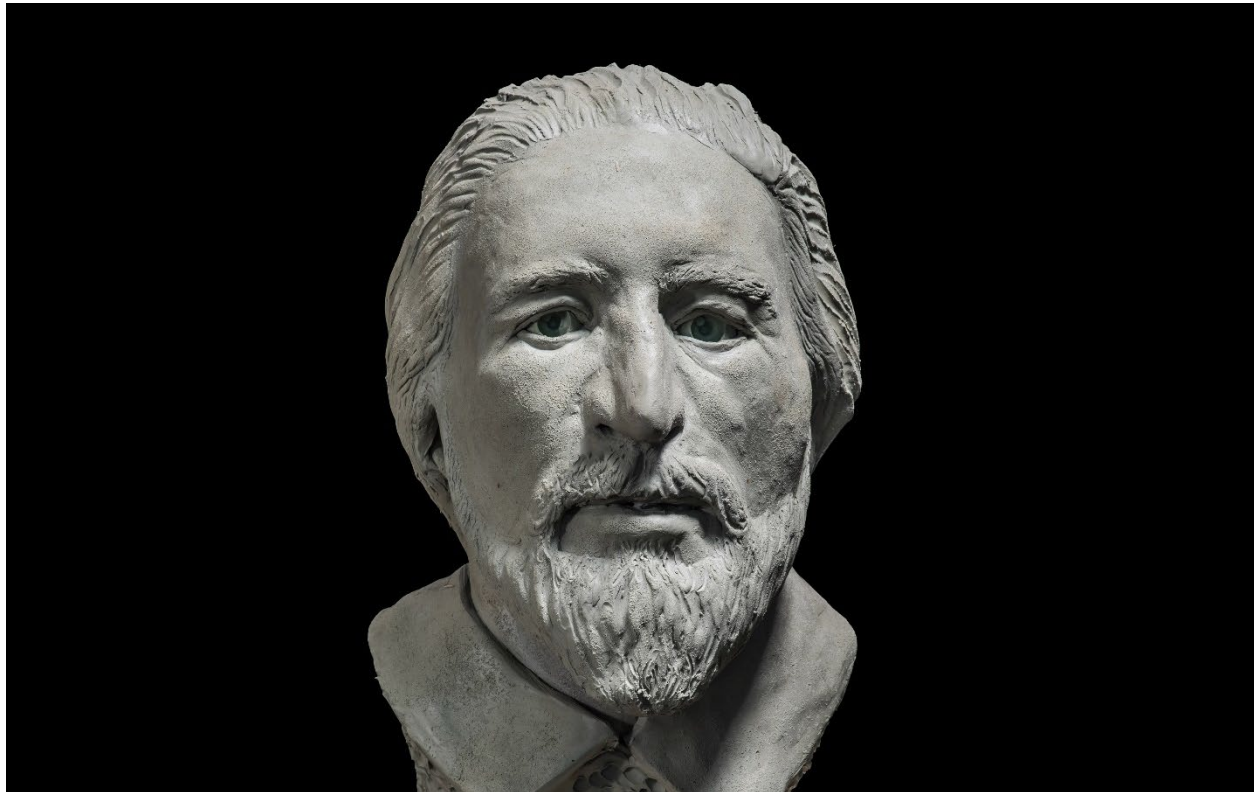


Jamestown Rediscovery

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Facial Reconstruction by FBI Laboratory

Who is Buried in the Grave in the Chancel? Research Continues at Jamestown

JAMESTOWN, VA (November 25, 2024) –

After years of research and analysis, DNA analysis has revealed that the skeletal remains excavated in the chancel of Jamestown's second church (1617-1639) are not Sir George Yeardley, who presided over Virginia's First Assembly meeting there in 1619.

Between 2016 and 2019, Jamestown Rediscovery conducted archaeological investigations inside the 1907 Memorial Church. This project had two goals: first, to examine structural evidence of the historic church that remained untouched by excavations by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA, now Preservation Virginia) between 1897 and 1906; and second, to recover and analyze burials within the structure, some of which had been disturbed by those earlier excavations. Over the course of the project, archaeologists revealed the cobblestone and yellow clay foundation of the 1617 church, as well as more than 40 burials.

Of those, only one grave was definitively associated with the chancel of the 1617 church. In 2018, Jamestown Rediscovery moved forward with a full excavation of this burial, with the goal of identifying the individual.

Based on research of historic documents and other evidence, Jamestown Rediscovery developed a list of possible identities for the grave in the chancel. The chancel was a place of privilege for 17th-century English burials and indicated the individual must have played a significant role in the colony. In addition, the grave was abnormally oversized for the individual interred there, which suggested it was once marked by a tombstone. A large Belgian black limestone slab, now called The Knight's Tombstone and believed to have belonged to Sir George Yeardley, was uncovered nearby by APVA archaeologists in 1901. Researchers theorized the tombstone once marked the chancel grave because of the proximity of the grave to the relocated tombstone. Sir George Yeardley was the Governor of the Virginia colony for several years and presided over the historic First Assembly in 1619. He died while serving as governor in 1627. His prestige in the colony and time of death made Yeardley one of the leading candidates for this individual.

Jamestown Rediscovery excavated the grave in 2018, utilizing the newest techniques to prevent cross-contamination of modern DNA, including an enclosed, temperature-controlled environment and protective suits, gloves, and face masks. After excavations were complete, researchers developed a biological profile of the individual excavated from the chancel. The profile is "read" from the bones, which encode information about the person's sex, age, health, activities in life, and sometimes their cause of death. The man buried in the chancel grave has features consistent with a European male between the ages of 38 and 44, which has since been confirmed by DNA analysis. His skeleton did not show signs of heavy physical labor, though several of the long bones of his legs had evidence of inflammation related to a long-term infection. This may have caused him pain throughout his life. Chemical analysis of the remains suggest this individual ate a diet that included wheat and animal protein. He also had moderately high lead levels within his bones, which suggest he was wealthy, since the heavy metal was used in expensive ceramics and pewter used in high society homes.

Because much of the biological profile was consistent with Governor Yeardley, Jamestown Rediscovery pursued genetic analysis of the man buried in the chancel to test this hypothesis. To extract and sequence ancient DNA within the remains and compare them to modern samples, Jamestown worked with ancient and forensic geneticist Dr. Turi King and experts in the DNA Support Unit of the FBI Laboratory. Professional genealogist and founder of Lifelines Research, Dave Annal, was contracted to research Sir George Yeardley's family tree. After several months of work, he found an unbroken female lineage to ten living people descended from Yeardley's sister, Katherin Yeardley (c. 1579- c. 1649). One of these descendants agreed to share their DNA for comparison. The modern DNA did not match the ancient DNA recovered from the chancel burial, meaning the individual buried in the 1617 church chancel cannot be Sir George Yeardley.

"With research of this nature, I needed to trace either a male line of descent from the subject, or one of his brothers, uncles, great uncles, et cetera, or a female line of descent from one of his sisters, aunts, great aunts, et cetera. It's a laborious process," said Dave Annal. "You can spend hours following a line down through several generations before coming to a dead end – you then have to go back and start again with another sibling. Yeardley's own descendants died out in the male line after just three generations. Fortunately, he was one of nine children so there

were lots of siblings to work with. It turned out be his oldest sister, Katherin, who produced the results for us and, after months of rigorous research, I was able to identify ten living descendants of hers in the female line.”

“I absolutely love working at the nexus of genetics, history and archaeology. It’s what gets me up in the morning,” said ancient and forensic geneticist Dr. Turi King. “The individual identified by Dave who shared their DNA with us was descended from Katherin Yeardeley, George’s sister. This means they all shared the same mitochondrial DNA that I could sequence and attempt to match. We didn’t get a DNA match in this instance, which was of course disappointing. But the work continues and each individual who is kind enough to provide us with a reference sample brings us that bit closer to identifying some of the individuals at the Jamestown site.”

“The process of exclusion is just as important as inclusion in this research,” said Jamestown Rediscovery Director of Collections Michael Lavin. “Though much of the circumstantial evidence pointed to this individual being Yeardeley, there are other men at Jamestown who were of similar rank and status. We’ll continue researching the possible identity of this man because, at Jamestown, the research is never finished.”

Jamestown Rediscovery and our current partners are now pursuing the identity of the man buried in the chancel, as well as exploring the possibility that Sir George Yeardeley may be among the individuals excavated from elsewhere in the 1617 church. The evidence still suggests the Knight’s tombstone belonged to Yeardeley, but because it was moved in 1647 or after, it does not offer any additional clues as to where he may have been buried. However, scientists and artists in the Trace Evidence and Operational Projects Units of the FBI Laboratory were able to use the forensic analyses to make a facial reconstruction of the man in the chancel; now we need to put a name to the face. The research continues.

Images of excavations, project staff, and the facial reconstruction [can be found here](#).

About Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation

The Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation preserves and shares the original site of James Fort and Jamestown, established in 1607. The Foundation is dedicated to uncovering, preserving, and sharing Jamestown’s diverse history, and highlighting its major contribution to the foundations of modern American society. Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation is a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit and jointly administers Historic Jamestowne alongside the National Park Service. Admission includes the James Fort site, New Town, and the Voorhees Archaearium Archaeological Museum, as well as walking tours, living history, and public programs. For more information about visiting Jamestown, please visit www.historicjamestowne.org or call (757) 856-1250.