



## Henry VIII's final resting place

### Background notes

#### Background

*The resting place of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour in the Quire of St George's Chapel was intended to be temporary while a grand monument was completed. However, the tomb was never finished and the location of the vault which Henry had intended to be temporary was not permanently marked until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The vault was opened in 1649 following the beheading of Charles I and his body added to it. It was opened again in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to house the body of a stillborn child of the future Queen Anne. In 1813 the tomb was uncovered during excavations for a new royal vault; it was opened in the presence of the future George IV who later requested the laying of the marble slab; this was eventually inserted into the Quire paving by William IV in 1837, although modern research suggests it was placed a little to the west of the actual vault.*

#### Source 1

##### The Register of the Order of the Garter. c.1534-1552 (SGC G.1)

This Register of the Order of the Garter, known as the 'Black Book' because of its black velvet cover, was compiled by Canon Robert Aldridge, Register (Registrar) of the Order, around 1534, and continues until the reign of Edward VI. It names each monarch, starting with Edward III, and lists the Knights of the Garter installed by them. Edward III had founded the Order in about 1348, to reward and unite his loyal friends and soldiers.

The text begins with an essay on orders of knighthood and a brief history of the Order of the Garter. It continues with summary histories of the reigns of Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V, followed by annals for the following reigns, ending in Edward VI (1552). It is illuminated, probably by Lucas Honebolter (who was appointed King's Painter in 1534), with portraits of monarchs from Edward III to Henry VIII, representations of Garter ceremonies, and colourful borders.

This illustration shows the members of the Order of the Garter from the twenty-sixth year of Henry VIII's reign (1534-35) grouped round the famous king: the twenty-five Knights Companion and the Monarch making up the statutory number of twenty six Knights of the Garter. Henry VIII is shown with the symbols of kingship – he is seated on a throne, crowned and holds an orb and a sceptre. There are four other sovereigns depicted in this picture who also hold a sceptre and an orb. These sovereigns were: Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor; Francis I, King of France; Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, afterwards Ferdinand I, Holy Roman Emperor (he wears a coronet rather than a crown); James V, King of Scotland.

It should be noted that although the portraits in this image are thought to be physically accurate, it is a virtual representation of the Order of the Garter rather than a historical record because some of the overseas Knights (known as 'Stranger Knights') shown in the pictured scene never visited England for Garter ceremonies. The image is included as an illustration of

Henry VIII's appreciation of grandeur, ceremony and being the focus of attention – in contrast with the plain marble slab marking his burial place.

## Source 2

### Memorial slab marking the burial place of Henry VIII in the Quire of St George's Chapel (SGC PH.312).

On Queen Jane Seymour's death in 1537 shortly after the birth of their son, Edward, Henry VIII ordered her burial in a vault under the Quire of St George's Chapel (the Quire is situated at the eastern end of the chapel and houses the Garter and choir stalls). In his own will of 1546, he requested to be buried with Queen Jane in the Quire, half way between the high altar and Sovereign's Garter stall, until a more permanent tomb had been constructed for them both. Henry VIII regarded Jane as his favourite wife since she alone of his six wives delivered a son who survived infancy. The planned tomb was never completed and the King and Queen remain buried under the marble paving in the Quire. Also buried in the Quire vault is Charles I. When searching for a suitable resting place for the executed King, the Commonwealth government under Oliver Cromwell agreed that his body should be moved to Windsor Castle and buried in St George's Chapel. Henry VIII's unmarked tomb was rediscovered in the Quire and the body of Charles I lowered into the small royal vault. Because Windsor Castle was a quieter and less accessible place than London, it was hoped that the number of pilgrims to the grave of 'the Martyr King' would be limited. Subsequently an infant child of Queen Anne was buried in the vault, its tiny coffin placed on that of Charles I. The exact location of the unmarked vault was forgotten over the years, but was rediscovered by workmen during the construction of a passage to a new royal vault in 1813. But it was only in 1837 that a marble slab was placed in the Quire, on the orders of William IV, to mark the burial place of the two famous Kings, although modern research suggests it was placed a little to the west of the actual vault, which was not reopened at that time.

The writing on the memorial slab reads:

IN A VAULT  
BENEATH THIS MARBLE SLAB  
ARE DEPOSITED THE REMAINS  
OF  
JANE SEYMOUR QUEEN OF KING HENRY VIII  
1537  
KING HENRY VIII  
1547  
KING CHARLES I  
1648  
AND  
AN INFANT CHILD OF QUEEN ANNE.  
THIS MEMORIAL WAS PLACED HERE  
BY COMMAND OF  
KING WILLIAM IV. 1837.

Although, under modern dating systems King Charles I was executed on 30 January 1649 the inscription on the marble slab records the date as 1648, employing the contemporary dating system when the year changed numerically on 25 March rather than 1 January.

### **Source 3**

#### **AY Nutt's watercolour of Henry VIII's vault (SGC RBK H.386)**

On the opening of the tomb in 1813, during the construction of a passage to a new royal vault, several relics of Charles I were removed in order to identify them; they included a piece of vertebrae, a section of beard and a tooth. They were replaced in 1888 and a watercolour drawing was made of the vault by AY Nutt, Surveyor of the Fabric to the College of St George, 1873-1912. The coffin on the left is that of Charles I (on top of which is the coffin of the infant child of Queen Anne and a box containing the relics of Charles I replaced in 1888) and on the right is Jane Seymour. Henry VIII's coffin is in the centre of the vault and is quite badly damaged. There are several possible explanations for this.

The damage to Henry VIII's coffin may have been caused when the trestle supporting it collapsed or, as Sir Henry Halford suggests in his account of the vault opening in 1813, it may have been damaged when Charles I's coffin was hastily added to the vault in 1649. However, the most popular explanation is that given by AY Nutt, who observed in 1888 that the damage must have been caused by "the action of internal forces outward". This may have occurred whilst the coffin rested in the vault. However, there were also reports of Henry VIII's coffin exploding during the overnight pause in the funeral procession, which transported the King's body in great ceremony from Westminster to Windsor. One contemporary account suggest that during the procession's overnight stay at Syon House in Middlesex putrid matter leaked from the coffin and stray dogs wandered in to lick it up. Another narrative states that the coffin's huge weight caused it to fall, damaging the outer casing and the lead shell.

### **Source 4**

#### **Henry VIII's will (The National Archives, E23/4)**

Henry requested in his will that he be temporarily buried in a vault in the Quire of St George's Chapel, half way between the high altar and Sovereign's Garter stall, while his permanent tomb was being completed. When this was done his body and that of Jane Seymour were to be placed in the tomb which was to be situated in a separate chapel to the east of St George's. In fact the monument which Henry described in his will as being 'almost made' was not originally his, but had been commissioned by Cardinal Wolsey. In 1524 the Cardinal commissioned the great Italian Renaissance sculptor, Benedetto da Rovenzanno, to construct a magnificent tomb for him. Work was well underway by the time of Wolsey's fall in 1529, and the marble base, pillars and statues, which were probably being constructed in workshops at Westminster, were immediately appropriated by the King. In addition to the tomb itself, Henry VIII wished for an altar to be constructed in his memorial chapel, at which daily masses were to be said for his soul and that of his favourite wife; evidence of his continuing Anglo-Catholic beliefs. Neither the tomb nor the altar was to be completed.

## **Source 5**

### **Speed's description of Henry VIII's planned tomb (SGC RBK S.479)**

The tomb which Henry VIII acquired from Cardinal Wolsey in 1529 was not the first one he had considered for his burial. Eleven years earlier, in 1518, plans had been drawn up for a tomb for Henry VIII and his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, designed by the Italian sculptor Pietro Torrigiano who had been responsible for Henry VII's grand monument in Westminster Abbey. Henry VIII's sarcophagus was to be made of the same white marble and black touchstone as his father's but to be twenty-five per cent larger. Following a financial disagreement which resulted in Torrigiano leaving England sometime before June 1519, there were reports that another Italian sculptor, Jacopo Sansovino, was considering a commission in 1527 from Henry VIII to the value of 75,000 ducats.

When John Speed, a famous 17<sup>th</sup> century mapmaker and antiquarian, was researching for his great topographical work, *The history of great Britaine* (1627), he was shown a manuscript allegedly relating to Henry VIII's planned tomb. It is believed that the manuscript, owned by Nicholas Charles, Lancaster Herald, described the plans for the construction of the tomb designed for Henry VIII by Jacopo Sansovino in 1527 (when Henry VIII was still married to Katherine of Aragon). While the original manuscript's location is unknown its description can be studied in Speed's completed work.

The manuscript, entitled 'The manner of the Tombe to be made for the Kings Grace at Windsore', demonstrates the grandiose nature of Henry VIII's plans. No expense was to be spared in crafting the vast edifice, ornamented with 'fine Oriental stones' and resplendent with white marble pillars, gilded bronze angels, life-size images of the King and Queen Jane, and a statue of the King on horseback under a triumphal arch, 'of the whole stature of a goodly man and a large horse'. In all, there were to be one hundred and thirty four figures, including St George, St John the Baptist, the Prophets, the Apostles and the Evangelists, 'all of brass gilt as in the pattern appeareth'.

## **Source 6**

### **Alfred Higgins' conjectured drawings (SGC M.871)**

During his employment for Cardinal Wolsey, from 1524 to 1529, and for Henry VIII from 1530 to 1536, Benedetto da Rovezzano kept inventories of the statues and ornamentation constructed for Wolsey's tomb and also a list of the changes to be made for the King. In 1894 these lists, considered in combination with a report made for Elizabeth I's chief advisor on the works needed to complete her father's tomb and a document detailing the weight of copper required for the King's tomb, allowed art-historian Alfred Higgins to make drawings predicting what the tomb may have looked like if it had been completed. The inventories of the tomb kept by Benedetto show that had this tomb been completed, it would have been far grander than the tomb of Henry VII at Westminster designed by fellow Italian sculptor Pietro Torrigiano.

Henry VIII appropriated components of this tomb for his own use, including the sarcophagus, upon which a gilded life size figure of Henry would lie. The podium of the tomb would be

raised and bronze friezes inserted into its walls, ten tall pillars topped with figures of the apostles were to surround the tomb. In between the pillars were to be 9ft tall bronze candlesticks. An altar would be set up at the east end of the tomb, surmounted by an angel-topped canopy and supported by four decorated pillars. There were to be 16 effigies of children at the base holding candlesticks. The tomb and the altar were to be surrounded by a bronze and black marble enclosure to form a separate chantry chapel for the royal soul.

It seems that Benedetto da Rovezzano and his assistant Giovanni de Maiano worked on the tomb for Henry VIII from 1530 to 1536. The effigy of the king is known to have been cast and polished in Henry's lifetime and work seems to have continued until the final years of the King's life when wars with France and Scotland were draining royal finances and Benedetto had returned to Italy for health reasons. Work continued on the monument in Edward VI's reign and he requested in his will that his father's tomb be completed. While little occurred in Mary's reign it appears that Elizabeth had some intention of completing the work as her chief advisor William Cecil arranged for a survey of the work that needed completing on the tomb and new plans were prepared in 1565. The completed components of the tomb seem to have been transported from Westminster to Windsor during Elizabeth's reign; however, after 1572 works seemed to have come to a halt. The tomb appears to have lain unfinished until 1646 when the Commonwealth parliament decided to sell the effigy of Henry VIII to raise funds, while four candlesticks from the tomb ended up at the Cathedral of St Bavo in Ghent, Belgium (replicas of two of these candles can now be seen in St George's Chapel next to the high altar). Charles II was keen to repair the remains of the monument. However, by 1749 it was ruined and neglected, and in 1808, during George III's alterations to St George's Chapel and his construction of a new royal vault there, the tomb's sarcophagus and base were sent to London for Lord Nelson's monument in St Paul's Cathedral where they remain today.

It is difficult to know what Henry VIII might have done to ensure the completion of his tomb after his death. A less ambitious scheme, achievable within his own life time, would have been a wiser plan.