



c/o The Reading Room
12 High Street, Barkway, Hertfordshire, SG8 8EE
info@barkwayhistory.com

The Clinton Vault

In the graveyard of Barkway church next to the boundary hedge to the east, by the Barkway House boundary, lies the Clinton vault. It is surmounted by an enormous stone slab of around 4 metres square. The nearest quarry would be north of Peterborough. It must weigh at least a ton, so transportation methods would be challenging.

Ownership of the Cokenach estate came to the Clinton family on descent from the Chapmans. In 1846 General Sir William Clinton commissioned the construction of this vault. A drawing in the Hertford Record Office has a plan and section. The vault is of the order of 2 metres in depth and brick built, with extending brick base. There are 2 slate shelves inserted, giving 3 compartments for coffin storage. The section drawing shows a coffin sitting on 3 supports. Access was from the south side, presumably down an incline. The stone slab sits squarely upon the brick box. It is not clear from the drawing how access to the vault interior was blocked off when not being used, but could have been wooden in construction.

Around the outside of the structure is drawn a square of fencing with 12 stone blocks sunk into the ground supporting pointed metal finials. The square formed with the fencing is something over 5 metres each side.

Records show that there were burials of 10 Clintons, their names being inscribed on the stone slab surface. The Clinton family sold Cokenach to Alexander Crossman in the late 1880s; the last Clinton burial being in 1885.

Over time, with no Clintons living locally, the vault site was allowed to decay. The approach path was filled in, and no fancy fencing is now in evidence. Encroachment has occurred with newer graves, and a yew tree is growing at one corner.

The vault plan shows the presence of a pair of air bricks, and one of these can still be seen in place.