one of two designers and executors for this March 1992 weekend event. While heavily involved in getting the program organized and prepared for execution, Ann Willis’s greatly aided the accomplishment of the weekend’s funeral procession reenactment. The weekend’s target audience was 200 program registrants, although the solemn processional was meant to be a fully “representative reenactment of Lord Botetourt’s funeral.”\textsuperscript{50} The Learning Weekend event followed the same route and basic program as the original procession in 1770, with one noticeable exception. Reenactor participants passed alongside Burton Parish Church rather than having service within.

\textsuperscript{48} Graham Hood, \textit{The Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg} (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1992), 17.
As one of two funeral staging’s ever undertaken by Colonial Williamsburg, this event was anything but ordinary. Complete in the Spring of 1992, when the economy was doing quite well, the funeral staging was once again able to showcase the very best of Virginia. Working in all departments within the historic area, this undertaking became a very expensive project, aimed at producing a visual sense, both understood and admired by the audience. Ann Willis believes that although depictions of state funerals existed in the home libraries of Williamsburg residents, this was a truly “audacious occurrence.”

When recalling the 1992 Learning Weekend funeral, she spoke about the processional being a full sensory experience, as the event began with bells tolling and horse hooves trotting across Duke of Gloucester street. She recalls the powerful statement made by this deathly quiet commemoration, even speaking about Asian visitors bowing down when the hearse passed alongside their viewing spot. While sharing many of the same foundations as the 1770 processional, the Life Passages experience capitalized on the emotion and sensory experience associated with all death, though the governor’s true historic legacy was mourned in the 18th century.

After the sudden death of Lord Botetourt, Virginians worked within five days to arrange all elements of his funeral, reflecting new levels of sensibility and maturity as a community. Clearly the colonists felt secure enough to pull off a production of this scale, ultimately making a statement about their capability for being successfully independent. Rhys Isaac believes much can be said about elaborately orchestrated ritual funeral processions in themselves, as they “offer social and cultural historians clear declarations

51 Although told about the additional funeral staging undertaken by Colonial Williamsburg, I was not aware of the other individual as a historic figure.
53 Ibid.
of how the nature of things was intended to be understood at the time of the ritual.”

Acknowledging both the solemn honor and recognition of the colonial governor, Virginians sent a strong word about wanting to be equals with England, rather than continue as a subordinate.

News of this major moment in colonial history made its way to England, appearing in the *London Chronicle* before 1770 was complete. Written in a December issue, a reprinting from the *Virginia Gazette* was produced:

America

Williamsburgh, Virginia, October 19

His Majesty’s Council, and the Gentlemen of the General Court, have gone into deep mourning for Lord Botetourt; and most of the principal gentlemen in the Country will do the same.  

Speaking to the sophistication of Williamsburg and its colonists, the reference by England helps put matters into perspective on both a local and international level. All the works created and assembled for the interment undertaking were completed in the highest quality and honor, making a very explicit statement about the social relationship in an elaborate formal pattern of action.  

Lord Botetourt’s death and funeral can be honored today through visiting the chapel on the William and Mary campus. It is in this space that guests can recall with the colonial governor, in addition to other notable College associates, including Thomas Roderick Dew.

---


President Dew’s body Interred at William and Mary

Thomas Roderick Dew was born on December 5, 1802. As the second of six children, he grew up at Dewsville, a prosperous plantation near King and Queen County, Virginia. Arriving at The College of William and Mary at the age of 15, Dew received an A.B. degree after only two years of study. Continuing his education at the College after completing a Bachelor of Arts in 1820, Dew received an M.A. four short years later. Although finished with his formal schooling in 1824, Thomas Roderick Dew remained an active member in the William and Mary community moving forward.

On October 16, 1826 Dew was appointed to one of six chairs at the College. “As a professor of Political Law, his assignment included lectures on natural and national law, political economy, metaphysics, government and history”. Clearly invested in the wellbeing of his alma mater, Thomas Roderick Dew became a prominent figure recognized by the William and Mary community, including the Board of Visitors. He was so well respected that, upon the resignation of President Adam Empie in 1836, this legislative body “elected Professor Dew, a young man of thirty-four, as President of the College.” Words of the newly elected William and Mary leader have been preserved, showcasing both the honor and appreciation of Dew in this esteemed leadership role.

Thomas Roderick Dew’s inaugural speech drew upon the school’s established history, while also looking onward towards the responsibilities that would challenge him with time. The president spoke, “when I reflect upon the long line of efficient and

58 Ibid., 5.
59 Ibid., 5.
60 Ibid., 7.
distinguished men who have preceded me in this office, and upon the character and
virtues of him who was my predecessor, I cannot but feel a weight of responsibility
which excited in me a deep and painful solicitude.” The former College student and
current leader exemplified ideas of hard work and determination, setting the tone for the
duration of Dew’s term in office. Focusing his time on history, metaphysics, government,
and political economy, the thirteenth president of the College developed both leadership
skills and scholarship to further the Williamsburg community.

President Dew’s steady investment and involvement at William and Mary allowed
the university, fondly called the College, to prosper to previously unseen levels of
success. William Meade, the third episcopal bishop of Virginia, believed the thirteenth
president of William and Mary, “raised the College ‘to as great prosperity and perhaps
had ever been its lot at any time since its first establishment’...[through] tact at
management, great zeal and wearied assiduity.” Reinforcement by the Williamsburg
community helped verify that Dew’s professional career was taking a stronghold. It is
fortunate for Thomas Roderick Dew that his personal life also saw signs of enhancement
at the same time.

In the fall of 1846, Dew married Miss Natalia Hay of Clarke County, Virginia. After the nuptials, the happy couple took leave from Williamsburg to honeymoon in
Paris. Unfortunately President Dew suddenly caught pneumonia and died the day after
his arrival in Europe, on August 6, 1846. Soon after, the decision was made to inter his

---

61 White, W. "An Address Delivered before the Students of William and Mary at the
Opening of the College, on Monday, October 10, 1836." Southern Literary Messenger,
December 1836, 760.
62 John Stewart Bryan, "Thomas Roderick Dew: An Address Delivered April 3, 1939..."
63 Ibid., 12.
body “in Montmartre cemetery.” 64 While these events transpired a continent away from the College, word quickly spread across the seas about the sudden death of William and Mary’s youthful thirteenth president.

News of Thomas Roderick Dew’s death caused widespread expressions of sorrow not only in Virginia, but throughout the South, where his reputation and leadership were recognized and followed. 65 The Richmond Enquirer of September 17th reprinted from The Washington Union a tribute to President Dew which deplored the fact that his body should be left in foreign soil, stating, “William and Mary College, which has contributed so much to establish the political and literary character of Virginia, and to educate so many distinguished men, sustains a heavy loss in his death.” 66 While many Americans recognized the reasoning for Thomas Roderick Dew’s burial in Paris, there remained a longing for the president’s body to return home to Williamsburg.

Although the body of Thomas Roderick Dew had lain for years in Paris’s Montmartre cemetery, his family descendants urged that the former College president be interred at William and Mary. With time and “the generous impulse of one of his kinswomen” 67 made this hope a reality. In the spring of 1939, Thomas Roderick Dew’s body was moved from Paris to Williamsburg (see Figure 15).

The William and Mary campus community gathered in the Wren chapel to celebrate the life of Dew on April 3rd, 1939. Although the exact date of Dew’s interment has not been preserved, it is known that his body was moved into a concrete vault below

---

64 Ibid., 12.
65 Ibid., 12.
67 Ibid., 3.
ground between “March 21, 1939 and the date of the service.”

John Stewart Bryan gave the memorial service’s major commemoration speech, addressing an entranced audience (see Figure 16). One sentiment understood by all at this event was stated out loud by the College’s then current president, who articulated “[Dew was] laid to rest at a safe retreat and sacred resting place within the Walls of the College chapel,” creating a familiar and fitting conclusion to his time on Earth.

This series of events have been recorded through visual and written documentation, allowing for the preservation of the major moments of Dew’s return to Williamsburg nearly one hundred years after his death and his subsequent interment under the south wing of the College Building. By examining the archival photographs from the spring of 1939, researchers can clearly follow the stages of Dew’s interment process. The burial of the College’s thirteenth president marks and completes the College crypt as we know it today, making this move significant and honorable on many fronts.

Comparing the Burials of Lord Botetourt and President Dew

Examining the death and burial of Lord Botetourt and President Dew in conjunction with one another provides an opportunity to explore larger themes and practices associated with funerary culture in early America. Though the years spread widely between the passing of these distinguished men, the sacred placement of their remains is most fitting

---

68 Paul Buchanan and Catherine Schlesinger, "Burial Vaults under the Chapel at the Wren Building, the College of William & Mary (Block 16, Building 3)," (1970).


70 Cultural filial piety emerges in the early 20th century, prompting reburials to take place beyond William and Mary. One example is Bruton Parish Church, described through the writings of W. A. R. Goodwin amidst the site’s 1907 restoration.
as these individuals brought much leadership, union, and reunion to the College and the Williamsburg community. Both William and Mary scholars and local residents participated in the funerals, attended memorial services, and aided the planning of these solemn events. Buried almost 170 years apart, each figure has a very distinct resting place below the chapel floor at the College. These differences are articulated physically by their individual vaults and in regard to their physical relationship to the others interred in the sacred space.

As it is seen today, Lord Botetourt’s brick vault remains, although in a damaged state (see Figure 17). Due to repeated vandalism over time, a significant portion of its arched top has detached from the incomplete main brick body. Buchanan gives the dimensions such, “five feet broad…eight feet long and the height from the bottom to the crown of the arch, four and one half feet…[while] the bottom of the vault is…three feet below the surface of the ground on the outside of the building.” Despite these sizeable dimensions, the low ceiling height of the chapel floor above and the cramped quarters present a sense of consolidation and fragmentation that overcomes one who visits the space. Located on the northern end of the basement wing, Lord Botetourt’s brick vault has been permanently linked together with that of Bishop James Madison and his wife, as

---

71 Lord Botetourt has always had a special bond with students at the College. The governor’s customary presence on campus provided the opportunity to influence young men in the 1700s, while his statue has become part of rituals associated with each new term for scholars in the 20th and 21st centuries. This close relationship explains the community fascination with Lord Botetourt, including his place of interment below the Wren chapel floor. It is no surprise that his brick burial vault and coffin pieces have been removed with time, as prowlers want to remain in touch with the historical legend.

72 Buchanan, Paul, and Catherine Schlesinger. "Burial Vaults under the Chapel at the Wren Building, the College of William& Mary (Block 16, Building 3)."
stated earlier. The two enclosures have been repaired together, creating one cohesive façade (Figure 4).

Lord Botetourt’s resting place below ground is deep within the southern wing of the basement, distanced far apart from that of the prominent Randolph family – who are arranged alongside one another at the east end, directly under the altar (Figure 5). Considering the political and social clout associated with the colonial governor, it seems quite odd that he would not be located in closer proximity to the eastern end under the chapel altar, as this space is traditionally reserved for the most prominent individuals associated with the church.

There are two possible explanations for this spatial distance, both intended to correlate Lord Botetourt’s remains with his possible customary seat within the College chapel during worship. First, it is possible Lord Botetourt worshiped alongside the William and Mary students each day on campus without any formal boundaries dividing social hierarchy. If this scenario were to be true, it is likely the governor would have sat alongside the pupils, truly becoming one of the many to take part in the daily ceremony which jumpstarted the day. This cohesive, free flowing state of unity would allow Lord Botetourt to remain consistently distanced from the altar, while still staying true to his joyous and admired personality.

The second option for explaining Lord Botetourt’s location underground is through questioning the antiphonal seating arrangement created by the Wren Building’s late 1920s restoration. Rather than accept the pulpit being located where we find it today at the east end of the southern wing alongside the altar, rearranging the lectern to the center of the chapel’s northern wall would accommodate both the societal hierarchy of
Lord Botetourt and distance of his resting place from the wing’s east end. Not unusual for the time, this new pulpit location would place Lord Botetourt worshiping farther inside the chapel next or near the pulpit, which would be worthy of his esteemed social and political status within the Williamsburg community. The second option seems more plausible, although there is no surviving documentation to support its supposition.

Regardless of the exact reasoning for placing Lord Botetourt at a distance from the Randolph family, it can be assumed the prominent governmental figure was lowered into his burial vault by taking up the wooden chapel floor beneath his pew. The flooring material would then be repaired after the formal funerary ceremony, taking extensive physical and economic resources. Such efforts support the aligning location of Bishop James Madison and his wife’s vault to Lord Botetourt’s vault below ground, as the governor’s constructed burial vault and correlating floor space above had already been worked upon in 1770. The adjacent chapel floor space would have easier access to the south wing’s basement level, easing the interment process of Bishop James Madison and his wife in the early 1800s.

Known to honor community members deeply tied to the College, the space below the building’s southern wing floor was intended to remain exclusive, aided by the strict selection process determined by William and Mary’s Board of Visitors. There are five brick vaults constructed by local masons underneath the chapel floor. Varying in size, each would have been created upon the death of the first member of a family, constructed

---

73 Warwick Rodwell, an author, archaeologist, architectural historian, and academic, writes about examining burials below family pews in English churches. His research describes the significant cost associated with this endeavor, indicating Lord Botetourt had a northern pew outlined in some special pattern, distinct from the remaining chapel space.

74 All interments would have been completed by way of taking up the floor, as there were no windows or other entrances to the south wing’s subfloor level.
by local masons working from the inside out. Today these clear markings of space are paired alongside ten connected concrete vaults built to help stabilize the chapel floor during the 1920s and 1930s restoration project. This precautionary measure was taken in addition to the inclusion of steel framing to the site’s already abundant brick and mortar underpinnings. Collectively, the basement landscape has become divided into four major sections: that easternmost Randolph family, the northern alcove with Lord Botetourt’s and the Madisons’ vaults, the southern portion with no known burials (see Figure 18), and the ten concrete vaults directly in the middle east-west axis, which divides the remaining space into its previously described sections. Intended to prevent the chapel floor from caving in, the ten concrete vaults also doubled as interment spaces.

Since President Dew was moved from Paris to Williamsburg after the 1929-1931 restoration, a decision was made to place his body in one of the nine remaining concrete vaults. The body of Thomas Roderick Dew was carefully lowered into the wide rectangular frame, and it remains there today (see Figure 19). A step-by-step process for this event has been preserved in photographs in the University Archives. While the narrative for this space may be made visible to a large audience, the presence of President Dew greatly varies from that of Lord Botetourt. The lack of formal architecture delineating the thirteenth president’s exact resting place creates a lack of tactile understanding, somewhat paralleled by the missing body and funeral artifacts from Lord Botetourt’s vault. However, the most compelling draw to Thomas Roderick Dew’s body comes from the chapel space itself, as visitors today have the opportunity to notice visual clues indicating his resting place via the grout on the slate tiles directly above. White vs. crème coloration indicates the area of flooring that was removed in order to access the
concrete vault from above, welcoming inquiring minds visiting the chapel to be aware of something that lies below.

Ideas of placement and belonging take on a new level of intellectual capacity when considering the individuals who have no architectural enclosure in the Wren crypt. Chancellor Robert Nelson and Judge Thomas Nelson have no bounds of personal space within it. These individuals, for reasons unknown, were placed alongside other notable William and Mary figures in the basement crypt with no formal covering (see Figure 20). Both bodies were placed directly below the dirt floor, with no vault to enclose their coffins. Scholars are still uncertain regarding the exact burial location of Judge Nelson, and the possibility remains that he was not placed within it. For many years, a rumor circulated that a William and Mary student who died due to drowning was also interred alongside the notable College community members.

There remains confusion as to exactly who is buried in the chapel, and no real protocol as to the method of burial. It is for this reason that archival documentation, including written letters and photographs, become extremely valuable in helping to sort out the content and layout below the chapel floor. It is through the close examination of objects once crafted for the crypt that a researcher can go beyond date and space, and begin to truly understand the burial patterns of the men and women who make up the underground landscape.
Part III

Archaeological Remnants from the Wren crypt

Removal Process

The Wren crypt has been a source of immense public curiosity. Created to safeguard the burials, a series of precautions have been taken to ensure the spaces remain intact as the building continues to be actively used. Although lacking approved access, many curious individuals have decided to explore the College Building’s basement level. Adventurers rely upon creative methods for entering the highly anticipated underground territory, including the crypt. Regardless of one’s reasoning, the moment of arrival must be a thrill to those who venture to its subterranean opening. For many, this journey becomes a pilgrimage of sorts, uniting emotions of anticipation, excitement, and nervousness for the expectancy and curiosity of what lies below the chapel.

There are a series of doors and turns in the College basement, which lead to a small pair of doors that provide just enough crawl space for entrance into the crypt (see Figure 21). Crossing this threshold point, visitors transition from one environment to another. This space is no longer a cellar but a cramped crawl space. Guests encounter a tranquil silence. The palpable difference one experiences when moving between these two spaces aligns well with Gaston Bachelard’s views of the relationship between what he calls intimate space and exterior space. The French philosopher states, “Intimate space and exterior space, keep encouraging each other, as it were, in their growth.”\(^{75}\) This relationship of embracing environments, in and out, allows the functional, largely static

basement to act as a counterweight and transition point to a space filled with lore and mystery that draws one toward exploration.

Firsthand accounts, and documents, have kept the crypt alive in the awareness of the general campus community. There are many accounts of members of the William and Mary community traveling below campus using the once functional steam tunnel system (see Figures 9 and 22). Students, faculty, and staff have been lured to the crypt by the underground space’s mysterious nature, including visitors who become tunnel experts, a term coined by The Flat Hat, the campus newspaper. Surviving narratives from these ventures serve as what David Yamane argues “are a primary linguistic vehicle through which people grasp the meaning of lived experience by configuring and reconfiguring past experiences in ongoing stories which have certain plots or directions and which guide the interpretation of those experiences.” Components of these experiences come to light through both written and verbal recollection of the physical space and its associated artifacts. Research grounded in the examination of these artifacts allows pieces once sealed below the William and Mary chapel floor to reveal intimate aspects of that past.

Preserved artifacts from the College’s crypt are seen as tokens embodying what was once part of a treasure filled burial ground. It is miraculous that some of these items

---

76 In summer 2012, the William and Mary campus completed a complex upgrade to the heating and cooling systems. This project included the installation of more than 7,000 feet of steam, condensate, and chilled water piping on the campus grounds. Described in an article by the American Society of Civil Engineers, this text documents the still present relevance of the tunnel system below campus.

have survived the multiple wars, fires, and looting that have ravaged the College of
William and Mary. There value now extends well beyond the walls of the historic
campus. As artifacts, these objects transcend their initial purpose and space, becoming
tools and reference points for research into different eras. These artifacts show significant
signs of aging, handling, and for their own preservation, they are now under the
protection of various institutions among which they have been distributed, including both
the College of William and Mary and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Though
these artifacts may be perpetually preserved due to advancements in digital technology
and atmospheric perseverance techniques, their removal from their original intended
spatial context and subsequent institutional protection affect our ability to understand
their earlier role. As Savas notes, “Researchers, experts and scholars all benefit from the
museum facilities; however their benefit is limited by the amount of information made
available to them.”78 It is in this institutional setting that a researcher like myself
encountered the artifacts and it is to the specific artifacts associated with the crypt of the
College chapel that we now turn.

From the historic campus crypt, only four sizable artifacts remain – the coffin
plate of the younger John Randolph, the shipping plate of Thomas Roderick Dew, and the
coffin plate and coffin hardware of Lord Botetourt. Much of their production history and
records of movement have been lost. Thus, only by close examination of objects can one
construct a more cohesive history. By closely examining these funerary objects, one can
find insights into our understanding of the events in which they were used.

78 Savas, S. "Total Displacement: Exhibiting Folklore and the Boundaries of Museum
John Randolph Coffin Plate

Functioning as a decorative ornament atop the coffin containing Sir John Randolph’s younger son John Randolph, the preserved lead coffin plate exemplifies a uniquely artistic masterpiece of Williamsburg from 1784. Measuring 5 by 7.25 inches in scale, the honorary tablet speaks to its audience through the esteemed craftsmanship (see Figure 23). Divided into three registers, the lead tablet details the name, legal position, and year of death for John Randolph. Each phrase is delicately engraved with parallel hatching patterns, precisely spaced within the curved lettering. Indentations mark the beginning and end of each register, helping to frame one line of text as a complete and distinct thought. These circular punctuations reveal part of the artisan’s fabrication process, designing each register as a distinguishable consideration. Given the high quality of craftsmanship, this small piece not only expresses remembrance of John Randolph, but his social status as well.

A creation like no other, this recovered plate shows 231 years of spatial wear and oxidation, in addition to acting as historical narrative. Conditions such as those that exist in the damp earthy environment of the crypt have caused the pristine coffin plate to become blemished and misshapen over time. The once smooth and flat funerary object has expanded upwards and outwards in radiating fractures to create a surface reminiscent of a topographic map (see Figures 23 and 24). Upon close examination, the plate has

---

79 John Randolph was born in Williamsburg, Virginia. Educated at William and Mary, he eventually went on to become a burgess for the College in addition to a prominent lawyer in the region.

80 It should be noted that John Randolph died in Brampton, England. His body was transported across the ocean so that he could lie with his father, brother, and other Randolph relatives in the family vaults below the College building chapel. The origin of his lead coffin plate is unknown.
many hairline cracks, and once symmetrical nail holes now vary in shape and scale. Rust and climate stains spread across tones of grey, white, brown, green, and red.

Built to withstand conditions of an underground burial, artisans placed eight nails through the lead plate into the coffin. Most noticeably inconsistent are the holes along the top edge of the coffin plate, which have torn through. The condition of these holes invite questions of causation. The remaining six holes appear fully enclosed, with two of them still containing nails. From these observations it seems logical to assume the bottom section of the coffin plate was loosened from its point of contact before its removal.

Pull marks within the uppermost nail holes indicate a quick removal, in which the lead coffin plate was yanked upward and outward from its resting place before detaching. Surviving documentation has not preserved the artifact’s removal date, although accounts reference a College workman in the early 20th century carrying John Randolph’s coffin plate away from the site of interment.81 Approximately twenty years passed before the coffin plate was given back to William and Mary, in October 1935.

Seen in its modern context as an academic asset made available to researchers sitting in an observation room at the Swem Library archive, a certain distance exists between the coffin plate and its original form and function. Knowledge of and about colonial funerary objects dissipates from one’s mind when handling John Randolph’s coffin plate because the object’s honorable level of execution makes it hard to imagine that any other object in the world could compare. Each indentation, scratch, and scale outline collaborates to create a united work, referential in nature. The methodical care in

---

crafting the coffin plate is an indication of the high status of John Randolph as an individual. The object’s revered craftsmanship is a reflection of the early American lawyer, prominently remembered in this position through the second register of his memorial plate. As the most expressive and animated piece preserved from the chapel, the coffin plate of John Randolph is a good example of a high status material reacting to an underground environment.

**Thomas Roderick Dew Shipping Plate**

Even though similar in scale, the shipping plate of College president Thomas Roderick Dew vastly differs from the coffin plate of John Randolph. Created in 1939 to label the figure being transported across the ocean, the machine-crafted shipping plate exemplifies the modern age of precision machine tooling (see Figure 25). The 5 by 7.5 inch metallic plate consists of four registers with effortlessly planar lettering. Such effective finishing dramatically contrasts this plate with its 1784 counterpart.\(^\text{82}\)

The craftsmanship of John Randolph’s coffin plate reflects the concerned care of the artisan’s hand. Thomas Roderick Dew’s shipping plate lacks such qualities. It is a product of mechanized production that valued readability and over craftsmanship. The 1939 shipping plate is seen today in almost pristine condition. Representing contemporary methods of production.

Although malleable under tension, the shipping plate of President Dew remains relatively pristine with few signs of patina. Juhani Pallasmaa describes the modern

\(^{82}\) Thomas Roderick Dew’s shipping plate has been determined to be non-magnetic, also considered to have relative heft. Lead or zinc are possible options for the plate’s material, as the object’s function was transitory rather than permanent.
phenomena by stating, “Machine-made materials of today…tend to present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without convening their material essence.”

With such an efficient process of immaculate and replicable production, it can be difficult to read these creations. However, researchers are fortunate when mistakes appear, for they allow inconsistencies to emerge as guideposts.

Nearly perfect in execution, the shipping plate of Thomas Roderick Dew has one substantial moment of error on the artifact’s second register. Highlighting the local region of interment by including the town’s name on it, Dew’s shipping plate was crafted with a misspelled Williamsburg. It seems the letter ‘g’ had been left out. Exemplifying human error and solution, artisans in Paris decided to hand craft the missing letter rather than produce a new remembrance plate (see Figure 26). Amended at some point postproduction, the letter ‘g’ becomes relatively concealed within the larger plate framework, as all letters are located in close proximity (Figures 25 and 26).

Unlike the coffin plate of John Randolph, the craftsmanship of the shipping plate of President Dew lacks any reflection of the status of this figure from the William and Mary community. Although placed on the coffin when shipped en route from Paris to the United States, the transitory shipping plate describes the arrival location in more depth than the deceased figure. President Dew’s four-register luggage tag showcases his initials, before describing the body’s final committal location. Smoothly finished, the supple metal appears almost unscathed when compared to John Randolph’s coffin plate.

---


Circular grooves can be found at the four corners of Dew’s coffin plate, complimented by minor tarnishing spots throughout the piece’s front and back. Helping to enhance the metal’s outward appearance, these minimal marks of tooling tell a story (see Figure 27). Texturally, the planar lettering’s consistency becomes almost unapparent, for it fits easily within the plate’s integrity. Anomalies begins to emerge on the plate’s backside, where pitting can be felt due to deeper cuts in the metal behind the added letter ‘g’. Slightly larger and more identifiable as curved than its counterparts, this handcrafted letter remains the most dynamic component of the artifact. Considered part of the University Archives Artifact Collection since 1981, the most recently crafted crypt remnant confronts observers with notions of intentionality and problem solving.

**Lord Botetourt Coffin Plate**

The coffin plate of Lord Botetourt was crafted in 1770 by local silversmith and engraver, William Waddill. Constructed to lay atop the governor’s outermost coffin, this sizable sterling silver memorial piece was intended to be outwardly admired by the community during the formal funeral procession, directly followed by Lord Botetourt’s interment in the College chapel.  

Crafted by hammering sterling silver into a consistent sheet, the metal was then molded into a shield shape, measuring 10 by 5.5 inches (see Figure 28). Due to the expensive quality of the material, the final form of Lord Botetourt’s coffin plate is quite

---

85 Ibid.
86 According to Janine Skerry, England had been producing sterling silver products since the 1300s. In order to achieve this level of standardization, there must be an alloy composite of 92.5% silver and 7.5% copper. If this standard is not met, the product cannot be marked sterling.
thin. This factor, in addition to the refined hand craftsmanship, increases the delicate qualities of the coffin plate.

The sterling silver coffin plate’s five registers boldly detail the colonial governor’s name, age, and date of death. A large coronet frames the plate’s upper curvature, visually associating Lord Botetourt within his familial and social heritage in England, reflecting his esteemed merit. Adding to its refined quality, the piece of sterling silver was curved upon its creation in 1770. This intentional arch indicates that the outermost coffin of Lord Botetourt was curved, facilitating the need for a bowed coffin plate.

While the material makes the artifact’s mass quite light, confident registers of visual and textual description give significant merit to the silver piece. Each engraved register is centered within the shield shaped coffin plate, and the lettering appears to have been scored. The effect is valiant, adding strength and weight of the artist’s hand to the carefully constructed front piece. A detailed examination of the artifact reveals to researchers a more specific information sequence of its creation, as well as its existence after its initial interment within the coffin in 1770.

Studying the coffin plate’s edges, one will notice eight small holes for nails appearing at turning points within the metal. Three of these punctures can be found alongside the baron’s coronet, framing the upper dimensions of the coffin plate. Personal observation showed the top most break in the silver carving away from the carefully crafted insignia, indicating that these marks were created after the engraving had been complete, or at least after the coronet top was finalized.
As stated earlier, the sterling silver coffin plate was laid to rest with Lord Botetourt in October 1770, where it was intended to remain for all time. However, the valuable artifact was removed in September 1862 during the looting and burning of the Wren Building by a Union soldier.\(^{87}\) A series of deep abrasions mark the plate’s bottom, presumably scored during the piece’s removal process. The coffin plate was discovered for sale in a Rome, New York pawnshop after the Civil War. Learning of the coffin plate’s immense historic value, the piece was returned to the state of Virginia and the College in the 1890s.\(^{88}\) Although owned by the College of William and Mary alongside all other known crypt artifacts, it is important to note this piece is on long term loan to Colonial Williamsburg.

Used as an educational tool within the historic district’s Geddy shop, Lord Botetourt’s coffin plate can be viewed by touring William and Mary’s neighboring organization. Colonial Williamsburg has presented the sterling silver coffin plate as a display case showpiece since 1956, when the living history museum reorganized its interpretation of the James Geddy shop and house.\(^{89}\) Lord Botetourt’s coffin plate fits accordingly with its current site, as the object is deeply respected through public admiration. Located within the shop once owned by William Waddill’s brother in law, the silver coffin plate can be appreciated as the product of the most esteemed artisan techniques produced by Williamsburg, Virginia.

---

\(^{87}\) College-Colonial Williamsburg Cooperative Committee, letter to President Alvin Duke Chandler, May 28, 1956.

\(^{88}\) W. D. Geiger, letter to Silversmith Shop, November 16, 1956.

\(^{89}\) College-Colonial Williamsburg Cooperative Committee letter, May 28, 1956.
Lord Botetourt Coffin Hardware

Due to the sudden death of Virginia’s colonial governor, Lord Botetourt, the Williamsburg community diligently worked to gather objects necessary for his state funeral equivalent. Quick production of material and re-allocation of products already circulating in the Williamsburg region were combined to create the visual aesthetic of an elaborate ceremony. To accompany the handcrafted coffin plate produced by William Waddill, an equally elegant hardware set needed to be assembled. This collective sterling silver set would be comprised of 16 escutcheons or back plates and 8 handles, composed together for the colonial governor’s coffin. To attach these crafted elements to Lord Botetourt’s outermost coffin, 16 posts and bolts would also need to be gathered. All that remains today of these objects are three handles, three posts, and four escutcheons (see Figure 29), all donated to William and Mary in 1925 by a faculty member of the College. Joseph H. Smith found these items beneath the chapel floor before donating them to Special Collections at Swem Library.

The most highly decorated component within the coffin hardware belongs to three unusually curved handles, preserved today in two distinct sizes. Two handles have remained fully intact, while the third is broken at its ornamental edge. The remaining small handles measure 3.75 inches long by 2 inches tall, while the large handle is 4.25 inches long by 1.75 inches tall. The decorative middle measures three inches in length, with a floral ornament appearing stamped in the handle’s center, bordered with a ruffled

91 "Handles, Posts, and Escutcheons from Lord Botetourt's Coffin Hardware Object Description." In Ceremonial Artifact Collection. Williamsburg, Virginia: College of William and Mary, 1770.
edge. Careful analysis of the sterling silver handles shows each floral detail ending prematurely, shortening the motif’s circular scheme (see Figure 30). Regardless of scale, each handle fits the fine curve of the holder’s hand jointure, molding to it.

Two posts connect to each silver handle, attaching to the side protuberances found on both the left and right end. Crafted as a functional item, the posts achieve utility through their side holes and screw cut thread. Three sterling silver posts are accessible to researchers today, all measuring one inch long. Each has a decorative top and screw bottom corresponding to a hole on each handle. The solid nature of each post is a direct result of mold casting. Although carefully fashioned, there is a rough quality to the finished bottoms of each post. This curvature makes it hard to fit the posts into the back plate squares cut for this very function. This perhaps indicates a removal by force.

The final safeguarded elements from Lord Botetourt’s sterling silver coffin hardware are four back plates. Comprising of two left and two right pieces, these intricately shaped sheets measure 2.5 inches long and 1.5 inches tall. Their rectangular core measures 1.25 inches long and 1 inch tall. Each escutcheon is cut from a sheet of silver, whose thin material results in breaks and shows signs of wear. One right escutcheon remains in complete form, while the other three are fragmentary. Striations on the metal are readily visible, accompanied by rough outside edges produced by human hands. It can be assumed that the rough quality of the back plates may have resulted from the limited time span between Botetourt’s time of death and his funeral, perhaps causing an apprentice to quickly draw and cut out the four shapes.

Today, much of this collection is best understood through its silver composition. Colonial Williamsburg’s choice of a method of organizing, storing, and overseeing the
Wren crypt artifacts based on their material composition has placed the silver artifacts under the care and eye of Janine Skerry, curator of metals in Colonial Williamsburg. Ms. Skerry’s foundational knowledge and expertise provides the basis for understanding Lord Botetourt’s coffin hardware beyond its basic form and function, extending our understanding of its purpose beyond funerary utility.

Janine Skerry has recognized, and I agree, that the functional demands of Lord Botetourt’s coffin hardware expand beyond the limits of sterling silver performance. It is readily apparent that Lord Botetourt’s coffin hardware was constructed as a series of decorative objects not intended to function as pieces capable of carrying the weight of the deceased dignitary.\(^\text{92}\) Although it is possible casts of these objects were craved from a piece of wood to make a mold into which the metal compound was poured, it seems more likely that Lord Botetourt’s coffin hardware came from a preexisting creation in the Williamsburg region. Scholars argue there would not be enough time to order these items in such a limited time frame, much less produce them.\(^\text{93}\)

Creating a mold is a lengthy and multifaceted process, also requiring the same skilled local artisans responsible for constructing Lord Botetourt’s coffin plate. As J.K. Wellman states, “The understanding that ‘context matters’ is a core tenant of social scientific studies and the field of sociology itself.”\(^\text{94}\) Given that it is much more plausible that the coffin hardware was sourced from somewhere other than William Waddill’s workshop and created sometime before the month of October 1770, the possible context

\(^{92}\) Janine Skerry, conversation with Somayah S. Allibhai-Mawani, September 26, 2014. 
\(^{93}\) Tara Chicirda, conversation with Somayah S. Allibhai-Mawani, February 6, 2015. 
of these objects suddenly broadens.\textsuperscript{95} This development impelled Ms. Skerry and me to compare other similar silver forms and functions in regard to their provenance and construction trends.

This led to the consideration of furniture—a product already accommodating handles, posts, and back plates within its regular composition—as the possible source of Lord Botetourt’s silver funerary hardware. After conferring with Tara Chicirda, curator of furniture in Colonial Williamsburg, it became much more likely that the handles and posts collectivized within Botetourt’s coffin hardware originated from a previously constructed object, but not a piece of furniture. Although no surviving pieces of furniture from the colonial era showcase the same vegetal patterning or sterling silver material composition as Lord Botetourt’s coffin hardware, Ms. Chicirda believes the larger aesthetic represented by these artifacts aligns with harness hardware associated with carriages.\textsuperscript{96} If this is true, it is highly likely that brass objects were copied in silver to create a cohesive funeral aesthetic. Lord Botetourt’s coffin hardware is catalogued together at William and Mary’s Special Collections, yet when one views the funeral silver, it is shown to the researcher by type rather than as a collective whole. Researchers have access to pieces individually: all handles at one time, all posts at one time, and all escutcheons at one time, but rarely do they have access to the pieces as a constructed set. Physically assembling the hardware together would allow the objects to become a combined unit and the sliding of the handles into posts, the joining of posts into escutcheons, and the elevating of the interconnected whole upright dramatically alters the perception of these collective artifacts. Each piece of the chain has a place in relation to

\textsuperscript{95} Janine Skerry conversation, September 26, 2014.
\textsuperscript{96} Tara Chicirda conversation, February 6, 2015.
another, fashioning a new amalgam of sculpted sterling silver (see Figure 31). As Bachelard asserts, “In other words, as soon as an art has become autonomous, it makes a fresh start”. 97

**Artifacts as Research Tools**

The process of examining these objects in the 21st century archival setting is an isolated encounter. As Savas points out, “[Parameters] related to institutional procedures will have an influence on [the object’s] perception.” 98 As the researcher follows the guidelines set forth by the research institution, this influence begins the moment one steps inside the research reading room. At Special Collections in Swem Library at the College of William and Mary, researchers approach an empty table with blank sheets of paper and a pencil, no pens allowed. Objects are maneuvered with care, with most artifacts being carefully handled with gloved hands. Objects are handled with caution and should not move away from their flat, approved surface area. At least one supervisor remains in the reading room in case one needs assistance, also ensuring an extra set of eyes and hands are readily available. These precautionary steps are taken to ensure the preservation of artifacts, and do not dampen the spirit of research as the supervisor can provide additional historical insights at times. The general restrictions enforced at William and Mary does not prevent close examination of artifacts. In fact, the time spent in close relation with the remnants of the Wren crypt allows researchers an opportunity to see these items as pieces of art crafted by artisans.

Tactility, close proximity, and focus allows one to observe the nuanced aspects of the crafted nature of an artifact, potentially yielding greater understanding of its existence and intended purpose. By having full access to one individual artifact at a time, each movement can become magnified. No detail is too small, and no component inconsequential. Each time a researcher approaches an artifact from the Wren crypt, they become more informed and the artifact becomes better understood.

The four primary collections of artifacts from the basement of the Wren Building compliment the physical crypt environment, in addition to the chapel wing directly above. The movement of objecthood has allowed the crypt to extend beyond brick vaults and condensed doorways.

Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory; qualities of space, matter and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle. Architecture strengthens the existential experience, one’s sense of being in the world, and this is essentially a strengthened experience of self. Instead of mere vision, or the five classical senses, architecture involves several realms of sensory experience which interact and fuse into each other.  

Communally, the preservation of artifacts in addition to the exploration of the physical crypt space re-emphasizes, and perhaps reframes, the importance of the south wing of the College Building. Its history impacts multiple realms of knowledge accessible through document analysis, object investigation, and exploration of physical space. These qualities reach beyond the specified location and grounds, becoming signifiers of a time and community once vibrant in the earlier days of Williamsburg, Virginia. The 21st century life at William and Mary would not be possible without the heritage represented by the College’s ancestors, patrons, and community. Each of these

---

individuals has paved a path for us today, allowing research to be conducted, stories to be shared and history to be honored.
Conclusion

Although multiple realms of study emerged in researching the Wren Building’s chapel and crypt, three areas of focus appeared paramount. My interest in physical space, exploration of archival documentation, and analysis of material remnants from the crypt shaped this project. While this final product showcases the most stimulating and favorable components to my individual research process, other avenues worth mentioning do not appear in this work.

When examining the building’s physical space, my concentration focused on major moments of change – noting burnings on site, installation of structural reinforcements, and alterations below the chapel floor. Interest in visible markings inside the crypt interior could become ones entire research project, as there are many facets within the sacred plot. The 20th century construction of ten concrete vaults dramatically changed the space, creating a fragmented environment. Paired alongside the urge of visitors to mark the space with graffiti or take a souvenir from their underground experience, such markers characterize the environment in which the remains of the College’s great dignitaries lie today. For Chancellor Robert Nelson and Judge Thomas Nelson, lack of formal bounds produce direct interaction with crypt explorers, allowing an opportunity to immediately engage members of William and Mary’s past.

To best understand the historic site’s composition, most site-specific research was instituted at Special Collections at William and Mary and the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library in Colonial Williamsburg. Each provided an intermediary organizational system that helped focus the content being examined. Although helpful in labeling primary and secondary sources within major moments of chapel use at William and Mary, their
fragmentary nature revealed less clarity than the potential yield from a preexisting colonial enterprise, such as the Bucktrout funeral home of Williamsburg, founded in 1759. Unfortunately the funeral home’s records postdate all but one burial within the Wren crypt, eliminating a monumental resource of content regarding the process of body analysis, categorization, and interment decisions.

Analyzing professional funeral arrangements along with University regulations would allow researchers to gain specified insight into the burial procedures and processes that took place on William and Mary property. The Board of Visitors still controls rulings of this nature. Researchers could interview members of this organization, inquiring about decision-making processes related to judgments about burials at the College.

In terms of artifact analysis, my interest remained focused on smaller scaled objects, which I was able to examine thoroughly for hours on end by my own two hands—learning, annotating and understanding details which explicitly mark a time of the College so unfamiliar to students on campus today. However, the largest and most monumental artifacts are the visible tablets located on the chapel walls and two versions of Lord Botetourt’s statue, which were created to represent the most influential figures at William and Mary. Located within and directly around the Sir Christopher Wren Building, these prodigious markers could be the main artifacts for investigation in future research endeavors, presenting a narrative regarding scale and historical tonality.

Each component of the Wren chapel helps inform the larger Williamsburg chronology. This outlook has been the core of my research study, based upon the urge to learn from an evolving sacred space containing a well-documented spatial history, easy accessibility from campus, featuring characteristics previously unassociated with the
space. These factors are represented well by the south wing of the Sir Christopher Wren Building, providing a site accessible to momentary pause, allowing my year-long transformation of knowledge to solidify into a physical, spatial bound.

This senior research project has provided a new way to study the sacred. As a visitor, I am urged to look beyond major architectural elements and toward details that hint at something beyond. I now intentionally shift perspective when visiting a historic site, craning my neck up and down to examine corners, details, and elements typically overlooked. Examining artifacts in Special Collections in Swem library has provided a new appreciation for my hands, and the way I handle objects in everyday life. Carrying a textbook to class has now become a cherished experience, for I have learned the power that comes from being in physical contact with literature in its physical form. Part of this growth has also come as a direct result of working with historic documents, allowing expansion of space and ideals associated with William and Mary’s original building to transcend physical footprints and engage a diverse course of professions, timetables, and interpretations.

Most significantly, my outlook of the Wren chapel and crypt has been informed through this study. Upon entering the building for class, office hours, or work, I become aware of the bodies below ground influencing my experience above. These figures invite me to reflect and consider my position within the brick walls, slowing down time and encouraging me to absorb my awareness of the environment. My impression of the chapel and crypt become informed by the absence of movement, allowing my senses to become engaged via the spaces themselves.
In the crypt I enjoy the sense of calm that emerges once I crawl through the basement opening. The cool, inclusive nature of the space stimulates a cave-like experience that is stilling to the core. William and Mary’s chapel has found a balance between reflecting a polished colonial appearance while maintaining a consistent, rustic smell activating memories of the past. Now so familiar, I cannot imagine sitting in a pew and looking outward without subconsciously recalling that distinctive scent. The result of the building’s long life, this scent is a presence that has become indistinguishable from the space it inhabits. In the same way, I am forever aware of the presence of the burials below, which have become indistinguishable for me from the totality of the space that is the Sir Christopher Wren Building.
Bibliography


https://digitalarchive.wm.edu/bitstream/handle/10288/16541/thomasroderickde335coll.pdf?sequence=2.

Buchanan, Paul, and Catherine Schlesinger. "Burial Vaults under the Chapel at the Wren Building, the College of William & Mary (Block 16, Building 3)." Chapel Vaults and Tablets. July 1970.


"Handles, Posts, and Escutcheons from Lord Botetourt's Coffin Object Description." In Ceremonial Artifact Collection. Williamsburg, Virginia: College of William and Mary, 1770.


Tara Chicirda, conversation with Somayah S. Allibhai-Mawani, September 26, 2014.


White, W. "An Address Delivered before the Students of William and Mary at the Opening of the College, on Monday, October 10, 1836." *Southern Literary Messenger*, December 1836, 760.


Appendix


Figure 1: The east elevation of the Sir Christopher Wren building as it stands today.

Figure 2: The west elevation of the Sir Christopher Wren building today.
Figure 3: The only known view of the original William and Mary building, created in mid-1702 by Franz Ludwig Michel, a Swiss visitor.

Figure 4: Seen here are the vaults of Lord Botetourt, Bishop James Madison, and his wife. The chapel’s northernmost wall appears on the right, acting as one of two vertical uprights for the vault originally containing the Bishop and his wife.
Figure 5: Paul Buchanan and Catherine Schlesinger of Colonial Williamsburg created this floor plan of the Wren building crypt in July 1970.
Figure 6: Sir John Randolph and his wife Lady Susanna were buried in the northeastern most corner of the College building’s south wing. They remain in the vault to the left, while their son John lies in the vault seen on the right.

Figure 7: Peyton Randolph and his wife Elisabeth were interred in the southeast corner of the crypt, parallel to Peyton’s parents. In 1929, the couple was transferred to concrete vault G within Peyton’s lead coffin.
Figure 8: This archival photograph from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation shows all three Randolph family vaults below the Wren chapel. Vault C is on the left, Vault A on the right.

Figure 9: This map depicts the steam tunnel system running below Old Campus at William and Mary.
Figure 10: Highlighting the building’s 1869 bearing wall, this archival photograph documents the College building chapel wing with no floor.

Figure 11: Colonial Williamsburg’s 1992 Learning Weekend funeral reenactment began with the movement of Lord Botetourt’s body from the Governor’s Palace.
Figure 12: Processional preparation is depicted within Colonial Williamsburg’s funeral reenactment for the death of Lord Botetourt.

Figure 13: The formal funeral hearse arrives at the College of William and Mary during Colonial Williamsburg’s 1992 Learning Weekend.
Figure 14: The receipt for Lord Botetourt’s silver coffin plate and hardware has survived since 1770 and features the signature of William Waddill, a Williamsburg silversmith and engraver.

Figure 15: The body of Thomas Roderick Dew is transported into the chapel on William and Mary’s campus by a group of men in spring 1939.
Figure 16: President John Stewart Bryan addresses the crowd assembled in the Wren chapel to honor the life of Thomas Roderick Dew.

Figure 17: Today Lord Botetourt’s vault remains permanently fragmented within the Wren crypt, allowing visitors to look inside the constructed form.
Figure 18: The southern underground passageway featuring no visible burials dramatically differs from its crypt counterparts.

Figure 19: The coffin of President Dew lies in one of ten concrete vaults below the Wren chapel aisle.
Figure 20: This archival photograph showcases the burial location of Chancellor Robert Nelson, seen without any formal markings of interment space.

Figure 21: The door leading to William and Mary’s underground crypt has two parts, presenting an open volume just large enough to crawl through.
Figure 22: Tunnel pipes on the William and Mary campus are seen above ground during the 2012 campus heating and cooling upgrade.

Figure 23: John Randolph’s lead coffin plate, crafted in 1784, remains in stable condition after being removed from the crypt on campus. Effort of the creator can be readily admired, even as oxidation has left its mark on the work.
Figure 24: This detail of John Randolph’s coffin plate shows framing of each register through punctuation, a significant tear emerging from below the surface, and careful hatching along the formed letters and numbers.

Figure 25: The metallic shipping plate of Thomas Roderick Dew was used to transition the College president’s body from Paris, France to Williamsburg, Virginia in 1939.
Figure 26: President Dew’s shipping plate contains an error. The word Williamsburg was originally crafted without a letter ‘g’.

Figure 27: Indentations from the machine made screws leave behind distinct patterning within Thomas Roderick Dew’s shipping plate.
Figure 28: Lord Botetourt’s coffin plate remains one of the most highly esteemed pieces of colonial craftsmanship produced in Williamsburg.

Figure 29: All surviving pieces from Lord Botetourt’s hardware are collectively gathered within this image, showing the grand scale and vast amount of decoration used to honor the colonial governor upon his unexpected death.
Figure 30: Showcasing the central floral detail from one coffin handle, this vantage point highlights the central design ending prematurely, shortening the circular scheme.

Figure 31: The fully assembled coffin hardware takes on new meaning when seen in unity, rather than fragmental objects housed within the same research institution.