

THE HOWARD VAULT (note by John Read)

Have you ever wondered what is inside the Howard Vault at the east end of the church? The entrance to the vault is now completely bricked up and an inscription on the outside wall indicates that it was closed in 1860. But this is what the 3rd Lord Braybrooke had to say about it in his book "The History of Audley End " published in 1835 (page 204):

"The Howard Vault is situated immediately under the altar, and entered from the outside by steps concealed within a close porch. The interior, which being above ground is very dry, receives its light from a small window at the south end. At the bottom of the stairs, on the left side, are the coffins of the six last Earls of Suffolk, who possessed Audley End, placed on wooden frames. It is worthy of remark, that they all died between 1709 and 1745, a short space of thirty six years. Upon the right hand are seen the coffins of John Griffin, Lord Howard de Walden and his two wives, deposited on a shelf of stone, and beneath it are the remains of Henry Charles, son of the Hon General Henry Fox and Marianne Clayton, his wife Lady Howard's half-sister, whose death occurring at Audley End, he was here buried. The coffins of the four first Earls of Suffolk, and of several of their Countesses and other members of the family, were originally deposited in this place, but have long since been lowered into another vault, sunk beneath the floor, to make room for their descendants. Some of their coffin plates, probably taken off when their bodies were removed, are now fixed against the wall. Several funeral helmets and swords formerly hung up in the chancel, also remain in the vault, with four hatchments, particularly that of the notorious Countess of Somerset, much torn and nearly defaced."

It would be interesting to know whether the above mentioned contents are still there, 150 years later.