

The Opening of the Tombs of the Dukes of Richmond and Norfolk, Framlingham, April 1841: the Account of the Reverend J.W. Darby¹

JOHN ASHDOWN-HILL

Framlingham Church, Suffolk, houses a remarkable series of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century funeral monuments which commemorate members of the Howard family, dukes of Norfolk, and their connections. Various publications have discussed the date and design of these tombs,² the generally accepted wisdom being that the monuments now standing to the north and south of the altar respectively were brought to Framlingham from Thetford Priory by the third Howard duke of Norfolk or his family, following the dissolution of the priory.³ Whether – and if so, which – human remains accompanied the tombs from Thetford Priory to Framlingham has been the subject of much debate. This article will offer a definitive answer to the first query and a tentative answer to the second, at the same time showing how these answers are of potential significance to those with an interest in Richard III.

Thetford Priory once housed the tombs of the last two Mowbray and the first two Howard dukes of Norfolk together with related burials. Following its dissolution the priory was granted by Henry VIII to Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk. Originally the latter seems to have intended to preserve the church building as his family mausoleum. However, the duke's long

¹ BL Additional MS 93: Papers Relating to Suffolk, vol. 9, item 6, ff. 8-11.

² There is a popular account in A.J. Martin, *The Church of Saint Michael, Framlingham*, 1978, pp. 9-15. Earlier published accounts of some or all of the monuments include G.O. Edwards, 'Notes on the Howard Monument in the South Aisle of Framlingham Church', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, vol. 3 (1863), pp. 352-57; T. Shave Gowing, 'Framlingham Church', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, vol. 3 (1863), pp. 340-51; L. Stone and H. Colvin, 'The Howard Tombs at Framlingham, Suffolk', *The Archaeological Journal*, vol. 122 (May 1966) and O.R. Sitwell, 'The Howard Tombs at Framlingham', *Suffolk Fair*, May 1975, pp. 20-24. I am grateful to Mr A.J. (Tony) Martin for his invaluable help in the early stages of my research.

³ Stone and Colvin analysed the evidence for this popular belief in great detail, and concluded that in general it is accurate. The tomb to the north of the altar at Framlingham – that of the duke of Richmond, illegitimate son of Henry VIII – was probably originally erected at Thetford. The tomb of the third Howard duke of Norfolk, which now stands to the south of the altar at Framlingham, was started at Thetford (albeit after the dissolution) but finally completed at Framlingham.

imprisonment, together with the temporary confiscation of the Thetford property, probably allowed the building to deteriorate excessively. The third duke seems to have started his own tomb at Thetford, but after his demise his heirs abandoned his project and moved his unfinished tomb, together with that of the duke of Richmond, to Framlingham. Other Howard monuments had already been removed from Thetford to the Howard Chapel at Lambeth. The removal to Lambeth of parts, at least, of the second Howard duke's tomb was apparently undertaken on the orders of his widow, Agnes Tilney, who was herself buried at Lambeth in 1545.⁴ She seems to have had only the decorative brasswork brought from Thetford. This was then affixed to a new stone base at Lambeth in order to constitute both a memorial to her late husband and also her own tomb. It seems that the old stone base of the second Howard duke's tomb was left at Thetford, with, presumably, his body still lying beneath it. The remains of the third and fourth Mowbray dukes of Norfolk apparently still lie in the ruins of Thetford Priory, beneath the sites of their vanished tomb superstructures to the north and south of the choir. However, no remains were found in the former Howard vault at Thetford when this was cleared by the Office of Works in 1935.⁵ It has therefore been assumed that the bodies of the first three Howard dukes of Norfolk, the remains of an unspecified selection of Howard consorts, and the bodies of the duke of Richmond and his bride were transported from Thetford to Framlingham.

Among the published accounts of the Framlingham tombs, only Edwards⁶ and Stone and Colvin⁷ mention the fact that the vaults beneath two of the monuments were opened in 1841.⁸ The tombs in question were those of Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond and of Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk. Stone and Colvin provide a reference to an unpublished manuscript at the British Library which constitutes the only known record of the 1841 investigation. This manuscript account is published here for the first time. It was written by the Reverend J.W. Darby, the Framlingham Church Reader, who was present at the opening of the vaults. John Wareyn Darby (1791-1846) was a cleric with antiquarian interests. Blatchly's *Topographers of Suffolk* furnishes brief biographical details.⁹ Vicar of Wicklewood (Norfolk) from 1823, and subsequently rector of Shottisham (Suffolk),¹⁰ he was a friend of the

⁴ Edwards, 'Notes', pp. 2 and 6; Stone and Colvin, p. 161.

⁵ Stone and Colvin, 'Howard Tombs', p. 162.

⁶ Edwards, 'Notes', p. 6.

⁷ Stone and Colvin, 'Howard Tombs', p. 162.

⁸ Sadly, both of these published sources give only very brief and erroneous accounts of what was found.

⁹ J. Blatchly, *The Topographers of Suffolk, 1561-1935*, Ipswich 1981, p. 16.

¹⁰ From 1832.

antiquarian, D.E. Davy, with whom he toured Suffolk churches transcribing monumental inscriptions.¹¹ These transcriptions remained unpublished during Darby's lifetime, but appeared in print early in the twentieth century.¹²

Darby's account of the Framlingham investigations was in the form of a letter, addressed to an unknown recipient (possibly Davy), whom Darby hoped might elucidate the possible identity of the remains which had been found. His account states that the tombs were explored two days after Easter Sunday in 1841. The vaults beneath the monuments were opened, and the human remains interred there were subject to a somewhat rudimentary examination. Darby's manuscript makes frustrating reading. There is much that one would like to know, that he does not tell us. It is, however, the only extant description of the contents of these two vaults. Thus, despite its limitations, the account deserves to be better known and more widely accessible. What follows is a transcription of Darby's text. Abbreviations have been expanded without comment, and Darby's somewhat rudimentary punctuation has been modernised.

Darby's Account

[f. 8r] Framlingham: an Account of the opening of the tombs of the Dukes of Richmond and Norfolk in the chancel of this church by the Revd J.W. Darby, Reader.

Framlingham. North and south aisles of the chancel: the monument for a duke of Norfolk on the south side of the communion table, and that of the duke of Richmond¹³ on the north side, are said to have been removed from Thetford when the priory was dissolved, but it was uncertain whether any bodies had been moved with them.

On Easter Tuesday 1841,¹⁴ in the presence of the rector, the reader, the clerk, &c., it was ascertained that there was a vault (nine feet by six feet) under the tomb of the duke of Richmond, and on removing the bricks from the west end, there was found a skeleton entire, the coffin of wood having fallen to pieces. The body appeared to have been wrapped in many folds of cired cloth, and the teeth in the upper and lower jaw bones (fourteen in number in each)

¹¹ In 1825 Darby compiled manuscript notes relating to the churchyard inscriptions at Campsea Ashe, Suffolk, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch (hereinafter IRO) FC 116/D4/1. In 1832 he made notes on the headstones at the Church of St Mary, Ashby, Norfolk, see www.lothingland.co.uk/ashby4.htm, perhaps based on E.C. Brooks, *A Thousand Years of Village History – Ashby, Suffolk*, Somerleyton 1977.

¹² C. Partridge, ed., *Suffolk Churchyard Inscriptions: Copied from the Darby Transcriptions made about 1825-34*, three volumes, Suffolk Institute for Archaeology 1913-23.

¹³ Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, the illegitimate son of Henry VIII by Elizabeth Blount, died 1536, aged seventeen.

¹⁴ Tuesday 13 April 1841.

were quite perfect, and as the duke was only seventeen years old when [f. 8v] he died, this was without doubt his skull, and the body must have been moved with the tomb.

On his left hand was a body wrapped in sheet lead. On cutting through the lead near the place wherethere were three folds of lead, the skull of an older person presented itself – if we may judge from the state of the teeth. There was a large hole in the front of this skull, as if the head must have had some severe blow at some time or other. The hair was in a good state of preservation, and was of a fair or sandy colour. The bones were not sufficiently examined to make sure whether they were those of a female.¹⁵ Mr Howard of Corby, in the *Memorials* of his family, has not ascertained the place of interment of Lady Mary Howard, who was affianced to the duke of Richmond (but does not appear ever to have married him).¹⁶ Can this be the body of the ‘duchess’ (as she is called) who lived to about the age of thirty-seven, [f. 9r] or is it the body of the duke of Norfolk slain at Bosworth, when an arrow pierced his brain, and [who] was first buried at Thetford – and¹⁷ was he brought afterwards to Framlingham with the body of the duke of Richmond and his tomb?

The ground at the west end of the monument of the duke of Norfolk was then examined. After a time, there was found a narrow vault (nine feet by three feet) under the tomb, which had not been closed up with brickwork, but only a large piece of worked freestone, a fragment of bricks and mortar, and other rubbish, had been laid at the mouth. Remains of wooden coffins then appeared, and the skeleton of a body with the feet to the east. The thigh and leg bones were embedded in a thick substance (like fine clay and the straw of flax, mixed together) and the skull was surrounded with the hair of the head and beard, which was of a fair or sandy colour. Several of the teeth appeared to have been decayed previous to inter- [f. 9v] –ment, and some linen, wrapped round the back of the neck, had received an impression of the folds of the skin. The thigh bones measured rather more than nineteen inches in length.¹⁸

¹⁵ Stone and Colvin, ‘Howard Tombs’, p. 162 state positively that the second body in the Richmond vault was female, but Darby’s account shows that there is no warranty for this assertion.

¹⁶ Darby is right to be hesitant. J.M. Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk*, Oxford 1982, p. 29, speaks only of a betrothal, though the third duke of Norfolk himself called his daughter Richmond’s wife (see below).

¹⁷ Two(?) incomplete words have been started by the writer at this point before he gives the next full word of the text.

¹⁸ Darby’s recorded measurement is imprecise, but ‘rather more than nineteen inches’ presumably suggests nearer 19" than 20". In calculating the height of this individual (below), the length of the femur has been assumed to be 49 cms (or about 19¼").

The skeleton of another body was found with the head at the east end. The crown of the skull was separated from the other parts (perhaps at the time of embalming the body) and the lower jaw bone was divided at the point of the chin. The front teeth above and below were very round and stout.

On further search, there was discovered beneath the above skeletons a leaden coffin which was then cut open over the part where the face might be supposed to lay, and the coffin was nearly filled with some liquid. Hair and skin remained on the face, but few teeth in the jaw bones; and the vertebrae of the neck were visible.

On the south side of this coffin, towards the feet, was found another [f. 10r] skull (and other bones – a lower jaw bone without any teeth) belonging probably to a female as, from the examination of the bones when all were taken out, there were the pelvis, *os sacrum* and thigh bones &c. of a female, and the same for two males. There were clavicles, ribs and vertebrae.

Amongst the rubbish in the vault were found fragments of two small figures carved in stone, one holding an open book, the other a scroll of paper. Now several small figures have been removed from the pedestals of the four corners of the monument, and from this it would seem that they were broken when removed from Thetford (as recorded) and thrown¹⁹ by the workmen into the vault. There was a quantity of very dry white sand, and about a dozen of plum and cherry stones, [f. 10v] the ends of which were cut off evenly as if with a knife. But had they not been carried in by rats or mice?

The figures on the top of this tomb must be those of the third duke of Norfolk (of the Howards) and of his wife, a daughter of Edward the 4th, and she is therefore laid on his right hand.²⁰ He died at Kenninghall, and was buried at Framlingham.

The second duke died at Framlingham and was buried at Thetford, with brass effigies of himself and his second wife, and that long inscription in Blomefield was probably engraven also on brass. Martin says the tomb was destroyed, and Mr Howard, that the effigies were removed to the Howard Chapel at Lambeth (built in 1522, now destroyed) at the dissolution of Thetford Priory. Now this tomb does not resemble such as upon which [f. 11r] brass plates are actually found, but the fragments of small figures found in the vault rather confirm its removal from Thetford. Is the body in the leaden coffin that of the third duke, who escaped being beheaded? And were the other three bodies brought from Thetford; and whose may we suppose them to be?

¹⁹ 'In' deleted.

²⁰ Darby's conclusion is now out of favour. The current opinion is that this female figure represents Elizabeth Stafford, second wife of the third duke of Norfolk.

I should like very much to have some of your valuable conjectures.
April 1841.

Commentary

Darby's account describes the discovery of six sets of human remains. Darby himself speculates (and the present writer will now explore further) regarding the possible identity of these remains. Darby's list of bodies found is as follows:

North aisle (Richmond vault): N1. A young (male?) body, wrapped in cere cloth, the head to the west. Darby assigns this to the duke of Richmond.

N 2. An older body (sex not clearly stated) in a lead coffin; sandy hair; a hole (perhaps a severe injury?) in the front of the skull. The orientation is not stated. Darby assigns this to either John Howard, first duke of Norfolk, or to Lady Mary Howard, the duke of Richmond's bride.

South aisle (Norfolk vault): S1. A male body (it had a beard) embedded in some 'substance', wrapped in linen and originally in wooden coffin; sandy hair and beard; decayed teeth; thigh bones just over 19" long. Orientated with the head to the west. Darby gives no opinion as to the identity of this body, or any of the remains found in the Norfolk vault.

S2. A body lying with its head to the east, with the top of the skull separated from the lower part, and the lower jaw in two pieces.

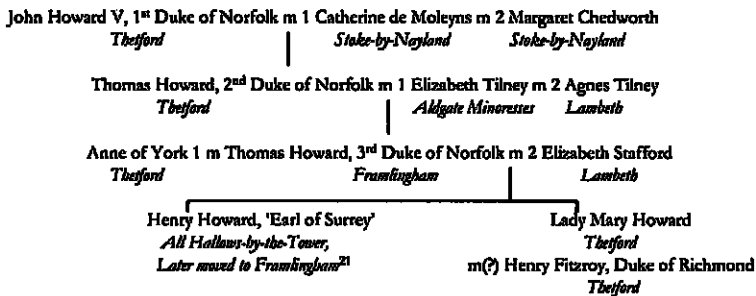
S3. A body in lead coffin filled with liquid. Hair (colour not stated) and skin were present. The sex is not stated.

S4. Lying beside S3, a female(?) body.

It will be helpful at this point to consider the Howard family tree, together with what is known of the burial locations of the principal family members.

Howard Family Tree

Locations are those of burial



²¹ The earl of Surrey has his own separate tomb at Framlingham. His body is therefore not one of those discussed by Darby.

One of the bodies (and presumably one of those found in the Norfolk vault, south of the altar) must be that of Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, who was buried at Framlingham. The other remains are likely to be of persons buried originally at Thetford; these being the only remains likely to have been moved, with the Richmond and Norfolk tombs, to Framlingham. The case of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey can be ignored, since his tomb (and presumably therefore his body) are located separately from the vaults opened in 1841, and in a different part of Framlingham Church.

It can immediately be seen that the individuals named on the Howard family tree as originally buried at Thetford Priory are five in number: John Howard, first Duke of Norfolk; Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk; Anne of York, daughter of Edward IV and wife of Thomas Howard (later third duke of Norfolk); Lady Mary Howard ('Duchess of Richmond'); Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond. There is no doubt about these interments. Indeed, the third duke of Norfolk himself, in a petition to Henry VIII dated 1539, stated specifically that the remains of his father, the second duke, together with 'the bodie of the late Duke of Richemond the kings naturall sonn, and also the body of the late wiff of the said Duke [and] the lady Anne awnte to his highnes' lay buried at Thetford Priory.²² It therefore seems logical to conclude that the six sets of remains found in the two vaults at Framlingham in 1841 represent the above five individuals, originally interred at Thetford Priory, together with the third duke of Norfolk himself, who was buried directly at Framlingham. The arithmetic seems persuasive. Nevertheless, with the possible exception of the duke of Richmond, doubt clearly remains as to which set of Framlingham remains correspond to which individual on the list. It would certainly be more satisfactory if the gender of all the remains in the two vaults had been established beyond question.

The male body from the southern vault listed above as S1 is probably that of the first, second or third Howard duke of Norfolk. The colour of the hair and beard seem to rule out the third duke, whose portrait by Holbein²³ appears to show a darker hair colour than 'sandy'. However, representations exist of both the first and second Howard dukes showing what might be described as sandy hair.²⁴ Neither the first nor the second duke is shown with a beard in any known representation, but it is not impossible that one or other of them grew

²² Stone and Colvin, 'Howard Tombs', p. 160, citing PRO [TNA], SP 1/156, f. 115.

²³ At Arundel Castle. See Robinson, *Dukes of Norfolk*, p. 24.

²⁴ The lost stained glass representation of the first duke, formerly at Stoke-by-Nayland, showed fair hair, as does the portrait of the second duke at Arundel Castle (Robinson, *Dukes of Norfolk*, p. 10). The sixteenth century 'portrait' of the first duke painted for Lord Lumley and now at Arundel Castle (Robinson, *Dukes of Norfolk*, facing p. 32) shows much darker hair, but there is no reason to suppose that it is accurate.

a beard later in life. Probably S1 represents the remains of Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk (c.1444-1524). A formula exists for calculating the height of a living individual, based upon the length of the femur.²⁵ Darby reports that the femur of S1 was just over 19 inches in length. This suggests that the height of S1 as a living individual was approximately five feet ten and a half inches.²⁶

There seems to be little immediate prospect of clarifying the situation by opening the vaults again and subjecting the remains to a more thorough and careful examination. There is currently no obvious means of access to either of those vaults opened in 1841 from within the chancel. An extensive restoration of the church was carried out during the period 1888-1909.²⁷ Among other changes this work completely altered the flooring around the tombs. A newspaper report of 30 September 1909 records the reopening of the church upon completion of the restoration work, and notes that 'the flooring has been relaid and the passages and tomb spaces are done with marble terrazzo'.²⁸ This marble terrazzo flooring remains in place around the tombs and allows no visible means of access to the vaults.

Nevertheless, should an occasion for reopening either or both of these vaults ever present itself, further examination of the remains would be desirable. It would be very interesting to try to establish exactly how the first Howard duke of Norfolk was killed at the battle of Bosworth. It should also be borne in mind that the remains of the duke of Richmond would offer the opportunity to establish details of the Y-chromosome of the Tudor dynasty, while the remains of Anne of York (sister of the 'princes in the Tower') could provide the mitochondrial DNA sequence not only of this princess herself but also of her missing brothers.

²⁵ D.R. Brothwell, *Digging Up Bones: the Excavation, Treatment and Study of Human Skeletal Remains*, 3rd edition, Natural History Museum/OUP, London 1981. I am grateful to W. White, Curator, Centre for Human Bioarchaeology, London Museum, for this reference.

²⁶ According to Brothwell's formula the calculated height in centimetres would be $(2.32 \times \text{the length of the femur}) + 65.53$. Assuming S1's femur to have measured 49 cms (just over 19"), $2.32 \times 49 + 65.53 = 179.21\text{cms} = 5'10\frac{1}{2}"$.

²⁷ IRO, FC 101/E6/6: draft petition to the Lord Bishop of Norwich for a faculty to carry out the proposed renovations, dating from February / March 1888. There is no surviving record at the IRO of the grant of the required faculty, but work appears to have commenced later in 1888, the nave being tackled first.

²⁸ IRO, FC 101/E6/6.